



**HOMELESSNESS &
ROUGH SLEEPING
STRATEGY
2022 - 2027**



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FOREWORD

As Cabinet Member for Housing, I am firmly committed to working in partnership with our local communities to prevent and relieve all forms of homelessness in the district.

There are many different and often complex reasons why people may face homelessness. These vary from unexpected economic, social, or medical reasons why families or individuals cannot remain in their current home, to the impact of mental ill health abuse and addiction or other forms of trauma either currently or in their past.

This Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is designed specifically to help local residents experiencing homelessness or the risk of homelessness to get back on their feet and live in settled accommodation.



I want to give a heartfelt thanks to the many people who have contributed to the Review of Homelessness in the District that has informed this strategy. Notable appreciation goes to those residents who have shared their lived experiences of homelessness to help us understand both the causes and solutions that worked for them.

The common theme is building resilience and providing the right support at the right time based on the individual needs, circumstances, and aspirations of our residents.

Our housing services cannot do this alone and I am impressed by the level of commitment that other professional agencies and community groups have given to identify and deliver the priorities in this strategy.

We have agreed a partnership approach that draws on all of our skills and resources. We will maximise opportunities that are available to provide effective flexible services delivery plan that I shall oversee and publish every year for the duration of the strategy.

Cllr Holly Whitbread
Housing and Strategic Health Partnerships Portfolio Holder

INTRODUCTION

SUMMARY

The Epping Forest District Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (the strategy) has been developed in partnership with local organisations and individuals committed to preventing and relieving homelessness and ending rough sleeping in the district.

This document sets out the vision, five priorities and associated aims and objectives that Epping Forest District Council (the Council) has agreed with its partners to prevent and relieve homelessness in the district between 2022-2027. It includes mechanisms for achieving shared objectives and will be delivered through an annual delivery plan.

Our strategy is underpinned by an evidence-based review of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping in the district and open consultation with local residents and organisations. Findings of the review and the outcome of the consultation have been produced as standalone reports in conjunction with this strategy.

THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

Under section 1(3), (4) of the Homelessness Act 2002, local housing authorities have a duty to review and publish their Homelessness Strategy on at least a 5-yearly basis.

Major changes have been introduced in recent years to the duties that local housing authorities have towards families and single people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which came into effect in 2018, and the associated Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities 2018 (as amended) are considered to be the most significant changes to primary homelessness legislation and guidance since 1985.

In August 2018, The Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) (now Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC)) published its national Rough Sleeping Strategy.

There continues to be a range of homelessness related legislative and regulatory directive initiatives and funding opportunities to prevent and reduce homelessness.

Most recently; the Prime Minister's 2019 pledge to end rough sleeping, the Coronavirus Act 2020 (as amended) which placed temporary restrictions on the residential possession processes, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 which strengthens the support for victims of abuse, and the Levelling Up White Paper 2022 which aims to spread opportunity more equally across the UK.

THE LOCAL CONTEXT

The district of Epping Forest is one of 12 district, borough, and city local housing authorities in the Essex. It is classified statistically as urban with significant rural populations, covering an area of approximately 339 square kilometres. In 2018 the resident population was estimated to be 131,137 people.

We are the ninth (out of 12) most densely populated district in Essex (well below the County average) and divided into 24 town and parish councils. These are mainly rural and

sparsely populated in the north and east, and more densely populated in the south (bordering the London boroughs of Enfield, Waltham Forest, Redbridge, and Havering).

The majority of residents live across four towns; Loughton, Waltham Abbey, Epping, and Buckhurst Hill.

Index of multiple deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) ranks areas in relation to six indices; income, employment, health, education, crime, barriers to housing and services, and the environment.

In 2019 the district was ranked 200 out of 317 lower tier authorities in England (1 being the most deprived). Our ranking has improved gradually to its highest level since 2007. This belies the contrast of mainly affluent geographical areas with several pockets of significant deprivation.

The district is split into 78 neighbourhoods known as 'Lower Super Output Areas'. In 2019 a total of 17 neighbourhoods were ranked in the top 20% (least deprived) areas nationally, five neighbourhoods were ranked in the bottom 30% (most deprived areas) one of which was ranked in the bottom 20%.

Housing supply and demand

The demand for affordable housing in the district far outweighs the supply across all tenure types. In 2017 there was an estimated 55,630 homes in the district with around 85% in the private sector of which about 70% were owner-occupied and 15% privately rented.

Social housing accounts for approximately 14% of accommodation in the district. The Council is the largest social landlord with 6,384 general needs properties which equates to 11% of all properties whilst housing associations own just over 3%.

The Strategic Housing Market Assessment forecasts that 12,573 properties of all tenure types are required to meet demand across the district over the 12-year period 2011- 2033.

The Council plans to build circa 195 homes for affordable housing between 2021/22 and 2025/26. These will be allocated to people on the housing register including homeless households.

Urgent housing need

As of 31 March 2021, there were 1,555 people on the housing register who qualified for social housing. Of these 697 had an urgent need for rehousing.

