

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy

2024-2030

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Section 1: Key Facts

1. On average there are 140 households in temporary accommodation at any one time. (55% singles, 40% families)
2. 1143 households were assessed as being homeless.
3. On average, 19% of households needing homeless assistance required temporary accommodation. This dropped by 11% last year.
4. More than 1 in 4 (27%) households privately rent, significantly higher than England (20%) – remove if not enough room.
5. There is a trend of increasing homelessness from private rented accommodation. This is the top reason for loss of last settled home and accounts for 57% of people. That nearly twice the national average.
6. An average of 293 children each year in temporary accommodation, staying for approximately 22 weeks, 72% of whom are primary school age and 28% secondary school age.
7. A 'history of mental health problems', was the 'support need' for 47 % of those owed a duty. This is almost double that of England (25%) and above that of the South West (33%)
8. There are approximately 30 rough sleepers in Torbay at any one time.
9. 76% of households assessed as homeless were single people.

To develop and inform this strategy, a review has been undertaken of local, regional and national homeless statistics. It provides an update on the local picture, highlighting emerging issues, trends and potential solutions, to support understanding and resolution of Torbay's homeless and rough sleeping challenges.

Section 2: Introduction

Everyone deserves good quality, safe and secure housing, though more people experience homelessness and rough sleeping in Torbay than we want. Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping is a key priority for Torbay Council.

The landscape of homelessness is evolving, quickly shaped by micro and macro factors. We are already witnessing the pressures on our services and the local housing market from the cumulative impacts of austerity, welfare reform, cost-of-living increases, and the national housing crisis. Today more than ever, homelessness can affect anyone at any time.

While most people affected by homelessness will have support networks in place that can build their resilience during times of need, some do not. We know that potentially facing homelessness is one of the most stressful situations for individuals and families to deal with. We want to ensure that we are equipped to support people in the best way we can.

This strategy therefore focuses upon preventing and relieving homelessness and ensuring integration and sets out areas where we want to do things differently. This new strategy complements our existing Housing Strategy which aims to deliver our strategic housing priorities. It sits alongside other strategies such as our Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy and Drug and Alcohol Strategy, to name but two, which aim to ensure that people receive the support that they need at an appropriate time.

All of these strategic documents seek to ensure that the Council meets its ambitions set out in its Corporate Plan to support its most vulnerable residents including care experienced young people.

Section 3: National and Local Strategic Context

Our work is guided by the Homeless Reduction Act 2017, which amended part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 and is the main piece of legislation which applies to our work in this area. This amended and introduced a number of new duties:

- Extension of the duty to a household 'threatened with homelessness' from 28 to 56 days.
- To prevent homelessness for all eligible applicants threatened with homelessness regardless of priority need.
- To relieve homelessness for all eligible homeless applicants, regardless of priority need.
- Requiring households to agree a Personal Housing Plan.
- 'Duty to Refer' – public services need to notify the Council if they come into contact with someone, they think maybe homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

In 2018, the government also published the Rough Sleeping Strategy which set out the government's plan to reduce rough sleeping. There are a number of other national policy documents and measures that impact on homelessness and rough sleeping. The enactment of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 has had unintended consequences impacting on homelessness levels. Difficulties in accessing money being one reason for increased numbers using food banks and the freezing of Local Housing Allowance rates in 2020 further exasperating affordability.

Building upon this, we understand that taking a holistic approach at a local level is key to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping. This is a moment in time opportunity to ensure that our commitment to reducing homelessness is visible and is embedded within our other local strategies

and plans. This will ensure that 'prevention' and 'early support' are prioritised wherever possible with the aim of averting 'crisis' in most cases.

Section 4: Vision

It is a legal requirement for the Council to publish a strategy every 5 years as a minimum, having completed a review into current and future homelessness. Torbay's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 – 2029 has been co-produced to set out our vision:

The strategy aims to make:

- **Homelessness a rare occurrence:** increasing prevention and earlier intervention at a community level.
- **Homelessness as brief as possible:** improving temporary and supported accommodation, so it becomes a positive experience.
- **Experience of homelessness unrepeated:** increasing access to settled homes and the right support at the right time.

Everyone has a role to play in working towards making homelessness in Torbay rare, brief and unrepeated. It is time for a new approach to homelessness, one that is proactive, not reactive.

The strategy will be supported by a detailed action plan for the Council and wider Torbay Homelessness Partnership which will be convened, to deliver.

Section 5: Strategic Priorities and Principles

Three main priorities are identified in this strategy and developed through the engagement work undertaken in its development. They also reflect the priorities at a governmental and legislative level and are relevant to all homeless households. Access to services has also been identified as a golden thread, running throughout the three principles.

