



# **Cheshire East Homelessness Strategy 2018 – 2021**



# CONTENTS

<b><i>Foreword by Lead Member</i></b>	<b>3</b>
<b><i>Background</i></b>	<b>4</b>
<b><i>Introduction</i></b>	<b>4</b>
<b><i>National Context</i></b>	<b>6</b>
<b><i>Local Context</i></b>	<b>9</b>
<b><i>Main Themes Arising from the Homelessness Strategy Review</i></b>	<b>12</b>
<b><i>Key Achievements</i></b>	<b>14</b>
<b><i>Gold Standard</i></b>	<b>15</b>
<b><i>Strategic Aim – Prevent Homelessness</i></b>	<b>17</b>
<b><i>Strategic Priority 1 – Enable more people to remain in their own home</i></b>	<b>21</b>
<b><i>Strategic Priority 2 - Help people who are homeless to secure appropriate affordable accommodation</i></b>	<b>26</b>
<b><i>Strategic Priority 3 – Provide interventions to prevent rough sleeping</i></b>	<b>30</b>
<b><i>Strategic Priority 4 - Ensure adequate support is in place to help people maintain and sustain accommodation</i></b>	<b>32</b>
<b><i>Delivering the Homelessness Strategy</i></b>	<b>36</b>
<b><i>Monitoring</i></b>	<b>37</b>
<b><i>Risk Assessment</i></b>	<b>38</b>
<b><i>Appendix 1 - Glossary</i></b>	<b>39</b>
<b><i>Appendix 2 - Statutory duties under Homelessness legislation</i></b>	<b>40</b>



## **Councillor Ainsley Arnold**

This is the new Cheshire East Homelessness Strategy, and it provides us and our partners with a clear plan and a strong vision for preventing and alleviating homelessness.

Over the lifetime of the Cheshire East 2014-17 Homelessness Strategy the main causes of homelessness were being asked to leave by family or friends, domestic abuse, and the end of an assured shorthold tenancy. These 3 causes added up to 67% of all our homeless acceptances. This is an indication of where we need to target our resources going forward.

The number of successful preventions has increased year on year, with 2,261 households assisted during 2014 to 2016. Good levels of prevention have been recorded with 1,813 (82%) households assisted to find alternative accommodation, rather than remain in their own home. Total cases of prevention and relief have increased from 577 in 2014 to 878 in 2016 (an increase of 52%). A priority for the new Homelessness Strategy will be to explore new ways to help more households to remain in their own home.

Rough sleeping is the most visible face of homelessness. Cheshire East has typically recorded low levels of rough sleeping. We don't want anyone to have to sleep rough in Cheshire East and we are committed to ending rough sleeping in collaboration with our partners. In Cheshire East a total of 50 clients used our No Second Night Out scheme in 2016/17 and so were prevented from having to sleep on the streets. Almost half of them then moved into supported housing where they received accommodation with support to prevent them from becoming homeless again.

We are working towards achieving the Gold Standard. This is designed to help deliver more efficient and cost effective homelessness prevention services. We expect to have achieved all 10 steps and achieved the Gold Standard by March 2018.

Above are just some examples of the excellent work being done and it shows that the Council and its partners are making good progress in ending homelessness in Cheshire East. A lot is still to be done though, and we are not complacent.

The new Homeless Reduction Act places a strong focus on early prevention work and the lifetime of this Strategy will see that Act introduced then fully embedded in Cheshire East practices. It is imperative that our focus remains on early identification of and intervention with individuals whose accommodation is not settled, as this will result in significantly improved outcomes for those affected.

This new Homelessness Strategy highlights where resources need to be focused and where truly joined up work can make a real difference to the housing pathway that residents of Cheshire East will experience. I am confident that this Strategy is robust in outlining how we will engage with households as early as possible, and how we will work with others to deliver interventions.

Once again, we have worked alongside a vast range of people: Cheshire East officers, external partners, stakeholders, and local people to ensure that the Strategy and its actions reflect their priorities. I would like to thank them for their contributions and for being involved in delivering homelessness solutions, and I look forward to continued partnership working as we implement this new Strategy.

## **Background**

### **Purpose:**

This Homelessness Strategy sets out the priorities for Cheshire East over the next 3 years.

It outlines the Strategic Priorities and options for delivery of a reduction in homelessness levels and improved housing outcomes for vulnerable residents.

The term 'homelessness' is often considered to apply only to people 'sleeping rough', or to those 'street sleeping'. However most homelessness issues involve households threatened with the loss of their home, or else are unable to remain in their current accommodation.

**Vision:** To give residents of Cheshire East access to appropriate affordable housing and improved quality of life.

### **Priorities:**

To prevent homelessness we will:

- Enable more people to remain in their home and prevent them from becoming homeless
- Help people who are homeless to secure appropriate affordable accommodation
- Provide interventions so no-one has to sleep rough in Cheshire East
- Ensure adequate support is in place to help people maintain and sustain accommodation

This Strategy uses information which may be found in the Homelessness Strategy Review 2017 document.

## **Introduction**

The section above outlines the priorities for the new Homelessness Strategy.

What follows sets out the key national policy drivers which are already directly or indirectly influencing housing and homelessness services. This is against the backdrop of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA), the biggest piece of homelessness legislation in over a decade.

This Strategy outlines a series of homeless interventions which will reduce homelessness levels in Cheshire East. The problem of homelessness is multi-faceted, requiring a range of co-ordinated activity. Each of these interventions will have short-term resource implications for the Council, either directly or indirectly. As the new Homelessness Reduction Act is embedded, numbers will eventually start to decrease as earlier interventions take effect. This has the potential to contribute to economic growth through supporting more households to financial independence.

The Homelessness Strategy 2018-2021 will set the framework for activity to deliver homelessness reductions in the short to medium term, and will both support, and be supported by, emerging strategic documents such as the new Housing Strategy and Tenancy Strategy, and work on an enhanced private rented sector interface.

The Council is working towards this objective through this Strategy, as it ties together the strategic priorities for improving services to communities. This can be illustrated as follows:



One of the priorities of the Cheshire East Sustainable Community Strategy 2010 – 2025 is to ‘articulate the aspirations, needs and priorities of the people of Cheshire East and the places they live in’ through:

- Planning for a range of housing to meet the needs of older people, families and young people, and developing suitable types of housing and tenures to ensure that residents have a choice of accommodation to meet their current and future needs, and
- Working in partnership to provide specialist accommodation and housing support for those residents who have complex needs and requirements

The Cheshire East Housing Strategy’s aim is “that all residents in Cheshire East are able to access affordable, appropriate and decent accommodation.” The key priorities are:

- Growth and Quality of Place and Health, and
- Wellbeing and Quality of Life

There are identified actions aimed at stimulating the housing market and preventing homelessness.

The Homelessness Strategy section called ‘Strategic Priorities’ details the strategic context and each Priority then sets out:

1. The issue
2. The Cheshire East position
3. Current activity, and
4. Future intentions

The aim is to set out a broad rationale for the Priorities, and to enable discussion and development of new ideas as the Homelessness Strategy is implemented.

During the lifespan of the last Homelessness Strategy, the Council reviewed strategic outputs through consultations with service providers, commissioners of services, and with service – users. The Homelessness Strategy Steering Group has played a major role in monitoring the Strategy’s action plan. The Steering Group is made up of people from a range of partner organisations, and meets quarterly. The Strategy has been reviewed using new priorities, which were in line with the Gold Standard (a Government initiative for Local Authority Housing Options Services aimed at improving

front line housing services), and the Homelessness Reduction Act, due to come into force in April 2018. The ambition is to prevent homelessness, and deliver homelessness prevention services which are more efficient and provide better value for money.

The four Strategic Priorities outline how homelessness will be prevented, as shown below. The Priorities incorporate tasks from the 2014-2017 Homelessness Strategy which have been carried forward, as well as current and emerging issues as identified in the Homelessness Strategy Review.

The 4 Priorities are:



## **National Context**

### **Fixing our broken housing market (Housing White Paper)**

The Government's aim is to build more homes, of the type people want to live in, in the places they want to live.

The Nation needs to build homes faster and invest in making the planning system more open and accessible, tackling unnecessary delays.

However, development is about far more than just building homes. Communities need roads, rail links, schools, shops, GP surgeries, parks, playgrounds and a sustainable natural environment. Without the right infrastructure new communities cannot thrive – and no existing community will welcome new housing if it places further strain on already stretched local resources.

The housing market needs to diversify, opening up to smaller builders and those who embrace innovative and efficient methods. Housing associations will be supported to build more, exploring options to encourage local authorities to build again, encouraging institutional investment in the private rented sector, and promotion of more modular and factory built homes. It will be easier for people who want to build their own homes.

Cheshire East has a 5 year supply target, using a standard formula of build rates and lead-in times which are applied to all housing sites. This is part of the Local Plan. The next table shows how the delivery of affordable housing units only goes some of the way to meeting housing need.

**Table: Housing completions 2014 – 2016**

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Net completions	713	1,236	1,473
Affordable completions	180	640	360
Additional social rented	40	70	29
Additional affordable rented	60	430	253
Additional intermediate	80	140	78

### **Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA)**

When the Cheshire East Homelessness Strategy 2014-17 was written big changes were being introduced by the Government, such as the Localism Act and the introduction of Welfare Reform. This new Cheshire East Homelessness Strategy has also been written as big change is taking place, that is, the Homelessness Reduction Act, and continuing Welfare Reform, such as the introduction of rent caps and Universal Credit, and changes to funding for supported housing.

The HRA makes provision about new measures for reducing homelessness. It applies to local housing and social care services authorities, who are required to have regard to the guidance in exercising their functions in relation to homelessness. A new Code of Guidance will also be issued to provide guidance on how local housing authorities should exercise their homelessness functions and apply the new statutory criteria in practice.

Currently the threat of homelessness is defined as beginning 28 days before a person is likely to become homeless. The HRA extends that period to 56 days, giving people a longer period of time to receive help from their local authority. The categories of people eligible for Council support have been expanded, in a move away from the previous focus on 'priority need', based on applicants' vulnerabilities.

Cheshire East will now have to help people threatened with homelessness when:

- A person is threatened with homelessness if it is likely that they will become homeless within 56 days
- A person is also threatened with homelessness if:
  - A valid section 21 notice (orders for possession on the expiry or termination of an assured shorthold tenancy in the private rented sector) has been given to the person in respect of the only accommodation the person has that is available for their occupation; and
  - That notice will expire within 56 days

Additionally, Cheshire East now has a duty to assess all eligible applicants' cases and agree a plan for each. If a customer is homeless / threatened with homelessness and eligible, then Housing Options must:

- Assess why they are becoming homeless
- What accommodation would be suitable
- What support is needed to help keep or obtain accommodation
- Notify the applicant of this, in writing

There is a new legislative duty to assess every eligible applicant's case, and agree a plan, or a 'pathway' for the following groups:

- a) Persons released from prison or youth detention accommodation
- b) Care leavers
- c) Former members of the regular armed forces
- d) Victims of domestic abuse
- e) Persons leaving hospital
- f) Persons suffering from a mental illness or impairment
- g) Any other group that the authority identifies as being at particular risk of homelessness in the district (Cheshire East considers at risk large families, people with a learning disability, and people who have substance misuse issues, as identified through the Homelessness Review).

There will also be a general duty from October 2018 on all public authorities to refer anyone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness to Housing Options, with that person's permission.

