



Cheshire West & Chester Council

Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020

Annual Review 2016



Building futures, opening doors



Cheshire West
and Chester

1. Background

1.1 Cheshire West and Chester Council's current Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020 was published in April 2015.

1.2 The Homelessness Act 2002 placed a duty on Local Authorities to periodically review and update their strategy in order to demonstrate how it provides homelessness, housing advice and support services.

1.3 This first annual review of the Strategy should be read in conjunction with the original document.

1.4 The annual review is based on consultation with a range of stakeholders from the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group and aims to:

- consider achievements against the action plan
- assess whether the existing priorities are still appropriate
- identify current and future challenges affecting homelessness
- identify areas where further work is required to deliver the strategy
- amend the action plan to ensure delivery of the strategy.

1.5 The annual review assesses whether the existing priorities are still appropriate and fit with current trends in homelessness, legal changes, financial constraints and service requirements. The Homelessness Strategy 2015-20120 identifies three strategic priorities:

- Reduce levels of homelessness and prioritise prevention
- End the use of bed and breakfast and improve temporary accommodation
- Improve access to permanent accommodation and support

Current levels of homelessness

2.1 As a result of the Homelessness Strategy and the Council's commitment to homelessness prevention and focused work, over the last year statutory homelessness has reduced in Cheshire West and Chester and homeless prevention remains high.

2.2 Figure 1 and Table 1 below show that over the last 12 months the number of homeless applications has gone down from 329 to 265. The number accepted has gone up slightly and is now 31% of all decisions compared to 27% last year. There is an increase in the number of no priority need decisions which indicates that more single people are making homeless applications than previous years.

Figure 1: Homelessness Presentations

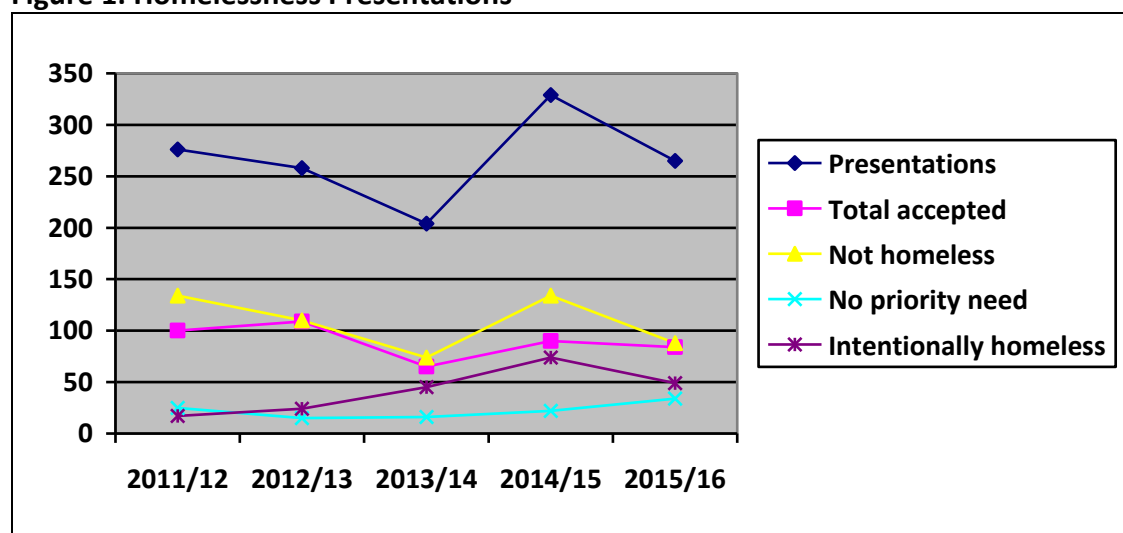


Table 1: Homeless decisions recorded on P1E

Year	Ineligible	Accepted	Not homeless	No priority need	Intentionally homeless	TOTAL
2011/12	0	100	134	25	17	276
2012/13	0	109	110	15	24	258
2013/14	4	65	74	16	45	204
2014/15		90	134	22	74	329
2015/16	10	84	88	34	49	265

2.3 Table 2 shows that the main household type accepted as homeless is now single males and accounts for 38% of accepted cases. This figure has been increasing since 2011 when it was only 6%. When added to single females the number of single applicants accepted is 57% of the total which is extremely high compared to previous years (18% in 2011). The other accepted cases are mostly female lone parents although this figure is much lower than previous years and the number of couples with children accepted is at an all-time low of just 6% compared to 24% in 2012.

