

Halton's Homelessness Strategy 2019-2024

Executive Summary

Homelessness has a direct effect on the health and wellbeing of people affected. It also affects the overall sustainability of neighbourhoods due to lack of settled communities, lack of continuity of schooling and reduction in community cohesion.

Some personal experiences can make people more vulnerable to homelessness. These include poor physical health, mental health problems, alcohol and drugs issues, bereavement, experience of care, and experience of the criminal justice system. Further environmental and social factors can include poverty, inequality, housing supply and affordability, unemployment, welfare and income policies.

Under the Homelessness Act 2002, it is a legal requirement for local authority areas to produce a 5 year strategy, which will be reviewed annually. Since the implementation of the previous Homelessness Strategy (2013-2018) there have been significant changes in housing policy at a national level, with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The Act further cements the local authority's responsibilities to prevent homelessness, resolve situations where someone has found themselves legally homeless and put measures in place to avoid repeat homelessness through providing long term solutions.

Addressing the immediate and long-term social and financial costs of homelessness, can be significant. Putting in place services which prevent homelessness in the first place, and which help people quickly if they find themselves needing support, can help stop these social and financial costs escalating.

By implementing this strategy, the vision is to make Halton a borough where:

- ✓ People are provided with early, targeted advice and intervention to prevent the loss of their accommodation
- ✓ Effective action is taken in a timely manner to relieve homelessness where it has not been preventable
- ✓ People are supported with the issues that can lead to homelessness, to prevent repeat homelessness
- ✓ Stakeholders work together to protect and increase local housing options.

Priority areas have been identified in this strategy to achieve the vision, shown below

Thematic Area	Priority Area	Priority
Avoid	Partnership Working	Adopt a whole system approach to working with supported housing providers and other key stakeholders to manage the impact of reduced housing related support and benefit changes
	Housing market	Work with key stakeholders to ensure homeless households are supported to access long term, affordable housing in the social and private rented sectors.
	Rough Sleepers	Reduce the numbers/impact of rough sleeping through development of Rough Sleeping services in partnership with key stakeholders.
Resolve	Partnership Working	Work with key stakeholders to increase options/alternatives to eviction through developing fair eviction protocols with all local housing providers
	Housing market	Develop sufficient temporary accommodation that meets the predicted future demands of homeless applicants
	Housing First	Work in partnership with the Liverpool City Region and adopt a whole system approach to address homelessness prevention and responses to homelessness
Prevent	Housing Market	Address issues with Universal Credit direct payments, developing local initiatives in the short term
	Partnership working	Increase the role of the 3 rd sector in information provision and signposting
	Partnership working	Develop seamless engagement for people, particularly those with mental health or other health conditions, who may find it difficult to deal with a number of agencies, services and professionals.
	Partnership working	Develop a joined up offer of homelessness prevention through a network of services, including statutory and 3 rd sector support services.
	Housing Solutions and Prevention Services	Equip young people with the necessary life skills required to live independently through enhanced links with other stakeholders, such as education and training.
	Housing Solutions and Prevention Services	Effectively engage with young people to help them feel confident in accessing information, prevention and support services at the right time in the right format for them.
	Housing Solutions and Prevention Services	Develop effective links with Children's Social Care to prevent crisis homeless presentations
	Asylum and	Ensure that the vulnerable client group have access to sustainable

	Refugee	housing and support services
	Health of people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness	Improve the health outcomes of people at risk/experiencing homeless to prevent further escalation of their situation. Working in partnership and devising joined up systems, joint commissioning and education between sectors.
Protect	Housing Market	Offer accommodation and intensive support to vulnerable complex needs clients through the development of a social letting agency as part of the Housing First Programme
	Housing market	Improve services and support for private rented sector to increase landlords/units available

The responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the strategy will lie with the Halton Health and Wellbeing Board. The governance arrangements of that board require regular updates on the delivery and impact of the strategy.

The Homelessness Forum meets on an annual basis, to monitor performance of partners against the strategy delivery plan and identify future priorities.

The Homelessness Partnership Group consists of local statutory and voluntary partners, who meet regularly to address and tackle homelessness issues. The Group will meet quarterly to identify and support partners to take the delegated lead on the delivery plan actions, establish task and finish groups and provide updates in line with progress made, changes to policy or legislative requirements and demands on homelessness services. The Homelessness Partnership Group will identify and review the prioritisation of the actions in the delivery plan in line with changing local need and other influencing factors. The strategy will also be monitored on a quarterly basis by Halton Borough Council's People Directorate's Senior Management Team.

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Contact

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Or visit

www.halton.gov.uk

Forward

Under the Homelessness Act 2002, it is a legal requirement for local authority areas to produce a 5 year strategy, which will be reviewed annually. This strategy follows on from Halton Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018 and associated 5 year action plan. Since the implementation of the previous Homelessness Strategy there have been significant changes in housing policy at a national level, with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 in April 2018. The Act further cements the local authority's responsibilities to prevent homelessness, resolve situations where someone has found themselves legally homeless and put measures in place to avoid repeat homelessness through providing long term solutions.

This strategy does not stand alone, but works alongside other key strategies of the Council, including the One Halton Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Halton Borough Council Corporate Plan, in tackling the wider determinants that may affect someone's chances of becoming homeless, such as employment, mental health and life chances.

Building on the successes of the previous strategy, along with new actions and areas of focus, a number of stakeholders will be involved in supporting the Council in the delivery of the action plan during the lifespan of this strategy.

