



Homelessness and Housing Solutions Service

Directorate Neighbourhoods

Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy

2020-2025

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Introduction and aims

Our homelessness prevention and rough sleeping strategy (2020-2025) sets out our approach for addressing these complex issues. It is supported by an accompanying report that provides an evidence-base.

The strategy is aligned with our vision of 'To put Tamworth, its people and the local economy at the heart of everything we do'. This sees us working in partnership with other organisations to make Tamworth a better place for people to live, work and visit.

Our four aims are, therefore, to:

- Halve rough sleeping by 2022 (and end rough sleeping by 2027)
- Prevent homelessness by meeting affordable housing and social needs
- Promote independence
- Create and maintain sustainable communities so as to make Tamworth.

These have led to the creation of five priorities for our homelessness prevention and rough sleeping strategy (which are set out in detail in section eight):

- Prevention and early intervention through working with partners and stakeholders
- Develop rapid pathways for rough sleepers
- Improve the supply of and access to affordable and supported housing
- Offer a high quality and innovative service to homeless households and those threatened with homelessness
- Improve health and well-being aspirations.

We are, of course, mindful of the impact of covid-19. We have responded positively and effectively since March 2020 to national initiatives such as the 'everyone in' programme and the 'next steps accommodation' plan (see section five). We recognise, however, that our strategy and its delivery plan have to be flexible to take account of potential future local lockdowns, further surges and a second wave.

Sections two to seven outline the background and context for this strategy. This is followed in section eight by the five priorities, which is the main substantive element. The final three sections (nine to eleven) focus on implementation issues.

Our vision as a service and a council

Foreword from the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Waste Management

The prevention of homelessness in Tamworth remains one of the Council's top priorities.

Following the successful delivery of our previous Homelessness Prevention Strategy, I am pleased to present our updated vision for the next five years.

It remains the case that households who are experiencing homelessness or who are threatened with homelessness are trapped in cycles of deprivation which impact on their health, emotional wellbeing and life chances. The effects on children within households experiencing or threatened with homelessness can be life-long.

Tamworth Borough Council, alongside our partners, will continue to prioritise the reduction in rough sleeping with an aim, supported by Government, to half rough sleeping levels by 2022 and end it completely by 2027. To do this, we must ensure our services are accessible; people know where to go and get help and most importantly feel supported to do so.

Promoting independence amongst our residents is essential to ensure Tamworth can create and maintain sustainable communities.

In a time when resources overall are limited, we remain committed to prioritising this topic. We look forward to working with our teams, residents and partners to achieve the basic goal that everyone has a safe, warm home to wake up to. I am confident that we can deliver this during the strategy lifetime.



Councillor Michelle Cook

Portfolio Holder for Housing and Waste Management

National context

The legislative and policy framework is set out below:



There has been a statutory requirement for local authorities to produce a local homelessness strategy since 2003. The homelessness reduction legislation and guidance has focussed on the prevention approach with a greater emphasis on actions to address the needs of households likely to face homelessness. This has been added to by the Government's rough sleeping strategy (2018) that covers policies and their implementation as well as guidance of the preparation of strategies. There are also two key commitments - halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end rough sleeping by 2027. The focus is threefold – (i) prevention, (ii) intervention and (iii) recovery.

As a result of the covid-19 pandemic, the national lockdown involved council's being required in March 2020 to end rough sleeping at short notice by providing temporary accommodation. This initiative is referred to as the 'everyone in' programme. This has been followed by the 'next steps' programme in summer 2020 to continue to provide temporary accommodation and to develop long-term housing options.

Corporate context

Our homelessness prevention and rough sleeping strategy is aligned with four key plans:

- Local housing strategy (including allocations and lettings)
- Our corporate plan
- Community safety partnership plan
- County-wide community safety agreement.