Household Type	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Couples with children	20	26	8	11	5
Lone parent (male)	8	5	5	6	3
Lone parent (female)	46	35	19	26	25
One person household (male)	6	14	18	30	32
One person household (female)	12	18	9	10	16
Other households	8	12	8	7	3
TOTAL	100	110	65	90	84

2.4 Table 3 shows that the main reason for homelessness for accepted cases is still the termination of assured shorthold tenancies, although this figure has gone down compared to previous years. Violent and non-violent breakdown of relationships are the next biggest reason for homeless, which is similar to last year. 'Other reasons' for homelessness account for 18% last year which is higher than previous years. This reason should only be used when none of the others fit but some of the reasons listed below could be considered as 'loss of other rented' instead and others are not reasons for homelessness. This will be addressed by the manager for consistency and understanding within the team.

- Medical discharge from HM Armed Force
- Supported accommodation closed
- Unaffordable private rented property
- Landlord being repossessed
- Sale of house to pay debts
- Sleeping rough
- Suicide attempt
- Gave up tenancy due to medical issues
- Grandparent could no longer act as guarantor
- Dad imprisoned
- Lodger served with NTQ
- Property unsuitable (not adapted)

Main reason for homelessness	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Parents no longer able to accommodate	14	7	9	11	5
Relatives/friends can no longer accommodate	9	9	5	12	5
Non-violent breakdown of relationship	5	1	2	8	8
Violent breakdown involving partner	8	15	2	8	9
Violent breakdown with associated persons	2	4	1	2	0
Racially motivated violence	0	0	0	0	0
Other forms of violence	1	5	1	3	5
Racially motivated harassment	0	0	0	0	0
Other forms of harassment	4	4	1	2	4
Mortgage arrears	13	11	8	4	1

Rent arrears on LA/public sector dwelling	0	0	0	0	1
RSL/housing association dwelling	0	0	0	0	2
Private sector dwelling	5	2	2	0	1
Termination of assured shorthold tenancy	24	34	12	22	19
Other reasons for loss of rented	1	3	1	2	2
Required to leave NASS accommodation	0	0	0	0	0
Left prison	2	2	3	1	2
Left hospital	1	0	0	1	4
Left other or LA care	0	0	1	0	1
Left HM-Forces	0	1	1	3	0
Other reason	11	12	14	11	15
TOTAL	100	110	65	90	84

2.5 Table 4 shows that the main priority need category is dependent children (38%) but this has been steadily declining since 2011 (71%). The number of accepted cases with a physical disability has increased from 10 (10%) in 2011 to 22 (26%) in 2015/2016. The number accepted with a mental health problem has increased from 6 (6%) to 15 (18%) in 2015/2016.

