



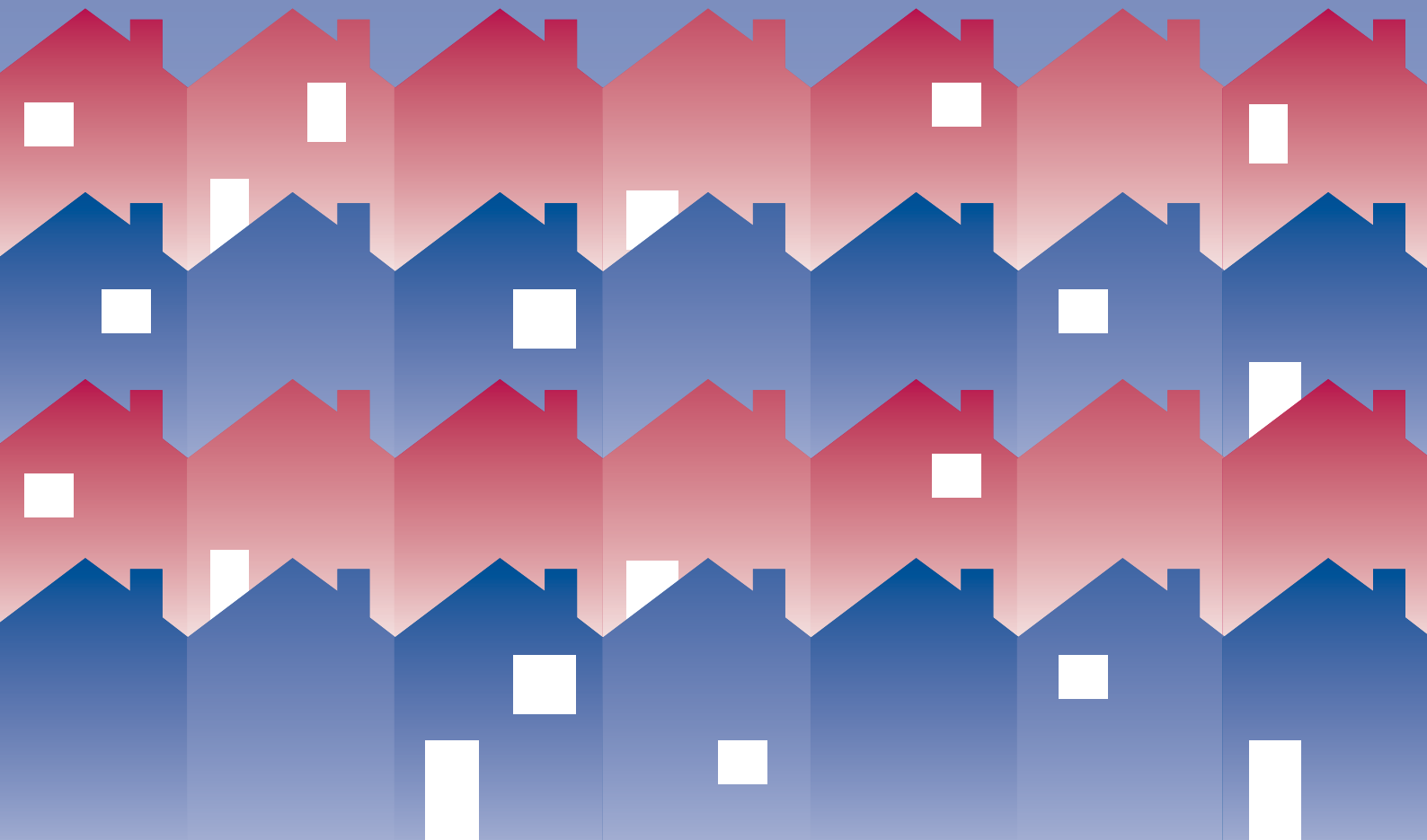
Hinckley & Bosworth
Borough Council

A Borough to be proud of

Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council

Homelessness Strategy

2015 – 2020



INTRODUCTION

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council covers an area of 297 square kilometres and has a population of just over 105,000. There are 4 key urban settlements of Hinckley, Barwell, Burbage and Earl Shilton, and most affordable housing is available in these settlements. The remainder of the Borough, particularly in the north west, is more rural and has little affordable and private rented housing and high house prices.

NATIONAL POLICY

Since the last Homelessness Strategy was produced, there have been a number of changes to Government guidance, focussing on preventative measures for homeless people. The key policy documents are:

The Localism Act

This Act was introduced in November 2011, and affects the duty of local authorities to rehouse homeless applicants, because it allows the council to discharge its duty to homeless people through the use of private rented housing as well as social housing. The offer must be for an Assured Shorthold Tenancy of at least 12 months, and must take account of the applicants personal circumstances, including access to employment, education and healthcare.