Cheshire East is already well along the way of preparing for the introduction of the HRA, with pathways being prepared for the identified groups at risk of homelessness. This is looked at in more detail in Strategic Priority 2: Enable more people to remain in their home and prevent homelessness.

Action Plan 1.a: Ensure that the new duty is used effectively and lawfully, minimising legal challenges

### **Welfare Reform**

There have been major changes to the benefits system over the last few years, including the Benefit Cap, the Under Occupancy Charge or Spare Room Subsidy (also known as the 'bedroom tax'), and the roll out of Universal Credit. How this might contribute to homelessness and what Cheshire East is doing to address the issue are explored in Strategic Priority 2: Enable more people to remain in their home and prevent them from becoming homeless.

### **Rough Sleeping Programme 2016 - 2019**

The Government has embarked on an ambitious programme, working with local areas and across Government, to fundamentally reform the response to homelessness. The aim is to put prevention at the heart of this approach to reduce the number of people who face a homelessness crisis in the first place.

A rough sleeping programme has been launched, which includes a £10 million rough sleeping grant fund, running in 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19, to help new rough sleepers or people at imminent risk of sleeping rough, get the rapid support they need. The aim is to reduce the flow of new rough sleepers to the street through more targeted prevention activity aimed at those at imminent risk of sleeping rough, to ensure they get the help they need before spending a single night on the streets and to recover and move-on from their homelessness. This will build on the No First Night Out pilot being delivered in London.

Local data from services (commissioned and non-commissioned) across the sub-region in the last 12 months have identified 137 different rough sleepers. Cheshire East continues to monitor levels of rough sleeping. One aspect of monitoring is to prevent as far as possible the issue of double counting. This is when the same person contacts 2 services who then record 2 rough sleepers.

Government funding has been awarded for 'Upstream', a sub-regional scheme to prevent rough sleeping across Cheshire West and Chester, Cheshire East and Warrington. Upstream seeks to identify the small number of people who will sleep rough if they do not get additional assistance among a much wider cohort of people with housing problems. It is expected that 200 people will be assisted across Cheshire over the next 2 years.

In Cheshire East a total of 50 Clients have used No Second Night Out over 2015 - 2016 and were prevented from having to sleep on the streets. Additionally, 92 people at risk of either sleeping rough or who would have had to sleep rough that night if accommodation wasn't provided were assisted in



2015/16. Some people will have been included in more than one cohort and have been counted twice. This is addressed in Strategic Priority 3: reducing rough sleeping.

### **Complex Dependencies**

The Government has provided funding through the national Transformation Challenge Award scheme. The Cheshire and Warrington Complex Dependency Programme was set up in 2015 following a successful bid.

Across the Pan-Cheshire sub-region there are 10,000 individuals affected by complex dependencies. This programme established a new, integrated model across agencies and services that tackle the causes of crisis for children, families and individuals across a range of related and complex issues. It ensures that there is more support available for families and individuals that are already in a state of crisis.

A Programme Team for the sub-region has been put into place and this will lead on delivering the aims of the programme across the sub-region, both as a whole and working individually with each area and partner agency as appropriate.

The expected outcomes are

- Better outcomes for children, individuals and families affected by complex dependencies
- The model being an exemplar that can be adopted in other areas across the country
- Reduced costs for agencies and services
- Estimated savings over five years across agencies of £93.4m are achieved and exceeded

Through this programme, Cheshire East aims to reduce the number of people leaving mental health care who are homeless when discharged. 2 Link Workers will refer these clients into one of 4 beds until a longer-term housing solution can be found. There has also been a Complex Dependency Housing Officer embedded with the Early Help Brokerage Service for the last 12 months as a pilot. Housing Options has supplemented the funding to extend the scheme until March 2018 to ensure that learning from the pilot can be embedded into normal practice. Additionally, Cheshire East has been awarded funding for 2 years for accommodation and support for households experiencing domestic abuse who also have additional, complex, needs.

### **Human Trafficking / Human Slavery**

Cheshire East under the Care Act has a statutory duty for Adult Safeguarding. The types of abuse include categories for human trafficking, and therefore, Cheshire East has a statutory duty to identify, report, and support victims of human trafficking as well as the duty as first responders.

Although local services are only aware of 2 individual cases between 2014 and 2016, Cheshire East may need to respond to an incidence of the uncovering of mass human trafficking in the Borough.

Given the seriousness of trafficking there is a need for joined up working between departments and local agencies, to promote a strategic response and good practice in supporting people in need. The Council's Emergency Response Plan will assist with the management of an incident, and Housing Services in attendance will establish how much temporary accommodation will be needed.

## **LOCAL CONTEXT**

### **Housing costs, income, and poverty in Cheshire East**

More and more attention is being paid to evidence showing that the main factor in homelessness in most regions is poverty, with links to under-employment (in London this is outweighed by the extreme

pressure on the housing market). Poverty is seen as the most important driver of homelessness in all its forms, and features strongly in all of the statistics in use.

Researchers in a recent project looked into the common argument that homelessness is a random event which can happen to anybody. The belief is that homelessness is caused by many different things and so is complex. However, causes have been identified, which are often preventable.

After looking at data from the British Cohort Study, it was seen that childhood poverty is the most powerful predictor of homelessness in young adulthood. This research shows that for some systematically disadvantaged groups, the probability of homelessness is so high that it comes close to being a *norm*. The research suggests that:

1. A Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) lone mother, who was poor as a child, living in rented accommodation when aged 26, and who has been unemployed, has a predicted probability of homelessness of **71.2%** by the age of 30.
2. This is contrasted with a white male, a university graduate from a financially secure background in the rural south of England, living at home with parents when aged 26, had a **0.6%** probability of being homeless by the age of 30.

National household surveys show that younger people who are single, a lone parent, or from a BME background and who live in poverty have an increased chance of homelessness. Research also shows that if poverty is removed from the situation the increased likelihood of homelessness massively reduces. Although substance misuse in adulthood may be a contributing factor, this is seen as less important than the poverty.

The research suggests that it is not being young, single, a lone parent or BME that makes someone vulnerable to homelessness, but the fact that the person is more likely to be poor.

The statistics also show that lone parents (usually mothers with young children) account for 47% of households accepted as homeless by English local authorities, despite making up only 6.3% of all households. In Cheshire East the figure is 29%. Couples with and without children, and older people – both more widespread in the general population – are significantly under-represented among statutorily homeless households.

Cheshire East research has shown that lower quartile (entry level) open market housing costs are:

Lower quartile house price	Lower quartile rental cost
£135,000	£475

(HM Land Registry © Crown copyright 2017)

#### Required income levels to meet housing costs

Nationally, original income and final income by quintile group data for households from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) says that a household's income can rise through tax and benefit assistance. The 2<sup>nd</sup> quintile is included in the next table showing original income of less than £15,000 which only rises above £20,000 via market intervention such as benefit payments. This can change between households or within the same household over time as circumstances change. There is a ratio of 15 to 1 between the lowest and the highest quintile. Those households in the bottom and 2<sup>nd</sup> quintiles are the most at risk of homelessness. The next table shows national quintiles.

	Original income (£'s)	(Final income £'s)
Bottom	5,521	15,504
2nd	13,731	23,173
3rd	24,842	28,358
4th	40,880	36,401

Top	80,803	60,027
All households average	33,155	32,692

The affordability ratios are calculated using ONS House Prices Statistics (based on Land Registry data) and earnings from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings. The earnings relate to the respondent's place of residence rather than place of work. This means that affordability in commuter areas reflects the earning power of commuters.

Traditionally households have needed at least the average income to purchase a property. Those on less than average have been encouraged to take up sub-prime mortgage offers. The level of debt caused by households being overstretched contributed to the recent recession and led to extreme hardship for households, in many cases resulting in repossession. Similarly, working households have needed an average income which enabled access to private rented homes.

Estimates of income required to access purchased or rented accommodation in Cheshire East

Required household income to purchase lower quartile housing (x3.5 times income)	Required income to rent lower quartile housing (third of monthly earnings)
£38,571	£1,440 (or £17,280 per year)

The average household income in Crewe, for example, is £20,960, which gives a lower quartile house price to earnings ratio of 6.4.

Many tenants on benefit in the private rented sector encounter 3 main difficulties: (i) LHA which doesn't cover all the rental costs, (ii) a shortage of affordable properties, and (iii) landlords unwilling to rent to benefit-reliant households.

The Cheshire East 'Local Welfare Safety Net' report says that there are currently almost 25,000 households in Cheshire East in receipt of one or more welfare benefit.

Benefit - reliant households:

Total households	Benefit reliant households*	% of households
171,170	25,000	14.6

\*Job seekers, ESA and incapacity benefits, lone parents and others on income related benefits

### Empty properties in Cheshire East

The number of empty residential properties in Cheshire East has decreased by -36% between 2010 and 2016, and empty property levels are currently the lowest they have been since 2009 (since records began).

The next table shows the number of empty properties in Cheshire East.

	2014	2015	2016
All vacant dwellings	4,163	4,036	2,686
Empty for 6 months or more	1,736	1,540	1,451
Private registered provider vacant	228	323	231
Private registered provider vacant for 6 months or more	43	54	57

Although empty properties are not the solution to homelessness they may help to reduce it.

As properties are bought and sold, or re-let, there will be a period of vacancy in between the changes in occupation. Such 'transactional vacancies' are not usually the cause of problems, but are a normal part of the operation of the housing market. Household flows exist which affect both the number of households in an area and the number of properties which are occupied, as seen in the next table:

**Table: The impact of household movement on the number of households and properties in Cheshire East**

Household flow	Number of	
	Households	Properties occupied
1. HH moving into Cheshire East and into an empty property	Increases	Increases
2. HH moving into Cheshire East and into an occupied property	Unchanged	Unchanged
3. HH moving within Cheshire East, leaving empty and entering empty	Unchanged	Unchanged
4. Whole HH moving within Cheshire East, leaving empty and entering occupied	Decreases	Unchanged
5. Whole HH leaves Cheshire East	Decreases	Decreases
6. Splitting HH, person leaving enters vacant	Increases	Increases
7. Splitting HH, person leaving enters occupied	Unchanged	Unchanged
8. Splitting HH, person leaving leaves Cheshire East	Unchanged	Unchanged
9. Household Dissolution	Decreases	Decreases

A number of empty properties are necessary for a healthy housing market and to allow household flows 1, 3, and 6 above. It may be possible for some empty properties to be brought back into use which may accommodate homeless households via leasing schemes or nominations.

Commercial properties are typically unsuitable for habitation.

Action Plan 2.c: Better use of available accommodation for the benefit of homelessness households
---

## **Main Themes Arising from the Homelessness Strategy Review**

Cheshire East's Homelessness Strategy 2014-2017 has been reviewed. Between March and June 2017 the Council's Housing Service carried out a review to:

- Identify the main reasons for homelessness, and present and future levels of homelessness and housing need
- Look at services in place to prevent homelessness and to provide accommodation and support to those in need
- Identify resources available to provide support for homeless people through prevention activity, and to divert people away from becoming homeless
- Identify gaps in provision

Engagement with a range of partners has increased understanding around local pressures, and how services could work better together to prevent and reduce homelessness.

Specifically the review has uncovered issues around young people / young adults (especially those who are single), and those who have complex needs, including chaotic behaviour. People leaving mental health care with no home is an increasing problem, as is the link between homelessness and substance misuse issues.

#### *Rough sleepers*

The Homelessness Review has identified that people sleeping rough in the north of Cheshire East receive a more limited service to those in the south. Cheshire East has secured £100k in rough sleeping funding, with an innovative model of service delivery which will make a real difference to local people at risk of sleeping rough.

