

Braintree District Council

**HOMELESSNESS
AND ROUGH
SLEEPING STRATEGY**

2018-2023



Homelessness is not a theoretical problem, it is a real issue that has real impacts on people who experience it.



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Foreword



Throughout this Strategy, there are statements about how homelessness disrupts people's lives. It can unsettle family life, employment, schooling, physical and mental wellbeing and can leave people at a disadvantage for years to come if they do not have access to a secure, safe home. These statements are here because we recognise that homelessness is not a

theoretical problem, it is a real issue that has real impacts on people who experience it.

Braintree District Council is proud of its record in preventing and dealing with homelessness. We do not routinely use bed and breakfast accommodation for temporary accommodation and very rarely place homeless households outside our District. We have invested over many years in specialist housing to help homeless households and have high quality, up-to-date facilities available locally. We participate fully in many cross-boundary initiatives and are very open to partnership working with other agencies and organisations.

We have to re-focus our work in response to the new Homelessness Reduction Act and welcome the opportunity to look for new relationships with other organisations to help prevent and manage homelessness. We recognise that the new Act brings additional pressures for the organisation at a time when we are seeing pressure on budgets and a national trend over the past few years of increasing homelessness. We also recognise that the new Act is

widely supported because it seeks to shift the concentration of effort towards preventing homelessness and to make sure that everyone who is at risk of homelessness has access to meaningful help from their local council.

We are fortunate in having local stakeholders who are interested and engaged in helping the Council to take action on homelessness. This strategy arises out of the positive participation of our local community in groups and workshops and we hope it will make a positive difference to people's lives.

Councillor Lynette Bowers-Flint
Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing



Introduction

The Purpose of the Strategy

Local Housing Authorities are required to carry out a homelessness review, formulate and publish a strategy .

With the commencement of the new Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018, we have focussed on the differences the new Act will pose for our services . In particular, we have looked for ways that we can increase our resilience by building a local network of people and organisations that can help us prevent and alleviate homelessness.

Strategy Design

We want the Strategy to contribute to building new partnerships. We have therefore set out to design a format that is easily readable and content that is as open and straightforward as possible. We hope that partner organisations will use the document as a catalyst for their discussions about meeting housing need.

Strategy Timing

Our previous Homelessness Strategy was for 2013-18. We started work on our consultation for the new Strategy in 2017 but felt it was more valuable to tie in our new Strategy with the implementation of the new Act.

Strategy Presentation

Throughout the Strategy document information is set out in boxes to help people dip in and out more easily Many of the pages follow the stages of progress through the Homelessness Reduction Act.

Reviewing and Updating

The change in legislation means that many of our proposed actions are based on our predictions of the impact of the new Act. We expect to keep under review whether this document needs to be refreshed and updated and to review our Action Plan with our stakeholder group (the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group).

We would expect to publish updates on an annual basis.

Our Actions:

Many of the pages include an area on the right of the page (like this) where we identify the actions we intend to take.

These actions form the basis of our Action Plan. Hopefully, in this way you can see where the actions originated from.

The Action Plan is published separately and will be the main focus for checking our progress.

Our first identified actions are:

- Publish and circulate our Action Plan to all our 'stakeholders';
- Make sure that we review and update the Action Plan with our Homelessness Strategy Steering Group .
- Make sure that we consider the impact of new Government initiatives and legislation as we update our Action Plan and this Strategy



Homelessness and its causes

What do we mean by homelessness?

A home is not simply a building. Although most people associate homelessness with rough sleeping, that is far from the whole story. The following are all examples of situations where we may consider people to be either homeless or threatened with homelessness:

- The household has no legal right to be in the property. This may include people staying with family or friends who want them to leave;
- The household is being evicted from a tenancy or their house is being repossessed;
- Members of the household are the subject of violence, threats of violence or abuse in their home;
- The property is unsafe or its condition is affecting the health of the occupants and there is no practical remedy;
- People who are 'sofa surfing', moving between various friends and or family members;
- The household is staying in a hostel, night shelter or bed and breakfast establishment. Temporary accommodation is not a home.

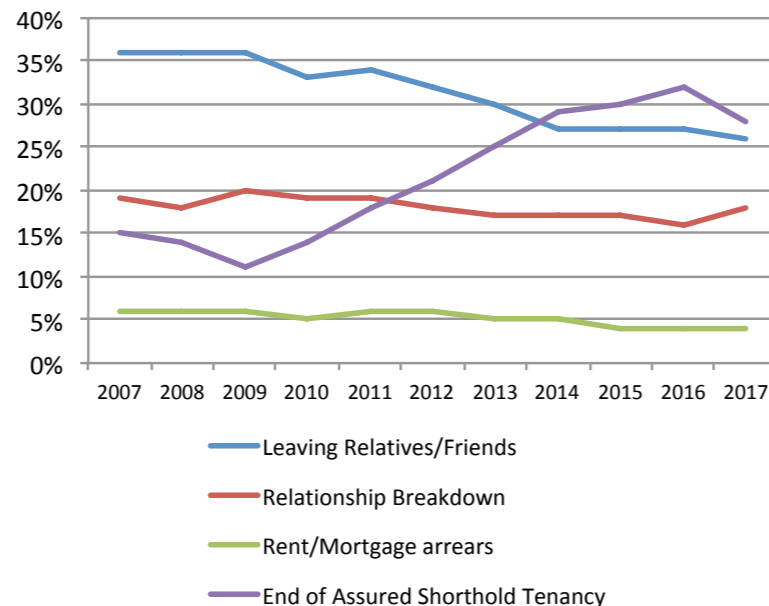
The main causes of homelessness

People become homeless for a variety of reasons. The most common categories are shown in the graph to the right.

Nationally, the proportion of homelessness caused by the ending of an assured shorthold tenancy (AST) has seen significant growth. Overwhelmingly ASTs are the main type of tenancy used in the private rented sector.

All the data suggests that the end of a private rented tenancy is one of the main causes of homelessness and yet better use of the private rented sector by Local Authorities is expected to be the main solution to homelessness.

Main reasons for Homelessness 2007-2017 reported by Local Authorities in England



Source: MHCLG Live Table774

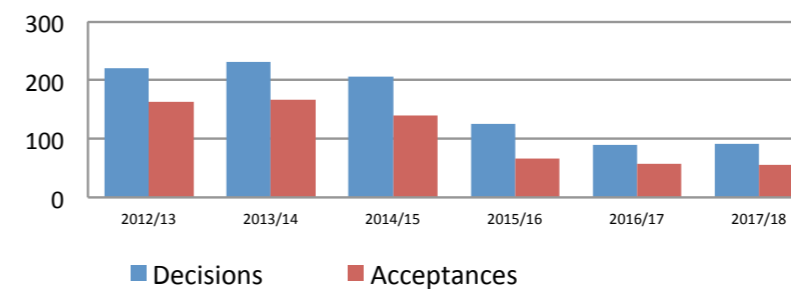


Homelessness in the Braintree District

Homelessness Decisions and Acceptances in the Braintree District 2012-2018

Under housing law as it stood until April 2018, when a household became homeless, one of our main duties was to decide whether we had a legal responsibility to find accommodation for them. The chart shows a comparison over the last 6 years between the number of households who presented as homeless to the Council and the number to whom we accepted a main housing duty.

