

BIRMINGHAM

Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017+

Working together to end homelessness



Making a positive difference everyday to people's lives



Contents

Foreword	3
Our Commitment	4
Introduction	5
Our Vision	6
Defining Homelessness	7
Impact of Homelessness	8
A Priority for Birmingham	9
Our Challenge	10
Our Approach – The Positive Pathway	12
Universal Prevention	13
Targeted Prevention	14
Crisis Prevention and Relief	15
Homeless Recovery	16
Sustainable Housing Options	17
Delivering our Vision	18
Joint Strategy Implementation Plan	19

Foreword

Welcome to Birmingham's fourth Homelessness Strategy. We would like to thank partners from across the Health, Criminal Justice, Housing, Voluntary and Third Sectors, who have contributed to its development and are committed to its success.

Responding to the social and economic causes associated with homelessness, requires a Council-wide effort that supports citizens to be more resilient to its impacts. To make this a reality, alignment of investment in housing, jobs, skills and safer communities is a fundamental part of our longer term response to the issue.

This strategy recognises homelessness is a cross cutting issue which cannot be tackled by one agency alone. The negative impact that homelessness has upon the health and wellbeing of our citizens is well understood. For these reasons, it remains as a key priority for the Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Board, as well the Council.

Birmingham has a strong history of working together in partnership to tackle homelessness. Despite this the scale and extent of homelessness has remained persistent - too many families who are homeless and / or living in temporary accommodation. Collectively we also face challenges such as pressure on budgets in all sectors and changes to the welfare system. A radically different approach that drives whole system change is now necessary.

Our new strategy focuses on preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place and supporting those who are homeless to build a more positive future in good health, sustainable accommodation and long lasting employment.

In collaboration with local authorities across the West Midlands Combined Authority, the West Midlands Mayoral Taskforce, and our

key partners, we will work together to eradicate homelessness from our city. The task ahead will be challenging as we respond to the diversity of presenting needs of homeless people in the city. This includes implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which brings with it new opportunities to work together to design out homelessness.

We are confident that together with our experienced and innovative partners, in collaboration with people who have lived experience of homelessness, we can make a significant impact on homelessness. We look forward to working together to drive the systemic change required to deliver this strategy and achieve our collective vision for Birmingham.

Councillor Ian Ward	Leader
Councillor Brigid Jones	Deputy Leader
Councillor Peter Griffiths	Cabinet Member for Housing & Homes
Councillor Paulette Hamilton	Cabinet Member, Health & Social Care and Chair of Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Board
Councillor Carl Rice	Cabinet Member, Children, Families and Schools
Councillor Brett O'Reilly	Cabinet Member, Jobs & Skills
Councillor Tristan Chatfield	Cabinet Member Community Safety & Equalities
Councillor Majid Mahmood	Cabinet Member, Commercialism, Commissioning & Contract Management
Councillor Lisa Trickett	Cabinet Member, Clean Streets, Recycling & Environment
Councillor Stewart Stacey	Cabinet Member Transport & Roads

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Our Commitment

Councillor Sharon Thompson
Birmingham Homelessness Ambassador

The impacts of homelessness are complex and intertwined. The growing number of people living on the street makes visible what may otherwise be unrecognisable to the majority of people in our city. Yet street homeless remains a relatively small proportion of the overall issue and we must not forget those living in precarious housing circumstances, temporary accommodation, hostels and supported accommodation - or indeed those who are taking positive steps to recover from homelessness.

Homelessness can lead individuals and families into a cycle that can have a profound effect on all aspects of life. It is not just a lack of accommodation; homelessness can affect our physical and mental health and wellbeing, educational achievement, ability to gain and sustain employment, and puts pressure on our personal and family relationships. These effects, especially on children, can be life long and can cause repeated homelessness of a generational nature.

No single organisation can prevent homelessness alone; together we must be proactive in working together to intervene earlier and prevent homelessness wherever possible.

Matt Green
Director, Crisis Skylight Birmingham on behalf of the
Homelessness Partnership Board

This new homelessness strategy has the vision and ambition to make a profound effect on the lives of people who are homeless and those who face the uncertainty and risk of becoming homeless.

As organisations and individuals working in the city, we will continue to work with Birmingham City Council by jointly owning this strategy and working in partnership to deliver life-changing services so that the vision of eradicating homelessness in Birmingham becomes a reality.

The impact of homelessness devastates lives and it is often a long, hard, painful journey to leave homelessness behind for good. The implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, alongside the delivery of this Homelessness Prevention Strategy through a Positive Pathway model, will be the opportunity to trigger a fundamental change in the way we create systems and design services to take a human rights approach to ending homelessness in Birmingham.