Between April 2020 and March 2021, a total of 567 households approached the Council for assistance due to homelessness or the threat of homelessness.

We provided information and advice to 186 households, accepted a duty to prevent or delay 123 households from becoming homeless and provided relief to 258 households who had lost their home (typically offering temporary accommodation and support to find alternative accommodation)

We also accepted a main housing duty to provide settled accommodation for 96 households.

The effects of Covid 19

The impact of the pandemic has significantly affected the patterns of homelessness and rough sleeping in the district. Government restrictions on possession proceedings, risks to public health through close contact, financial and social hardship, furlough and isolation have seen a reduction in landlord evictions but an increase in domestic abuse, non-violent relationship breakdown and the number of people found to be sleeping rough or at risk of doing so.

The effects have been compounded by supply chain issues which have slowed down much needed housing developments and the volume of properties that would typically become available and ready to let within given timescales.

LINKS WITH OTHER STRATEGIES AND POLICIES

In order to achieve maximum impact, the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022- 2027 is being aligned with the following strategic documents:

- EFDC Allocations Scheme 2022-2027
- EFDC Corporate Plan 2018-2023
- Epping Forest Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026
- EFDC Housing Strategy 2023-2027
- Essex County Council Housing Strategy 2021-2025
- Levelling Up Essex – An Essex White Paper 2022
- EFDC emerging Local Plan
- More than Bricks and Mortar Estate Improvement Programme 2020
- EFDC Tenancy Policy 2022-2027

THE STRATEGY

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-2027 aims to achieve a whole systems partnership approach to preventing and relieving homelessness and to end rough sleeping in the district, in harmony with the Council's corporate objectives and the Levelling Up agenda.

The Council's key corporate objectives are:

- People live longer, healthier and independent lives
- Adults and children are supported in times of need
- People and communities achieve their full potential
- Delivering effective core services that people want
- Improving the district housing offer

The purpose of the strategy is to:

- Make a significant contribution to social and economic recovery and social mobility within the district to redress the impact of the pandemic

- Support the Community and Wellbeing commitment to build strong, resilient, cohesive and healthy communities
- Help households that are homeless or at risk of homelessness in the district to access appropriate support to enable them to live well and achieve their aspirations in suitable good quality affordable housing
- Strengthen the partnerships and shared services that already exist within the district and create opportunities for new initiatives, partnerships and volunteers to jointly own the strategy and be responsible for its delivery
- Extend commitment to our staff by providing the opportunities and environment to develop their skills, achieve their aspirations and thrive as a strong and motivated workforce.

IDENTIFYING THE PRIORITIES

Priorities, themes and intended outcomes were identified through a review of homelessness and rough sleeping in the district. Additional research and analysis was achieved in collaboration with members of our community who have an interest in preventing and relieving homelessness.

OPEN CONSULTATION

We completed a two-stage open consultation exercise between May and December 2021.

Online consultation was combined with targeted events to enable residents, professional partners, other statutory services, staff, and members of the Council to express their ideas and views on what priorities should be included in the strategy.

The events included bitesize briefing sessions, detailed workshops, webinars, surveys and smaller meetings. These were underpinned by a review of local and national statistical data and the lived experiences of homeless households.

We then went back to the same audience to consider and comment on the Council's proposals and the outcome of the consultation. The review and equalities impact assessment are available on our website.

OUR FIVE PRIORITIES

The strategy is made up of five evidence-based priorities with associated themes and clear measurable outcomes that we aim to achieve over the next five years.

Priority 1: Working Together

Theme: Make every contact count

Priority 2: Preventing Homelessness

Theme: Early intervention

Priority 3: Building Resilience

Theme: Positive mental health, positive activities, positive community

Priority 4: Access to Suitable Accommodation and Support

Theme: More than bricks and mortar

Priority 5: Ending Rough Sleeping

Theme: Proportionate prevention, intervention and recovery

PRIORITY 1: WORKING TOGETHER

In addition to the 12 partner organisations based at the Epping Community Hub we have the potential to strengthen collaborative working with over 150 statutory services, community groups, charities, social enterprises and countless individual volunteers.

- By working together we will share skills, expertise and resources to make every customer contact count and maximise opportunities to secure funding and develop integrated service improvements.

Together we will:

Make Every Contact Count

Making every contact count is an approach that uses the day-to-day interactions between organisations and people to support them with making positive changes to their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

- We propose to extend the Make Every Contact Count principle to become a whole-systems approach to homelessness prevention. It will recognise the interdependencies between housing and the environment, income, vulnerability, employment, education, and crime in the wider determinants of health for our residents.

More than half of residents who approach the Council due to homelessness or at risk of homelessness have one or more support needs. The most common issues include a history of mental health problems, physical ill health or disability, domestic abuse and/or substance misuse.

- We will work with the Health and Wellbeing Board to develop a skilled workforce equipped with the knowledge, and tools to make every contact count in our interactions with residents so that we can offer the right support at the right time.

