

Cheshire West and Chester Council

Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020

DRAFT

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Foreword

Cheshire West and Chester Council is pleased to present a new Homelessness Strategy which sets out the priorities and future actions for tackling homelessness over the next five years.

The Council is committed to reducing and preventing homelessness. There have been a number of achievements in the delivery of homelessness services since the last Strategy was published in 2010 but the Council recognises that some significant challenges lie ahead. Future levels of homelessness will be influenced by the wider economic and social environment and tackling these issues come at a time when the Council is faced with making significant budget savings.

The priorities within the Homelessness Strategy are based upon the findings of the recent Homelessness Review 2014. The Homelessness Review considered locally the current and likely future levels of homelessness, an audit of services available to the homeless, and the resources available to tackle homelessness. There are many key findings in the Homelessness Review but it is very clear that a focus on prevention is the key to tackling homelessness and makes financial sense. Therefore continuing to develop our excellent work around prevention will be a priority for the next five years along with improving access to accommodation, particularly in the private rented sector. At a time when the use of Bed and Breakfast is very high we will also prioritise ways of reducing this and developing flexible temporary accommodation options.

The Council cannot achieve these priorities in isolation and partnership working is fundamental to the Homelessness Strategy in order to prevent homelessness and offer sustainable housing options. We hope to continue to work closely with partner agencies to help us deliver the Strategy successfully. The Strategy covers April 2015 to March 2020 and will be monitored and reviewed regularly during this time to ensure that the strategic aims are achieved.

Introduction

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities to carry out a review of homelessness in their area and then formulate and publish a Homelessness Strategy based on the findings from the review. This strategy has been written in accordance with the legislation and statutory guidance.

The Cheshire West and Chester Homelessness Review 2014 is a published document which should be read in conjunction with this Strategy. This Strategy focuses on the key findings from the Homelessness Review turning them into priorities for the Council along with a series of actions which will be delivered during the next five years.

Achievements since the last Homelessness Strategy

Cheshire West and Chester has made a great deal of progress since the previous strategy was published in 2010. Six priorities were developed at this time around prevention, delivering an Enhanced Housing Options service, ending rough sleeping, addressing current market conditions, improving supported accommodation and improving access to permanent housing.

Some of the achievements over the last five years have been:

- A continuing focus on homelessness prevention and a housing options approach has proved successful as the number of homelessness preventions has remained very high. Last year 1248 households had their homelessness prevented.
- In spite of the economic climate the number of homelessness applications has fallen over the last three years.
- Enhanced Housing Options government funding of £240,000 helped fund new posts until March 2011 specialising in employment, money advice and resettlement. This gave customers high quality housing advice with better links to employment and led to an increase in homelessness preventions. Some of these posts were funded by the Council beyond 2011. The EHO programme has led to a greater understanding of the root causes of homelessness and has shaped the service that we deliver today.
- In April 2013 'No Second Night Out' was launched to help rough sleepers. This joint service with Cheshire East offers a bed to people new to the streets for up to 72 hours. So far 669 rough sleepers have been supported by the service from the Cheshire area.
- In November 2012 Foundation Enterprise North West was awarded a five year contract to deliver homelessness provision across Cheshire West and Chester for single homeless people over 18. This includes emergency accommodation and a rough sleeper outreach service. FENW also provide safe seats allowing service users to get off the streets and sleep in a safe place. Since November 2012 4,503 safe seat places have been provided allowing individuals at risk of rough sleeping to access a place of safety hosted by professional staff. The number of people found rough sleeping in the area has gone down as a result of these services.
- A successful application for funding by Forum Housing has enabled a new project to support homeless young people in shared private rented accommodation. Support is provided to both tenant and landlord to help the

young person sustain the tenancy. This project has now secured further funding to continue work in this area.

