

A city wide commitment to resolving and preventing homelessness in Southampton.

Homelessness

Prevention Strategy 2013/18



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Councillor Warwick Payne

This is our third Homelessness Prevention Strategy and draws on our experiences and achievements to build on the solid foundations we've laid down in tackling homelessness in Southampton.

It comes at a time of huge economic and social change. Welfare changes will clearly have an impact on housing tenants and those on limited incomes. The social housing landscape is also changing at a rapid pace.

Our commitment to preventing homelessness is unwavering. The Council has recently set its core priorities in our City Plan 2013-16 and this Strategy will help us deliver our priorities for keeping safe and improving the health of some of Southampton's most disadvantaged residents.

Continuing the successes of the past will require joint working between the public, private and voluntary sectors and we greatly value the contributions made by each and every group.

This Strategy sets out how we plan to meet the challenges ahead and also reaffirms our stance that 'prevention is better than cure'.

It is more cost-effective and better for vulnerable individuals and families to stop homelessness before it starts, and we're determined to keep assisting those people who need our help in their hour of need.

Councillor Warwick Payne
Cabinet Member for Housing & Sustainability



Alison Elliott

This Strategy reflects the People Directorate's commitment, across all service areas, to focus on early help and prevention. Given the pressures in housing and the welfare benefits reforms some of our most vulnerable members of society face an uncertain future.

Preventing homelessness is a top priority for this directorate as it is well understood the impact of homelessness can have on the most vulnerable children, young people and adults. The impact of losing the most basic need of a home is devastating on the future prosperity of the individuals affected.

There are significant opportunities to build on the collaborative approach that has been developed to date within the directorate to ensure the whole Council and its partners work together to focus on the prevention agenda.

Whilst this is undoubtedly a challenging time for housing it is also a time of potential opportunities and this Strategy focuses on how we can harness those opportunities to support people retain that most basic need, a home.

Alison Elliott
Director of People, Southampton City Council



Overview

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to carry out a review of homelessness every five years, and to use the findings to develop a Strategy for preventing homelessness locally.

Southampton City Council has produced two previous Strategies, in 2003 and 2008, outlining how we aimed to prevent homelessness and secure sufficient accommodation and support for all those who have or may become homeless.

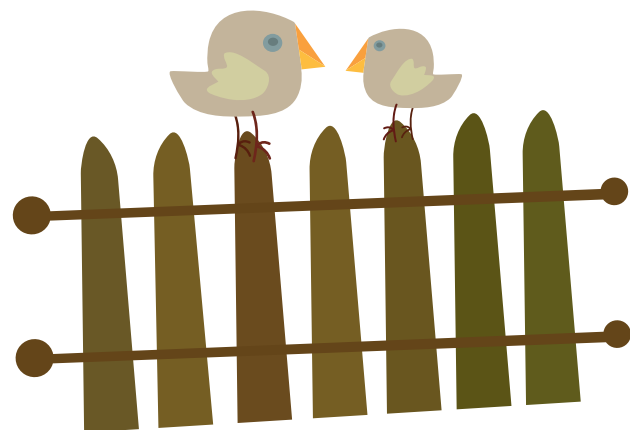
Since our first Strategy was published in 2003 there have been noticeable achievements in our homelessness response including:

- significant decreases in homelessness applications and acceptances;
- halved the use of temporary accommodation for families in order to meet government targets; and
- continued low levels of rough sleeping and the use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B).

The 2013 Strategy builds upon the achievements of our previous two Strategies, and outlines the challenges we face in today's economic and social climate.

This document sets out:

- our aims and objectives for the next five years;
- the local and national context;
- our achievements to date including successful partnership working;
- the results of the review that we conducted to help us produce the new Homeless Strategy; and
- the challenges we face ahead and our proposals to continue to prevent homelessness in our city.



Setting the scene – the local context

Southampton

Our 2013 Strategy comes at a time when the country is undergoing a period of social and economic change.

The government's welfare reforms and the reductions in housing benefit mean more people are struggling to manage their finances. This is already putting extra pressure on housing, and the full effects of the welfare reforms are yet to be fully realised.

As a Council we must continue to reduce public spending. Public austerity measures are also impacting on statutory agencies and voluntary groups, and we must all adapt the way we work. Since 2009 whilst prevention figures have continued to increase, we have seen small increases in homelessness presentations, and the levels of rough sleeping.

Like the rest of the South East, Southampton's property prices continue to grow at a rate that puts home ownership out of reach for the majority of households. As such the demand for social housing in the city is extremely high, and waiting times for an affordable home can often reach up to seven years. Consequently the private rented sector has become a very useful source of meeting local housing needs and has grown to become one of the largest private rented sectors in the South East.