Key stakeholders have been pivotal to the development of the strategy, from public and professionals taking part in consultation to identify priorities, statutory services contributing to the provision of homelessness services and 3rd sector support of our communities. It is these stakeholders, and others, who will play a fundamental part in working with Halton Borough Council to deliver the action required to realise the vision set out in this strategy.

Thank you for reading this strategy, and thank you to the staff and services who contribute to the borough wide vision of a Halton where homelessness is prevented, homelessness is resolved where it has not been able to be prevented, the cycle of repeat homelessness is avoided and housing options are protected.

Councillor Ron Hignett

Portfolio Holder for Physical Environment

The vision for Halton

By implementing this strategy, the vision is to make Halton a borough where:

- ✓ People are provided with early, targeted advice and intervention to prevent the loss of their accommodation
- ✓ Effective action is taken in a timely manner to relieve homelessness where it has not been preventable
- ✓ People are supported with the issues that can lead to homelessness, to prevent repeat homelessness
- ✓ Stakeholders work together to protect and increase local housing options.

Why do we need to focus on homelessness?

Homelessness has a direct effect on the health and wellbeing of people affected. It also affects the overall sustainability of neighbourhoods due to lack of settled communities, lack of continuity of schooling and reduction in community cohesion. Being homeless can make it more difficult for people to obtain work, and losing a job can make homelessness a greater risk. This impacts on the local economy for the wider community, as well as community and individual safety.

In being able to identify the action that needs to be taken in Halton to deliver the strategic vision it is important to understand the reasons why people become homeless, and the impact that it has on them as an individual, family and on wider society.

The definition of people who are homeless does not just include those people who are roofless or living rough; but also includes people who are sometimes described as being “hidden homeless”:

Whilst rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness, and when most people think of a homeless person they tend to think of someone sleeping rough on the streets, this is not currently identified as a major issue in Halton. To be legally defined as homeless a person must lack a secure place in which they are entitled to live or not reasonably be able to stay.

People become homeless for lots of different reasons. There are social causes of homelessness, such as a lack of affordable housing, poverty and unemployment; and life events such as a breakdown of a relationship or abuse.

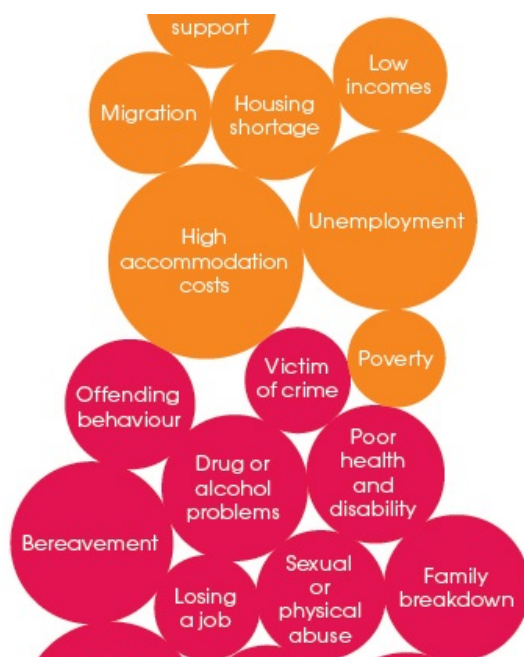
People on low incomes without regular work, lack of proven track record, previous failed tenancies, mental health or substance misuse are unlikely to meet letting agents/landlords vetting procedures and so cannot obtain a private tenancy.

Poor discharge planning for ex-offenders and those with mental health needs have are additional factors contributing to homelessness. Those with complex needs, addiction, negative behaviour, and poor parenting and life skills face particular problems in attaining settled homes and can often fall through the net of services and accommodation provided.

Addressing the health and social care needs of the homeless is clearly very costly and it is arguably more cost effective to prevent homelessness than it is to treat the medical risks and meet the demand on social care services that come with it.

Causes of Homelessness

There are many contributing factors to why people become homeless, most of which are due to circumstances outside of their control. Relationship breakdown and loss of settled accommodation is the main reason people give for losing their home, but there are often many hidden factors that have led to them becoming homeless, some of which are shown below.



Some personal experiences can make people more vulnerable to homelessness: these include poor physical health, mental health problems, alcohol and drugs issues, bereavement, experience of care, and experience of the criminal justice system. Environmental and social factors can include poverty, inequality, housing supply and affordability, unemployment, welfare and income policies.

Welfare benefit reforms, especially limiting Housing Benefit for younger people and the effect of the 'Benefit Cap' on larger families, can increase the risk of

homelessness for these groups. Low income, temporary and zero contracts have the potential to cause homelessness for many people. The uncertainty of a guaranteed salary means that people do not know whether they have enough money to pay their rent and other expenses.

In the private rented sector, homes in disrepair or poor condition can cause physical and mental health problems, forcing some to leave the home.

Environmental and individual factors are often interrelated; individual issues can arise from structural disadvantages such as poverty or lack of education. While personal factors, such as family and social relationships, can also be put under pressure by structural forces such as poverty.

Defining Homelessness

To fully understand the impact of homelessness, and the demands it can put on local systems, it is useful to understand how homelessness is legally defined.

