

# **Bracknell Forest Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026**

**December 2021**

# Bracknell Forest Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026

## Forward

I am delighted to present to you the Bracknell Forest Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. This strategy sets out the Council's vision for tackling homelessness and how it will work with partners to prevent homelessness and eliminate rough sleeping.

This strategy comes at a crucial period in time. A shortage of affordable homes and rapidly rising house prices are placing increased pressure on homelessness services, whilst at the same time, the covid 19 pandemic has impacted on many households' employment and welfare, leaving them vulnerable to homelessness. As a result, we have seen a steady increase in the numbers of households, particularly single people, presenting as homeless over the last year. Homelessness has an undoubtedly negative impact on people's lives, well-being and opportunities. Therefore, preventing homelessness and assisting people to remain in or access suitable accommodation are key priorities for this Council.

We are proud of our achievements to date. Following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2018, we re-focussed our services on prevention and early intervention. We have been successful in preventing homelessness in a high number of cases, and our rate of prevention is better than the national and regional averages. Using government funding to tackle rough sleeping, we have seen numbers reduce dramatically as a result of the support and assistance that we are providing. We rarely use bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless people and have made sure that families with dependent children are not placed in such accommodation.

We are fortunate to work with local stakeholders who share our commitment to preventing homelessness and rough sleeping. I would like to extend my thanks to all of these colleagues, as we could not achieve the successes we have already, without them.

I am very pleased to endorse this strategy, knowing that it will deliver continuous improvements in how we tackle and prevent homelessness, and impact positively on people's lives.

Cllr. Dale Birch

Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing

## Introduction

Bracknell Forest's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2021-2026 has been developed during a period of unprecedented uncertainty. Whilst some of the known housing and homelessness challenges will shape the detail of this strategy, there is the overarching context of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, which has had, and will continue to have an impact in communities in our local area, as well as in the UK and globally. As a result, it is difficult to predict in the longer term the likely impacts on different forms of homelessness. In the immediate future it is predicted nationally that there will be an increase in homelessness as the ending of restrictions on evictions take effect.

There have been significant changes in national policy since the publication of the last Homelessness Strategy 5 years ago. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was introduced in April 2018, with the aim of offering more assistance to single people and to improve prevention of homelessness through placing this within a statutory framework. The change in the legislation was cited as the most significant change in homelessness law in 40 years. At the same time, the Government announced a cross-Government priority to focus on ending rough sleeping by 2024.

More resources have been made available by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to every local authority to support their work to prevent homelessness and end rough sleeping. Bracknell Forest now has a dedicated Rough Sleeping Team and more staff to work on preventing homelessness for both families and single people.

This Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy aims to consolidate some of the positive progress in the last 2 years, as well as focus on better meeting customer's needs and changing, where possible, what's not been working well, through identifying and addressing barriers to continual improvement.

The delivery of actions coming out of this strategy will be set in the context of local authorities and Government not yet fully understanding the medium and longer term impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on housing and homelessness. We know that we need to ensure the Action Plan which accompanies this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is continually reviewed and when needed, can be updated or changed in response to learning, and any new trends or circumstances as a result of the pandemic or other major socio-economic and policy drivers.

Effective partnership working lies at the heart of all successful homelessness prevention services. The scope of the strategy is therefore wider than the services delivered directly by Council. It supports the delivery of services within other public services, including health and criminal justice agencies, housing associations and voluntary sector organisations.

We have used data, other information, and feedback to review homelessness in Bracknell Forest, its causes and how this affects different groups of people in our communities. The findings from this extensive review work have shaped this strategy. You can read the full review, which sets out local detail, in Appendix One.

Our aim has to be to continue to prevent homelessness occurring in the first place – this is the best outcome for people living in Bracknell Forest. It also makes good financial sense for the Council and other public sector agencies locally to prevent homelessness, because the cost of homelessness and its wider impacts on other services is high. At the moment too much of our focus and resources are spent assisting people once the crisis of homelessness has already happened. For some single people, this can be at the point they are on the edge of, or are already, rough sleeping. We want to turn that around and help