Priorities

1. Increasing early help and prevention

Supporting people at risk of becoming homeless and/or ensuring people at risk of homelessness can stay in their existing home or make a planned move to alternative accommodation.

2. Intervention

When people fall into crisis, we will act swiftly to give them targeted support to get them into accommodation or off the streets.

3. Better outcomes, better lives

A home is not the end, but the start of the journey, we will support people to live independently and lead meaningful quality lives to create a home.

These priorities closely relate to Torbay's wider approach to equality ensuring an environment where all individuals, regardless of need, want or aspiration, have an equal chance of realising their full potential.

Principles

Through the development of this strategy and engagement work undertaken it was considered that a set of core and shared values be used to underpin the strategy and its delivery.

These priorities support Torbay's commitment to placing relational working and inclusion at the centre of everything we do. We are committed to meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty and to delivering accessible services that meet the needs of our community. We will ensure that services are accessible for all by ensuring we can see people in person, removing the barriers created by digitalisation. We want everyone to live with dignity and have the opportunity to reach their full potential. We know that safe and secure, good quality accommodation is central to achieving this.

We expect our staff and partners to work together in a way which supports our principles, and which is tailored to the individual and their specific needs. We value the knowledge and experience that our partners bring. Where an issue arises, we will work with our partners to address this in a timely and efficient manner.

The shared values we will work to are:

1. Person Centred

We will empower people to make decisions and choices about their lives, creating a culture of continuous improvement by delivering quality services and recognising the potential of an individual by growing knowledge, self-belief, and responsibility.

2. Working Together

We will work collaboratively with our partners and within the community to ensure that services are informed by the voices of those with lived experience, delivering services collectively that meet people's needs.

3. Delivery of quality services

We will work in a relational way to transcend traditional patterns, rules, and relationships to create something new and valuable to meet people's needs. We recognise that systems are complex and that everyone's homelessness journey is different and that we must work in a trauma informed manner.

Section 6: What have we delivered so far

A person is homeless if they have nowhere to stay and are living on the streets, but you can also be homeless even if you have a roof over your head. People experiencing the most acute forms of homelessness will include those sleeping rough, sofa surfing or living in hostels, night shelters or unsuitable temporary accommodation. Those in insecure or poor housing at risk of homelessness will include those with notice to quit who cannot afford to rent anywhere else, those in suitable but temporary accommodation and those about to be discharged from prison or hospital with nowhere to live permanently.

Work is ongoing to address homelessness and rough sleeping in Torbay. The following section provides some examples of the activities that have been delivered by working with our partners, homeless households and individuals. We have:

- **Increased temporary accommodation provision for families though £10m investment** by purchasing and leasing suitable accommodation. This has helped to provide consistent good quality temporary accommodation within Torbay, ensuring that support networks and relationships are protected and eliminating the use of B&B accommodation in all but exceptional circumstances.
- **Put in place joint working arrangements with Children's Services** to ensure that families entering temporary accommodation are supported by Early Help colleagues to help them recover from homelessness and sustain future accommodation.
- **Established a youth homelessness protocol** and a prevention panel to ensure collaborative working to support care experienced and young people who are at risk of homelessness. B&B usage has been eliminated for 16/17 year olds and significantly reduced for all young people.
- **Developed the Growth in Action Alliance** comprising of domestic abuse, drug and alcohol services and the homeless hostel. Shared responsibility across the alliance for delivery of services, providing a 'one front door' approach is helping to alleviate repetition and enable the timely sharing of information to facilitate the right support at the right time.
- **Insourced the Homeless Hostel** which has provided the foundation to transform and develop our single persons provision, average length of stay reduced from an average of over 500 days to 170 days within the first 12 months. The aim is to reduce this to three months by further developing our pathway to increase move on opportunities.
- **Establishing the Rough Sleeper Initiative** which provides outreach support to rough sleepers to enable offers of accommodation, support and tenancy sustainment.

- **Single Homeless Accommodation Programme (SHAP)** partnering with the YMCA to secure funding to deliver 36 units of supported accommodation for homeless care experienced and young people aged 18-25, a provision which will be able to provide tailored, flexible support based on individual needs.
- **Stabilised our workforce** which has ensured consistency for homeless households. This has been achieved by establishing a training and development scheme to attract the right candidates, investment in training and support for the team. This has eliminated the use of costly and inefficient reliance on temporary agency staff and ensured a positive workplace.
- **Increased performance management** which has created a culture of timely decision making, proactive prevention and relief work and resettlement from temporary accommodation.
- **Implemented specialist roles** across the housing team in response to identified trends and needs such as domestic abuse, young people, care experienced and families. Key relationships have been built with professionals by offering a dedicated point of contact with someone who specialises in the area.