The trend in acceptances has been downwards since 2013/14, with 56 acceptances in 2017/18, although compared to the previous year, the number of decisions rose by 3 to 92.

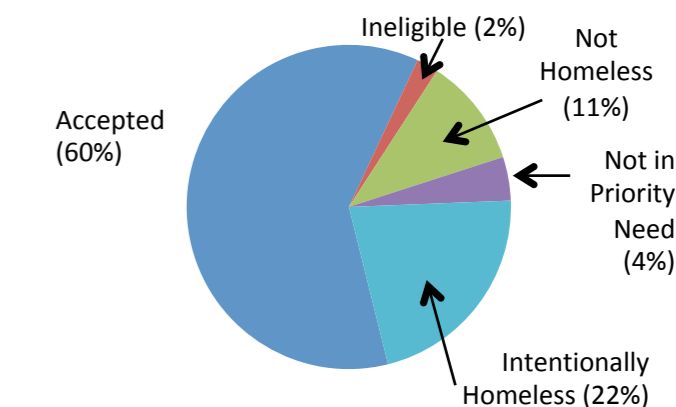


Source: Braintree District Council Housing Options Service

Decisions Taken on Homelessness Applications to Braintree District Council 2017/18

The chart summarises the outcome of the homelessness decisions we took last year. The most common reason that we did not accept a legal duty to households who approach us was that we found them to be 'intentionally homeless'. This decision is taken because the household deliberately did something (or failed to do something) a consequence of which was that they lost their accommodation.

47 out of the 56 households we accepted a main homelessness duty to were families with dependent children.

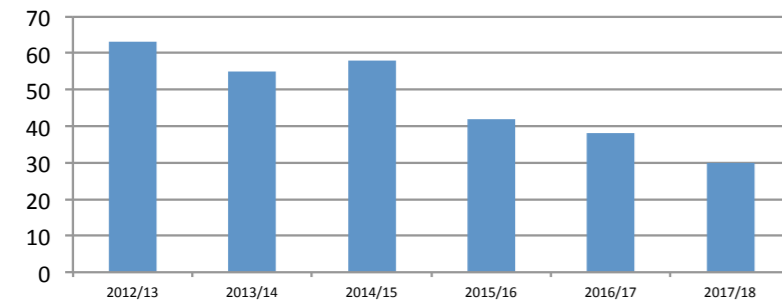


Source: Braintree District Council Housing Options Service

Number of households in temporary accommodation on 31st March 2013-2018

We have a duty to secure accommodation for some homeless households. These may be placed in temporary accommodation while their application is being investigated, or after being accepted as homeless but while waiting for secure accommodation to become available.

Our use of temporary accommodation has fallen, following a similar overall trend to our homelessness acceptances.



Source: Braintree District Council Housing Options Service



Our work to prevent homelessness and how our performance compares

Homelessness prevention and relief in the Braintree District 2017/18

The table shows the data for our prevention and relief of homelessness. We monitor:

- the number of households that come seeking our help;
- the number of households we help to stay in their existing housing;
- how many were helped to find accommodation;
 - before they became homeless (prevention);
 - after they became homeless (relief).

The data shows that we prevent or relieve many people's homelessness before we have to take a decision on whether to accept a duty to them. All sorts of households are included in this data but most are single people.

Compared to national data, our figures for relief are notably high. We relieved homelessness for more households (74) than we accepted a main duty to (56). There were far fewer 'reliefs' (15,000) than acceptances (59,110) nationally. This may reflect a good local supply of supported accommodation for homeless households, which in turn reflects significant investment in homelessness services by the Council over many years.

Outcome	Prevention or relief?	Number of Households	Main Methods Used
Helped stay in existing home	Prevention	76	Resolving rent arrears private or social rented accommodation (24 cases)
Secured alternative accommodation before household became homeless	Prevention	140	Helped secure private rented housing (62 cases) or social housing (51 cases)
Household was already homeless when we helped them secure accommodation	Relief	74	Secured supported accommodation (33 cases) hostel or house in multiple occupation (17 cases) or social housing (13 cases)

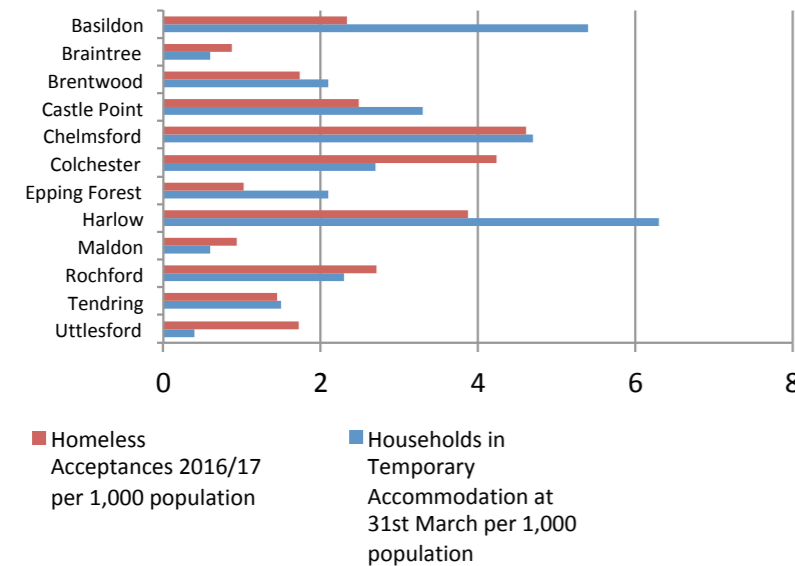
Source: Braintree District Council Housing Options Service

Homeless acceptances and households in temporary accommodation 2016/17

The chart shows how we compared with other Essex Districts in 2016/17. The number of acceptances and number of households in temporary accommodation is adjusted in proportion to the numbers in the local population. At the time of writing, this was the latest full-year dataset available.

In the Braintree District, we accepted a main homelessness duty to 0.9 households per 1,000 population and 0.6 households per 1,000 were in temporary accommodation.

Generally, districts with a lot of people in temporary accommodation are struggling to find enough suitable accommodation to enable people to move on from temporary housing.



Source: MHCLG Local Authority Homelessness Statistics (England)



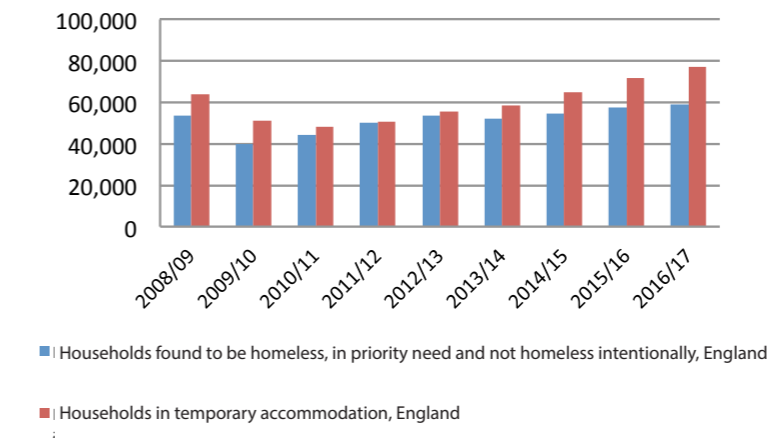
National Trends and Pressures

Nationally, the trend for homeless acceptances and the use of temporary accommodation has been rising steadily since 2009/10. Although this trend has not been seen locally, it would be unrealistic to think that we can escape the trend indefinitely.

