

# **Birmingham Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2017+**

**(Consultation Draft)**

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## Foreword

### Cllr Peter Griffiths - Cabinet Member for Housing and Homes

Welcome to Birmingham's fourth Homelessness Strategy. I would like to thank partners from across the Council, Health, Criminal Justice, Housing Sector, and Voluntary and Third Sectors, who have contributed and committed to its development and success.

Birmingham has a strong history of working together in partnership to tackle homelessness. Despite our success, the scale and extent of homelessness has remained persistent. A radically different approach that drives whole system change is now necessary. In collaboration with our Local Authority neighbours from across the West Midlands Combined Authority area and the West Midlands Mayoral Taskforce, we will work together to eradicate homelessness from our city. Our new strategy focuses preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place and helping people who are homeless to build a more positive future.

The task ahead will be challenging. Increasing pressure on budgets in all sectors and the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 are just some of the challenges that we face. I am confident that together with our partners, and in collaboration with our Local Authority neighbours, we will tackle those challenges and make a significant impact on homelessness in Birmingham.

### Cllr Sharon Thompson - Birmingham Homelessness Ambassador

The impacts of homelessness are complex and intertwined. The growing number of people living on the street makes visible what may otherwise be unrecognisable to the majority of people in our city. Yet street homeless remains a relatively small proportion of the overall issue and we must not forget those living in precarious housing circumstances, temporary accommodation, hostels and supported accommodation - or indeed those who are taking positive steps to recover from homelessness.

Homelessness can lead individuals and families into a cycle that can have a profound effect on all aspects of life. It is not just a lack of accommodation; homelessness can affect our physical and mental health and wellbeing, educational achievement, ability to gain and sustain employment, and puts pressure on our personal and family relationships. These effects, especially on children, can be life long and can cause repeated homelessness of a generational nature.

No single organisation can prevent homelessness alone; together we must be proactive in working together to intervene earlier and prevent homelessness wherever possible.

I look forward to working with our highly skilled, experienced and innovative partners in the city to deliver this strategy and achieve our vision for Birmingham.

## Introduction

Homelessness is caused by a complex interaction between a person or family's individual circumstances and a number of social and structural factors often outside of their own control.

Unless these other factors are addressed, the ability of an individual or family to become resilient and improve their chance of a positive future is greatly reduced, and places them at risk of becoming trapped in a cycle of homelessness.

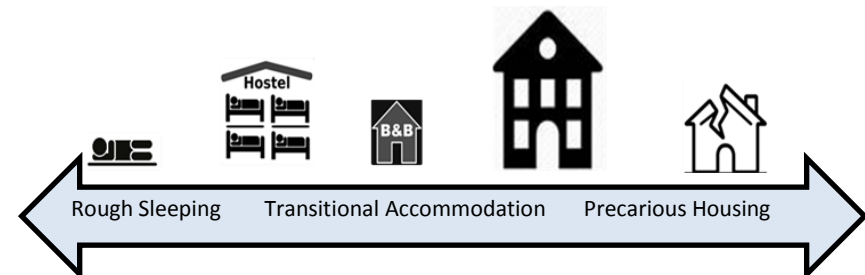
Tackling all of these issues at the point of crisis is complex and very expensive. Therefore, we must do more to intervene as early as possible, to limit the impact of homelessness, help people to recover from homelessness, and prevent it from happening in the future.

The journey into and through homelessness is different for everyone. People enter at different stages, at different times in their lives, and each with individual support; it is important that our approach is flexible to respond effectively.

## Scope

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)



## Our Vision

**Birmingham is a city where we all work together to eradicate homelessness**

## Aims

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

## Defining Homelessness

### Statutory Homelessness

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) defines statutory homelessness 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”*

Households in priority housing need include families, pregnant women and single people who are particularly vulnerable.

### Non-Statutory Homelessness

Non-statutory homeless people are typically single people/childless couples who are not assessed as being in ‘priority need’ and are only entitled to advice and assistance if homeless.

Some non-priority homeless people are offered access to Local Authority - commissioned housing support services.

## Street Homelessness

DCLG define street homelessness 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”)”*

### Legal duties

The **Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977** requires Local Authorities to prevent as well as respond to homelessness and assist people under imminent threat of homelessness (and classed as ‘in priority need’) by taking reasonable steps to prevent them from losing their existing accommodation.