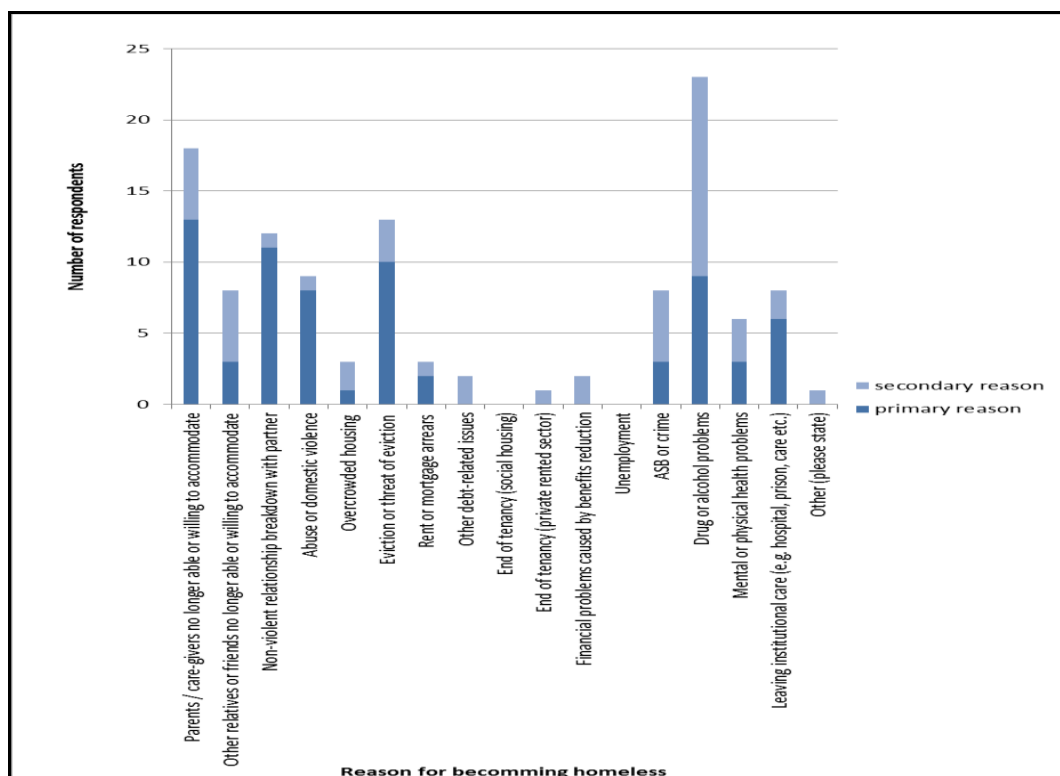
Priority Need	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Emergency	0	0	4	0	1
Children	71	66	32	45	32
Pregnant	6	4	4	2	2
16/17 year olds	1	3	1	3	0
Care leaver	1	2	1	1	2
Old age	2	1	0	0	0
Physical disability	10	11	9	15	22
Mental disability	6	8	11	18	15
Drug dependency	0	0	0	0	0
Alcohol dependency	0	0	0	0	2
Asylum seeker	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	4	0	0	1
Care leaver	0	1	0	0	0
HM forces	0	1	0	0	0
Custody	0	0	0	0	1
Violence	0	9	2	6	6
Domestic Violence	3	7	0	4	3
TOTAL	100	110	65	90	84

2.6 A recent Homeless Health Needs Audit conducted by Cheshire West and Chester's Public Health team looked into the health needs of single homeless people in the area and their experience of services. 69 people who were either homeless or had recently experienced homelessness were interviewed and focus groups were carried out with clients in three different locations - Richmond Court in Chester, The Harold Tomlins Day Centre in Chester and The Salvation Army Church in Northwich.

These focus groups looked at general perceptions of health and experience of services. Of those surveyed:

- 93% of respondents reported physical health problems
- 87% smoke
- 96% respondents reported mental health problems
- 81% had depression
- 59% had an anxiety disorder or phobia
- 65% use drugs or alcohol to help cope with their mental health
- 41% had or was recovering from an alcohol problem
- 77% had taken drugs in the past year
- 33% had or were recovering from a drug problem
- 70% had been to A&E in the past 12 months
- 54% had been admitted to hospital in the past 12 months
- 55% eat less than two meals a day
- 70% eat less than two portions of fruit and veg a day

2.7 The survey results revealed a higher prevalence of mental health and substance misuse when benchmarked against other LAs nationally and very high levels of institutional backgrounds such as prison or care being linked with homelessness. The survey asked respondents to identify the primary and secondary reasons for them becoming homeless the most recent time which is shown below:



2.8 Since the publication of the Homelessness Strategy in 2015 the Housing Solutions service has been redesigned. The new service is called West Cheshire Homes and they provide housing advice, the statutory homelessness service and they also administer the housing register which gives an indication of housing need in the

area. There are currently the following numbers of households on the register:

- Band A – 128
- Band B – 1061
- Band C – 2167
- Band D – 559 (over 55 with no housing need)

2.9 Of those on the register the following are considered to be homeless:

- Band A statutory homeless – 19
- Band B homeless prevention priority applied – 136
- Band C homeless prevention non priority applied – 243

2.10 Table 5 shows that the number of households placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation is still very high at 218 placements, although not as high as last year which was 233. The average length of time in Bed and Breakfast has increased to 5.27 weeks which is the highest level recorded and indicates a lack of alternative temporary accommodation or supported housing for single people with complex needs.

Year	Number placed in B&B	Discretionary B&B Placements	Total	Average length of stay in weeks
2011/12	132	11	143	1.66
2012/13	177	30	207	3.96
2013/14	139	11	150	4.80
2014/15	217	16	233	3.91
2015/16	200	18	218	5.27

2.11 Table 6 below shows the number of households in temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast and the proportion in bed and breakfast on the last night of each month during 2015/2016.