There is no single reason why the Braintree District has avoided similar rises but factors that have helped include the following:

- A relatively large social sector stock of homes;
- Continued supply of new affordable homes through 'planning gain';
- Historic and continuing investment in supported housing for homeless households;
- A concentration of staff resources on prevention of homelessness.

Homeless acceptances and number of households in temporary accommodation in England



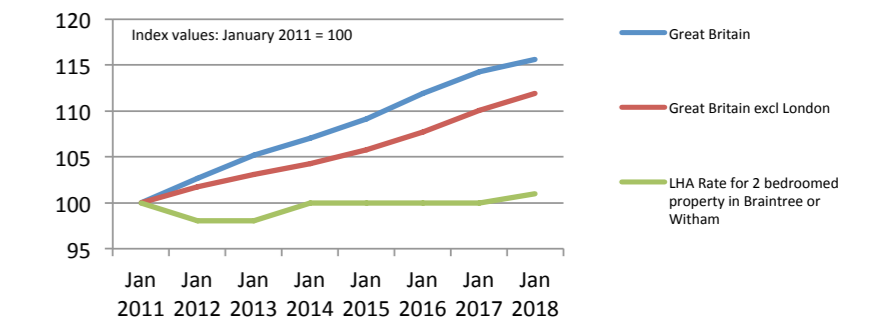
Source: MHCLG Live Table 784

This Strategy sets out how we intend to continue to manage the pressures we face but we expect additional pressures, in particular in the following areas:

- Private sector rents locally are significantly higher than the normal rates that can be met through welfare benefits.
- As shown in the chart below, Local Housing Allowance (LHA) (which sets the maximum that benefits will support) continues to fall behind market rents.
- The private rented market is not expected to grow as fast as the overall supply of housing and
- We expect greater competition from other local authorities to secure vacancies in the private rented sector.

In addition, the new Homelessness Reduction Act means that we cannot expect 'business as usual'. We expect to work with more people, in a more concentrated way and for longer periods of time as a result of the new Act.

Indices of private housing rental prices, Great Britain, January 2011 to April 2018, compared to changes in rates of Local Housing Allowance



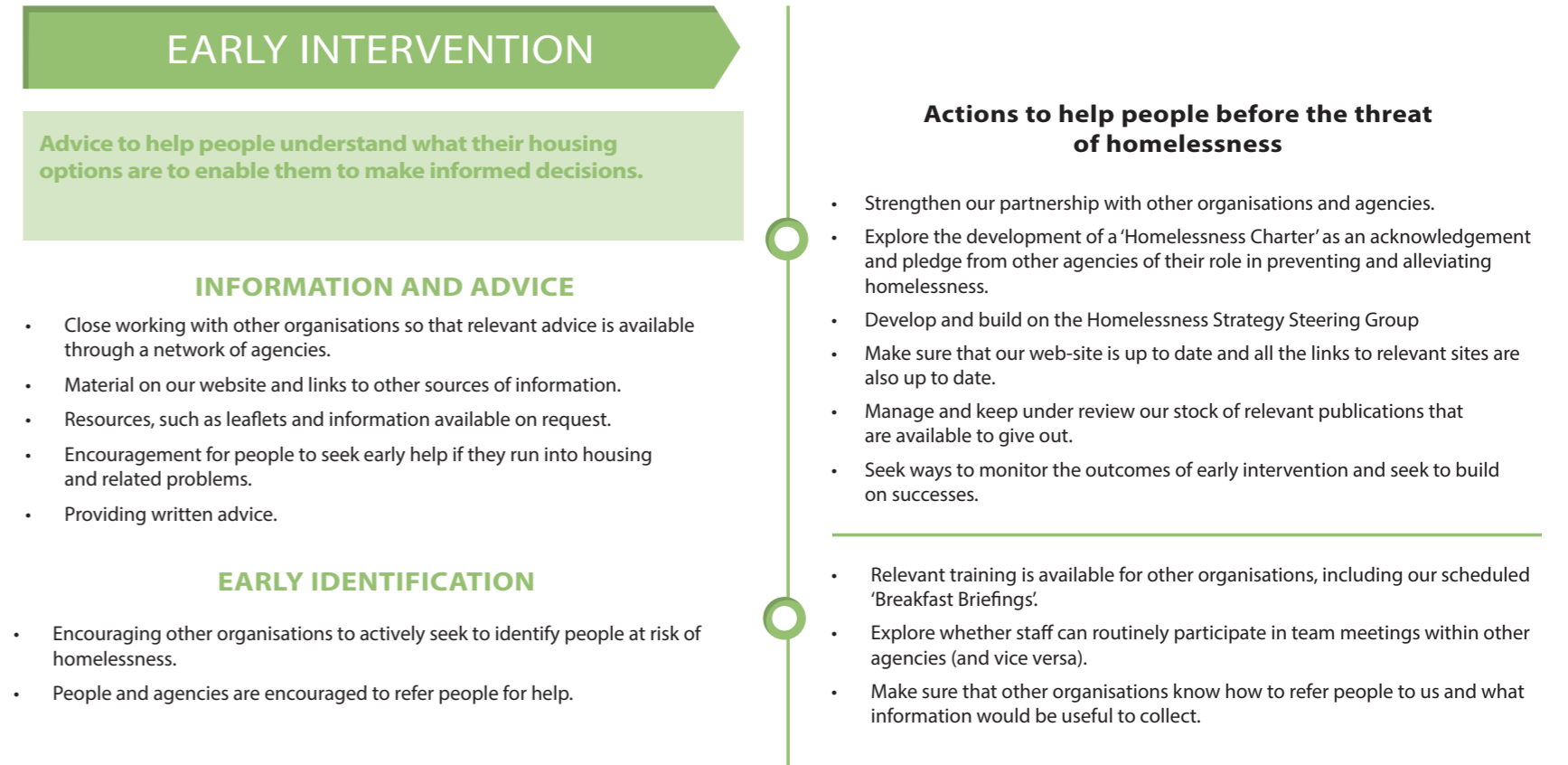
Source: Office for National Statistics (Rents) & National Valuation Office (LHA rates)



Homelessness Reduction Act: Stages of Intervention



Early Interventions





A Duty to Refer: Accessing Help from the Council



PREVENTION

The Homelessness Reduction Act places a duty on certain public authorities to refer people believed to be homeless or at risk of homelessness to a local housing authority. This part of the Act comes into force in October 2018.

The public authorities must have the consent of the individual to make the referral.

During the prevention stage, people can ask to be referred to any council they choose.

The agencies include:

- Prisons and agencies involved in working with offenders, including Probation services
- Job Centre Plus
- Hospitals (A&E and inpatient services)
- Social Care Services
- Regular Armed Forces



RELIEF

We have worked on our website to make it as easy as possible for agencies to make referrals. Our logic has been as follows:

- We did not want to provide a single, separate web-page that agencies have to find in order to make a referral.
- On all the main housing and homelessness web-pages, there is a clearly marked 'housing enquiries form' button that opens the choice of 3 referral pathways – one for self-referrals and one for public authorities. The button looks like this:

Housing enquiry form

- The forms are completed online, with an option to save or print the completed form.
- As a minimum, we need a name, contact details and agreed reason for referral but agencies are asked for additional information. This includes risk assessment and relevant key medical information

The referral process is new and we are committed to making it as straightforward as possible.

