

# Housing Scrutiny Commission Report

---

## **Homelessness Strategy Update**

Housing Scrutiny Commission: 25<sup>th</sup> February 2020

---

Assistant Mayor for Housing: Cllr Elly Cutkelvin

Lead director: Chris Burgin

## Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report author: Justin Haywood, Service Manager – Housing Solutions & Partnerships
- Author contact details: justin.haywod@leicester.gov.uk
- Report version number: 1.0

### 1. Purpose

- 1.1 To provide a further update to Members of the Scrutiny Commission on progress in implementing Leicester's Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023, since the last update to Scrutiny in August 2019.

### 2. Summary

- 2.1 Leicester's fourth [Homelessness Strategy](#) was formally agreed May 2018 and coincided closely with the inception of the Homelessness Reduction Act, which came into force on 3rd April 2018. The Homelessness Reduction Act significantly increased the depth and breadth of local authorities' statutory homeless duties. Most notably it added two new duties; the 'Prevention Duty' and 'Relief (recovery from homelessness) Duty'.
- 2.2 As a result, the workload of our front-line officers and the Service has increased significantly, and the government have provided some temporary funding to acknowledge these increased burdens upon local authorities. It is important that this funding continues to be made available by central government if they expect local authorities to continue to achieve the level of prevention and support currently being delivered. They have provisionally informed LAs that the funding will be extended to cover at least 2020/2021.
- 2.3 The Strategy factored in new pressures, and an updated landscape, and makes it clear that this is not a council endeavour alone, as tackling homelessness requires significant partnership working to address the root causes of homelessness, and provide the level of support and advice needed to those affected.
- 2.4 As such, Leicester and key partners are undertaking an ambitious programme of work to tackle homelessness locally. Work has been ongoing to implement the agreed actions / proposals and build on the extensive work already in place.
- 2.5 Shown below is the latest progress made since the last update (September 2019 to February 2020) across the key strategic aims:
1. Anyone at risk of homelessness is aware of and has access to the services they may need to prevent it.
  2. Provide suitable accommodation and support options for people who are, or who may become homeless.
  3. Reduce rates of repeat homelessness amongst single people.
  4. Provide the right support and services so that no person needs to sleep rough in Leicester.

### **3. Progress report**

#### **3.1 Strategic Aim 1: Anyone at risk of homelessness is aware of and has access to the services they may need to prevent it**

3.1.1 Homelessness Prevention, formally good practice, is now part of the statutory duty. The duty requires an authority to provide help and advice to prevent homelessness for households in their district. We work together with applicants to create and carry out a personalised housing plan.

3.1.2 Prevention solutions remain high for households who approach us with a threat of homelessness. The Service achieves this by offering a multitude of interventions, aiming first for sustainment of current accommodation and, failing that, a new accommodation solution before homelessness occurs. Interventions include:

- Negotiation with family and friends, lenders, and landlords;
- Referrals and signposting to partner agencies and specialist advice;
- Private Rented Sector solutions through financial help and incentive schemes;
- Housing Register priority;
- Advice about other housing solutions such as Shared Ownership, where appropriate

3.1.3 Since the last update, the advice and assistance available to customers has improved further with the opening of a digital gateway - a mobile application has been developed (MyHome) which allows customers, should they wish, to get information and advice on their housing situation 24 hours a day without approaching the service, and to self-refer themselves into the service if the situation is serious.

This does not replace any face-to-face or telephone advice services. It is an additional service for those than can, and want to, self-serve online. Users are able to enter the housing problem they are experiencing and answer a few questions and the MyHome app will provide clear advice, contacts for further information and refer to the council's housing options service; dependent on the problem. Customers facing homelessness will also be able to use the app to manage their Personalised Housing Plan if they later make a formal homeless application, including keeping in touch with, and sending documents to, their case worker.

3.1.4 Overcrowding is known to be a key driver in family exclusions, which remain in themselves a leading reason for homelessness. The council are currently developing a holistic strategy to reduce overcrowding in the city. One key step already taken within the period was to make changes to the Allocations Policy to allow the most overcrowded households to be given a Band 1 priority.