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Introduction
Homelessness is caused by a complex interaction between a person or family's individual circumstances and a number of social and structural factors often outside of their own control.

Unless these other factors are addressed, the ability of an individual or family to become resilient and improve their chance of a positive future is greatly reduced, and places them at risk of becoming trapped in a cycle of homelessness.

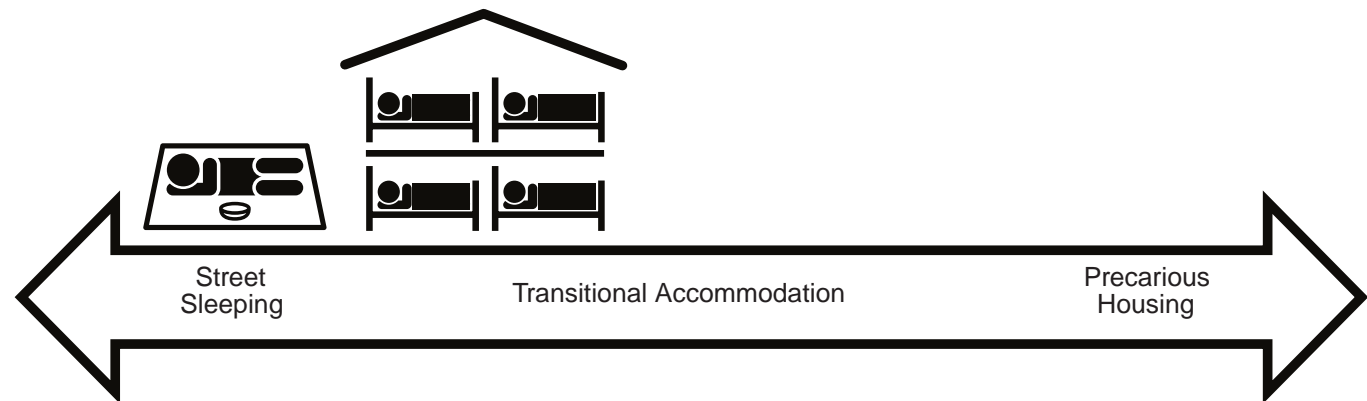
Tackling all of these issues at the point of crisis is complex and very expensive. Therefore, we must do more to intervene as early as possible, to limit the impact of homelessness, help people to recover from homelessness, and prevent it from happening in the future.

The journey into and through homelessness is different for everyone. People enter at different stages, at different times in their lives, and with varying levels and types of support needs. In recognition of this it is important that our approach is able to respond effectively.

Scope

The scope of this strategy recognises all types of homelessness needs:

- Those who are considering their housing options
- Those who are at risk of homelessness
- Those who are deemed statutory homeless
- Those who are deemed non – statutory homeless
- Those who are street homeless
- Children who experience homelessness
- Those who are moving on from homelessness
- The wider population (for the purposes of prevention more broadly).



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Our Vision

Birmingham is a city where we all work together to eradicate homelessness

Aims

1. Ensure people are well informed about their housing options
2. Prevent people from becoming homeless
3. Assist people as soon as possible if they do become homeless so that their homelessness can be relieved by securing sufficient accommodation and support
4. Support people to recover from their experience and stay out of homelessness
5. Enable people to secure homes that they can afford and maintain.



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Defining Homelessness

Statutory Homelessness

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) defines statutory homelessness as:

A person is deemed to be in priority need if they are a person who is a member of a family, a pregnant woman, or a single person who is particularly vulnerable.

Households in priority housing need include families, pregnant women and single people who are particularly vulnerable.

Non-Statutory Homelessness

Non-statutory homeless people are typically single people/childless couples who are not assessed as being in 'priority need' and are only entitled to advice and assistance if homeless.

Some non-priority homeless people are offered access to Local Authority-commissioned housing support services.

Street Homelessness

MHCLG defines street homelessness as:

People who are sleeping rough, in a bed in a public place, or in a vehicle, are considered to be homeless. People who are sleeping in a vehicle are considered to be homeless if they are not using the vehicle as their only or main accommodation.

Legal duties

The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 requires Local Authorities to prevent as well as respond to homelessness and assist people under imminent threat of homelessness (and classed as 'in priority need') by taking reasonable steps to prevent them from losing their existing accommodation.

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a specific requirement on Local Authorities to devise and implement a Homelessness Strategy.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 places a duty on Local Authorities to provide anyone threatened with or at risk of being homeless (within a 56 day period) with advice and support to prevent them becoming homeless.

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Impact of Homelessness

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Homelessness continues to be a high priority for Birmingham. Despite our progress, the number of people experiencing homelessness is growing.

