



Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-24 – Draft Text

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Foreword

Bristol is an economically successful and productive city that is widely recognised as an attractive place to live. Our city has won national polls for being the UK's most liveable city, European awards for our green credentials and recognition in China for our innovation.

Yet, this success has also contributed to the challenges we now face. Bristol's appeal as a desirable place to live and work has resulted in high house prices and high rents, making the city unaffordable for many.

The average Bristol resident now needs almost 10 times their annual salary in order to be able to buy a house and private sector rents have also risen by more than the national average since 2013/14. In addition to these challenges, there is an ongoing undersupply of new homes built, both for ownership and for rent.

Changes to local and national employment practices such as the growth of temporary, low paid and zero hours contract jobs; coupled with the multiple effects of welfare reform have made it difficult for many low income households

to meet housing related costs. This has undoubtedly contributed to the rise in homelessness in the city in recent years.

Reducing homelessness and rough sleeping is a key priority for the city as a whole, not just the city council. Finding lasting and effective solutions to these challenges requires a holistic and joined-up approach from organisations and citizens across Bristol.

This revised Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy has been produced with the input and involvement of a wide range of people and organisations, including homeless households, private registered providers of social housing, health services, and voluntary and community organisations. Thank you to all those who contributed to developing this new strategy and to everyone who works with us every day to help deliver the services that contribute to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in the city.

1. Introduction

A range of social and economic factors can lead to homelessness. Some of these issues are not housing related. The impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), for example, has been linked to drug and alcohol abuse in later life as well as domestic violence and mental and physical health issues. Traumatic events experienced in early life can also lead to homelessness and rough sleeping.

However, it is also clear that wider housing issues, along with the impact of recent government legislation, has had a major impact on many Bristol residents in recent years. Bristol's high housing costs combined with welfare reform have resulted in many more people being at increased risk of homelessness.

The impacts of homelessness can be devastating for individuals and families. It can affect both physical and mental health, educational and employment opportunities (for both adults and children), and has long term consequences for those affected. For these reasons reducing homelessness and rough sleeping is a priority for the

city, and is a key commitment in Bristol City Council's [Corporate Strategy](#).

Despite significant work in Bristol to prevent and respond to homelessness, there remains a major homelessness crisis in the city. Rates of homelessness remain significantly higher than they were a decade ago.

This is evidenced in our Homeless Review; a comprehensive assessment of homelessness in Bristol to identify key issues and trends. The review also examines wider issues including population in Bristol, economic factors, health inequalities and the local housing market.

Bristol is a successful city, with new households attracted by its strong economy and varied cultural life. However, there remain deep seated inequalities of both health and wealth.

This strategy explores opportunities for the city to work together to tackle this complex issue. The strategy is aligned with the Mayor's One City Plan, which promotes a collective approach to tackling long standing issues such as inequality and social exclusion.

2. Our vision

Bristol's One City Plan outlines a shared vision for 'Homes and Communities' which states that:

'By 2050 everyone in Bristol will live in a home that meets their needs within a thriving and safe community'.

We know that for people who are homeless this ambition can feel like a long way off. This Preventing Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy provides the initial five year roadmap for our communities to work together to support people to achieve this. In order to enact significant change within our communities this strategy focuses on five key priorities:

- Tackling Rough Sleeping
- Prevention and Early Intervention
- Improving Health and Wellbeing, Skills and Aspirations
- Delivering Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in all Services
- Working in Partnership

Our vision and key priorities are in keeping with the increased emphasis on early intervention and prevention in the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017); and the focus on providing support to enable

people to live independently in the council's Corporate Plan.

With its emphasis on partnership working, our vision recognises that not only is a 'one-city' approach required to tackle homelessness, but also to break down some of the deep-seated inequalities that can lead to homelessness. Our revised Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and its accompanying action plan provide a great opportunity to further develop an effective collaborative approach to tackling homelessness within Bristol.

