



Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025

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This Homelessness Strategy has been prepared by arc⁴ Ltd on behalf of Wirral Council.

The strategy is based upon the findings of a separate Homelessness Review which provides a detailed analysis of the levels and nature of homelessness, an audit of the services and a review of the resources available to spend on homelessness within the county.

Both the strategy and review comply with the associated and relevant legislation Section 1 of the Homeless Act 2002 along with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government’s Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (2018).

Foreword

Recent welfare changes against a backdrop of rising rents in some areas have put increasing pressure on the affordability of housing for residents. This along with a shortage of affordable homes and a range of complex social and health factors have led to an increase in homelessness and rough sleeping over the last five years, nationally, regionally and within the Borough.

Locally, we have worked hard with our partners and made good progress in preventing homelessness and alleviating rough sleeping since the adoption of our last Homelessness Strategy in 2013, however, there is still more to do. Recent changes in legislation through the Homelessness Reduction Act place additional responsibilities on the Council to work with partners to provide appropriate support to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage.

To understand the current position in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping in Wirral, a comprehensive independent review of current homeless services was undertaken by Arc4 on behalf of Wirral Council, during the summer of 2019. This new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy has been informed by this review and the consultation undertaken with our partners and stakeholders.

I'm pleased to present Wirral's Homelessness Strategy and Rough Sleeping Strategy which sets out the Council's ambition to meet the challenges faced, through partnership working to deliver better outcomes for our households at risk of homelessness and to reduce rough sleeping.



The strategy sets out a five-year action plan setting out the short, medium and long-term solutions and actions identified to deliver lasting change to those at risk of, or currently homeless in Wirral.

To ensure this Strategy remains relevant and flexible to change, it will be monitored by Wirral's multi-agency Homelessness Forum and reviewed annually so that it can be responsive to the evolving needs within the Borough.

I would like to thank everyone who has helped develop this strategy, in particular, those stakeholders and partners who will help us deliver the priorities contained within it to prevent homelessness and eradicate rough sleeping.

Councillor Stuart Whittingham

Cabinet Member Housing and Planning

Introduction

Homelessness can be understood to mean different things to different people. Whilst rough sleeping (those who sleep or live on the streets) is often the most visible and concerning form of homelessness, the definitions of homelessness extends much wider than this. It also include anyone who cannot access suitable accommodation and maybe staying with friends of family (sofa surfing) or living in temporary accommodation provided by the Council.

Wirral's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy sets out how we will prevent homelessness, including rough sleeping and support those who face homelessness or those at risk of becoming homeless over the next 5 years. Our actions will be focussed on the following themes:-

Theme 1

Providing a joined-up approach to early intervention and homeless prevention across the Wirral

Theme 2

Ensure that housing-related support services meet the diverse needs and complex needs of customers

Theme 3

Preventing and ending rough sleeping

Theme 4

Ensuring the adequate supply of temporary accommodation is available

Theme 5

Improving access to and developing more settled accommodation solutions

'Homelessness is about more than rooflessness. A home is not just a physical space; it also has a legal and social definition. A home provides roots, identity, a sense of belonging and a place of emotional well being'

Crisis

Recognising the rise of homelessness as a significant issue, the Chancellor of the Exchequer reiterated a number of the Government's manifesto commitments around homelessness as part of his 2017 Budget speech. These included:

- A commitment to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminate it by 2027.
- The creation of a Homelessness Reduction Taskforce to develop a cross-government strategy to deliver the manifesto commitment.
- £28m investment into 'Housing First' pilot projects which prioritises an individual's need of stable housing, rather than the traditional approach of moving them through different 'levels' of supported accommodation.

Since the implementation of the Wirral Homeless Strategy in 2013, the largest change in national policy has been the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act which came into force in April 2018.

National Policy

The Homelessness Reduction Act

The Homelessness Reduction Act provides new legislation to prevent homelessness for households and individuals at risk through the following clauses:

- Improved advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness, tailored to individual need and accessible.
- Extension of the period at which a client may be considered as 'threatened with homelessness' and thus potentially owed a duty to be housed, from 28 to 56 days.
- Introduced new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible people, regardless of priority need and local connection.
- Introduced needs assessments and personalised housing plans, setting out the actions housing authorities and individuals will take to help secure accommodation.
- Encouraging public bodies to work together to prevent and relieve homelessness through a mandatory duty to refer.