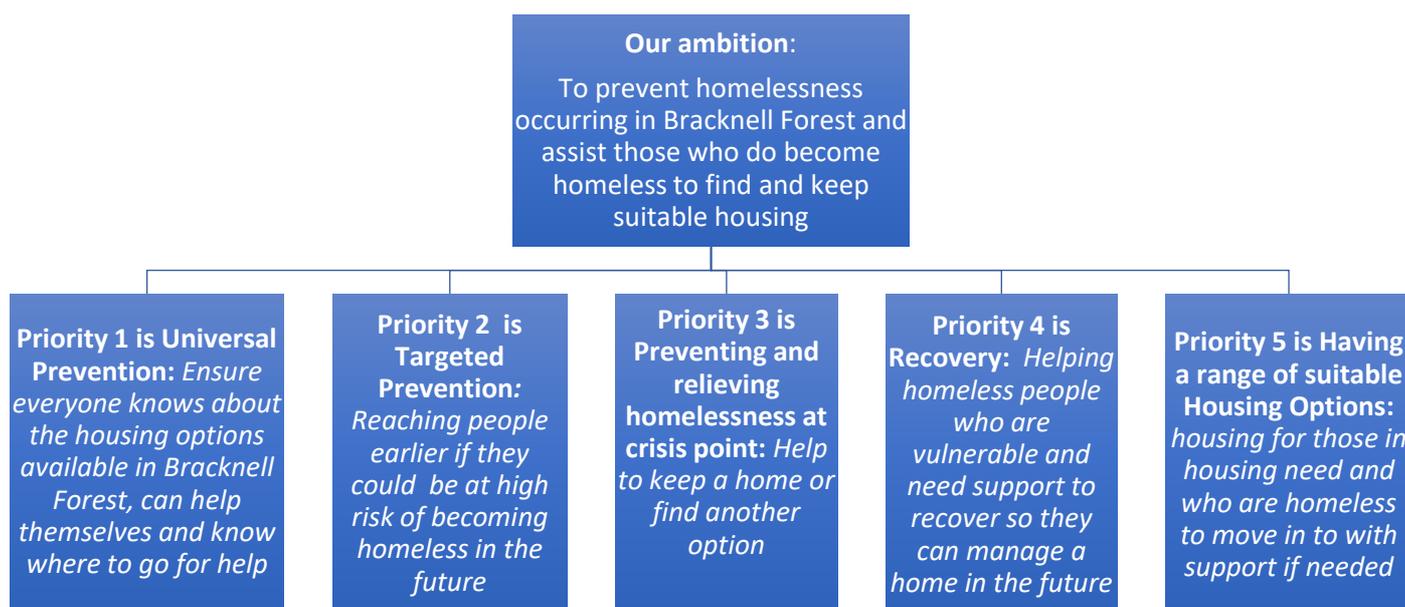
people earlier.

We also need to break the cycle of insecure housing and repeat homelessness and continue to assist those who do become homeless, so that they can find a home and if needed, offer them support to make sure they don't experience homelessness again.

## Development of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

### A structured approach to preventing and ending rough sleeping

The way we have structured the strategy broadly follows the Government's 2018 Rough Sleeping Strategy, which looks at actions in 3 domains or areas: Prevention; Intervention; Recovery. We have made our strategy relevant for all forms of housing need and homelessness in Bracknell Forest by borrowing as well from the structure of the St Basils 'Positive Pathway' for prevention of youth homelessness. This puts more emphasis on the earlier 'Prevention' elements and adds in a final element on housing supply to improve move-on options. This is critical in Bracknell Forest, where finding a home which is decent, and people can afford in the long term, is a challenge for those who are homeless.



We want to encourage people to seek early housing advice in order to resolve any problems and this could be delivered through actions in Priority Areas 1 or 2 in the diagram above. Some people who are homeless do not need to 'recover' from homelessness as they do not have any specific support needs, only a need for housing, so they might get help through Priority Areas 3 and 5.

Some people need support to recover from the issues which have led to their homelessness, or the trauma of being homeless. This is covered in Priority Area 4.

The success of the structured approach set out in the strategy lies in partnership working, with the Council taking a lead, but with other key stakeholders working with the Council to prevent homelessness and end

rough sleeping. Listening to people with lived experience of homelessness is also important - not every 5 years, but much more regularly, so that services can be better shaped to help people and communicate with them effectively.