Private rented homes in the city vary in quality, size and cost but generally rent levels are lower here (especially in some areas of the city), than other parts of the region such as the New Forest and Winchester. As a result, people on limited incomes can find themselves priced out of these more expensive housing areas, causing them to move to Southampton out of economic necessity, placing greater strain on the city's housing.

Our 2013 Strategy comes at a time when the country is undergoing a period of social and economic change.



Setting the scene – the national context

Government Policy

The current coalition government set out a vision for encouraging housing supply and supporting choice in its Housing Strategy, which was published in November 2011. A ministerial working group was also set up to look at the complex causes of homelessness, and in August 2012 published two important papers; “Vision to end rough sleeping: no second night out nationwide” and “Making every contact count: a joint approach to preventing homelessness”. They highlighted the importance the government placed on the issue at a national level.

- The latter document listed the following 10 challenges for local authorities to adopt to help prevent homelessness:
- 1 Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services.
 - 2 Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs.
 - 3 Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients.
 - 4 Adopt a ‘No second night out’ model or an effective local alternative.
 - 5 Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support.
 - 6 Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords.
 - 7 Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme.
 - 8 Have a homelessness Strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs.
 - 9 Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
 - 10 Not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency, and then for no longer than six weeks.

Changes to Homelessness Funding

Funding from central government to support our Homelessness Strategy has changed.

The previous Strategy had an annual ring fenced Homelessness Prevention Grant of £365,000 to support initiatives that helped meet our objectives.

However, this figure almost doubled following the comprehensive Spending Review in 2011, and an award of £634,000 was made to Southampton. But the removal of the ring fence means that as a Council, we have had to make some difficult decisions on how it is spent.

Homelessness and Supporting People funded homelessness services are now commissioned in the wider city context improving the links to Probation, Health, Adult Social Care and Children’s Services.

Another change to previous funding regimes is that increasingly central government is administering homelessness prevention funding by allocating grants to the third sector. Several national charities such as Homeless Link and Crisis have taken on the role of fund administrators, and local organisations must bid for grants. As a local authority we are not allowed to make direct grant applications, and instead must play a key role in supporting and coordinating agencies in submitting joint bids, and assisting them in monitoring outcomes. Distributing funding this way increases the need for a clear strategic direction. We must ensure that any supported bids contribute to the city’s objectives on preventing homelessness.

The table below summarises the funding resources used by the city to tackle homelessness between 2008/13.

Spend	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	Funding Type
B&B	£31,778	£44,307	£44,850	£28,132	£24,898	General Fund
PRS Bonds	£20,724	£15,186	£8,044	£6,580	£5,027	Combined Fund
Rent Deposits	£45,620	£41,605	£25,211	£77,639	£81,129	DCLG
Day Centre	n/a	n/a	n/a	£25,000	£25,000	DCLG
Accommodation Service	£47,872	£31,760	£38,853	£45,000	£35,000	DCLG
Furniture Packs	n/a	£7,600	£9,366	£9,517	£15,426	DCLG
No Limits	£22,885	£16,111	£17,340	n/a *	n/a*	DCLG
Women’s Aid	£12,471	£17,429	£17,778	n/a*	n/a*	DCLG
EU Welcome	£13,000	£22,257	£28,219	£13,500	£4,500	DCLG
Street Homeless Service	£190,598	£189,000	£148,000	£118,000	£118,000	DCLG, now in-house

* funds towards these services have now been incorporated into Southampton’s corporate grants pot.

We have also received smaller sums of one-off funding from central government to support particular projects, for example the funding of a court desk advice service, transition to new system of housing benefit award and a repossession fund.

Localism Act 2011

The Localism Act 2011 transferred more decision making powers from central government back into the hands of local authorities. It aimed to ensure decisions about housing were taken locally, and as such introduced a number of significant changes to social housing policy including:

- Fixed term tenancies of no less than five years, ending the “tenancy for life” previously granted to new tenants.
- New powers (from April 2012) to enable the full discharge of our homelessness duty by securing an offer of suitable accommodation in the private rented sector.
- Greater freedom for local authorities to formulate their allocations policy for access to social housing.

Other changes include the introduction of the new Affordable Rent Product which sets rents on new developments, and a proportion of existing stock as it becomes vacant, at up to 80% of the local market rents. This new higher rental income will be used to fund future developments of social housing.

The Council developed its Tenancy Strategy in 2012. The need to focus on homelessness prevention and assisting the local authority in meeting the needs of homeless households is reiterated within this Strategy. It also included a continuing commitment to the principle of tenancies for life in the Council’s own stock and that rent levels should remain consistent with the local housing allowance levels.

