

Bolton Homelessness Strategy 2020-2025.



Foreword

This is the final year of our annually reviewed homelessness strategy and sets out Bolton's continuing aim to tackle and prevent homelessness across the borough.

As detailed, Bolton continues to work in partnership to provide housing options and homelessness services for the people of Bolton our approach to which is centered around our key priorities agreed in 2019: Prevention, Enabling & Intervention.

This forms part of and links to our service plan in development for 2024 following which the co-production of our longer-term strategy will begin in earnest.

Over the last 5 years there has been significant changes to the management arrangement of core homelessness services and significant systemic challenges which persist across the housing sector.

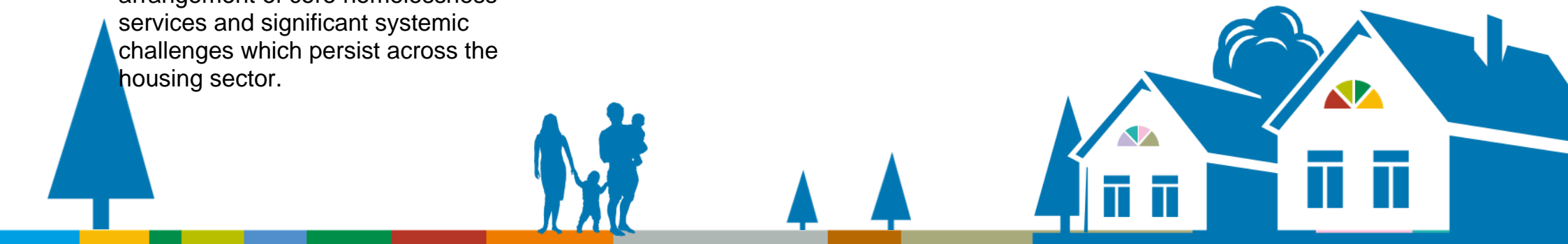
We continue to put ourselves in the best position to prioritise those that really need our help, with a focus on achieving independence where possible at the earliest opportunity.

In setting the standard for supporting vulnerable people, helping residents to find and retain places they can call home, and in promoting quality and good landlords whom provide the right support at the right time as part of a wider system, we continue to help the most vulnerable weather the storm.

Progress has and is being made. While in a challenging position, Bolton retains its commitment to ending rough sleeping, improving the quality of our housing stock and has been able to operate flexibly and dynamically to new and emerging challenges.

This includes a commitment to more open and accessible services rather than distant and remote engagement, switching to more pro-active over reactive approaches with prevention and partnership being central pillars of our plan.

That so many need our help is concerning and prioritising those in greatest need a necessity. We continue to be innovative, test new ways of working, and use every means at our disposal to achieve our ambitions.



What we do

OUR ROLE

- 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.



Context

Over the last 5 years there has been significant changes to the management arrangement of core homelessness services and significant systemic deterioration of the wider housing market placing pressure on it.

Ultimately the UK has an affordable and social housing supply issue. This housing shortage coupled with the impact of international events, has seen rents rise significantly faster than incomes in the private rented sector, acutely impacting the lowest income and vulnerable families and individuals. As is often the case those most marginalised are most affected. As we work to reconnect people with their communities' help address the factors that are putting them at disadvantage, the systemic challenges are working against people's ability to sustain progress we are working hard to help navigate. As an example the widening gap between Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and market rents continues to be a risk factor, and while the government's recent announcement on changes to the LHA is welcome, it's effect will quickly wain unless wider market conditions change.


In short, the UK is in the midst of a national housing crisis, and Bolton is being directly impacted with our most vulnerable communities worst affected.

Key themes and priorities are set in the context of our challenges and also opportunities presented by Public Servicer Reform and Greater Manchester Devolution. The strategy statement intends to ensure a continuity of 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 during the coming development period of the longer term homelessness strategy.

Core principles that remain are:

- Prevention
- Enabling
- Intervention

These are underpinned by our wider organisational and partnership values as well as the wider Community Housing Services business model. These values and business model are captured below.



Our Vision 2030

“Accessible, affordable, sustainable and high-quality homes for every Bolton resident that needs one.”

OUR VALUES



ACCOUNTABILITY

Take responsibility for actions and stand by good decisions



DETERMINATION

We won't give up on people, will remain positive and open to new ideas



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Set and maintain high standards, provide a quality service that keeps it simple.



WORKING TOGETHER

Share knowledge, learn from others, collaborate with partners for better outcomes for all.



HONESTY AND RESPECT

Be truthful, open, fair and treat others how we would want to be treated.

Target Business Model

What the data tells us...

The landscape for housing services is a challenging one and is summarised in the performance and demand data below:



2455

Homelessness applications.



£1,246,595

Total cost of providing temporary accommodation.



