

Homelessness Strategy Statement 2017-2021

Executive Summary.

Introduction

This strategy sets out Bolton's aim to tackle and prevent homelessness across the borough and details how Bolton will continue to work in partnership to provide housing options and homelessness services for the people of Bolton over the coming years.

The 2017 – 21 strategy intends to ensure that there is continued commitment across the Council and its partners in the prevention of homelessness; the maintenance of a viable range of services and interventions to both prevent homelessness and to offer appropriate assistance where necessary.

- Prevent homelessness through a range and quality of the housing options available through the provision of appropriate housing and support;
- Enable people to maintain their accommodation or secure more suitable accommodation where possible; and
- Provide appropriate services and interventions to those people experiencing homelessness and ensure that they are supported to play a full and positive role within the community in which they live.

Key themes and priorities are set in the wider context of challenges and opportunities presented by Public Servicer Reform, Greater Manchester Devolution, Welfare Reform and impending implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

The systemic impacts of Welfare Reform upon the ability of individuals to maintain as well as secure accommodation allied with the challenges to Council budgets in being able to resource activity mitigating particular needs of local communities does present major concerns as to our ability to respond to the housing needs of in particular some of the most vulnerable, chaotic and complex individuals and households.

Local Context

Bolton Council has maintained a clear focus upon upstream interventions to prevent escalation requiring costly statutory interventions whilst also ensuring delivery of services to the most vulnerable people in the borough. The impact of the wider changes has however led to increase in demand and pressure for homelessness and housing services.

Bolton's approach within the context of homelessness can be summarised simply:

PREVENTION - PREVENTION – PREVENTION

- Prevent homelessness through a range and quality of the housing options:
- Prevent the need for emergency assistance by enabling people to maintain their accommodation or secure more suitable accommodation where possible in a planned way; and

- Prevent repeat homelessness where possible by providing appropriate services and interventions to those people experiencing homelessness and enabling them to secure sustainable outcomes

In order to achieve this Bolton remains very focussed on the shape and principles that under-pin this approach:

- *Streamline prevention, alternative accommodation and assistance routes for households with greater capacity & self-reliance*
- *Provide bespoke personalised approaches for those with less capacity and self-reliance through:*
 - ✓ *Asset based approach – building capacity within households and enabling those with where-with-all*
 - ✓ *Complex Dependencies – bespoke personalised approaches for those with more enduring and complex / chaotic presentations*

Through the council's service review process, internal service structures have been developed to reflect the changing context and emerging challenges.

Key achievements

This strategy statement highlights a summary of key achievements delivered through the Homelessness Strategy 2011-16 including:

- ✓ ***Co-ordinated prevention activity***
 - ✓ *Bolton has maintained a relatively low level of rough sleeping*
 - ✓ *Maintained a tight offender management housing pathway*
 - ✓ *Provision of timely family mediation to prevent homelessness of young people.*
 - ✓ *The review of the single homelessness service, more efficient use of temporary accommodation resources and better aligned support services*
 - ✓ *Implementation of prevention of repossession interventions*
- ✓ ***Use of revenue based interventions in particular delivery of financial inclusion support***

Bolton's holistic approach in supporting households under stress has helped lessen increases in levels of homelessness compared to those in other boroughs and the country in general.

Overall Bolton has achieved considerable success in tackling homelessness in the face of major structural and systemic challenges.

Key points to note:

- *Relatively successful approach to prevention but needs to adapt further to new challenges including Homelessness Reduction Act 2017*
- *No major increase in homelessness numbers locally due to very proactive prevention approach BUT a very big shift in household profile, most notably:*
 - *An increasingly competitive bottom end of the housing market*
 - *Increase in 'single vulnerable' cases and the overall complexity of households requiring assistance.*

Bolton's Homelessness Strategy 2017 to 2021 - Key Challenges, Opportunities and Priorities

The impacts and continuing roll out of Welfare Reform and continuing squeeze on Council budgets are building to potentially a perfect storm and major concerns as to many Councils' capacity to respond to local housing need and in particular that of some of the most vulnerable, chaotic and complex individuals and households.

The context and systemic long term impact of Welfare Reform and reduction in critical council budgets undermining the ability to fund activity that mitigates particular needs of local communities is set against a backdrop of increasing competition and scarce supply of affordable accommodation.

In the context of Bolton's Homelessness Strategy and Action plan a number of key challenges are identified, including:

- *Maintaining supported accommodation options going forwards is absolutely critical*
- *Risks associated with changes to the funding of supported housing.*
- *Structural change in the 'homeless' cohort*
- *Health and Wellbeing – developing an asset based approach*
- *Further Welfare Reform Challenges*
- *Homelessness Reduction Act*
- *Maintaining coherent approach for young people:*
- *Management of offenders*

Strategic Priorities for Tackling Homelessness in Bolton

Tackling homelessness requires a balance between interventions to prevent homelessness and meeting the needs of households experiencing homelessness.

The preventative approach ensures where possible circumstances are addressed early and in a planned way to ensure interventions are more likely to prevent a critical deterioration.

The following priorities provide the strategic direction for homelessness services in the Borough.

- **Priority 1: Homelessness prevention and sustainability**
- **Priority 2: Advice and access**
- **Priority 3: Accessing interim accommodation**
- **Priority 4: Move-on and sustainable outcomes**

These priorities are reflected in the Homelessness Action Plan 2017-21.