

# **West Suffolk Homelessness Reduction Strategy**

**2018-2023**

Final design of strategy to follow consultation

24 May 2018  
Draft for Overview and Scrutiny Committee

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Introduction	4
2. Our vision	6
3. National and regional context	8
4. The West Suffolk context	10
5. Strategic context	14
6. 2018-2023 homelessness priorities	17
7. Equality analysis	24
8. Governance and delivery of the strategy	25

Appendix A – Data and evidence base

Appendix B – Delivery plan

## **Foreword**

We know what a wonderful place West Suffolk is to live and work in. It is not just our beautiful countryside and our historic towns and villages that makes the area so appealing to so many – it is also the people that live here, our way of life and the strong community support that people have for each other. A great many people across West Suffolk naturally want to remain close to their families and the communities where they grew up. There are also many people looking to relocate to West Suffolk, to grow their business or to capitalise on the job opportunities that are being created here. The only drawback is with West Suffolk in such high demand, housing can be expensive which puts pressure on the Council to ensure that there are suitable and sustainable places for people to live.

Housing impacts our health, quality of life, employment and education. A home should be a sanctuary where people feel safe and secure. But for many, this is not the case. The reasons for this are varied and complex but it can often lead to homelessness, and at its worst extreme, rough sleeping.

If we are to succeed in reducing homelessness, then as agencies we will need to work even more closely than we have ever done before. That is why we have forged strong bonds with the public, private and voluntary sector agencies to not only help people find a home but to give them any support that they may need to move on with their lives and in so doing, prevent homelessness.

This strategy builds on the good work we have already carried out and shows how we, with partners, are responding to meet national challenges and new major changes to statutory duties. At the heart of what we do are individuals and families, sometimes with challenging issues, in need of our help. This strategy ensures their needs are identified and that they are assisted as they engage and work through their personalised plans.

I want to thank our partners who have helped produce this strategy and I know they, together with us in West Suffolk are committed to preventing and reducing homelessness, tackling its main causes and supporting those in need.

**Cllr Sara Mildmay-White,  
Cabinet Member for Housing  
West Suffolk councils**

## **1. Introduction**

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory duty on local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their area, and based on the findings, develop and publish a strategy to prevent homelessness.

West Suffolk councils (Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury councils) produced its first Homelessness Strategy in 2015, which covers the period to 2018. The strategy has been reviewed and this new strategy published. The timing of this new strategy is particularly relevant as the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the biggest change to homelessness legislation in 40 years, came into force in April 2018.

The Act has an emphasis on the prevention of homelessness and on partnership working with statutory, voluntary and third sector agencies. This ensures individuals' needs are identified and that they are assisted as they engage and work through their personalised plans.

The Act has a focus on helping individuals to access housing and we need to make sure that we have effective pathways to work collaboratively with and encourage people to secure their own accommodation.

Residents in West Suffolk need suitable and affordable housing to achieve their ambitions, whether for family life, career development or a fulfilling retirement. The local conditions in West Suffolk make housing particularly difficult to afford, given relatively high house prices and low wages. The councils therefore have an important role to play in seeking to address this situation and to ensure housing is suitable for changing demographics, including an ageing population. West Suffolk councils are also working to improve the quality of housing, so as to ensure it supports the health and wellbeing of residents, both in our towns and in our rural areas. In recent years, while the focus has increased on the supply of appropriate housing, the councils have also responded to rising homelessness in West Suffolk by investing resources in prevention and securing suitable accommodation for those people in crisis.

The development of this Homelessness Reduction Strategy is an important part of our approach to preventing and reducing homelessness across West Suffolk. Other activities that support the reduction of homelessness are outlined in West Suffolk's Housing Strategy and in the Strategic Framework 2018-2020.

Since the publication of our first Homelessness Strategy, we have made progress both in preventing homelessness and helping individuals who have, for whatever reason, become homeless:

1. In 2015, West Suffolk invested in a property and converted a former bed and breakfast facility into a property that can accommodate up to six families who have become homeless and are in need of temporary accommodation. A property was also purchased in Bury St Edmunds to provide five units of accommodation for those with low level support needs.