- A successful application for funding by the crime reduction charity Nacro helped set up a short term project across Cheshire helping offenders, especially PPOs (persistent and perpetual offenders) and those responsible for high volumes of crime, access accommodation in the private rented sector. Nacro were able to recruit landlords by offering a package of incentives and support the client ensuring they had the skills to live independently and were diverted from further offending.
- In April 2012 the Housing Support Gateway was introduced as a centralised system for referrals to supported housing projects and floating support. Since the launch (up to 31 May 2014) there have been 2642 referrals which show a high demand for supported housing and floating support.
- On the 1 October 2011 Housing Solutions launched the Housing Solutions Advice Line. This is the first point of contact for customers with a housing issue wishing to speak to a Housing Solutions Adviser. The Advice Line is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday 9am to 5pm and Wednesday 1pm to 5pm. Over 42,000 calls were received in the first year which was higher than anticipated and indicated a growing level of need across the borough. This rose to 49,667 in 2013/2014.
- On 1 October 2011 the Housing Options service delivered by Chester and District Housing Trust was brought in-house to deliver an integrated and consistent service across the borough. The service was reconfigured to focus on the prevention of homelessness which has continued to deliver excellent results.
- On the 1 October 2013 the management of the housing register was transferred to Cheshire West and Chester Council's Housing Solutions service. Trust Homechoice (Choice Based Lettings) continues to be a successful partnership with the Council, Chester and District Housing Trust, Plus Dane Housing and Weaver Vale Housing Trust.
- In October 2012 a joint protocol was agreed between Housing Solutions, Children's Social Care and Youth Offending Services. The protocol aims to promote and consolidate joint working between Housing Solutions, Youth Offending Services, Children's Social Care and key partners to ensure the provision of support, advice, and housing for young people in Cheshire West who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The protocol is

particularly important when dealing with homeless 16 and 17 year olds.

- Customer Satisfaction surveys completed by 500 Housing Solutions customers between April 2012 and March 2014 showed that overall satisfaction with the service is extremely high.
- Working in partnership with key organisations that provide services for homeless households or those threatened with homelessness has been fundamental in helping the Council achieve the strategic priorities of the Homelessness Strategy 2010-2015. The successful Homelessness Steering Group made up of senior managers from these key organisations has not only monitored the Action Plan over the five years but along with other statutory and voluntary agencies has helped identify priorities and actions for this new strategy.

Looking forward, Cheshire West and Chester acknowledges that there are still some considerable challenges ahead to tackle homelessness. With fundamental changes in the housing market and in social and national policy changes we will continue to need to work closely with our partners to prevent and tackle homelessness in the Borough.

Consultation

Consultation has been central to the development of this strategy and as part of the review process was carried out with staff, partners and customers.

Thoughts and comments from the Housing Solutions team were captured in a focus group and staff workshop. From these two sessions over 100 ideas were generated by the team.

Staff felt that access to the private rented sector should be improved, money and benefit specialists should work within the team, the provision and management of temporary accommodation should be reviewed, processes around enquiries and phone calls need improving, the issue of move-on in supported housing, particularly for young people, needs addressing.

Customers who were either homeless or had experienced homelessness in the past were also part of the consultation process and attended a focus group and completed a questionnaire.

Customers thought that the Housing Solutions team were professional, friendly, informative and helpful and provided an excellent service. They commended the services for young people but did not like the fact that there was a waiting list for Forum Housing and the FIRM project. Customers would like debt and money advice within the team, more suitable temporary accommodation. They were not happy with the time it takes to get through on the phones, not being able to have an appointment with an adviser and the length of the housing application form.

Members of the Homelessness Forum, Supported Accommodation Group and Third Sector Assembly attended a consultation event and completed a questionnaire.

Partners thought that the key strengths of the Housing Solutions service were that it was accessible and fair, staff are approachable and supportive and meet the needs of the customer, and that the prevention services are very good, particularly when referring clients with mortgage and rent arrears. They felt that the team had a good relationship with housing providers.