Review the Duty to Refer

Public authorities such as social service authorities, prison services, emergency departments and hospitals have a duty to refer service users who they consider may be homeless or at risk of homelessness, to a local housing authority.

The duty became effective in October 2018 and the quality and number of referrals has increased over the last two years. However, more work can be done with agencies to facilitate appropriate timely referrals.

- We will review the Duty to Refer arrangements with statutory and non-statutory services, with a view to increasing the number of appropriate early interventions.

Develop a support service with the NHS for people with substance misuse

The link between mental health, substance misuse and homelessness is indisputable both locally and nationally. Not all people who become homeless struggle with their mental health or misuse drugs, alcohol or other substances. However; substance misuse can be both a cause and result of homelessness - and mental illness is often an underlying cause of substance misuse, and therefore homelessness too.

- Around 10% of all households that approached the Council for help to prevent or relieve homelessness reported having either drug or alcohol dependency needs. Public Health England statistics demonstrate that around 42% of people sleeping rough are likely to misuse alcohol and 41% are likely to misuse drugs.
- Building on the success of the recently appointed mental health navigator we are planning another joint venture with the NHS to secure sufficient funds to recruit a substance misuse navigator to work directly with affected homeless households.
- We will help to end the cycle of substance misuse, mental health and repeat homelessness.

Maximise opportunities for grant funding and shared resources

Our network of partners spans an increasing range of statutory and non-statutory not-for-profit organisations, social enterprises, community interest groups and local businesses.

Much of the innovative partnership work that we do is made possible by successful multi-agency bids for Government and charitable trust grant funding as it becomes available, often at short notice.

- We will maximise access to available funds and opportunities for shared resources.

Grant funding has enabled us to convert two single dwelling homes into housing with support to break the cycle of rough sleeping, deliver community development projects at our temporary accommodation scheme, and co-locate the NHS mental health clinician to address the health and support needs of homeless households.

- We will continue to make the majority of our joint bids in collaboration with the Essex sector-wide Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Partnership, members of the Health and Wellbeing Board and/or the Community Safety Partnership.

Collectively we have a powerful voice and a comprehensive portfolio of skills, experience and resources, but also acknowledge that bid submissions can be labour intensive and require flexible co-operation when dealing with competing priorities.

- We will build on our shared and individual strengths and expand as opportunities arise to secure grant funding and deliver initiatives that are conducive to all five priorities within this strategy.

Promote social and economic mobility

A local and national skills shortage, fuel poverty and increase in the cost of living is affecting all parts of the local economy and community.

In 2020/21 at least 32% of households that presented as homelessness or at risk of

homelessness were registered as unemployed. One of the main causes of homelessness was loss of rented accommodation in the private rented sector which has become increasingly unaffordable for many families. Despite being a relatively affluent district overall there are several neighbourhoods that fall in the bottom 30% of the most deprived areas in the country.

- Epping Forest District Council is one of a group of large not-for-profit organisations in Essex known as ‘anchor organisations’ that will continue to work together to identify how our employment, procurement and workforce development practices can support local people.

A network of over 30 partners will continue to work on several employment initiatives including the appointment of work coaches and arranging ‘reverse job fairs’.

- We will collectively bid for funding to create similar employment opportunities for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping.

PRIORITY 2: PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

Theme: Early intervention

Where possible, we believe the best way to tackle homelessness is to prevent it from happening in the first place. The purpose of early intervention is to prevent homelessness in the long term - not just the 56 days leading up to a household potentially losing their home.

- We will minimise the risks of the problems that lead to homelessness and take action to prevent future homelessness that extends beyond the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Our early intervention will include:

Accessible community information and advice

The lived experiences of homelessness that Kiera, Ahmed and Somaiya and Tex shared in the lived experiences section of the strategy highlight that a whole-system approach to early intervention is dependent on good communication and easy access to information.

Kiera, Ahmed and Somaiya and Tex all had very different reasons for becoming homeless and all described how they benefited from multi-agency support.

- We will establish what more we can do so that people finding themselves in these situations know who to approach for help before they reach crisis point.
- For example Tex knowing he could turn to the Council before turning to the street; the range of people available for Kiera to talk to for emotional support, and Ahmed and Somaiya being aware of alternatives to temporary accommodation such as key worker housing or affordable home ownership.
- We will continue to learn from lived experiences and talk to other agencies to find out where there are gaps in information, or access to information, and agree practical solutions to plug those gaps.

Identifying and removing barriers to digital inclusion

Digital inclusion or rather reducing digital exclusion is about making sure that residents have the capability to access the internet for things that benefit them, including access to information, advice and services.

Digital exclusion is linked to wider inequalities in society and is more likely to be faced by homeless households, those on low income, people over 65 and people with disabilities.

When the pandemic hit in March 2020, nationally only 51% of households earning between £6,000 and £10,000 had internet access compared to 99% of households with an income over £40,000.

