



Chelmsford Policy Board
26th September 2024

Homelessness & Rough Sleepers Strategy 2025-2030

Report by: Director of Sustainable Communities

Officer Contact: Paul Gayler, Strategic Housing Services Manager,
paul.gayler@chelmsford.gov.uk Tel: 01245 606375

Purpose

To present an updated Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2025-2030 for approval to undertake external consultation. Chelmsford City Council's previous Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy was published in 2020 so it now due for review and replacement.

Local Authorities must publish a strategy at least every 5 years that outlines how homelessness and rough sleeping will be prevented and relived.

Recommendation

1. The Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2025-2030 be approved for consultation process as presented.
-

1. Background

- 1.1 Chelmsford City Council's previous Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy was published in 2020, so it is now due for review and replacement. The purpose of the Strategy is to establish the Council's ambition and priorities to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping in the district.
- 1.2 The refreshed Strategy for consultation reflects the changing housing market conditions in the district, specifically in relation to the supply and affordability of housing and how the lack of accessible social and affordable homes and supported housing options impacts on people's ability to find and sustain permanent housing. The impact of individuals social-economic position and health and well-being is determining factor in ensuring that people can sustain their home and dictates the need for specialist and supported housing.
- 1.3 Refreshing the Strategy will enable the Housing Service to reset the priorities in line with the housing market conditions and reinvigorate activity in partnership to tackle homelessness, rough sleeping, and the causes.

2. Context

- 2.1 Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping is a critical priority for Chelmsford City Council, to meet the vision and deliver services and specifically to control the cost and impact on the Council of provision of temporary accommodation.
- 2.2 The Council recognises that tackling homelessness and rough sleeping is requires a whole system approach and it is imperative that partner agencies support and own the ambitions and contribute to its delivery through collaboration and joint working.
- 2.3 There are challenges with the housing market, specifically the lack of social and affordable housing and the wide differentials in income levels to house prices. The average house price is £398,000 and the average income £30,000; the average monthly rent is between £522 for a single room to £1,714 for a 4 bed property, resulting in housing supply and affordability driving the number of homeless households.
- 2.4 The 2020-2024 Strategy instigated significant progress in tacking rough sleeping in the district, therefore the focus of the refreshed strategy is to deliver homelessness prevention priorities and provide the right support to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

3. Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2025-2030

3.1 The Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2025-2030 highlights three main causes of homelessness, the number of households within each of these categories has more than doubled since the previous strategy was introduced in 2020.

The three main causes of homelessness are:

- Friends and family breakdown (33% of all homelessness)
- People experiencing domestic abuse (18% of all homelessness)
- End of a Private Rented Tenancy (26% of all homelessness)

3.2 Homelessness prevention is key to tackling homelessness, Chelmsford has developed a strong prevention model with early intervention and prevention activities and relief activity, the Strategy aims to increase activity to ensure households sustain and retain their existing homes or have planned moves rather than emergency relief.

3.3 A critical and innovative aspect of our focus on prevention in this strategy will include better communication about the housing crisis, making others including those working within local statutory and voluntary organisations more aware of how great the gap is between the need and supply of affordable homes and the impact this now is having on those whose homelessness can not be prevented.

3.3 People experiencing homelessness often have additional support needs, the most common include mental health, physical ill health and disability and people requiring support to recover from domestic abuse and the new strategy provides a review and update and proposals that link to the Housing Strategy.

3.4 A determining factor is the ability to secure and retain a home, the plans to increase housing supply are established within the Housing Strategy 2022-2027, the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy highlights the need for increased provision of specialist and supported housing for people with complex needs, mental health and experiencing domestic abuse.

3.5 The draft document is attached at **Appendix 1**.

4. Consultation Process

4.1 Chelmsford City Council is unable to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping by itself therefore one of the main purposes of the consultation is to understand from partners how they can contribute to delivering the actions proposed in the strategy.

4.2 In June and July this year discussions took place with a number of organisations to make them aware of the housing crisis, the review of homelessness in Chelmsford, and the launch of a new strategy. This has enabled them to prepare for the formal consultation process as the consultation will take place at a time when there is uncertainty in the decision of future government funding that may

affect stakeholders ability to contribute to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping.

- 4.3 These preliminary discussions also highlighted the need to improve communication with partners about the problems caused by the lack of supply, the growing need and cost of temporary accommodation and in view of this the importance of prevention of homelessness and their role in this. This was followed by an on-line survey with local residents on homelessness in the city which will help us develop our plans for the new strategy.
- 4.4 Through the consultation on this draft strategy we want to develop a more integrated approach to preventing and relieving homelessness with our partners and agree actions for the future which will deliver this aim. The main aims of the consultation questions in the draft strategy are:
- The 4 proposed ambitions and how partners can contribute to delivery and achievement.
 - How partners can contribute to service delivery and provision within commissioning and operating models to support groups at higher risk of homelessness.
 - How partners can support and plan to develop specialist and supported housing to specifically address mental health, physical ill health and disability and domestic abuse.
 - How Registered Provider partners can increase general needs housing supply and make best use of their existing housing stock to increase access to affordable housing.
 - How partners can support and assist in delivery of homelessness prevention through effective communication, support and advice.
 - What additional actions to increase support and connection with private sector landlords to work with tenants and create more sustainable provision can we take?
- 4.5 Following the consultation exercise the draft strategy will be presented to Policy Board on 16th January 2025 ahead of being presented to Cabinet on 11th March. After the end of the consultation and the Policy Board on 16th January members of Policy Board may wish to consider in detail, through a working group, the draft strategy in light of the consultation responses.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The demand for social and affordable housing is increasing as is the number of people approaching the Council for advice and assistance due to homelessness or the threat of homelessness.
- 5.2 Adoption of an updated Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2025-2030 will enable the Council to reiterate and refresh partnership activity with relevant partners to address the challenges in the Chelmsford housing market using up to