A copy of our Tenancy Strategy is available online at:

www.southampton.gov.uk/Images/Tenancy%20Strategy%202013_tcm46-338199.pdf

Welfare reforms (the national context)

The Coalition Government is introducing the biggest changes to welfare reform in 60 years. These changes are designed to reduce the unprecedented historic rise in welfare benefit spending and encourage more claimants into employment by making work pay. Many households will see their benefit payments cut, and all claimants must manage their own finances responsibly, open a bank account and pay their rent and other bills regularly. We predict these reforms - and the effect they will have on individuals - will be the single biggest challenge to preventing and tackling homelessness over the coming years.

Many more benefit claimants will actively be seeking work, looking for smaller accommodation, or trying to exist on much smaller “capped” levels of benefits; all of which may lead to increased levels of homelessness and a much greater need for local, joined up homelessness prevention work.

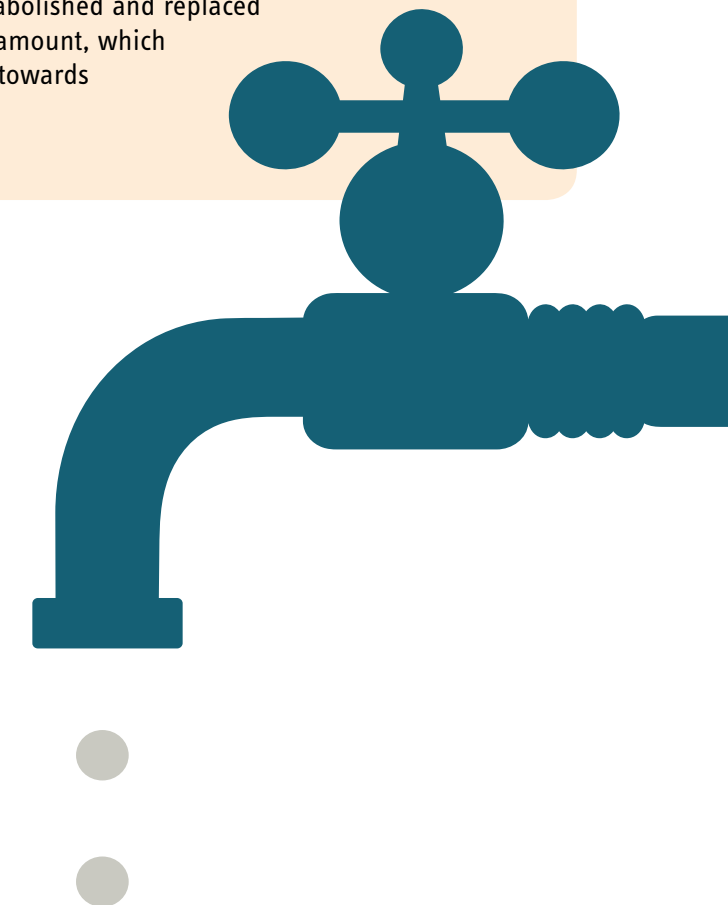
Since our last Homelessness Strategy was published in 2008 there have already been significant shifts in legislation and even more welfare reforms are set to be implemented in the next few years.

Tackling homelessness will prove much more challenging, as the impacts of welfare reform are felt. In recognition of this, the government has increased Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP), to local authorities, from £57,783 in 2010/11 to £527,593 for 2013/14. DHP is available to help benefit claimants who are having difficulty making up the shortfall in their rent, but is only available for a short term period whilst the tenant adapts to their new circumstances. It will not prevent evictions where claimants are unable to manage their finances successfully in the long term.

As well as changes to limit the amount of benefits paid out to households claimants will be expected to apply on line, manage their money monthly and receive their housing costs directly as part of a single sum called Universal Credit. Tenants will be responsible for paying their rent directly to their landlord (either social or private) directly. The uncertainties on the degree of impact these changes will have makes it vital to have a flexible Homelessness Prevention Strategy.

Summary of the welfare reforms:

- The reorganisation of several different benefits (including housing benefit) into one single Universal Credit, paid direct to claimants.
- The expectation that most claims be made online.
- The increasing of conditions, for example to job search for up to 35 hours a week, before claimants can receive benefits.
- Increasing sanctions on claimants who don’t meet their claim conditions.
- A tightened medical assessment process for the claiming of disability and sickness benefits, and the introduction of Personal Independence Payment which will be implemented over the next few years.
- The expectation that most claimants’ will open a bank account and manage their own finances independently.
- Claimants who do not find and sustain work will be subject to Total Caps.
- Larger families will be particularly affected by significant benefit reductions.
- New size criteria for benefit claimants (living in social or private accommodation) means payments will be reduced for those with ‘spare rooms’ and these households will be expected to search for cheaper or smaller accommodation, or make up the shortfall in rent out of their own pocket.
- Social Fund Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants were no longer available after April 2013.
- Council tax support from central government has been abolished and replaced with payments via local authorities, but not for the full amount, which means more people now have to contribute something towards their Council tax.