## The scope of the strategy

The strategy aims to ensure homelessness is addressed at whatever stage or circumstance people are in. It covers people who:

- Want or need general advice about housing options
- Are at risk of homelessness in the future
- Are already homeless
- Are rough sleeping
- Are staying in supported housing or temporary accommodation

## Links to other strategies and plans

- Bracknell Forest Council Plan
- Bracknell Forest Local Plan 2022 – 2036. The Local Plan is currently in draft format, due for final publication in 2022
- Bracknell Forest Domestic Abuse Strategy
- Draft Bracknell Forest Safe Accommodation Strategy (October 2021)

## The Homelessness Review

In order to develop this strategy, we conducted a review into homelessness and rough sleeping in Bracknell Forest. The review is inevitably a collection and analysis of information taken at a moment in time. This review was undertaken during May 2021, over a year after the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, though much of the data we looked at pre-dates the pandemic. The homelessness statistics we have used are from 2019/20 in most instances as this is a better comparator than 2020/21, which has been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The longer-term impact of Covid-19 on housing and homelessness is not yet known. The strategy and action plan take the uncertainty about impacts into account as far as possible.

The review is attached as Appendix One to this strategy. A summary of the key points and findings from the review are set out in the following pages.

## About Bracknell Forest

Bracknell Forest had a population of 113,205 at the time of the last census in 2011. The most recent Office of National Statistics data published in 2019 estimates that there has been a rise of almost 10,000 since 2011 to 122,549. The number of households in Bracknell Forest was 51,068 in 2019 and this is forecast to rise to 55,759 by 2029.

More housing will be needed to accommodate the future growth in households. The emerging Local Plan

seeks around a third of new development to be affordable to those on low incomes to either rent or to buy. New housing specifically for older people is needed to meet the accommodation needs of an ageing population.

Rising house prices are making home ownership more challenging. The proportion of income needed to buy a house has almost doubled for those in the lower quartile of earnings in Bracknell Forest over the last 20 years. Bracknell Forest has a relatively small private rented sector compared to other areas and much of this accommodation is unaffordable for households on low incomes, including those in receipt of welfare support.

The demand for social housing is high and outstrips supply, with approximately 1,558 households on the housing register in August 2021 and only a small number of properties available to let each year. Households who need a 3 bedroom property will wait on average for 4 years for a home and larger properties are in shorter supply still.

Bracknell Forest is one of the least deprived local authority areas in the country. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact with the number of people claiming out of work benefits jumping from 1.4% (1,075 people) in April 2019 to 4.4% (3,510) in March 2021. Young people have been hit hardest by job losses and unemployment during the Covid-19 pandemic, in line with national trends.

## Homelessness and its causes

There has been a significant rise in homeless applications since the commencement of the Homelessness Reduction Act, in line with national trends. Most notably numbers increased in 2020/21, with 735 households being owed a statutory duty compared to 573 the year before.

80% of people contacted the Council for assistance before becoming homeless, which is positive, reflecting the shift in emphasis towards prevention within the Housing Options Service over the last 2 years.

The two most common causes of homelessness are 'family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate' and the loss of accommodation due to the ending of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy in the private rented sector.

Domestic abuse is the third highest cause of homelessness with the number of cases where domestic abuse was recorded as the cause rising from 38 in 2019/20 to 83 in 2020/21. This reflects a nationally reported rise in cases during the pandemic. Whilst the majority of these were families with children, single people made up over 40% of the total.

## Who is most at risk of homelessness?

In Bracknell Forest we know that some groups are more at risk of homelessness and actions should target these groups. For example, rough sleeping is most prevalent amongst single men and under 45 year olds.

Young people aged 18 – 24 are almost 3 times more likely to become homeless than those aged 45 – 54 in Bracknell Forest, as is the case nationally. This includes single people with no children and young families with dependent children. The 25 – 34 year old age group is also over-represented in terms of homelessness.

Black people (Black British, Caribbean and Black African people) are at a higher risk of homelessness than

other ethnicities. And lone parent households are significantly over-represented compared to couples with dependent children.

Other groups at risk are people on low incomes and in debt; people experiencing family or relationship breakdown; people – mainly women - experiencing domestic abuse; people leaving prison and people with a mental health illness.

Some people may have several risks - for example, a care leaver in prison who has a mental health problem, or a woman being a victim of domestic abuse and being in debt.

## Homelessness prevention and relief

Under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, when a homelessness application is taken, and a statutory duty is owed to prevent or relieve homelessness, the Council must take 'reasonable steps' to assist the applicant in securing accommodation. This could be by 'retaining' the accommodation they already have, or if they can't stay where they are, or if they are already homeless, then helping them to find suitable alternative accommodation.