Partners did feel that there were areas for improvement and gaps in provision. The service improvements would be around answering more calls on the Advice Line and being available all day every day, being more accessible in Northwich and Winsford, more appointments with advisers, improving the service for customers who do not have access to phones or computers, increasing staff levels and staff training. Partners also saw the importance of increasing the number of private rented properties, reviewing the Bond Scheme and increasing the mediation service for young people.

In terms of gaps in provision partners felt that there needed to be more suitable accommodation for people under 35 and more support for those with complex needs. Affordable housing in both the social and private sector needs increasing.

Our strategic priorities for the next five years

The Homelessness Review 2014 highlighted a number of issues to be addressed within this new Strategy. Given the resources available to tackle homelessness it is therefore necessary to identify our priorities, these are based on the findings of the Homelessness Review as well as the Government's Gold Standard benchmark for local authorities (from 'Making Every Contact Count, A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness' August 2012). This report clearly states that 'there is no place for homelessness in the 21st century'.

There are 10 challenges in the Gold Standard for local authorities which are:

1. To adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
2. To actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
3. To offer a Housing Options prevention service to all clients including written advice
4. To adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative
5. To have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support
6. To develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both client and landlord
7. To actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
8. To have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness, reviewed annually to be responsive to emerging needs
9. To not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
10. To not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and for no longer than 6 weeks

Cheshire West and Chester Council has already achieved some of the Gold Standard challenges and going forward will ensure that they all remain key when addressing homelessness in the area. To show this commitment many of them will be reflected in the strategic priorities.

There are four priorities for the Cheshire West and Chester Homelessness Strategy:

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|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Reduce levels of homelessness and prioritise the prevention of homelessness |
| 2. Reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast and temporary accommodation |

3. Improve access to accommodation and support

4. Ensure satisfactory resources are available for tackling homelessness

1. Reduce levels of homelessness and prioritise the prevention of homelessness

Current levels of homelessness

The Homelessness Review 2014 provides us with a detailed analysis of the level and nature of homelessness, considering previous, current and future trends.

The shift in focus over the last ten years towards a preventative service rather than a reactive one has worked, delivering excellent results. Ten years ago the number of homeless applications taken by the three authorities which were to become Cheshire West and Chester was 1476. In 2009 it had reduced to just 84 and this success was down to the highly effective tools used by the Housing Solutions team to prevent homelessness.

Since 2009 the number of applications has fluctuated and last year 204 homeless applications were recorded. This is still high compared to 2009 and is currently higher than our neighbouring authorities of Cheshire East and Halton Borough Council but it is a lower figure than the two previous years. Alongside this the prevention work of the team last year prevented 1248 cases of homelessness.

There has been a significant reduction in the number of applications accepted as homeless and the figure in Cheshire West is considerably lower than Cheshire East and Warrington. Intentionally homeless decisions have been increasing year by year and last year most households were intentionally homeless due to rent arrears in the private sector.

The number of households accepted as homeless age 16 to 24 has gone down and last year only one person age 16 or 17 was accepted. The excellent mediation work done by FIRM Foundations has meant that 32 young people had their homelessness prevented last year. Over the last five years most of the people accepted as homeless were aged 25 to 44.

The majority of households accepted as homeless are from a White ethnic group but this reflects the ethnic composition of the local population so does not suggest that the application process is inaccessible to applicants with other ethnic origins.

The most common type of household accepted as homeless is female lone parent but this figure has reduced significantly whilst the number of single men accepted has increased to over a quarter of all accepted applications. This is high when compared with the figure for the rest of the North West.

The main reason for homelessness (disregarding 'other reason') when a household is accepted is the termination of an assured shorthold tenancy. This is followed by parents no longer willing to accommodate. Violent relationship breakdown involving a partner has gone down quite significantly.

Most households accepted as homeless have dependent children but this figure seems to be going down whilst the number of single people with a mental health disability is rising.