- We will align this strategy with the Council's Digital Strategy 2022-2025 to reinforce wider practical measures for improved access to online services for vulnerable and disadvantaged residents.
- Central to this support will be the role of the staff responsible for providing customer-facing services in the Community hub and staff who provide outreach support.
- Community responders at Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF) will offer home visits or telephone support to anyone struggling with digital access and can provide free SIM cards with 6 months unlimited calls and texts and 20GB data to qualifying vulnerable residents via their partner organisation WECAN.
- VAEF and the Housing and Wellbeing Service will be looking at other ways of offering digital support to access housing related services.

Landlord incentives to provide settled accommodation

Private rented accommodation accounts for about 15% of all properties in the district, and over recent years has become increasingly unaffordable for residents on low incomes. Prior to the pandemic, loss of private rented accommodation was the main reason for threatened homelessness.

- The Council will work with private sector landlords who provide decent affordable accommodation both to prevent people from becoming unnecessarily homeless, and to assist the Council to discharge its main housing duty (by providing settled accommodation to those who have lost their home).

The Coronavirus Act 2020 provided protection to social and private tenants through a variety of restrictions between March 2020 and October 2021 to delay when landlords could evict tenants.

Now the restrictions have been lifted and the backlog of bailiff eviction warrants begins to subside, the Council anticipates an increase in homelessness. This is likely to be compounded by concerned landlords pre-empting the proposed abolition of S.21 no fault evictions.

- We will make best use of a skilled negotiator to liaise with private sector landlords on a case-by-case basis to reconsider allowing tenants to stay who they had asked to leave, or to charge an affordable rent and provide a tenancy for a minimum of 12 months to a household in need.

- We will take a flexible bespoke approach to using limited homelessness prevention grant funding to provide help where it is needed to maximum effect.

Maximise support and accommodation options for people leaving institutions

Our profiling information shows that too many people leaving institutions find themselves homeless and vulnerable to exploitation, addiction, poverty and mental and physical health problems. This can occur either straight away, after a period of hidden homelessness such as sofa surfing, or after being granted a tenancy which they struggle to sustain.

We have protocols in place so that people leaving institutions including hospital, care, prison, and the armed forces do so in a planned way and have the necessary support plans and housing options arrangements in place to enable them to adjust and thrive.

- We will work with the Essex Housing Officers Group, the Essex Homeless Officers Housing Group and relevant agencies to review the effectiveness of the protocols for people leaving institutions.

Raising awareness of homelessness

The donations, support and time that individual volunteers, local community groups and businesses give to our temporary accommodation scheme at Christmas and throughout the year reflects the social capital that exists within the district.

- We will harness that social capital and raise awareness of homelessness, the causes, impact and lived experiences from a wide range of residents.
- We want to work with CHEAD to go into schools and colleges and talk with students about homelessness from their perspective and encourage them to really think about how it can be avoided.

PRIORITY 3: BUILDING RESILIENCE

Theme: Positive mental health, positive activities, positive community

The guiding principles of positive mental health, positive activities, positive community feature in all of the housing related services we provide as well as our plans for economic and social recovery from the pandemic.

- We will embrace our duty under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to take appropriate steps for improving the health of the people in the district. Our review of homelessness informs and is informed by the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.
- Our Homelessness Strategy is intended to achieve complete synergy with the current Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Levelling Up Essex White Paper.

We believe that building resilience within the community and amongst staff and partner organisations is central to diminishing the human cost of homelessness.

- We are keen to learn from peers in clinical and third sector services about building resilience.

Our approach to building resilience will include:

Developing our workforce

We want to develop a resilient, motivated, and empowered workforce that is well equipped to meet the demands of the constantly changing environment. It will recognise and understand vulnerability and the complexities of trauma that many of our customers have experienced, and has an awareness of neurodiversity including the mixture of associated strengths and weaknesses.

- We will consult our People team and experienced partnership organisations to provide staff with suitable training to develop their skills and improve their communication with people who may be affected by trauma or neurodiversity.

Launch the 'Say Something' campaign

We have a moral and legal obligation to say something if we come across a potential safeguarding issue. This may be easier to do when something is obviously not right, for example if physical abuse is disclosed during an interview. However sometimes things just do not feel right and may require action.

- We will provide staff with the training and confidence to act when things 'do not feel right' including sensitive curious questioning to help establish whether there is cause for concern and to deliver an appropriate response.

The Domestic Abuse Act has highlighted the need to identify when personal information can and should be shared without consent for example if an individual's safety is at risk.

- We will provide refresher training on data protection and information sharing in the context of the Domestic Abuse Act and our wider duties towards safeguarding vulnerable adults and children.

The 'Say Something' campaign is not just speaking up about other people.

- Staff will be encouraged to let their managers know what their career aspirations are and have a safe space to say when they are struggling with their own mental, physical or emotional health, workloads or other issues.

Promoting opportunities to engage in Health and wellbeing initiatives

Part of both the homelessness prevention duty and the homelessness relief duty includes agreeing a Personal Housing Plan with homeless households, setting out what the Council will do and what the household will do to address their housing needs.