date housing market and housing needs assessment and the clarity of expectation.

List of appendices:

Appendix 1 - Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2025-2030

Background papers:

None

Corporate Implications

Legal/Constitutional:

All Local Housing Authorities are required by law to undertake a review of homelessness in their area and produce a strategy that is informed by this no less than once every five years.

Financial:

Clearly stating the need and aims of a Local Housing Authority in its Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy can help inform and influence future decisions on funding from others including central government.

Potential impact on climate change and the environment:

None

Contribution toward achieving a net zero carbon position by 2030:

None

Personnel:

Some posts in the Council's Housing Service are funded by central government based on the need and requirements identified in the previous strategy and the new strategy highlights both the achievements and continuing need for this resource.

Risk Management:

By reviewing and planning for future trends in homelessness the Council is able to assess and make best use of resources to ensure it can continue to meet its legal obligations.

Equality and Diversity:

An Equality Impact Assessment will be completed.

Health and Safety:

None

Digital:

None

Other:

None

Consultees:

Counsel

Relevant Chelmsford City Council Directorates

Partners operating in the Chelmsford District

Relevant Policies and Strategies:

The report takes account of the following policies and strategies of the City Council:

Chelmsford Housing Strategy 2022-2027

Chelmsford Tenancy Strategy 2024-2029

Temporary Accommodation Placement and Procurement Plan



Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2025-2030

Contents

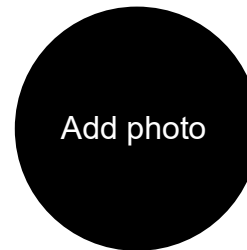
| | |
|--|-----------|
| Foreword | 3 |
| S1: Introduction | 4 |
| Our Homelessness Ambition | 7 |
| S2: Strategic Links | 8 |
| Our Chelmsford, Our Plan | 9 |
| Housing Strategy 2022-2027 | 10 |
| Local Plan | 11 |
| S3: Review of Homelessness in Chelmsford . 12 | |
| Understanding the drivers of homelessness | 13 |
| Main causes of homelessness in Chelmsford.... | 15 |
| Rough sleeping | 18 |
| Prevention & relief of homelessness..... | 20 |
| Temporary accommodation | 21 |
| Supported & specialist housing | 23 |
| S4: Developing our Strategy | 25 |
| S5: our Ambitions | 28 |



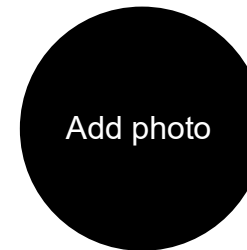
Foreword

XXXXXXX

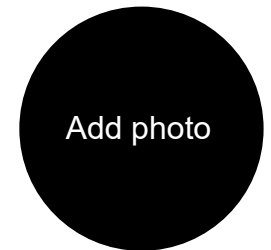
XXXXXXXXX



Director
Paul Brookes



Councillor
Lynne Foster



Councillor
Stephen Robinson

Section 1: Introduction



Local Housing Authorities must publish a strategy at least every five years setting out how it will prevent homelessness and meet its legal duties to those who become homeless, including those at risk of sleeping rough. The strategy should be based on a review of homelessness in the district. The national Homelessness Code of Guidance outlines the key components that are expected to be included within a strategy:

- It should be consistent with other plans and strategies for the authority, demonstrating that all relevant departments and corporate partners are committed to delivering the aims of the strategy;
- It should take into account local trends such as the main causes of homelessness, changes since the last strategy and future needs and demands.
- It should include link with other local statutory and voluntary organisations in the area, especially those that are involved with health, social care, criminal justice and economic policy;
- It should recognise and build on opportunities for working with neighbouring authorities, especially if the council is not a unitary authority, as is the case with Chelmsford City Council.