#### *Welfare reform*

The impact is continuing and is impacting in new cohorts. How the impact on vulnerable households can be mitigated is a major theme, as is the impact of the new Homelessness Reduction Act. Welfare Reform is discussed more in the Strategic Priority 4: Ensure adequate support is in place to help maintain and sustain accommodation.

#### *Housing-related support*

How to make better use of existing service provision to be more effective is being addressed through the new Housing Related Support contracts. As services bed down, performance and outputs are eagerly anticipated.

#### *Referrals*

Better communication and timely and accurate referrals to relevant services is an area needing more work. How the Cheshire East Housing Options 'offer' is promoted is something which requires looking into, as residents have different requirements. There is a lack of broader knowledge about services and appropriate referrals for customers, and also a lack of access to affordable settled accommodation.

#### *Move on*

There is a lack of suitable 'move-on' accommodation from supported and other forms of accommodation, thereby creating logjams, with people stuck where they don't need to be.

#### *Private rented*

Access to the private rented sector is a challenge but some improvements have been seen. Cheshire East needs to work with other agencies and private landlords to develop initiatives to address this gap in provision. Different options are currently being considered.

#### *Partnership working*

The information gathering events demonstrated that there is a real commitment from agencies and providers in Cheshire East to achieve positive outcomes for people who are homeless or who are at risk of homelessness. New solutions are being developed.

#### *Acceptances*

Homelessness acceptances have increased between 2014 and 2017 by 31%, with the main causes of homelessness out by family and friends, domestic abuse, and the end of assured shorthold tenancy (between them being 67% of acceptances).

#### *Preventions*

The number of successful preventions has increased year on year between 2014 and 2017 with 2,261 households assisted. Preventions data shows a good rate of successful prevention. The balance is weighted in favour of outcomes where assistance was given to obtain alternative accommodation.

#### *Improvements*

As already said, better partnership working between, for example, mental health, probation, housing, and social services will be needed to deliver identified outcomes for service users. As resources are

limited, innovation and good practice will deliver improvements and savings. It is essential to avoid duplication of work and of services.

Two issues to be carried over from the last Homelessness Strategy to this one are

- clients with complex needs, who are repeat service users, and
- lack of affordable accommodation for young single people.

Whilst work is being done to deliver improvements, such as a new Housing Related Support project, and increased provision for mental health, the Homelessness Strategy Review shows that more needs to be done.

Several key issues require more attention and are addressed in the Homelessness Strategy:

- Holistic advice for single homeless
- Offenders and links to Probation
- Homeless from social landlords
- Relationship breakdown
- A protocol for 'frequent flyers' or repeat presenters
- New Psychoactive Substances (formerly Legal Highs)
- Welfare Reform and partnership working between the CAB, Job Centres, DWP, and Housing
- Referrals to the Single Point of Access (SPA)
- Adapted Registered Provider (RP) properties and recording where they are located
- Move on from supported accommodation into the private rented sector, and how to improve offer options
- A commitment to preventing mortgage repossessions
- A commitment to limiting the use of B&B accommodation for all client groups, justified by a 'spend to save' approach

More information is available in the Homelessness Strategy Review 2017.

## Key Achievements

Since 2014 the Council has made measurable progress in reducing homelessness in Cheshire East. What follows are just some examples, which include, under the old Homelessness Strategy's 4 priorities:

Strategic Priority	What has been achieved
Providing effective early interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Worked with Registered Providers (RPs) to prepare for the introduction of Universal Credit</li> <li>- Provided information to partners on how Welfare Reform may affect their clients</li> <li>- Worked with health services to reduce the number of unplanned discharges, especially from mental health services</li> <li>- Developed a mental health discharge protocol and provided support through 2 link workers and bed spaces of emergency accommodation</li> <li>- Prevented rough sleeping, and secured over £100,000 DCLG Rough Sleeping Grant Funding to assist over 100 people over 3 years as part of a cross-Cheshire initiative</li> <li>- Developed a private sector landlord offer. Accreditation is on-going. There has been an 18% increase, with 11 landlords reaching the Council's Landlord 'Gold Standard'. This shows an increase in landlords willing to engage with Cheshire East.</li> <li>- Total cases of prevention and relief have increased from 577 to 878 (an increase of 52%)</li> <li>- Achieved the Bronze level in the Gold Standard having shown evidence that Cheshire East have adopted a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services.</li> </ul>
Complex needs and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explored options for substance misuse clients</li> </ul>

crisis management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provided advice and training for partner agencies about assisting clients with no recourse to public funds</li> </ul>
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Developed an Enhanced Housing Options Service, along with improved use of the SPA by increasing awareness of the service amongst stakeholders</li> <li>- Reduced households in temporary accommodation by 30%</li> </ul>
Accommodation and affordability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enabled move on from supported accommodation to PRS for high risk tenancies which would have been homeless otherwise.</li> <li>- Reviewed the Allocations Policy with a Review of Homechoice and IT carried out</li> <li>- In partnership with Registered Providers and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) new affordable units have been delivered, and set to meet a 3 year target of 1,050 units</li> </ul>

Task and Finish Groups have met and tasks in the old Homelessness Strategy action plan have been designated Red, Amber, or Green, and assessed as an 'improvement', 'deterioration', or as 'stable'.

The groups have identified those tasks which have been achieved over the course of 2014-2017, and those which will be included in the new Homelessness Strategy for 2018-2021. More specific details on what has been achieved, what issues are still current, along with emerging themes can be found in the Homelessness Strategy Review.

## Gold Standard

Cheshire East is on track to achieve the Gold Standard. This is a process of self assessment, benchmarking and diagnostic peer review (DPR) with the ultimate aim of ensuring that services offered by Housing Options Teams are robust, fit for purpose and respond effectively to residents with a housing need. The DPR, carried out by a neighboring local authority and an external assessor, gave Cheshire East one of the highest scores achieved nationally, meaning that Cheshire East has a good foundation in place. A Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP), tailored to Cheshire East, with contents taken from the results of the DPR, highlights areas for improvement.

Cheshire East has already achieved Bronze, with Silver due to be achieved soon, with the aim of achieving the Gold Standard by the end of 2017 / 18. This will ensure that there is continuous improvement in service delivery and outcomes for vulnerable people in Cheshire East.

The Gold Standard entails achieving key objectives around each of 10 challenges:

### BRONZE STANDARD

- Anywhere between 1 and 4 Local Challenges achieved

### SILVER STANDARD

- Anywhere between 5 and 9 Local Challenges achieved

### GOLD STANDARD

- All 10 Local Challenges achieved

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has established the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS) with the priority of developing the Gold Standard to assist local authorities to deliver the best possible homeless and prevention services. The NPSS have therefore

developed this structured process of self assessment. Through the process of working towards the Gold Standard, Cheshire East will have the opportunity to:

- Refine and improve our Housing Options Service
- Deliver improvements in social, health and economic outcomes for Cheshire East residents
- Reduce the use and cost of Bed & Breakfast
- Reduce levels of rough sleeping
- Improve our relationship with Cheshire East landlords
- Improve access for Cheshire East residents to affordable private rented accommodation
- Prevent mortgage repossessions
- Provide more consistent and robust housing advice
- Reduce levels of homelessness acceptances

### **The 10 Challenges and the current position**

The Housing Options Service believes it is in an excellent position to have submitted all its evidence and receive the Gold Award by the end of 2017/18. The 10 Challenges and the current position are outlined in the table below.

	<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Progress made</b>
1	Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness	The Homeless Strategy and associated action plan has visible corporate support from Children's Services, Adult Services, Health colleagues and Communities teams. Engagement ongoing via the Strategy Steering Group is vital.
2	Partnerships in place to address support, training, education & employment	Partnerships internally and externally in relation to support, training and employment are effective with some work to be done in broadening those and making those links resilient.
3	Offer a Housing Options and homeless prevention service	Cheshire East has a structure in place to deliver this challenge and has strong evidence of high achievement in preventing homelessness.
4	Adopt a No Second Night Out (NSNO) model	A No Second Night Out Model has been in place in CEC for 3 years. A review of that period and any areas to develop are underway.
5	Housing Pathways are in place with a provision of accommodation and support	Cheshire East set an excellent example in relation to this challenge, with a single point of access and strong contracts for supported service provision. The movement of contract management to Housing Options will be seen as a benefit and the challenge of delivering services with a reduced budget will be evidenced through the need analysis already carried out.
6	A private rented sector offer is in place	Our 3 tier Private Landlord Offer was signed off by Cabinet in September 2015. It's a strong and innovative offer and has been positively received by Private Sector landlords.
7	A scheme is in place to prevent mortgage repossessions	There is a clear process that can be used to comprehensively evidence this challenge coupled with high success rate of the Money Advisor role.
8	A homeless strategy is in place	The current Homelessness Strategy 2014-2017 has already been approved at Cabinet and meets all the legal requirements, including a process of regular review.
9	No 16-17 years olds are placed in B&B	The Housing Options Service has procedures and measures in place to prevent 16-17 year olds from being placed in B&B. A challenge and review method is already established between Housing and Children's Services in relation to the 16-17 year old protocol.
10	Families spend no longer than 6 weeks in B&B accommodation	Cheshire East has a good record and excellent provision for families. Appropriate measures are in place and B&B is rarely, if ever, used for families. Where it is a requirement it is only for a matter of nights. This challenge will be quickly and easily evidenced.



### The Housing Options Team

The Gold Standard Diagnostic Peer Review (a peer assessment) of Housing Options interviews observed the following:

- Excellent engagement with the customer throughout the interview
- Very detailed and clear advice given, with a particular focus on affordability and support to access the PRS
- The officer took the time to confirm the customers understanding of specific issues at various points in the interview
- Clear and appropriate next steps discussed with the customer
- Hand written confirmation of advice given at close of interview

The Housing Options Team has been assessed as being sympathetic and with a good understanding of the issues faced by services. However, Housing Options sometimes struggles with understanding the support levels available in some services.

## **Strategic Aim - Prevent homelessness**

### The issue

DCLG statistics suggest that homelessness levels nationally are going up. Increasing numbers of people are unable to find a home and the loss of a private sector tenancy is now the most common cause of homelessness nationally.

However the scale of homelessness is greater than that captured in the statistics. The scale of hidden homelessness is unknown, and people are homeless but have not approached local authorities for help, and some who do seek help but are turned away before a formal application is made are still homeless and should be taken into account in national statistics. The DCLG is giving consideration to how these groups can be captured effectively in the data it collects.

### The Cheshire East position

Homelessness acceptances during 2014 – 2016 have increased by 31%, with the main causes of homelessness eviction by family and friends (38%), domestic abuse (20.5%), and the end of assured shorthold tenancy (9%), between them being 67% of acceptances.