A 'Personal Housing Plan' must be created and is based on an assessment of the housing circumstances, housing needs and support needs that the applicant and anyone else in their household has. The 'reasonable steps' the Council will take, along with actions the applicant can take to help themselves, and any actions partner agencies will take, must all be set out in the Plan.

Some of the actions currently undertaken taken in Bracknell Forest are:

- Negotiation and mediation with parents and family where there is a risk of homelessness
- Work with private and social landlords where a notice to end the tenancy has been issued
- Planning with other organisations to assist people leaving institutions (e.g. prison, care)
- Supporting tenants with possession proceedings
- Work with the Public Protection Partnership around illegal evictions and unfit properties
- Outreach services that contact, support and find accommodation for people rough sleeping
- Use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to pay rent in advance or rent deposits or pay off some arrears so the person can remain in their accommodation
- A tenancy deposit scheme to assist with access into private rented accommodation
- Referral to agencies such as Citizen's Advice
- Help with registering for social housing

Bracknell Forest has significantly improved its offer to people who are threatened with homelessness. More people are coming for help earlier and there is a relatively high rate of homelessness prevention. However, it is important to ensure that the Housing Options Service is able to maintain and increase this success rate over the next 5 years.

In 2019/20, 57% of households seeking assistance had their threat of homelessness resolved, which is higher than the South East region overall performance and in line with the national performance on prevention. This is attributable in part to a strong focus on prevention and on customer care. In 2020/21 this fell slightly to 55% in Bracknell Forest.

Bracknell Forest is also performing highly on the proportion of people helped to keep the home that they have, rather than having to move. 42% of people were able to stay where they were in 2019/20

compared to 31% in the South East overall and 36.8% nationally.

There was an increase in the proportion of single people and couples without dependent children seeking assistance in 2020/21 and a corresponding reduction in the number of households with dependent children. Some of this may be due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Single people, and men in particular, were less likely to seek help before becoming homeless and more likely to be owed the 'relief' duty. This mirrors the position nationally.

In 2019/20, of the people who were actually homeless, 38% had this successfully resolved. This is higher than the South East regional average of 31% but slightly lower than the national figure of 40%. This is positive when considering the housing pressures in the South East, compared to some other parts of England.

Far fewer households each year are being accepted under the 'main' homelessness duty than before the change in the homelessness legislation. In 2018/19, 111 households were owed the 'main' duty. In 2019/20 this dropped to 51, with a further fall in 2020/21 to 36. This because homelessness is prevented or relieved in many instances now, before a main duty decision is due.

## Temporary accommodation

Where households are homeless, suitable Temporary Accommodation must be provided for those who have or may have a 'priority need'. This would include all those with dependent children and some single people based on their individual circumstances.

When a household is owed the main duty, the offer of suitable accommodation to end the homelessness duty must be either a 12 month tenancy in private rented accommodation or social housing.

In Bracknell Forest the number of people in Temporary Accommodation has increased since the Covid-19 pandemic. Most of this increase relates to single people, including rough sleepers accommodated through the Everyone In programme. This has resulted in an increase in the use of nightly-paid accommodation for single people, although no families are placed in this type of accommodation.

In March 2020, there were 136 households in TA with 100 owed the 'main' duty. The number of households in TA was 174 by the end of March 2021, with 111 of these households owed the 'main' housing duty. The length of stay in temporary accommodation has also increased over this period. This indicates that there is some challenge locally in finding accommodation for these households.

The main issue in ending the main duty in Bracknell is the difficulty accessing private rented and social housing due to affordability issues and a lack of supply. Securing accommodation for families needing homes with three or more bedrooms is particularly difficult, resulting in prolonged stays in temporary accommodation.

## Rough Sleeping

Rough sleeping rose between 2015 and 2020, with a sharp rise in 2018. In 2019, based on a 'snapshot' count in November, 22 people were rough sleeping on any night. The reported increase in 2019 may in large part be attributable to more focus on working with people who are rough sleeping and improved intelligence on the extent of this in the area.

However, in 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic led to the national 'Everyone In' response to bring people into accommodation who had been or were at risk of rough sleeping. As a consequence, just 4 people were found rough sleeping in a 'snapshot' count in November 2020.

Rough Sleeping Team assessments have identified that a high proportion of rough sleepers have multiple needs and require high levels of support to find a home and keep it. The range and number of support needs reflects national research findings on the needs of rough sleepers.