We are working with other Essex Councils through the Essex Homelessness Officers Group to explore a single online process and to see if it is feasible to provide identical forms for use across Essex.

We will also explore the best way to work with staff in other agencies to make sure they are aware of the Duty. Some services may be best tackled locally, whereas others may need a more strategic approach.

For example, we already work very closely with staff at our local Job Centre Plus and it is easy for us to keep them up to date. By comparison, it is much more complex to work with hospital staff, particularly as there is no A&E or General Hospital department in the Braintree District.

Our Planned Actions and Interventions

- Contact all the relevant agencies that have a 'duty to refer' and see what sort of information would be helpful and how they would like information to be disseminated.
- Make sure that the invitations to our 'Breakfast Briefing' training sessions are sent to all relevant organisations, including those with a duty to refer.
- Keep under review the effectiveness of the referral process and the relevance of the information provided



The Decision-Making Process



PREVENTION



RELIEF



MAIN DUTY DECISION



MAIN DUTY

Under the Homelessness Reduction Act, Local Authorities have a number of stages when decisions have to be taken about an applicant's legal status. It is not relevant to the Strategy to set them all out here but the key points where our decisions make a really significant difference to the progress (and likely outcome) of an application are summarised below. For as long as we have a duty to help the household, we will work with them to help find suitable accommodation. We have a duty to inform them in writing of our decision if we 'discharge' or end our duty to them.

Is the household eligible for our help?

District Councils only have a duty to help find housing for people with the correct immigration status.

Does the household have a legal right to stay where they are? For example, if they have a notice, is it valid?

If they have a genuine threat of homelessness, is it possible for the household to stay in their existing home? Can we help them negotiate to stay where they are?

Is it safe for them to stay? If not, can we help them take action to make it safe?

If the household cannot stay, is social housing the only appropriate outcome? For example, does the household need an adapted property they are unlikely to find in the private sector? If so, can we give their application a high enough priority to house them in the social sector before they become homeless?

Is there anywhere the person can access for themselves to stay on a temporary or emergency basis? This could be with family or friends or it could be a night shelter or refuge.

Do they have a connection with the Braintree District?

Do we have a legal duty to provide interim accommodation, while the household looks for alternatives?

Do we think that the household has needs that are best met in supported housing schemes we can help them access?

Do we think the household are likely to be found 'intentionally homeless'? Does it appear that they lost their accommodation because of their actions (or inaction)?

At the end of the 56-day relief stage, we must issue a decision whether we owe the household the 'main housing duty'.

If we decide we do, we must continue to work with them to find suitable housing. At this point, their priority for social housing will be increased.

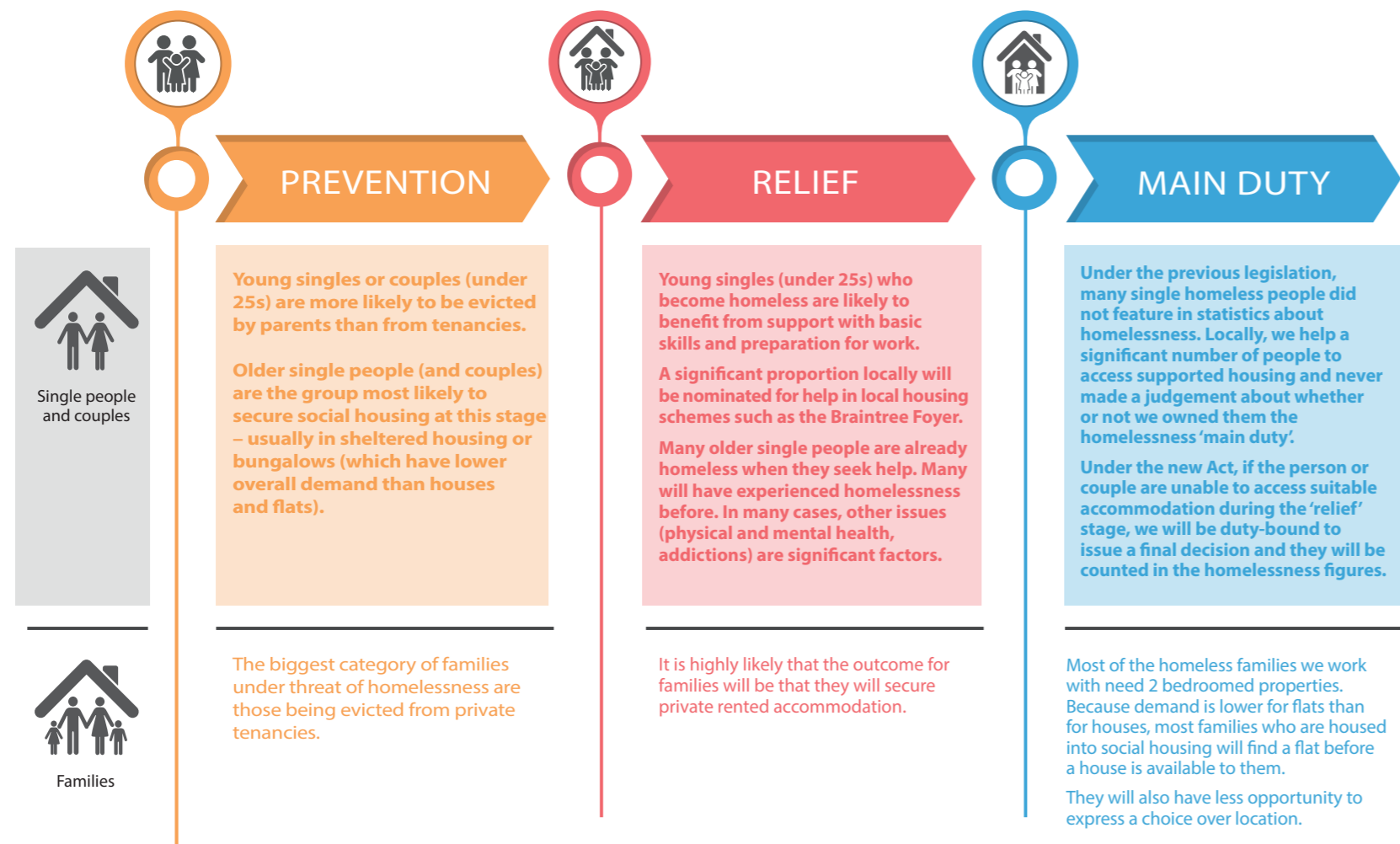
If we decide we don't have a 'main duty', we will inform them of their future options. In some circumstances, we are obliged to make a referral to the Social Care Team at Essex CC.

Is the household doing everything they can to secure suitable housing?

If a property becomes available, is it reasonable for them to move there?