Rough Sleeping Strategy

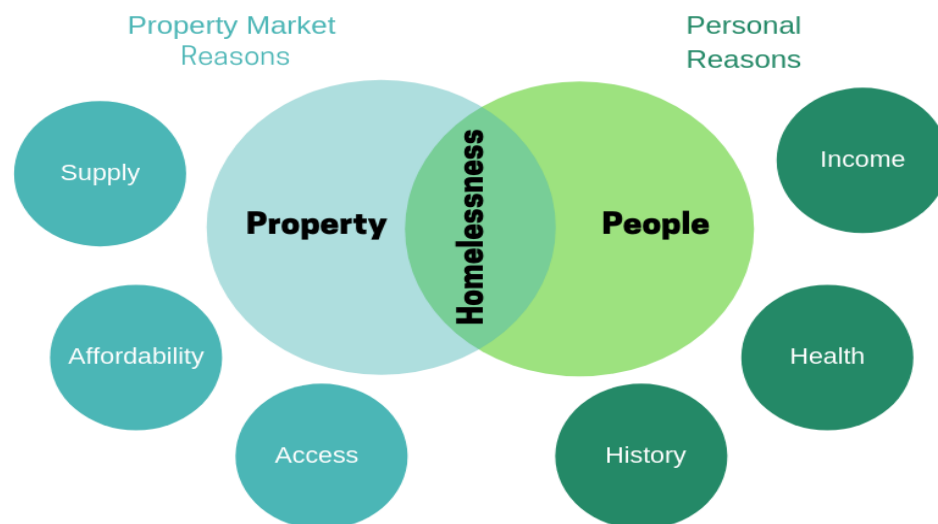
In addition to policies to prevent homelessness through the Homelessness Reduction Act, commitment is further emphasised through the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018. In summary, this committed:

- To halve rough sleeping by 2022, and to end it for good by 2027.
- £100m of funding and a three-pronged approach to ending rough sleeping through prevention, intervention and recovery.
- A wider review of homelessness and rough sleeping legislation, which will include the Vagrancy Act.

National Picture

Homelessness can occur for a wide variety of reasons. For some, it will be due to the housing market and the supply and affordability of appropriate housing options. For others, their personal circumstances, their health, life experiences or the income will have a role to play. Often though it is a combination of all these factors that leads to someone needing support and assistance to resolve their situation.

The Complex Nature of Homelessness



Welfare Reform and freezing of the Local Housing Allowance since 2011 are key contributing factors to homelessness and people’s ability to afford accommodation. High demand for social housing stock and a limited supply of affordable housing to meet needs leave some households with fewer options leading to homelessness occurring and people’s ability to resolve their own housing needs.

Key National Statistics

- Since the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act, prevention duties owed by Councils increased nationally by 7.2%.
- Number of prevention duties ended has trebled from 11,030 to 31,930.
- The number of relief duties owed (where someone is actually homeless increased by 23.6%, from 26,480 to 32,740.
- The main reasons for homeless nationally is where friend and family can no longer accommodate them, the second largest reason (not including other) was termination of a private tenancy.
- There has been a overall decrease in the national numbers of rough sleepers by 5.8% from October to December 2018.

Local & Regional Policy

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority

While homelessness remains a matter for national and local governments, Steve Rotheram, the Elected Mayor of the Liverpool City Region made a manifesto pledge to tackle homelessness and street sleeping.

A strategic lead for homelessness has been appointed to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

£7.7m has been awarded to the Combined Authority to carry out a Housing First Pilot, together with £2.2m for a homeless trailblazer initiative which is being implemented.

Wirral Council Plan 2025

Wirral's 2020 Plan highlights the need to tackle the challenges and causes of homelessness as a priority and The Council Plan for 2025 sets out Wirral's position and commitment to what we will deliver over the next five years. The plan vision is that 'we will secure the best possible future for our residents, defined by the community prosperity we create. For residents this means people will live in safe and pleasant communities with access to services which help people live active and healthy lives and can benefit from a prosperous and inclusive economy.

Key outcomes include:

- Residents having access to great job and good quality, affordable housing;
- Residents feeling safe inside and outside their home;
- Encouraging quality, affordable, sustainable homes;
- Bringing empty properties back into use; and
- Improving private sector properties.

The delivery plan for 2019/20 includes tackling homelessness and launching our new strategy for social and affordable homes.

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy

This Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy sets out our long term ambitions for homelessness services in Wirral. It sets out how we will work in partnership with a wide range of partners and stakeholders to tackle homelessness in the Borough and to ensure that appropriate support and accommodation can be accessed.

Other relevant strategies/plans

In addition to Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategies, we have a range of other complementary strategies and plans to address both the root causes and impact of homelessness and rough sleeping. These include:

- LCR tenancy Strategy (2016-19)
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment rebadged as "This is Wirral"
- Improving Life Chances Strategy (2016-2020)
- Zero Tolerance to Abuse Strategy (2016-2020)
- Alcohol Strategy (2015-2020)
- Emerging Local Development Plan (2020-2035)
- LCR Property Pool Plus Review (scheduled for completion 2020)

What we've already achieved so far

This is not our first Homelessness Strategy, and we should not forget the considerable achievements of the last five years.