MONTH	All Temporary Accommodation	B&B	Discretionary	% of TA placements in B&B
April	46	18	1	39.13%
May	40	14	0	35.00%
June	43	18	0	41.86%
July	46	24	0	52.17%
Aug	45	25	0	55.56%
Sept	47	27	0	57.45%
Oct	44	24	0	54.55%
Nov	44	27	2	61.36%
Dec	42	23	0	54.76%
Jan	32	13	7	40.63%

Feb	41	18	0	43.90%
Mar	42	19	0	45.24%

2.12 The Council currently has 34 units of temporary accommodation:

- Gorse Hill, Chester 12 units
- Brook Street, Chester 5 units
- The Lymes, Northwich 8 units
- Dispersed units, Ellesmere Port 9 units

2.13 Table 7 shows that the number of cases of homelessness that have been prevented by the Council has gone up to 1433 which is the highest level recorded for 4 years. The main reason for this is the relocation of housing benefit staff who now work more closely with West Cheshire Homes and prevent homelessness through Discretionary Housing Payments. The demand on West Cheshire Homes is still very high and 3185 advice cases were opened last year in spite of ongoing pressures on the team to reduce costs. The current economic climate and the impact of welfare reform means that the demand on the service will remain high and preventing homelessness will still be a priority.

Table 7: P1E number of Homelessness Preventions		
Year	Number of cases opened	Cases where homelessness prevented
2011/12	4358	1593
2012/13	4467	1429
2013/14	3859	1248
2014/15	3349	1080
2015/16	3185	1433

2.14 Table 8 shows the positive action and prevention tools used to prevent homelessness. 70% of preventions are achieved through finding alternative accommodation rather than enabling households to remain in their existing home. Most households are helped through the housing register, Discretionary Housing Payments, finding private rented accommodation. Referrals to supported housing are still high compared to other tools but have fallen significantly over the last 4 years and now only account for 10% of preventions compared to 22% in 2012. This is down to fewer spaces in supported housing, increased demand from single people, lack of move on, and difficulties with monitoring progress since the Gateway referral process was removed.

Table 8: Positive action and prevention tools recorded on the P1E					
Type of Prevention	Year				
	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
(A) Household able to remain in					

existing home as a result of:					
Mediation	25	29	32	29	9
Conciliation	70	19	12	14	8
Financial payments	8	5	0	2	1
Debt advice	73	15	4	2	0
Resolving Housing Benefit issues	11	14	9	12	8
Resolving rent arrears	14	26	9	12	11
Sanctuary Scheme	187	123	119	104	103
Crisis intervention	10	2	2	0	0
Negotiation in private sector	33	24	17	19	8
Other assistance in the private sector or social rented	71	37	32	40	37
Mortgage interventions	34	22	16	2	0
Other (DHP)	86	45	28	17	246
Total A	622	361	280	253	431
(B) Household assisted to obtain alternative accommodation by:	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Hostel or HMO	86	34	35	19	10
Private sector with incentive	237	220	162	131	88
Private sector without incentive	180	238	242	157	93
Friends or relatives	35	19	20	12	4
Supported accommodation	215	320	214	197	140
Social housing management move	2	1	3	0	2
Social Housing part 6 offer	157	174	161	14	398
Negotiation with RSL	44	48	124	403	40
Low-cost home ownership	1	0	0	1	1
Other (DHP)	14	14	6	1	226
Total B	971	1068	967	935	1002
Total A and B	1593	1429	1247	1188	1433

2.15 Table 9 below shows that nationally across England rough sleeping has gone up by 30% and is an issue in all areas, not just London. The 2015 Rough Sleeper Count last year recorded 5 rough sleepers in Cheshire West and Chester, which was the same as the previous year.

