

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy (2019-2024)



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1.0 Foreword by Councillor

Homelessness and rough sleeping have increased across the Country, and these problems blight the lives of those directly affected and the wider community. This strategy is the Council's response to these pressures and focusses on prevention, as well as increasing access to accommodation and supporting residents to prevent homelessness. Tackling homelessness is one of our top priorities which we believe can be addressed through the delivery of secure, affordable housing and working with service delivery partners across the Borough.

This strategy is to be read in conjunction with the Council's Housing Strategy. We recognise that a decent, secure and affordable home is central to all residents of the Borough of Oadby & Wigston being able to live full, prosperous and happy lives; it is vital to wellbeing, employment, children's education and managing household debt.

We recognise the need for an increased supply of housing which should be delivered through new council housing and by working collaboratively with partners who share our commitment to providing secure, affordable homes. There is also the need for a broad approach for housing and planning services to deliver affordable housing to meet the needs of priority groups and those wanting to live in the Borough.

The Council has introduced a Temporary Housing Strategy and will seek to reduce the use of B&Bs and the placing of homeless households out of the Borough. This will be achieved by acquiring Council run temporary accommodation in the Borough and working with the private sector.

Rough Sleepers are often the face of homelessness to the general public. A coherent response of outreach work, and support is in place to help the rough sleeper community and we will continue to work with partner agencies with the aim of turning around as many lives as possible.

2.0 Executive Summary

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy identifies the main issues surrounding homelessness and rough sleeping in the Borough of Oadby & Wigston and sets out the Council's priorities for dealing with them. This strategy supports the delivery of the Corporate Plan and Housing Strategy supporting the strategic framework for the delivery of our four housing priorities:

1. Increase the supply of housing
2. Manage the demand for housing
3. Provide high quality local authority landlord services
4. Create great places to live

It is our commitment to deliver the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy which considers options to prevent homelessness and meet demand, and to reduce the number of households placed in temporary accommodation outside of the Borough. To achieve this we are committed to developing Council owned and managed temporary accommodation within the Borough.

In developing this Strategy we have given consideration to ensure the most vulnerable groups can be assisted.

We are committed to working with local landlords, both private landlords and Registered Providers to prevent homelessness and to provide more affordable homes in the Borough.

3.0 Introduction

Whilst rough sleepers are often the most visible and concerning form of homelessness the definition of homelessness and experience of those facing homelessness extends much wider than this.

Homelessness can include anyone who does not have access to suitable accommodation or a permanent home and may be someone staying with friends, "sofa surfing" with family, or in temporary accommodation provided by the Council.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy sets out how we will, over the coming five years, prevent homelessness including rough sleeping and support those who face homelessness or who are at risk of becoming homeless. Our Priorities to achieve this are:

Priority One: Homeless Prevention

- Tackling the causes of homelessness and continue to implement the Homelessness Reduction Act
- Preventing homelessness by access to affordable and sustainable housing options

Priority Two: Providing Services to respond to homeless and vulnerable people

- Preventing and responding to rough sleeping
- Supporting children, families, young people and vulnerable adults

Priority Three: Reduce the use of accommodation outside of the Borough

- Implementing our Temporary Accommodation Strategy
- Work with the private sector to secure suitable temporary accommodation

Priority Four: Increase the supply of affordable housing in the Borough

- Implementing the Local Plan and Housing Strategy
- Ensuring the provision of new affordable homes

4.0 Challenges and wider context

In the Borough of Oadby & Wigston, as nationally, the three main reasons why people become homeless are:

- The landlord issued a notice to end an Assured Shorthold Tenancy
- Family or friends were no longer willing or able to accommodate the family, couple or single person
- There was a violent or non-violent breakdown in a relationship

During the 2018-2019 financial year Oadby & Wigston Borough Council recorded the following statistics:

- 347 households experiencing housing difficulties approached the Council for assistance.
- The Council started a relief duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 for 235 households seeking housing assistance.
- The Council prevented 8 households from becoming homeless from their existing home.
- The Council worked with 35 households so that alternative accommodation could be found for them before they became homeless from their existing home.
- The Council accepted a full homeless duty to 35 households who would have been provided with temporary accommodation, pending rehousing, if needed.
- The Council provided outreach support to 3 rough sleepers

Whilst rough sleeping is the most visible and damaging manifestation of homelessness, it is not the only form. Homelessness also happens to families with children, couples and single people. A household could be at risk of becoming homeless, be living in temporary homeless accommodation arranged by the council, be sofa surfing between family and friends or be sleeping rough.