Achievements since our 2008 Homelessness Strategy

The city has focused its energy and resources increasingly on preventing homelessness. Consequently we have seen a 50% increase in the number of recorded homelessness preventions. In 2008 the number of households prevented from becoming homeless was 902, but five years later this increased to 1486 cases in 2013.

Whilst homeless acceptances have increased nationally by 20% over the last four years, in Southampton we have successfully managed to restrict this figure to 10%. This is a significant achievement and illustrates a higher proportion of preventions per head of population than the South East as a whole.

Tackling homelessness – Southampton’s key headlines:

- We met the statutory six week maximum in B&B throughout the last five years.
- The use of temporary accommodation for families was halved, meeting the government target of 134 (in 2010).
- We prevented 1486 households from becoming homeless in 2012/13.
- In 2012/13 we procured private rented accommodation for 286 priority need households, through use of bonds and deposits.
- Together with our social housing provider partners, we delivered 1796 affordable new homes between 2007/12.
- Between 2009/13 we rescued 36 owner occupiers under the government’s Mortgage Rescue Scheme, enabling home owners to become tenants and remain in their home.
- We worked successfully with private sector landlords to ensure accommodation in the private sector remains a realistic option. Two new projects were launched; to provide much needed shared accommodation for young people, and settled homes with long term leases to help more former homeless people get back on their own two feet.
- We identified families affected by the four-bed housing benefit limit, and negotiated new rent levels or helped them to find alternative accommodation.
- A successful bid of £200,000 of Homelessness Transitional Funding ensured the city’s only remaining Day Centre stays open for two years after its local funding was cut. The Centre provides an essential service for the city’s rough sleepers.
- A new single homeless service pathway was introduced following the service review of Supporting People funded services.
- We supported 25-35 year olds access appropriate accommodation through the Day Centre.
- Private rented accommodation was accessed at the Day Centre for 120 households in 2012/13. This includes single homeless clients who received funds for a deposit or rent in advance, through the help of an Accommodation Officer at the Day Centre.
- Using the Homebid lettings system we have been able to maintain a route into social housing that is not dependent on a household becoming homeless.
- We have achieved considerable success in ensuring tenants in our temporary accommodation are supported and can prepare for a move on into stable accommodation.
- We developed a programme of publicity to help raise awareness of the many welfare benefit changes.
- Working with the DWP we visited 249 families who were identified as being affected by the benefit cap, to help them prepare for the cut in income.

Homelessness Review 2013

Homelessness trends

To help us prepare for the development of this Strategy, and in order to explore the challenges facing the city, a statistical review of homelessness and homelessness services in Southampton was carried out. This information was shared with a wide range of agencies that are involved in helping to deliver services to homeless people citywide.

The review was led by the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group who met regularly to monitor progress of the Strategy, help steer change and make recommendations for use of government grant funding.

It was completed in consultation with key stakeholders (organisations and agencies working in Southampton on homelessness related issues) including:

- Adult and children’s social care services
- Health services
- Youth offending service
- Probation service
- Various advice agencies
- Housing partners and providers

Stakeholders were asked to complete questionnaires that focused on the main issues facing three distinct groups who encounter homelessness: young people (16 – 25 year olds), single people (including rough sleepers) and families. The aim was to identify the needs of these groups, and find solutions.

A summary of the financial challenges ahead along with these review findings were used as evidence of the needs in the city, and provided a framework to help us develop a coherent and viable Homelessness Prevention Strategy.

The review provided hard evidence of the collective success of the homelessness prevention measures in Southampton over the past few years, which is a tribute to the collective work of many agencies across the city.

A separate homelessness full review document including the full list of agencies consulted as part of the review is available on the Council’s website at www.southampton.gov.uk/living/housing/housingpolicies/homelessnessstrategy.aspx

The consultation with stakeholders identified real concerns about shrinking resources and potential increasing demand for services from homeless clients. The results are outlined on the following page, and the challenges identified for the future

The review provided hard evidence of the collective success of the homelessness prevention measures in Southampton.



The stakeholders came to the consensus that the four key objectives in our current Strategy remain relevant and should be retained as the focus for looking forward. These objectives are:

1 Prevent homelessness.

2 Maximise the number of available homes in the city to all sectors of the community including homeless people.

3 Provide good quality accommodation with support for short periods only, in order to enable successful move on and maintenance of a settled home.

4 Improve positive outcomes for homeless people or people at risk of homelessness.

are discussed in the next section.