2. We focused much of our work on prevention – in 2017 we actively assisted or prevented some 500 households across West Suffolk, from becoming homeless.
3. We established a number of arrangements with housing providers to secure supported accommodation, including Newmarket Open Door, YMCA and Home Group.
4. We continue to ensure that no family would have to spend more than six weeks in bed and breakfast accommodation.
5. We successfully bid for funding from the then Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) domestic abuse accommodation fund. Funding of £516,244 has been granted to partners to provide accommodation for victims of domestic abuse across Suffolk.
6. We were also successful in our bid for funding for a rough sleeper outreach worker to work across the areas cover by West Suffolk, Babergh and Mid-Suffolk councils. The outreach worker helps us further achieve our aim to reduce rough sleeping by providing a point of contact for individuals who are either rough sleeping or who are homeless and at risk of rough sleeping. The outreach worker also has a role working with agencies and our partners to develop ways of preventing homelessness. This post is now included within the councils' staffing structure.
7. We have further increased our outreach services with joint funding for two more outreach workers, one of which will specialise in helping people trying to overcome drink or drug issues.
8. We invested £250,000 in the housing team to provide additional resourcing for advice and prevention. This includes the establishment of new posts to provide housing solutions including Welfare Support.
9. We provided additional funding to Citizens' Advice to increase capacity for budgeting advice to support those people who are receiving Universal Credit.
10. We established a Winter Night Shelter to provide accommodation for rough sleepers over the winter months.
11. We continue to fund a specialist post within the Probation Service to find accommodation and support those leaving the criminal justice system.
12. We have begun to develop a No Second Night Out partnership.
13. We funded two bed spaces for prolific offenders, working with police and probation to support rehabilitation.

In order to develop this new Strategy we have: (i) reviewed progress since the approval of the first strategy; (ii) undertaken detailed analysis of homelessness in the area (Appendix A); and (iii) consulted a number of partners in the statutory and voluntary sector.

In accordance with the Homelessness Act 2002, West Suffolk councils have conducted a review of homelessness in the area between November 2017 and April 2018. The review takes the form of an evidence base that is attached as Appendix A to the Homelessness Reduction Strategy. The depth and scope of the review has contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the key issues behind homelessness in West Suffolk. It has enabled us to consider where we need to focus our attention in the future.

## 2. Our vision

West Suffolk councils are committed to preventing and reducing homelessness, tackling the main causes of homelessness and supporting those in need.

Through this new Homelessness Reduction Strategy, West Suffolk councils are responding to a period of change, not only through the Homelessness Reduction Act but also the significant financial challenges to public services, housing demand which squeezes affordability and as a result puts pressure on social housing and the impact of welfare reforms. This strategy builds on the recent achievements already described and responds to the new ways in which homelessness and support services are delivered.

The vision of this strategy is to:

**Deliver a focused and accessible service to prevent homelessness and assist homeless people to find a settled home.**

The main objectives are to:

1. provide a service with a focus on preventing or relieving homelessness ensuring those people have access to effective support services
2. ensure that homeless people are supported to secure a settled home
3. work collaboratively in finding housing solutions for those people threatened with homelessness.

In order to achieve these objectives, we have identified five priorities to deliver.

These priorities have emerged from a combination of analysis of the outcomes of the first Homelessness Strategy, consultation with our partners and public, the changing national and local context which is a response to the ongoing welfare reforms and new legislation, in particular the Homelessness Reduction Act.

The five priorities are set out below and they are explored in further detail, together with actions, in section 6:

### **Priority one: Homelessness prevention**

We will continue to focus on preventing homelessness.

### **Priority two: Tackling rough sleeping**

Central government has set a target to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and to eliminate it altogether by 2027. We will continue to invest in tackling rough sleeping. One of the ways that we will do this is by establishing a No Second Night Out partnership which will support the Government's aims.

**Priority three: Supporting vulnerable households**

We will ensure that our services remain accessible to all and that there is targeted support for the most vulnerable households, such as those affected by domestic abuse, people leaving care, people with mental health issues, members of the Armed Forces and prison leavers.

**Priority four: Increasing accommodation options**

We will respond to the challenging local housing market conditions enabling a wide range of accommodation options, including providing advice and support to landlords to help develop a private rented sector that is better suited to local needs.

**Priority five: Supporting the implementation of welfare reforms**

We will work in partnership with support agencies and services to offer solutions that help people to maintain tenancies.



### **3. National and regional context**

#### **National and regional homelessness trends**

*The Homelessness Monitor: England 2017* commissioned by *Crisis* provides a useful overview of the current national and regional context in terms of homelessness.

The report shows that homelessness application acceptance rates have gone up nationally and regionally in recent years. At nearly 58,000, annual homelessness application acceptances were some 18,000 higher across England in 2015/16 than in 2009/10. With a rise of 6% over the past year, application acceptances now stand 44% above their 2009/10 low point.

The number of people sleeping rough has been increasing nationally for a number of years and more recently in West Suffolk (see Appendix A for more detail of homelessness and rough sleeping data).

#### **Statutory duties, policy and guidance**

##### **The Homelessness Reduction Act**

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 changes the way homelessness advice and assistance is provided by councils.

The Act reforms the homelessness duties to ensure that councils provide meaningful advice and assistance to those people who do not fall into a priority need category or who have been found to be intentionally homeless.

In particular this is likely to have a positive impact for singles or couples with no children where previously legislation had not prescribed much to assist them.