Over the last five years there have been a number of significant changes, in particular:

| | |
|---|---|
| Cost of living | The cost of renting and maintaining a home has risen faster than inflation, placing a growing number of families into debt |
| Temporary accommodation | As the gap between the need and supply of affordable accommodation has grown, more and more families have had to be placed in temporary accommodation. |
| The Covid Pandemic | Introducing new and more flexible ways of working, closer ties with health and an increase in resources for those sleeping rough in Chelmsford. |
| The war in Ukraine | With several hundred Ukrainian families moving to Chelmsford to live temporarily as guests in people's homes, all needing longer term plans for where they will live. |
| The withdrawal from Afghanistan | Families who were placed temporarily in hotel accommodation have now been helped to move into settled housing with additional resources for support and housing. |
| Provision of accommodation locally for asylum seekers | Some of whom will be granted leave to remain which will end their temporary accommodation making them homeless. |

In addition to these national challenges there have also been some additional local issues:

Private Rented Homes

Rents have risen, very few in Chelmsford are now affordable to those on low incomes and a growing number of landlords have sold homes reducing the local supply and choice. Homelessness from people being given notice in this sector has become the single greatest cause of homelessness in Chelmsford.

Affordable housing

The Council has enabled the development of more homes in addition to those that are required through our policies for new developments. This has inevitably made a difference but the overall supply from the existing stock reflects the national trend in a reducing number of homes becoming available.

Domestic abuse

Levels of domestic abuse has increased in Chelmsford and with that the number of families becoming homeless. As a cause of homelessness, this is now three times higher in Chelmsford than the national average.

Supported housing

A growing number of those who become homeless in Chelmsford have a need for support, as well as accommodation, to enable them to cope with additional needs and be able to manage their home. Mental health, domestic abuse, physical disability and illness are the most common issues.



There have also been some achievements that have helped reduce the impact of some of these challenges over the last five years:

- More resources and better working with partners to reduce the level of rough sleeping in Chelmsford;
- Additional funding and staff to support those who have become homeless due to domestic abuse, Ukrainian and Afghan families; and
- Changes to policies to extend housing options, ensure the Council can meet its legal duties to those who in greatest need.

Our Homelessness Ambition

Our review of homelessness provides us with the evidence for the priorities of this strategy. We also have some broader themes we want to promote through the work we do in delivering this strategy which will build on our experience and success from the previous one and create a sustainable service for the future.

Our ambition is:

1

Universal prevention

Through better understanding of the causes and consequences of homelessness we want to develop better awareness of the risks of homelessness and as a result the importance for everyone of prevention wherever possible.

2

Targeted prevention

Our review of homelessness helps us identify the most frequent causes of homelessness and we want to make sure that these are addressed as effectively as possible, whether through prevention or relief.

3

Intervention and recovery through partnership working

Through better understanding of the causes and consequences of homelessness we want to develop better awareness of the risks of homelessness and as a result the importance for everyone of prevention wherever possible.

4

An integrated approach to local housing options

We associate homelessness with the loss of a home but it is the inability to find another home that makes a person or family homeless. We are now seeing the lack of supply as the main reason people in Chelmsford become and remain homeless. Whether this is due to the reducing supply of affordable homes, supported accommodation or even temporary accommodation we have to do all we can to improve the supply of homes to those in greatest need through this and other streams of work.

Section 2: Strategic Links



Our Chelmsford, Our Plan

Our Chelmsford, Our Plan is the Council's corporate plan that sets out priorities to help create a greener, fairer, and more connected place. Our Chelmsford, Our Plan' reaffirms our ambition for the area to be a highly sustainable and creative community at the heart of Essex, recognised as a leading regional centre and destination in the East of England.

Our Chelmsford, Our Plan' aims to deliver a fairer and more inclusive place.

- By promoting sustainable and environmentally responsible growth to stimulate a vibrant, balanced economy, a fairer society and provide more homes of all types.
- Bringing investment into the area, together with an increase in skills, jobs, and overall employment.
- Meeting the demand for new homes of all types and tenures, in particular homes to rent that local people can afford.
- By adopting an approach whereby growth and development also delivers a broad range of social, community and environmental benefits that are sustainable over time.

Our Chelmsford,
Our Plan

Priority **A**

Set out the approach and planning principles to guide housing and economic growth, promoting sustainable development and helping to create greener, fairer and more connected communities.

Our Chelmsford,
Our Plan

Priority **B**

Put in place measures to help tackle local housing needs so everyone can aspire to having a home that they can afford, and which help address the causes of, and mitigate the impacts of, homelessness.

Our Chelmsford,
Our Plan

Priority **C**

Promote the area as a place for investment and business location, encouraging the creation of a wider range of jobs and excellence in education, skills, and vocational attainment, thereby improving income equality.



Housing Strategy 2022-2027

The priorities established in the **Housing Strategy 2022-2027** are currently under review due to the changes and challenges of the housing market and the onset of new legislation which has renewed the focus on housing conditions in the private and public sector. However, the vision to address the housing needs of all Chelmsford residents so everyone can reasonably aspire to having a home that meets their needs is paramount.