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| <p>Preventing Homelessness</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16/17-year-old protocol developed with Children's Social Care Services. • Young person's accommodation-based services reviewed and recommissioned. • Accommodation Pathway developed for 16/17-year olds to include 6 beds of emergency accommodation, a 25 unit move on project and 23 supported lodging places. • Enabled substance misuse clients with complex needs to access appropriate accommodation through provider training, strengthened partnerships with health and floating support. • Reviewed policies and partnership arrangements to strengthen homeless prevention activities for offenders upon release • Begun a review of Liverpool City Region common allocation policy. • Increased temporary accommodation provision to respond to demands. |
| <p>Strengthening partnership working</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported a Liverpool City Region CRISS service for complex/entrenched rough sleepers. • Secured funding from the Rough Sleeping Initiative and implemented a night time outreach service to provide a personalised approach to engagement. • Public Health funded Outreach Team to engage with rough sleepers. • Appointed a mental health practitioner to work with hostels and Charles Thompson mission. • Retendered and commissioned all supported housing services. • Commissioned mental health-focused floating support service via the 'Whitechapel Centre'. • Committed to using Council DFG funding for adaptations in Registered Provider properties for homelessness households where necessary. • Implementation of the No Second Night Out Rough Sleeping Initiative. |

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| Evaluating and realigning homelessness and prevention services | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Citizens Advice Bureau officer embedded in Housing Options Team.• Introduced the Mainstay system to improve our data and knowledge of support needs across the Borough.• Developed an abstinence house for rehab clients.• Two controlled drinking environments funded by Public Health. |
| Increasing access to the Private Rented Sector | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Established a policy to discharge the Council’s homelessness duty into the private rented sector.• Appointed a Private Sector Liaison Officer to ensure effect liaison with landlords.• Introduced a private rented access bond scheme.• Grants products linked to nomination rights for homeless people. |

Our vision and priorities over the next five years

This strategy is underpinned by a comprehensive review of homelessness and rough sleeping across Wirral in accordance with the current Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government Code of Guidance. Detailed findings from the review can be found in the accompanying Homeless Review document and Executive Summary.

We have carried out detailed research and analysed key statistics and data from a range of sources to consider current services and identify opportunities for gaps to be filled and improvements to be made. Consultation has taken place with people who are homeless or have been homeless in the past, support and accommodation providers as well as officers from the Council Housing Options team.

The priorities to be achieved through this strategy and associated plans are grouped under the following five themes:

- 1. Providing a joined-up approach to early intervention and homeless prevention across the Wirral;**
- 2. Ensure that housing-related support services meet the diverse and complex needs of customers;**
- 3. Preventing and ending rough sleeping;**
- 4. Ensuring the adequate supply of temporary accommodation is available; and**
- 5. Improving access to and developing more settled accommodation solutions.**

Our Vision

“We will work in partnership to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping across the Borough; ensuring that those who require support are assisted to access appropriate, affordable accommodation and services are tailored to individual needs”

Theme 1: Providing a joined-up approach to early intervention and homeless prevention

Early intervention and prevention is the key to successfully tackling homelessness. We also know that homelessness cannot be reduced by working in isolation; but rather a strong partnership approach across the Wirral will be essential if we are to successfully intervene earlier and prevent homelessness.

What the homelessness review told us

Increased demand for services

There was an increase in footfall to the Council's Housing service of 17% in 2018/19 following the introduction of the HRA 2017. It will be important to continue to monitor demand on a quarterly basis so that any increases can be appropriately responded to.

Raising awareness of the prevention duty and maintaining contact

During 2018-19 the Council owed a larger proportion of customers a relief duty (57%) compared to a prevention duty (43%). This suggests that more work may be needed to raise awareness of the service and the work that can be done to prevent homelessness occurring.

This is true not only for households but for partner services who have a duty to refer such cases to the housing options service. Of the Duty to Refer cases, 18% resulted in a duty being owed. The majority of cases referred under duty to refer (80%) were assessed at the homelessness relief stage as opposed to the prevention stage, indicating that the referral may not have been made soon enough.

For 22% of prevention cases and 9% of relief cases, the duty came to an end due to loss of contact. This is currently being monitored by the team.

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| 3,555 households accessed by the Council's Housing Options Service (2018/19) | 17% increase in service footfall (2018/19) | 57% of customers approaching at relief duty stage when homelessness has already occurred (2018/19) |
| 57% of those owed a prevention duty had their homelessness successfully prevented during first half of 2019/20 | 31% of all cases homeless due to loss of private rented accommodation (2018/19) | 16% of all cases homeless due to leaving accommodation provided by family or friends (2018/19) |
| Single people accounted for 53% of all households owed a duty (2018/19) | 60% of cases had self-declared support needs (2018/19) | Securing social housing was the most successful prevention activity, 56% of cases where homelessness was prevented (2018/19) |
| 80 households owed a main duty (2018/19) | 32 main duty cases discharged through offer of social housing (2018/19) | 7 main duty cases discharged through private rented sector (2018/19) |

Single households

Single people are significantly over-represented in terms of households to whom a relief duty is owed accounting for 62%. This is due to single people approaching the service once they are already homeless.