According to the UK homelessness charity Crisis, a home is not just a physical space: it also provides roots, identity, security, and a sense of belonging and a place of emotional wellbeing. Homelessness is the circumstance when people are without a permanent dwelling, such as a house or apartment. People who are homeless are most often unable to acquire and maintain regular, safe, secure and adequate housing.

The legal definition of homelessness may also include people whose primary night-time residence is in a homeless shelter, a domestic violence shelter, long-term residence in a motel, a vehicle, squatting, cardboard boxes, a tent city, and tarpaulins, shanty town structures made of discarded building materials or other ad hoc housing situations.

Statutory Homeless

There are several ways in which a person can be legally defined as homeless:

- no accommodation available in the UK or abroad
- no legal right to occupy the accommodation
- split households and availability of accommodation for whole household
- unreasonable to continue to occupy accommodation
- violence from any person
- applicant unable to secure entry
- applicant lives in a moveable structure but has no place to put this.
- have been evicted from their home
- are asked to leave by friends or family
- can't stay due to fire or flood
- are sleeping on the streets¹

'Priority need groups' include households with dependent children or a pregnant woman and people who are vulnerable in some way e.g. because of mental illness

or physical disability. In 2002 an order made under the 1996 Act extended the priority need categories to include applicants:

- aged 16 or 17
- aged 18 to 20 who were previously in care
- vulnerable as a result of time spent in care, in custody, or in HM Forces
- vulnerable as a result of having to flee their home because of violence or the threat of violence

If an applicant falls within any of the above groups The [Housing \(Homeless Persons\) Act 1977](#), [Housing Act 1996](#), and the [Homelessness Act 2002](#), placed statutory duties on local authorities to have some form of duty towards her/him. This ranges from advice and assistance, or providing interim accommodation, to the relief duty or the main housing duty of securing accommodation for a continuing period. The extent of the duty will depend on whether or not s/he is, or may be: eligible for assistance, in priority need, intentionally homeless, or has a local connection.

All households that apply for assistance under the Housing and Homelessness Acts are referred to as '**decisions**'. However, these do not include households found to be ineligible for assistance (some persons from abroad are ineligible for assistance).

A 'main homelessness duty' is owed where the authority is satisfied that the applicant is eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and falls within a specified priority need group. Such statutorily homeless households are referred to as '**acceptances**'.

Where a main duty is owed, the authority must ensure that suitable accommodation is available for the applicant and his or her household. The duty continues until a settled housing solution becomes available for them, or some other circumstance brings the duty to an end. Where households are found to be intentionally homeless, or not in priority need, the authority must make an assessment of their housing needs and provide advice and assistance to help them find accommodation for themselves.

Rough Sleepers

Rough sleepers are defined for the purposes of rough sleeping counts and estimates as:

- people sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments)
- People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or 'bashes').

The definition does not include people in hostels or shelters, people in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes or organized protest, squatters or travelers.

Hidden Homeless

It is often difficult to build a true picture of the number of homeless people nationally, regionally and locally as the majority of homeless people are hidden from statistics and services as they are dealing with their situation informally. This means staying with family and friends, sofa surfing, living in unsuitable housing such as squats or in 'beds in shed' situationsⁱⁱ. All these situations leave the person extremely vulnerable. The local picture of homelessness in Halton is built on local data from services that work with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, but may only be a snapshot of the actual numbers affected by homelessness in the borough.

Temporary Accommodation

People who are in temporary accommodation may still be classed as homeless. The length of time people can stay in temporary accommodation can range from a single night to indefinite. There are a number of different types of temporary accommodation:

- night/winter shelters
- hostels
- B&Bs
- woman's refuges
- private and social housing

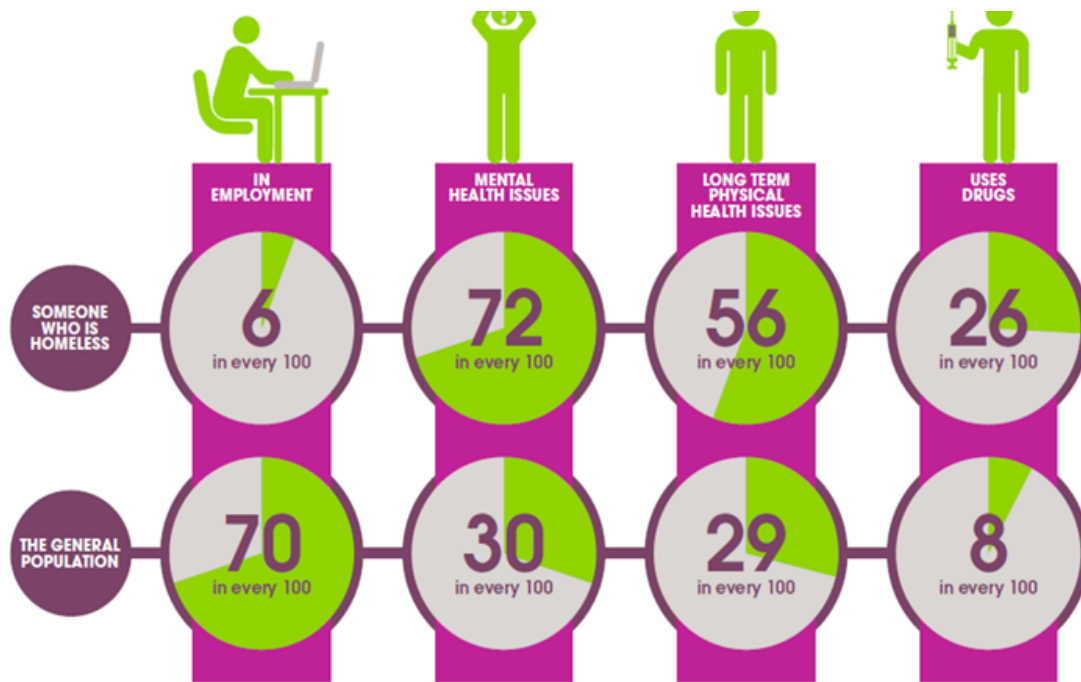
Each type of temporary accommodation has its own rules on access and lengths of stay and may not always be appropriate for the individuals staying in them. Although this accommodation is described as 'temporary', in practice, homeless households may be forced to spend a long time in such living arrangements due to the current shortage of settled housing leading to feelings of uncertainty.