The priorities under consideration are:

1

Increase the supply of housing options across all tenures and price points in the housing market, with a focus on affordable

2

Improve the housing conditions across all tenures

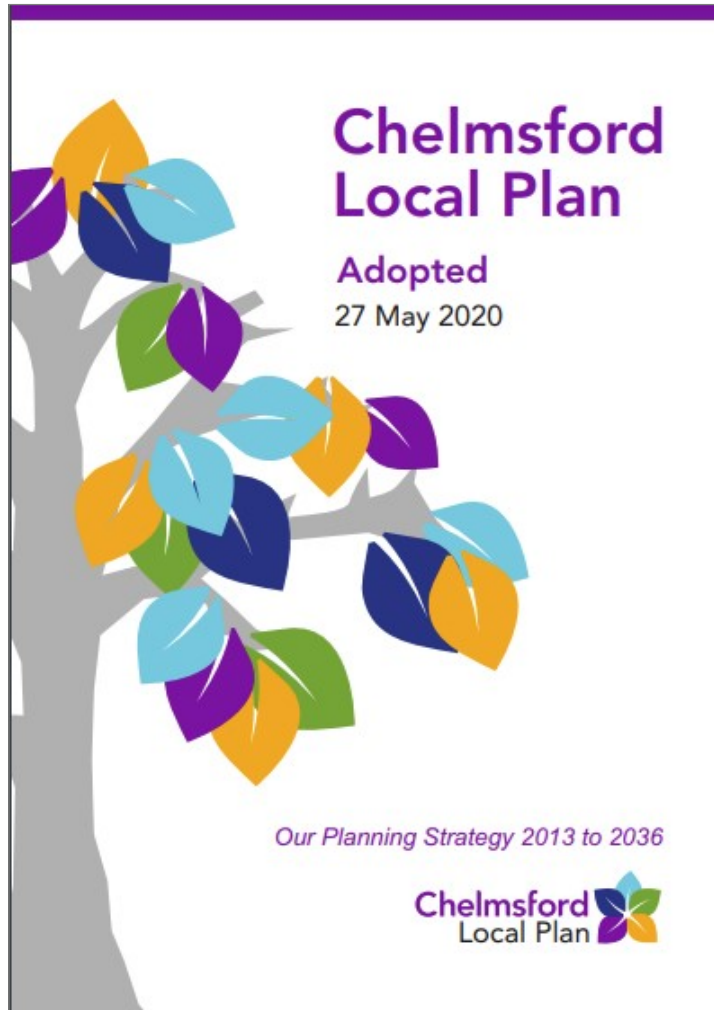
3

Enabling housing options & support options for vulnerable people, health and well-being, older people, and people with complex needs & people experiencing homelessness / rough sleeping.

4

Delivering through effective partnerships

Local Plan



The Council's Local Plan sets out our vision for the future, ensuring there is an adequate supply of housing, infrastructure and services to meet the needs of every citizen of Chelmsford. This includes policies for the supply of affordable homes and specialist housing that can provide support to those who are homeless or in other types of housing need.

The review is informed by an updated Strategic Housing Needs Assessment which has highlighted how great the need is not just for affordable housing but the specific type of affordable tenure that is particularly needed to meet the growing gap between the housing need of those unable to afford a home on the open local housing market in Chelmsford.



Section 3: Review of Homelessness in Chelmsford



Understanding the drivers of homelessness



Understanding the drivers of homelessness – main causes in Chelmsford is crucial to the prioritisation of action and intervention.

- In 2019/20 there were 812 assessed homelessness applications.
- In 2023/24 there were 1,135, assessed homelessness applications.

The average number of cases per month has increased over the last five years from 68 to 95, an increase of nearly 40%.

The average caseload of active cases for each Homelessness Officer in March 2024 was 66, this is more than twice the number recommended by DLUHC.

Over the same period, the number of homes available to let through the Housing Register has reduced by 25%, from 316 at the start of 2019/20 to 235 by the end of 2023/24.

This gap between need and supply has in the past been offset by using privately rented homes as an alternative but the rising cost of this tenure has effectively ended this option for those on a low income, the table below shows how the gap between Local Housing Allowance and the monthly average cost of a home by bedroom size in Chelmsford over the last five years.

| Bedroom size | Shortfall Q4 2019/20 | Shortfall Q3 2023/24 | Shortfall Q4 2023/24 |
|--------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1-bed | £125 | £450 | £368 |
| 2-bed | £180 | £655 | £575 |
| 3-bed | £215 | £738 | £618 |
| 4-bed | £404 | £1,155 | £1,115 |

Despite an increase in Local Housing Allowance at the end of the financial year, there remains a considerable shortfall of around £100 to £250 per week for many families.

This gap between the need and supply of affordable homes in Chelmsford has contributed to the number in temporary accommodation increasing from 272 to 460 over the same period. An increase of 41% reflecting a 40% increase in need and a 25% reduction in supply of affordable homes.



Modular housing in Chelmsford

Main causes of homelessness in Chelmsford

1. Eviction by family or friends



2. Section 21 NTQs (all)



3. Domestic Abuse



The table below shows a comparison of the main causes of homelessness in Chelmsford over the last five years. The percentages will not add to 100 as there were some other causes that are not so significant.

| Reason for homelessness | 2019/20 | 2023/24 | Change |
|--|-----------|-----------|--------|
| 1. Eviction by family or friends | 155 (21%) | 359 (33%) | +204 |
| 2. Notice by private landlord | 105 (14%) | 277 (26%) | +172 |
| 3. Domestic abuse | 80 (11%) | 191 (18%) | +111 |
| 4. Notice by social housing landlord | 103 (14%) | 105 (9%) | +2 |
| 5. Non-violent relationship breakdown | 49 (7%) | 45 (4%) | -4 |
| 6. Leaving hospital, prison or other institution | 11 (1.5%) | 86 (7%) | +75 |
| 7. Other reason or not known | 227 (31%) | 20 (2%) | -207 |

What has changed?