Realistic Expected Outcomes at each Stage of the Act



Our homelessness duties can be ended in a number of ways but the main ones are likely to be that:

1. We have prevented someone from becoming homeless; or
2. We have helped them to find suitable accommodation.

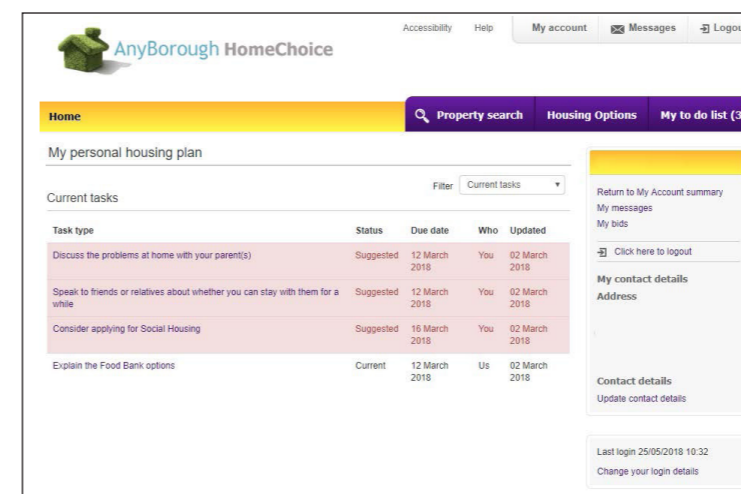
Because of the increase from 28 to 56 days for the prevention stage and the addition of the 56 day relief stage, we now have longer to work with people experiencing homelessness. We therefore expect more applicants to access private rented accommodation (assuming that there are enough affordable available private tenancies).



New tools: Personal Housing Plans

We have always worked with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to plan the steps they need to take to secure housing. Under the Homelessness Reduction Act, Local Authorities have a legal duty to work with all applicants to produce a Personal Housing Plan (PHP) and to assess if they have support needs which need to be addressed if they are able to sustain suitable accommodation. The plans must be available in writing, including steps the applicant is expected to take and the steps the Council will undertake. The Council must also try to ensure that identified support needs are met. How we address support needs is dealt with later in this document.

This is a 'screenshot' of a basic Personal Housing Plan (PHP)



The applicant can now login to the 'Gateway to Homechoice' website and

- view the progress of their homelessness application
- update progress on their PHP
- track the progress of their Housing Register application
- 'bid' for social housing advertised on the system

The new plans are a powerful tool and we want to get the most out of them. We will work together with our partner agencies to develop the PHP:

Aim	Example
We are able to make the most appropriate referrals for people using the system	If a person is recommended to seek help from Citizens Advice, their staff are aware of the type of help the person may benefit from
Our wording is specific enough to be helpful to the applicant and the agency	Rather than simply refer someone to the local Jobcentre Plus, can we put the hyperlink to their website in the Plan?
We put in tasks that other agencies would find helpful	If we are referring someone to a health professional, perhaps we could indicate documents it would be helpful to take
We make the most of local resources	We suggest social or community groups we think may be helpful to the applicant

Our Planned Actions and Interventions

- Make sure that stakeholders in our local community are aware of the principle of Personal Housing Plans
- Develop and improve our Personal Housing Plans by drafting a wide and useful range of relevant tasks
- Work closely with other agencies and local stakeholders to develop individual Personal Housing Plans so that messages are consistent across agencies and there is greater clarity for customers
- Ensure that PHPs include training and/or employment opportunities wherever possible



Housing Pathway: Families with Dependent Children and pregnant women



ALTERNATIVE HOUSING OPTIONS TO BE EXPLORED THROUGHOUT ALL HOMELESSNESS STAGES

PREVENTION ACTIVITIES:

Parental eviction:

- Discussion with parents about reasons for eviction.
- Discussion of costs and steps to be taken to secure private rented accommodation.
- Exploration with applicant of realistic timescale for securing social housing through the Housing Register.

Threat of eviction from rented housing:

- Discussion with landlord about reason for notice.
- Agree possible steps to retain tenancy.
- If not possible to retain existing tenancy, explore possibility of tenant staying until alternative accommodation secured.

Private Sector Options:

- Applicant identifies private rented property and secures without financial assistance from Braintree District Council (BDC)
- Applicant identifies private rented property and secures with financial assistance from BDC
- BDC identifies a suitable private rented property and discharges

Social Sector Options:

- Applicant joins Housing Register. Expected to take first available suitable offer

TEMPORARY AND SHORT TERM ACCOMMODATION

- **Digby's Court, Braintree:** 20 flats in purpose-built temporary housing scheme with on-site daytime support staff.
- **Bradford Street, Braintree:** 4 council owned self-contained bedsit flats.
- **Great Eastern Close, Braintree:** 3 self-contained flats.
- **College House, Braintree:** 12 flats for vulnerable young parents accessible via a referral to Essex County Council.
- **Greenfields Community Housing:** Up to 35 units at various locations in the District, in social housing let as temporary accommodation.
- **Women's Refuges:** Various (non-local) schemes accessed through BDC staff and other agencies

ACTIONS AND INTERVENTIONS for families with dependent children:

- Develop financial risk assessment tool
- Consider acting as guarantor for low-risk households
- Establish 'tenant offer' to assist applicants to secure their own accommodation
- Establish 'landlord offer' to landlords prepared to accept nominations from the Council
- Expand and develop the private sector leasing scheme with Colne Housing
- Continue to develop and publish information about realistic waiting times for social housing
- Continue to run free training for partner agencies and stakeholders

- Continue to monitor and highlight issues with the availability and accessibility of temporary and supported accommodation.
- Continue to avoid the use of Bed & Breakfast for households with dependent children, except in exceptional circumstances and never for more than 6 weeks.



Housing Pathway: Single People and Couples



ALTERNATIVE HOUSING OPTIONS TO BE EXPLORED THROUGHOUT ALL HOMELESSNESS STAGES

PREVENTION ACTIVITIES TO SECURE EXISTING HOME:

Parental eviction:

- Discussion with parents about reasons for eviction.
- Discussion of costs and steps to be taken to secure private rented accommodation.
- Exploration with applicant of realistic timescale for securing social housing through register.

Threat of eviction from rented housing:

- Discussion with landlord about reason for notice.
- Agree possible steps to retain tenancy.
- If impossible to retain existing tenancy, explore possibility of tenant staying until alternative accommodation secured.

Private Sector Options:

- 18-21 year olds have no automatic right to help with housing costs and single people under 35 claiming Universal Credit will only receive the single-room rate.
- Applicant identifies private rented property and secures without financial assistance from BDC
- Applicant identifies private rented property and secures with financial assistance from BDC
- BDC identifies private rented property and discharges homelessness duty

Social Sector Options:

- Applicant joins Housing Register. Current waiting time for one-bed flats is around 2 years.

SUPPORTED HOUSING OPTIONS

- **Braintree Foyer:** 35 flats in clusters for under 35s
- **New Direction, Braintree:** 14 rooms in shared house all ages
- **Glen House, Braintree:** 8 rooms in shared house all ages
- **Leahurst Hostel, Braintree:** 12 rooms in shared house mainly for under 35s
- **Hope House, Braintree:** 4 rooms in shared house
- **Genesis HMOs, Braintree and Witham:** 4 properties providing shared accommodation for 22 single people

Up to 2 years residency. All schemes have daytime support staff available

ACTIONS AND INTERVENTIONS for single people

- Establish tenant and landlord 'offers' (see actions in 'families pathway')
- Consider if lodgings/air b&b could have a role

- Continue to support and lobby for funding to enable supported housing schemes to continue in operation
- Work with providers to explore alternative funding opportunities
- Investigate whether we need to provide emergency (nightshelter) accommodation
- Explore whether emergency places can be provided in existing schemes
- Continue to co-ordinate the Severe Weather Emergency Procedures (SWEP) during the winter months
- Continue to avoid the use of B&B for 16/17 year olds
- Improve working arrangements with Essex CC, including operation of 'crash pads'.