**Table: Homelessness Decisions 2014 - 2016**

<b>2014</b>			<b>2015</b>			<b>2016</b>		
<i>Decisions</i>	<i>No in B&amp;B</i>	<i>No in Temp Accom</i>	<i>Decisions</i>	<i>No in B&amp;B</i>	<i>No in Temp Accom</i>	<i>Decisions</i>	<i>No in B&amp;B</i>	<i>No in Temp Accom</i>
181	155	47	293	166	75	468	132	94

**Table: Homelessness Acceptances 2014 - 2016**

	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Total</b>
Decisions	181	293	468	942
Of which Acceptances	114	84	110	308

**Table: Main causes of homelessness in Cheshire East 2014 – 2016**

Year	In priority need and unintentionally homeless	Main causes of homelessness:			Total
		Out by family or friends	Domestic abuse	End of Assured Shorthold Tenancy	
2014	114	48	23	7	78
2015	84	24	18	9	51
2016	110	44	22	12	78
<b>Total</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>116 (37.6%)</b>	<b>63 (20.4%)</b>	<b>28 (9%)</b>	<b>207 (67.2%)</b>

**Table: Total households on Homechoice on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 - 2017**

Year	Total
2014	8,846
2015	7,368
2016	6,868
2017	6,180

The number of successful preventions has increased year on year, with 2,261 households assisted between 2014 and 2016. The extent to which Cheshire East employs the full range of prevention measures will have a strong influence on homeless acceptances and thereby on the extent of use of Temporary Accommodation (TA).

The use of TA is a sensitive barometer of local pressure and is reflected in the levels of different forms of homelessness, including rough sleeping and 'sofa-surfing'.

### **Current activity**

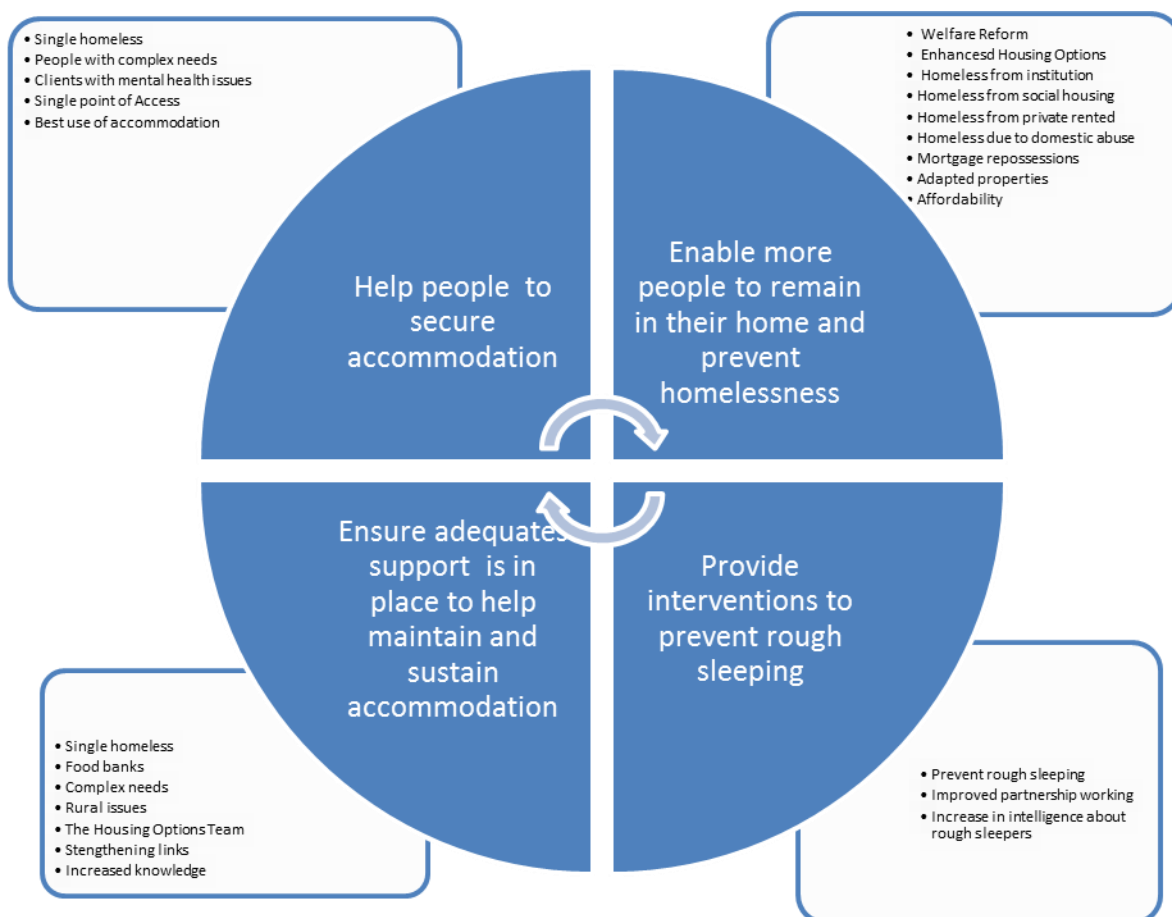
Since 2014 the Council has made measurable progress in reducing homelessness in Cheshire East. There are many examples of:

- Effective early interventions
- Management of complex needs and crisis situations
- Increased levels of support, and
- Provision of additional affordable accommodation

A study of the likely impact of Welfare Reform on eligible cohorts has been carried out. An updated Tenancy Strategy is being drafted with the aim of making the best use of affordable housing to meet local housing need.

There are several issues in need of attention, which are addressed in this Homelessness Strategy. The outcomes of the Review have been incorporated into the new Homelessness Strategy. This will ensure that as far as possible service-provider and service-user views have been captured.

The chart below shows the 4 Strategic Priorities, with the outer boxes showing the main issues to be worked on under each of the Priorities.



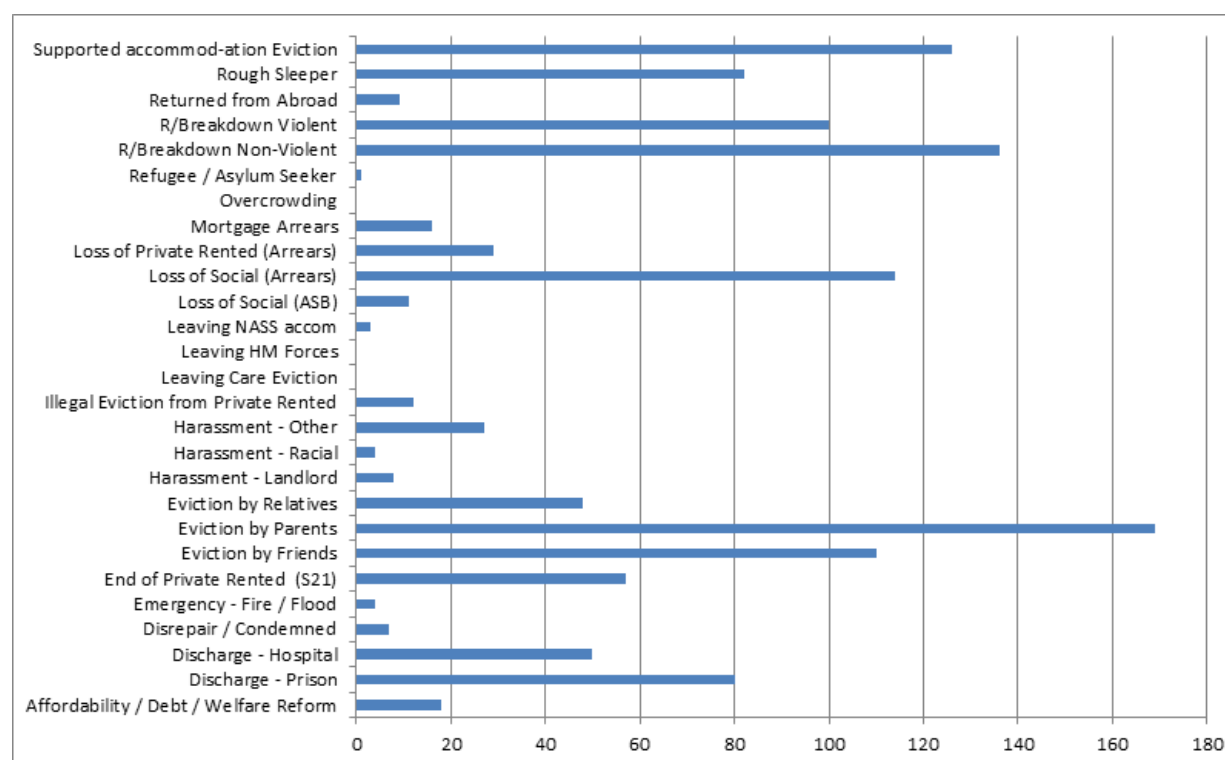
Data does not capture those people helped by more informal methods by Cheshire East or by family members before they are classed as homeless. National statistics attempt to outline whether councils are taking action to stop someone becoming homeless (prevention) or stepping in to offer assistance afterwards (relief). This can be recorded in different ways.

Homelessness applications and acceptance figures may misrepresent the amount of demand Cheshire East is facing at a local level.

For example, 50 people left hospital and approached Housing Options as homeless or wanting assistance. 7 were accepted as homeless with the remaining 43 receiving other forms of assistance after being assessed as lacking one or more of the '5 tests for homelessness' (being homeless, eligible, in priority need, unintentionally homeless, and with a local connection).

This can be seen in many similar situations, with more people assisted by Housing Options than are accepted as homeless, in the next 2 tables.

**Chart: Reasons for clients approaching Housing Options in 2015 / 2016**



Asked to leave by family or friends, and domestic abuse both feature above with high numbers of approaches. However, there are many more approaches from households evicted from social housing than from those evicted from private rented accommodation, even though that is one of the 3 main categories of homelessness acceptances in Cheshire East (almost 10%).

Crewe & Macclesfield	Total	Main reason for loss of last settled home for applicant households found to be eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need
Discharge - Prison	80	0
Discharge - Hospital	50	7
Eviction by Friends or relatives	158	15
Eviction by Parents	169	12
Harassment - Other	27	9
Leaving National Asylum Support accommodation	3	1
Loss of Social (Arrears)	114	1
Mortgage Arrears	16	3
Refugee / Asylum Seeker	1	0
R/Breakdown Violent	100	22

## **Rural homelessness**

About 50% of Cheshire East residents live in rural locations. There are significant levels of inequality and deprivation to which rural communities are vulnerable. Often there are limited transport options. Circumstances in rural areas can make delivering services to prevent and relieve homelessness particularly difficult.

Recent research by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) has said that central to addressing homelessness in rural areas is making sure rural housing markets work for their resident populations by providing affordable accommodation across a range of tenures and types of home.

Cheshire East has no specific information about homelessness in local rural settlements. Cheshire East will address this issue as a priority in the Homelessness Strategy, and if evidence suggests this is a significant problem, then a number of things could be pursued, such as a rural-specific homelessness strategy, new models of partnership working, and improved monitoring.

Action Plan 4.b: Explore homelessness issues in rural communities
---

## **Future intentions**

The Housing Service will explore new ways to help more households to remain in their own home. This will be done through an efficient process to pick up homelessness triggers from contact via the new Homechoice and Single Point of Access, and an understanding of the triggers of homelessness through the new 56 days run in through the HRA.

More details about these and other issues, and what Cheshire East is doing and will do to prevent homelessness is covered next under the 4 Strategic Priorities.

# **Strategic Priorities**

## **Strategic Priority 1: Enable more people to remain in their home and prevent them from becoming homeless**

### **The issue**

The DCLG collects data on prevention and relief efforts by local authorities, which are now included in the same statistical release as statutory homeless figures. Homelessness prevention involves councils helping people to avoid homelessness through measures such as helping them to secure alternative accommodation or to stay in their current home. Homelessness relief is when an authority has been unable to prevent homelessness but has helped someone to secure accommodation, even though it was not under a legal obligation to do so.