The local housing strategy incorporates six major relevant themes that are set out in the table below:

Key themes	Relevance for homelessness and rough sleeping
1. Development of 250 new homes per year to meet the needs of the existing population	Provision of new affordable homes addresses the affordability issue that underpins homelessness issues
2. Provide a range of new homes to reflect need and aspiration	
3. Ensure all new homes meet the Tamworth Housing Standard set out in the Climate Change Strategy	High quality housing can help to reduce households' living costs by, for instance, addressing fuel poverty – so reducing the probability of homelessness
4. Improve conditions in the private sector	Ending of an assured tenancy is a major immediate reason for homelessness
5. Improve tenancy sustainment rates	Proactive initiatives to maintain an existing tenancy reduces the likelihood of homelessness
6. Providing a wider range of options for younger people.	Younger people on low incomes are more likely to experience homelessness and rough sleeping (eg sofa surfing)

Our corporate plan (2019-2022) has as its vision to 'put Tamworth, its people and the local economy at the heart of everything we do'. This is underpinned by statements of purpose – four of which relate to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping:

- Help tackle causes and effects of poverty and financial hardship
- Utilise our resources effectively
- Help tackle the causes of inequality and increase opportunities for all residents and businesses
- Help prevent homelessness and help people access suitable housing.

The community safety partnership plan for Tamworth is updated annually. Five of the priorities are relevant for our homelessness and rough sleeping strategy:

- Anti-social behaviour

- Protecting the vulnerable in our communities
- Public place violence and disorder
- Domestic abuse
- Alcohol and substance misuse.

For example, the immediate reasons for homelessness include domestic abuse, while personal circumstance factors include vulnerability and alcohol / substance misuse.

The county-wide community safety agreement includes a focus on piloting a place-based approach to proactively identify vulnerable families and children, so as to be able to make early interventions. This might include actions to prevent a loss of a tenancy, domestic abuse and relationship breakdown. These are significant factors in the immediate reasons for homelessness.

Current climate – covid-19

Covid-19 has had major ramifications for homelessness and rough sleeping services since March 2020. As has already been pointed out, there are two relevant national policies for rough sleeping – (i) ‘everyone in’ initiative and (ii) the ‘next steps’ accommodation proposal.

The ‘*everyone in*’ programme was announced in March 2020. The aim has been to provide safe temporary accommodation. Councils have been required to provide a move-on accommodation plan for those in this programme by 11 June 2020. This included consideration of three options – encouraging people, wherever possible, to return to friends and family, providing sustainable move-on accommodation (eg through housing associations, local authorities and the private rented sector) and delivering temporary accommodation where sustainable housing is not an option.

The ‘*next steps*’ accommodation programme was launched on 18 July 2020. Funding has been available to councils to (i) continue to provide safe accommodation for vulnerable people including rough sleepers and (ii) help people into long-term housing. Bidding for these funds ran until 20 August 2020 to cover property costs and new tenancies. This is part of a larger programme to provide 6,000 long-term safe homes for vulnerable people.

In addition to these two initiatives, national policies have targeted vulnerable people including those potentially faced with homelessness. For instance, there has been the reopening of funding bids for the domestic abuse safe accommodation programme. This is a significant immediate reason for homelessness.

In relation to the private rented sector, a temporary ban on eviction proceedings was extended until 23 August 2020 and then extended again until 20 September 2020. In addition, landlords should provide tenants with six months' notice, excluding serious cases such as anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse. When courts do resume eviction hearings, priority should be given to the most serious cases. The loss of a private rented tenancy is the major immediate reason for homelessness.

As the next section shows, we have successfully responded to these national policies.

Actions to date

Overall, we and our partners have achieved a positive performance, especially compared with national trends. A significant reason for this is the existing local policy and its implementation.

Our favourable performance is further highlighted in feedback from partners. The Government's homelessness and support advisers (HAST) have commented that in relation to rough sleeping, the 'Tamworth position is well managed'. The interviews undertaken with local stakeholders by HQN in autumn 2019 highlighted the effective cooperation at an operational level with one organisation commenting that 'joint working with Tamworth Council delivers a good service for people threatened with homelessness'.