Of the 32 people assisted off the streets during the Covid-19 pandemic under the 'Everyone In' directive, the most common support needs were a mixture of one or more of: help with mental health issues; managing substance misuse/addiction; a history of offending behaviour, with dual diagnosis (a combination of mental health and substance misuse) a significant issue.

## People with support needs

Homeless applicants have their support needs assessed under the new homelessness legislation. As well as having a home, knowing how to keep it, good physical and mental health and an income, the importance of relationships - being part of a social network of people - is often overlooked, but can be, for many people, essential to recovery.

Some people do not have any support needs, whilst other people have a number of issues that they need help with. For all homeless households presenting, support with mental health issues is significantly higher than any other type of support need. Physical ill health and disability is the 2nd highest support need, followed by recovery from domestic abuse.

There are 75 units of supported accommodation for young people aged 16-25 year in the borough, commissioned from Look Ahead, and a further 7 units for young pregnant women and young women with children.

There are 11 supported places in refuge accommodation for women and children fleeing domestic abuse.

There is no suitable short stay supported housing offer for single people aged over 25 who are homeless, including those recovering from rough sleeping. Whilst a very small amount of shared supported housing is being developed by a local charity, this will not address the demand for short stay supported accommodation for single people. Such accommodation would reduce numbers returning to rough sleeping and provide a more detailed initial understanding of their needs, enabling a closer match between settled options and the support needs of individuals.

## Longer-term housing solutions

There are limited options for more settled accommodation in Bracknell Forest for people who have experienced homelessness. This means that some households placed in temporary accommodation are staying for long periods of time. Social housing is in high demand, especially for larger properties. The chart below shows that there are relatively few 3 and 4 bed properties becoming available for let and consequently waiting times are much longer.

### **Demand by property size, average waiting times and new lettings of social housing**



Based on financial assessments undertaken by Registered Providers, it is not always affordable for some households on low incomes, such as single parent households

There are challenges accessing private rented accommodation for many homeless households, as the benefit cap and the Local Housing Allowance can make this tenure type unaffordable in Bracknell Forest. In addition, the private rented sector is smaller in Bracknell than the national average, accounting for 12.5% of housing stock at the 2011 Census, compared to 16.8% nationally.

Currently, for those that do not fall under the remit of the Rough Sleeping Team or are not accommodated in one of the supported housing provisions detailed above (primarily for young people), there is limited resettlement or floating support for those who may need help in the first few months of a new tenancy or in the longer term. This increases the likelihood of repeat homelessness.

## Partnership working

The following partners have a key role in contributing to the strategy and formulating and delivering the objectives and the action plan:

- Adult and Children’s Social Care
- Other public authorities including: the police, NHS Trust, Job Centre Plus, MOD, Community Mental Health Services and the National Probation Service
- Registered Providers and voluntary organisations such as advice agencies, supported housing providers, outreach services, refuge providers, and faith organisations

Some of these bodies have formal responsibilities under the Duty to Refer, where people are identified as being at risk of homelessness. More widely, partnership working should promote a joint approach to preventing homelessness, securing accommodation, and providing support. One aspect of this is ensuring there are consistent routes to assist people leaving institutional environments.

Partnership working overall has been improving. With some partners there is strong joint working, for

example with Children's Services and with several partner agencies involved in work on ending rough sleeping. The Covid-19 pandemic has acted as a catalyst to further improve partnership working in some instances, for example with the Probation Service and some health services.

There are challenges in accessing local mental health services for homeless people, including rough sleepers, especially for those with a dual diagnosis. This points to a need build on and improve joint working between mental health agencies and the Housing Options Service and Rough Sleeping Team.

Methods of engagement with partners tend to be day to day rather than structured, with the exception of the new working arrangements to prevent and end rough sleeping. For example, there is no Homelessness Forum or structured engagement with private landlords at the moment. This is addressed in the priorities below.

## Consultation

In November 2019, a series of stakeholder consultation workshops took place which have been used to inform this strategy. This was 16 months before the review in Appendix One was drafted and there have been some changes in staffing, as well as a renewed focus on helping customers earlier and improving customer service. As a result, the local authority Housing Service has seen a significant reduction in complaints over the period.