The **Homelessness Act 2002** places a specific requirement for Local Authorities to devise and implement a Homelessness Strategy.

The **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017** places a duty on Local Authorities to provide anyone threatened with or at risk of being homeless (within a 56 day period) to be provided with advice and support to prevent them becoming homeless.

## Impact of Homelessness

The impact of homelessness begins at birth; children are more likely to be born at a low birth weight and miss their immunisations, and are less likely to be registered with a GP.

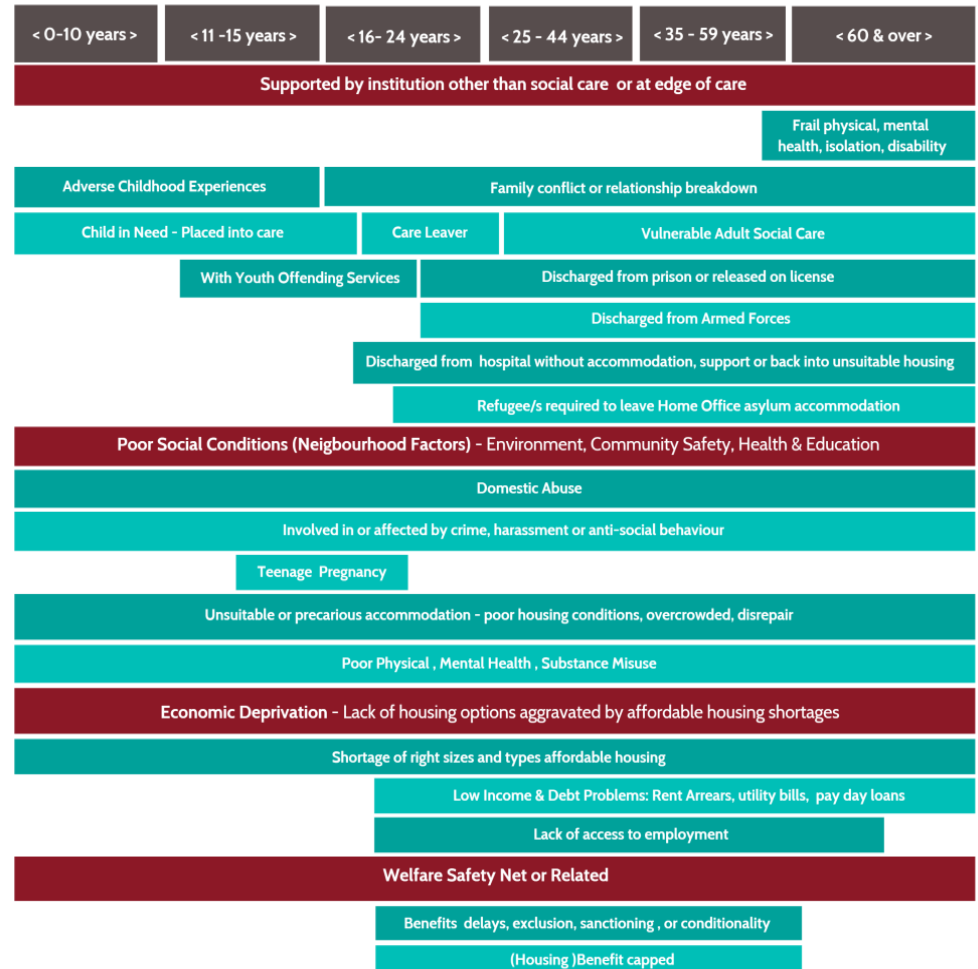
Homeless children are three times more likely to experience poor mental health; the impact of which is long lasting. Even after they have a new home, children who experience homelessness remain vulnerable to family breakdown, domestic abuse, maternal mental ill health, and learning and development difficulties.

As a result of their preoccupation with addressing their unstable and unsafe living conditions, a parent’s capacity to effectively parent is much reduced.

For many people, homelessness is not just a housing issue. It is closely linked with complex and chaotic life experiences. Mental health problems, drug and alcohol dependencies, and experiences in prison or with the care system are often closely linked to more entrenched experiences of homelessness. Traumatic childhood experiences are part of most street homeless people’s life histories.