The cross cutting nature of homelessness is clear and highlighted by its inclusion as a key contributing factor to the success of the following strategic priorities:

- Birmingham Housing Strategy Statement (2017) - Enabling citizens to find, access and sustain housing that meets their needs is a key priority.
- Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2017) - Tackling homelessness is key to children living in permanent housing, increasing employment or meaningful activity, stable accommodation for those with mental health problems, and improving the wellbeing of people with complex needs.
- Birmingham Financial Inclusion Strategy (2017) - Financial exclusion exacerbates poverty and can lead to serious debt problems, homelessness, mental health issues and involvement with crime.
- Birmingham Domestic Abuse Prevention Strategy (2017) - Domestic abuse is the second highest presenting reason for homelessness households in priority housing need.
- Birmingham Early Help Strategy (2015-2017) - Reducing the number of families experiencing homelessness and overcrowding is key to 'a good childhood for the best start in life'.

- The agreed purpose for Improved Mentionb09>>> BDC ()T18 welc Tfe

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Our Challenge

Nationally the Government recognises that the housing system is 'broken'. Locally, this market failure is particularly apparent as:

- There is a lack of affordable housing options for many larger households – Birmingham has higher than average household sizes but a limited supply of 4 bed and larger homes. This is especially difficult for larger households affected by the 'benefit cap',
- Increasing difficulties experienced by people under-35 to secure affordable, independent accommodation – particularly for low-income and unemployed young people. Whilst there is a relatively good supply of accommodation of this type, it is often not affordable for this group. People who are subject to benefit restrictions face additional difficulties. This contributes to a need for additional larger homes as young people are living with their family for longer representing a new and growing housing need in the city, as well as an affordable housing offer for young people, including young workers.
- Birmingham has a growing population, which is putting increasing pressure on the existing housing stock. Locally there are more than three times the rate of priority homeless households than the national average and double the rate of Core City neighbours. These high rates can also be seen as a direct consequence of a fractured housing system. The statutory homeless system can seem to offer a clear pathway into permanent accommodation, which contrasts with the difficulties that people experience in finding suitable and affordable accommodation.

Increasingly, people are presenting as statutory homeless because an assured shorthold tenancy has ended. Domestic abuse and parental exclusion are also significant reasons for why people become homeless in Birmingham; over 40% of homeless applications from outside of the city are associated with homelessness resulting from domestic abuse.

Deprivation and associated poverty / low incomes are key barriers for accessing suitable housing and maintaining stable and financially sustainable tenancies. Access to employment is a key mechanism for preventing homelessness. The average household income in Birmingham is relatively low. Combined with relatively high rates of unemployment – this is a driver of housing exclusion. Poor financial management and a failure to maximise household income also limit people's ability to access and sustain housing.

Our approach to recovery has been overly housing focussed, with an emphasis on securing accommodation and not enough attention given to prevent future homelessness by addressing the underlying cause of people's experience. We need to do more to recognise the impact that the trauma of homelessness can have on both adult and children's physical and mental health and wellbeing. Homelessness is an adverse childhood experience that can have a long-term negative impact on children's development.

Birmingham has a very high level of families who are homeless and/or in temporary accommodation. It affects social bonding, school performance as well as being linked to disadvantage in future generations. More than three quarters of applicants accepted as homeless and in priority need have children – either with a lone parent, or as dependants of a couple.

Our Approach – The Positive Pathway



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Universal Prevention

Our Aim

To ensure people are well informed about their housing options.

Our Approach

Universal prevention sets out a bold vision of creating structural step change across the city to ensure people are equipped to navigate the housing system, and create a city that is sufficiently robust to deliver change at system, organisational and community levels.

It is intended to empower people and communities to successfully live resilient, independent lives without support from specialist services, and ensure they know where to go to seek help if required.

This domain includes the adoption of social prescribing which recognises that people's health is determined primarily by a range of social, economic and environmental factors.

The impact of inadequate or inappropriate housing may manifest on health and health services in a number of ways for example, repeat visits to the family doctor or Accident and Emergency department, or delays in discharge from hospital due a lack of safe, warm accommodation to return to.

This means that family doctors, nurses and other professionals will be aware of and be able to refer people to a range of local, non-clinical services relating to their housing needs.

This domain also includes a wide range of timely, accurate information and advice about housing options, financial issues and support services available to everyone to prevent issues with housing, and housing related risks, occurring in the first place, and to ensure people understand the links between housing choice and their financial and employment circumstances.

Strategically, this approach links closely to the work of the Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Birmingham Financial Inclusion Strategy and the Child Poverty Commission to support reductions in inequality across the city.