Focus on the main causes of homelessness

The main reason for homelessness in Wirral is the loss of private rented accommodation; this accounted for 31% of cases. The main reason for private rented accommodation coming to an end is the landlord wishing to sell or re-let the property - accounting for 48% of all cases. Arrears accounted for 33% of cases. This data identifies opportunities to better focus prevention activity, including fast access to money and debt advice.

The second leading cause of homelessness is being asked to leave accommodation provided by family and friends (153 cases) and accounts for 16% of all cases.

A range of prevention tools need to be developed to address all the main causes of homelessness, alongside making best use of the existing prevention tools. This includes:

- support and advice for both landlords and tenants as tenancy difficulties arise;
- effective and timely family mediation;
- increased awareness of domestic abuse services through all appropriate channels such as website information, factsheets etc.; and
- a pre-eviction protocol with social housing and supported accommodation providers.

Enabling households to remain in their existing accommodation

44% of those owed a prevention duty had their homelessness successfully prevented, compared to 58% nationally (although this has increased to 57% during the first half of 2019/20). This highlights the positive impact homeless services have and in particular how the Housing Options team has been learning lessons following the first 12 months of the implementation of the HRA legislation.

The Housing Options service is much more successful at helping households to secure alternative accommodation than enabling them to remain in their existing accommodation. The most successful prevention activity was securing social housing (56%), followed by securing private rented accommodation (34%).

In 2018/19, 57% of those owed a relief duty had their homelessness successfully relieved, compared to 43% nationally. Positively, this also increased to 63% in the first two-quarters of 2019/20.

What we plan to do next

- Through the Homeless Forum, we will formalise our commitment to joint working through the establishment of a range of task-and-finish groups to lead on individual projects identified within the accompanying action plan, while also providing a platform for joint working and collaborative initiatives. These groups will be responsible for delivering key actions and feeding back to the main homeless forum.
- All agencies operating across the Wirral have opportunities to reduce housing crisis amongst their clients. We can achieve this by working in a more joined-up way to identify those households at high risk of homelessness. Preventing homelessness is everyone's responsibility, and we will work with agencies to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to achieve this.
- Following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act implemented in 2018, the Housing Options team has achieved success in preventing and relieving homelessness, although we recognise we can and need to do more in response to the ever-increasing demand. It is now timely to review how the service operates, our systems and processes, alongside how resources are focused to ensure that we are maximising opportunities for prevention, while effectively managing demand.
- Building on our Early Intervention Trailblazer work, we will intervene earlier to prevent homelessness. To be able to do this, we will identify the specific triggers, risk factors and causes of homelessness. Based upon this, we will develop a range of interventions specifically targeted at responding to these. Our Housing Options team will work with clients before the 56-day threat of homelessness.
- The provision of good quality timely housing advice and effective interventions are integral to being able to effectively prevent homelessness. Evidence from the Homelessness Review identified a large proportion of customers approaching the service at the point of crisis, with missed opportunities for homelessness prevention work.
- To enhance opportunities for effective homeless prevention, customers must contact the Housing Options service as soon as they begin to experience housing difficulties. We will, therefore, invest in an awareness-raising campaign to raise the profile of the service internally within the Council, with partners particularly those that have a duty-to-refer cases to the Council, and the wider public.

Theme 1: Providing a joined-up approach to early intervention and homeless prevention across the Wirral**Key Actions:**

- 1. Ensure Wirral's Homeless Forum oversees the delivery of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy**
- 2. Publish an annual report detailing the current levels of homelessness and the progress of homeless services, in order to aid elected members and chief officers with decision making**
- 3. Ensure joined up service delivery, joint protocols and effective referral arrangements are in place to both prevent and respond to homelessness**
- 4. Provide a consistent high-quality Housing Options Service.**
- 5. Undertake an awareness-raising campaign in relation to homeless prevention and services in order to help address the underlying causes of homelessness.**
- 6. Prevent homelessness through an effective homelessness toolkit.**

Theme 2: Ensure that housing-related support services meet the diverse and complex needs of customers

Housing Related Support Services play a critical role in preventing and responding to homelessness. The Council is committed to investing in a supported housing model that acts as a place of change, not only meeting the housing needs of homeless people; but supporting people to tackle the underlying causes of homelessness, raising their aspirations, empowering change and assisting them to access training, education and employment.

What our review told us

High demand

Despite significant levels of housing-related support provision across the Wirral for homeless and socially excluded clients, demand for this accommodation outstrips supply. The gap between demand and supply is increasing on an annual basis.

The waiting list for accessing supported housing peaked at its highest level in October 2019 with 196 people waiting to access supported housing. This is linked to the lack of move-on options for people in supported provision.

Increasingly complex needs

The most frequently occurring support need is mental health, followed by physical health and disability and domestic abuse. 72% of all MainStay assessments identified poor mental health as a current issue.