Homeless households experience severe health inequalities, poorer health and wellbeing, and a lower life expectancy than the general population. It is vital that we can identify and address the impact of homelessness for people at every stage of life.

Homelessness across the life course: Triggers, Causes & Risk Factors



## A Priority for Birmingham

Homelessness continues to be a high priority for Birmingham. Despite our progress, the number of people experiencing homelessness is growing.

The cross cutting nature of homelessness is clear and highlighted by its inclusion as a key contributing factor to the success of the following strategic priorities:

- **Birmingham Housing Strategy Statement (2017)** - Enabling citizens to find, access and sustain housing that meets their needs is a key priority.
- **Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2017)** - Tackling homelessness is key to children living in permanent housing, increasing employment or meaningful activity stable accommodation for those with mental health problems, and improving the wellbeing of people with complex needs.
- **Birmingham Financial Inclusion Strategy (2017)** - Financial exclusion exacerbates poverty and can lead to serious debt problems, homelessness, mental health issues and involvement with crime.

- **Birmingham Domestic Abuse Prevention Strategy (2017)** - Domestic abuse as the second highest presenting reason for homelessness households in priority housing need.
- **Birmingham Early Help Strategy (2015-2017)** - Reducing the number of families experiencing homelessness and overcrowding is key to 'a good childhood for the best start in life'.
- The **agreed purpose for Improved Mental Health in Birmingham (2016)** - Supporting people to recover from poor mental health in order to reduce adult and youth homeless.

Homelessness is an issue for the West Midlands as well as the city. We are very aware of the regional aspects of homelessness which include the impact of issues such as standards in the Private Rented Sector, affordability and lack of supply. There is also crossover with potential households who are experiencing homelessness.

We will continue to explore regional opportunities to influence and shape the homelessness agenda across the West Midlands Combined Authority. We will also support activity and services that can afford us better value for money and improved outcomes for our Citizens through models such as Housing First and the combined efforts towards hospital discharge and prison release.

Birmingham is also keen to share its approach to tackling and preventing homelessness with the West Midland's Mayoral



Taskforce on Homelessness, collaborating with our Local Authority neighbours to ensure we are making the greatest impact to achieve our vision.

## **Our Challenge**

Nationally the Government recognises that the housing system is 'broken'. Locally, this market failure is particularly apparent as:

- A lack of affordable housing options for many larger households – Birmingham has higher than average household sizes but a limited supply of 4 bed and larger homes. This is especially difficult for larger households affected by the 'benefit cap',
- Increasing difficulties experienced by people under-35 to secure affordable, independent accommodation – particularly for low-income and unemployed young people. Whilst there is a relatively good supply of accommodation of this type, it is often not affordable for this group. People who are subject to benefit restrictions face additional difficulties. This contributes to a need for additional larger homes as young people are living with their family for longer; representing a new and growing housing need in the city.

Birmingham has a growing population, which is putting increasing pressure on the existing housing stock. Locally there are more than three times the rate of priority homelessness than the national average and double the rate of Core City neighbours. These high

rates can also be seen as a direct consequence of a fractured housing system. The statutory homeless system can seem to offer a clear pathway into permanent accommodation, which contrasts with the difficulties that people experience in finding suitable and affordable accommodation.

Increasingly, people are presenting as statutory homeless because an assured short hold tenancy has ended. Domestic abuse and parental exclusion are also significant reasons for why people become homeless in Birmingham; over 40% of homeless applications from outside of the city are associated with homelessness resulting from domestic abuse.

Deprivation and associated poverty / low incomes are key barriers for accessing suitable housing and maintaining stable and financially sustainable tenancies. Access to employment is a key mechanism for preventing homelessness. The average household income in Birmingham is relatively low. Combined with relatively high rates of unemployment – this is a driver of housing exclusion. Poor financial management and a failure to maximise household income also limits people's ability to access housing.

Our approach to recovery has been overly housing focussed, with an emphasis on securing accommodation and not enough attention given to prevent future homelessness by addressing the underlying cause of peoples' experience. We need to do more to recognise the impact that the trauma of homelessness can have on both adult and childrens' physical and mental health and well-being.