Housing Pathway: 16/17 year olds and Vulnerable Young People



PREVENTION

Essex Young Person's Partnership

Under certain circumstances, Essex County Council has a legal duty to house young people. There is a protocol agreed by Essex County and all the Essex Districts for 16 and 17 year olds and other vulnerable young people. The protocol indicates that wherever possible, both the County and the District will work together to prevent young people from becoming homeless and to assess their needs.

Young people contacting Braintree District Council can be referred to the 'Essex Gateway'. Staff at the Gateway will complete an assessment of the person's needs and their legal status. On that basis, they could be housed in one of the supported housing schemes accessed through Essex County Council. If that is the case, they will not continue through the stages set out in the Homelessness Reduction Act.

Supported housing schemes accessed through Essex County Council:

- **Epping Way, Witham:** 8 self contained one bedroomed flats
- **Bramble Court, Witham:** 25 rooms and flats (all one bedroomed)
- **College House, Braintree:** 12 flats (vulnerable young parents)



RELIEF

Generally, the schemes to which Essex County Council make nominations are geared to provide substantial support for residents. If a young person is homeless but does not meet the threshold for the support provided, Braintree District Council may have to secure accommodation for them. It is likely that we will refer them to our Joint Referral Panel to explore if they are suitable for vacancies in other supported housing schemes. The 2 main schemes for young people are below:

SUPPORTED HOUSING OPTIONS (ALL IN BRAINTRE TOWN)

- **Braintree Foyer:** 35 flats in clusters for under 35s
- **Leahurst Hostel,** Braintree: 12 rooms in shared house mainly for under 35s

Up to 2 years residency. All schemes have daytime support staff available

Emergency Accommodation

A pair of rooms at our main scheme for homeless people, Digby's Court, is configured as 'crash pads'.

The rooms have ensuite facilities but share a kitchen. They are intended as emergency accommodation for 16/17 year olds in particular but can be used by other single people.

Move-on Options

All of the supported housing schemes need access to move-on accommodation. Some scheme providers also have units available as first-time move-on but most will try to secure some private sector opportunities. All supported housing schemes using the Joint Referral Panel have access to nominations to social housing (see next page).



MAIN DUTY

ACTIONS AND INTERVENTIONS

- Continue to monitor the successful implementation of the Essex Protocol for homeless 16 & 17 year olds
- Review move-on arrangements with all supported housing providers.
- Continue to try to secure information from Essex County Council about the expected move-on arrangements from the supported housing schemes for young people.
- Complete and circulate to stakeholders pathway plans for other vulnerable groups, including:
 - people with mental health problems
 - Ex-offenders
 - Armed forces veterans
 - People with addiction problems
 - Rough Sleepers
 - Gypsies and Travellers



Rough Sleepers: Falling Between the Cracks?



RELIEF

Local people are understandably concerned when they come across people sleeping rough and we receive quite regular reports from local communities, local agencies and the local Police. A member of staff will follow up all reports and, if the person can be found, try to speak with them to see if we can help.

The District does not have a severe rough sleeping issue – we have always reported none or at most single figure numbers in our annual estimate – but we accept that it is important for us to work with individuals and our local communities to try to eradicate the need for people to sleep rough.

The causes of rough sleeping vary from individual to individual but in our area, agencies involved with people who are rough sleeping locally report the following as the principle issues:

- The person is not succeeding in making and sustaining long-term relationships;
- The person's behaviour is often erratic and unpredictable;
- The person is dealing with issues relating to mental health, drugs or alcohol (or a combination of these);
- In many cases, the issues the person is dealing with are very longstanding and entrenched.

One of our concerns is that supported housing schemes locally have limited resources to deal with someone exhibiting really difficult behaviour. All schemes have rules about drug and alcohol consumption to protect residents and staff. If someone is unable to comply with these requirements, it is unlikely that we are able to secure this type of accommodation for them.

We do not have a nightshelter provision in the Braintree District and do not think that such a provision is required to meet the District's need but even a nightshelter can only provide a temporary respite and in many cases, the individual is not in a position to manage a hostel-type facility.

The only way we can make a difference is through joint working with other agencies (in particular mental health services, the police and housing and support providers).



MAIN DUTY

OUR ACTIONS

- Work with local agencies and organisations, including through the Community Safety Hub and the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group to establish a project to look at how all the agencies can deal with rough sleeping.
- Make sure that we co-ordinate with other groups, including the Health and Wellbeing Board to raise awareness and build effective partnerships.
- Consider if we can establish and publicise procedures that help make sure all relevant agencies communicate information about progress with individual rough sleepers.
- Consider whether a project would be more effective if we included neighbouring councils.



Temporary, short term and move-on accommodation



Apart from the schemes already referred to in the 'Housing Pathways', there are a few schemes that are accessed through a 'Mental Health Joint Referral Panel'. The cost of support for the schemes is funded by Essex County Council and access is co-ordinated by the Mental Health Team. BDC staff participate in the Panel.

Supported housing schemes accessed through the Mental Health Joint Referral Panel:

- Pavilion Court, Braintree:** 6 self contained flats
- Coverdale, Witham:** 23 flats and bedsits and 2 rooms in shared house
- Freebournes Court, Witham:** 14 flats
- Newland Street, Witham:** 7 self-contained bedsits
- Julien Court Road, Braintree:** 6 rooms in 2 shared houses

OUR ACTIONS

- Continue to participate in the Mental Health Joint Referral Panel
- Make sure we are aware of the pathways into, and move-on from Mental Health schemes





The contribution of the allocations policy and new affordable homes



Access to Social Housing

The Braintree District is part of the 'Gateway to Homechoice' lettings scheme that covers 8 Essex and Suffolk districts and boroughs. The scheme operates a single allocations policy to advertise and allocate vacancies in social housing. All mainstream general-needs housing association homes in the Braintree District are let to Housing Register applicants through the scheme. The scheme's policy was updated to coincide with the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

Key Policy Features:

- The scheme aims to sustain a balance between existing social housing tenants needing to transfer, new entrants to the sector and homeless households. Across all the districts in 2017/18, 31% of moves were transfers, 53% were people new to the social sector and 16% were accepted homeless households.
- Most of the allocations to accepted homeless applicants were 2 bedroomed flats, whereas the transfer applicants mainly moved to houses and bungalows.
- Currently, we have no residency criteria for qualification to join the Housing Register. This is under review, in particular because we are concerned that our districts and boroughs may become particularly attractive to other districts and boroughs seeking to discharge their homelessness duties.

New Social Housing

- Our programme of new development of social housing has consistently provided an average of 100 new homes per year for the last 20 years, of which around 70% are for rent.
- Our overall lettings have averaged 570 per year for the last 3 years, with around 70 properties coming from new lets.
- The expected numbers of new social homes is increasing in the next few years as our Local Plan sets out much higher growth than in previous years. We expect to double our average delivery of social housing from 2020 onwards.
- Most new social housing is not specifically planned to meet the demand from homeless households but increased lettings overall have a beneficial impact on our capacity to meet our needs.