The largest variation has been in the number of cases where the reason for homelessness was not known, in many of these cases this may reflect a failure to accurately record this so it is good to see that this has reduced to just two percent, giving a more accurate picture of the cause of homelessness in Chelmsford today.

1. Eviction by family and friends

It is likely that many of the cases where the cause was not previously recorded would have been for this reason reducing the variation shown in the table above. This seems to have changed from a cause that was predominantly associated with eviction of older children by parents to one of adult children returning temporarily to the family home having lost other accommodation, or people relying on friends to help them when becoming homeless through other reasons.

By carrying out home-visits we can make families and friends aware of how hard it can be to find affordable housing in Chelmsford and a number of cases are prevented in this way through our 'Homeless at Home' scheme.

2. Notice by private landlord

This has more than doubled as a cause of homelessness over the last five years and reflects a regional and national trend.

It is a concern that in a number of cases this is due to landlords selling the home and no longer being a private landlord, this means that not only would the proposal to end no-fault evictions not apply to these cases, there is also a reduction in the number of homes of this tenure in Chelmsford.

3. Domestic abuse

This has also doubled as a cause of homelessness over the same period. The Domestic Abuse Act was introduced in the intervening period with a number of new requirements that could help such as providing safe accommodation to those who lose their home for this reason, better use of court orders to keep perpetrators away from families at risk, a commitment that those in social housing will be considered for a like-for-like replacement and a duty on upper-tier local authorities to provide strategies that set out how these and other aims of the Act will be delivered in their area.



4. Notice by social landlord

Taking into account the increase in other causes and the overall number becoming homeless, it is good news that this has remained almost the same over the last five years despite the cost-of-living crisis and other pressures local families face.

We are grateful for the help and support of local housing associations for the work they do in partnership with the Council and other agencies to avoid the risk of people losing their tenancies and we want to continue to build on this success to see if we can reduce this over the lifetime of this strategy.



5. Non-violent relationship breakdown

As a cause of homelessness this is likely to be more incidental to other factors such as changes to the housing market than some of the other causes making it difficult to proactively manage this as a cause but improving the supply of affordable housing in general and other options would inevitably help make an improvement in the future.

6. Leaving hospital, prison or other institution

It was hoped that the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act and its accompanying duty on some organisations to help identify and refer people at risk of homelessness would have maintained if not reduced levels of homelessness. We are pleased that a growing number of people are being identified and referred but concerned by the limited opportunity to prevent homelessness in many of these cases, the number who are very vulnerable and the need to make referring agencies aware of this in order to manage expectations and highlight the need to work more closely on preventing and relieving homelessness.

We have been successful in developing more supported accommodation for some groups with the support of other organisations, for example more homes for those leaving prison but there remain significant gaps for others such as those leaving hospital with poor physical or mental health.

Rough Sleeping

There has been a considerable improvement in resources available to help rough sleepers in Chelmsford over the lifetime of the last strategy including:

- **46 additional bedspaces** with support funded through the Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP) and Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI), **and an additional 24 places planned for 2025**
- **12 additional bedspaces** for those who become homeless after leaving prison funded by the Accommodation For Ex-Offenders (AFEO) programme.

A local team of Rough Sleeper Navigators and Coordinator funded through the RSI programme, along with an outreach service for anyone reported as a rough sleeper through the Streetlink website.

A dedicated mental health support worker jointly commissioned by Essex Partnership University Trust (EPUT) Alongside this is the invaluable contribution made by local charities and voluntary groups who together with Chelmsford City Council work together as part of Chelmsford's Single Homeless Forum.

Whilst supportive of the government's aim to end rough sleeping we recognise through our experience over the last five years that there is always a risk of some people finding themselves having to resort to sleeping rough so we aim to help them move off the streets of Chelmsford into accommodation as quickly as possible.



Many will be unaware of what help and support exists in Chelmsford so the first thing we need to do is make sure we have an effective way to engage with new rough sleepers as quickly as possible, promoting and using Streetlink as a source of information about any who is sleeping rough in our city and working with local charities and other agencies to make contact.

We then need a supply of accommodation, often with support, that can be accessed as quickly as possible to help people move off the streets. Support is critical at this stage as many people will have other problems that have often led to them becoming homeless and without help to overcome these, some of which may be deep seated, there is a high risk that they will become homeless once again.

The number of people helped each year in Chelmsford demonstrates how effective this system is but there is a small number who have become entrenched as rough sleepers despite offers of help and accommodation. In almost all of these cases there is a need for considerable levels of support just to build up trust and engagement. Any offer of accommodation will need to provide a similar level of high support, at least for the early stages, with a recognition that many will regress back at times and it is the ability to have accommodation and support that recognises this as part of the pathway to recovery that is so important.