Rough sleepers can still be found in the area although no rough sleepers were recorded on the agreed night of the official rough sleeper count. The FENW outreach team ensure that anyone found sleeping on the streets has access to services and safe seats and if necessary are re-located back to their local area. With these services in place the number of people actually sleeping on the streets has reduced. Cheshire West and Chester is one of the only authorities to place rough sleepers in Bed and Breakfast on discretionary grounds meaning staff can work and support them into suitable accommodation. The numbers placed last year had gone down quite dramatically from the previous year.

Local court activity confirms that action by mortgage companies is going down whereas action by landlords, particularly social landlords, is going up. County Court evictions by the three main social housing providers (Chester and District Housing Trust, Weaver Vale Housing Trust and Plus Dane) are on the increase mainly due to rent arrears. At the end of March 2014 there were 6636 live rent arrears cases and the amount owed was £3.52 million. £714,015 of those arrears related to under-occupied properties (20% of the total owed).

Current levels of prevention

Cheshire West and Chester Council recognises that early intervention and prevention is the key to successfully tackling homelessness and to stop repeat homelessness. Good quality housing advice and a range of housing options are essential.

The Council's Housing Solutions team provides all aspects of housing and homelessness advice and manages the housing register. The Council is currently reviewing all services under 'Make or Buy' which looks at what each service should deliver and what the best delivery model is to achieve this. The Housing Solutions service is already part way through the Make or Buy review. Following a recent re-structure there are now 25 full time equivalent members of staff.

The first point of contact for customers wishing to speak to Housing Solutions is the telephone Advice Line. Last year the Advice Line answered 17,894 calls indicating a huge demand for housing advice in the area.

Housing Solutions Advisers work closely with households who are threatened with homelessness to either enable them to remain in their home or assist them with planned and timely moves into more suitable and sustainable accommodation. They do this by offering a range of housing options and, where appropriate, referrals to other organisations. Advice is offered regardless of priority and intentionality and is tailored towards the individual needs of the customer.

3859 advice cases were opened by the Housing Solutions team last year which is a reduction on previous years but still extremely high. The range of prevention tools available to the team has reduced due to a reduction in specialist money advice services and this has had an impact on the percentage of cases prevented.

Although the number of preventions went down in 2013/14 there were still 1248 households threatened with homelessness that may otherwise have made a homeless application if the Housing Solutions team had not intervened.

The most successful prevention tools used by the team enabling people to remain in their existing home are:

- FIRM Foundations mediation service for young people
- Sanctuary Scheme (professionally installed security measures allowing those experiencing domestic violence to remain in their own home where it is safe for them to do so)
- Private sector negotiation with landlords
- Housing advice
- Debt advice, mortgage advice, resolving rent arrears or Housing Benefit issues

The most successful prevention tools used by the team to obtain alternative accommodation are:

- Securing private rented accommodation with or without an incentive
- Securing supported housing
- Securing an offer of accommodation from the housing register
- Negotiating with social landlords

The prevention figures show that the team are nearly four times more likely to prevent homelessness by finding alternative accommodation than by enabling households to remain in their accommodation. This is largely due to the reduction of money and mortgage arrears services.

To achieve this priority and successfully reduce homelessness and prioritise the prevention of homelessness the Council will:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has a buy-in across all local authority services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the Homelessness Strategy annually and be responsive to emerging needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the role of the Homelessness Steering Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer a Housing Options prevention service to all clients including written advice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and improve current homelessness prevention tools, especially those enabling households to remain in their current accommodation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the first point of contact for customers and the customer journey

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide training to all staff involved with homelessness prevention on new and existing tools available.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake home visits for 'hard to engage' clients or those who are unable to access the service
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review protocols) with each key partner and client group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and increase the use of the Prevention Fund and develop a clear criteria for using it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the provision of debt and money advice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor social housing tenants affected by the under occupation charges and other welfare reforms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review mediation services for young people and families
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake an assessment of services for single homeless people
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the 'No Second Night Out' project and ensure services are available to rough sleepers

2. Reduce the use of bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation

Current use of bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation

Most households accepted as homeless last year were provided with temporary accommodation. Temporary accommodation is also used for households as interim accommodation whilst they await a homeless decision.