OUR ACTIONS

- Work with the Gateway to Homechoice group to review local connection residency criteria.
 - Consult with local people, applicants and stakeholders on any plans to change policy.
 - Monitor the relevant waiting list and lettings data to make sure that the Policy is fit-for-purpose once the new Act is embedded in operation.
-
- Monitor and report on the impact of increased social housing development in the District
 - Monitor and report on changes in patterns of demand as overall growth increases



Improving access to the private rented sector



We have already identified that we need to explore the way we help people to access the private rented sector. Typically this will be through a mixture of loans to tenants to help with advanced payments, bonds and guarantees to landlords and with targeted use of resources such as Discretionary Housing Payments (administered by the Housing Benefit Team) and payments that may be available to Universal Credit claimants. Here, we consider things that we can do that may not impact immediately on the people we work with but may change how we operate in the future.

"The overall proportion of the population of Great Britain who live in rented accommodation has risen to 35%, up from 29% in the mid 1990s. But this growth has been entirely in the private rather than social sector and is heavily concentrated among the young. Just 12% of 25 to 34-year-olds rented privately in the mid 1990s. This has since trebled to 37%."

Source: The Cost of Housing for Low-Income Renters. Robert Joyce, Matthew Mitchell and Agnes Norris Keiller. Institute for Fiscal Studies

At the time of the last Census in 2011, just over 8,000 of the 61,000 households in the Braintree District rented privately. This is a significant proportion of our population and yet we know relatively little about the expectations and aspirations of private tenants and private landlords.

We want to explore how we can make sure that the sector thrives so that the local community and economy benefit

There are a number of aspects we have identified that we think we should explore:

- We know very little about the sector. No data is held by Council Tax on tenure – we only know about the numbers renting privately at the time of the Census (i.e. at 10 yearly intervals) and we therefore have little intelligence about how we could help the sector.

- The sector is very diverse. Greenfields Community Housing has as many properties as the whole of the private rented sector. To discuss issues with Greenfields, we routinely speak to 5 or 6 members of its staff and have a pretty reliable idea of what is happening. By contrast, the 8,000 privately rented homes are likely to be owned by more than a thousand landlords. It would be valuable to establish ways of communicating that work for landlords and for the Council.

- People principally rent out property as an investment and it must be viable for people and organisations to invest in the sector. But given the diversity of the ownership of the homes, should we be working on business models that may not attract all types of investors but may work for enough to be available for people we look to nominate?

ACTIONS AND INTERVENTIONS for families with dependent children:

- Explore whether we can secure funding and support (including working with other Local Authorities) for a research project to give us a greater understanding of the private rented sector as a whole, from a tenant and landlord perspective.
- Explore corporately how we can support landlords to invest locally.
- Work with Colne Housing to see if its private sector leasing scheme can be promoted effectively as a form of ethical investment.



What we mean by “Housing-Related Support”

There are no obvious beneficial aspects to homelessness. It disrupts people’s lives, makes it harder to provide a stable family life and impacts on people’s ability to sustain employment.

Targeted help at the right time can prevent people from becoming homeless or help them re-establish a settled life and livelihood. Over a longer period, it can prevent repeat homelessness and help people engage with people and organisations in their community that can help them thrive.

Housing-related support services can be provided to residents of specific properties, such as homeless hostels or through ‘floating support’ schemes where the support is linked to the individual.

We don’t underestimate the role played by the range of community services, for example from staff at Citizens Advice, food banks and faith groups.

To prevent and resolve homelessness, we also need services that focus on helping individuals find or maintain their independence.

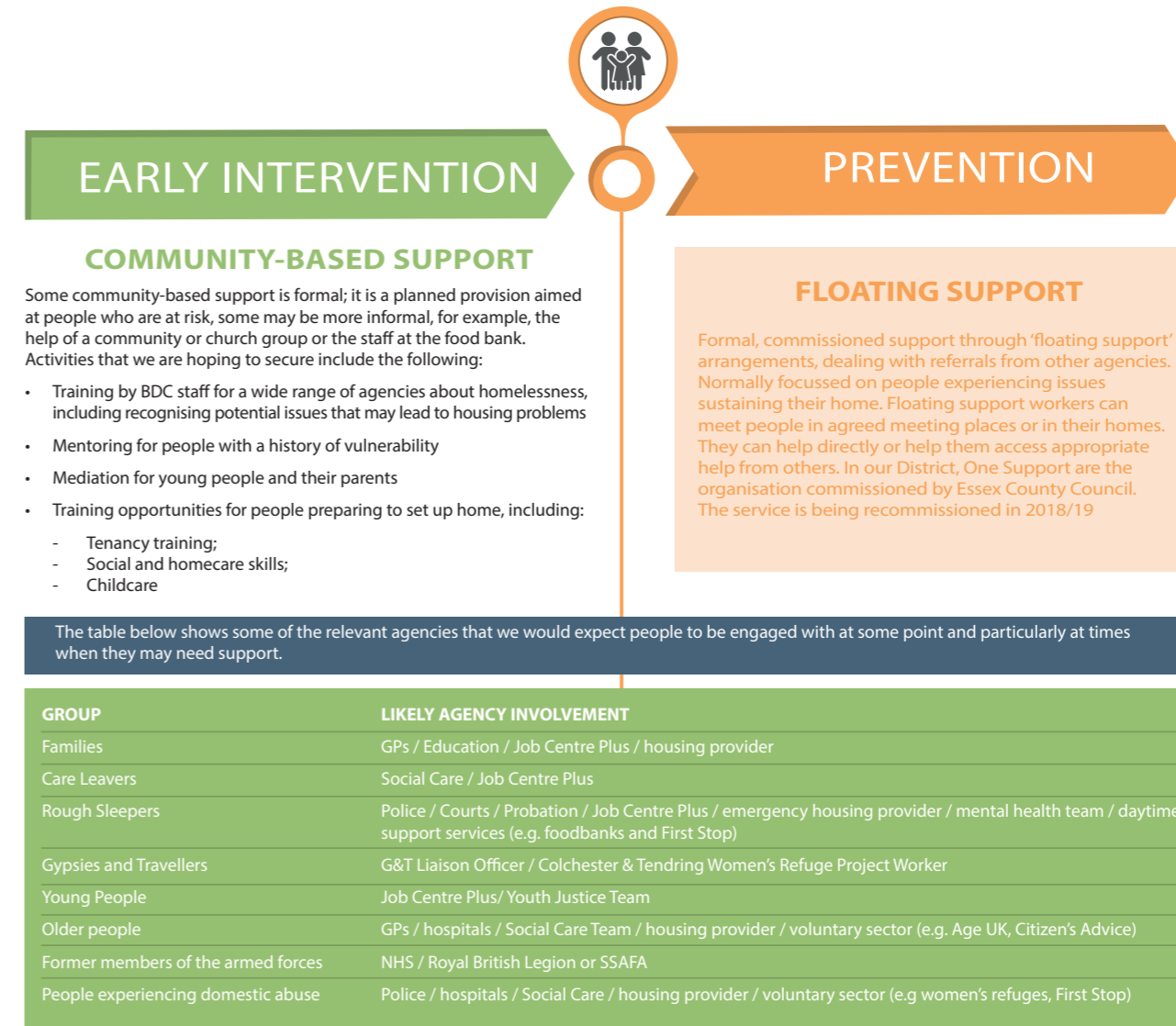
The main services, their relationship to local community services and the risks in the system are explored in the next few pages of this Strategy.