3. Progress in delivering the 2013-18 Preventing Homelessness Strategy

Improved partnership working was a key objective in the 2013-18 Preventing Homelessness Strategy. The council and its partners worked hard to coordinate activity and focus combined energies on preventing homelessness and improving services for homeless people.

Despite homelessness and rough sleeping providing an ongoing and growing challenge for the city, a number of

achievements were made between 2013-18:

- ✓ The development of new services for people sleeping rough in the city, such as 'No Second Night Out', co-ordinated cold weather provision, and the provision of high quality day centres that offer a range of advice and practical support
 - ✓ A successful bid to promote the establishment of a Social Impact Bond (SIB) as a means to fund the prevention of rough sleeping for a group of 125 people sleeping rough who have complex needs.
 - ✓ The establishment of the Golden Key Programme, a city wide partnership funded through the big lottery to deliver innovative services to those with complex and multiple needs including those at risk of homelessness
 - ✓ An innovative partnership approach to commissioning of joined-up pathways for homeless adults to help them successfully move on into settled accommodation
- ✓ Significant developments in homelessness prevention outcomes across partner agencies, including targeted welfare benefits, debt and financial advice and a successful bid to fund a pilot Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer service, which offers early interventions to those identified as at risk of homelessness.
 - ✓ An increased focus on homelessness prevention by services commissioned by the council, including an improved homelessness and accommodation pathway introduced for 16/17 year olds at risk of homelessness, a greater focus on young people staying at home if safe to do so and a specialist single point of access for young people facing homelessness delivered by the Youth MAPS service.
 - ✓ The delivery of dedicated primary health care services to homeless people including the establishment of NHS/BCC funded Health and Housing Services including Compass Health, the Homelessness Support Team and the Assertive Contact and Engagement (ACE) Service.

- ✓ The establishment of a Lettings Negotiation Team to make links between those at risk of homelessness and the Private Rented Sector.
- ✓ The establishment of a successful Rough Sleeper Partnership that has brought together a wide range of statutory, voluntary and faith based organisations.
- ✓ The Housing Options service was awarded a bronze standard for its Homelessness Prevention Services by the [National Practitioner Support Service](#) (NPSS). This has helped to increase capacity, enhance the skills of front-line staff and reinforce the council's commitment to reducing homelessness.

4. Challenges

Bristol offers a wide range of homelessness services. Alongside the council, service providers participate actively in a range of forums dedicated to sharing information and good practice between them. Our partnerships provide insight, experience and skills from a wide range of organisations.

However, the city still faces a number of significant challenges. There is no 'quick fix' to resolving many of these broader social and economic challenges, but identifying them and understanding their impact will be crucial to the delivery of this revised strategy and the future delivery of our services. Among the key challenges are:

Social housing

Approximately 19% of the city's housing stock is social housing, the largest landlord being the city council. There are over 12,000 households on the council waiting list for social housing. Approximately 1,800 properties are let each year, which means long waiting times for many.

Private rented sector

Around 29% of the city's housing stock is privately rented. Due to a very sharp rise in property prices in recent years, many purchasers of homes are existing or prospective landlords, not aspiring owner occupiers. Private market rents are usually higher than low income households can afford.

Supported housing

Bristol commissions up to 800 units of supported housing through a series of

homelessness pathways. However, many people find it difficult to move on from this accommodation due to the unavailability of social housing and unaffordable private rents.

Local Housing Allowance (LHA)

Bristol's Local Housing Allowance is £250+ below market rents for all property sizes, making access to the private rented sector a major challenge.

Because the city has very high housing demand, landlords are often keen to increase rent levels, which can lead to households being issued with a notice to quit if they can't keep up with rising rent levels.

The benefit cap

Some 439 households in Bristol are affected by the benefit cap. The benefit cap does not discriminate between smaller families and large ones, so creates a huge homelessness risk for families with 3 or more children.