Three different groups were part of this exercise:

- 22 customers, 90% of whom had been homeless or threatened with homelessness
- 25 stakeholders from other agencies and services within the Council
- 12 members of staff from the Housing and Welfare Service

There were common themes which came across in responses to the questions, albeit there were different perspectives. In summary, the themes highlighted the importance of:

- Improving customer care through training of staff to ensure that customers have a positive experience, a timely response, feel listened to and cared about
- Partnership working in general across all agencies including use of the 'duty to refer' households at risk of homelessness
- Pro-active earlier intervention, through working jointly with other agencies to avert homelessness
- Joint work on poverty, recognising this is a major driver of homelessness: more work on welfare and money advice with specialist agencies and the relief of destitution
- Action to make the private rented sector more affordable and sustainable for those on low incomes: more work with landlords and tools to assist with access, available to everyone regardless of their 'priority need' status
- More social housing: there was a general view that whilst hard to achieve, there was a need for more social housing due to its relative affordability and the security of tenure affordable rented housing offers
- Emergency /short stay accommodation (including Temporary Accommodation) within Bracknell Forest area which is suitable and able to support people with more complex needs
- Longer stay supported housing options
- A service which is focused on tenancy sustainment for people who need help to keep their accommodation.

## Equalities issues in housing and homelessness

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) requires public bodies to have due regard of the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

All councils must have due regard for advancing equality, which involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

The way in which services are delivered to people who are or may be homeless must take into account and have regard for different protected characteristics. These are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. This means that the design of policies and the delivery of services must include explicit consideration of equality issues and we must take action to ensure services are able to meet the diverse range of needs and these are reviewed regularly.

It is not only our legal duty to conform to the Public Sector Equality Duty, it makes good sense to ensure that services are provided appropriately and fairly to our customers in order to address homelessness amongst every group of people living in Bracknell Forest.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review (see Appendix One) sets out evidence indicating that some people are at higher risk of homelessness based on their age, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Health inequalities are also a feature, with higher levels of people who have physical and mental health issues and disabilities becoming homeless.

## Our priorities going forward

### Priority 1. Prevention: Ensure everyone knows about the housing options available in Bracknell Forest, and can help themselves or know where to go for help

We need to give people clear information, so there is an increased understanding about the realities of housing options locally, people can help themselves but also know where to go for advice in the future. We need to make sure that other organisations – both adults and children’s services, health services, Job Centre Plus and voluntary agencies - have a good understanding of the ‘warning signs’ of housing need – financial, employment and health factors for example - and that they can encourage self-help, give basic early advice, or contact the Housing Options Service. In short, homelessness prevention should be everyone’s business.

**We will:**

- Review and improve information provided through the Council website and through partner organisations to promote access to advice and support and self-serve help
- Establish a rolling programme of meetings with local agencies to deliver briefings and training on homelessness services and to facilitate sharing of information and ideas
- Provide social and private landlords with information on locally available services and promote the Council's role in negotiation, planning, and averting homelessness
- Provide information within Bracknell and Wokingham College and secondary schools, targeting Year 11, 12 and 13 learners working in partnership with relevant youth services
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## Priority 2. Prevention: Target help at people at risk of becoming homeless

### Why is this important?

We need to identify and assist people at higher risk of homelessness much earlier than the statutory guideline, which is 56 days or less before homelessness is likely to occur. A strong partnership with other organisations is critical to reach more people where there are early signs of a housing problem and resolve these before homelessness becomes a real possibility. Actively reaching people at risk earlier is likely to become even more important because of the Covid -19 pandemic and the possible medium- and longer-term impacts of this, including the ending of restrictions on evictions, the impact of the furlough scheme on payment of rent, and rises in unemployment as a result of the economic downturn.

**We will:**

- Better utilise data to identify households at risk of homelessness and to forecast future demand.
- Explore opportunities for working with partners to provide employment assistance and support to people at risk of homelessness who are not in employment.
- Work with Registered Providers to establish 'Commitment to Refer' routes to make timely referrals where there is a risk of homelessness
- Review single homelessness accommodation pathways and protocols and specifically, work with the Probation Service and the Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust to improve referral pathways for people leaving either custody or hospital or where mental health is an issue
- Monitor the duty to refer protocol for effectiveness and adherence and establish closer working with Job Centre Plus to ensure referral where a claimant may be at risk of homelessness
- Develop a new joint protocol with Children's Services to reduce the risk of care leavers making homelessness applications and improve the 'Local Offer' to care leavers
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## Priority 3. Intervention: Help people keep or find a home

Bracknell Forest has significantly improved its offer to people who are threatened with homelessness. In order to ensure that the Housing Options Service maintains and increases its success rate over the next 5 years, there needs to be a greater focus on those who are already homeless, in an emergency or crisis situation. There are some gaps in the services provided which, if addressed, would strengthen the ability of the Council to support people to prevent or resolve their homelessness. We need to improve our use of data so that our review and planning work is informed by the evidence we collect through better monitoring of repeat homelessness and ensuring that the causes of homelessness are more accurately recorded.

