

Birmingham **Homelessness** **Prevention** **Strategy** **2017+**



24 August - 5 October 2017

Consultation Summary



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What are we trying to achieve?

Birmingham strives to be a city where we work together to eradicate homelessness. This is our vision for the new Homelessness Prevention Strategy for Birmingham.

Strategic partners from the Housing Birmingham Partnership, and across the City Council, Health, Housing, Voluntary and Third Sectors all recognise that homelessness is an important priority for our city. We have all committed to working together to tackle the issue and prevent it from happening in the future.

Our strategic vision is informed by a number of key drivers including:

- A current and comprehensive review of homelessness in Birmingham;
- The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 due in April 2018;
- The recommendations from inquiries into Rough Sleeping and Prevention and Homeless Health made by the Birmingham Housing and Homes Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

To reduce homelessness we must do more to make sure that people get the early help they need to prevent incidents of homelessness from happening, and also make sure appropriate support is available for those who have experienced homelessness, so that they are able to improve their chance of a positive future.

To achieve this we have identified five key aims:

- Ensure people are well informed about their housing options;
- Prevent people from becoming homeless;
- Assist people as soon as possible if they do become homeless so their homelessness can be relieved by securing sufficient accommodation and support;
- Support people to recover from their experience and to stay out of homelessness;
- Enable people to secure homes that they can afford and maintain.

We will ask Birmingham citizens, including those who have directly experienced homelessness; strategic partners and key agencies to tell us their views on our proposals.

This section supports Question 1 of the Homelessness Prevention Strategy Consultation Questionnaire

What is the scope of our Homelessness Prevention Strategy?

Homelessness is defined by the Government as:

“A household is legally homeless if, either, they do not have accommodation that they are entitled to occupy, which is accessible and physically available to them or, they have accommodation but it is not reasonable for them to continue to occupy this accommodation.”

People who are assessed as meeting this definition are referred to as ‘statutory homeless’ or ‘priority housing need’.

People who are assessed and do not meet the Government definition are referred to as ‘non-statutory homeless’.

Street Homelessness is defined by the Government 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’).”

To ensure that we can effectively tackle homelessness at every stage of a person or family’s journey the scope of this strategy recognises:

- Those who are considering their housing options
- Those who are at risk of homelessness
- Those who are deemed statutory homeless
- Those who are deemed non - statutory homeless
- Those who are street homeless
- Children who experience homelessness
- Those who are moving on from homelessness
- The wider population (for the purposes of prevention more broadly).

Why do we need a Homelessness Prevention Strategy?

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a legal requirement on Local Authorities to develop and implement a Homelessness Strategy every five years.

Our Health and Wellbeing Challenge

Homelessness is a significant public health issue that affects the health and wellbeing of our local population.

Whilst we have made good progress in tackling homelessness in the city, we have focused on making sure people have a place to stay. There are now more than 20,000 households in Birmingham each year who are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless or moving out of homelessness. We must do more to support people to address the reasons why they are at risk of homelessness or why they became homeless in the first place to prevent cycles of homelessness negatively affecting both individuals and families.

Experiencing poverty and living on a low income are key barriers for people to access, afford and maintain safe and appropriate places to live. Family income in Birmingham is below the national average and we have a high number of people who are unemployed. Birmingham also has a very high number of families who are homeless and/or have a temporary place to stay.

More than three quarters of people who are accepted as statutory homeless in the city have children. Experiencing adversity in childhood, including homelessness, can have a long-term negative effect on a child's health, development, and emotional wellbeing and we therefore need to better understand how trauma such as abuse or neglect in childhood or living in a dysfunctional home can increase the risk of becoming homeless. We also need to do more to recognise how traumatic the experience of homelessness itself can be to all age groups.

People who sleep on the street are the most visible type of homelessness in our city. Street homeless people have needs that are multiple and complex. When we combine these with the reasons that brought them to sleep on the street in the first place, it makes it very hard for one single agency to provide the right support. We know from our review of homelessness that we need to find more effective ways to engage with the street homeless community.

Our Housing Challenge

The Birmingham Housing Strategy - *Birmingham: A Great Place to Live* - sets out the challenge we face to make sure that there are enough good quality and affordable housing options for everyone in the city. We need to make sure that people who have experienced homelessness are able to continue to live in their new home for as long as they choose.

This means making sure that there are enough suitable homes for people moving on from homelessness to live in. It also means effectively supporting people to gain the knowledge and resilience they need to live independently, either whilst at risk of becoming homeless or after experiencing homelessness.

Birmingham has a growing population that is putting increasing pressure on the availability of our current housing options. While the statutory homeless system may seem to offer a clear pathway into permanent housing, it does contrast with the difficulties that people experience in finding a suitable and affordable place to live. The strategy will look to explore local solutions to this complex issue.

Locally we are seeing an increase in people becoming statutory homeless because a short term tenancy with a private landlord has ended. Domestic abuse and being unable to stay at the family home are also reasons why people become homeless in Birmingham.

The size of families in Birmingham is larger than average and not enough larger homes are available to house those in need. This is especially difficult for larger families who have been impacted by the limit that the government has put on the amount of benefits people can claim.