The Act has introduced the following:

1. The definition of being threatened with homelessness be extended from 28 days to 56 days, meaning councils can start working with people at an earlier date.
2. Councils must accept a valid 'section 21' notice as evidence that the tenant is threatened with homelessness.
3. A greater duty to give advice and information to a wider range of people at a much earlier stage than previously offered.
4. Duty to assess all eligible applicants' cases and agree a plan (known as the 'personal housing plan').
5. The creation of a stronger prevention duty for anyone threatened with homelessness and eligible for assistance. This can involve assisting them to stay in their current accommodation, or helping them to find a new place to live.
6. A new relief duty which is available to all those who are homeless, have a local connection and are eligible regardless of whether they have a priority need. It requires councils to take reasonable steps to help secure

accommodation. This help could be, for example, the provision of a rent deposit or debt advice. Those who have a priority need (for example they have dependent children or are vulnerable in some way) may be provided with interim accommodation while the council carries out the reasonable steps.

7. Duties to help to secure accommodation.
8. Incentives to people to engage in prevention and relief work by allowing councils to discharge their prevention and relief duties if an applicant unreasonably refuses to cooperate with the course of action proposed.
9. A right for councils to discharge the prevention and relief duties by providing accommodation with a reasonable prospect of this being available for at least the next six months. This does *not* need to be social housing.
10. A right to a review at the prevention, relief and main duty stages to ensure councils are held to account.
11. A requirement to collect data in order to monitor the overall effectiveness of the new legislation.

West Suffolk councils already take steps at an early stage to help those threatened with homelessness. However, the additional requirements as a result of the Homelessness Reduction Act have also meant a redesign of the way services are provided, with additional members of staff and a new approach to the way advice and support is provided.

### **Other legislation**

In addition, the housing team has to consider duties under the following and/or are impacted by the following legislation:

- Localism Act 2011
- Welfare Reform Act 2012
- Deregulation Act 2015
- Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016
- Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities 2018
- Housing and Planning Act 2016
- National Planning Policy Framework
- Health and Social Care Act 2012
- Children and Social Care Act 2017

## 4. The West Suffolk context

This section provides an overview of the West Suffolk area with a focus on its population, deprivation, economic activity and housing availability.

More detailed data on housing demand and homelessness is contained in Appendix A.

### Population

West Suffolk's population is set to grow significantly in the future, and with an ageing demographic in comparison with many parts of the country. This poses challenges for the councils in ensuring the right kinds of housing, together with employment and infrastructure, are available for our growing population in both urban and rural areas.

The ONS 2016 Mid-year population estimates that the total population of West Suffolk in 2016 was 177,385. It shows that 9.3% of West Suffolk's population was over 75 (compared to 8.1% of England's population). Between 2017 and 2030, the population of West Suffolk is predicted to grow by 8% (compared to 9% in England as a whole). The over 75s population is predicted to grow by 55% (compared to 47% in England as a whole).<sup>1</sup>

This clearly presents West Suffolk with significant challenges in terms of the increased population of over 75 year olds and how we help meet their needs.

### The Index of Multiple Deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) provides indicators of deprivation at local authority and lower super output area level (LSOA). Lower super output areas are a statistical geography and are smaller in size than wards. They are a statistical cluster of around 1,500 people.

There are seven domains that look at deprivation and together they represent the IMD.

Ranked out of 326 local authorities where 1 = most deprived		
Domain	Rank	
	Forest Heath	St Edmundsbury
<b>Overall IMD rank</b>	140	196
<b>Income</b>	208	240
<b>Employment</b>	250	230
<b>Education</b>	20	129
<b>Health</b>	180	203
<b>Crime</b>	140	198
<b>Barriers to Services</b>	26	32
<b>Living Environment</b>	187	257

Forest Heath ranks poorly for education and both Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury rank poorly for barriers to services.

<sup>1</sup> ONS 2014-based Sub-National population projections

There are 32,844 LSOAs in England, 66 of these are in St Edmundsbury and 34 in Forest Heath. Of the 100 LSOAs in West Suffolk only two (2%) are in the **most** deprived 20% of all LSOAs nationally. 14 (14%) are in the 20% **least** deprived LSOAs in England.

### **Socio-economic**

West Suffolk's workforce is growing faster than surrounding areas and the country as a whole, and employment among young people is particularly healthy. However, wage levels remain below the national average, leading to a renewed focus on attracting high quality employment to the area, supported by training and skills development.

In 2016 workers in West Suffolk were employed in the five following main sectors: business administration and support services, manufacturing, health, retail and accommodation and food services<sup>2</sup>.

### **Economic activity**

Between October 2016 and September 2017, the percentage of 16-64 year olds who were economically active<sup>3</sup> was 83.4% across West Suffolk compared to 78.1% for Great Britain as a whole.

In 2015, 83.3% of West Suffolk employees worked in services, 11.1% worked in manufacturing and 4.4% worked in construction.<sup>4</sup>

The weekly median pay (gross) for full time workers in Forest Heath in 2017 was £506.70, in St Edmundsbury it was £536.40 compared to £555.30 in England.<sup>5</sup>

### **Housing affordability**

The infographic below shows that compared to earnings, property in West Suffolk is less affordable than England as a whole which has a significant impact on options available to local people and on the services we deliver.