Underoccupation charge

As of November 2018, some 2,762 Housing Benefit claimants had their entitlement reduced from due to the 'bedroom tax'. In a city with limited available affordable housing stock, the

challenge for householders affected and the council is managing the charge and/or finding alternative accommodation to 'downsize' to.

Universal credit full service (UCFS)

UCFS rollout in Bristol began on 6th June 2018 and is now complete. Housing cost decisions for UCFS claimants are no longer made locally.

Changes in employment practices

Bristol has a high number of short term, temporary, low paid and zero hours contract jobs. Many people on such contracts are frequently in and out of work. Nearly 50% of the families accommodated by the council in temporary accommodation are working households.

5. Summary Findings from the Homelessness Review

In addition to the wider social and economic challenges that have contributed to the increase in homelessness and rough sleeping in the city in recent years, there are also a range of more immediate factors that can lead to homelessness, such as relationship or family breakdown.

Bristol we have been closely monitoring the trends in homelessness and rough sleeping each quarter since 2012-13. This has enabled us to target services and submit a series of successful bids for funding homelessness prevention activities. In developing this new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, a comprehensive review of homelessness in the city was undertaken.

Among the issues raised in the review are:

- The most common factor leading to statutory homelessness over the past five years has been the loss of a private rented tenancy, closely followed by parents or other relatives not willing or able to accommodate.
- The main reason for establishing priority need in statutory homeless cases over the past five years has been due to the household including dependent children. This is unlikely to change with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA).
- Households aged between 25-44 are the most common group accepted as statutorily homeless in Bristol. This age group has also seen the largest

increase in numbers over the last five years.

- Female lone parent households account for most cases accepted as homeless by the city council.
- More couples with (or expecting) children are presenting as homeless; a trend likely to continue with the introduction of the HRA.
- 2014 marked a big increase in the number of households accepted as statutorily homeless in Bristol. The majority of households accepted were in the 'homeless at home' category.¹
- There has been a significant increase in the numbers of households provided with temporary accommodation in the last few years. This has placed a significant strain on the council's resources.
- Fewer homes in the private rented sector can now provide a sustainable, affordable housing option for households facing homelessness, many of whom are on low incomes. The main reason for this is that the

¹ These are households that have been accepted as statutorily homeless by a local authority but arrangements have been made, with the consent of the applicant, for them to remain in their own accommodation.

gap between average rents in Bristol and the Local Housing Allowance has grown considerably in recent years.

- Bristol consistently reports one of the highest numbers of homelessness preventions and reliefs nationally.
- The national rough sleeper count in November 2017 identified that, compared to the rest of England, the Bristol rough sleeping population had higher than average numbers of women and non-EU nationals. It also identified a slightly higher than average number in the 18-25 age group.
- The number of households living in temporary accommodation (TA) in Bristol in March 2012 was 160. On the 30th June 2017 this figure was 585. This is a 265% increase and has had a significant impact the service delivery plans of the Housing Options Team.
- The number of households living in temporary accommodation for more than six months was 287 on 31st March 2018. This accounts for 53% of all temporary accommodation. This figure is increasing due to the lack of availability of adequate and affordable move-on accommodation. Homeless households receive a high

banding on the city's choice-based lettings system; however the average time between statutory homelessness being agreed and a household making a successful bid for social housing is 18 months.

- At the annual rough sleeping count in November 2018 Bristol reported 82 people sleeping rough, which is the fifth highest return nationally. It is accepted that the annual count may underestimate the true scale of rough sleeping in the city.

6. Strategic Context

When developing this strategy regard was given to a number of national and local strategies.

National context

The National Rough Sleeper Strategy 2018 was published in August 2018. A new feature of government policy has been the growth in collaboration and use of homelessness charities including Crisis, Homelessness Link and St Mungos to adopt a new role particularly in terms of leading national homelessness policy and development.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Homelessness Reduction Act came into force in April 2018, key measures in the act include:

- **An extension of the period 'threatened with homelessness'** from 28 to 56 days.
- **A new duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible applicants** threatened with homelessness, regardless of priority need.
- **A new duty to relieve homelessness for all eligible homeless applicants**, regardless of priority need.
- **A new 'duty to refer'** - public services will need to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

The Act has prompted a comprehensive review of how homelessness prevention services are delivered.