Since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (which came in to effect 1 April 2018) the need for temporary accommodation in the Borough has risen as has the time which the Council is required to accommodate certain households for (as defined within the legislation). In addition to this the total number of general needs social and affordable vacancies (those not for older persons) in the Borough has reduced over the past three years from 147 in 2016/17 to 53 in 2017/18 and just 40 in 2018/19. This means those families and persons owed the 'main homelessness duty' are spending longer in temporary accommodation.

5.0 Priority One - Prevention

- Preventing and responding to rough sleeping
- Supporting children, families, young people and vulnerable adults

The Council will continue to ensure that residents can access all the services they need to help them resolve their housing problems from one point of contact. This will include assistance to prevent homelessness through giving comprehensive advice and guidance to private sector tenants, registered social landlord tenants and leaseholders. We will continue to try and resolve landlord disputes, disrepair issues and rent/mortgage problems.

The Council will continue to deliver rent deposits for homeless households when homelessness prevention has failed.

We will continue to broker the relationship between tenants and landlords (both private and Registered Social Providers) by intervening early and preventing homelessness caused by rent arrears and anti-social behaviour.

We will continue to consider the accommodation needs of eligible care leavers as part of their individual needs assessment and Pathway Plan.

We will continue to work with and support local voluntary organisations.

6.0 Priority Two – Response of Services

- Preventing and responding to rough sleeping
- Supporting children, families, young people and vulnerable adults

In the next five years we aim to prevent people from having to rough sleep in the Borough. We will support new rough sleepers and assist people to exit the street safely and work with former rough sleepers to maintain their independence and accommodation.

We will provide services and interventions by working in partnership with substance misuse services, adult social care, integrated commissioning, primary health care and mental health services, community safety services, and the third sector. We will participate in multi-agency forums within the Leicestershire region and beyond.

We will provide a response to the Governments Rough Sleeping Strategy and work closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to make most effective use of new funding streams to end rough sleeping.

7.0 Priority Three – Reduce out of Borough Placements

- Implementing our Temporary Accommodation Strategy
- Work with the private sector to secure suitable temporary accommodation

There are occasions which will necessitate placement out of Borough, where there is insufficient accommodation available within the Borough. Whilst this is sometimes necessary we recognise that this practice can have a negative impact on family life, schooling and the overall wellbeing of those households who are homeless and we are committed to reducing the need for out of Borough placements for households who are homeless.

Our Temporary Accommodation Strategy sets out our aim to increase the provision of temporary accommodation within the Borough by developing and acquiring new properties to be managed by the Council. This will also include working closely with private owners to access suitable and cost effective accommodation within the Borough.

8.0 Priority Four – Affordable Homes

- Implementing the Local Plan and Housing Strategy
- Ensuring the provision of new affordable homes

Our Housing Strategy sets out how we will achieve this by securing additional inward investment in the provision of new homes by working more closely with registered providers and Homes England to enable the provision and variety of homes to meet different needs.

We will ensure the provision of new affordable homes to meet local need by prioritising planning obligations to deliver affordable housing over other obligations when negotiating planning applications, and expanding the Council's new build programme to deliver more new council homes that are affordable for residents.

We will develop a model to compulsorily purchase suitable buildings and sites and work with development partners to deliver them.

We will encourage small and medium enterprises to build by working with local communities to identify small and medium sites for development

9.0 Delivery and Monitoring

The Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy sets out the strategic direction for preventing and reducing homelessness and rough sleeping in the Borough of Oadby & Wigston and what we want to achieve, focusing in particular on the major changes required. It will be underpinned by policies and delivery plans to measure progress.

We will know if our actions are working if:

- Increased number of homelessness preventions and reduced cases of repeat homelessness are reported
- An increased proportion of personal housing plans which achieve a positive outcome
- Improved satisfaction with the Housing Options Service
- Funds secured to deliver rough sleeping initiatives will be maximised
- The number of rough sleepers in the Borough of Oadby & Wigston will be reduced over the lifetime of this strategy
- Increasing the number of homes within the Borough for temporary accommodation
- Reduce the number of out of Borough placements for temporary accommodation
- Reduce the number of households living in temporary accommodation
- Increase the number of affordable housing in the Borough

The strategic priorities set out within the strategy cannot be achieved without the collective commitment of the Council and its key partners and stakeholders. This partnership approach should apply to all housing in the Borough, which means that everyone involved in building and managing homes, and supporting the people who live in them have an important role to play.

We will:

- Involve residents and partners in developing detailed proposals to deliver the strategic objectives.
- Be inclusive and transparent in developing our policies and delivery plans.
- Publish details of our progress against the strategic priorities and the Council's Corporate Plan.
- Report progress against the strategic priorities to Committee.