As of November 2017, the percentage of out-of-work benefits claimants in Forest Heath was 0.7%, in St Edmundsbury it was 1.1% and across Great Britain it was 1.9%.<sup>6</sup>

It should be noted that under Universal Credit, a broader span of claimants are required to look for work than under Jobseeker's Allowance. As Universal Credit Service is rolled out in particular areas, the number of people recorded as being on the Claimant Count is likely to rise.

---

<sup>2</sup> Business Register and Employment Survey

<sup>3</sup> NOMIS Annual population survey October 2016 to September 2017

<sup>4</sup> NOMIS Annual population survey 2015

<sup>5</sup> Annual survey of hours and earnings

<sup>6</sup> ONS claimant count

## Affordability

The estimated ratio of average earnings to average property price in West Suffolk in 2017 was 7.2, compared to a ratio of 6.4 for England as a whole.



Ratio of average earnings (full time workers' mean gross annual pay) : (Mean semi-detached property price). Comparisons using ratios of lower quartile earnings to lower quartile house prices can also be used, which show further problems with affordability in West Suffolk. As a rule of thumb, house prices of up to 3 - 3.5 times household income are considered affordable

Source: Wage levels - Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings. House prices - Gov.uk - UK House Price Index: data downloads Aug 2017

## Health and wellbeing

Housing that meets the minimum standard and is suitable and warm, is essential to ensure the health and wellbeing of residents. We understand that housing is a wider determinant of health.

Male life expectancy is 80.5 years in Forest Heath and 81.9 years in St Edmundsbury compared to 79.5 years in England. Female life expectancy is 83.3 years in Forest Heath and 84.6 years in St Edmundsbury compared to 83.1 years in England. Across Suffolk, healthy life expectancy for males is 65.1 years compared to 63.4 years in England. Healthy life expectancy for females across Suffolk is 66.7 compared to 64.1 years in England.<sup>7</sup> Healthy life expectancy is an estimate of the number of years lived in "very good" or "good" general health, based on how individuals perceive their general health.

In 2015, the top three causes of death across West Suffolk were cancers, diseases of the circulatory system and diseases of the respiratory system.<sup>8</sup>

In 2015/16, the prevalence of depression in Suffolk was 8.9% compared with 8.3% in England.<sup>9</sup> In 2015/16, the prevalence of severe mental illness for those registered with a GP was 0.78%, this is lower than the England value of 0.990% and equates to 1,919 individuals in West Suffolk. In 2014/15, 7,516 of people who are registered with a GP in Suffolk have been diagnosed with schizophrenia, bipolar or other psychoses.<sup>10</sup>

In 2015/16 a personal wellbeing survey<sup>11</sup> for those aged 16+ in Suffolk found that: 1 in 3 reported low happiness (7-8%), 1 in 5 reported high anxiety

<sup>7</sup> [www.phoutcomes.info](http://www.phoutcomes.info) (2013-15)

<sup>8</sup> NOMIS

<sup>9</sup> [HealthySuffolk.org.uk/JSNA](http://HealthySuffolk.org.uk/JSNA)

<sup>10</sup> [www.fingertips.phe.org](http://www.fingertips.phe.org) mental health profile MH JSNA

<sup>11</sup> [ONS.gov.uk/people, population and community/wellbeing/localauthorityupdate2015to2016](http://ONS.gov.uk/people, population and community/wellbeing/localauthorityupdate2015to2016)

(18.8%), 1 in 25 reported low life satisfaction (4.4%) and 1 in 30 reported low worthwhileness (3.5%).

## **5. Strategic context**

This section outlines the key strategies which need to be taken into account alongside the delivery of this Homelessness Reduction Strategy.

### **West Suffolk Strategic Framework 2018-2020**

West Suffolk councils' strategic framework sets out the vision and aims that the councils will be working with others to achieve over the next two years, as follows:

***Supporting and investing in our west Suffolk communities and businesses to encourage and manage ambitious growth in prosperity and quality of life for all.***

To achieve this vision, the focus will be on the three main strategic priorities which are:

1. growth in West Suffolk's economy for the benefit of all our residents and UK plc
2. resilient families and communities that are healthy and active
3. increased and improved provision of appropriate housing in West Suffolk both in our towns and rural areas.

With a particular focus on housing, the priorities as set out in the Strategic Framework are to:

- plan for housing to meet the needs of current and future generations throughout their lifetimes, that is properly supported by infrastructure, facilities and community networks
- improve the quality of housing and the local environment for our residents
- enable people to access suitable and sustainable housing.

### **West Suffolk Housing Strategy**

Our Housing Strategy sets out the councils' priorities for increasing the overall supply of housing in the area. The Strategy will be developed later in 2018 and will support the delivery of the councils' housing priorities which are:

1. plan for housing to meet the needs of current and future generations throughout their lifetimes, that is property supported by infrastructure, facilities and community networks
2. improve the quality of housing and the local environment for our residents
3. enable people to access suitable and sustainable housing.