- We will work with members of the Health and Wellbeing Board to train housing staff on how to offer applicants access to community groups and non-clinical statutory services for practical and emotional support such as community health initiatives for weight management, stop smoking, diabetes reversal etc.

A whole-systems approach to assisting residents with mental health needs

Funding has been secured to appoint a practitioner from the NHS to work as a specialist Mental Health Navigator across Epping Forest and Braintree districts, to help homeless households link with mental health services to prevent rough sleeping.

- We will ensure that the navigator works alongside mental health and primary care professionals, the voluntary sector and family and friends to provide relevant support and guidance to improve the applicant's mental wellbeing and quality of life.
- We will arrange shared learning to achieve greater awareness of the link between mental health and homelessness, and staff training to deliver trauma informed services.

Meaningful participation and volunteering

Many homeless applicants in temporary accommodation mention feelings of loneliness and isolation, across all age groups and all personal circumstances. Kiera expressed this when sharing her story about becoming homeless and living in temporary accommodation (featured in the lived experiences section of the strategy).

- As well as buddying schemes that put people in contact with volunteers, we encourage people to consider the benefits of volunteering themselves and to speak to Voluntary Action Epping Forest based in the Community Hub, alongside a range of support services for our residents.

PRIORITY 4: ACCESS TO SUITABLE HOUSING AND SUPPORT

Theme - More than bricks and mortar

The pandemic has brought into sharp focus the role of the home as a place of safety and the need for access to the right statutory services and community support when and where it is needed.

Suitable housing conditions and knowing who to talk to can save lives, prevent disease, increase quality of life, reduce poverty, protect the public purse, and help alleviate climate change.

- We will align our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy with our Allocations Scheme, our Tenancy Policy, and our overarching Housing Strategy.

Our focus on access to suitable housing will include:

Making the best use of all available housing

We will continually review our practices and monitor supply and demand across all tenure types to ensure we are making the most effective use of the range of available housing. This includes temporary accommodation, private rented sector, supported housing, the housing register and home ownership - in the context of both financial and human resources - and based on the needs of the applicant.

We have access to a variety of temporary accommodation options.

- We will always consider Council-owned temporary housing in the first instance and avoid placing anyone in bed and breakfast unless it is due to an emergency where there is nothing else suitable and immediately vacant. In this event it will be for the shortest time.

- We will make the best use of the resources available to provide disability adaptations and safety measures in both Council-owned stock and the private sector, to enable people to remain living in their home where it is reasonable to do so.
- We will review average waiting times on an annual basis and incentivise downsizing for tenants who are under-occupying family sized accommodation to maximise the availability of stock that is in shortest supply.

The right support at the right time

In 2020/21 more than half of applicants reported having one or more support needs - either at the point of application or some time prior to becoming homeless or at risk of homelessness. The most commonly reported needs related to mental health, physical ill health, disability or domestic abuse.

- We will collaborate with social care and health care to ensure that wherever possible residents are offered support interventions to prevent, or recover from crisis, whilst remaining in their own homes.
- We will encourage multi-agency working to enable people to move on from supported housing to achieve greater independence when they are ready to do so.

Support for victims and survivors of domestic abuse

The number of applicants who become homeless due to domestic abuse has continued to rise in recent years. The Domestic Abuse Act 2022 brought with it an allocation of New Burdens Funding that the Council will use to employ a Domestic Abuse Specialist Officer who will join the Community Safety Unit and provide a service to victims of domestic abuse across the district.

- We will pursue Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation which is the UK benchmark for how housing providers should respond to domestic abuse.
- We will build in processes that help guide staff to adequately address the needs of survivors and hold abusers to account.

Synergy with the National Disability Strategy

Physical ill health or disability accounted for support needs of 18% of applicants seeking help with homelessness or the threat of homelessness.

- We will incorporate the housing related elements of the National Disability Strategy into this strategy.
- We will review our policies on the use of disabled facilities grants, provide the appropriate supported housing for people with specific needs, and ensure measures are in place so that disabled people can contribute to consultation and share their stories as part of the lived experience activities.

Our ageing population

The district has an ageing population, and it is estimated that by 2033 there will be an increase of around 22% in the 65+ households and 24% in the 75+ households.

Very few people over the age of 65 present as homeless or at risk of being homeless. There is an oversupply of sheltered housing for rent. Conversely there is an undersupply of 'retirement homes' in the private sector.

- We will review our sheltered housing and independent living services.
- Our staff will continue to receive training on what it means to create dementia friendly communities.
- We will offer better incentives and more options for older people to downsize to accommodation that meets their assessed needs and their personal preferences where it is reasonable to do so.

The needs of Gypsies and Travellers

Very few Gypsies and Travellers present to the Housing Needs Team. Between 2018/19 and 2020/21 two households who identified as Gypsies or Travellers approached the Housing Needs service for assistance due to homelessness or the threat of homelessness and one person approached fleeing domestic abuse.