There are a number of refusals by providers due to high levels of risk and clients needs being too high. This may indicate that some provision may require reconfiguration to fully meet the increasing complexity of need that clients are presenting with.

During 2018/19, the majority of cases have moved on in a planned way, 66.5%.

While the majority of people move on from supported accommodation in a planned way into alternative accommodation, eviction is the second-highest single reason for leaving supported housing and accounts for 18% of all moves. This may link to the higher and more complex support needs that clients are presenting with, leading to a rise in challenging behaviour and a lack of engagement.

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| 406 units of supported accommodation (Dec 2019) | 155 floating support places (Dec 2019) |
| 196 people waiting to access supported housing (October 2019) | 18% of all moves from supported housing are due to eviction (2018/19) |
| 72% of mainstay assessments self-identified mental health needs (2018/19) | Some current provision may no longer be able to fully meet the increasing complexity of need |

Suitability and gaps in provision

Some issues have been identified concerning the physical nature of some of the supported housing projects, with concerns that these may not provide the best environment for recovery out of homelessness. The lack of provision of supported accommodation specifically for women was also identified.

There is a need to undertake a detailed needs assessment and review of housing-related support services, in order to respond to the current identified need and shape what future provision should look like. The findings from this should be used to inform a robust commissioning plan.

Move-on

There is a significant issue concerning a lack of move-on from supported accommodation, and undertaking Homeless Link's MOPP may provide a better understanding of the issue. Reviewing the Move on Priority Panel and developing a coordinated private landlord offer could help improve move-on options.

What we plan to do next

- It is therefore essential that we make the most effective use of the current provision ensuring that referrals are appropriate and based on a comprehensive assessment of need and that vacancies are prioritised to those in the greatest need.
- We recognise that the needs of clients are diverse and varied; therefore we need to create a range of housing-related support services that meet these needs. We understand that traditional supported housing projects, particularly those that operate on a large scale, may not be suitable for all clients; we will, therefore, continue to work with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority to deliver the Housing First Pilot. Learning from the pilot will be incorporated into our approach to housing-related support moving forward.
- We recognise the need for accommodation that provides a safe environment for women. We will respond to this need through the provision of female-only provision and in the short term will ensure that some female-only emergency accommodation provision is made available.
- The Homelessness Review identified a high level of refusals, evictions and abandonments from supported housing projects. We will work with providers to change practice to reduce evictions and abandonments including working with a wide range of providers to ensure that services and practices are psychologically informed building upon the assets of the individuals supported.
- Move on from supported housing at the point when it is right for the client is an essential part of the accommodation pathway. We will work with providers to improve move on options for clients into both move-on accommodation, social housing and the private rented sector.
- To ensure that supported housing provision can meet the increasingly complex and multiple needs that clients are presenting with, we will undertake a detailed review of housing-related support services to respond to the current identified need and shape what future provision should look like. This will provide the basis for a robust commissioning strategy.

Theme 2: Ensure that housing-related support services meet the diverse and complex needs of customers

Key Actions:

- 1. Work with providers of supported housing services to ensure that the principles of psychologically informed approaches and trauma informed care are embedded within service delivery.**
- 2. Work with providers of supported housing to reduce evictions and abandonments**
- 3. Develop a coordinated approach to improve move on from supported accommodation.**
- 4. Delivery of Housing First on the Wirral as part of the Liverpool City Region Housing First Pilot across the city region.**
- 5. Evaluate the effectiveness of housing related support services to both inform further gaps in provision, such as accommodation for female service users, and the development of a new commissioning plan.**

Theme 3: Preventing and ending rough sleeping

It is widely recognised that rough sleeping is a complex issue. The support needs of rough sleepers are wide-ranging, and the lack of accommodation is rarely the sole issue - indeed is often the symptom of the other issues. It is widely recognised that access to a stable home is essential to break an often revolving cycle and to ensure that wide health and support needs can be addressed.

What our review told us

Levels of Rough Sleeping

There was a significant increase in rough sleeping from 2014 to 2018. This mirrored the national increase in rough sleeping.

In 2018 Wirral had the highest level of rough sleeping across the City Region. However, during 2019 Wirral Council made a successful bid for RSI funding for an assertive outreach service. This has resulted in a 62.5% decrease in levels according to the official annual count.

The Assertive Outreach Service has been successful in reducing the number of individuals sleeping rough and increasing access to the emergency accommodation.

In October 2019, 5 rough sleepers were found by the Assertive Outreach Service, and 20 individuals were accessing emergency accommodation on any given night. It should be noted that some of these may have accessed the accommodation directly.

There is a need to develop a continued service that prevents clients from rough sleeping, reducing the flow of new rough sleepers onto the street, and to secure longer-term funding for the Assertive Outreach Service.

Understanding of the nature of rough sleeping

There is no centralised database to capture details about rough sleeping. Having adopted the stock/flow/returner intelligence, the Council will have a better understanding of the level and nature of rough sleeping across the Wirral.