### **Domestic Abuse Strategy**

The Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board has widened its responsibilities around domestic abuse to include Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) which is

in line with a refreshed strategy published by central Government. It acknowledges however that victim and perpetrators can be women, men, girls and boys.

The vision for Suffolk's Violence Against Women and Girls Multi Agency Strategy is as follows:

***Ensure that victims of abuse in Suffolk are safe and supported.***

To achieve this the main objectives are:

1. to reduce the prevalence of all forms of VAWG in Suffolk
2. increase the early identification and intervention with victims of VAWG
3. build cross-agency skills and capability to provide effective VAWG advice and support services
4. improve the criminal justice response to VAWG.

**Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Strategy**

Suffolk's Health and Wellbeing Board was established in 2013 and it has a duty to encourage integrated working between health, care, police and other public services in order to improve wellbeing outcomes for Suffolk. It has an important strategic influence in encouraging joined up, integrated and system wide working to improve outcomes for local people.

In 2015, Suffolk's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2012-2022 was refreshed. The following strategic outcomes for years 4-6 of the strategy were agreed:

- Outcome one: Every child in Suffolk has the best start in life
- Outcome two: Improving independent life for people with physical and learning disabilities
- Outcome three: Older people in Suffolk have a good quality of life
- Outcome four: People in Suffolk have the opportunity to improve their mental health and wellbeing

Given that housing is a wider determinate of health, it is important that the actions within this strategy support the delivery of the Health and Wellbeing Board's outcomes. Furthermore, given that the councils require the support and expertise of other agencies to meet its homelessness duties, it is vital that effective partnership working is central to this strategy. While the statutory duty to prevent and relieve homelessness rest with the councils, the reality is that input from a wide cross-section of public and voluntary partners is needed to find and retain accommodation.

**Housing Forum**

The councils' Chair the West Suffolk Housing Forum. The purpose of this forum is to bring together statutory and voluntary sector partners, including housing providers, to support some of the most vulnerable individuals and households. Cases discussed are usually about those people who are sleeping rough or those who are struggling to maintain tenancies. The aim is to have a joint



approach with all organisations so that information can be shared and action co-ordinated. Any organisation can add cases for discussion and outcomes are shared.

### **Working in partnership**

The councils work closely with a range of partners in the statutory and voluntary sector and recognise that there are a range of factors that contribute to homelessness. Furthermore the solutions for these can only be found by partners working together as part of a coherent approach to tackling homelessness. Examples of joint working include:

*Suffolk and Cambridgeshire partnerships:* A number of Suffolk and Cambridge-sub region partnership meetings are in place to provide a forum for senior managers to discuss best practice, sharing resources and agreeing collective training and development. They also provides an opportunity for organisations to discuss strategic and operational matters with a wider range of district housing authorities.

*Joint pathways for support:* Suffolk housing authorities are working together to develop pathways for support, particularly for vulnerable individuals such as people with mental health issues, people leaving care, people leaving prison. These pathways will provide consistency of support for the individuals and enable organisations working across the county (and wider) to understand the requirements of housing teams.

*Joint staffing:* The councils continue to explore opportunities for sharing resources, including joint staffing posts, to increase resilience and access to specialist skills and support services. Joint posts are currently in place for outreach work and for domestic abuse support and the councils will continue to identify opportunities for sharing staff with other organisations where there is mutual benefit. Further conversations are being explored with partners, particularly in order to increase capacity for helping people with mental health issues.

*Universal Credit partnership:* The councils have coordinated the local response to Universal Credit to ensure the right level of support is in place and that organisations are able to signpost effectively. The council chairs a partnership of the Citizens Advice Bureau, local housing providers, Jobcentres and the county council.

## **6. 2018-2023 homelessness priorities**

This five year strategy covers the period 2018-2023, and seeks to further strengthen the partnership working in place in West Suffolk and to continue to make significant improvements in alleviating homelessness.

We will continue to work to prevent homelessness and help local families and individuals. This will be achieved through the adoption of the following five inter-relating priorities. Key actions across each of the five priorities are detailed in the delivery plan attached as Appendix B.

Our priorities and actions are aligned with our Strategic Plan 2018-2020 and with the Housing Strategy.

The five priorities are:

### **Priority one: Homelessness prevention**

We will continue to focus on prevention of homelessness in the first instance as has been our strategy prior to its emphasis in the Homelessness Reduction Act. We will work in partnership with residents, communities, registered providers and other partner organisations to prevent homelessness and ensure families and individuals are appropriately housed.

We know that many people are experiencing housing difficulties and sometimes this can reach a crisis point before they ask for advice from homelessness services. We want to reach people earlier with the right advice, practical help and support to help them to either keep their current home or move home in a planned way rather than through eviction.