Last year 211 households were placed in temporary accommodation in either local authority or housing association stock, bed and breakfast, or supported housing projects (including refuges). The average length of stay was 11 weeks. Private sector leases have also been used as temporary accommodation and last year 12 households were placed in assured shorthold tenancies.

Some households accepted as homeless are considered 'homeless at home' (the term given to households who have been accepted as homeless but are able to stay in their current accommodation until an alternative is secured for them). Last year only 26% of households were homeless at home which is much lower than previous years. Cheshire West and Chester has the lowest homeless at home figure in Cheshire and the North West region.

The numbers in bed and breakfast did reduce last year but the average length of stay has increased to almost five weeks. Bed and breakfast is only provided as a last resort when other accommodation is not available, usually as interim accommodation whilst investigations are being carried out on a homeless application, or to a rough sleeper placed under discretionary powers to prevent homelessness.

The most common type of household in temporary accommodation is single men.

The majority of people in temporary accommodation or homeless at home are rehoused within six months by accepting an offer of accommodation from the housing register. A small minority voluntarily cease to occupy temporary accommodation and make their own arrangements.

In spite of having a long-established and dedicated service available to help people obtain private sector accommodation this tenure is not being used to its full potential at present and the Council do not utilise the private rented sector to discharge its homelessness duty; to achieve this a landlord must offer a 12 month tenancy which, if achieved, will reduce the number of households in bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation.

To achieve this priority and successfully reduce numbers in bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation the Council will:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a policy and procedure to use the power to end the main duty with an offer of private rented accommodation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review the provision and range of temporary accommodation options, especially for those with complex needs to avoid the use of bed and breakfast
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minimise the use of unsuitable and expensive bed and breakfast accommodation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that appropriate accommodation is available for 16 and 17 year olds so that they are not placed in bed and breakfast
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that appropriate accommodation is available for families so that they are not placed in bed and breakfast unless in an emergency and for no longer than six weeks
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a specialist role within the Housing Solutions team to focus on households in temporary accommodation.

3. Improve access to permanent accommodation and support

Permanent accommodation

In Cheshire West and Chester nearly 71% of housing is owner-occupied, 15% is social rented and 14% is private rented. Housing market trends show a significant reduction in owner occupation among those aged between 16 and 34 years and an increase of this age group renting in the private sector. The supply of affordable housing has reduced but the demand has significantly increased.

The Housing Register is the main route to permanent accommodation and there are currently over 6000 households registered, nearly half of which are over 55 with no housing need. Since the transfer of Trust Homechoice (choice based lettings) to the Council in October 2013 there were (up to May 2014) 1622 adverts for properties. Of these 25% of adverts were designated for those age 55 or over as 'sheltered housing'. Sheltered housing also accounts for 27% of properties re-advertised when a suitable tenant has not been found.

Nationally, the private rented sector has established itself as an important dimension of the housing market to complement owner occupation and social renting. Nationally, 18.1% of households now rent privately which is higher than those who rent from a social landlord (17.7%) but in Cheshire West and Chester the figure is lower at 13.7%.

The private rented sector is vital for those households who cannot afford to buy or cannot access social housing. The Homelessness Review found that access to private rented housing needs improving and landlords need supporting to encourage longer lets and sustainability in this sector. Although a great deal of prevention work is achieved through finding private sector tenancies, accepted homeless households are most likely to be homeless from the ending of an assured shorthold tenancy.

Support

There is a good number and range of community-based services for homeless people in Cheshire West and Chester, particularly medical services, domestic abuse support services and furniture projects.

Adult Social Care offer support services to children, young people who have been cared for by social services, adults with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health or drug and alcohol related problems and older people to help them remain in their own homes.

Accommodation for people with support needs is currently funded by the Housing Related Support Programme and out of 309 units of accommodation funded in this

way 134 are specifically for homeless people or women and families fleeing domestic abuse.