According to a 2016 data release, an estimated 212,600 cases of homelessness prevention or relief took place outside the statutory framework in England in 2014/15 - of these 198,100 were estimated to be preventions, and 14,400 cases of relief. The total number of cases of homelessness prevention and relief increased by 38% between 2009/10 and 2013/14, from 165,200 to 228,400, before falling back to 212,600 in 2015/16.

More is needed to prevent homelessness by supporting households at risk before they reach crisis point, as well as reducing rough sleeping.

### **The Cheshire East position**

The number of successful preventions has increased year on year, with 2,261 households assisted between 2014 and 2016.

Good levels of prevention have been recorded which shows a preference for prevention. Between 2014 – 2016, 2,114 (90.6%) were assisted to find alternative accommodation, rather than remain in their own home (406). A priority for the new Homelessness Strategy will be to explore new ways to help more households to remain in their own home.

Action Plan 1.a: Homelessness Reduction Act
---

Early intervention can help prevent households from losing their homes. 49.2% (200) of cases had homelessness prevented through a resolution of rent or service charge issues. Homelessness prevention involves providing people with the ways and means to address their housing and other needs to avoid homelessness.

Homelessness prevention data accounts for cases previously at risk of homelessness, for which homelessness was prevented through positive action (either allowing the household to remain in their existing home, or assisting the household to obtain alternative accommodation).

Homelessness relief data accounts for cases that had become homeless (but were not accepted as owed a main duty), for which homelessness was relieved through positive action (assistance in securing accommodation)

Homelessness relief occurs when an authority has made a negative homeless decision, that is, that a household is either intentionally homeless or is non-priority as defined within part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (amended 2002), but helps someone to secure alternative accommodation, even though it is under no statutory obligation to do so.

Prevention and relief work is carried out with partner agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureaux, floating support providers, etc.

The number of successful prevention cases has increased year on year for the past 3 years, with just a decrease of 1.6% % between 2015 and 2016. The majority of the households have been assisted to move into social housing via Homechoice, evidence that Cheshire East allocations policy gives 'reasonable preference' to those households threatened with homelessness. This includes ex - members of HM Armed Forces who are awarded the appropriate banding and local connection. The numbers being assisted to remain in their own homes has remained static, with an average of 128 per year over the last 3 years.

**Table: total number of cases of homelessness prevention and relief by outcome**

Number of cases where positive action was successful in <i>preventing</i> homelessness of which household				Cases where positive action was successful in <i>relieving</i> homelessness	Total cases of prevention and relief
	Able to remain in existing home	Assisted to obtain alternative accommodation	<b>Total</b>		
<b>2014</b>	135	436	571	6	577
<b>2015</b>	122	663	856	21	877

<b>2016</b>	128	714	842	36	878
<b>Total</b>	385	1,813	2,269	63	2,332

421 family / couple households were prevented from becoming homeless during 2015/2016

### **Welfare Reform**

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) figures show in July 2017 that almost half of households affected by the benefit cap are losing £50 a week or more, which is likely to make it difficult for people to afford their bills, rent and potentially even basic necessities.

Nearly 75% are single parent families, many with very young children – these are people who may find it incredibly difficult to escape the cap by finding work, given the cost of childcare and lack of flexible employment options. Closer working with Third Sector community initiatives, such as foodbanks for example, will be explored to find out why people need their services.

Indications are that the same issues as usual are presenting themselves but that they are becoming more complicated: benefits problems leading to debt, which leads to threatened homelessness, and employment problems, all of which may lead to relationship breakdown. These issues impact on family life and on children, on an individual's physical and mental health, including possible loss of self-esteem and confidence. This then, may lead to unemployment, or homelessness, which impacts on the local economy.

#### **Action Plan 4.a: Third Sector Community Initiatives**

Cheshire East's continued competitive economic offer continues to present employment opportunities. Ensuring that more of the population are able to benefit from economic growth through gaining employment remains a priority.

Working together with local partners to address employment and training needs will ensure that households have the opportunity to obtain higher value employment opportunities, therefore increasing their ability to sustain a tenancy, and to exercise more choice in the housing market. Cheshire East wants to make sure that people have sufficient skills to enter the job market through careers advice and support - an important step in households being able to gain independence.

The provision of employment, financial and housing advice will:

- (1) Increase the number of adults moving off 'out of work' benefits and into continuous employment, and
- (2) Increase the number of individuals not claiming unemployment benefit over 6 months and who are on a pathway to work.

Ideally they will be positioned to respond to new employment opportunities in Cheshire East.

Cheshire East will positively support partnerships with voluntary sector stakeholders and other local partners to address the support, education, employment and training needs (including bespoke training around partnerships and operational working).

#### **Action Plan 1.e: Work in partnership to provide support for the acquiring of skills and knowledge, and increase opportunities to access work**

Steps have been taken in this direction already when Cheshire East recently invited colleagues from a range of partners (providers of housing, support, advice and training) to an event intended to facilitate

an open discussion about the current housing climate, and joint challenges and opportunities going into the future.

One clearly identified need which was highlighted was for a database of services and options available via website with free access for all. This would be useful and connect up services across geographical areas and overcome poor connectivity issues. 'Live Well Cheshire East' has been launched, an information and advice service, on a range of subjects, with an easy to use directory of over 3,000 services and activities in Cheshire East. This database will be reviewed and updated every 6 months so that the information is always up to date and accurate.

Cheshire East is currently exploring options with the DWP for working on joint local initiatives aimed at reducing homelessness and unemployment.

#### Action Plan 4.d: Access to free information

Discharges of people from prison and hospital are sometimes untimely and short notice. 50% of prison discharges are unplanned, as are discharges from mental health services. Increased engagement with the Probation Service has been agreed, and work is being done by Link Workers to support those leaving mental health services who may be homeless.

#### Action Plan 2.e: Homeless from institutions

##### **Current activity**

Successful interventions are carried out, through means such as mortgage arrears interventions, family mediation, the Emergency Assistance Fund, and support at Court via the Money Advisor.

Over 60% of preventions have involved resolving money problems with 50% rent or service charge problems, and 13% Housing Benefit problems.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) are used to prevent homelessness to assist with a range of issues including benefit cap cases, the under occupancy charge or the Spare Room Subsidy ('bedroom tax'), short-term rent shortfalls, when, for example, a baby is due, and for rent in advance.

The DHP fund is administered by the Housing Benefit Service. Private sector liaison officers work closely with Benefits staff to maximise the chance of successful outcomes. Payments from the Discretionary Housing Payments and the Emergency Assistance Fund may be offered to eligible households.

The largest single prevention action (almost 50%) concerns rent or service charge arrears in social housing, followed by Housing benefit problems and mortgage arrears.

**Table: Homelessness prevented - household able to remain in existing home as a result of:**

	2014	2015	2016	Total
Mediation using external or internal trained family mediators	13	5	4	22
Conciliation including home visits for family/friend threatened exclusions	10	4	2	16
Financial payments from a homeless prevention fund	7	12	8	27
Debt advice	1	2	3	6



Resolving Housing Benefit problems	18	16	19	53
Resolving rent or service charge arrears in the social or private rented sector	66	62	72	200
Sanctuary scheme measures for domestic violence	1	0	0	1
Crisis intervention - providing emergency support	3	1	0	4
Negotiation or legal advocacy to ensure that someone can remain in accommodation in the private rented sector	7	1	5	13
Providing other assistance that will enable someone to remain in accommodation in the private or social rented sector	8	13	6	27
Mortgage arrears interventions or mortgage rescue	18	5	16	39
Other	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>406</b>

Mortgage arrears and rent arrears in Cheshire East have remained at low levels as the causes of loss of accommodation. The Mortgage Pre-Action Protocol (MPAP) has led to a reduction in the number of repossessions. These findings suggest that steps taken by Cheshire East to reduce homelessness have been effective, such as:

- Participating in and funding court desks in Macclesfield and Crewe which assists in representing the resident in court in cases of mortgage and rent arrears
- Promoting the work of the money advice officer and monitoring referrals to the service to assessing the impact of any increases in mortgage interest rates on owner-occupiers

The data for Cheshire East is static, although the repossession activity by social landlords is something which will need specific work in order to establish why this is the case, and what can be done to produce reductions to match those seen in the private landlord and mortgage sectors.

Gold Standard challenge number seven is aimed at actively engaging in preventing mortgage repossessions.

#### Action Plan 1.d: Mortgage Repossessions

The CAB has been contracted to provide debt advice to households facing financial hardships. Money advice is a key homelessness prevention tool.

#### Action Plan 1.b: Welfare Reform

##### Future intentions

Prevention work will see an increase once the Homeless Reduction Act is enforced, with people assisted 56 days before they are likely to become homeless. A new Section 195 inserted into the 1996 Act requires Cheshire East to take steps to help prevent homelessness for any eligible households threatened with homelessness. Steps to be taken will be informed by the assessment set out in the new duty to assess and agree a personalised plan. This will include things such as mediation to help keep families together, or financial payments.

There will be a demonstrable focus on delivering proactive advice and support to enable clients to sustain their existing accommodation wherever practicable and appropriate, or, to access alternative accommodation.

A pathways model will be devised to connect young people with appropriate services such as supported accommodation leading to self contained sustainable accommodation.

Work is being done to reduce homelessness from mental health hospital through a discharge protocol signed up to by Cheshire East and the Cheshire and Wirral Partnership / NHS, which outlines key roles and responsibilities of each service and what each can expect from the others. 2 Link Workers will assist people leaving hospital, with no home to go to, into one of 4 commissioned bed spaces, for a short duration, as the Link Worker finds a more permanent housing solution.

Action Plan 2.b: Clients with mental health problems
--

## **Strategic Priority 2: Help people who are homeless to secure appropriate affordable accommodation**

### **The issue**

Homeless households found to be unintentionally homeless and in priority need are owed the full housing duty. Section 208 of the Housing Act 1996 requires that where it is 'reasonably practicable', local authorities should secure accommodation within their administrative boundary. However, the combination of a limited supply of social housing and rising costs in many areas means that some authorities are increasingly struggling to accommodate homeless households in their locality.

### **The Cheshire East position**

The largest interventions across both prevention and relief have been 49.3% (1,043) nominations to RP partners and 27% (570) referred to supported housing. Very detailed and clear advice is given, with a particular focus on affordability and support to access the Private Rented Sector (PRS). Cheshire East are developing a private sector landlord offer. Accreditation of landlords is on-going. There has been an 18% increase in those accredited, with more landlords reaching the Council's 'Gold Standard'. This shows an increase in landlords willing to engage. The Scheme aims to recognise private landlords who operate good management practices and maintain good property standards. Cheshire East Private Landlord Liaison Officers provide support and advice to private landlords. The Cheshire East scheme works well and has been seen as an example of good practice

### **Current activity**

The number of successful prevention cases has increased year on year for the past 3 years, with just a decrease of 1.6% between 2015 and 2016. The majority of the households have been assisted to move into social housing via Homechoice. The numbers being assisted to remain in their own homes has remained static, with an average of 128 per year over the last 3 years.

Since 2013/14 no homeless households have had their homelessness addressed through the use of low cost home ownership housing products (at the point of homelessness relief, although as household circumstances improved some may have entered shared ownership, for example), but 38 have had homelessness prevented through social housing for rent.

A new housing-related support contract began in Cheshire East in April 2017. It has split services into 3 areas: Cheshire East North, Central, and South. There is a requirement to link this into tenancy sustainment as a key element of prevention work.