The Homelessness Reduction Act enables us to support people much earlier in the process (56 days as opposed to 28 days). It also places a duty on public sector organisations to refer cases to us who they consider to be homeless or threatened with homelessness. This statutory duty does not include registered providers (housing associations). We have, however, already put in place local arrangements for these referrals so that support can be provided at a much earlier stage.

The Act strengthens our duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible applicants including those who do not have priority need or those who may be considered intentionally homeless and regardless of local connection. Given the increased number of people who will require support, we must make sure that responses are both timely and every contact is made to count whether directly to housing or with other services.

The housing team must report to Government each quarter detailing what prevention activity has been undertaken. In order for the council to discharge the prevention and relief duties, it has to be satisfied that accommodation is available and that there is a reasonable prospect of this being available for at least the next six months. This accommodation could be social housing or private housing. As a consequence, the councils will need to provide advice and

information to applicants to ensure that they are fully aware of all accommodation options available to them. Furthermore, given the lack of social housing availability, the affordability of housing and the costs in the private rented sector, the councils will need to be proactive and enable different accommodation options. This will include boosting the availability of affordable private rented homes (see priority four for more detail).

To deliver this priority we will:

- Provide high quality timely advice to all residents on their housing options.
- For people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, we will agree a personal housing plan that sets out the actions they can take and we will take to enable the applicant to help themselves. We will review our casework management system to ensure we can monitor progress and report on the outcomes of advice given.
- Identify people at risk of homelessness at an earlier stage and develop interventions to prevent them from being threatened with or becoming homeless.
- Identify ways to encourage tenancy sustainment and prevent recurring homelessness by helping people sustain settled accommodation.
- Provide tailored advice for people at greater risk of homelessness including young single people, people released from prison, people leaving care, victims of domestic abuse, former members of the armed forces, people leaving hospital, people with learning difficulties, people with mental health issues and Gypsies and Travellers (also linked to actions around priority three).
- Develop a prevention toolkit, training and advice to help organisations respond to the risk of homelessness at an earlier stage.
- Ensure that the statutory and voluntary sector are aware of the requirements and expectations of the Homelessness Reduction Act so that they can provide the right support and advice.
- With partners, agree clear pathways and referral routes. This will include public bodies that will have a new duty to refer cases as well as implement protocols for information sharing between services working with customers at risk of homelessness.
- Improve our data collection and recording. Use data and predictive analysis to help target resources to prevent homelessness and identify and interact with people in need of support and advice, in order to prevent homelessness from occurring. This will include developing local community based responses offering specialist advice and signposting to services in those geographical areas identified as having higher levels of homelessness.
- Make better use of debt and financial advice to improve prevention work.
- Better align assessment processes with statutory services and explore housing issues where appropriate as a key line of questioning.
- Work with partners through the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure that the health benefits of individuals and families having a settled home, remain high on its agenda.
- Ensure that people in temporary accommodation are supported to access services and ensure that referrals are made to relevant floating support.

Floating support provides the flexibility to support people wherever they are living.

## **Priority two: Tackling rough sleeping**

Central government has set a target to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and to eliminate it altogether by 2027. We will continue to invest in alleviating rough sleeping by establishing a No Second Night Out partnership which will support the Government's aims.

We want to see an end to rough sleeping in West Suffolk by doing more to prevent the risk and improve the support that is available. The main focus currently is on dealing with rough sleeping at crisis point or mitigating the impact. There are a range of services but the activity needs more co-ordination. We will concentrate more on preventing rough sleeping happening and improving the effectiveness of services for entrenched rough sleepers.

The Government defines rough sleeping as people sleeping or bedded down in the open air and people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation. A long term rough sleeper is defined as someone who has been identified as sleeping rough on at least 50 occasions over a five year period.

People who become entrenched in rough sleeping are more likely to have complex mental and physical health needs and a shortened life expectancy. Most have previously been involved in programmes of support and have lost permanent and supported housing. Supporting entrenched rough sleepers will link to our work under priority three to improve partnership work for the most vulnerable to homelessness.

West Suffolk has seen a sharp increase in numbers of rough sleepers. We have, and will continue, to work hard with partners to address that situation. In 2011, there were four rough sleepers across West Suffolk and this number increased to 29 rough sleepers<sup>12</sup> in 2017. Of the 325 local authorities, in 2017 West Suffolk ranked 284 out of 325 (a ranking of 325 indicates the highest number of rough sleepers per 1000 head of population).

To deliver this priority we will:

- Use dedicated support to work with rough sleepers and try to address the problems that lead to rough sleeping and being at risk of sleeping rough. This will include the development of a 'No Second Night Out' partnership. No Second Night Out is aimed at ensuring that people who spend a night sleeping rough for the first time do not spend a second night on the streets. This means that rapid support is provided to new rough sleepers so that they do not have to sleep out for a second night.
- Implement pathways for tackling homelessness, including identifying risks early, promoting self-help and resilience for those who are able to help themselves and proactive help for those who are too vulnerable to help themselves.