Table 9: National Rough Sleeper Data

Local Authority	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Number of Households 2015 ('000s)	2015 Rough Sleeping Rate (per 1,000 households)
England	1,768	2,181	2,309	2,414	2,744	3,569	22,940	0.16
<i>% change from previous year</i>		23%	6%	5%	14%	30%		
London	415	446	557	543	742	940	3,491	0.27
<i>% change from previous year</i>		7%	25%	-3%	37%	27%		
<i>% of England total</i>	23%	20%	24%	22%	27%	26%		
Rest of England	1,353	1,735	1,752	1,871	2,002	2,629	19,449	0.14
<i>% change from previous year</i>		28%	1%	7%	7%	31%		
<i>% of England total</i>	77%	80%	76%	78%	73%	74%		
Cheshire East UA	0	3	3	4	12	0	164.2	0.00
Halton UA	0	0	0	2	1	1	54.6	0.02
Cheshire West & Chester	2	4	3	0	5	5	143.9	0.03
Warrington UA	7	11	7	11	5	5	88.9	0.06
Wirral	4	5	7	7	5	8	143.2	0.06

2.16 Table 10 shows that last year the number of rough sleepers recorded in Cheshire West and Chester had gone down by 3 to 155 but compared to previous years the figure is high and reflects the national trend of an increase in rough sleeping. Rough sleepers are recorded by the FENW Outreach Team but included in these figures are people they see on the streets in Chester who are not always homeless and often choose to go to Chester to engage in street activity. Some have accommodation but refuse to access it. Some people recorded by the Outreach Team may be seen more than once during the month, but they will only be counted once for that month. If they are seen again in following months they will be counted again in the month or months they are seen.

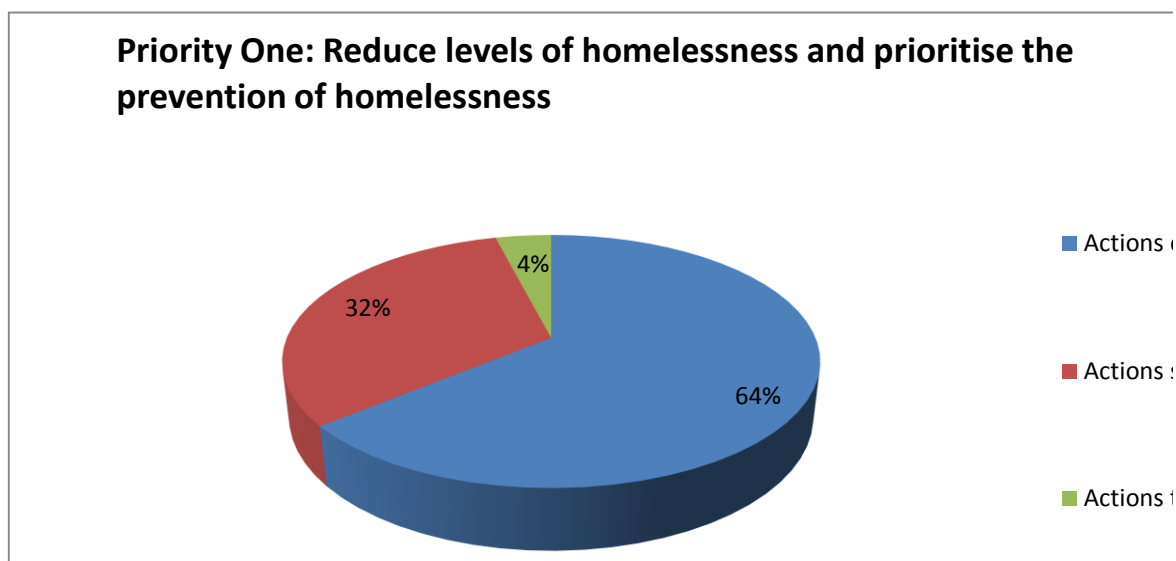
Table 10	
Year	Total number of Rough Sleepers found during outreach sessions.
2012/13	111
2013/14	91
2014/15	158
2015/16	155

Our Strategic Priorities

Priority One - Reduce levels of homelessness and prioritise prevention

3.1 The homelessness figures show us that last year statutory homeless applications went down significantly compared to the previous year. Homelessness preventions are the highest recorded for 4 years.

3.2 Reducing levels of homelessness and prioritising prevention was identified as a priority within the Homelessness Strategy. These findings show that focused prevention does work and the Council will continue to support this priority for the next 12 months of the Strategy. Progress against this priority within the action plan has been very high and 68% completed as shown by the pie chart below.