In relation to our existing strategy, there are four key points:

- Little use is made of temporary accommodation (especially bed and breakfast provision) compared to England as a whole – this reflects the emphasis in the strategy of providing suitable and sustainable accommodation
- Low numbers of repeat homelessness cases that shows the successful impact of our relief activities
- Relatively few rough sleepers with little evidence in the data on repeat cases, so demonstrating our collaborative work with partners
- Homelessness acceptance rates are in line with national rates – this shows that we have managed the homelessness crisis adequately.

During the existing strategy period, there have been significant changes in national policy. The most important of these is the focus on prevention through the homelessness reduction legislation and guidance. We have made significant progress on reorganising our services to facilitate a stronger preventative focus, though we recognise that further work is required.

Progress on the existing action plan is contained within Appendix A.

In relation to our performance in addressing the impact of covid-19, we have successfully completed the 'everyone in' programme and have provided accommodation for 16 people comprising bed and breakfast (three people), council temporary provision (five people) and settled accommodation (eight people). Of these 16 people, only four would have been supported on mandatory grounds. The remaining 12 people have been helped on a discretionary basis. This demonstrates our commitment and success. We recognise that we must maintain this momentum to maintain our aims of halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending rough sleeping by 2027.

Local services and partnership working

Our successes have been achieved through effective working with partners and stakeholders at an operation level. Examples that show our commitment to prevention include:

- Supporting Tamworth Cornerstone Housing Association that provides accommodation and help to vulnerable young people (16-25 years old)
- Liaising with Staffordshire County Council to ensure that care leavers are provided with suitable sustainable accommodation and support
- Working with the Starfish Project on night shelter accommodation in the winter since 2016 as part of the national severe weather emergency protocol (SWEPE) programme
- Through the Tamworth Community Safety Partnership, we are actively involved in the Tamworth Vulnerability Partnership that meets weekly to coordinate and manage high risk cases including vulnerable households.

Working with partners and stakeholders is, therefore, a fundamental element of our new strategy.

Our five priorities

Our five priorities are:

- Prevention and early intervention through working with partners and stakeholders
- Develop rapid pathways for rough sleepers
- Improve the supply of and access to affordable and supported housing
- Offer a high quality and innovative service to homeless households and those threatened with homelessness
- Improve health and well-being aspirations.

The details of each of these is set out in the tables below.

Priority one: Prevention and early intervention through working with partners and stakeholders

We have already highlighted the importance of prevention to minimise the risk of homelessness and rough sleeping. A key theme is collaboration with partners and stakeholders.

See also *'improve the supply of and access to affordable and supported housing'*.

Action	Justification and Focus	Additional Information
Pre-action protocols with registered providers / housing associations	Work with our partners to create and implement a local pre-action protocol on possession claims by social landlords	Ministry of Justice guidance updated in January 2020 ¹ It could be included in a revised local authority tenancy strategy
Opening up the Jigsaw Software to third parties	The Staffordshire approach to well-being for people with mental health issues will be rolled out more widely. This will help to address the relatively large number of homeless households citing mental health as a support need	
Protocols for 16/17 years olds / Care leavers	Although the number of young people presenting themselves as homeless or rough sleeping continues to be low, we are aware that there may be a hidden issue (eg sofa-surfing) We will work with Staffordshire County Council (adult social care and childrens services) and other stakeholders (such as Tamworth Cornerstones Housing Association) to identify the scale of the issue and develop and implement a protocol based on best practice	CIH report in 2019 on rethinking allocations includes good practice in meeting the needs of care leavers ² Allocations policy gives them band 1
Review and revise referral duties	We will work with our partners (especially registered providers, third sector agencies, the police and the county council) to ensure that referrals on homelessness and rough	Homelessness Code of Guidance and the legislation on homelessness prevention (see

¹ <https://www.justice.gov.uk/courts/procedure-rules/civil/protocol/pre-action-protocol-for-possession-claims-by-social-landlords>