Through this strategy and our work with partners we aim to:

- provide longer-term supported accommodation for those who need more time to prepare for living independently, and
- re-establish the Home First scheme for those needing a high level of support and time to adjust to living away from the streets and the problems they have experienced.



Prevention and relief of homelessness

The Homelessness Reduction Act formalised the work we previously did to prevent homelessness whenever possible. Under the Act prevention means preventing homelessness so someone is able to remain in their existing home or can be helped to find somewhere else before they have to leave, relief from homelessness means that although they have lost their home and become homeless they have been helped to find somewhere else so the Council does not then have a duty to consider if they need other settled accommodation and temporary accommodation in the meantime.

Over the last five years performance in prevention and relief of homelessness has remained consistent as shown in the table below:

| Number of successful cases | 2019/20 | 2023/24 | Change |
|----------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Prevention | 248 | 213 | -35 |
| Relief | 96 | 112 | +16 |
| Total | 344 | 325 | +19 |

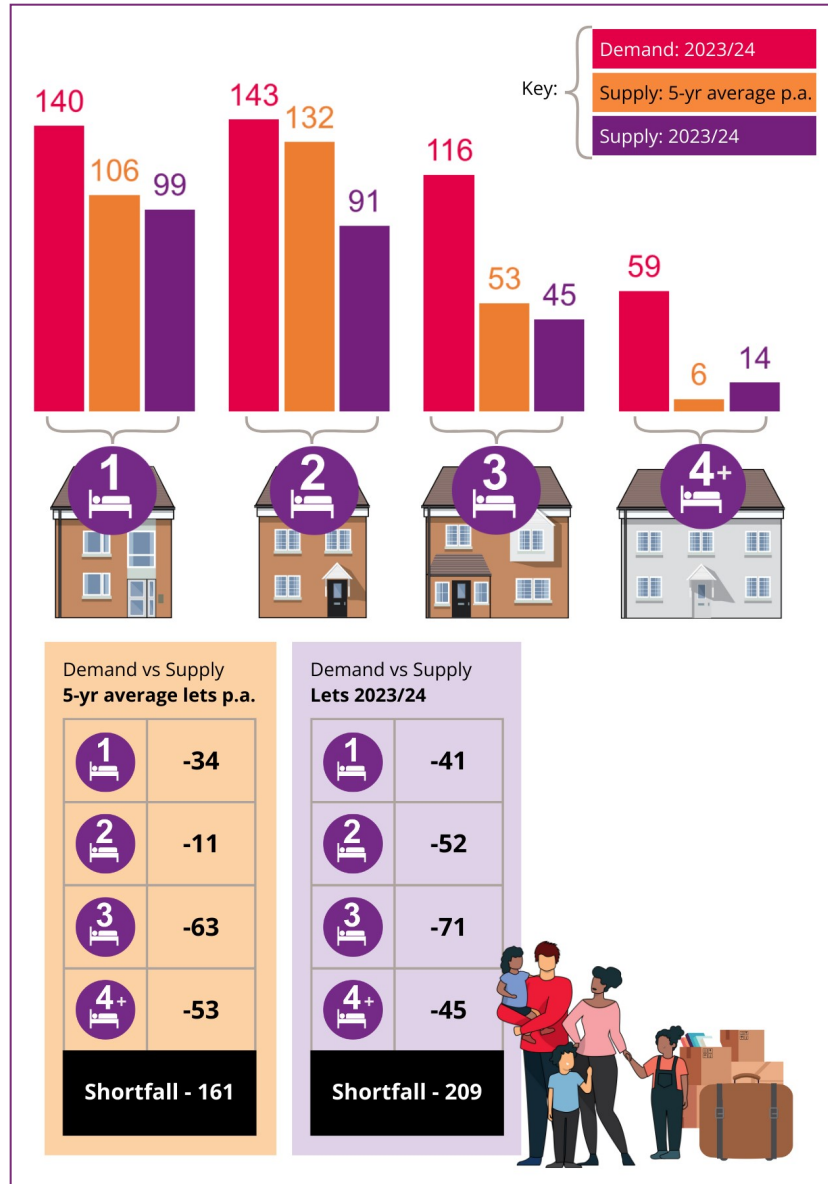
Naturally we would like to be able to prevent more cases of homelessness but this has to be seen in the context of a more challenging situation, with rising levels of homelessness (more applications and growing levels of complexity) and a reducing supply of alternate options as the supply of affordable and supported housing reduces and the cost of private rent exceeds what many on lower incomes can afford.

As part of our renewed strategic approach we aim to improve awareness of the growing gap between the need and supply of affordable and supported accommodation in Chelmsford. This will link to our Housing Strategy which aims to improve the supply of both these options. We believe that by having a better and wider understanding of this problem:

- Local residents will recognise the need to seek help and advice as soon as possible, giving more time to see how homelessness can be prevented and encouraging more flexibility over options to relieve homelessness; and
- Local partners will recognise the need and importance of early referrals of those they are working with, along with the need to work together to prevent homelessness whenever possible even though the current accommodation may not be ideal, it may still be preferable to the consequence of becoming homeless and having to move into temporary accommodation.