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Our Approach

Anyone can become homeless. However, it is possible to identify people who are most likely to become homeless. Groups at risk of homelessness include:

- Vulnerable children and young people
- Young people leaving the care of the Local Authority
- People leaving prison
- People experiencing domestic abuse
- People leaving the Armed Forces
- People with a mental health issue
- People with addictions e.g. drug, alcohol
- People experiencing family breakdown

- People with multiple and complex needs
- People on low incomes and those who are in debt
- People with learning disabilities
- Refugees and people with no recourse to public funds.

There is a strong overlap between homelessness and deep social exclusion.

This approach introduces early intervention through trauma informed practice – understanding trauma and how it may lead to homelessness either now or in the future.

Linked to the Birmingham Early Help Strategy, this domain focuses on early intervention targeted for people who are most likely, or identified,



Crisis Prevention and Relief

Our Aim

To assist people as soon as possible if they do become homeless so that their homelessness can be relieved by securing sufficient accommodation and support

Our Approach

Whilst we seek to shift the balance to a more proactive, preventative approach, we must ensure there is still an effective response for those who present as homeless in an emergency or crisis situation. Groups that are recognised as predominantly affected in this area are private rented sector tenants, families with dependent children, people experiencing domestic abuse, young people experiencing parental exclusion, under 35 year olds, people with multiple and complex needs, people with drug and /or alcohol addiction, and street homeless people.

Crisis prevention and relief is defined as a range of responses that support prevention and relief of homeless crisis.

This domain aims to respond at the point of crisis, where the threat of homelessness is imminent or has occurred. It includes interventions that

result in someone making a homeless application in order to help them secure accommodation.

It also encompasses interventions that seek to resolve the threat of homelessness such as mediation resulting in someone being able to remain in the current home or alternative accommodation and therefore removing the imminent threat of being homeless.

The scope of the Crisis Prevention and Relief offer is broad and includes:

- Outreach services that make contact with the street homeless population
- Support and intervention for adults and children affected by domestic abuse
- Specialist accommodation such as refuges
- Statutory and non-statutory homeless prevention services
- Immediate and direct hostel provision
- Bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation
- Housing options and advice
- Rapid re-housing via initiatives such as Housing First.

As a result, homelessness is prevented through intervention at point of crisis; emergency accommodation is secured for those without other housing options; and there is co-ordinated action to prevent street homelessness and move people into accommodation.

This domain is underpinned by a comprehensive, multi-agency holistic assessment of need and is a key data collection point to inform ongoing development of the pathway.

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Homeless Recovery

Our Aim

To support people to recover from their experience and stay out of homelessness

Our Approach

People who have experienced homelessness are more likely to have additional needs around their mental, physical and emotional health and may need extra support to make a sustained recovery into stable housing and onward to a positive and healthy future. This is particularly true for children, young people and more vulnerable adults. Providing this extra support is critical to limiting the impact of homelessness as well as preventing homelessness recurring.

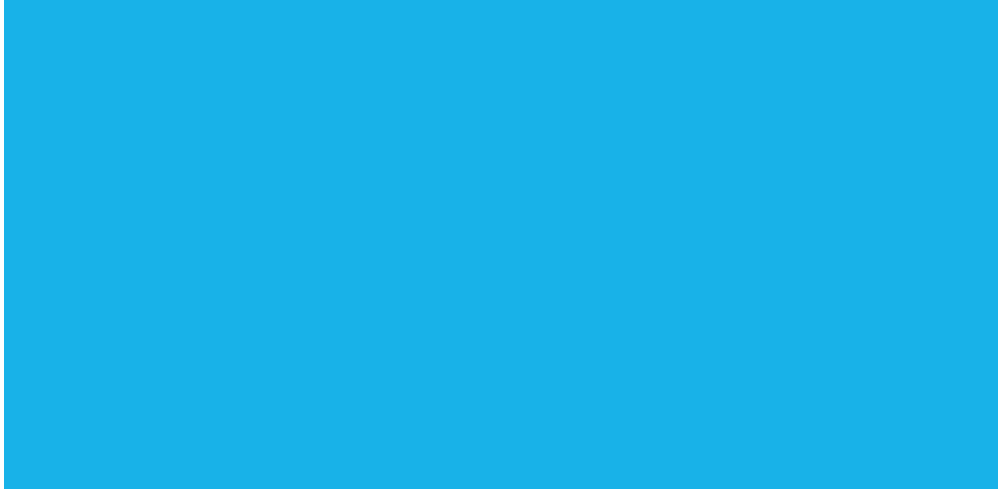
Experiencing homelessness can have a serious, adverse and long lasting impact, particularly in childhood. By understanding that being homeless can be traumatic, this approach involves working with people to reduce the risk of secondary trauma or re-traumatisation by encompassing psychologically informed environments.