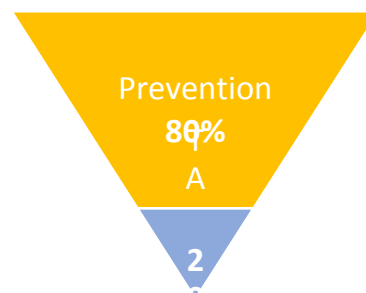
#### **3.2 Strategic Aim 2: Provide suitable accommodation and support options for people who are, or who may become homeless**

3.2.1 If prevention does not work, or if applicants seek help when they are already homeless, there is a range of support available to work with the customer to help them recover as quickly as possible.

- 3.2.2 The success levels for applicants at this stage is high. The Service achieves this by offering a variety of housing options to applicants, including the housing register, sign-posting to separate RP housing lists, Private Rented Sector solutions through financial help and incentive schemes, advice about other housing solutions such as Shared Ownership, where appropriate, and ensuring any support required to sustain solutions is made available.
- 3.2.3 With regard to the housing register specifically, this period saw the introduction of Allocations Policy changes that enable some homeless households (based on vulnerability and circumstances leading to homelessness) to achieve a Band 1 priority, leading to a higher level of lets to homeless applicants (82% increase in lettings).
- 3.2.4 The city council intends to deliver about 1,500 new affordable homes over the next four years, including developing sites to provide the estimated 640 additional Extra Care supported living spaces needed over the next 10 years. We have so far acquired 224 new properties that will be made available to those on the Housing Register. Further acquisitions are ongoing to achieve the target set.
- 3.2.5 With regard to the private rented sector solutions, recent piloted changes to landlord incentive schemes have resulted in a significant increase in PRS tenancies available for let to homeless households. The next immediate step is to formalise the changes and launch re-badged schemes with appropriate publicity. Longer term plans include building on successes in the sector, and conducting research to determine if Leicester may benefit from creation of a social-lettings-agency, and if so - what might that look like?
- 3.2.6 LCC plans to roll out selective licensing across Leicester’s private rented sector, which is aimed at improving the overall quality of accommodation. This needs to be carefully managed in terms of relationships with landlord, especially those who partner with us to prevent homelessness. As such, Housing are included in the Selective Licensing Project Board.
- 3.2.7 Importantly, the Council’s duties at this stage also includes providing temporary accommodation to families and vulnerable single-person households.

3.2.8 Accommodation for families

3.2.9 During the period, only 20% of families presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness went on to need temporary accommodation (TA). In most cases where families seek assistance from the council when they are at risk of homelessness they do not actually become homeless.



3.2.10 On average, each quarter there are 55 new families requiring temporary accommodation.

3.2.11 We have been able to maintain a 100% record of ensuring all families placed in B&B do not exceed 6-weeks’ occupancy, which is a legal requirement upon LAs. Furthermore, most families have been moved on from B&B within a very short period of time – days not weeks.

3.2.12 During the period, progress has been made on consideration of a new model of family temporary accommodation to support the “Homes not Hostels” vision. The council aims to provide self-contained temporary accommodation, when there is no alternative, which allows families to live as normal a family life as possible, whilst they find suitable settled accommodation for their family.

### 3.2.13 Accommodation for singles

3.2.14 Progress continues to be made towards creating a range of different options for single-person households.

3.2.15 Current tendering exercises have focussed on expanding the accommodation pathway, making sure to include a selection of ‘step down’ accommodation options as well as shorter-term temporary accommodation. A new pathway is being developed to ensure that applicants are able to access the support they need at the level most appropriate for them.

3.2.16 New eligibility criteria to be implemented in Spring 2020 to support this new pathway. The new eligibility criteria gives clearer priority for temporary accommodation to individuals who have the most complex support needs. The eligibility criteria was consulted upon as part of the homelessness strategy and the time is now right for implementation.

3.2.17 Progress has been made within the period to develop Housing First initiatives with East Midlands Housing Association, and Action Homeless have also made progress with their own Housing First offer.