The Essex Countywide Traveller Unit (ECTU) supports Gypsies and Travellers to access services and accommodation related issues including 12 local authority sites across the county.

- We will continue to develop a co-ordinated approach with the ECTU for the services we provide for Gypsies and Travellers, with particular focus on support for women who experience domestic abuse, and the Covid-19 vaccination programme.

PRIORITY 5: ENDING ROUGH SLEEPING

Theme: Proportionate prevention, intervention and recovery

Historically relatively few people have been known to be sleeping rough in the district on any given night. However, one person sleeping rough is one too many.

- Our approach to ending rough sleeping will be proportionate and focus on prevention intervention and recovery.

Prevention: Stopping people from sleeping rough for the first time

Intervention: Supporting those currently sleeping rough to move off the streets

Recovery: Support those who have slept rough to ensure they do not return to the streets

We know that people who do sleep rough in Essex are generally transient, and travel from district to district across the county. We are part of the Essex Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Group and pool resources, share expertise and pursue joint funding bids.

- We will underpin our commitment to achieving the Government's target of ending rough sleeping by a holistic approach to improving the life chances of individuals with a history of sleeping rough or who are at risk of sleeping rough.

Our plans to end rough sleeping will include:

Collaborative working with our neighbours

We are keen to continue to build on the success of the sector-wide Essex Homelessness Officers Group and the Greater Essex Rough Sleeper Strategy Group to secure RSI funding and a co-ordinated approach to working with potential rough sleepers.

- By pooling resources and expertise, we will continue to share the proportionate benefits of joint initiatives like the Horizons scheme where intensive support is provided to a small cohort of individuals impacted by significant multiple disadvantage (homelessness, offending and substance misuse).

Learning from lived experiences

We are expanding our learning from lived experiences to understand the stories of those rough sleepers who have returned to the streets on more than one occasion and those who avoided doing so.

- We will enquire whether people who are happy to share their stories may also be interested in participating in future 'reverse job fairs' and other available initiatives and opportunities.

Expanding the outreach service to include supporting former rough sleepers

We are keen to follow up on the success of the Everyone In Initiative which accommodated 23 people and granted settled tenancies to 12 people who had previously been sleeping rough.

- We are arranging to collaborate with local outreach teams to develop an enhanced outreach service for former rough sleepers. The idea is to provide longer term support if and when it is needed, that complements the work of the mental health navigator and the planned substance misuse navigator.

Understanding the impact of hidden homelessness e.g. sofa surfing and sleeping in cars

We recognise from the increase in numbers of people who became street homeless during the pandemic that hidden homelessness is still an issue.

- We will work with the Community Safety Team to ensure that anyone found sleeping in a car is referred to the Housing Needs service in the first instance.

We want to ensure that all residents without a settled home can access the appropriate information and advice on the options available to them.

- We will develop a publicity campaign about sofa surfing and the early intervention measures for single homeless people, to avoid having to rely on friends and associates to put them up for a few nights.

LIVED EXPERIENCES

Learning from lived experiences of homelessness

During consultation a variety of residents said they were happy to give in depth accounts of their experiences of becoming homeless in Epping Forest to provide an insight into the causes and help that is available.

We asked the following questions and considered the feedback when formulating the strategy;

- What were the main reasons you became homeless?
- What have you found to be most challenging, and have you overcome these challenges?
- How do you think your homelessness could have been prevented or avoided?
- What organisations or services have been particularly helpful?
- What do you think could help you keep somewhere settled to live?

We are very grateful to the residents who shared their stories so openly and honestly. With their permission we have published the accounts of three different households whose names have been changed to protect their privacy.

Lived Experience 1

Keira

Kiera became homeless as a young adult. She was living with her mum and younger siblings until Children's Social Care intervened. Kiera was too old to go into foster care and was suffering mental ill health so she was referred to the Council's Housing services who provided temporary accommodation.

Kiera said that her homelessness was caused by complex family issues so she does not think it could have been avoided. She said the help she received from the winter clothes fund, food from the foodbank and donations to the temporary accommodation have kept her going and she has managed to stay in full time education.

Kiera still struggles with her mental health and is currently dealing with this on her own. She said she is worried about how she will manage when she moves out of temporary accommodation and into a settled home. Kiera said she finds being homeless with no family support very lonely and she is anxious that this will increase if she moves to an area she does not know.

Kiera would like to find an organisation that could help her with someone to talk to. She suggested more activities for single people in temporary accommodation to connect and make friendships and perhaps motivational monthly challenges like cooking or exercises.

Lived experience 2

Ahmed and Somaiya

Ahmed and Somaiya have two children and have always lived in private rented accommodation. Their landlord decided to sell the house and gave them notice to leave. Despite both being in employment Ahmed and Somaiya could not find anywhere

affordable to rent that was within travelling distance of work and school.

Ahmed and Somaiya said the biggest challenge was trying to find somewhere else to live with such short notice, because rents had increased so much and they did not have enough time to find higher paid jobs and get the money together in time. They went to the Citizens Advice Bureau who they found to be very helpful and they are now in Council-owned temporary accommodation.

