

## Leicester's Homelessness Review and Strategy

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*Last year over 3,000 households were provided with support to help them maintain their current home or find alternative accommodation with an average of 90% of those who asked for help having their homelessness prevented*

### **Introduction**

People who don't have a home are described as homeless; this is not just people living on the streets. Homelessness can include people:

- Staying with friends or family
- Staying in a hostel or bed & breakfast accommodation
- Squatting
- At risk of violence or abuse in their home
- Living in poor conditions that affects their health
- Living apart from their family because they don't have a place to live together

There is no single reason why someone can end up without a home. Personal circumstances and wider factors both play their part. Homelessness can be devastating, dangerous and isolating for those who experience it.

We have recently undertaken a review of homelessness in Leicester and developed a new homelessness strategy for Leicester. We are asking for comments and views on the strategy, including future service proposals and how they could be improved to continue to prevent homelessness in Leicester.

### **What causes homelessness?**

People become homeless for lots of different reasons. There are social causes of homelessness, such as a lack of affordable housing, poverty, unemployment and life events that cause individuals to become homeless.

People can become homeless when they leave prison, care or the army with no home to go to. Many homeless women have escaped a violent relationship.

Many people become homeless because they can no longer afford the rent.

For many, life events like a relationship breaking down, losing a job, mental or physical health problems, or substance misuse can be the trigger. Being homeless can in turn make many of these problems even harder to resolve.

The main causes of family homelessness are:-

- Termination of private tenancies
- Asked to leave by family/friends
- Relationship breakdown including domestic violence

70% of single people who become homeless in Leicester are male with over half being aged 22-44. The causes of homelessness for single people are a lot more diverse, and include family and relationship breakdowns and unemployment.

### **How many people are homeless?**

There is no national figure for how many people are homeless across the UK. This is because homelessness is recorded differently and many homeless people do not show up in official statistics. Last year 59,090 households who approached local authorities for help were accepted as homeless in England (this is the number of statutory homeless households).

In Leicester in 2016/17 3,739 households approached the council for assistance when they were homeless or at risk of homelessness. Over 90% of those who sought help when facing homelessness had their homelessness prevented, with 1,215 households being supported by council services to remain in their existing home. In the same year, the council placed 188 families and 732 singles and couples in temporary accommodation. Also 579 lettings from the social housing register were for the prevention of homelessness or to households who became homeless.

### **Statutory homelessness**

Local authorities have a duty to secure a home for some groups of people. This is often referred to as the 'main homelessness duty'. Every year, tens of thousands of people apply to their local authority for homelessness assistance.

To be legally defined as homeless you must either lack a secure place in which you are entitled to live or not reasonably be able to stay. However, in order to receive assistance under the main homelessness duty, there are further strict criteria that you have to meet. Local authorities may initially provide temporary accommodation to households who might meet these criteria, mainly families with children.

In Leicester, we are committed to providing help to anyone who is homeless or facing homelessness and we are proud to offer this assistance to more than those who meet the statutory definition of homelessness.

### **Rough sleeping**

Rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness, and when most people think of a homeless person they tend to think of someone sleeping rough on the streets, however homelessness is much more than this.

Government street counts and estimates give a snapshot of the national situation. The latest figures showed that 4,134 people slept rough across England on any given night in

2016 - a 16% increase compared to the previous year, and more than double the amount in 2010.

Many people who sleep rough will suffer from multiple health conditions, such as mental health problems and drug misuse they are also in greater danger of violence than the general population.

On average, homeless people die at just 47 years old.

People sleeping on the street are almost 17 times more likely to have been victims of violence. More than one in three people sleeping rough have been deliberately hit or kicked or experienced some other form of violence whilst homeless.

Homeless people are over 9 times more likely to take their own life than the general population.

*(National research and figures taken from Homeless Link and Crisis).*

### **Leicester's Homelessness Strategy**

Our comprehensive review of the current strategy looks in more detail at the local position and provides a great deal of data on what has been achieved and where we feel there is still work to do.

#### **Headline Data**

- Tackling homelessness has been a political commitment and priority for a number of years and it remains a priority
- Over £5m a year is invested by the council in services for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness
- Last year over 3,000 households were provided with support to help them maintain their current home or find alternative accommodation with an average of 90% of those who asked for help having their homelessness prevented
- Dedicated staff committed to helping those facing homelessness or rough sleeping
- Strengthened work with the private rented sector; working with landlords and sourcing appropriate and affordable private rented sector accommodation to provide those threatened with homelessness more options to prevent homelessness
- Assisting homeless families to access a home from the housing register so they do not have to be accommodated in a homeless hostel
- Strong integrated external agencies, voluntary agencies and service providers all working in a coordinated way to help and support those facing homelessness or rough sleeping.
- Rough sleeping action plan developed to manage the increase in numbers locally which is also reflected in the national picture.
- Street lifestyle group established to tackle the issues associated with this of street begging, substance use, and street drinking.
- Excellent health care provision for the homeless in recognition of the complex nature of some of the cases who need support with drug and alcohol services and mental health.

## Leicester's services for rough sleepers

- Excellent health care for the homeless with a dedicated practice including drug and alcohol services to help support those with substance use issues. Specialist teams working with homeless people in Leicester to help them to access mental health services.
- Drop in day services including access to showers, laundry facilities, food, clothing and access to other services including training, education and employment.
- Improved profiles of those rough sleeping in the city and a 'Street Lifestyle Group' to assist in a coordinated approach to tackle the issues of those with street lifestyles such as street drinking, drug use, begging and rough sleeping.
- We know there is a growing issue with begging in the city. Many members of the public assume that those begging are rough sleeping. We are committed to working with our partners and the Police to tackle begging in the city. Information on whether beggars do have accommodation helps the police take appropriate action against persistent beggars. The police have served community protection notices and criminal behaviour orders to help tackle those persistently begging. We are awaiting analysis of a public consultation exercise we recently carried out on the issues of street begging.
- We have a dedicated team who work to support those who are rough sleeping off the street from 6am – 10pm every weekday.
- We are supporting as a city the European Ending Street Homeless campaign where our partners in the voluntary sector are coordinating a week of activities involving the local community including a 'street count' of those rough sleeping.
- Before the winter we are launching a further initiative to get our known prolific rough sleepers, who want to accept our help off the streets by reviewing our approach and looking to get them fully engaged with the support they need. For those who do not want to accept our help we will work with the Police and other agencies to manage these individuals.
- In the winter the council works with local homeless charities and faith organisations to provide emergency accommodation and food to homeless people during the coldest months of the year to help ensure that no-one has to sleep rough.

## What we want to achieve

- Leicester is committed to ensure that support, advice and assistance is fully available to those that may be facing homelessness in the future, or are homeless or rough sleeping in the city. Leicester has many excellent services already in place to support this.
- Our approach to rough sleeping is that '*no one needs to sleep rough*' with a commitment to provide resolutions for those who want to accept support and services.
- We are proud to work in partnership with Leicester's strong voluntary and community sector to reduce homelessness and to provide the best possible support for those affected by homelessness. Over £5m a year is invested by the council in housing-related services for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- Our work locally could be supported by further national action. The National Audit Office recommended in September 2017 that government should: develop and publish a national homelessness strategy; work with local authorities to gain a full understanding of current measures to tackle homelessness; and evaluate the interactions between local housing markets and welfare reform.

We hope that you find the review of our current strategy interesting and look forward to receiving your responses to our consultation on our proposed strategy for the next 5 years.