3.3 Key achievements against this priority include:

- The Housing Solutions service has been redesigned and restructured to improve the customer journey with the creation of West Cheshire Homes. The new service will reduce telephone demand on the team by enabling customers to self-serve on-line and will improve the application process and access to permanent housing through the housing register.
- Homelessness prevention tools, especially those enabling households to remain in their current accommodation, have been reviewed and staff have been trained on the P1E definition and how the tools can be used in practice. Staff have also been trained on the prevention fund and how it can be used effectively by the team.
- The 'No Second Night Out' project was reviewed. Commissioned services provided by FENW now ensure services are available to prevent rough sleeping or support rough sleepers to obtain suitable accommodation through similar provision.
- Services to rough sleepers have been reviewed and a report was published in December 2015 (which also considered the evaluation report by Neil Morland Consultants). There have been improved services to rough sleepers

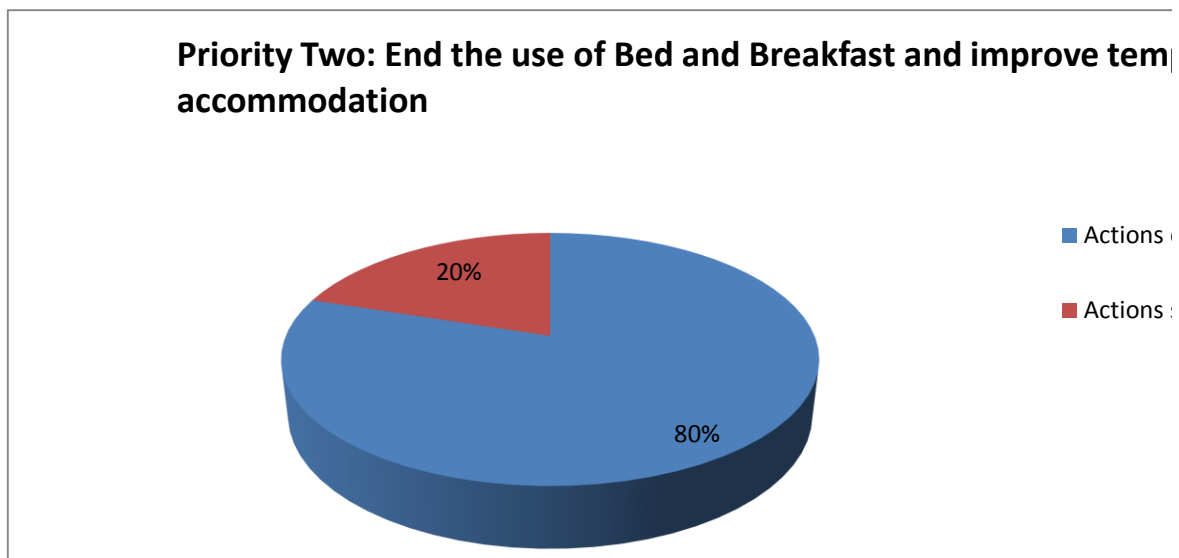
and further work is ongoing in this area, for example, working with Commissioning to ensure that rough sleepers and other vulnerable groups receive the support and accommodation they need.

- Cheshire West and Chester's Health and Wellbeing Board has signed up to homeless charity St Mungo's Broadway's 'Charter for Homeless Health'. Important aspects of this work will include accessing local data, consulting local people and sharing good practice. By signing the Charter the Health and Well Being Board will commit to:
 - Identify need (single homeless people only)
 - Work with people who are homeless and homelessness services to include the health needs of homeless people in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA).
 - Provide leadership to improve homeless health
 - For the Director of Public Health, or another local health leader, to drive efforts to tackle health inequalities affecting people who are homeless and to promote integration and cross-boundary work.
 - Commission to ensure health related services are provided
 - Make sure that that local health services are welcoming and accessible and meet the needs of people who are homeless.
- To identify need Cheshire West and Chester's Public Health team have successfully conducted a Homeless Health Needs Audit which looked into the health needs of single homeless people in the area and their experience of services. 69 people who were either homeless or had recently experienced homelessness were interviewed and focus groups were carried out with clients in three different locations
- A new working group has been created to discuss and identify the links between hospital discharge and homelessness and to develop a new Hospital Discharge Protocol.
- The Complex Dependency Programme has been set up following a successful bid for Government funding. £5 million was awarded to the Council to look at opportunities to roll out integrated services to adults with complex needs with no dependent children. A six month pilot is working with a cohort of 100 adults who are already known to a range of partners, including West Cheshire Homes, and two officers from the team have been seconded to this project as support workers.
- The Housing Strategy Team has developed a Vulnerable and Older People's Plan (the 12 week consultation period runs from 25 April 2016 to 17 July 2016). The draft plan explains the Council's vision and aims for promoting a suitable range of accommodation for vulnerable and older people living in the borough, helping to support them to live healthier lives and be as independent as possible. The plan has been developed in collaboration with key partners and stakeholders and takes into account feedback received from an earlier consultation about accommodation for vulnerable and older people. The plan proposes a number of priorities and actions to help ensure that older and vulnerable people living in the borough have the opportunity to access a suitable and sustainable home that meets their needs and helps them to maintain their health and independence.