Homelessness is an adverse childhood experience that can have a long-term negative impact on children's development.

Birmingham has a very high level of families who are homeless and/or in temporary accommodation. It affects social bonding, school performance as well as linked to disadvantage in future generations. More than three quarters of applicants accepted as homeless and in priority need have children – either with a lone parent, or as dependants of a couple.

Young people are the most disadvantaged in the housing market because they are likely to have a low income and are viewed by Landlords as potentially high risk. As Birmingham is a young city, this is a particularly local challenge. There are 4,118 young people facing homelessness in Birmingham, most of whom have been made homeless from their family home (42%). It is common for there to be other underlying factors that could contribute to or increase the risk of a young person becoming homeless, including lack of tenancy experience and mental health issues.

The difficulties that people experience trying to find and secure suitable housing has a direct impact on their health and well-being. This places increased pressure on health services, particularly family doctors and mental health services, as people struggle to navigate the housing system in the city. With more than 20,000 (est.) households in Birmingham each year either homeless, at risk of becoming homeless or transitioning out of homelessness – the overall health and wellbeing of the city is under threat.

Birmingham is at crisis point with rough sleepers at the most visible tip of the homelessness iceberg. The number of street homeless people has increased by 53% in the last year, and by 588% since 2012. The complexity of multiple needs, circumstances and increasing inter-relationship of triggers and reasons leading people to sleep rough makes it increasingly more difficult for a single provider or partner to address. At the same time, it is increasingly hard to engage with this group suggesting that our traditional approach is no longer as effective as it used to be.

The Housing Birmingham Partnership's strategy "Birmingham: A Great Place to Live" sets out the challenge we face in terms of ensuring a sufficient supply of sustainable housing options for all citizens. Ensuring that households who have experienced homelessness are able to sustain accommodation in the long-term requires both the availability of suitable housing, and also the household having the capacity and resilience to maintain occupation of their home.

## Our Approach – The Positive Pathway

The Positive Pathway is a whole systems approach built on collaboration, best practice and service integration. Successful implementation of our approach will ensure an excellent response to homelessness in the city.

First developed by St Basil's and implemented locally with young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, the Positive Pathway has seen much success. By embedding the approach at the heart of this strategy, Birmingham will create a comprehensive and consistent approach to homelessness across the life course.

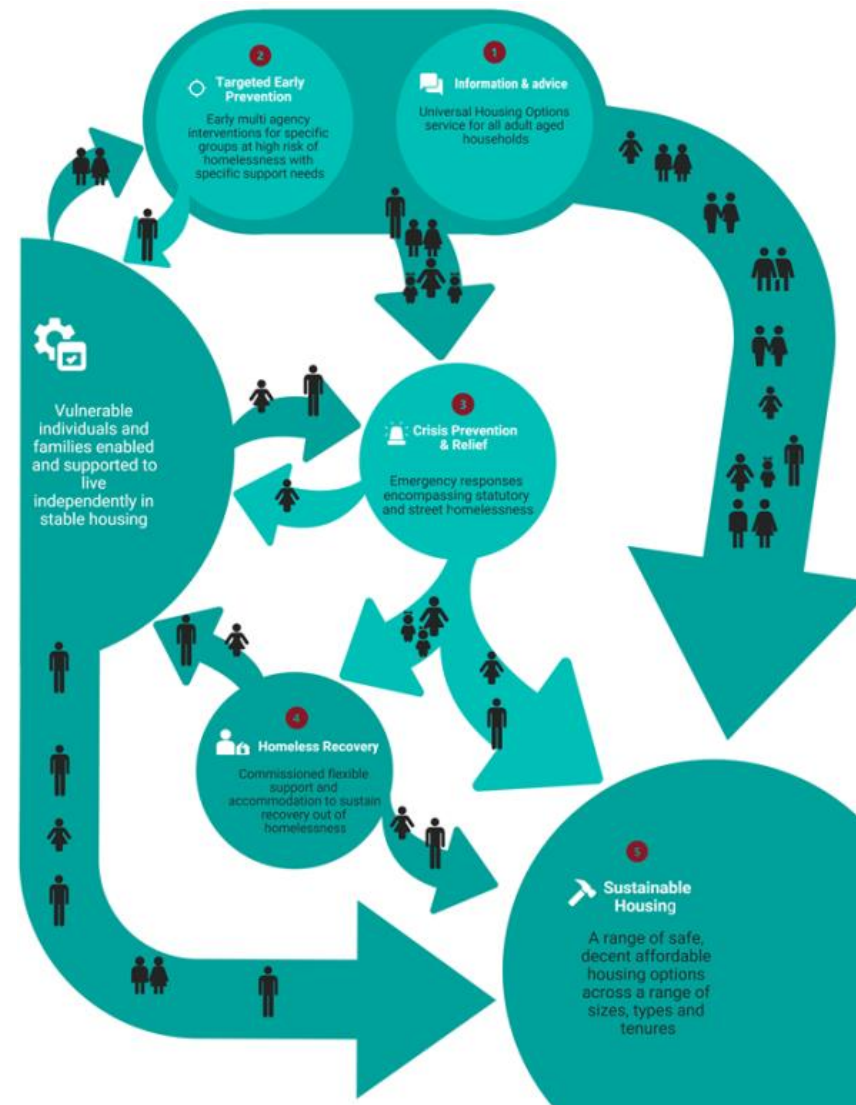
Our approach sets out five key areas that can be used flexibly to ensure that no matter what stage people enter the pathway; they will be supported as early and as effectively as possible.