² <http://www.cih.org/resources/Rethinking%20allocations.pdf>

	sleeping are made, wherever possible, at an early stage	section three) sets out a baseline position
Tenancy-ready schemes	Tenancy-ready schemes can help to ensure that households are able to sustain a tenancy so preventing the possibility of homelessness. We will, therefore, work with each of our registered providers to ensure that schemes are appropriate and similar	CIH report on rethinking allocations (see above) covers this topic. It could be included in a revised local authority tenancy strategy
Drop-in service	Advice and support for households and people at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping Expand the current service at the Tamworth Advice Centre (TAC) to include mental health support / signposting and extend job and training advice and homelessness prevention support	These can be held virtually or in person depending on current guidance
Prevention of evictions	Loss of an assured short hold tenancy is one of the main immediate reasons for the loss of a home / homelessness. One of the impacts of covid-19 in 2021 is likely to centre on households unable to pay rents and, thus, facing eviction Through our housing strategy, we will prioritise working with landlords and tenants to prevent evictions by offering a range of services and / or signpost to other partners on issues such as dispute resolution	Pre-action protocols and tenancy-ready schemes will help to resolve this issue in the social rented sector Government policies are subject to alteration – as of August 2020, the ban on evictions is extended until 20 September. There is a six-month notice period until at least March 2021
Move on pathways	In order to continue to prevent repeat homelessness and rough sleeping, we will develop move on pathways for sustainable accommodation and support needs	

Priority two: Develop rapid pathways for rough sleepers

The focus of this priority is to help rough sleepers (and other vulnerable households) into safe and secure sustainable accommodation. It, therefore, links with the national initiatives on tackling rough sleeping during the covid-19 pandemic - ‘everyone in’ programme and the ‘next steps accommodation’ plan.

Action	Justification and Focus	Additional Information
Data and information	We will continuously analyse data from sources such as the annual rough sleeper count and the severe weather emergency protocol (SWEP) to identify needs and trends	See also priority five
‘Housing first’	Working with partners and stakeholders, we will explore the relevance of ‘housing first’ as a potential pathway for rough sleepers with complex needs and chaotic lifestyles	Data and information will help to identify the nature and scale of need
Provision of emergency accommodation	<p>Although our focus is on prevention, we recognise that there will be a requirement for emergency provision, especially for rough sleepers during winter periods / severe weather</p> <p>There are four specific actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce even further the use of bed and breakfast accommodation • Ensure that our allocations and lettings policy fast tracks rough sleepers into our accommodation and that of registered providers • Continue to support the provision of appropriate emergency accommodation during winter periods / severe weather • Ensure that we have an appropriate range of types of accommodation through asset management and acquisitions – for example, currently, there is a shortage of four-bedroom accommodation for vulnerable families 	A number of these initiatives are cross-referenced with our local housing strategy
Advice and support services	<p>Help and assistance to rough sleepers and vulnerable households to access accommodation and support is fundamental.</p> <p>We, therefore, have three specific actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the third sector / voluntary sector (eg Heart of Tamworth and Manna House) 	See also ‘drop-in services’ in ‘prevention and early intervention through working with partners and stakeholders’

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As part of the community safety partnership, make links with the street warden scheme and local policing teams • Explore the concept of a ‘homeless hub’ based on our homelessness team and its services 	
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Priority three: Improve the supply of and access to affordable and supported housing

This priority links with ‘*prevention and early intervention through working with partners and stakeholders*’. It is also an important theme in our local housing strategy.

Our evidence-base report highlights the diverse needs of households threatened with homelessness or likely to experience rough sleeping. These include households with the age of head of household under 35 years of age, single people, lone parents and family households.

Although, our proposed actions include working with private rented sector, we recognise the challenge of local housing allowance rates that for five years remained unchanged. We, therefore welcome the unfreezing of this rate as well as the temporary change as a result of covid-19. But we acknowledge that landlords are likely to look towards other segments of the housing market. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that the loss of an assured shorthold tenancy is one of the main immediate reasons for homelessness.