There is a need to better understand the health needs of this client group to address both immediate and longer-term needs and, in the longer term, develop options for respite and end of life care.

62.5% decrease in rough sleeping
2018 to 2019

In September 2019 60 individuals
slept in the night shelter for at least
one night

6 individuals as identified as
sleeping rough by the Outreach
service in September 2019

The Streetlink number should be more widely promoted to ensure that agencies and the public know how to report rough sleepers, so that targeted help can be offered.

Alternative accommodation options

There is a need to ensure that emergency accommodation provision makes the best use of the available beds, helping to create a clear pathway off the streets and into services, and including a review of how beds are allocated (and for how long).

Alternative, private accommodation should be procured to provide a safe, private space for clients requiring an emergency bed. Funding opportunities should be explored.

Day service provision

There is also potentially a need to strengthen formal and structured day service provision to engage with rough sleepers throughout the day, offering a range of services and activities under one roof.

A collaborative approach

It is important to continue to harness the goodwill of volunteers, the Faith community and providers, and it is envisaged that the delivery of actions within the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will provide a co-ordination vehicle for doing this.

What we plan to do next

- Throughout the lifetime of this Strategy, we will work to reduce rough sleeping to as close to zero as possible, with a wider commitment to end rough sleeping by 2027 in line with the MHCLG's Rough Sleeping Target.
- We will reduce rough sleeping and the multiple harms it brings, by firstly working to prevent people sleeping rough, and where they do sleep rough, we will respond by a rapid intervention to offer a route off of the street and a pathway for recovery.
- To minimise rough sleeping, we must maximise multi-disciplinary and partnership approaches to best meet these multiple and often complex needs.
- A partnership approach led by the Council will be critical in developing targeted services and interventions. We will review the strategic and operational rough sleeping multi-agency groups and their remits to ensure the aims of this strategy can be met. We will facilitate multi-agency responses through a new Co-ordinator role.

- We will end the need for anyone to sleep rough through three clear strands mirroring the Government’s Rough Sleeping Strategy; prevention, intervention and recovery.

Prevention

- If we are to minimise the considerable harm caused by rough sleeping, the most important thing we can do is to prevent it from happening in the first place. However, we can’t do this on our own; rather we need to ensure that the right support is in place from other key agencies, with a multi-disciplinary approach to support the most vulnerable people from ending up in crisis.
- We will identify the key triggers that lead to rough sleeping, and work with partner agencies to ensure that these key triggers and risk factors are identified, and referrals are made. We will also ensure that effective preventative work is targeted at groups who have a greater likelihood of becoming homeless and rough sleeping. We will work to develop a No First Night Out project that will ensure that no one at risk of rough sleeping has to ever sleep rough.

Intervention

- To better understand the profile of Wirral’s rough sleeping population and develop appropriate service responses, we will improve data recording.
- We will provide a rapid route off the streets for anyone sleeping rough, through continuing to fund an assertive outreach service, that works effectively and rapidly with those new to the streets, alongside supporting more entrenched rough sleepers into accommodation and support.
- We recognise the importance of diversionary activities in promoting recovery and reducing street-based activity. We will review the need for structured day service provision.
- We will ensure that no one on the Wirral has to sleep rough through the creation of a clear accommodation pathway from the streets into a range of accommodation options. We will ensure that emergency accommodation is available to anyone who needs it, and we will explore the viability of an assessment centre as part of this pathway. Direct access provision on the Wirral will support a clear pathway from the streets into support, offering stability, safety, and a person-centred, psychologically informed approach.
- There is a body of evidence that indicates homelessness, especially rough sleeping, has significant and adverse consequences for an individual’s health. We will work to improve access to health services for single homeless people to address both immediate and longer-term needs.
- We will develop a coordinated approach to tackling street activity associated with rough sleeping, including begging, street drinking, and substance misuse reducing harm.

Recovery

- A secure and stable home is essential to recovery; we will work to ensure people who sleep rough can access appropriate accommodation so that they can begin to build a new future.
- We will ensure that there is a range of accommodation options available to meet the diverse needs of this client group, including a rapid rehousing and Housing First approach.

Theme 3: Preventing and ending rough sleeping

Key Actions:

1. **Develop a multi-agency response to tackling rough sleeping and also street activity.**
2. **Work to prevent anyone from sleeping rough on the Wirral.**
3. **Develop a rapid intervention for all rough sleepers through an assertive outreach service, and supported reconnection.**
4. **Review the need for structured day services to engage with rough sleepers and support them in their journey off the streets**
5. **Develop a clear accommodation pathway off the streets into a range of accommodation provision.**
6. **Consider the feasibility of the provision of self-contained night shelter units**
7. **Improve access to health services, and health outcomes for rough sleepers**

Theme 4: Ensuring the adequate supply of temporary accommodation is available

Where homeless cannot be prevented, temporary accommodation can be the starting point on a household's rehousing journey. A move at any time can be stressful, but at this point of crisis in people's lives, it is vital that the accommodation they are provided with is somewhere where they can feel safe and supported. A stay in this type of accommodation is only a short-term solution, and adequate move-on arrangements should be in place.