183

Rough sleepers supported into accommodation.



168%

accommodation in the last 6 years.



£190,895

Funding identified for customers who were unaware they were entitled to on assessment.

Key metrics

In addition to the above:

Demand for social housing is at an all-time high, typically Homes for Bolton Choice Based Lettings would advertise between 1700-2000 properties per year receiving around 100,000 expressions of interest. In the first half of 2023/24 995 properties advertised received 326,584 expressions with an average of 328 expressions per property, a tripling of demand.

Adapted Accommodation Needs - People requiring accommodation that is adapted to their needs is also in increasingly short supply. Currently there are in excess of 400 households on the Adapted Housing Register and of these 1 in 4 will be rehoused during the year.

Private Rented Sector - Whilst Bolton remains one of Greater Manchester's least expensive housing market areas, from 2020 to 2023 PRS landlord rental expectations recorded through Zoopla showed an increase of 38.7%, with most recent annual rise in the Bolton recorded as 15% - the highest of all local authority areas in the UK other than Glasgow.

The result - before the LHA changes announced by government, 95% of PRS property was unaffordable to a single person on universal credit. It was also unaffordable to 50% of singles in employment in low-income roles.

Temporary Accommodation Homelessness Assistance - All our temporary accommodation is routinely full. The average stay has increased from 3 months to 9 months as we cannot find affordable decent standard accommodation to move people on to easily.

Like many areas we are having to use chain hotel accommodation when our core temporary accommodation is full, going from occasional emergency use to concurrently having between 20-45 families/households placed. The cost is high and has doubled over the last 18 months. At this rate, our projected 2024/25 bill for chain hotel accommodation alone could exceed £1m we are working hard to mitigate.



Rough Sleeping - In supporting those in greatest need, the challenge of maintaining accommodation is significant. Bolton has a strong track record in responding to rough sleeping however and as of the last quarter of 2023-24, we averaged 5 entrenched rough sleepers per night, up from 2 in 2022/2023 albeit with peaks of 12.

Bolton has an overall flow of between 180 – 220 people identified as sleeping rough at some stage, however maintain our commitment to no second night out and deploy significant resources to move people from the street 365 days a year. This has helped us to maintain relatively low 'repeat and entrenched rough sleeping' compared to 'new to street'

Asylum and Refugee dispersal - Bolton has a very high level of asylum seeker dispersal. SERCO are one of the competing organisations for properties locally. They have just under 1000 and have indicated an intention to secure up to 200 more through 2023/24 and 2025. Notifications increased during the autumn of 2023 from 10 per month to 60 per month with a peak of 100, adding to our wider challenges. Emergency shelters will remain in use for at least the first half of 2024 as a result.



Our Response:

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 as we have looked to strengthen over the last 4 years.

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 for the remainder of this strategy period:

➤ **Priority 1: Homelessness prevention and sustainability**

- Review prevention options and implement initiatives targeted on the main reasons for homelessness building on successes to date.
- Develop effective management and targeting of prevention budget including securing further close alignment with both LWP (Local Welfare Provision), DHP (Discretionary Housing Payments)
- Domestic abuse and violence – proactively manage and secure full alignment of commissioned DAV prevention and intervention services with homelessness related functions.

➤ **Priority 2: Advice and access**

- Ensure appropriate access to housing services across the wide range of presentation routes, circumstances and household types including: Improve customer self-help information, awareness and management of expectations; hospital discharge; offender resettlement and co-ordination across vulnerable people / family services for those with complex multiple need.



- Develop the refugee and asylum response to improve early intervention, expectation management and alleviate pressure from core homelessness functions
- Review sustainability services including money skills and mediation funding model to secure continued delivery of preventative interventions
- Complete review of Bolton Council / BCH allocations policy update

➤ **Priority 3: Accessing interim accommodation**

- Ensure adequate supply of temporary and other supported or stepping-stone accommodation including with BCH partners and others to develop Registered Provider temporary accommodation provision that improves financial sustainability, unpinned by a repurposing of nightly fee accommodation funding into support and non-recoverable ineligible costs.
- Secure the delivery of a GM wide Out Of Borough placement protocol to reduce volume and PRS landlord expectation impacts
- Work with BCH partners to delivery adapted units for temporary accommodation use

➤ **Priority 4: Move-on and sustainable outcomes**

- Develop Strategic Housing Board to maximise both delivery of social housing accommodation for rent and secure maximum impact from corporate property / land resources
 - Development of Positive Social Circles and VCSFO community capacity for rough sleepers and single homeless in line with the Rough Sleeping Initiative and Bolton's Rough Sleeping Pathway plan
 - Develop approach to PRS inspection and securing of accommodation for move-on of homeless households including developing a strategy towards multiple occupied accommodation in order to support delivery of self-contained accommodation, improve standards of accommodation and management
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