Action	Justification and Focus	Additional Information
Nominations to and direct lets by registered providers	<p>Accessing a wider range of social housing will help us meet our prevention and relief duties</p> <p>We will work with our existing registered providers to revise our nominations agreements to improve the range of available social housing</p>	<p>Links to (i) allocations and lettings policies and the development of our local authority tenancy strategy</p> <p>‘Direct lets’ relates to ‘housing first’ (see above)</p>
Planning agreements (national levy)	Availability of new affordable rented housing for homeless households could be enhanced by incorporating a nomination provision into planning agreements	Government’s Planning White Paper proposes replacing planning agreements with a national levy
Supported housing / floating support	Our evidence base shows that homeless households have a diverse range of support needs as well as accommodation	This links with the proposed tenancy-

	We, therefore, will investigate with our partners the potential of putting together a hybrid package of support to help households better access move on accommodation	ready initiative in priority one
Private renting	<p>Improving our offer to landlords opens up opportunities of accessing a wider range of accommodation</p> <p>We have three specific actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use our landlords forum to highlight our offer • Operate a tenancy-ready scheme for households willing to consider the private rented sector • Enhance the role of our temporary accommodation service to include joint working with tenants and landlords 	<p>Our local housing strategy includes a number of additional relevant proposals on addressing issues in the private rented sector</p> <p>Preventing evictions is highlighted under priority one</p>

Priority four: Offer a high quality and innovative service to homeless households and those threatened with homelessness

We have already flagged up a number of initiatives including a drop-in service, tenancy-ready schemes and advice and support services.

This priority, therefore, focuses on two issues:

- Customer access to services
- Quality assurances.

Action	Justification and Focus	Additional Information
Customer access to services	<p>The overall theme of this action is to support vulnerable users to access services so as to (i) prevent homelessness and (ii) relieve homelessness</p> <p>The specific actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting vulnerable households on digital inclusion so as to directly access / use, for example, e-forms and customer portals • Assisting third sector organisations to support their vulnerable customers to access services online 	This is part of a broader customer services agenda focussed on digital inclusion
Quality assurances	Ensuring appropriate access to services (including advice and support) depends on having robust mechanisms for checking quality	

	<p>Our specific actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training (including updates) on issues such as trauma management and conflict resolution • Use of a customer steering group to oversee quality issues • External reviews eg Government's homelessness and support advisers (HAST) 	
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Priority five: Improve health and well-being aspirations

Our evidence base illustrates the important relationship between health and well-being and homelessness and rough sleeping:

- Support needs of people presenting themselves as homeless highlights the significance of (i) mental health and (ii) physical ill-health and disability
- External research findings emphasise the complex relationships – homelessness (and the threat of homelessness) can contribute to health and well-being issues, while health and well-being challenges can lead to homelessness and rough sleeping.

Action	Justification and Focus	Additional Information
Data and information	<p>We need to better understand the relationship between health and well-being and homelessness at a local level so as to develop appropriate responses</p> <p>We will continuously analyse data from sources such as the annual rough sleeper count and the severe weather emergency protocol (SWEP)</p>	See also priority two
Occupational therapy (OT) assessments	We are developing policies and protocols to ensure that OT assessments for customers can be undertaken	
Addressing mental health issues	<p>As part of our response to covid-19, we have flagged up to customers mental health support services such as South Staffordshire Network for Mental Health.</p> <p>We will enhance our joint working with partners on addressing this issue</p>	
Helping vulnerable customers access emergency services	Vulnerable households often require the assurance of being able to contact organisations in times of crisis via our Out of Hours Service (OOH)	This links with priority four

	Working with our community safety partnership, we will promote the Staffordshire Smart Alert service to vulnerable customers	
Helping households in the owner-occupied sector with financial problems	One of the potential impacts of covid-19 is that there could be an increase in mortgage arrears leading to a rise in repossessions. External research shows that this can detrimentally affect health and well-being as well as leading to homelessness	See also priority one action on preventing evictions
Tackling domestic abuse	Domestic abuse is both one of the immediate reasons for homelessness as well as one of the support needs for those presenting themselves as homeless (see evidence base) We will work with our partners in developing and implementing policies to address this issue	The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance is a useful source of information ³

Future direction of travel

Our direction of travel is twofold:

- To continue to deliver and improve services for homeless households and rough sleeping
- To focus even more strongly on the prevention agenda.