No Second Night Out

No Second Night Out aims to tackle the problem of rough sleepers by ensuring that any new homeless person should have a chance to find accommodation and not to fall into a rough sleeping lifestyle. It also recommends partners working together to tackle the underlying causes of rough sleeping, and improving support services to help people access healthcare and employment. Attached to this policy is a funding stream to enable councils to develop models of practice to end rough sleeping.

Making Every Contact Count

This document focusses on the initiatives to be taken to ensure people do not get to the crisis point where they become homeless. It puts forward 10 local challenges which when adopted will lead to homelessness teams within local authorities delivering a gold standard service. The 10 challenges are:

- 1 adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services;
- 2 actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs;

- 3 offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients;
- 4 adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative;
- 5 have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support;
- 6 develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords;
- 7 actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme;
- 8 have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs;
- 9 not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
- 10 not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks.

Welfare Reform Act 2012

This Act introduces Universal Credit to replace most existing benefits, and places a cap on the amount of benefit households can receive. It also introduces a size criteria for housing, called the under occupancy charge. Both of these initiatives will reduce the amount of disposable income some households have, and make it more likely therefore that they may fall into debt. Households who formerly were underoccupying their property but having benefit paid to cover the whole rent may now be more likely to move to a smaller property rather than pay the shortfall in benefit. It also reduces the number of people who can have their housing benefit paid directly to the landlord.

HOMELESSNESS IN HINCKLEY AND BOSWORTH

Numbers accessing the service

The numbers of claims have fallen from 212 in 2004 /5 to 153 in 2013/14. However the number of people receiving advice and assistance has tripled from 203 in 2004 /5 to 808 in 2013 /14, and peaked at the height of the economic crisis at 1118 in 2012/13.

The records on number of homelessness preventions started in 2006 /7 where 143 cases of homelessness

were prevented, rose to its highest level of 618 in 2013/14. These figures show the increased change of focus of the housing options team and shows the success of the team in getting the message across to people to seek assistance early before crisis point is reached. Increased numbers of people accessing the service also shows the success of outreach work in making sure people are signposted to the right organisations to give help and advice.

The number of people in temporary accommodation has reduced since 2004 /5 but is still higher than desired at 15 households at the end of 2013. Increased working with the private rented sector is hoped to alleviate some of the need to use temporary accommodation. However use of temporary accommodation will continue to form part of the provision in certain circumstances.

Why they access the service

The main cause of homelessness in 2003 - 14 was due to parents no longer willing to accommodate the claimant. This has changed over time and in 2013 - 14 the main cause is loss of rented or tied accommodation due to the termination of an assured shorthold tenancy. These two reasons have consistently remained the main two causes of homelessness, with violence being the third reason throughout this period.

Half of the people owed a full duty in 2012 – 13 were aged 16 – 24 (42 out of 84 applicants). The second highest group are aged 25 – 44 and from 2004 to 2013 these two groups make up the majority of people to whom a full duty was owed.

HINCKLEY AND BOSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL HOUSING OPTIONS SERVICE

Achievements since the 2008 Strategy

- Establishment of a successful Mortgage Rescue Scheme;
- Participation in the Troubled Families programme to work with families in danger of eviction
- An increased number of people accessing the housing options service, but a reduced number of homelessness claims and higher prevention rates
- Use of a supported lodgings scheme in partnership with Stonham Housing – we are part of the steering group but do not provide any funding

- 578 cases of homelessness prevented by the Housing Options service in 2012/13 and this increases year on year
- Appointment of a temporary welfare reform coordinator to deal with the changes from the Welfare Reform Act
- Opening of an Emmaus community house in the Borough
- Dramatic reduction in the number of people in temporary accommodation
- Drop in surgeries so that people are seen the same day and given timely advice
- Move to a case management system to give continuity of service to people approaching the Housing Options team
- Prevention loan scheme to provide a deposit and rent in advance to allow applicants to access accommodation in the private rented sector. Cashless bonds are offered to those where there is no statutory duty
- In partnership with Leicester City Council and other District Councils, establishment of a website called Homefinder to advertise private accommodation where Landlords are sympathetic to benefits.
- A multi-agency protocol with Leicestershire County Council, the Youth Offending service, Connexions and the other districts in Leicestershire for helping 16 and 17 year olds who are potentially homeless

THE FUTURE OF THE SERVICE

The service offered by the Housing Options Team in Hinckley and Bosworth aims to be focussed on looking at issues from the customer's perspective and led by what the customer wants.