Ahmed and Somaiya would still like to live in private rented accommodation that is affordable, but worry that most landlords only offer 1-year tenancies so they could find themselves in the same position within 12 months which is no good for their children.

Lived experience 3

Tex

Tex is an older male who had been living in accommodation tied to his low paid job, until the company went into liquidation without warning. Tex found himself homeless and with no money and began sleeping rough. He said his health quickly deteriorated and his overwhelming memories were of being cold and fearing that he would not survive.

Tex had been sleeping in a variety of parks and open spaces for about three weeks when a minister from the Church approached him and offered practical and emotional support to get back on his feet.

The minister made a referral to the Council's outreach team who provided Tex with temporary accommodation and arranged for Peabody Housing Association to give housing related support - including access to benefits and help to move into temporary accommodation.

Tex has now left temporary accommodation and moved into a settled home with support. He said that the temporary accommodation made him feel secure and everyone had been really nice and supportive.

More conversations

We will continue to listen to and learn from the lived experiences of our residents as part of our strategy to work together to prevent and relieve homelessness and end rough sleeping.

PARTNERS

We would like to thank the following key strategic partners and organisations that have attended workshops and signed up to the priorities and themes within this strategy. They have also given in principle agreement to contribute to the production and delivery of an annual delivery plan.

- Adult Social Care (ECC)
- Changing Pathways
- Chelmsford City Council
- CHESS Homeless
- Children and Family Wellbeing Service (ECC)
- Community Hub (EFDC)
- Community Safety Partnership (EFDC)
- Cultural Forum (EFD)
- Department of Work and Pensions
- Disability and Autism Team (ECC)
- Epping Community Hub
- Epping Team Ministry
- Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust
- Harlow Council
- Health and Wellbeing Board (EFD)
- Housing Growth Lead (ECC)
- Peabody Outreach Support
- Tenant and Leaseholders Panel (EFDC)
- Voluntary Action Epping Forest
- West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group

ACHIEVING THE INTENDED OUTCOMES

Monitoring arrangements and accountability:

- An annual delivery plan will be drawn up with the partners who have contributed to developing the strategy, statutory partnerships and other organisations who come on board during the lifetime of the strategy.
- The actions on the delivery plan will be reviewed each year and approved by the Portfolio Holder for Housing.
- Lead organisations and officers will be agreed for each action on the delivery plan.
- Progress and outcomes will be tracked and recorded for each action every six months.
- The lead organisation for each action will be responsible for informing partners of any issues or risks between progress updates with a view to resolution.
- The annual delivery plan will be published as an appendix to the strategy and updated as appropriate.