How does homeless impact individuals and communities in Halton?

Health and Homelessness

Not having a home can make it harder for individuals to find a job, stay healthy and maintain relationships.

The infographic below shows the experience of homeless people compared to the general populationⁱⁱⁱ



The impact of homelessness on individuals will often leave them experiencing feelings of isolation, worthlessness and totally demoralised. Homelessness can also increase the chances of drug & alcohol addiction, or experiencing physical or mental health problems. Evidence suggests that the longer someone is in this position the more difficult it can become to make the positive changes to improve lifestyle choices. As someone's problems become more complex, anti-social behaviour, involvement with the criminal justice system and acute NHS services become more likely.

Homelessness can often have a negative impact on local communities. We know from one study^{iv} on the experiences of homeless people with complex problems, that there is a:

- 77% chance that someone could sleep rough
- 53% chance that someone could be involved in street drinking
- 32% chance that someone could beg
- 10% chance that someone could be involved in prostitution.

Research^v indicates that:

- the average cost of an A&E visit is £147;
- 4 out of 10 experiencing homelessness have used A&E in last six months
- £1,668 is the average cost per arrest;
- 7 out of 10 homeless ex-offenders are reconvicted within one year
- £26, 000 is the estimated average cost of a homeless person each year to public purse
- £1 billion is the estimated annual cost of homelessness

Addressing the immediate and long-term costs of homelessness, can be significant. Putting in place services which prevent homelessness in the first place,

and which help people quickly if they find themselves needing support, can help stop these costs escalating.

Living in temporary accommodation can have very damaging health effects, both physical and mental. Surveys conducted by Shelter have found that:

- 58 per cent of families in temporary accommodation (other than bed and breakfast) said their health had suffered as a result of where they were living.
- people who had been living in temporary accommodation for over a year reported increased health problems and greater use of health services.
almost half of parents with children and 71 per cent of childless people said they were depressed.

The impact of homelessness on children

Homelessness can put children's lives in chaos. The effect of homelessness on children can be long-lasting. A study undertaken in Birmingham found that 40 per cent of the homeless children studied were still suffering mental and developmental problems one year after being rehoused.^{vi}

Homelessness has an adverse effect on children's educational progress because of problems relating to accessing schools, attendance, and the isolation that children can feel due to their circumstances. Children living in bad housing conditions also have a higher risk of developing long-term health problems.

- Poor housing conditions increase the risk of severe ill-health or disability by up to 25 per cent during childhood and early adulthood.
- Children in bad housing are almost twice as likely to suffer from poor health as other children

Trends in single homelessness

- Approximately 200,000 single people experience homelessness in England each year.
- An average of 77,000 single people are estimated to experience some form of homelessness on any one night.
- Between April 2016 and March 2017, 19,460 people who made a homelessness application in England were found to not be in priority need by their Local Authority and the majority of them were likely to be single homeless people.

- This represents 17% of the total number of households making a homelessness application.

Availability of homelessness services

- There are currently 1,121 accommodation projects for single homeless people in England.
- A total of 196 day centres currently operate throughout England.
- Homeless England data identifies a reduction in both the number of accommodation projects (-5%) and the number of day centres (-8%) in the past year.
- The number of bed spaces has decreased by 3% in the past year, and now stands at 34,497 in total.
- 39% of the responding accommodation providers reported a decrease in funding, with 38% reporting no change in funding over the past 12 months. 15% reported an increase in funding. ^{vii}

Responsibilities of Halton Borough Council *The legal and policy framework*

This strategy is written at a time of considerable change within the homelessness sector, with diminishing financial resource available to local authorities, the impact of radical welfare reform, new and increased responsibilities towards asylum seekers and refugees and a changing legal framework, of which the key legislation is outlined below.

Homelessness services are currently covered by the ***Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and the Homelessness Act 2002***. There are also a number of key pieces of non-housing related legislation that have a direct impact on homelessness services to which we must have regard. These include the Children's Act and the introduction of the Care Act.

The ***Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA 2017)*** is the most significant piece of new legislation for homelessness services since 1977 and was implemented 1st April 2018. The HRA 2017 places a legal duty on Halton Borough Council to give people meaningful support to try to resolve their homelessness, as well as introducing measures to prevent people becoming homeless in the first place. Although Local Authorities don't have to offer housing to everyone who is homeless, they look at the 5 conditions outlined in the Introduction section to decide what support someone may qualify for, and don't have to provide housing if someone is threatened with homelessness, the HRA 2017 will place duties on local housing authorities to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness and to take reasonable steps to help those who become homeless to secure accommodation.