The model of supported housing in Cheshire West and Chester is currently under review. The Housing team will work closely with Commissioning to ensure that the needs of homeless households are met and the appropriate number of units are available which will then reduce the numbers in temporary accommodation and Bed and Breakfast (some of which are unsuitable). As the main household group in temporary accommodation is single men this suggests that there is a shortage of units available for this group who may also have complex needs.

P3 is the organisation commissioned to provide floating support services across Cheshire West and Chester. There is a team of 30 staff across five sites offering advice and support to people regarding benefits, debts, education and training, and living independently.

The Firm project (Forum Intervention, Research and Mediation) provide specialist intervention and support for young people who are threatened with homelessness. This includes mediation, support to claim benefits, access services, gain training and employment. They can also offer accommodation options in the private sector, emergency accommodation, lodgings and house shares. This project has an extremely good reputation with staff, partners and customers and their mediation work has become an important prevention tool for the Housing Solutions team.

To achieve this priority and successfully improve access to permanent accommodation and support the Council will:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Strategic Commissioning to ensure that homeless households receive the support and accommodation they need
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the supply of private rented accommodation in the area by engaging with landlords
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review housing options for customers with mental health issues/complex and chaotic behaviour, who may be deemed high risk, to ensure sustained tenancies, particularly in the private rented sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review permanent housing options for young people including move-on from temporary accommodation or supported housing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the Bond Scheme and other incentives offered to landlords
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain a register of reputable landlords with good quality properties
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work and negotiate with private landlords with tenants who have fallen into arrears to prevent eviction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support, debt advice and signposting to private tenants threatened with homelessness due to rent arrears
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a multi-agency approach for bringing empty properties back into use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide training to staff on the Homes and Communities Agency empty homes toolkit

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Actively work in partnership with the voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support customers adversely affected by welfare reform changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review the application process for accessing social housing
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review the supply and demand of accommodation and make best use of local stock to ensure accommodation is available for all groups

4. Ensure satisfactory resources are available for tackling homelessness

Current resources

The Authority is faced with a financial challenge of saving £49 million over the next three years. Plans are in place to deliver savings in the region of £43 million leaving a residual gap of £6 million.

The Council's budget for homelessness is tied in with the budget for Housing Solutions. The total budget is £1,060,104. Most of this is staffing costs at £859,104 and other costs of £201,000 which cover Bed and Breakfast and the prevention fund. The budget has reduced by £446,896 from last year.

The CLG Homelessness Grant of £512,064 makes an important contribution to the delivery of homelessness services in Cheshire West and Chester. This fund is currently frozen and arrangements for the distribution of the grant for the financial years ahead are unclear. If the homelessness grant funding is reduced or stopped it would adversely affect the ability of the team to offer a range of housing options and would impact upon performance and service delivery.

Cheshire West and Chester receive government funding of £6.5 million for Housing Related Support.

Some third sector partners in the area have been successful with Government funding including Forum Housing and Nacro who were granted money from the £10m Private Rented Sector Development Programme.

In 2011 Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East were jointly awarded £235,938 over three years from the £20 million Homelessness Transition Fund for the No Second Night Out project. This funding is now coming to an end and the future of the No Second Night Out project is under review.

An on-going programme of training for the team is essential to equip them with the skills necessary to meet the continuing demands of the service.

Customer leaflets and information materials need reviewing and coordinated with other providers and partners.

Better investment in ICT software for homelessness data could enable the service to become more efficient especially if it is compatible with the Housing Register and Choice Based Lettings systems.