Local context

The Corporate Plan includes a key commitment under the 'Empowering and Caring' theme to 'Prevent people becoming homeless and reduce the overall level of homelessness, with no-one needing to spend a 'second night out.'

In addition to the Corporate Strategy, the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy aligns with a number of local and sub-regional partnerships and strategies, including:

- [West of England Joint Spatial Plan \(JSP\)](#)
- [2016-20 Bristol Housing Strategy \(More than a roof\)](#)
- [Housing Delivery Plan 2017-20](#)
- [Bristol Health & Well Being Board](#)
- [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment \(JSNA\)](#)
- [Avon & Somerset Police Reducing Reoffending Board](#)

7. Strategic Priorities 2019-24

This five year strategy covers the period 2019-2024 and looks at strengthening the already high level of partnership working across Bristol and how we can continue to make significant improvements across homelessness services. In order to bring about significant change within our communities, this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy focuses on five key priorities, which have been agreed by a number of key partners.

More detail on the actions being undertaken against each priority is included in the accompanying action plan.

Priority one – Tackling Rough Sleeping

Homelessness across the UK is a growing concern with people sleeping rough remaining one of the most vulnerable groups in society. At the annual count in November 2018 Bristol reported 82 people sleeping rough which was the fifth highest return nationally. However, it is recognised that these figures represent just the ‘tip of the iceberg’, with people sleeping in unsafe buildings and "sofa surfing" not included in the official statistics.

The new [National Rough Sleeper Strategy 2018](#)² identifies addressing rough sleeping as a top government priority and reaffirms the target to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and eradicate it by 2027. Bristol played an active role in developing this strategy as a member of the National Rough Sleeping Advisory Panel.

²https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733421/Rough-Sleeping-Strategy_WEB.pdf

Bristol has also recently set up a ‘collective approach to rough sleeping’ group, which brings together a wide range of city stakeholders. The group will review and map existing resources that currently contribute to assisting people who are sleeping rough in Bristol and develop a more coordinated citywide approach to reducing rough sleeping.

Key Objectives

- We will focus maximum efforts and resources to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and eradicate it by 2027.
- We will develop effective services to address rough sleeping, using evidence-based approaches that have been proven to work with existing and emerging client groups and specifically target clients with complex multiple needs.
- We will evaluate and adapt housing pathways (including supported housing) to ensure they meet the needs of those living with complex needs as well as new/emergent client groups
- We will increase supply of move-on accommodation available to people who have slept rough.

Priority two – Prevention and Early Intervention

Given the challenges we face around increasing homelessness it is critical that we continue to put homeless prevention at the heart of everything we do.

We will find new ways of both understanding and addressing the factors that can lead to homelessness – such as the ending of private tenancies, family/relationship breakdown and discharge from other institutions; as well as developing greater understanding of the impact of wider social issues such as Adverse Childhood Experiences, poverty and disadvantage, unemployment, poor health and wellbeing and lack of access to affordable, decent homes.

We believe this will greatly increase the chances of positive outcomes for people at risk of becoming homeless. We have adopted a person-centred housing and support solution which seeks to ensure effective information and advice is available at every stage to maximise the positive outcomes for those who are or may face homelessness.