---

<sup>12</sup> ONS data: Rough sleepers in England: autumn 2017 (published 25 January 2018)

- Deliver robust services for those who are homeless. Our work will recognise that some people need more than just a roof over their head. We will work in partnership to provide support and stability to their lives, with the aim of breaking the cycle of homelessness.
- Work with local authorities across Suffolk and the Cambridge sub-region to improve the service offer and outcomes over the next two years including support to people leaving institutions (for example hospitals and prisons).
- Further enhance coordination across statutory, commissioned and voluntary services that are working with rough sleepers to coordinate activity, share information and work together on initiatives.
- Continue to access external funding to support outreach and prevention activity, building on the success of previous bids for funding from government and Suffolk Public Health.
- Continue to provide Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP)
- Help people with entrenched patterns of rough sleeping more holistically through better collaborative working and support tailored to their individual needs.
- If people have come from another area, should they wish, we will reconnect them back to their local community where they have support that they need. There will however be some occasions when there is a good reason why they shouldn't return to a previous area, and naturally we will respect this.
- Provide effective information to the public about rough sleeping and how they can help if they have concerns.

### **Priority three: Support for vulnerable households**

We will ensure that our services remain accessible to all whilst ensuring there is targeted support for the most vulnerable households. We aim to increase the resilience of people and communities, equip them with the necessary skills to prevent crises, such as homelessness, before they occur.

For some people who become homeless the provision of suitable accommodation is the only problem that needs to be addressed. However, many other people can become homeless or threatened by homelessness due to a range of support needs. Some vulnerable groups are at a greater risk of homelessness and/or repeated incidence of housing instability. This includes young people, those with complex needs, substance misusers and victims of domestic abuse. There are also groups with very complex needs who may be substance misusers, have mental health issues and have had contact with the criminal justice system. We will improve our targeted interventions and partnership work to help people find lasting housing solutions. This includes how we assess needs and plan support jointly across agencies and design the specific services to be provided.

By working with our partners to provide targeted, specialist support, we endeavour to limit the number of vulnerable people who become homeless. We aim to achieve this by developing new ways of co-commissioning services with partners, exploring the Housing First model. The model is a new evidence-based approach to supporting people with high needs and a history of entrenched or repeat homelessness to live in their own homes. The aim is to

provide a stable and independent home with intensive personalised support to people with multiple and complex needs.

We will continue to influence commissioning and services provided by other organisations to ensure there is effective support in place for those who need it.

To deliver this priority we will:

- Explore options for the provision of more temporary accommodation, in order to house individuals and families, including those who have experienced domestic abuse.
- Support the monitoring of housing related support, we will work with partners to identify the resources that are available to meet the support needs of all those groups that are at high risk of homelessness.
- Explore the Housing First model and continue to influence commissioning decisions, made by other agencies, in order that contracts support the outcomes we are aiming to achieve and that appropriate resources are allocated to West Suffolk.
- Continue to monitor and review pathways and referral processes for vulnerable groups to ensure that they provide the right level of support and are fit for purpose.
- Work with partners across Suffolk to ensure there is appropriate provision of domestic abuse support and accommodation, including building on the satellite accommodation already in place.
- Continue to identify opportunities to share resourcing, including staff, to support vulnerable households. Share posts and have funding in place to support domestic abuse, and rough sleepers.
- Explore opportunities to increase access to mental health services with a view to promoting these services to housing customers.
- Continue to operate the Housing Forum to provide a multi-agency approach to vulnerable customers, including those who are rough sleeping and those in supported accommodation.
- Continue to hold and attend case management meetings with agencies, including adult and children services, to help prevent the most vulnerable families from becoming homeless.

#### **Priority four: Increasing accommodation options**

We need to improve the range of housing options available to both prevent homelessness and meet rehousing needs. As well as providing housing, we also want to improve the support available to help people keep their home and live independently. The West Suffolk Housing Strategy sets out in detail how the council will use its influence, including through its planning and regulatory services, to increase the supply of housing in the area.

The Housing Team proactively source a wide range of accommodation options, either by direct provision or encouraging providers and commissioners, including: lodging schemes; shared accommodation; six months' tenancies; temporary accommodation; supported accommodation; and increased private sector provision.

We will respond to the challenging local housing market conditions by working collaboratively with, and offering advice and support to people and landlords to develop suitable private rented sector offers.

Having a settled home enables people to access support services, integrate into their local community and to obtain and sustain work and training. We will continue to manage the expectations of customers and ensure that we maximise access and availability not only to social rented accommodation but to other housing options. This approach will help us to meet housing need, prevent homelessness and reduce the use of temporary accommodation.