To achieve this priority and successfully ensure satisfactory resources are available to tackle homelessness Council will:

- Carry out an annual review of available sources of funding and establish procedures for identifying and applying for funding

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide an on-going programme of training for housing advisers to meet the continuing demands of the service
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve the skills, knowledge and experience of the Housing Solutions team for intensive case management where required
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invest in ICT software for homelessness data
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that elected members have sufficient knowledge of homelessness
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide high quality customer information and leaflets on homelessness
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve the ways that customers can self-serve

Implementing the Strategy

The Homelessness Steering Group already established in Cheshire West and Chester will be responsible for the delivery of this Homelessness Strategy and action plan. Membership of the group is made up of managers with decision-making powers, commissioning responsibilities and statutory responsibilities for tackling homelessness.

How Cheshire West and Chester will deliver the priorities within this Strategy is contained within the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan which sets out clear tasks and targets within identified areas of work. The Action Plan will be monitored and reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs and achieves the priorities within it.

By adopting the Homelessness Strategy Cheshire West and Chester Council is making a commitment to tackling and preventing homelessness and to ending rough sleeping.

Cheshire West and Chester Homelessness Strategy Action Plan

1. Reduce levels of homelessness and prioritise the prevention of homelessness			
Action	Outcomes	Responsibility	When
Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has a buy-in across all local authority services	Meets a Gold Standard challenge. Member's understanding of future challenges and funding requirements.	Housing Strategy and Policy	Year one
Review the Homelessness Strategy annually and be responsive to emerging needs	Meets a Gold Standard challenge.	Housing Strategy and Policy	Years 1-4
Review the role of the Homelessness Steering Group	Ensures a corporate commitment to homelessness prevention	Housing Strategy and Policy	Year one
Offer a Housing Options prevention service to all clients including written advice	Meets a Gold Standard challenge. Increases homelessness preventions.	Housing Solutions	Year one
Review and improve current homelessness prevention tools, especially those enabling households to remain in their current accommodation	Increases homelessness preventions.	Housing Solutions	Years 1-2
Review the first point of contact for customers and the customer journey	Improves customer satisfaction	Housing Solutions	Year one
Provide training to all staff involved with homelessness prevention on new and existing tools available.	Improves knowledge and expertise. Promotes good practice within the team.	Housing Solutions	Years 1-4
Review and increase the use of the Prevention Fund and develop a clear criteria for using it	Helps maintain accommodation and prevent homelessness	Housing Solutions	Year one
Undertake home visits for 'hard to engage' clients or those who are unable to access the service	Increases homelessness prevention	Housing Solutions	Year one
Review protocols/housing pathways (that include appropriate accommodation and support) with each key partner and client group	Meets a Gold Standard challenge.	Housing Strategy and Policy Partners	Year one

Review the provision of debt and money advice	Early intervention and prevention	Housing Strategy and Policy	Year one
Review preventing mortgage repossessions	Meets a Gold Standard challenge. Increases homelessness preventions.	Housing Solutions	Year one
Monitor social housing tenants affected by the under occupation penalties enforced through Welfare Reform	Early intervention will prevent homelessness and promote tenancy sustainment	Housing Partnership, Welfare Reform Group	Year one
Review mediation services for young people and families	Helps young people and families work through housing and social issues and promote outcomes.	Housing Solutions	Year one
Review the 'No Second Night Out' project and ensure services are available to rough sleepers	Meets a Gold Standard challenge. Reduces rough sleeping.	Housing Strategy and Policy	Year one
2. Reduce the use of bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation			
Action	Outcomes	Responsibility	When
Create a policy and procedure to use the power to end the main duty with an offer of private rented accommodation	Meets a Gold Standard challenge. To discharge full homeless duty into the private rented sector	Housing Strategy and Policy	Year one
Review the provision and range of temporary accommodation options, especially for those with complex needs to avoid the use of bed and breakfast	Accommodation for all groups	Housing Strategy and Policy, Commissioning	Year one
Review the use of unsuitable and expensive bed and breakfast accommodation	Reduces bed and breakfast expenditure	Housing Solutions	Year two
Ensure homeless applications are taken from households placed in bed and breakfast that day or the next working day	Length of stay in bed and breakfast reduced	Housing Solutions	Year one
Ensure that appropriate accommodation is available for 16 and 17 year olds so that they are not placed in bed and breakfast	Meets a Gold Standard challenge.	Housing Solutions, Commissioning, Children's Services	Year one