The Single Point of Access (SPA) received 888 referrals during 2016 – 2017. 44% of referrals were made by the Housing Options team, of which, 89% came from the Homelessness Team, with the remainder from enhanced housing options or Homechoice. Referrals to the SPA are high, but often services available are not always appropriate for those with complex needs. It is necessary to improve use of the SPA by increasing awareness of the service amongst partners and stakeholders.

#### Action Plan 2.d: Single Point of Access

Typically, clients who left services in a negative or an unplanned way are more likely to return, needing more support than clients that leave services in a positive or a planned way.

One of the largest causes of homelessness (over 20% of all homeless cases over the last 3 years) is domestic abuse. In the last year alone over 2,500 referrals were made to local specialist domestic abuse services, with an additional 344 to the commissioned sexual violence support provider.

Domestic abuse is one of the 3 biggest causes of homelessness.

Responses to domestic abuse, including housing need, are specifically co-ordinated through the work of the Cheshire East Domestic and Sexual Abuse Partnership (CEDSAP). CEDSAP has the prevention of homelessness as a key priority, working to keep people safe in their homes where possible, and only sending people out of the area as a last resort. This is done by, amongst other things:

- Support for victims to remain in their accommodation where it is safe to do so
- Target hardening of properties
- Support for victims to use Council services to get help with accommodation problems

The CEDSAP hub service has seen an increase in 2016 in the number of people seeking support (over 20%) including accommodation, and provides quality services to respond to need, including housing.

The CEDSAP Strategy aims at strengthening joint working with recently commissioned providers of 14 units of local accommodation for those with additional needs across Cheshire East.

More information can be accessed via the Homelessness Strategy Review 2017.

#### Action Plan 2.a: Homeless due to relationship breakdown

##### Care Leavers

Cheshire East Council has a legal Corporate Parenting Responsibility for all children and young people who are cared for and care leavers from 0 - 25. The Care Leavers Service Plan 2016/17 says that there should be sufficiency and choice of accommodation for care leavers, where they can feel safe. Social Work Reform now requires local authorities to issue a local offer to care leavers to set out specifically what the local authority will provide with due weight attached to housing options. During information gathering events for the Homelessness Strategy Review, care leavers were highlighted as a vulnerable group who may struggle to identify and sustain appropriate accommodation.

Pathway Plans and Ignition panel are some of the ways in which 16 – 25 year olds can achieve permanence within their own homes. Young people are central to the formation of these plans. Cheshire East has a number of ways to prepare care leavers to transition to their own accommodation such as tenancy readiness courses, training flats, and the use of guarantors and council tax exemptions. Whilst the offer is good, Cheshire East remain aspirational in aiming work toward the

extension of the options available and specifically a tolerance and 'can do' attitude when care leavers experience difficulty in maintaining their own properties and tenancies.

This strategy aim to identify care leavers as a vulnerable group within Cheshire East and to specifically reduction the number of young people presenting as homeless with less young people experiencing disruption as a consequence of their care leaver journey. The Homelessness Reduction Act says that councils must take specific account of care leavers. Any homeless pathways will work in conjunction with the Care Leaver Service to prioritise the needs of care leavers. Options for joint training opportunities and joint meetings will be developed.

Action Plan: 2.e: Reduce homelessness from leaving Care
---

### Gypsies and Travellers

Cheshire East assesses the accommodation needs of all residents, including vulnerable groups such as Gypsies and Travellers. Gypsies and Travellers are protected by Law from discrimination and unfair treatment.

Cheshire East has recently in partnership with other Cheshire local authorities commissioned a Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA), due to be published in early 2018.

Cheshire East currently manages 1 socially run site and is also responsible for licensing all private Gypsy and Traveller caravan sites, known as authorised sites. Sometimes unauthorised encampments may be established on Cheshire East land or private land and this may be an indication that the Gypsies and Travellers have nowhere legal to place their caravans. At all encampments on Council land a welfare assessment is undertaken covering health and welfare issues, as well as addressing issues around permanent accommodation.

Gypsies and Travellers can contact Cheshire East Council and ask to make a homeless application if they have nowhere to stay, if, for example, there is nowhere safe to legally park a caravan or a mobile home. The Council has a 24-hour emergency number to call if households become homeless out of office hours.

Action Plan 2.a: Single Homeless
----------------------------------

Mental health support is a major issue, with a gap between Housing Options and the bottom end of Adult Social Care and mental health support. How to manage and understand mental health thresholds and accommodation requirements has been a problem, especially for those clients not engaging with mental health services.

Action Plan 4.e: Support the 3rd sector in strengthening links with Adult Social Care.
--

The Housing Discharge Protocol outlines what 'capacity' is, and what the roles and responsibilities are of Health services and Housing services. The Housing Options Service will communicate with partners on a regular basis. One way of doing this is through a regular newsletter, or e-mail update, which can collate information from other organisations or services. This will then be circulated to contacts and strategic partners.

Action Plan 4.c: Housing Options Team
---------------------------------------

### Future intentions

The design of the new housing related support services are outcome focused, allowing families and single people the opportunity to access the support they need. This approach will ensure that those with complex needs, such as substance misuse and mental health, will be supported into

independence where this is achievable, or will have a suitable service in place to support them to maintain accommodation and prevent homelessness.

The service providers are bringing innovative approaches to the programme of early intervention and prevention, which will provide significant value for money to Cheshire East, with a reduction in demand to front line services.

#### Action Plan 2.c: Better use of accommodation

Work is being done to develop an enhanced PRS offer. This will see increased access to the PRS, especially for homeless and vulnerable households. It may also include incentives offered to private landlords to rent out their properties to nominated households, and the creation of a social lettings company.

#### Action Plan 2.f: Increased knowledge of the local PRS

Commissioners are currently working with key stakeholders to re-commission the Cheshire East Substance Misuse Service. A core value and key principle of the re-commissioning process has been engagement, co-production and co-design with service users. Priorities include the aim of reducing homelessness and the risk of homelessness related to alcohol-related crime, anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse. One aim is to examine what levels of homelessness originate from social and private rented accommodation as a result of substance misuse, and clarify if households were known to services.

#### Action Plan 2.e: Substance Misuse

Younger people will have more difficulty finding rented accommodation in coming months as a substantial proportion of private landlords actively cut back on renting to under-35s.

Although nearly all landlords are willing to rent to under-35s, nearly a third are changing their letting strategy, mostly to ensure that they have security of rent payment.

National Research by the Residential Landlord Association (RLA) states that under-35s provide a rich source of demand for landlords, and comprise a significant proportion of their tenants. Nationally, nearly all landlords consider renting to under-35s, but there are particular sub-groups to whom they are less willing to let to. Two-thirds of landlords (68%) are not willing to let to under-35s on Housing Benefit/Universal Credit (HB/UC). More than two-fifths of landlords (44%) are not willing to let to students. The most common reasons why landlords were not willing to let to particular groups of under-35s tend to fall into two categories – difficulty in managing the accommodation, and fears about financial loss.

This supports evidence that students and HB/UC claimants are viewed as relatively distinct sub-markets which some landlords specialise in and others avoid. There was some regional variation in the willingness to let to both these groups. Recent migrants represented the third largest group that landlords were not willing to rent to. It would be worth exploring the extent to which this has been influenced by the introduction of 'Right to Rent' legislation which means that landlords have a legal obligation to check the immigration status of tenants.

#### Action Plan 1.c: Homeless from the private rented sector

Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester and Warrington Borough Councils have launched a Cheshire Landlord Accreditation Scheme.

The Scheme aims to recognise private landlords who operate good management practices and maintain good property standards. Private landlords play an essential role in the provision of accommodations across Cheshire. It is acknowledged and appreciated that many private landlords manage their tenancies well, and provide and maintain properties to a good standard, often above the

standard required by the law. It is important to recognise these landlords and encourage and support others to achieve this higher standard.

The Scheme has a focus on developing private landlords, through access to support on tenancy and property issues, and professional development courses.

The benefit for landlords of being a member of an accreditation scheme includes public recognition of the good standards that they deliver, as well as access to initiatives that will be developed for the Scheme. Tenants also benefit from accreditation schemes through the knowledge that properties are safe and in good repair, and the confidence that their landlord is professional and reputable.

Action Plan 2.f: Develop an enhanced private sector landlord offer
--

## **Repossession**

715 households across all 3 tenures have been the subject of repossession and have therefore lost their home.

This is not reflected in the reasons for approaches to the Council's Homelessness Service, or in the cause of homelessness data, with 42 households accepted as homeless due to repossession.

Of the 3 tenures, claims and repossessions by social landlords are the highest.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Mortgage claims	362	263	101	117	843
Mortgage possessions	131	110	23	28	292
Private landlord claims	73	69	56	61	259
Private landlord possessions	16	18	13	15	62
Social landlord claims	429	423	418	331	1,601
Social landlord possessions	79	102	86	94	361

Locally, up to 20% of new tenancies are failing within the first 12 months. The reasons why RPs are evicting so many households is something requiring investigation. For example, are the high numbers due to anti-social behaviour, or rent arrears? If rent arrears, is that due to delays in Benefit receipts, or a tenant's unwillingness or inability to pay rent due? The causes and determinants will be unpicked.

Action Plan 1.c: Work with RSLs to provide timely advice to households in rent arrears
--

## **Strategic Priority 3: Provide interventions to prevent rough sleeping**

### **The issue**

Rough sleeping is the most visible face of homelessness. According to the latest figures, collected in the autumn of 2016 and published in January 2017, 4,134 people are estimated to be sleeping rough on any one night. There was an increase of 16% from 2015 to 2016, while since 2010 national rough sleeping estimates show an increase of 134%.

The East of England has seen the biggest percentage increase in rough sleeping since last year (44%). This is followed by the North West (42%), the East Midlands (23%) and the North East (18%), all of which have seen increases in rough sleeping above the national average.

### **The Cheshire East position**

The number of rough sleepers is continuously monitored by the Council, through information from partners, who also provide an estimate of rough sleeping on one night each year chosen between 1st October and 30th November. This is a snapshot on a single night, and not an assessment of the total number of rough sleepers over the whole year.

**Table: Rough sleeping recorded on a single night each year**

2014	2015	2016
12	0	4

The Housing Options Team is committed to tackling rough sleeping and has a range of solutions available to people who find themselves sleeping on the streets. These efforts are ramped up in the cold months in close collaboration with local faith groups / churches and third sector organisations.

There is no outreach service available in Cheshire East, but when a report of a person sleeping rough comes in from Streetlink, a rough sleeping hotline, attempts are made within 24 hours to find the individual and offer an intervention

### **Current activity**

Cheshire East data from services (commissioned and non-commissioned) across the sub-region in the last 12 months have identified 137 different rough sleepers. Of these some are known to services and have been seen up to 8 times rough sleeping, but the majority are new to the streets or have slept rough for 5 days or less.

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) - 10 verified rough sleepers were recorded during the recent SWEP during the Winter of 2016/17. The SWEP is triggered when night time temperatures between November and March will fall below 0 Celsius for 3 consecutive nights, therefore increasing the likelihood of a death.

Additionally, 92 people at risk of either sleeping rough, or who would have had to sleep rough if accommodation wasn't provided, were assisted in 2015/16 through SWEP.

No Second Night Out (NSNO) – A total of 50 Clients have used NSNO over the past 12 months and were prevented from having to sleep on the streets.

Winter Hope Accommodation Macclesfield (WHAM) - Local churches organise the WHAM winter weekend shelters. During the latest shelter period, 22 people were given at least one night's shelter, with 104 nights of accommodation provided in total.