What our review told us

Increase in placements

The number of households in temporary accommodation at the end of each year has increased, reflecting the overall increase in homelessness demand. There has been an increase in Bed & Breakfast usage since 2014/15.

Reliance on Bed & Breakfast

Following the introduction of the HRA, in 2018/19 there was an increased reliance on Bed & Breakfast accommodation placements.

There is a need to more fully understand the current and future demand for temporary accommodation through a detailed temporary accommodation review, which will also consider an options appraisal for future delivery and management arrangements.

What we plan to do next

- We will ensure an adequate supply of temporary accommodation is in place to meet the needs of customers while reducing the use of Bed & Breakfast.
- Through our Early Intervention Trailblazer work and our enhanced focus on homeless prevention, we will stem the flow of new placements into temporary accommodation.
- We will undertake a review of our approach to temporary accommodation to ensure that it meets the current needs, ends the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation. This review will respond to the immediate need but will also take a longer-term approach to ensuring a model that

24 units of temporary accommodation

29 households in temporary accommodation (End of March 2019)

6 of these households were in Bed & Breakfast accommodation (End of March 2019)

is flexible and responsive to the changing demand; it will also include an options appraisal for future delivery and management arrangements. The Review will result in a more effective strategic approach to temporary accommodation provision and its management.

- We will work to reduce the number of households placed in temporary accommodation and to minimise their length of stay. We will actively work with households in temporary accommodation to continue to review their housing options and plan their move into settled accommodation through individual move-on plans.
- We will ensure that every household in temporary accommodation has access to support where needed, to enable them to sustain future accommodation.
- We intend to use Bed & Breakfast for emergencies only, but for no longer than is absolutely necessary. In the longer term, we will aim to end the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation.

Theme 4: Ensuring the adequate supply of temporary accommodation is available

Key Actions

- 1. Undertake an independent Strategic review of the use of temporary accommodation and establish options for future delivery.**
- 2. Reduce the reliance and use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation.**
- 3. Improve the customer journey and reduce the time spent in temporary accommodation through improved monitoring and management of accommodation.**

Theme 5: Improving access to and developing more settled accommodation solutions

For those who require alternative accommodation, appropriate, affordable housing is key to ensuring a long-term solution to a household's housing situation. A range of accommodation options are needed across the social and affordable sector to cater for a wider range of housing needs.

What the review told us

High demand for social housing

The 2018 Statistical Data Return (SDR) reports a total of 23,234 affordable dwellings across Wirral Borough (22,823 affordable/social rented and 471 intermediate tenure).

According to the emerging SHMA household survey 2019, households in Birkenhead are more likely to live in this type of accommodation (25.7% of households). Rural areas and those to the west of the Borough have the lowest levels of affordable accommodation.

Since 2016/17 the number of households on the Housing Register has remained relatively steady at around 9,000. As at 31st March 2019 there were 8,797 registered households. The register is dominated by applicants requiring one-bed homes, representing 58% of the register.

Reducing supply of social housing

During the financial year 2018/19, there were 649 properties allocated to people on the Wirral Housing register via Choice Based Lettings or via direct Council nomination of urgent cases. This figure has fallen by 49% since 2013/14.

The number of 4-bedroom properties being let has seen the most significant decrease over this time at 71%. One-bed property lettings have declined by 40%.

Demand for social sector rented housing far outweighs the supply available, with 25 single person applicants for every one-bed property let. A shortfall of 705 affordable homes is estimated by the emerging strategic housing market assessment; however, it is important that this is considered further and placed in the context of viability in terms of developing supply further.

| | |
|---|--|
| 8,797 registered households waiting for social housing (31 st March 2019) | 649 social homes re-let during 2018/19, a 49% decrease since 2013/14 |
| 58% of social housing applicants require one-bedroom | 25 single person applicants for each one-bed property let |
| The shared room rate fails to cover rental levels for 1-bedroom properties in all of the ward areas. | A lack of knowledge from private landlords on the incentives to work with homeless households |

Affordability in the private rented sector

From 2001 to 2011, Wirral's private rented sector grew from 8.8% to 15.8%. This is reflective of the picture across the North West of England as a whole. Private rented accommodation makes up almost one in four (24.9%) of households in Wallasey, compared to 16.9% for Wirral Borough as a whole.

Comparing the rental price in 2018 with that in 2010 indicates that there has been around a 5% increase in median and lower quartile rental prices locally, which is higher than that experienced regionally.