The agreed commitments that the city should follow are:

Young people

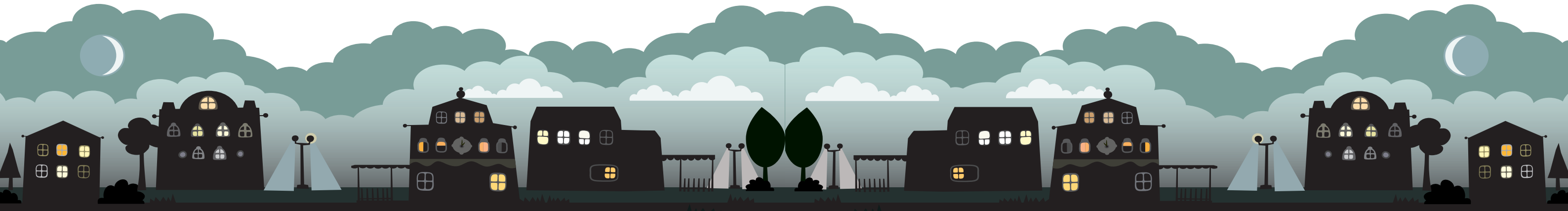
1. Refrain from the use of B&B for 16/17 year olds except in emergencies.
2. Return young people to the family home where it is safe to do so, and keep the possibility of return home even when placed in supported housing.
3. Avoid placing young people under the age of 25 in adult services wherever possible.
4. Carry out early planning for housing for those leaving care in order to improve outcomes.

Single adult

1. Keep numbers of rough sleepers to minimal levels and retain a rough sleeper outreach service that can locate and work with street sleepers.
2. Retain emergency assessment accommodation for rough sleepers so that they can be taken off the street, in line with the government guidelines of 'No second night out'.
3. Ensure vital Day Centre provision is retained so that homeless people have access to basic needs and services that support the accommodation pathway.
4. Keep a range of accommodation provision that reflects the differing needs of single adults, and enables them to progress to sustainable independent living.

Families

1. Make only minimum use of B&B for families.
2. Ensure temporary accommodation is of good quality, located in a range of locations across the city and used for time limited periods to reduce the uncertainty for families.
3. Keep resources focused on assisting families to stay in their homes and retain an approach which supports families to find their most appropriate solution.
4. Ensure that homelessness priority for social housing is balanced against other housing needs so that incentives to homelessness are not created.
5. Make use of the new power to use accommodation in the private rented sector, but only where it meets a good standard and is available for more than two years.



Looking forward: emerging challenges and opportunities

Welfare reform and social policy changes nationally are likely to bring significant challenges to homelessness services in the coming years. Housing need and demand for services is intensifying, and there are early warning signs that homelessness is on the increase. Whilst actual numbers of additional homeless households are still small, the worry is how we will be able to respond in financially constrained times should this trend continue.

The key challenges identified by the review are explored below:

Homelessness prevention

Feedback from private landlords indicates that many are reluctant to let their properties to benefit claimants because of the uncertainty this represents for their rental income. Private landlords who do not receive rent payments from tenants who are struggling to manage on a reduced income or benefit reductions, will look to recover possession of their property, leading to more evictions and increases in homelessness.

Similarly, in the social housing sector there is also increasing pressure on both Council and registered provider landlords to collect rent to help fund the development of further homes or as a consequence of self financing arrangements. Whilst this presents opportunities to improve services, it is heavily reliant on the full collection of rental income. In addition, new social rent levels charged under the Affordable Rent regime are higher than previously which make the burden of collecting these rents from hard pressed households much greater. This is compounded by reductions in the direct payment of rent by housing benefits. Under-occupancy deductions, benefit cap restrictions and the introduction of Universal Credit, will all create additional burdens on collection of rent and have the potential to increase the numbers of tenants evicted for rent arrears. In 2012/13 the Council received £40 million in housing benefit payments for Council rents – around half of the authority’s rental income – which is now insecure with the introduction of Universal Credit.

Household incomes are clearly under pressure as a consequence of increasing living costs and reduced incomes. The migration from Disability Living Allowance to the new Personal Independence Payment is predicted to reduce available income to households with disabilities by up to 40%. Larger families especially will be affected by the benefit cap of £500 per week, which may mean some households will need to use up to 50% of their income to pay their rent. All benefit claimants, except pensioners, will see increases in the amount they have to pay for Council tax. This increasing pressure on household incomes coupled with a rise in both private and social housing rents, pose significant difficulties for vulnerable, especially larger families. Our challenge is to support households in making the right choices on how they spend their income, how best to budget and how to improve their long term prospects for independence through paid work.