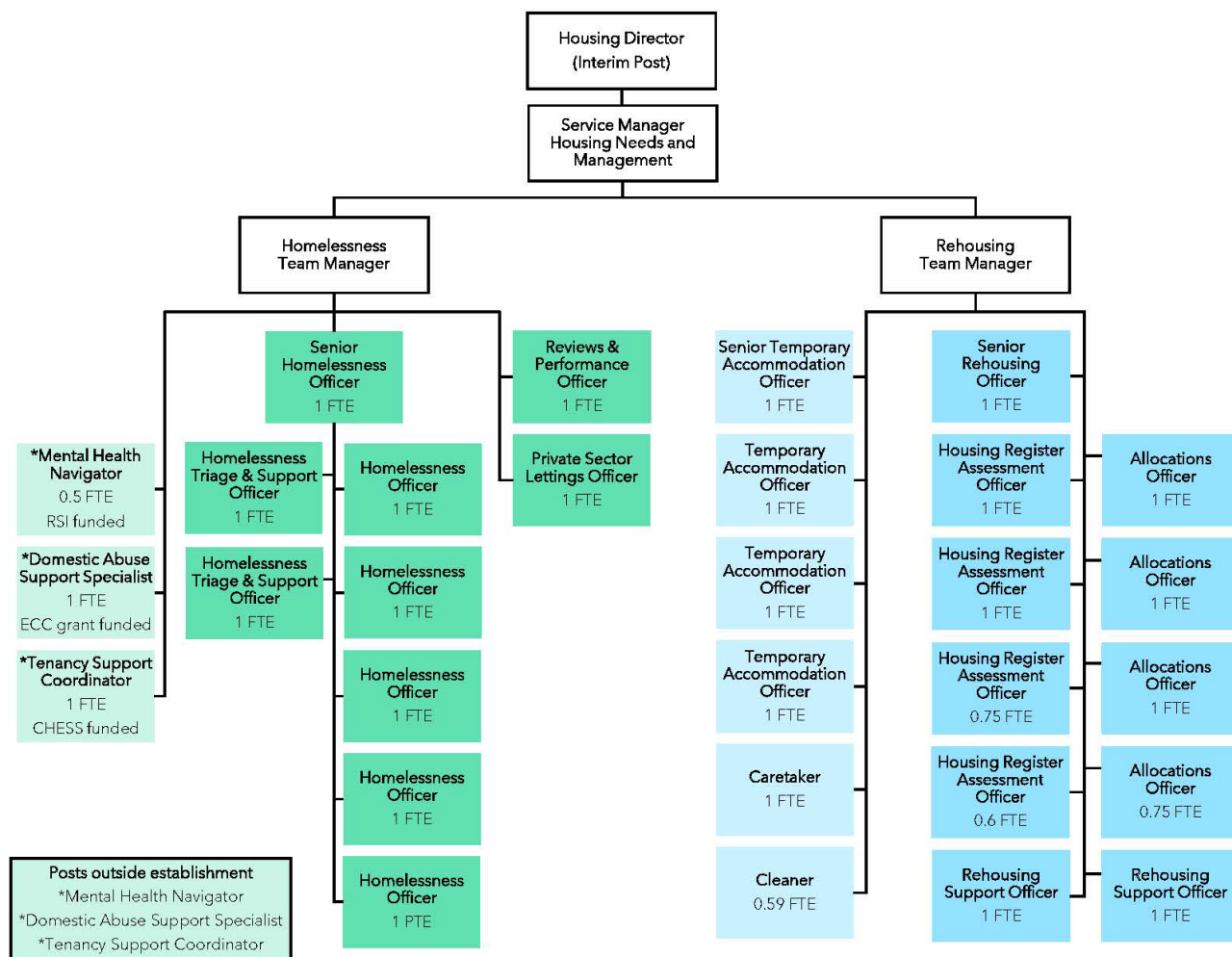
INFORMATION SHARING PROTOCOLS

We are signed up to the following information sharing protocols:

- Essex Prisoner Release Housing Protocol
- Essex Joint 16-17 Housing Protocol
- London Essex Bi-lateral Agreement
- Essex Homeless Families Protocol
- Essex Hospital Discharge Housing Protocol (developed and currently out for consultation).

STRUCTURE CHART

Our Housing Options and Advice Service includes Homelessness Preventions and Relief



As at 13 June 2023

VERSION CONTROL LOG

Version	Date	Details	Author
01.00	25.08.2023	Publication on website	Janice Nuth

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy
2022 - 2027

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APPENDIX 1: ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN

Priority 1 - Working Together						
	Project	Action	Lead	Date	Measure	Rag rating
1.1	Make every contact count	Partnership awayday held. Consider inviting a wider group of partners.	Homelessness Team Manager	September 2023	Event held and additional partners attending.	
1.2	Review the Duty to Refer	Working more closely with Probation and Essex County Council via the Complex Case Panel.	Senior Homelessness Officer	Quarterly	Meetings attended and improved processes.	
1.3	Develop a support service with the NHS for people with substance misuse	Substance Misuse Worker appointed.	Housing Growth Lead Essex County Council	March 2023	Staff members in place and improved outcomes.	
Priority 2 - Preventing Homelessness via Early Intervention						
	Project	Action	Lead	Date	Measure	Rag rating
2.1	Digital inclusion	Providing support to homeless households in Norway and Homefield House.	Voluntary Action Epping Forest IT EFDC	Monthly	Number of SIM cards delivered. Improving Wi-Fi at the Council's hostels and providing donated equipment.	
2.2	Raising awareness of homelessness and tackling stereotypes and stigmas	Exhibition at Waltham Abbey Museum about homelessness and creating an online legacy.	Team Manager for Heritage & Venues EFDC	February 2023	Number of people seeing the exhibition.	

Priority 3 - Building Resilience

	Project	Action	Lead	Date	Measure	Rag rating
3.1	Promoting opportunities to engage in health and wellbeing initiatives	Connecting people to services via their personalised housing plans to health and wellbeing services (e.g. weight management).	Public Health Improvement Officer EFDC	Reviewed annually	Numbers accessing the services who have experience of homelessness and outcomes.	
3.2	Meaningful participation and volunteering	Set up volunteering opportunities in consultation with homeless households or those at risk of becoming homeless.	Voluntary Action Epping Forest Job Coach	Quarterly	Number of participants taking up volunteering.	

Priority 4 - Access to Suitable Housing and Support

	Project	Action	Lead	Date	Measure	Rag rating
4.1	Support for victims and survivors of domestic abuse	Achieve Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation.	Domestic Abuse Support Specialist	(Can take 3 years to achieve) We are in year 2	Accreditation achieved and maintained.	

Priority 5 - Ending Rough Sleeping

	Project	Action	Lead	Date	Measure	Rag rating
5.1	Continuation of interventions directly with people who are sleeping rough	Effective interventions delivered.	CHES	Monitored monthly	KPIs achieved and longer term reduction in the numbers of people rough sleeping.	
5.2	Hidden homelessness	Referral of people sleeping in cars/sofa surfing to the homelessness service.	Community Safety Partnership	Quarterly monitoring	Numbers picked up and resolutions in place.	