- The role and membership of the Homelessness Steering Group has been reviewed.
- The Homelessness Strategy has had its first annual review

Priority Two - End the use of Bed and Breakfast and improve temporary accommodation

3.4 Although the numbers in Bed and Breakfast have reduced over the last year the figure is still high and this should therefore continue to be a priority for the Council. Improving and increasing temporary accommodation will help reduce numbers in Bed and Breakfast which is expensive and unsuitable for all customers particularly those with complex needs. Progress against this priority within the action plan has been very good and 68% completed and is shown in the pie chart below. There are only 6 actions against this priority. 4 have been completed, one started, and one is being removed (the development of a specialist role within the team for temporary accommodation).



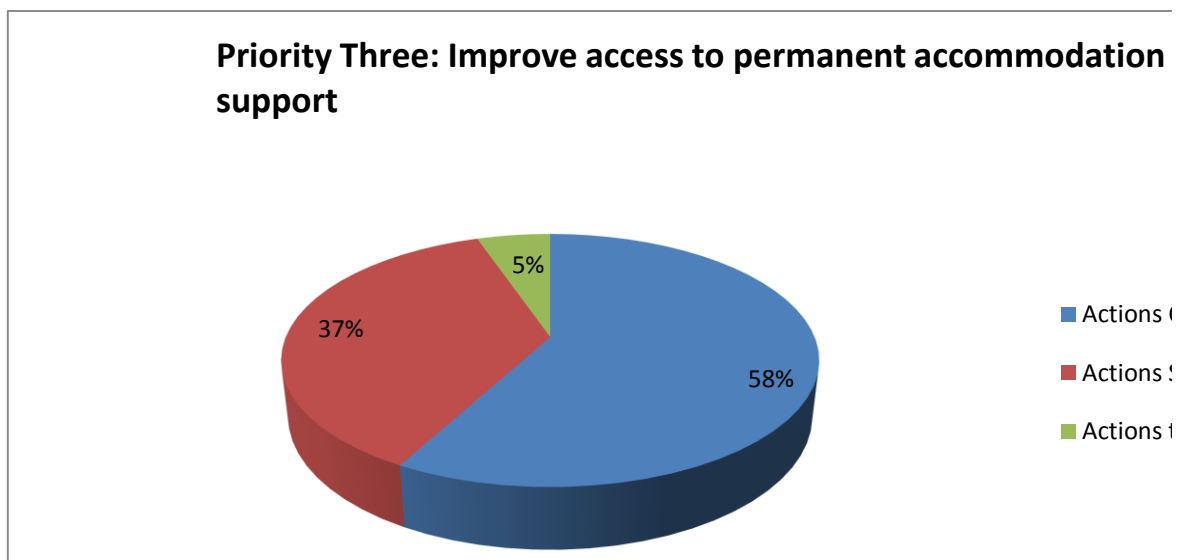
3.5 Key achievements against this priority include:

- To meet the increasing demand for single person households 5 additional units of temporary accommodation have been provided in Chester by Muir Group and 1 additional dispersed unit by Plus Dane.
- Support in temporary accommodation has been reviewed. Support at The Lymes and Brook Street is now provided through the HRS contract.
- Homeless applications are taken from households placed in bed and breakfast that day or the next working day
- Care leavers age 16 to 18 are being assisted with social housing to avoid the high costs for the Council associated with private residential placements. So far 17 care leavers have been housed through the scheme and work is ongoing to encourage RPs outside the area to support this work.
- A government funded Youth Homelessness Adviser will be working with the team to specifically look at the issues of homeless 16 and 17 year olds in

conjunction with colleagues from Children's Services and the Youth Offending Team.