The service is run through a case management system, so the customer has one single point of contact and their named officer will work with the customer until their housing issue is resolved. This means that the service does not end when the customer leaves the office after their first interview but that the case officer follows up contact with the customer afterwards. The case is actively monitored and contact made with the customer at least every two weeks to ensure they understand and can act on the advice they have been given.

The Housing Options Team run an effective service as a partnership approach. There are good relationships between the agencies and departments involved with

working with a homeless person, who understand the pressures each other face and work together to achieve the best outcome for the customer.

Some of the initiatives that are used to offer an individualised and customer focussed service are:

- **Supporting Leicestershire Families**
This initiative, led by Leicestershire County Council, is an important part of the Council's prevention of homelessness. It is part of the Government's Troubled Families Programme. Intensive support is given to families who are identified as being in danger of eviction from their home due to anti-social behaviour, to try and change their behaviour and therefore remove the threat of eviction.
- **Cashless Bond Scheme**
Set up to help single no priority people approaching the council for help. This service was successfully piloted last year and will be expanded as part of the No Second Night Out pathway.
- **Homefinder**
Use of the Homefinder site to advertise private rented properties, and use of 2 coordinators who will drive up standards and encourage private landlords to take on more waiting list applicants.
- **Pathway model**
Use of No Second Night Out funding to implement use of a pathway model, currently being used by Leicester City Council for outreach workers to work intensively with rough sleepers in the county and provide accommodation pending an assessment of needs.
- **Private sector leasing scheme**
The council has set up "Tailored Housing Solutions" to lease empty properties from private owners, bring them up to standard and let them to applicants on the council's waiting list.
- **Rent arrears policy**
The council's rent arrears policy is being reviewed to ensure assistance is given to people who can't pay their rent and a firm, consistent and fair approach is taken to those who won't pay.

- **Prisoner pathway protocol**

Settled accommodation is important to prevent reoffending rates for people leaving prison and a protocol is being developed to ensure that fair and effective planned procedures are in place for prisoners on release from prison.

- **Welfare Reform officer**

A dedicated officer has offered a home visit to people affected by the welfare reform changes to give them help and assistance. Discretionary Housing Payments have been used where possible to mitigate the impact of welfare reform.

- **Health and Well Being Strategy**

Linking with the local Health Partnership to assist with early intervention and prevention priorities in the Health and Well Being Strategy to investigate the links between homelessness and ill health, particularly with respect to poorer outcomes for children. This may include joint funded projects to achieve better health outcomes.

Use of temporary accommodation

Whilst the Council tries to limit its' use of temporary accommodation there are occasions when it must be provided:

- When an applicant has made a claim for homelessness and the outcome is being decided by the Council
- Where a full homelessness duty is owed, the Council must provide accommodation until the applicant is rehoused
- Where no duty is owed, the council will provide temporary accommodation for a reasonable period, usually 28 days for people with children and 14 days for others.
- Placements under the No Second Night Out Pathway.
- Severe weather provisions where the temperature is zero or below for 3 consecutive nights, or where there are severe rains and storms

In addition, the Council is increasingly using temporary accommodation when working to prevent homelessness. Whilst this means the cost of temporary accommodation has risen, it does reduce the number of homelessness claims and therefore the overall cost to the Council of longer term temporary accommodation and rehousing.

Provision of temporary accommodation includes the following:

- Hostel accommodation for single people or families, though places are limited
- Use of the Council's own stock
- Use of private rented stock
- Refuges for women fleeing domestic violence
- Bed and breakfast accommodation, most commonly used for single homeless people.

Challenges for the service

- Pressure on smaller housing stock as people affected by the under occupancy charge choose or are forced to look for smaller accommodation;
- The introduction of fixed term tenancies by Registered Providers in the Borough may increase the numbers seeking help as people whose circumstances have changed during their tenancy may not have a new fixed term tenancy granted;
- Universal Credit could lead to an increase in evictions as people who have never had to budget before may fall into difficulties managing their money.
- Pressures on County Council budgets mean that the number of people able to access housing related support services will be reduced which may in turn increase the numbers turning to the housing options service for help and advice.

PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

- 1 Close liaison with, and increased use of the private rented sector to meet the need of priority housing applicants, including through the use of the Tailored Housing Solutions service and introduction of a tenants charter for landlords;
- 2 Proactive engagement with people at risk of homelessness, particularly with those from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups;
- 3 Increasing work with partners in the voluntary and private sectors to ensure a joined up service is offered to people at risk of homelessness;
- 4 Maximisation of the delivery of new affordable housing in the right place, of the right type;
- 5 Identification of funding sources to grow the service.
- 6 Review of temporary accommodation.