Cheshire East has been awarded funding from the DCLG as part of a pan-Cheshire bid. £100K will be spent in Cheshire East over 3 years to assist, via the 'Upstream' Project, about 120 people who will be at risk of sleeping rough.

This project is in its early days and is working with the limited evidence base that currently exists to identify pre-rough sleepers. However, triggers have been identified to raise concerns for people within the targeted client groups:

- leaving institutional care aged 16 plus
- new rough sleepers of 3 days or less
- people at assessed and imminent risk of rough sleeping
- individuals with no recourse to public funds
- mental health/substance misuse issues
- relationship and parental breakdown
- the end of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy

Clients will be assessed based on a range of risk and protective factors including:

- resilience
- motivation
- capacity
- mental health
- housing circumstances
- drug and alcohol, and
- social networks

Clients will be assessed within a maximum of 2 hours' (during normal office hours) notification and be signposted to appropriate services for accommodation and support.

### **Future intentions**

Rough sleeping numbers continue to be monitored. More information is known about entrenched rough sleepers. A specific action plan, as an appendix to the Strategy with a protocol and linked to a 'hard to house' panel is to be produced early in 2018. A separate action plan to deliver a suitable reconnection service and a CE-wide single service offer will be developed to assist rough sleepers. Those who are more entrenched may be assisted by the 'hard to house' panel which will explore solutions for those who have exhausted all housing options.

It will map further options available for people with complex needs and look at housing demand, identify gaps in provision and services, and develop a menu of options.

It is intended to develop further links with partners and local churches / Faith groups to provide an enhanced service to rough sleepers.

#### **3b) Development of options for entrenched rough sleepers assisted by the 'hard to house' panel**

As well as a co-ordinated pan-Cheshire approach via the Upstream Project, Cheshire East will continue to implement and support the SWEP, NSNO and the WHAM provision. Cheshire East is exploring opportunities for partnership working with voluntary groups to reduce rough sleeping in Macclesfield.

Cheshire East is currently monitoring the level of rough sleeping cases in the authority, through information from partners, and an estimate of rough sleeping on one night, or a physical count, will be undertaken each year.

#### **Action Plan 3.c: Improved intelligence about rough sleepers**

To remedy rough sleepers being counted twice by different services or organisation (double counting), the new Homelessness Strategy will look at improvements to the monitoring and recording of rough sleepers. This may include use of a multi-agency form to ensure that double counting is avoided.

Improved reporting options will be explored, apart from Streetlink, through things like wider links being established with street-based services, such as community and parking enforcement, and local businesses, which may come across people sleeping rough.

## **Strategic Priority 4: Ensure adequate support is in place to help maintain and sustain accommodation**

### **The issue**



Supported housing is housing for vulnerable people to maintain their dignity and be part of a community.

Schemes provide both housing and support to help vulnerable people live as independently as possible in their community and maintain their tenancies, so preventing homelessness and poverty. These schemes are designed for client groups such as people with mental health issues, learning or physical disabilities, substance misuse issues, victims of, or at risk of domestic violence, teenage parents, ex-offenders, or older people.

More than 700,000 people in the UK benefit from the support and supervision provided within the supported housing sector. The vast majority of provision is sheltered accommodation for older people.

In September 2016, the Government announced proposals for a new funding model for supported housing, which would operate from April 2019. Under the new model, core rent and service charges would be funded through Housing Benefit or Universal Credit up to the level of the applicable Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate. For costs above the LHA rate, the Government would devolve ring-fenced top-up funding for disbursement by local authorities.

Supported housing transforms lives and importantly makes a vital contribution to relieving pressure from our strained health and social services. More details are expected to be announced in the Supported Housing Green Paper later in 2017. However, it seems likely that under the new financial system Cheshire East will need to work within a specific budget. Work will be done with the administrators of the budget to ensure sustainability of services.

### **The Cheshire East position**

A new housing-related support contract began in Cheshire East in April 2017. It has split services into 3 areas: Cheshire East North, Central, and South, as shown in the tables below.

This will be linked into tenancy sustainment as a key part of homeless prevention.

#### **North**

<b>Bed spaces</b>	<b>Client group</b>
45	Non-statutory homeless, mixed gender, 16 or over, low-medium complexity.
49	Floating support (increased from 25). This was resettlement, but is now housing related.
10	Women only and to include single parents.

#### **Centre**

<b>Bed spaces</b>	<b>Client group</b>
20	Non-statutory homeless, generic, 16 or over, low – medium complexities.
8	Vulnerable women (including pregnant, or with dependent children)
37	Floating support

#### **South**

<b>Bed spaces</b>	<b>Client group</b>
62	77, including 5 bed spaces for statutory homeless
10	Vulnerable women (including pregnant, or with dependent children)
69	Floating support (up from 25)

### **Single Point of Access**

Housing related support applications are received and processed by the Single Point of Access (SPA), which is contracted by and managed by the Housing Options Service. The SPA is a secure web-based application system. It is set up for referral agencies to make referrals for people with housing related support needs.

An analysis of 234 clients leaving services between September 2015 and April 2016 was carried out in December 2016 (8 months plus from leaving service) to help inform how successful services have been in helping clients to move on in a positive and sustainable way. Research was completed using SPA and Homechoice data to help inform whether clients had continued to live independently and manage their own tenancy, or if they had returned needing further support.

6% of referrals were made by Children and Families Services. Some ongoing work is needed with Children's Services regarding a joint working protocol for 16/17 year olds.

#### Action Plan 2.d: Single Point of Access

One issue to be considered is how priority is awarded to care leavers / young people within a revised Cheshire East Allocations Policy. The Policy underpins the ability to move people who are in housing need to appropriate social housing. With approximately 6,500 registered for housing needs each year and only an average of 1,300 properties available annually it is vital the policy strikes the balance between supporting sustainable, settled neighbourhoods whilst giving priority to those people who are in urgent housing need.

The Policy is being reviewed to:

- ensure that the Policy is Homelessness Reduction Act compliant
- respond to customers' comments
- respond to Elected Members' comments
- tackle under-occupation to make best use of housing stock

An improved understanding and awareness of the SPA needs to be developed, as some providers are making referrals via the SPA for clients with welfare reform issues and rent arrears. This may lead to evictions from social housing. Increased awareness of the SPA amongst partners such as the Prison Service and Young Offender's Institutions is also required to ensure that clients are aware of where to go access services. A re - branding event will be held to promote and re-launch the SPA to partners and stakeholders.

#### Action Plan 1.c: Homeless from the social rented sector

##### **Current activity**

##### **Emergency AssistanCE scheme**

Emergency AssistanCE is a scheme introduced by Cheshire East following the changes to the Social Fund by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) from April 2013. Following the abolition of Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans, the Council has developed this policy to provide support for the most vulnerable households facing immediate short-term needs in an emergency, or as a consequence of a disaster, to prevent a serious risk to the health and safety of themselves or their family.

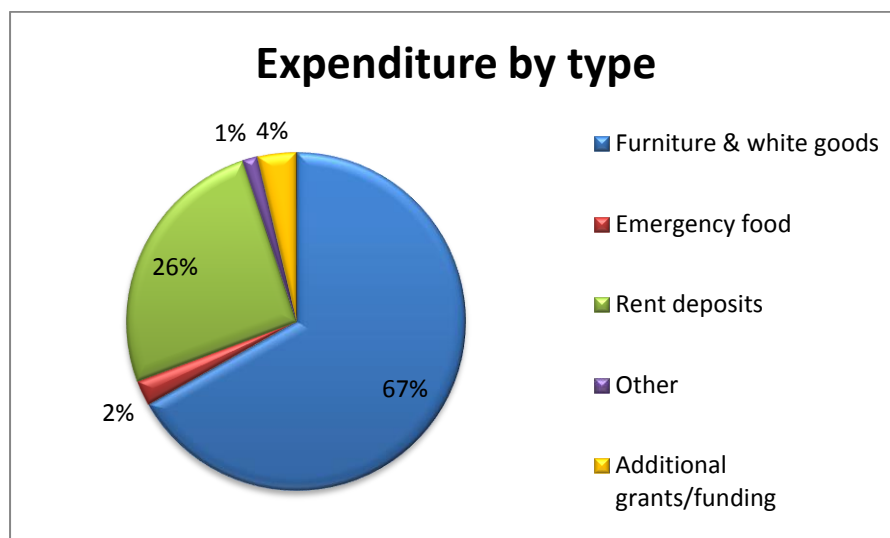
Any award is intended to:

- support vulnerable people facing immediate hardship, following a crisis or disaster
- prevent homelessness, in conjunction with support from the Housing Options Team
- keep families together and safeguard vulnerable people

The Emergency AssistanCE scheme is available to vulnerable people who are in receipt of state benefits. In exceptional circumstances awards may be allowed to those on a low wage.

The majority of funding has helped households to purchase essential items for the home such as fridges and washing machines, and furniture. The next largest funding allocation was for rent deposits.

The Emergency Assistance scheme is due to be reviewed in 2018 when funding options will be explored.



### **The Homeless Prevention Fund**

The Homeless Prevention Fund is used for anything that would stop someone from being homeless and this can be adapted to be a personalised approach for someone who is sleeping rough. Rough sleepers have a variety of needs to get them back into accommodation and for some financial support is needed to start a new tenancy or to clear off debts which make it difficult to be able to move into a property.

This scheme has limits, but the approach of the service attempts to be open minded and flexible so that applications can be received to cover individual and exceptional circumstances. The Fund is retained fully within the Housing Options Service, with a case for its retention based on the quality of the service and the value for money it provides, especially in 'spend to save' scenarios.

Financial assistance and advice is also available at the Credit Union and Citizens' Advice Bureau.

### **Website and information**

Cheshire East meets the standard for public websites. There is a good range of information which is easy to locate. The information is clear on the main areas required, with a good range of links. There is also a good range of telephone numbers for customers to contact for help. It also makes best use of the template available.

The website offers effective and relevant housing advice and information at the earliest possible stage which enables a customer to make choices about which option is best for them. It enables an exploration of possible tenure options and a tailoring to their individual circumstances, such as information about social rented housing from housing associations, or the private rented sector.

The website will be kept up to date with good quality information and useful links.

Information sharing and drop-in sessions, newsletters and increased understanding of roles and responsibilities of organisations and agencies will be developed.

#### Action Plan 4.d: Access to free information

##### **Future intentions**

The Housing Options Team during the recent DPR was assessed as being sympathetic to the customer's needs, and to have a clear methodical approach in one to one contact with clients. There are excellent levels of engagement with customers, with detailed clear advice given, with a particular focus on affordability and support to access the PRS. Clear and appropriate next steps are discussed with the customer.

However, information sharing has been identified as an issue. Third sector (voluntary sector, the economic sector consisting of non-governmental organisations and other non-profit organisations) services are used by Housing Options but information is sometimes erratic.

#### Action Plan 2.d: Single Point of Access

Under the forthcoming HRA there will be a significant number of new proposed opportunities for applicants to request a Section 202 review (concerning the decision about someone's eligibility for assistance or the offer of accommodation). More cases are likely to be reviewed due to the number of clients that this new duty will affect. There will also be increased legal costs.