Further indicative data identified from web sites such as Zoopla suggests that in some areas of the Borough, private rents are within or close to Wirral's Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates. This is particularly the case for Bidston, Birkenhead and wards LHA would cover or be within £50 PCM of average rental levels for most the corresponding property types. In some wards however such as Heswall, there are greater gaps between LHA rates and private rent levels, for example, here there is a £361 PCM shortfall in LHA for a 3-bedroom property, illustrating the variety of conditions within Wirral's rental market.

The shared room rate fails to cover rental levels for 1-bedroom properties in all of the ward areas.

Landlords reported that generally, tenants stay in their properties for more than three years, and the average length of tenancy is increasing.

Working with private sector landlords

The homelessness review identified that there was some potential to work more closely with private sector landlords, 78% of those who responded to our survey believing that the private rented sector has a role to play in meeting the needs of homeless households.

There was a lack of awareness of incentives such as the payment of cash deposits, rent in advance and housing-related support.

What we plan to do next

- We recognise the importance of enabling homeless households to be rehoused in affordable accommodation which is suitable for their needs as soon as possible so that they can move with their lives.
- Ideally, we would be in a position to secure social housing for everyone who needs it, when they need it, but the supply of accommodation simply does not meet current demand, especially for single people.
- The Council is committed to increasing supply. Homes England's current Shared Ownership and Affordable Housing Programme identified that in Wirral by 2021 at least 283 new affordable homes will be delivered in partnership with Registered Providers. This will go some way towards meeting demand, but resources and land availability will limit the extent of development in the Borough overall. The Wirral Local Plan is currently being developed, and this must support the maximisation of affordable housing delivery wherever possible.

- Where social sector rented accommodation across our housing association partners becomes available for reletting, it is important that those in the greatest need of rehousing are prioritised. A review of the Property Pool Plus allocation policy was ongoing at the time of the homelessness review, and we will take account of its findings.
- For households facing a long wait for social housing, we want to make the private rented sector a more attractive and sustainable option than it appears to be currently. There are areas of the Borough where private rental accommodation is in good supply and affordable compared to the local housing allowance levels. Yet, it is not the tenure of choice for many due to a reputation for short term tenancies and less reputable landlords.
- Equally, private sector landlords will be wary of taking on tenants who are on lower incomes or reliant on benefit payments. For them, they need to know that the rent will be paid and properties looked after. As landlords face growing amounts of regulation, they may choose to leave the market.
- We want to support positive landlord/tenant relationships where both feel supported. For landlords, we already have a number of ways to support landlords from as the payment of cash deposits, rent in advance and housing-related support, but the homelessness review suggests that these are not widely known about.
- We also know from the review that landlords may consider housing a homeless household if tenant history checks were available, or there was a property cleansing service. Financial incentives were also suggested, and this is something which we wish to explore further. If we can redirect the money, it would cost to keep a household in temporary accommodation into an incentive to access a suitable privately rented home and a much quicker move into settled accommodation; we can deliver better value customer outcomes.
- As landlords consider leaving the market, we believe that there are opportunities to reduce their management burden. We will work with our private sector landlord steering group to consider appropriate models of managing and leasing their accommodation - such as social lettings agencies - either directly as a Council, or in partnership with other providers.
- For tenants, we will explore the development of a tenant accreditation scheme. This is a training programme which provides the essential skills, knowledge and understanding required to seek accommodation and successfully maintain a home and tenancy. Certification could be provided to demonstrate that they are “tenancy” ready and less of a “risk” to prospective landlords.

Theme 5: Improving access to and developing more settled accommodation solutions

Key Actions:

- 1. Maximise opportunities to develop more social and affordable housing**
- 2. Ensure the homeless households needs are recognised and given relevant priority as part of the Property Pool Plus allocation policy review.**
- 3. Expand the landlord offer to incentivise private sector lettings.**
- 4. Increase awareness of support available to engage Private Rented Sector Landlords**
- 5. Conduct a feasibility study into the potential models to take on the management of private sector properties.**
- 6. Target and provide support for empty homes to be brought back into use for homeless households.**

Monitoring and Governance

In developing this strategy, we are striving to be aspirational but also realistic in our ambition. To meet our commitments, we need to ensure across all partners; we have the skills, services and resources. A joined-up partnership approach is critical to delivering our ambitious and innovative plans and this strategy's vision for homelessness services within the Borough.

A detailed delivery plan (will be formulated following the consultation on the strategy to reality check key priorities and actions), setting out what actions and projects we will be undertaking over the next five years can be found as a separate document. This shows what we will work on first and how will take the lead on ensuring that the work we have identified takes place.

Our new Task-and-Finish Groups will be responsible for the delivery of the key actions of the monitoring of this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and delivery plan. This will be reported to, and monitored by the Multi-Agency Homeless Forum The plan will be monitored quarterly and reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs, policy and legislative changes and achieves the priorities contained within it.

Progress against the delivery plan will be reported to elected members.

Wirral Council will continue to contribute to the work and priorities of the Liverpool City Region to ensure an effective regional collaborative approach to tackling homelessness and ending rough sleeping.