### 3.2.18 Prison releases, and accommodation for offenders

3.2.19 From 1<sup>st</sup> July new contracts were set up with Adullam Housing Association who are a long-standing provider of accommodation support services for offenders locally. Specialist services help us support criminal justice agencies locally by ensuring the safety of the public and reduce reoffending rates.

3.2.20 The number of specialist accommodation units available for offenders has increased from a total of 20 units to a total of 30 units. This accommodation includes a range of support levels and licence agreement terms, including ‘step down’ accommodation to assist Offenders to move on into independent accommodation.

3.2.21 We have also been working closely with probation services during the period. The National Probation Service are making a financial contribution towards providing this accommodation service and are co-locating probation staff alongside this contracted provider.

3.2.22 Fortnightly housing options surgeries have been introduced at Leicester Prison from June 2019. Working with Leicester Prison a new referral pathway has been introduced so individuals who are likely to be homeless on release can get early help and support.

3.2.23 To further develop partnership arrangements, workshops have recently been held with Probation, Prisons, CRCs, and other partners to look at how the Offender housing pathway can be optimised. Further meetings are planned next month.

### 3.2.24 Hospital Discharges

3.2.25 The referral and pathway set up with the NHS's Housing Enablement Team has been reviewed in partnership and improvements have been made to ensure LCC are alerted earlier, and can take action more swiftly.

### 3.2.26 Accommodation for young people

3.2.27 The Joint working group established with children's services to develop a joint commissioning exercise continues to make progress. This will consider the supported accommodation needs of 16-25-year olds in the city. The driver behind the joint commissioning exercise is to allow LCC to provide a better range of options for young people.

3.2.28 Strategy actions relating to younger persons will be aligned with the ongoing placement sufficiency work.

3.2.29 Recent co-production meetings have led to much improved pathways for care leavers, and a more effective '16/17yr old procedure'.

### 3.2.30 Housing-related Floating support

3.2.31 A recent re-tendering exercise for improved floating support services for Leicester has closed to submissions at the end of January, and is currently under evaluation.

## **3.3 Strategic Aims 3 and 4: Reduce rates of repeat homelessness amongst single people & provide the right support and services so that no person needs to sleep rough in Leicester**

3.3.1 During the period, work has continued with local partners and charities, and we continue to fund and support various initiatives in the community, including day centres and specialist case workers (navigators). Rough sleeping has reduced by around 30% during the period.

3.3.2 Safe Space at Andover Street continues to be an important part of our offer to this cohort. This offers an additional 10 bed spaces for rough sleepers. Individuals who do not want to access accommodation-based support services can access this service nightly for a safe space to sleep overnight and leave in the morning.

3.3.3 2019/20 RSI funding of £350k was secured previously from Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). This included funding for 20 additional hostel beds at Action Homeless and additional staff supporting rough sleepers. This, along with the funding secured from the successful bid to MHCLG for Rapid Rehousing Pathway funding (£211k) was evaluated.

3.3.4 LCC continue to bid for as much funding as possible to support this group, and we have recently been advised that we have been successful in securing £566,783 for the 20/21 fiscal. This will allow continuation of the good work, and continued reduction of rough sleeping and repeat homelessness within Leicester.

- 3.3.5 Work to set up donation points across the city was completed, as part of the fundraising Charter working group, involving Bid Leicester. The public can donate to charities support the homeless and assist in providing additional services such as the winter shelter. The first phase of pay points went live in October and by the beginning of January the points had collected donations totalling £4,975.
- 3.3.6 No.5 drug and alcohol recovery centre received almost 8,000 visits since opening. This service is run by Inclusion Health Care with support from peer-led recovery service Dear Albert. It provides services from organisations including substance misuse treatment service Turning Point, the Department of Work and Pensions, Restorative Justice and Inclusion Healthcare itself which provides GP services for socially excluded and vulnerable and homeless people.
- 3.3.7 Housing Scrutiny Members were previously advised that we have achieved an exciting and promising partnership with St. Mungo's to open a recovery college for homeless clients within the Dawn Centre. St Mungo's have been recruiting and getting ready to launch, and we now have an Official launch happening within April 2020.