**We will:**

- Develop a new Sanctuary Scheme for people experiencing domestic abuse who can stay in their home with additional safety measures
- Implement the recommendations in the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy to address gaps in safe accommodation and support
- Reduce the time families spend in Temporary Accommodation by establishing an internal target and project team to oversee move on work
- Develop within Bracknell Forest a partnership model which delivers a specialist short stay assessment option for single people who have been rough sleeping
- Strengthen data recording in order to improve our understanding and analysis of homelessness including repeat homelessness

#### **Priority 4. Recovery: Help homeless people who are vulnerable and need support so they can manage a home in the future**

Our review has highlighted the extent and range of support needs, as well as housing needs, that some people who are homeless in Bracknell Forest have. For many people, homelessness is symptomatic of other issues in their lives – mental or physical health problems, domestic abuse, drug or alcohol dependency, offending behaviour, and fractured support networks. The recovery from homelessness requires strong partnership working with other statutory services, voluntary agencies and housing providers. A range of support options are needed to help people with their initial recovery from homelessness and to sustain accommodation in the longer term and address the range of issues they have experienced.

**We will**

- Move towards an outcome-based approach in the future commissioning of accommodation related support services
- Assess the need and options for supported housing for vulnerable single people.
- Work in collaboration with mental health services to improve two-way referrals and to access to mental health and substance misuse support for rough sleepers and those otherwise homeless/at risk of homelessness.
- Review and re-commission services for young people in housing need to ensure effective use of resources and achieve the best outcomes for those accommodated

#### **Priority 5. Move on and support: ensure a range of options for people who are at risk of homelessness or who have experienced homelessness**

Homelessness is exacerbated by limited access to suitable, settled accommodation. The housing market in Bracknell Forest is high cost and move-on within the area is challenging. Developing sustainable housing options is a key part of the work in the next 5 years to reduce homelessness and move to a more prevention-focused model of working. We need to create more affordable housing options that are available before people are in crisis, which reduce the numbers of households being insecurely housed, homeless or in Temporary Accommodation and instead provide options, so people can move in a planned way into suitable accommodation.

There is likely to be some learning from new work in Bracknell Forest with people moving into private rented accommodation who have been rough sleeping. We will be providing a comprehensive offer to private landlords, through 'Next Steps Accommodation' funding from MHCLG. It may be that some of the elements of this will inform future work with landlords in our area.

**We will:**

- Review the availability of resettlement and tenancy sustainment support for all client groups, including vulnerable people, ex-offenders, young people and people who have been or are at risk of sleeping rough
- Increase access to the private rented sector by establishing a comprehensive offer to customers and landlords and setting up a Landlords Forum
- Establish a Homelessness Forum, agreeing the membership, key objectives and vision
- Establish closer partnership working with local Registered Providers to promote access to social housing for single homeless people, care leavers and people recovering from rough sleeping
- Review the allocations policy to ensure reasonable preference is given to homeless households
- Develop new accommodation options, with bespoke support, specifically for people who have been rough sleeping, including a 'Housing led' pilot based on Housing First principles

## How Bracknell Forest Council will monitor progress in the delivery of the strategy

In order to ensure that we deliver against this strategy we will:

- Develop an Action Plan and update this as needed over the next 5 years
- Agree and set up reporting and governance arrangements
- Build on positive partnership work: establish a new Homelessness Forum and a Landlord Forum to ensure we can listen to and consult with stakeholders from agencies outside the local authority
- Continue to focus on customer care and establish mechanisms to seek feedback from our customers. This will include regularly engaging with people who have lived experience of homelessness to find out more about how they experience services and listen to their advice on what can be improved.
- Ensure there is a good understanding of the strategy and our commitments amongst the staff who work in housing needs and welfare support within the local authority, and with our partners, so the ambitions and relevant actions needed to achieve change are embedded in daily work within services.