Key Objectives

- We will develop a range of preventative actions to reduce the number of households presenting to

homelessness services in Bristol and identify simple measures to monitor progress

- We will develop greater understanding of the ‘triggers’ that are causing tenancies to end, especially in the private rented sector; and why relationships and/or families are breaking down – to allow new opportunities for prevention to be identified and implemented.
- We will embed a ‘three tier’³ approach to preventing homelessness and rough sleeping, similar to the methods used by Health and Social Care Services.
- There will be a particular focus on young people, people leaving institutions (prison release, hospital discharge), people leaving the Private Rented Sector (PRS), families at risk of

³ The three tier approach has been designed by Health and Social Care services to ensure that people can get the right level and type of support, at the right time to help prevent, reduce or delay the need for ongoing support, and to maximise people’s independence. The three tiers are:

- **Help to Help Yourself** – Universal, accessible and quick information and advice
- **Help When You Need It** – Immediate help, goal focused
- **Help to Live Your Life** – Self directed, individual support

homelessness and those left homeless due to family breakdown.

- We will monitor and act on the impact of the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act within Bristol City Council’s Housing Options service and with partner agencies.
- There will be an ongoing review and analysis of the information that we gather in relation to homelessness and we will adapt future services and interventions in response to what we learn. There will be a focus on families, young people and early interventions.
- We will continue to effectively communicate with people about how to avoid the risk of homelessness
- We will change perceptions and expectations of homelessness services among members of the public through an effective communication plan, increasing the effectiveness of prevention through understanding the realities of the services available, including reducing stigma.
- We will tackle the causes of homelessness by influencing local, national and regional policies, strategies and approaches, including through campaigning.

Priority three –Improving Health and Wellbeing, Skills and Aspirations

The Homelessness Review has highlighted the link between homelessness and health; and has illustrated the significant health inequalities experienced by homeless people, especially those who are sleeping rough.

Whilst some aspects of poor health are attributable to being homeless, some health problems can also play a part in becoming homeless and also then prevent people from moving on from the streets or temporary housing into more stable accommodation.

Homeless populations are more likely to suffer from a range of health problems including substance misuse, and mental and physical ill health.

Access to appropriate and timely drug, alcohol and mental health treatments can play a vital role in moving people away from homelessness and into long term recovery. Some people find it difficult to access and engage with mainstream health services, particularly primary care services (GPs) and as a result health problems may be left untreated.

When homeless people do access health services it can often be in an unplanned way and at the point of crisis e.g through accident and emergency departments.

Problems can also arise on discharge from hospital, particularly for those who do not have accommodation to return to or those that may find their existing accommodation is now inappropriate or unsafe for them. This can have a negative affect on ongoing health care and lead to readmission to hospital.

By working with ‘experts by experience’ who have used our services previously, we will strive to better understand individual experiences of homelessness and use this knowledge to reshape our services.

Key Objectives

- We will reduce the numbers in temporary accommodation in favour of more sustainable options.
- We will work with partners to improve the health and wellbeing of homeless people and rough sleepers and support people to build better lives.
- We will work with those delivering drug and alcohol services to reduce the deaths of people known to homelessness services in the city

- We will work with long term homeless people, building their resilience and capacity and supporting them to solve their homelessness and reduce repeat homelessness
- We will increase access to mental health support and improve advice and training for staff working with complex needs clients to create ‘psychologically informed environments’ within all homelessness services.
- We will make effective use of clients with lived experience to shape our services.

Priority four – Delivering Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in all Services

The Homelessness review highlighted a number of issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion which will be taken into account for future service delivery and action plans.

Single People

Some single homeless people can have multiple and complex needs, such as drug and alcohol misuse, mental ill health and/or a history of offending. They can include people sleeping rough and /or

people who beg on the streets in the city centre, people living in hostels or in poor quality shared accommodation. Many have a transient lifestyle and the complexity of their needs can prevent or exclude them from being able to access or engage with mainstream accommodation and services.

Young People

The review shows that young people are increasingly disadvantaged by the combined impact of high rents, low incomes, welfare reform and limited housing options. Some young people may also have complex needs, with a range of support needs including drug, alcohol and mental health issues; and may lack the skills to live independently or build relationships. For some the risk of becoming homeless may be linked to their sexuality or transgender identity. There is also evidence for links between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and long-term homelessness and that becoming homeless at a young age can have a negative impact on future economic and emotional wellbeing.