The Act requires local housing authorities to provide some new homelessness services to all people in their area and expands the categories of people who they have to help to find accommodation. A new duty is placed on local housing authorities to assess all eligible applicants' cases and agree a plan. There will also be a duty for other public services to refer cases to the local housing authority.

Historically, homeless people in England have only been able to get help if their local council thought they were a 'priority'. The HRA2017 means that:

- all homeless people will be able to get help from their council
- councils must try to prevent people becoming homeless in the first place
- families with children will still be housed by councils if that's the best way to help them

Key measures include:

An extension of the period during which Halton Borough Council should treat someone as threatened with homelessness from 28 to 56 days

A new duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible applicants threatened with homelessness, regardless of priority need.

A new duty to relieve homelessness for all eligible homeless applicants, regardless of priority need. This help could be, for example, the provision of a rent deposit or debt advice.

A new duty on public services to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless

Other national Housing Policy and legislation that impacts on addressing homelessness include:

- The Welfare Reform Act 2012
- The Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016
- The Localism Act 2011
- The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) Order 2012(England)
- The Deregulation Act 2015
- The Housing and Planning Act 2016

Local Drivers

The Council has five strategic priorities for the borough to achieve the vision and help to build a better future for Halton:

1. A Healthy Halton

Homeless people have significantly higher levels of premature mortality, mental and physical ill health than among the settled population and are more likely to have a drug or alcohol addiction. An audit found that 41 per cent of homeless people reported a long term physical health problem and 45 per cent had a diagnosed mental health problem, compared with 28 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively, in the general population. The last conservative estimate (2010) of the healthcare cost associated with this population was £86 million per year .

Halton's Urban Renewal

2. Environmental impact of rough sleeping and its potential impact on economic investment in an area. High incidence and turnover of temporary accommodation in an area can lead to neighbourhood decline.

3. Employment Learning and Skills in Halton.

The lack of a settled home can be a significant barrier for those seeking permanent employment and training opportunities. Additional costs of providing support to homeless people to enable them to find a job and live independently.

4. Children and Young People in Halton

Frequent adverse residential mobility (e.g. due to homelessness) can have a detrimental effect on educational attainment. Additional costs resulting from children entering the care system due to the lack of a settled home.

5. A Safer Halton

Criminal activity can be both a cause of and a consequence of homelessness. Lack of settled accommodation on release from prison will may make homeless ex-offenders more likely to re-offend within the first year of release than those who had settled accommodation before custody .

A number of key strategies are in place to take action against each of the priorities, many of which are cross cutting, impacting on the wider determinants of homelessness and homelessness prevention and should be considered alongside this strategy, including:

- The One Halton Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Halton Borough Council Corporate Plan
- Halton Borough Council Housing Strategy
- Halton Youth Strategy

Housing First Programme

A social letting agency is a stand-alone Council service that can offer a range of housing management solutions to private landlords. The Housing First programme

is a Government initiative, which brings permanent solutions to homelessness people. It is founded on the principle of housing being a basic human right that provides accommodation for people straight from the street.

The Housing First programme has demonstrated high degrees of success in both housing and supporting those that are chronically street homeless. The model operates by taking account of two key principles;

- Housing is a basic human right and not a reward for clinical success.
- Upon the chaos of homelessness being alleviated from a person's life, clinical and social stabilisation occur faster and are more enduring.

The Liverpool City Region is a pilot area for the Housing First model and will aim to deliver suitable accommodation within the social and private rented sectors, for vulnerable complex needs clients. The programme will work alongside local support agencies to develop and deliver intensive support to this vulnerable client group, to assist them in achieving sustainable lifestyle changes. This has a positive effect of ensuring that any possible relapse does not result in eviction.

Local Picture

Our aim is to be a Borough where homelessness is prevented from occurring in the first instance, rather than crisis led management and reacting to resolve it once it has happened. However, we cannot yet claim to have eliminated homelessness, but there have been vast service improvements made to reduce homelessness.

Homelessness Prevention

The simple definition of Homelessness Prevention is; to stop homelessness from happening. However, the meaning is slightly more complex when exploring the range of services and interventions that are made available by this approach.

There are a number of factors that are contributable towards the increase of homelessness. The main causes of homelessness are;

- Relationship breakdown
Loss of accommodation and break up of families
- Domestic Abuse
Increase in domestic abuse to both male and female victims
- Parental Exclusion
Young People being forced to leave the family home
- Welfare Reform
Bedroom Cap, reducing Local Housing Allowance
- Universal Credit
Major factor for clients facing homelessness. The financial process is time consuming, whereby, many clients are without financial help for approximately 6 weeks.

Therefore, whilst we aim to move away from the need for reactive and crisis services, we do understand that currently they play a crucial part in the system of homelessness prevention and in particular, preventing repeat homelessness through effective stabilisation and resettlement.

Existing local services that support prevention, and reactive services, include:

- o **Housing Solutions community focused service**
- o **Partnership working with registered providers and private landlords**
- o **Benefit and legal advice**
- o **Floating support**
- o **Supported temporary accommodation**
- o **Effective and accelerated Move On approach to secure accommodation using Housing Solutions Team**
 - o **HBC is signed up to the Cheshire Armed Forces Covenant**

Regardless of their type of service delivery, all of the partners, agencies and groups involved in the Homelessness Consultation process, understand the principles of homelessness prevention and the role they have in assisting people move to on from homelessness or how to eliminate the threat of it.