Temporary accommodation



An inevitable consequence of rising need and reducing supply has been an increase in the number of households having to live in temporary accommodation. There will always be a need for emergency accommodation, for example when families are made homeless due to fire or flood, or other cases when there has been no prior warning of someone becoming roofless and time is needed to investigate their circumstances.

In March 2024 there were 458 households in temporary accommodation, two-thirds of these had been accepted under the main duty of needing settled accommodation and were waiting for a suitable home to become available. Improving the supply of affordable homes is an objective of the Council’s Housing Strategy and there have been some improvements as a result of this, in particular improving the supply of larger family homes and temporary accommodation in Chelmsford. Despite this, the gap between the need and supply of affordable homes continues to grow which highlights how critical the prevention of homelessness is.

The graphic (left) below shows the number of households by bedroom size in temporary accommodation at the end of 2023/24 alongside the supply (lettings) of affordable homes in 2023/24 and the average supply over the last five years.

- 458 total in temporary accommodation (2023/24)
- 249 total lettings (2023/24)
- 297 total average 5-year annual lettings (2019-2024)



The Council has invested in additional temporary accommodation over the lifetime of the previous Homelessness Strategy, all of these homes are in Chelmsford which reduces the impact of disruption to families.

The current portfolio of Council-owned temporary accommodation is:

- 57 two, three, and four-bedroom homes owned by the Council.
- 79 one, two, three and four-bedroom homes leased by the Council from private landlords
- 18 one and two-bedroom modular homes

This provides a total of 154 properties. In addition to this there are also 56 homes owned and managed by local Registered Providers also all in Chelmsford.

This total of 206 properties would be more than enough to meet the needs of those who need temporary (or interim) accommodation pending enquiries to establish whether or not there would be a permanent duty to accommodate. It is the reduction in the supply of general needs affordable homes to rent which is causing the growing backlog and number of households in temporary accommodation. The additional need is currently met by private providers who make properties available at a daily rate, often referred to as 'nightly lets'. Most of these are also in Chelmsford but there is a finite number and we are increasingly having to place people into nightly let accommodation outside of Chelmsford.



In 2024 the Council introduced a new Temporary Accommodation Placement and Procurement Policy ([weblink to be added](#)) which provides more information on how we will ensure there is an adequate supply of temporary accommodation that meets the needs of those who are homeless and the legal duties of the Council.



Supported and Specialist Housing

Many people who become homeless have a need for support as well as accommodation. Everyone who becomes homeless and is helped by the Council will have a Personal Housing Plan and as part of this we identify where there may be a need for support.

A summary of the ten most prevalent support needs for 2022/23 is provided below:

| Support requirement | Cases | % |
|---------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| 1. Mental health | 311 | 31.1% |
| 2. Physical ill health and disability | 212 | 21.2% |
| 3. Domestic abuse | 146 | 14.6% |
| 4. Learning disability | 95 | 9.5% |
| 5. Repeat homelessness | 78 | 7.8% |
| 6. Abuse (not domestic) | 71 | 7.1% |
| 7. Offending | 71 | 7.1% |
| 8. Rough sleeping | 70 | 7.0% |
| 9. Access to education and training | 62 | 6.2% |
| 10. Drug dependency | 36 | 3.6% |

These are the principle support needs identified by applicants and in some cases there may be more than one support need but this still gives a good indication of the most common problems many of those who are homeless in Chelmsford face. This helps us match the supply of supported housing alongside the likely need. Our Housing Strategy set out the following actions which remains relevant:

(1) Complete the programme for providing supported accommodation for those at risk of rough sleeping

Since 2022 we have worked with partners to double the amount of supported accommodation for rough sleepers in Chelmsford. In 2024/25 we hope to see an additional 24 new units will be provided by CHESSE as part of the Single Homeless Accommodation Programme (SHAP).

We also want to replace the 8 units of high level support that were provided as a Housing First scheme by Home Group until March 2024.

(2) Identify opportunities and bring forward plans to meet the needs of those who need support and accommodation due to mental ill-health

We have not been able to make progress so far with this action and want to identify partners who can help us meet this objective as we have no nomination rights to any schemes like this despite the large number of homeless people who identify themselves as needing this support.



(3) Provide suitable temporary accommodation for those with physical disabilities and publicise the Disabled Facilities Grant

There are very few properties suitable for wheelchair use which can be provided at short notice for those who become homeless, as we are seeing a growing number of people who are homeless as the result of leaving hospital with this need we must continue to work to achieve this aim.

(4) Ensure there is an adequate supply of specialist accommodation for those experiencing domestic abuse

There are only 12 places in the local refuge suitable for families and 4 other bedspaces for single people, which is only one-tenth the annual number who are homeless as a result of domestic abuse. There is clearly a need for more safe accommodation with support in Chelmsford, to meet the needs of a diverse range of households.