#### Action Plan 4.f: Develop a better understanding of the housing options service through customer feedback

## **Delivering the Homelessness Strategy 2018 – 2021**

<b>Strategic Priority</b>	<b>1. Enable more people to remain in their home and prevent homelessness</b>	<b>2. Help people who are homeless to secure appropriate affordable accommodation</b>	<b>3. Provide interventions to end rough sleeping</b>	<b>4. Ensure adequate support is in place to help people maintain and sustain accommodation</b>
<b>Aims</b>	a) Successfully deliver change via the Homelessness Reduction Act  b) Mitigate the impact of Welfare Reform  c) Provide a range of advice and guidance for tenants and homeowners who are experiencing financial difficulties  d) Evidence	a) Options for single homeless and complex needs  b) Reduced homelessness of customers with mental health issues  c) Better use of accommodation  e) Housing pathways for all i) single ii) complex iii) mental health iv) large families  f) Develop an	a) Increased interventions to prevent rough sleeping  b) Development of options for entrenched rough sleepers assisted by the 'hard to house' panel  c) Develop further links with partners and local churches / Faith groups to provide an enhanced service to rough	a) Joint work with Third Sector Community Initiatives  b) Explore rural homelessness  c) Promote the Housing Options Team  d) Promotion of the SPA and housing related support  d) Provide access to free information  e) Develop the

	early intervention in rent arrears and mortgage repossessions  e) Reduce the 3 main causes of homelessness  f) Provide support for employment training and education	enhanced private rented sector  g) Reduce use of B and B  h) See less large families homeless	sleepers.  d) Increased knowledge about rough sleepers	Steering Group and Strategic Partnerships  f) Develop a better understanding of the service through customer feedback
<b>Key targets for 2018</b>	HRA embedded into services / No one homeless as the result of welfare reform	Reduced homelessness from hospital / Reduced B and B use	0 rough sleepers  Homelessness prevented for 60% of all homelessness applications	Promotion of the Housing Options Team / Dissemination of advice and information in appropriate formats
<b>Key actions for 2018</b>	Reduce rent arrears homeless cases	Promotion of the SPA	Expand use of SWEP accommodation during winter months to all year round provision	Achieve the Gold Standard

### A strategic approach

Improved partnership working will help to deliver identified outcomes for service users. With limited resources and reductions in funding, innovation and good practice will deliver improvements and savings. It is essential to avoid duplication of work and of services within, and between, services.

Cheshire East has already adopted a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all *Cheshire East* services (this is Local Challenge 1 in the Gold Standard). However, strategically important external partners may be unable, through pressures on their service, to meet demand. In this case funding arrangements may be reviewed, or the partners may be supported in exploring funding streams or shared services with other partner organisations. Budget holders and decision makers would be made aware of a lack of capacity in strategically relevant services.

Action Plan 4.e: Review the role of partners in delivering the strategic priorities
---

### Monitoring

The Strategy will be monitored in partnership, with accountability for delivery resting with identified leads to support performance management of the Strategy. The Homelessness Strategy Steering Group will monitor the overall action plan, and monitoring plans for each strategic priority, and be responsible for driving forward the delivery of the action plan. It is intended that the Steering Group will be a strong and effective partnership. Membership will be reviewed to ensure that it is as inclusive as necessary, with a wider role for voluntary, third sector, and Faith groups.

Task and Finish groups will support the work of the Steering Group, focusing on specific projects and will report back to the Steering Group on progress and on any areas of concern.

Action Plan 4.d: Access to free information
---

## **Risk Assessment**

### *Access to resources*

The aims of this Homelessness Strategy will be addressed using existing budgets and staff resources. Government has stated that local authorities will have made available various funding sources. For example, almost £3 million is to be allocated to local authorities to support the costs of implementing welfare reform changes in 2017/18. Job Centre Plus's 'Flexible Support Fund' (FSF) will be available to local partnerships to address barriers to work. The 'flexible homelessness support grant', a new grant for council homelessness services gives freedom to support the full range of homelessness services as part of £550 million of Government funding up to 2020 to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping. Funding will also be made available to local authorities to help with the added work involved in delivering the HRA. These funding streams are or will be available to CE Housing Options and it will be important that Cheshire East support the Housing Service to retain those budgets in order to help deliver the Homelessness Strategy and contribute to homelessness prevention.

Additional one-off funding payments for homelessness services may be allocated by Government and Cheshire East will ensure bids are submitted for any relevant funding, and actively seek out sources of investment funding for Cheshire East, especially ensuring Value for Money.

### *Housing Options*

The new requirements for service delivery imposed by the HRA will place significant pressures on staffing and resources. It is imperative that the Housing Service adequately prepares itself and its partners in advance of the legislation becoming working practice. The Housing Service will also need to reflect upon the impact of the HRA within a reasonable time frame after the legislation is launched, in order to assess whether the resources are in the right place and proportionate to the demand.

### *Welfare Reform*

The Welfare Reform and Work Act takes forward Government commitments to achieving full employment and a target of three million apprenticeships in England. The Act also addresses the effect of certain support for troubled families and provision for social mobility, the benefit cap, social security and tax credits, loans for mortgage interest, and social housing rents. Cheshire East will continue to work with partners in addressing the challenges raised by continuing welfare reform.

### *Lack of affordable housing*

Cheshire East and its partners have been successful in attracting funding to the area, with most recently £10million received to fund the delivery of 334 affordable homes. More affordable homes are needed. However there has been a period of rapid change, with tighter budgets, development viability issues for developers, and changes in Government policy. They have all contributed to a climate of heightened risk and uncertainty. Cheshire East will regularly review the approaches being used to increase affordable housing provision, being creative and flexible. This will produce 355 affordable housing units per year, with 30% of all planning policy as affordable housing.

### *Changes to social housing*

The economic climate has fallen significantly as a key risk but it has been replaced by the EU Referendum/Brexit. The uncertainties in the housing market have increased concern. Access to finance has become easier for Registered Providers (RPs). Welfare reform remains a major concern for social housing providers, with the Government demand to reduce the rent they charge by 1% per year for 4 years identified as a problem.

Government policy and Regulation are seen by RPs as a continuing risk. Cheshire East will explore opportunities available to work with our RP partners and find new and imaginative ways to inform and influence successful outcomes. This will include continued provision of good quality affordable homes and support for those households in need.

This Homelessness Strategy has tried to limit the impact of these changes through the 4 Strategic Priorities.

## **The Delivery Plans**

Cheshire East knows our priority areas to focus on and the Council has identified the major gaps that need to be addressed. Cheshire East knows that it is essential that it works in partnership to achieve the shared vision of preventing homelessness, and have produced an action plan with tasks clustered under the 4 key priorities.

# **Appendix 1**

## **Glossary**

**Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA)** The Homelessness Reduction Act makes changes to legislation contained in Part 7 of the Housing Act of 1996. The HRA places a duty on Cheshire East to intervene earlier to prevent homelessness, and to take reasonable steps to help homeless people to find accommodation. It also requires Cheshire East to expand the category of people who we have to help to find accommodation.

**Gold Standard** The DCLG has established the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS) with the priority of developing the Gold Standard to assist local authorities to deliver the best possible homeless and prevention service. The ultimate aim is to ensure that services offered by Housing Options Teams are robust, fit for purpose, and respond effectively to residents with a housing need. Cheshire East has made the pledge to strive for continuous improvement through the Gold Standard.

This involves a structured process of self assessment, benchmarking and peer review. The challenge follows a 10-step continuous improvement approach designed to help local authorities deliver more efficient and cost effective homelessness prevention services. 10 challenges are answered in three stages: Bronze, Silver and Gold. We have already achieved the 'Bronze' award, and intend throughout 2017 to achieve the 'Silver' award, finally achieving the 'Gold' Standard.

**Black and Minority Ethnic (BME)** Black Minority Ethnic, term used to describe minority groups recognised as falling under the Race Relations Act 1976.

**Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)** Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) is an extra amount of money that the Council can give someone already receiving some Housing Benefit to help them pay their rent (it cannot be awarded to help pay for non-rent charges like water rates and service charges). It is not a benefit, and there is no automatic right to it. It is awarded at the discretion of Cheshire East. There is no fixed amount and the amount to be paid is assessed.

**Emergency Assistance** This policy has been created to provide support for the most vulnerable households facing immediate short-term needs in an emergency, or as a consequence of a disaster, or to prevent a serious risk to the health and safety of themselves or their family.

**Local Housing Allowance (LHA)** The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) arrangements are a way of working out Housing Benefit (HB) for people who rent from a private landlord. Local authorities use LHA rates based on the size of household and the area in which a person lives to work out the amount of rent which can be met with HB. HB paid under the LHA arrangements is normally paid to the tenant, who will then pay the landlord.

**Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)** The Government department that sets policy on supporting local government: communities and neighbourhoods, regeneration, housing, planning, building and the environment, and fire.

**Single Point of Access (SPA)** Housing related support applications are received and processed by the Single Point of Access (SPA), which is contracted by and managed by the Housing Options Service. The SPA is a secure web-based application system. It is set up for referral agencies to make referrals for people with housing related support needs

**Homechoice** Cheshire East does not have any council housing of its own and does not operate its own council housing waiting list. However, it is partnered with Guinness, Plus Dane and Cheshire Peaks and Plains Housing Trusts, who advertise affordable, rented properties (referred to as 'social housing') via a website called Cheshire Homechoice. Housing applications can be made through the Homechoice website.

**Streetlink** StreetLink is a website that enables the public to alert local authorities in England and Wales about people sleeping rough in their area. This service offers the public a means to act when they see someone sleeping rough, and is the first step someone can take to ensure rough sleepers are connected to the local services and support available to them. The service is funded by Government as part of its commitment to end rough sleeping.

**Rough sleepers / street homeless** Households who find themselves with no support networks such as friends or family who are able to offer short term accommodation will likely end up street homeless (rough sleeping). Anyone who is sleeping rough or street homeless is the most visible sign of homelessness.

**No Second Night Out (NSNO)** NSNO helps to identify where rough sleepers are coming from and improve prevention and recovery services so that they don't have to sleep rough.

**Registered Provider (RP)** A registered provider is defined as providing social housing. Social housing includes low cost rental (such as affordable rent properties) and low cost home ownership. Registered providers include local authority landlords and private registered providers (such as not-for-profit housing associations and for-profit organizations).

**Universal Credit** A monthly payment for people who are on low income or who are unemployed. It is being rolled out in stages across the UK and is replacing other benefits. How much is paid depends on the customer's circumstances, including their income and how many children they have.

## Appendix 2

### Statutory Duties under Homelessness legislation

What Cheshire East must do (its duties) for people at risk of homelessness or homeless are mostly to be found in:

Housing Act 1996, including:



Section 179: Duty to provide advisory services

Section 184: Duty to make enquiries in respect of eligibility and duties owed

Section 188: Interim duty to accommodate in cases of apparent priority need

Section 192: Duties to people found not to be in priority need and not homeless intentionally.

Section 193: Duties to people found to be in priority need and not homeless intentionally.

Section 195: Duties to those threatened with homelessness

The 2002 Homelessness Act introduced a requirement on Local Authorities to take a strategic approach to dealing with homelessness. This is done by:

Carrying out a review of homelessness in their area, and then

Based on the findings of the review, developing and publishing a strategy to tackle and prevent homelessness

The Homelessness Reduction Act of 2018 now includes

An amendment to S175 of the Housing Act 1996, which the definition of prevention duty and threatened with homelessness now say:

that a person threatened with homelessness within 56 days or if a valid Section 21 notice (orders for possession at the end of an AST) has been given (175(5))

S189A: Cheshire East must carry out as assessment in all cases where an eligible applicant is homeless, or threatened with homelessness. This is regardless of whether the applicant is in priority need or possibly intentionally homeless.