Main Purposes of Support

- Finding and maintaining a suitable home
- Support with daily living skills, such as budgeting and cooking
- Support to access services such as benefits, health and community care
- Help to establish and maintain social networks
- Help finding work



Support to prevent homelessness



OUR ACTIONS

- Make sure that we work with One Support to monitor the outcomes of the ‘Trailblazer’ Project.
- Work collaboratively with other LAs to explore how the service can be maintained and developed.
- Check our advertising for ‘Breakfast Briefings’ to ensure wide distribution and participation.
- Work with The Foyer to establish the proposed housing-related courses in the Community College.
- Work with the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group to explore mentoring and mediation provision.



Risk for Housing Related Support

Funding and commissioning of support services is directed mainly to first tier authorities, in our case Essex County Council (ECC) and so lies outside the District's direct control. The funding is not ring-fenced. County Councils as social care providers are under severe financial pressure with rising demand and real terms cuts.

Essex County Council will renew the housing related support contract by March 2019. If the service is significantly reduced, it could:

- Increase the number of people who become homeless;
- Increase repeat homelessness;
- Reduce the number of supported housing places and schemes;
- Reduce the effectiveness of the work we undertake to secure accommodation for people.

In 2017, ECC secured 'Trailblazer' funding to provide additional floating support services, based on homelessness prevention. The funding was for a two year period and we do not know if the service provided by 'Trailblazer' will continue after March 2019.

To mitigate these risks, we will engage with the County Council during 2018/19 to influence the re-commissioning and future of the trailblazer scheme. We hope that the actions set out in this Strategy to build a community response to homelessness may help mitigate the impact if there are reductions in the service from 2019.

OUR ACTIONS

- Try to maintain relevant contacts with Essex County Council to enable informed discussion about the future funding for 'building-based' support
- Work jointly with other LAs when it is relevant to co-ordinate knowledge, resources and expertise.
- Work with partners across Essex to influence the re-commissioning of housing related support.
- Make sure that new funding, including Flexible Homelessness Support Grant is used effectively.
- Work with partners to influence national policy to better fund homelessness services.



Building a network of support

We regularly meet with other organisations through the 'Homelessness Strategy Steering Group' and in preparation for this strategy, we held a 'stakeholder' event with representatives from a wide range of local organisations.

Homelessness can badly disrupt people's lives. It can affect:

- Schooling;
- Access to work;
- Continuity of healthcare;
- Relationships with extended family and other support structures;
- Mental health

Our ideal would be that someone working or volunteering in professional or community-based services automatically considers whether issues raised by their clients or customers could result in them losing their home.



We will work with stakeholders to:

- Make sure that they are using the opportunities they have to identify people who may be at risk of homelessness
- Make sure that the formal process for agencies to refer people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness is fully understood and easy to use
- Involve other organisations in the identification and provision of opportunities to help people facing housing issues.
- Explore and generate ideas for potential projects and monitor potential sources of funding such as community funds and Government initiatives



Our assumptions about resources

Specific Government Grants for Homelessness

'New Burdens Funding'

The Government has recognised that the Homelessness Reduction Act places additional burdens on Local Authorities. In particular:

- Throughout the 'prevention' and 'relief' stages of the process, Councils will be working with more people, as we now work more extensively with single people and couples than we were required to under previous legislation.
- From October 2018, the 'Duty to Refer' comes into force. We expect an increase in the number of people we are dealing with as a result.
- The requirement for a Personal Housing Plan for everyone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness is time consuming, particularly if it is to be meaningful in its recommendations and requirements. In addition, the plans have to be updated as progress is made.
- We will be working with some people for much longer than under previous legislation – in some cases, we will be working with people for 4 months before we issue a main homelessness duty decision.

IT Funding

We have invested in updated IT systems that help us manage the new workload and communicate with people we are dealing with. The new system automatically uploads data to The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). We received a one-off payment to cover this cost.

Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (FHSO)

Since April 2017, some payments that were made to housing providers through the benefits system ceased and payment was diverted to Local Authorities. The funding was previously used to support temporary accommodation leased by housing associations. The allocation is flexible and is intended to more than cover the level of funding that was withdrawn and allow Councils to choose whether to continue to support the schemes or use it in other ways in their work to prevent and alleviate homelessness.

Our Planned Expenditure

The Council's 'Base Budget' is drawn from a mixture of Government Grants, Council income from investments and charges and Council Tax. Resources are allocated to the Housing Service to cover the costs associated with our housing functions. All of the additional funding coming from the sources listed in table 3 on the right is ring-fenced to the Housing Service.

At the time of writing, recommendations are under discussion to recruit additional staff to the Housing Options and Housing Assessment Teams. Our early experience with the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act is suggesting that we need additional staff in the early assessment of individuals needs, including a 'triage' function. We have continued to support the costs of the HMO leasing scheme with Genesis Housing Association, with an allocation of £30,000 per year.

We had already started the process of enlarging the Team during 2017/18 and had allocated a one-off addition to the Team's budget of £150,000. The funding shown on the next page is the known additional resources available as a result of the Government grants and this one-off payment. We do not know if any of the Government Grants will continue beyond March 2020.



Expected income and expenditure

The base budget for the Housing Teams that deal with homelessness is shown in Table 1 (to the right). As we enlarge the Team to meet the new demands on the service, the budget will increase by £250,000 by 2021/22 (as shown in Table 2 below).

Table 3 shows how that increase in staffing impacts on the additional grant funds we are expecting. At the proposed rate of expenditure, our additional commitments are funded to about half way through the 2021/22 financial year.

We will continue to review our expenditure on temporary accommodation and on securing access to private sector housing. We will identify and report on any significant changes to the budget.

Table 1

Expenditure	Base Budget 2017/18
Staff Costs (Housing Options Team)	£408,000
Staff Costs (Housing Assessment Team)	£139,000
Temporary accommodation costs	£93,000
Loans and payments to Private Landlords	£21,000
IT System	£7,240
	£ 668,240

Table 2

Expenditure – Budget Figures for additional expenditure	Extra expenditure 2018/19	Extra expenditure 2019/20	Extra expenditure 2020/21	Extra expenditure 2021/22
Additional temporary accommodation costs	£30,000	£30,000	£30,000	£30,000
Additional staff from 2018	£165,640	£207,910	£214,620	£221,580
IT System (known upgrade cost)	£5,500			
	£201,140	£237,910	£244,620	£251,580

Table 3

Income Source (in addition to base budget)	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
BDC One-off Addition to Base Budget	£150,000				
Flexible Homelessness Support Grant	£150,127	£169,996	£198,948	£0	£0
New Burdens Funding	£52,355	£47,957	£55,115	£0	£0
ITC Grant Funding	£9,202				
	£361,684	£217,953	£254,063	£0	£0
Balance to Carry forward	£350,145	£366,958	£383,111	£138,491	£-113,089