The five key areas are:

1. Universal Prevention
2. Targeted Prevention
3. Crisis Prevention and Relief
4. Homeless Recovery
5. Sustainable Housing

The Positive Pathway radically changes the way we respond to homelessness in Birmingham; shifting the balance from a reactive crisis prevention response to proactively addressing homelessness in all of its forms throughout a person or family's journey.

## The Positive Pathway Model



## Universal Prevention

### Our Aim

**To ensure people are well informed about their housing options.**

### Our Approach

A wide range of timely, accurate information and advice about housing options and financial issues that is available to everyone to prevent issues with housing occurring in the first place, and to 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 community networks to 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 Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Birmingham Financial Inclusion Strategy and the Child Poverty Commission to support reductions in inequality across the city.

## Targeted Prevention

### Our aim

**To prevent people from becoming homeless**

### Our Approach

Anyone can become homeless. However, it is possible to identify people who are most likely to become homeless. Groups at risk of homelessness includes 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. There is a strong overlap between homelessness and deep social exclusion.

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

Linked to the Birmingham Early Help Strategy, targeted prevention focuses on identifying individuals and families who may be at risk of becoming homeless and offering them effective support as early as possible. In a significant number of cases early, effective intervention can prevent homelessness occurring.

To be successful, we must strengthen our collective approach to ensure the right structures, partners, and services are in place. As part of that 'joining-up' process, the development of appropriate and proportionate information sharing protocols with relevant agencies is vital to ensure a holistic response to the prevention of homelessness with people most at risk.

This will also ensure we can improve our understanding of the scale and nature of homelessness in the city, as well as the evidence base of 'what works' to predict and prevent homelessness, understand household strengths and assets, and achieve other related outcomes relevant to people in Birmingham.

## Crisis Prevention and Relief

### Our Aim

**To assist people as soon as possible if they do become homeless so that their homelessness can be relieved by securing sufficient accommodation and support**

### Our Approach

Whilst we seek to shift the balance to a more proactive, preventative approach, we must ensure there is still an effective response for those who present as homeless in an emergency or crisis situation.

Crisis responses concern those where the threat of homelessness is imminent. Making a homeless application is a crisis response in itself, which may in turn lead to a placement into temporary or emergency accommodation.

Interventions 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.

This approach outlines an integrated, co-ordinated response to commissioned accommodation and support. This means housing options and homelessness services coming together with other services including health, education or family mediation to ensure

the impact of the crisis is limited. This means everyone knowing how to answer and how they contribute to the question – ‘help I need somewhere to stay’.

This approach is underpinned by a comprehensive, multiagency holistic assessment of need and is a key data collection point to inform ongoing development of the pathway.

Homelessness is prevented wherever possible – whether that is supporting a young person to stay in their family network, preventing the loss of a tenancy, quick access to emergency accommodation including domestic abuse refuge, and immediate and ongoing support where required.