(5) Improve the provision of temporary accommodation for young people

Although we do not have an especially large number of young homeless people, those who do become homeless may be especially vulnerable and in need of additional support in homes where there is some additional protection from older people. We will continue to work with partners such as the YMCA to progress plans for improving this provision.



Section 4: Developing our strategy



Taking into account our review of homelessness in Chelmsford, existing plans and strategies and our ambitions, we now seek feedback to help us prepare a final version of a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy including actions to be delivered over the next five years.

1. Rough Sleeping

Continue to develop a more comprehensive and evidence-based approach to reducing the need to sleep rough by:

- A. Recognising the distinction between those who are new to rough sleeping whose main need is accommodation, those who experience repeat homelessness and may need a higher level of housing with support, and those who are entrenched and whose primary need is access to specialist support whilst sleeping rough.
- B. Replacing the provision of accommodation and support of the eight units previously provided by Home Group as on a 'Housing First' basis
- C. Refining the links between the Councils Rough Sleeper Navigators and CHES outreach service to get the best outcome from these two services.
- D. Developing a wider range of supported accommodation for single people to reduce the need for temporary accommodation.
- E. Improve awareness of local services to help those sleeping rough, and communication and cooperation between these organisations so they are helped to understand and respond to gaps in services.

2. Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse spans various agencies and issues, it needs a multi-faceted approach, working across several fields of expertise including the criminal justice system, housing management, adult and young people's social care and the voluntary sector using the Domestic Abuse Act as a framework for partnership working. We have seen how a focus on rough sleeping over the last five years has transformed this aspect of homelessness in Chelmsford and we now want to adopt a similar approach to those at risk of homelessness due to domestic abuse, including:

- A. Better use made of existing supported housing to allow people time to understand their options and make informed decisions;
- B. Better understanding of housing pressures and options across various agencies to stimulate more innovation and development of housing options and support for those at risk of homelessness;
- C. Innovation in dealing with perpetrators to make them rather than their victims responsible for their actions, removing them rather than others from the home;

...continued on next page..



Taking into account our review of homelessness in Chelmsford, existing plans and strategies and our ambitions, we now seek feedback to help us prepare a final version of a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy including actions to be delivered over the next five years.

2. Domestic Abuse continued..

- D. Developing local reciprocal arrangements to enable victims to retain a like-for-like home if they can not be helped to remain safely in their current home;
- E. Better supply of safe accommodation for a more diverse range of people to eliminate the risk of exclusion;
- F. Better provision of support to those who have to be placed into generic temporary accommodation.
- F. Create a forum of local service providers to improve the quality of support to those at risk of abuse and homelessness, improving cooperation and opportunities to meet the aims of this strategy.

3. Mental Health

- A. Retain and expand the pilot scheme of providing support to single homeless through the Mental Health Navigator with EPUT
- B. Develop accommodation with support for those who are at risk of homelessness and suffering with mental health to avoid the risk of rough sleeping.

4. Young People

- A. Continue to develop plans with partners for supported housing for young people to avoid the need for temporary accommodation.

5. Temporary accommodation

- A. Progress plans for the procurement and management of temporary accommodation in Chelmsford to improve the quality and reduce the cost.
- B. Work with partners to improve the level of support provided to those placed into temporary accommodation, especially where this has to be outside of the Chelmsford district.
- C. Explore the opportunities to create housing with support for vulnerable families as an alternative to temporary accommodation.
- D. Progress plans to provide temporary accommodation that is suitable for people with physical disabilities.



Section 5: Our Ambitions



1. Universal prevention

- Improve communication about the housing situation in Chelmsford to help our partners understand and manage expectations, recognise the importance of prevention and the consequences of becoming homeless.
- Continue to work with and expand the work of Chelmsford's Single Homeless Forum and Homeless Families Forum, sharing and promoting good practice and highlighting those most at risk and in need of help.

2. Targeted prevention

- Develop a multi-agency strategic approach to reducing homelessness for those at risk of domestic abuse
- Work with partners to provide advice and support to others who are more likely to experience homelessness – single parents in privately rented accommodation, refugees from Ukraine, asylum seekers granted leave to remain, those who have previously experienced homelessness.
- Review and develop the role of our Tenancy Sustainment Officer to help those at risk of eviction.



3. Intervention and recovery through partnership working

- Continue to develop our work with those accommodated through the Homes for Ukraine scheme and explore how this could be expanded to help other refugees;
- Develop more options with partners to support vulnerable households in temporary accommodation;
- Extend the work of the mental health navigator;
- Review and develop the Accommodation for Ex Offenders (AFE0) scheme with probation service and others.

4. An integrated approach to local housing options

- Implement, review and develop our policy for the use of privately rented accommodation as an alternative to social housing for those accepted as homeless;
- Implement, review and develop our Temporary Accommodation Placement and Procurement policies
- Renew our Tenancy Strategy with registered providers to make best use of existing housing stock;
- Prepare and implement the requirements of the Supported Housing Act

Housing Team

Chelmsford City Council



Civic Centre, Duke Street, Chelmsford. CM1 1JE



01245 060400



www.chelmsford.gov.uk/housing



<https://forms.chelmsford.gov.uk/contactus-housing/>