Owner occupiers have not been shielded from the economic downturn and also pose a potential risk to becoming homeless. Employers are being forced to make increasing numbers of redundancies, which can increase an owner occupier’s chances of losing their home. Repossession rates however are lower than in previous economic downturns. This is due to relatively low mortgage interest rates, lower sales values locally, and the introduction of a government Mortgage Rescue Scheme coupled with positive measures that lenders now have to follow.

We are concerned about the possibility of increasing homelessness amongst owner occupiers. Lenders may start to repossess more homes from struggling homeowners when property prices start to rise, and likewise if there is a mortgage interest rate rise the ability for owners to sustain their repayment is threatened. This is coupled with the impending termination of the current government funded Mortgage Rescue Scheme in March 2014, one of our primary prevention tools, that may also lead to additional homelessness pressure.

Supply and use of stock

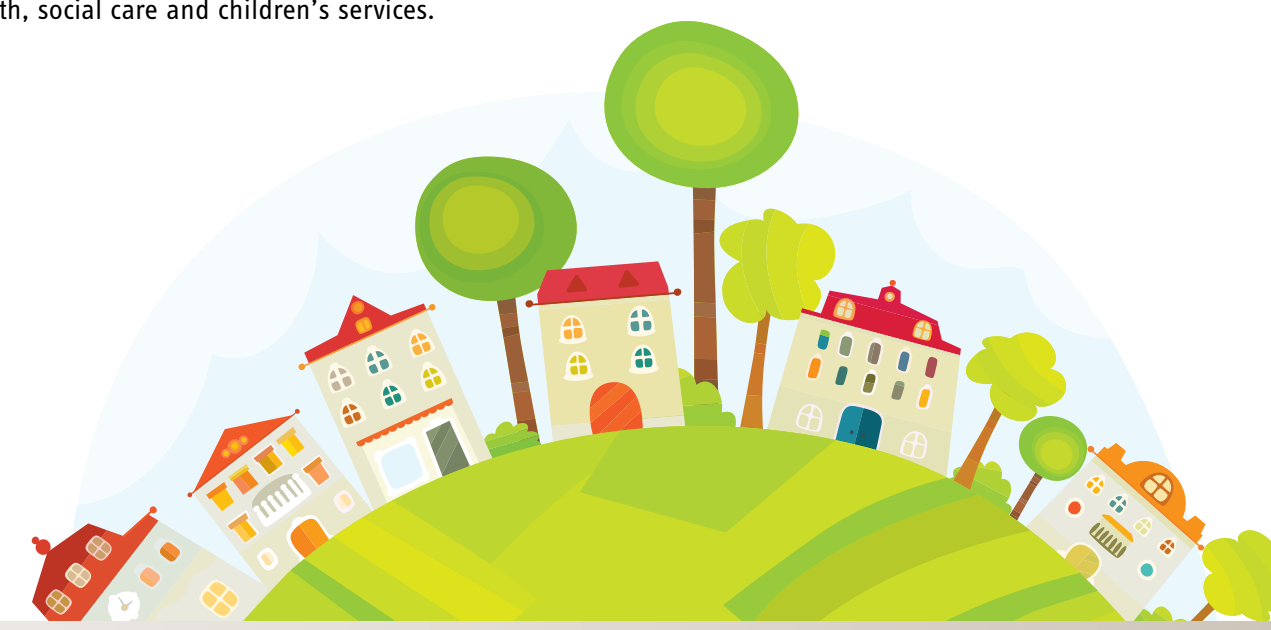
The size of the private rented sector in Southampton is twice the size of the national average, yet it is out of reach financially for increasing numbers of families and single people. Therefore it may no longer be a realistic option for low income households, especially those needing larger accommodation when Universal Credit is introduced. National increases in homelessness acceptances have already risen, due to the end of Assured Shorthold Tenancies, from 14% to 21%. Locally the rise in households accepted as homeless due to the end of Assured Shorthold Tenancies is from 19 in 2008/9, to 74 in 2012/13. We anticipate that this figure will continue to rise.

Equally access to good quality private rented housing is a challenge many families are facing. A Housing Condition Survey of Southampton’s private sector housing in 2003 found that 23,600 homes were non-decent and 15,300 in need of substantial repair. Regulations and HMO additional licensing is a welcomed addition to improve conditions of private sector accommodation; however there is some suggestion that a few landlords may withdraw from the lettings market deterred by tougher regulation. Private rented accommodation is heavily relied upon as a significant means of preventing homelessness, so managing these two important but competing priorities will be a challenge.