## Homeless Recovery

### Our Aim

**To support people to recover from their experience and stay out of homelessness**

### Our Approach

People who have experienced homelessness are more likely to have additional needs around their mental, physical and emotional health and may need extra support to make a sustained recovery into stable housing and onward to 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, adverse 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 secondary trauma or re-traumatisation by encompassing psychologically informed environments. This means taking into account emotional and psychological needs alongside continued support to stabilise their accommodation, and focusing on improving the overall wellbeing of all adults and children in the household.

This includes ensuring people have access to a range of support that will enable them to improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing, stabilise the family income, enter and/ or maintain employment, strengthen social networks, and access education or training.

Through building on personal resilience, skills, support and income needed to regain independence and avoid the crises that trigger homelessness this type of preventative action will need to be flexible and right first time.

## Sustainable Housing Options

### Our Aim

**To enable people to secure homes that they can afford and maintain**

### Our Approach

There is no doubt that homelessness in Birmingham is exacerbated by the lack of supply and access to suitable, settled accommodation.

Recognising the impact of a growing population and increasing pressure on our current housing stock, sustainable housing options are a key part of resolving structural influences on homelessness.

To maintain the momentum of supporting people into independence when they are ready, we must have access to a truly affordable supply of accommodation for people to move into.

Without it, the current situation will remain inevitable: people that are ready for independence are trapped in supported accommodation, potentially blocking others in the system from moving on and getting the help they need.

This approach requires the provision of a range of safe, decent, affordable housing options, both shared and self-contained, in the

private, social and third sectors is crucial. Supply, affordability and support are key enablers of tenancy sustainment.

This domain concerns longer term strategic actions such as improving the supply of suitably affordable housing to make a difference to homelessness. Alongside increasing sub-market level housing supply across all tenures, improving the standards and quality of tenure in the private rented sector can also contribute to tackling homelessness in the city.

By enabling this environment, people are economically active and have suitable homes that they can afford and build their future from.



## Delivering our Vision

### Oversight

Housing Birmingham Partnership is responsible for, and committed to ensuring that Birmingham’s vision to eradicate homelessness becomes reality.

### Assurance

The Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Board will seek assurance from the Homelessness Positive Pathway Board on the effectiveness of partnership working in the development and implementation of the Strategy Implementation Plan.

### Accountability

The multi-agency and cross sector Homelessness Positive Programme Pathway Board will be responsible for the successful delivery of the Strategy Implementation Plan.

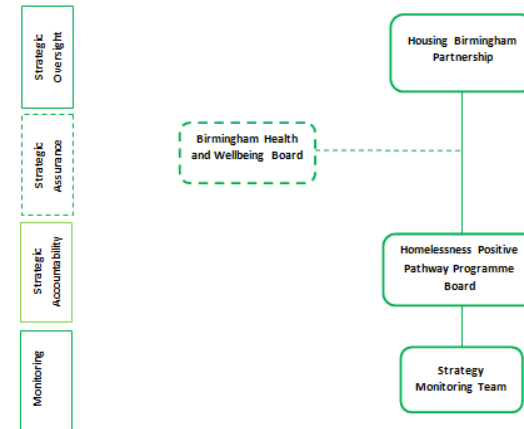
### Monitoring

The Strategy Monitoring Team will report progress against the Strategy Implementation Plan to the Homelessness Positive Pathway Programme Board. The Homelessness Positive Pathway Programme Board will undertake a review of progress against the

Strategy Implementation Plan on an annual basis up to and including 2021.

### Governance Structure

The strategy will be monitored through the following governance structure:



### Equality Duty

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities.

As such, our approach has and will continue to be informed by the latest available intelligence when determining key actions associated with the delivery of our strategy vision.

## **Implementation Plan**

The Positive Pathway Model will be used to shape, inform and drive the whole systems change that is required to achieve our vision.

The Homelessness Positive Pathway Programme Board has established five Task and Finish Groups, one for each key area of the pathway.

Membership of each group consists of a range of key partners, stakeholders, and crucially citizens as a reference point.

The Task and Finish groups will describe what an excellent system looks like. Informed by the public consultation, they will then identify a series of actions, initiatives and opportunities that will be incorporated into the final Strategy Implementation Plan.