Early Intervention

The aim of the Housing Solutions Team is to assist and prevent people who are threatened with homelessness in Halton. To provide a community focussed and accessible service to ensure people know where and how they can seek help and assistance to prevent them becoming homeless and receive a quality and confidential housing options service.

There are a number of officers within the team who have their own specialisms. Each of the officers work closely with the designated client group and offer drop in appointment sessions across the Borough. The aim of the team is to be more community focused, thus allowing them to work directly with hard to reach clients, make the service more accessible and break down formal communication barriers.

There are a number of initiatives in place to assist the officers to prevent homelessness.

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| • GIFT Initiative | Tenancy Furniture package for under 35s |
| • Discretionary Payment | Guarantee to clients on universal credit to facilitate move on / secure accommodation |
| • Bond Guarantee Fund | Guarantee to cover rent arrears etc and encourage Private landlords to work with LA |
| • Prevention Fund | Financial assistance to secure property
Financial assistance with rent arrears, etc |

Demand on homelessness services in Halton

The Homelessness Reduction Act was implemented in April 2018, and has undoubtedly, had an impact upon homelessness service delivery and future housing allocations and priority preference. All Local Authorities must comply with the new legislation, as part of the Government's commitment to reduce homelessness and eliminate rough sleeping within the Borough. The new duties identified have placed extreme pressure upon Housing and Homelessness services to prevent and relieve homelessness.

The Housing Solutions Team have been applying some of the identified measures for some time, which have proven successful, but very time consuming. However, the role of the team has changed significantly, with additional pressure to facilitate and promote positive move on and sustainability for vulnerable clients.

A new duty on Local Authorities to relieve homelessness for all applicants and families who are eligible for assistance, regardless of priority need. This has placed additional pressure on Local Authorities to accommodate all applicants, pending the homelessness decision making. Furthermore, a homelessness decision cannot be made during the 56 day period and can only be issued on 57th day.

The pressure placed upon the team to work closely with clients and support them through the process has resulted in a vast increase in caseload. This has also increased the demand upon temporary accommodation provision. See table below

Year	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Placements	0	0	0	15

The main concern is B&B usage, consequently, due to the shortage of sufficient accommodation for families, this has led to an increase in B&B provision. Discussions are underway to review the accommodation provision and address the changing homelessness culture and statutory responsibilities

Where the Council is satisfied that an applicant is eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and falls within a specified priority need group, these statutorily homeless households are referred to as 'acceptances'. The increasing demand on services is illustrated in table 1, showing the number of statutory homeless acceptances and the numbers supported with homelessness prevention services, advice and assistance.

Over the last 5 years there has been an 88% increase in the number of people presenting as homelessness presentations (since 2013/14), however only 6.5% of those were accepted as statutory homeless in 2017/18, compared with 24.8% in 2013/14.

There has been a slight drop in 2017/18, from 2016/17, in the number of people in receipt of homelessness preventions services, but over the 5 year period Halton has seen an increase in demand on prevention services.

Achievements	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Statutory homelessness presentations	197	249	177	320	372
Statutory homelessness acceptances	46	42	20	36	24
Use of Bed & Breakfast	0	0	0	0	0
Homelessness Prevention	744	798	987	1,095	960
Advice and assistance	1781	1897	1887	1616	1920

Table 1. Statutory homeless presentations and acceptances

Table 2 shows projected numbers of homelessness presentations and acceptances. Projections clearly indicate an ongoing need for prevention services, which forms part of the strategic priorities addressed by this strategy.

	2018 / 19	2019/20	2020/21
Homelessness Presentations	427	491	564
Homelessness Acceptances	53	61	70
Bed & Breakfast	3	6	7
Homelessness Prevention / Relief	2,208	2,539	2,920

Table 2. Projected statutory homeless presentations and acceptances

Rough sleeping in Halton

Whilst rough sleeping is not identified as a major issue in Halton, there has been an increase in the last 2 years.

Rough sleepers are amongst the most vulnerable of homeless people, and people in society as a whole. The factors that may have led them to sleeping on the streets combined with the impact of rough sleeping on their physical and mental wellbeing and life chances is significant.

In 2017, a total of 4,751 people were estimated to be sleeping rough in England on any given night, which represents an increase of 15% since 2016. ^{viii} Within the delivery plan of this strategy Halton will consider both accommodation and support needs of people at risk of homelessness to prevent rough sleeping. A strong focus on prevention, a better coordinated emergency response and adequate supply of

secure, accessible and affordable housing will be key to addressing the potential for rough sleeping to increase in Halton.

Local Authority	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Halton	2	1	1	3	4
Cheshire East	0	5	5	7	18
Cheshire West	4	12	0	4	21
Warrington	11	5	5	5	4
Liverpool	6	8	15	21	33
Sefton	8	11	4	4	9
St Helens	1	0	2	2	9
Knowsley	1	0	1	2	0
Wirral	7	5	8	11	14

Table 3. Rough Sleepers by local authority area

Temporary Accommodation

Halton Borough Council has commissioned a number of supported housing hostels to temporarily accommodate vulnerable single homeless clients and families. The Borough presently has sufficient accommodation to meet its statutory homelessness duty. The current number of units commissioned is show in table 4

Single Hostel Provision	105 beds
Domestic Abuse Refuge Provision	12 beds
Family Unit Provision	10 units

Table 4. Temporary Accommodation Units in Halton

Youth Homelessness

Young people are one of the most vulnerable groups in society, without the right support homelessness can have a serious impact on young people's lives. Experience of homelessness at a young age increases their chance of becoming homeless again and developing complex problems in later life.