The latter centres especially on two of our priorities - prevention and early intervention through working with partners and stakeholders and improve the supply of and access to affordable and supported housing.

We recognise, however, that the covid-19 pandemic has focused our attention since March 2020 on the former. This is illustrated by our satisfactory performance on the 'everyone in' initiative to ensure that rough sleepers were moved off the streets into accommodation.

As we have already pointed out, the consequences of potential local lockdowns, further surges and a second wave will affect the balance between prevention and relief duties.

Our direction of travel is, in addition, linked to our other strategies including the corporate plan, the community safety partnership plan and the local housing strategy. We have highlighted the close relationship between the policies in these plans and our priorities for homeless prevention and rough sleeping in section eight. We, therefore, want to ensure that there is a coordinated approach on moving forward on customer services and health and well-being – priorities four and five respectively.

³ See <https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/>

Governance

- Public sector equality requirements - All activities to give due consideration to the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy- Making Equality Real in Tamworth (MERIT)
- Consultation requirements- An informal consultation was undertaken in Autumn 2019 with key partners and stakeholders. There are important principles set out in chapter 2 of the Homelessness Code of Guidance, however the guidance is yet to be updated by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government⁴.
- Legal duties- It is a requirement of all Local Authorities to produce and publish and Rough Sleeping and Homelessness Strategy⁵
- Financial soundness of the strategy- Details contained within Annex A to be reviewed yearly due to Covid- 19.

Delivering the strategy

As has been indicated in section nine on the direction of travel, the impact and uncertainty of the covid-19 pandemic makes delivery of the homelessness prevention and rough sleeping strategy challenging. Normally, this type of strategy would incorporate an action plan comprising a three-year timescale. However, we are aware from the work of HQN that a number of councils that had published their strategies in 2019 have had to abandon their action plans in response to covid-19. Our approach is, therefore, at this stage limited to a set of five actions covering the next 12 months with a focus on responding to covid-19.

Action Plan 2020/21

Actions	Justification and Descriptions	Links to Priorities (section eight)
Respond to covid-19	Continue to take forward the principles of the 'next steps accommodation' initiative ie (i) continue to provide temporary accommodation and (ii) to provide sustainable long-term accommodation and support	Priority one: Move on accommodation Priority two: Emergency accommodation
Address the requirements of the severe weather emergency	Ensure that suitable emergency accommodation is available for rough sleepers and other vulnerable households	Priority two: Emergency accommodation

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-2-homelessness-strategies-and-reviews>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-2-homelessness-strategies-and-reviews>

protocol (SWEP)	This needs to take account of the health and safety requirements of social distancing etc. Night shelter-type provision in the form of dormitory accommodation and the sharing of facilities is, thus, unsuitable	
Prevention of evictions	One of the impacts of covid-19 in 2021 is likely to centre on a growing number of households unable to pay rents and, thus, facing eviction We will develop policies and procedures to work with landlords and tenants to resolve difficulties through, for example, dispute resolution mechanisms, mediation. Agreements between tenant and Landlords.	Priority one: Prevention of evictions
Helping households in the owner-occupied sector with financial problems	One of the potential impacts of covid-19 is that there could be an increase in mortgage arrears leading to a rise in repossessions in 2021 We will develop policies and procedures to work with lenders and homeowners to resolve difficulties	Priority five: Helping households in the owner-occupied sector with financial problems
Helping vulnerable customers access emergency services	We will work with our partners and stakeholders to develop a one-stop service for vulnerable customers threatened with homelessness or who are homeless	Priority one: Drop in service Priority two: Advice and support services Priority five: Helping vulnerable customers access emergency services