Priority Three - Improve access to permanent accommodation and support

3.6 Accessing permanent accommodation is still an issue for some customers, particularly those who are in supported housing projects and or may be excluded from the housing register. This leads to 'bed blocking' in supported housing and has an adverse effect on the numbers of customers in bed and breakfast who may be waiting for a place in a supported housing project. Work has started this year on addressing some of these issues as well as making the private rented sector more accessible. This work needs to continue and improving access to permanent accommodation and support will continue to be a priority for the Council within the Homelessness Strategy. Progress against this priority within the action plan has been good in the first 12 months and is 58% complete as shown in the pie chart below:



3.7 Key achievements against this priority include:

- A new 'Private Landlord Service' has been developed and is about to be launched which offers a range of incentives for private landlords that correlate to the landlord's level of involvement with the customer. A three month pilot will introduce Bronze, Silver and Gold standards. The Gold Standard provides accredited landlords with a premium service offer when they house a West Cheshire Homes customer. The service will be delivered by West Cheshire Homes.
- The Bond Scheme has been reviewed and an Enhanced Bond Scheme will provide a 2 month bond to accredited landlords who agree to house more vulnerable customers.
- A register of reputable landlords with good quality properties has been developed.

- A new Empty Homes Strategy has been adopted to bring empty properties back into use. A new Empty Homes Matching Service has also been formerly launched which brings together accredited landlords who wish to purchase empty homes with owners who wish to sell an empty home.
- The Council was successful in a bid for domestic abuse funding
- The Council has started a house building programme of 230 properties in Neston (8 units), Winsford (130 units) and Ellesmere Port (92 units). Work starts in Winsford this month (July 2016).

4 Challenges ahead

4.1 The Council is committed to the aims and priorities within the Homelessness Strategy but still faces the overall challenges of economic austerity and reductions in public sector funding. Over the next few years there may be further demands on our service but with decreased budgets.

4.2 Customers will continue to be affected by welfare reform and particularly the introduction of Universal Credit which could lead to an increased demand on our service. Work will need to continue with partners to ensure that customers are supported and homelessness is prevented, particularly when housing benefit is paid directly to claimants. In addition private sector landlords will need advice and support as they may feel that their income stream is at risk when rent is no longer paid directly to them.

4.3 The Government published the Housing and Planning Act 2016 on 24 May 2016 which includes a new broader definition of affordable housing which includes Starter Homes. As a consequence, Local Plan Affordable Housing policies and the underpinning viability and housing needs evidence base will require updating to reflect the impact of Starter Homes – and potentially other forms of Affordable Housing.

4.4 The Government is considering introducing a prevention duty for English local authorities, similar to the one in Wales already, making prevention work a statutory duty. In spite of the good prevention work already being done with non-priority groups West Cheshire Homes will need to prepare for this with new processes, and closer working with 3rd sector agencies.

4.5 The amount of rent that housing benefit will cover for social housing tenants will be capped from 1 April 2018 to the relevant LHA rate (the rate paid to private tenants on Housing Benefit). This will apply to social tenancies including temporary accommodation. A policy delay of 12 months has been applied to supported and sheltered housing until 1st April 2017. The move means that housing benefit for single people in social housing under 35 without children will be restricted to shared accommodation rates. They will only be able to claim the same amount of benefit as a private tenant is able to claim for a room in a shared house

5. Ongoing priorities

5.1 The Council will continue to work smartly and efficiently by prioritising prevention work as well as building on our existing partnerships for support.

5.2 The Council is committed to the 'Gold Standard Challenge' a peer review scheme designed to help local authorities deliver high quality, efficient and cost effective homelessness services. The Government has set 10 challenges for local authorities to achieve and the Council is committed to achieving them and they are all included in the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan.

5.3 The Housing Strategy Team will continue to work closely with commissioners to ensure that homeless households receive the support and accommodation they need.

5.4 The Council will continue to work with registered providers to secure accommodation to meet the needs of customers, particularly those with complex needs, or those who may be excluded from the housing register.

5.5 West Cheshire Homes will continue to work with Children's Services to ensure that 16 and 17 year olds are not placed in Bed and Breakfast or unsuitable accommodation.

5.6 The Council's Health and Wellbeing Board will be presented with the findings of a Homeless Health Matters Survey in July 2016 and any recommendations from this should be included in the Homelessness Strategy going forward.

5.7 The number of achievements over the last 12 months has been recognised within this review but these have only been possible through effective partnership working from a range of organisations working with people in housing need or facing homelessness.