Halton is committed to safeguarding the welfare and wellbeing of young people and recognises and responds to key risk factors which lead to difficulties with housing. The Council's vision to ensure that all young people who need help and support with housing receive it. Moreover that youth homelessness is prevented through proactive partnership working and early intervention.

The Local Authority will aim to improve the lives of children young people aged 16 - 25, so that they become confident, happy, fulfilled adults, who contribute to their communities. To tackle and reduce homelessness amongst young people, through:

- Support and assistance to enable the young person to remain at home, if safe to do so
- Provide the opportunities to develop life skills which lead to sustained education or employment.
- Empowerment for young people to instil confidence that enables them to manage independently to maintain and sustain successful tenancies.
- Creating opportunities for co-production - working in collaboration with young people to meet their individual needs
- Working in partnership – Developing multi-agency approach with partners agencies to facilitate a joined-up approach to ensure a range of needs which lead to the threat of homelessness
- Recognising diversity – delivering person-centred approaches based on consistent, objective and impartial practices
- Inspiring citizenship – ensuring that young people’s understanding of residency and tenancy is intertwined with their value of their community and their place within that
- Providing educational support – creating opportunities to design and deliver pre-emptive and pragmatic learning solutions to prevent homelessness T

The scale of youth homelessness is difficult to quantify as many young people who are homeless are not counted in Official Statistics. Government data only counts the number of young people who approach their local authority for assistance and get a full homelessness duty accepted.

16-19 Year Olds - Young people that have presented as homeless



19 - 21 Year Olds - Presented as homeless



Consultation with voluntary sector and housing sector partners has highlighted areas where Halton is working well to prevent homelessness and work with people and families when if homelessness has been unavoidable, and also areas where improvement could be made. This has helped develop a picture of what 'good' looks like for people of Halton, illustrated below.



What does 'good' look like in Halton?

- ✓ People know who to contact for support by having a designated key worker who will help them coordinate their support and navigate them through the system
- ✓ Housing and homelessness services work together to provide prevention and early intervention support to avoid homelessness
- ✓ Information is available to people at the right time and in the right format, to help them avoid homelessness and support decision making
- ✓ The Third sector actively identify people who may be at risk of homelessness and initiate early intervention/prevention support
- ✓ People are discharged from Mental Health units in a timely manner and into appropriate accommodation, through working closely with Housing Solutions Team
- ✓ People, especially young people, are equipped with the necessary life skills to maintain tenancies.

The reasons why people find themselves at risk of homelessness vary, so the actions taken to reduce the risk must vary too. A 'one-size-fits-all' approach to tackling homelessness is unlikely to be successful. Individualised, professional support from multidisciplinary, joined-up services is important for tackling homelessness, and would likely bring improvements to other public services too. Investment in services that protect and prevent people from homelessness are a priority, with services to support people who are facing homelessness and avoid repeat homelessness, following.

Taking Action

A 'Housing and future challenges workshop' that took place in Halton identified a number of local challenges, which shaped the priorities below that will be addressed through actions laid out in the strategy delivery plan (appendix 1)