At the same time, it is becoming more difficult for young people aged under 35 to get a home that they can afford to live in independently. Young people that have a low income or are unemployed are particularly affected and often are living with their family for longer. This is putting further pressure on the need for larger homes - and represents a new and growing need in the city.

This section supports Questions 1 and 2 of the Homelessness Prevention Strategy Consultation Questionnaire

What do we want to do to address homelessness in Birmingham?

We need to change the way we respond to homelessness in Birmingham so that we shift the balance from reactive crisis prevention response to proactively addressing homelessness in all of its forms throughout a person or family's journey.

The Positive Pathway is a whole system approach where all partners work together to tackle homelessness.

This model is already working well with young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness in Birmingham, and by adopting this approach wider the city will have a consistent approach to tackling homelessness.

Our approach sets out five key areas that can be used flexibly to ensure that no matter what stage people enter the pathway; they will be supported as early and as effectively as possible. The five key areas are:

1. Universal Prevention

This means delivering a wide range of timely, accurate information and advice about housing options and financial issues and it will be available to everyone to help prevent issues with housing occurring in the first place. It will also ensure people understand the links between housing choice and their financial and employment circumstances.

This approach is delivered through a variety of ways including online, through schools and universal services and through community networks that reach young people, families and professionals.

It is intended to empower people to successfully live independently without support from specialist services and ensure they know where to go to seek help if required.

Strategically, this approach links closely to the work of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Birmingham Financial Inclusion Strategy and the Child Poverty Commission to support reductions in inequality in the city.

2. Targeted Prevention

Anyone can become homeless. However, it is possible to identify people who are most likely to become homeless.

Groups at risk of homelessness include: young people leaving the care of the local authority; those leaving prison; people suffering from domestic violence; those with a mental health problem or suicidal ideation; those with a substance misuse problem; those experiencing bereavement or from troubled families; people on low incomes and those who are in debt.

This approach introduces early intervention through trauma informed practice. This means understanding trauma and how it may lead to homelessness either now or in the future.

It links to the city's Early Help Strategy and is based upon identifying individuals and families who may be at risk of becoming homeless and offering them effective support as early as possible. In many cases, this type of support can prevent homelessness from happening.

It means strengthening our joined up approach to ensure the right structures, partners, and services are in place.

3. Crisis Prevention and Relief

The strategy shifts the balance to delivering a more proactive, prevention approach, however we must make sure that there is still an effective response for those people who become homeless in an emergency or crisis situation.

This part of the pathway approach outlines an integrated, co-ordinated response to commissioned accommodation and support, where Housing Options and Homelessness Services come together with other services including Health, Employment and/ or Childrens Services to make sure the impact of the crisis is limited. This means everyone knowing how to effectively respond to someone who is identified as either at risk of becoming homeless or is homeless.

Effective support in this area may help reduce the need for someone to make a homeless application to the Local Authority, or to avoid the need for rehousing into social housing.

4. Homeless Recovery

People who have experienced homelessness are more likely to have additional needs around their mental, physical and emotional health. They may also need extra support to make sure they can maintain their new home and move on into a positive and healthy future. This is particularly true for children, young people and more vulnerable adults. Providing this support is critical to limiting the impact of homelessness as well as preventing homelessness recurring.

Experiencing homelessness can have a serious and long lasting impact, particularly in childhood. Understanding that being homeless can be traumatic, this approach involves working with people to reduce the risk of experiencing trauma again.

This means taking into account a person's emotional and psychological needs alongside continued support to stabilise accommodation. It also means focusing on improving the overall wellbeing of all adults and children in the household.

5. Sustainable Housing

The lack of suitable homes makes homelessness in Birmingham an ongoing challenge, and the need to secure more sustainable housing options is a key part of addressing a critical structural influence on the city's homelessness.

To maintain the momentum of supporting people into independence when they are ready, we must have access to a truly affordable supply of housing options for people to move in to. Without it, our situation regards levels and types of homelessness will not change.

People that are ready to live independently may find that they are trapped in supported housing, and it may stop others from moving on and getting the help they need to move towards independent living. This part of the pathway will explore local solutions to expanding the supply of safe, good quality, affordable housing options, and will look across the options for people living alone, with family, or in other forms of shared homes.

This approach focuses on longer term strategic actions such as improving the supply of suitable, affordable housing to make a difference to homelessness, and improving the standards and quality of homes in the private rented sector

This section supports Questions 1, 2 and 3 of the Homelessness Prevention Strategy Consultation Questionnaire

What next?

We are inviting views from all stakeholders interested in tackling homelessness in Birmingham and have developed a questionnaire that lists the things we think will help to achieve our vision for the Homelessness Prevention Strategy.

Please complete the questionnaire and return your views using the FREE postal address below

Alternatively, you can share your thoughts by contacting:

Website: **www.birminghambeheard.org.uk**

Twitter: **@healthybrum**

Email: **homelessnessconsultation@birmingham.gov.uk**

Telephone: **0121 303 5154**

Write to: **Homelessness Prevention Strategy Consultation
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Please note that you do not need to use a stamp.