Ensure that appropriate accommodation is available for families so that they are not placed in bed and breakfast unless in an emergency and for no longer than six weeks	Meets a Gold Standard challenge.	Housing Solutions, Commissioning, Children's Services	Year one
Develop a specialist role within the Housing Solutions team to focus on households in temporary accommodation.	Fewer households in bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation	Housing Solutions	Year one
3. Improve access to permanent accommodation and support			
Action	Outcomes	Responsibility	When
Work with Strategic Commissioning to ensure that homeless households receive the support and accommodation they need	To address any gaps in accommodation and support provision	Housing Strategy and Policy	Year one
Review housing options for customers with mental health issues/complex and chaotic behaviour, who may be deemed high risk, to ensure sustained tenancies, particularly in the private rented sector	Ensures that housing and support is available for all groups	Housing Solutions	Year two
Review permanent housing options for young people including move-on from temporary accommodation or supported housing	Reduces temporary accommodation and improves move-on from supported housing	Housing Solutions	Year two
Improve the supply of private rented accommodation in the area by engaging with landlords	Landlord engagement. Improved access for homeless households	Housing Strategy and Policy, Housing Solutions	Year one
Review the Bond Scheme and other incentives offered to landlords	Landlord engagement. Improved access for homeless households	Housing Strategy and Policy, Housing Solutions	Year one
Maintain a register of reputable landlords with good quality properties	Landlord engagement	Housing Strategy and Policy, Housing Solutions	Year one
Work and negotiate with private landlords with tenants who have fallen into arrears to prevent eviction	Landlord engagement and homelessness prevention	Housing Solutions	Year one
Provide support, debt advice	Homelessness	Housing	Year one

and signposting to private tenants threatened with homelessness due to rent arrears	prevention	Solutions	
Develop a multi-agency approach for bringing empty properties back into use	Adopt the Empty Homes Strategy	Housing Strategy and Policy team	Year one
Provide training to staff on the Homes and Communities Agency empty homes toolkit	Ensures that existing stock is used most effectively	Housing Solutions	Year two
To actively work in partnership with the voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs	Meets a Gold Standard challenge. Expands the range of housing options. People in employment are less likely to become homeless.	Housing Solutions	Years 2-3
Support customers adversely affected by welfare reform changes	Homelessness prevention	Housing Solutions	Year one
Review the application process for accessing social housing	Improves access to permanent housing	Housing Solutions	Year one
Review the supply and demand of accommodation and make best use of local stock to ensure accommodation is available for all groups	Address gaps in demand	Housing Strategy and Policy team	Year three
4. Ensure satisfactory resources are available for tackling homelessness			
Action	Outcomes	Responsibility	When
Carry out an annual review of available sources of funding and establish procedures for identifying and applying for funding	Maximises funding for homelessness services	Housing Strategy and Policy	Years 1-4
Provide an on-going programme of training for housing advisers to meet the continuing demands of the service	Improves knowledge and expertise within the team	Housing Solutions	Years 1-4
Improve the skills, knowledge and experience of the Housing Solutions team for intensive case management where required	To improve the customer journey and customer satisfaction. To improve best practise. To increase homelessness prevention.	Housing Solutions	Years 1-4
Invest in ICT software for	To increase	Housing	Year one

homelessness data	efficiencies through the integration of homelessness software and the housing register. To enable more customers to access online services.	Solutions	
Ensure that elected members have sufficient knowledge of homelessness	To enable members to make informed decisions about the allocation of resources and ensure that the local authority is fulfilling its statutory duties.	Housing Strategy and Policy	Year one
Provide high quality customer information and leaflets on homelessness	To encourage self-serve	Housing Solutions	Year one
Improve the ways that customers can self-serve	Will allow the team to focus on the most complex and vulnerable customers.	Housing Solutions	Years 1-2