Within the social sector, demand for Council housing and registered providers is outstripping supply as families and single people attempt to access this accommodation in the absence of other affordable options. Over half of the Housing Register – which currently stands at 14,000 – are single people. As the welfare reforms take effect we anticipate the demand for larger family homes to further increase. We have already seen increased demand for smaller accommodation from social housing households affected by the ‘spare room’ benefit reduction. Estimated supply of new build suggests a shortfall of roughly 1,471 homes per year. This is coupled with a further concern that Affordable Rents introduced on new social housing developments may still be out of reach for some low income families.

We also anticipate increasing demand for local social housing stock due to displacement of households from higher cost areas in Hampshire and London, as families affected by the benefit cap relocate to places like Southampton to find cheaper accommodation. This in turn will place extra pressure on other local services including health, social care and children’s services.

As the welfare reforms take effect we anticipate the demand for larger family homes to further increase.



Temporary accommodation for short periods

In Southampton, placement of families into B&B accommodation has always been a last resort, carried out in accordance with statutory requirements, whilst other housing options are explored. If homeless applications rise as expected, the use of B&B accommodation for vulnerable households, especially for those with children, will inevitably increase as an emergency homelessness response. In 2009, No. 5 Bellevue Road (which provided temporary support needs for the 16 – 65 age group) closed with the loss of 63 units of accommodation. The loss of this short term supported accommodation makes alternative arrangements for this client group a big challenge.

A reduction of Supporting People funds will further reduce the numbers of available bed spaces in supported housing for the single homeless, and subsequently may lead to increases in numbers of people having to sleep rough or ‘sofa surf’ for longer spells. The average number of rough sleepers found on outreach sessions has doubled from five people in 2008/09 to 9.8 people in 2012/13, with a 50% increase in the numbers of separate individuals found during the year from 98 in 2009/10 to 154 in 2012/13.

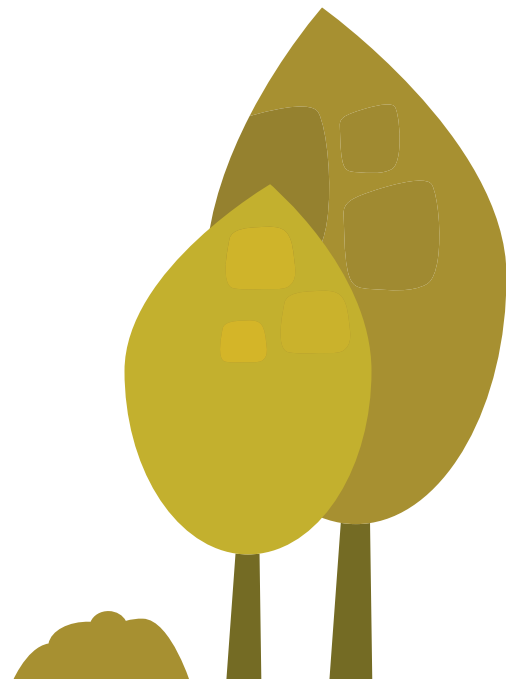
Rough sleepers

The number of people found sleeping rough on Southampton’s streets has been variable over past years, but the increase in average numbers as outlined above shows that rough sleeping remains a real concern.

A particular issue is the significant rise in EU accession state nationals found sleeping rough in Southampton (which is higher proportionally than in London).

Local outreach sessions have found an average of 48% of rough sleepers come from EU member states (compared with 28% of London’s rough sleeping figures collected by CHAIN). This figure may increase further with the removal of restrictions from new EU accession states joining in January 2014.

The number of people found sleeping rough on Southampton’s streets remains a real concern.



Sustaining positive outcomes

Supporting People funded services play an essential role in preventing homelessness in the city (through providing accommodation and floating support), but pressure on local budgets will impact seriously on some of our most vulnerable client groups.

Supporting People homelessness services provide the main support to help drug and alcohol users turn their lives around and find settled accommodation. Trained support workers focus on harm minimisation, and provide particular support for offenders leaving prison and those completing drug and alcohol rehabilitation. New proposals to change resettlement support services for offenders (via the Ministry of Justice’s Transforming Rehabilitation agenda) are likely to create uncertainty and additional pressure on housing and associated services. Reductions in funding may impact on the ability of these services to address their clients’ housing needs.

We remain committed to tackling and preventing homelessness in Southampton by continuing to develop best practice, working with partners and pooling city wide resources.

We know there are many challenges ahead, including:

- the potential for more households to be evicted for rent arrears, following benefit reductions
- increasing pressure on our finances due to tighter budgets and changes to the way homeless funding is allocated
- instability and uncertainty in the voluntary and community sectors caused by budget restrictions
- the increasing reliance on the local private rented sector, and the need to increase good quality, affordable accommodation.

Despite these challenges we see opportunities for the future. Front line statutory services have been brought together in the Council’s new People Directorate, and with the Council taking responsibility for Public Health there are now much closer and stronger links with health care commissioning.