This means taking into account emotional and psychological needs alongside continued support to stabilise their accommodation, and focusing on improving the overall wellbeing of all adults and children in the household.

Homeless Recovery means key agencies work together to support people to ensure they have access to a range of support that will improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing, access education or training, enter and/ or maintain employment, stabilise the family income, and strengthen social networks.

This type of preventative action will need to be sensitive, timely, appropriate and right first time. Done effectively, this approach supports people to regain their independence, enabling them to avoid the crises that may trigger homelessness in the future. It is recognised that recovery from homelessness can be a difficult journey, however, and as such this approach works to instil the resilience, skills and confidence people need to effectively manage crisis should it occur again.





Our Approach

There is no doubt that homelessness in Birmingham is exacerbated by

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Delivering our Vision

Oversight

The Housing Birmingham Partnership is responsible for, and committed to, ensuring that Birmingham’s vision to eradicate homelessness becomes reality.

Assurance

The Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Board will seek assurance from the Homelessness Partnership Board on the effectiveness of partnership working in the development and implementation of the Strategy Implementation Plan.

Accountability

The multi-agency and cross sector Homelessness Partnership Board will be responsible for the successful delivery of the Strategy Implementation Plan.

Monitoring

The Strategy Monitoring Team will report progress against the Strategy Implementation Plan to the Homelessness Partnership Board. The Homelessness Partnership Board will undertake a review of progress against the Strategy Implementation Plan on an annual basis up to and including 2021.

Governance Structure

The strategy will be monitored through the following governance structure:



Equality Duty

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities.

As such, our approach has and will continue to be informed by the latest available intelligence when determining key actions associated with the delivery of our strategy vision.

The Homelessness Partnership Board has agreed that the fundamental action is to develop an excellent pathway and secure its adoption by key partners in the city and to ensure that is appropriately resourced in terms of implementation. This requires significant system change, both in terms of how we work together as partners and what we jointly deliver. This Strategy Implementation Plan sets the direction for the next five years. The vision for the strategy is ambitious and there are a lot of things that need to be done. The following actions have been split into whole system and domain specific actions; the detail of which will continue to develop over a period of time.

Key System Actions:
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Domain	Aim	Key Action
Universal Prevention	Ensure people are well informed about their housing options	Adopt a duty to collaborate between all partner agencies to support people to navigate their housing options.
		Develop a universal offer to enable access to high quality, appropriate advice and information on housing options and maintaining wellbeing.
		Communicate the universal offer consistently across the range of partnership agencies, making sure that messages and media are appropriate and relevant to all cohorts of people.
Targeted Prevention	Prevent people from becoming homeless	Develop the capacity and capability of organisations and workforces to competently respond to individuals and families at risk.
		Strong protocols for multi-agency working to support and appropriately refer individuals and families at risk.
		Design and implement early and targeted interventions for groups identified as higher risk of homelessness.
Crisis Prevention and Relief	Assist people as soon as possible if they do become homeless so that their homelessness can be relieved by securing sufficient accommodation and support	Redesign of systems and services to fully implement the Homelessness Reduction Act.
		Strengthen the response of the Street Intervention Team and Outreach service to tackle entrenched street sleeping.
		Reinforce commitments to minimise the use of bed and breakfast provision particularly for families with children and maintain zero usage for 16-17 year olds.
		Establish and enforce standards for the safety and quality of temporary accommodation.

Domain	Aim	Key Action
Homeless Recovery	Support people to recover from their experience and stay out of homelessness	Establish a minimum training standard for specialist support staff to work with therapeutic models such as Psychologically Informed Environments, in a person centred way to aid recovery and build resilience.
		Develop and implement a Homelessness Recovery Charter that is understood and accepted by all relevant agencies.
Sustainable Housing Options	Enable people to secure homes that they can afford and maintain	Ensure that updated policies in relation to housing continue to reflect housing needs in the city.
		Take innovative best practice models and mainstream them e.g. Housing First, modular housing, community led housing organisations, Employment First, and empty homes initiatives.
		Develop robust standards for existing housing provision designated for vulnerable people with care and / or support needs (in time for the April 2020 Supported Housing Financial Reform).
		Progress Selective Licensing options for the city as a means of improving standards in the Private Rented Sector.
		Take steps to support private rented sector landlords to build confidence in providing affordable accommodation for vulnerable groups.
		Take steps to better align Local Housing Allowance rates to the 30th percentile of market rents to increase affordability in the private rented sector.

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