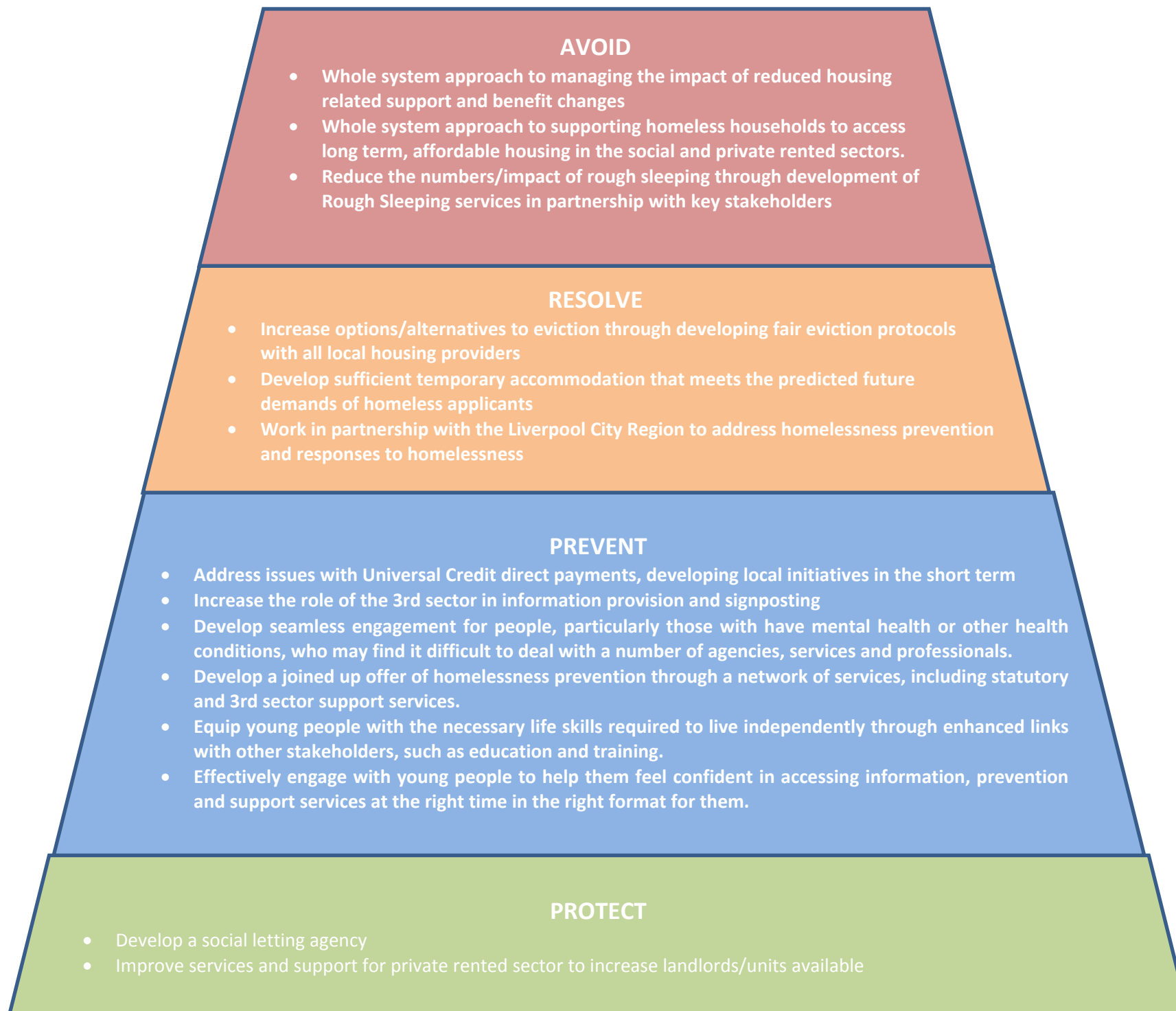
Further consultation with stakeholders, specifically in relation to health and homelessness, identified a number of cause and effect factors, such as communication, engagement and people's service needs and that impact locally on housing and homelessness. These factors may have a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups including those with mental health problems, older people and those with a criminal record, resulting in poor engagement and less opportunities to work with people to maintain tenancies and serious incidents that result in homelessness.

A consultation workshop with stakeholders around youth homelessness identified the specific challenges faced by young people which may increase their risk of homelessness, and the experience that this particular cohort of people have when faced with homelessness.

A whole systems approach will be adopted to tackling the determinants of homelessness: developing local initiatives to counteract the impact of benefit reforms and supporting people towards employment by accessing employment, learning and skills training opportunities.

Working in partnership with health, social care, education, children's social care, police and probation services, voluntary sector agencies, registered social landlords and the private rental sector.

Priority areas can be seen in the diagram below, with the actions required to achieve the priorities contained within the delivery plan in Appendix 1.



Investment in achieving the vision

LCR Funding

The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government awarded the Local Authority a financial flexible homelessness grant. The purpose of the grant is to facilitate the service changes, in line with new legislation (Homelessness Reduction Act) and to ensure that financial retention is available to offer prevention initiatives to vulnerable homelessness clients.

Year	2017/18	2018/19
Funding Allocation	£85,106	£94,745

Local authorities are encouraged to use their Homelessness Grant Allocation to support the development and enhancement of front line housing services, which will ensure that services for anyone homeless, threatened with homelessness, or rough sleeping within the Borough are available and are of a high quality.

It is the government's intention to transform the way councils fund homelessness services, giving them greater flexibility to prioritise homelessness prevention. The new 'flexible homelessness support grant' is a radical replacement of the tightly controlled funding currently given to source and manage temporary accommodation for homeless individuals and their families.

The new grant will empower councils with the freedom to support the full range of homelessness services. This could include employing a homelessness prevention or tenancy support officer to work closely with people who are at risk of losing their homes. The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act, has considerably changed the Homelessness service delivery process. The emphasis is now placed up prevention and relief, placing additional pressure upon the team to provide a community focused service, work with hard to reach vulnerable clients and offering a range of options and services available to resolve the homelessness situation.

Monitoring progress of the strategy

The responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the strategy will lie with the Halton Health and Wellbeing Board. The governance arrangements of that board require regular updates on the delivery and impact of the strategy.

The Homelessness Forum meets on an annual basis, to monitor performance of partners against the strategy delivery plan and identify future priorities.

The Homelessness Partnership Group consists of local statutory and voluntary partners, who meet regularly to address and tackle homelessness issues. The Group will meet quarterly to identify and support partners to take the delegated lead on the delivery plan actions, establish task and finish groups and provide updates in line with progress made, changes to policy or legislative requirements and demands on homelessness services. The Homelessness Partnership Group will identify and

review the prioritisation of the actions in the delivery plan in line with changing local need and other influencing factors. The strategy will also be monitored on a quarterly basis by Halton Borough Council's People Directorate's Senior Management Team.

Contact

For more information about this strategy or housing and homelessness services in Halton, please contact:

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Or visit

www.halton.gov.uk and search for '*Housing & Homeless Advice*

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http://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/homelessness/guide/homeless_get_help_from_the_council/who_qualifies_for_housing

ii Homeless Monitor; Shelter 2016

iii <https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/understanding-homelessness/impact-of-homelessness>

iiii Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

v Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

vi Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

vii Harker, L, Chance of a Lifetime: the impact of bad housing on children's lives, Shelter, London, 2006.

viii Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and NHS England

ix Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government