The homeless legislation expands the circumstances in which we can help an applicant find a private sector tenancy. We will therefore need to increase access to private rented housing for people who we have a duty to rehouse and other groups in housing need. This will help us provide meaningful options for people that we must help under the Homelessness Reduction Act. It enables us to offer more choice of property type and areas as well as recognising that not everybody is looking for a lifetime home.

This presents a challenge, as finding enough properties can be difficult due to the supply of housing, a very competitive housing market which means more people are private renting, the pressure that then puts on social rented accommodation, and issues around benefits.

The lower security of tenure is also an issue as the loss of Assured Shorthold Tenancy is one of the main reasons for homelessness.

To deliver this priority we will:

- Improve access to good quality private rented housing to expand choices and provide affordable housing options for families and individuals. This includes supporting both tenants and landlords in developing new approaches that are attractive to all parties.
- Work with private sector landlords and developers to maximise the use of resources and opportunities for all vulnerable people across West Suffolk.
- Continue to review the effectiveness of the West Suffolk Lettings Partnership to increase access to quality private rented accommodation.
- Encourage private landlords to engage with the council by holding Landlord Forums which share best practice and offer advice and support.
- We will focus more on sustaining tenancies and providing timely advice to prevent a housing crisis arising in the rented sector and working positively with landlords and tenants to improve positive outcomes.
- Work with registered providers and voluntary sector to increase access to accommodation, including: lodging schemes; shared accommodation (particularly for under 35s); temporary accommodation; and tenancies to support move on.
- Continue to influence the provision of supported accommodation by identifying need and demand.
- Support Suffolk County Council to manage its existing contracts, by providing robust operational feedback, and influencing the new contracts from 2020.

- Monitor use of bed and breakfast accommodation to ensure use only in emergency situations. Manage move on as soon as possible to improve the outcomes for individuals and families and reduce cost to the taxpayer.
- Ensure procedures are followed to manage the use of temporary accommodation and when used, to ensure that plans are in place to manage move on.

**Priority five: Supporting the implementation of welfare reforms**

We will continue to work in partnership with support agencies and services to offer solutions that help households to maintain tenancies. We already support households to maximise their income and to minimise outgoings to ensure they are able to manage rent or mortgage payments. Our Welfare Support and Income Recovery roles support individuals and households and identify ways of supporting them to sustain existing tenancies or to help whilst better accommodation options are found. This can include effective use of Discretionary Housing Payments.

We already work with partners at the Department of Work and Pensions, Jobcentres, Citizens' Advice, Anglia Revenues Partnership and registered housing providers, to ensure there is a collective response to Universal Credit. The partnership ensures there is effective signposting for support and contacts for helping vulnerable people. Digital assistance and personal budgeting support is provided by the council and partner agencies, such as Citizens' Advice.

To deliver this priority we will:

- Continue to develop the role of our Welfare Support Officer and Income Recovery posts to ensure they continue to support people to maximise income and minimise expenditure.
- Develop early intervention protocols with registered providers to ensure tenants retain their accommodation.
- Work with Anglia Revenues Partnership, the Citizens' Advice Bureau, Jobcentres, Department of Works and Pensions and registered providers to support the roll out of Universal Credit.
- Work with partner organisations to provide timely financial advice to households that are homeless or at risk of homelessness due to debt.
- Support private sector landlords to understand the impact of Universal Credit and other welfare reform matters through the West Suffolk Lettings Partnership and Landlords Forum.
- Support customers with financial management advice and signpost to appropriate agencies.
- Work with Anglia Revenues Partnership to ensure effective allocation of Discretionary Housing Payment to support those who are experiencing difficulties as a result of welfare reform.



## **8. Equality analysis**

An equality impact assessment (EqIA) has been undertaken on this strategy to ensure that there are no adverse effects for any particular group. The strategy contains priorities and actions which will be delivered to prevent homelessness and respond to those in housing need. It has relevance to equality because it impacts on West Suffolk's most vulnerable people. Additional support is identified for those who have priority needs, including people who are:

- pregnant or have dependent children
- vulnerable due to old age, mental illness or physical disability
- care leavers and young people
- veterans and those leaving the armed forces
- prison leavers
- people experiencing violence or threats of violence
- people experiencing homelessness as a result of an emergency

## **9. Governance and delivery of the strategy**

The councils are committed to ensuring that together with partners, we have the skills, structures and infrastructure for the delivery of the strategy's priorities over the next five years.

West Suffolk councils are committed to working with partners to ensure that the priorities set out in the Homelessness Reduction Strategy are delivered. The objectives in the Homelessness Reduction Strategy will be achieved using the delivery plan (Appendix B) that identifies the main tasks needed to tackle and prevent homelessness over the next five years. Given the context of rapid change, the delivery plan will be reviewed every year to ensure that the tasks remain relevant and are revised where appropriate. A mid-term review is also planned for 2020.

Progress towards the Homelessness Reduction Strategy delivery plan (Appendix B) will be monitored with feedback, if necessary, on the barriers to delivering the Homelessness Reduction Strategy.