Black and Minority Ethnic Households

The review has found that some BME communities are over represented in

homelessness services. These include Black African, Middle Eastern and Eastern European households. A number of other BME communities may not be over represented but may be at risk of homelessness because of specific issues such as forced marriage or as a result of their migrant status.

Domestic Abuse Survivors

Domestic abuse remains a major cause of homelessness in the city, with large numbers presenting and being accepted as homeless. We need to understand how best to intervene earlier and prevent domestic abuse and associated homelessness. This includes understanding how we can work with partners to encourage earlier reporting of domestic abuse and swift, achievable interventions to prevent it.

Key Objectives

- We will ensure that homelessness services are accessible and effective for all our citizens and are appropriate for groups in the community who may be disproportionately vulnerable to homelessness (with specific services offered where required)

- We will work with people with lived experience of homelessness - to provide a more personalised, inclusive approach to the overall quality of the services provided.
- We will review the data we collect and to identify trends and possible gaps in service delivery use this information to adapt our services in order to reduce disadvantage
- We will ensure that everyone is treated with respect and humanity, and avoid risks of harming wellbeing and dignity.

Priority five – Working in Partnership

Tackling citywide challenges like homelessness and rough sleeping requires collective action across the city. No one person or organisation can deliver the solutions to homelessness and rough sleeping in our city on their own; the way forward lies in involving and coordinating as many people's energies, ideas, talents and expertise as possible.

The previous homelessness strategy emphasised partnership working to coordinate activity and focus combined energies on preventing homelessness

and improving services for homeless people. With this new strategy we wish to develop this approach further.

Over the life of this strategy, we will forge new relationships with our partners and ensure that our collective efforts to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping are effectively aligned.

Key Objectives

- We will work with social housing developers and landlords to increase the supply of move on accommodation for all supported housing pathways and link this strategy with the targets to increase affordable housing supply and overall house building in Bristol.
- We will adopt a one-city approach and align efforts and resources with partners across the city to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping. For example, we will work more closely with the NHS and health partners through collaboration with NHS Clinical Commissioners and we will embed links to Children and Family Services through involvement on the Children and Partnership Board.
- We will seek Housing Options representation on the Health & Well

Being Board to achieve shared outcomes to improve the health and wellbeing of homeless people.

- We will develop an effective 'duty to refer' from all relevant public sector bodies as set out in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- We will work more closely with the Ministry of Justice and with the [Avon & Somerset Reducing Reoffending Board](#)⁴ to reduce the risk of homelessness for those leaving prison.
- We will develop effective sharing of information between the council and partners for this strategy through a shared performance dashboard with local, regional and national partners.
- We will build relationships to increase the supply of affordable housing and work with landlords to increase the supply of affordable rented accommodation.
- We will challenge and resolve barriers to effective service delivery as part of business as usual.

⁴ <https://www.avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk/Partnerships/Reducing-Reoffending.aspx>

8. Governance and delivery of the strategy

We need to ensure that together with our partners we have the skills and structures in place for the delivery of the strategy's priorities, and to deliver the innovative agenda that will be required to tackle homelessness over the next five years.

All city council directorates are signed up to and committed to delivering the Homelessness Strategy, working with partners and within the council to ensure the priorities are delivered.

The objectives in the Homelessness Strategy will be delivered using a plan that identifies the main tasks needed to tackle and prevent homelessness in the next five years. A multi-agency approach group will monitor and evaluate the plan regularly.

The action plan will identify who is responsible for the completion of specific tasks, and indicate timescales. The Early Intervention & Preventing Homelessness Challenge Group (EI&PHCG), a multi-agency partnership board comprised of a range of organisations that work within homelessness prevention services, will

hold overall responsibility for the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy.

Commissioning proposals for remodelling investments in homelessness services will be submitted to the Bristol Homes Board and Strategic Commissioning Board.

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