The successful work being undertaken within the Families Matter programme (Southampton’s response to the government’s Troubled Families agenda) will build on existing prevention work and help many more families maintain their homes.

We remain committed to tackling and preventing homelessness in Southampton by continuing to develop best practice, working with partners and pooling city wide resources.

This Strategy sets out our ongoing objectives and illustrates our continuing achievements against them. We have highlighted and identified challenges that we consider may hinder our progress in delivery of those objectives.

An Action Plan will be developed to detail our anticipated approach, yet offer flexibility to enable our services to adapt to changing priorities as they emerge.

Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2013 - the way forward

We have drawn on our experiences and achievements to produce our current Homelessness Prevention Strategy. It has also been developed in light of national policy and the rapidly changing environment, and as such we have made a commitment to review it annually.

This annual review will be carried out within the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group, where all relevant agencies are represented. This will ensure the actions remain responsive to the realities on the ground. By keeping a close eye on progress we aim to ensure that services and statutory responsibilities continue to be met and that we maintain a clear focus on preventing homelessness in Southampton.

We have drawn up the following minimum standards for preventing homelessness in Southampton.

Homelessness Prevention Strategy priority actions:

- Continue to foster a city approach to tackling homelessness to sustain a strong focus on preventing homelessness.
- Carry out close monitoring of homelessness demand and impacts on other agencies funded to prevent homelessness, so that early responses can be made.
- Promote the positive contribution of working together to achieve collective aims and realise the benefits of joint working that the new Council People Directorate brings.
- Engage with work and skills development programmes to assist benefit dependent households into work – increasing access to IT and computer literacy to help in this process.
- Encourage household budgeting skills and facilitate access to low cost financial products as a means of improving financial capability amongst vulnerable groups.
- Work in partnership with local advice agencies and courts to deliver prevention advice targeted at those most in need of it.
- Develop sign up to policies, for both private and social landlords that avoid eviction and do not exclude those in greatest need.
- Sustain access to good quality private accommodation and ‘bring back’ empty properties into use by working with private sector landlords.
- Deliver the right level of temporary accommodation for families through the Council’s asset plan and ensure capital resources are made available for investing in the accommodation.
- Ensure participation in the review of supported housing for young people and parents and seek the right range of housing provision for care leavers.
- Protect current funding for homelessness services and continue to target homelessness funds towards prevention activities.
- Support funding opportunities that complement the city’s homelessness prevention agenda in light of dwindling local authority finances.
- Develop close working with private sector leasing schemes and registered providers to sustain a flow of additional accommodation.
- Build on work with the Police, Probation and Borders Agency to tackle entrenched rough sleepers in line with a ‘No second night out’ approach.

- Consider new trends in housing need as part of Lettings Policy review so that we continue to use social housing to best effect and as a strong prevention tool.
- Maintain close working with registered providers to influence the development of more homes of the right mix of property sizes.
- Maintain current arrangements for rent direct payments to private landlords where they accommodate vulnerable tenants and work to maximise the opportunities for rent direct to all landlords under Universal Credit where this will sustain tenancies for vulnerable households.
- Investigate the cost of providing emergency beds for rough sleepers with no recourse to public funds during severe weather via the current providers.

We will monitor trends in homelessness annually by using the following set of Priority Indicators to ensure that the Strategy and service can adapt to the changing landscape. We will:

1. Closely monitor the incidence of statutory homelessness and homelessness prevention numbers.
2. Liaise with Housing Benefit, Private Sector housing team and maintain landlord forums to seek to identify the numbers of landlords in the private rented sector no longer housing our clients.
3. Monitor court possession hearings and evictions of social housing tenants.
4. Track any rise in numbers of families approaching services, who are unable to afford their accommodation.
5. Record increases in use of B&B temporary accommodation, by volume, length of stay and the cost to the Council.
6. Investigate increase in displaced homeless applicants moving to our area through local authority notifications and via referral from services such as Health Visitors.
7. Track the dependence on food banks by amount of local welfare assistance and grant funds used.
8. Monitor the number of casework enquiries from families with financial and debt problems.
9. Track the increase in families overcrowding themselves in smaller accommodation through the Housing Register, social care agencies and Health Visiting teams.
10. Monitor rough sleeping numbers by regular street outreach counts and numbers of people accessing the Day Centre.
11. Profile the ages of clients found on street counts and log numbers accessing specific services such as No Limits to track any rises in young people becoming homeless.
12. Record numbers of young people provided with supported housing that prevents them becoming homeless and the numbers of pathway housing plans completed prior to leaving care.
13. Plot any rise in people fleeing domestic violence against homelessness causes.
14. Record the numbers of people subject to the benefit cap requiring homelessness assistance.