Section 7: Priority One - Increasing Early Help and Prevention

Priority One - Increasing early help and prevention.

Supporting people at risk of becoming homeless and/or ensuring people at risk of homelessness can stay in their existing home or make a planned move to alternative accommodation.

Early help and prevention reduce the likelihood of someone becoming at risk of or experiencing homelessness, requiring a lesser intervention than if circumstances escalate and reach crisis point. This means supporting people in a range of circumstances before they might be considered at risk of homelessness.

We know there is more we can do to support our residents and stop them from reaching this point.

Our objectives are:

1. To provide the right advice at the right time

We will:

- **Continue to transform Prevention and Engagement services so that they are accessible when and where people need them** – this might include more outreach, digital transformation, different opening hours, flexible and face to face appointments for example.
- **Strengthen our collective partnership** commitment to joint working on homelessness prevention across all tenures of housing including the provision of support.

- **Developing a universal training program accessible for all that may encounter people that are at risk of homelessness** to improve knowledge and understanding to help prevent homelessness at any opportunity.
- **Put information sharing agreements and consent forms in place** so that anyone approaching services or voluntary sector organisations (with their permission) need only tell their story once.
- **Deliver timely, accurate and accessible housing advice and guidance**, including through assisted self-service models, to help people make planned moves when they need and before they reach crisis - this will include working with people that are 'pre 56 days' in terms of Homelessness Reduction Act criteria.
- **Giving advice about housing in the community** in our family hub, where a range of services for families are located.

2. Targeted prevention to reach people whose homelessness is hidden from services and to prevent and reduce repeat homelessness, rough sleeping and youth homelessness.

We will:

- **Develop a strategic plan for integrating housing and mental health practices** in Torbay.
- **Deliver a range of solutions** so that no one in Torbay needs to sleep rough.
- **Ensure people are not discharged from prison or hospital directly onto the street** through joint working protocols and that appropriate accommodation is offered by the right agency.
- **Design homelessness out of young people lives** by working with Early Help services upstream with families and young people at high risk of homelessness and through designing planned housing pathways based on partnership collaboration and integrated working with our partners.
- **Ensure there are integrated working practices across Housing and Children's Services** to achieve better outcomes for families.
- **Engage with young people through the most appropriate setting** to raise awareness of housing, the challenges, and solutions.

3. Reduce homelessness from private rented accommodation.

We will:

- **Continue to develop our 'Duty to Refer' model** to ensure that all partners can make timely referrals where there may be a risk of homelessness.
- **Develop our relationship with landlords** to improve communication and support to access to information to ensure early intervention if tenancies begin to fail.
- **Work with private landlords to increase standards**, reduce evictions, and make Torbay's private rented sector, the 'sector of choice.'
- **Develop an upstream approach to income maximisation including training and employment opportunities** to reduce the risk of homelessness occurring in the first place.

Section 8: Priority - Two Intervention

Priority Two - Intervention

When people fall into crisis, we will act swiftly to give them targeted support to get them into accommodation or off the streets.

When people become homeless, we need the right type of accommodation and support in place as part of a system wider approach to provide timely interventions. This requires strong and different partnerships and ability to adapt.

Our objectives are:

1. Providing somewhere safe to stay

We will:

- **Develop a range of accommodation options** so that no one needs to sleep rough.
- **Develop a pathway of accommodation** with a variety of support ensuring an offer for those with multiple and complex needs that does not rely on the Hostel. Therefore, providing alternatives.
- **Develop an approach that focus on prevention of homeless for young people** who are or may be homeless in partnership with Children's Services and our combined youth housing providers.
- **Collaboratively develop a Supported Housing Strategy** to enable the commissioning of supported accommodation that is tolerant and trauma informed environment so that we can support people of all ages and address the cause of homelessness.
- **Provide additional accommodation space to meet changes in demand** and have the ability to rapidly provide additional spaces to meet short term peaks in demand e.g. Severe weather.
- **Strengthen and develop wider partnerships** with existing and new providers to maximise opportunities to develop and provide services in Torbay.

2. To provide targeted support

We will:

- **Carry out targeted rough sleeping outreach** work in the community that also seeks to understand why certain groups are overrepresented in homelessness.
- **Provide a tenancy sustainment service** to support people recovering from homelessness.
- **As Corporate Parents ensure that there are planned pathways and appropriate information and support** to meet the needs of care experienced young people.

3. We will maintain a commitment within the authority area to

We will:

- **Never place any young person aged 16 or 17 in B&B except in an exceptional circumstance** by ensuring there is sufficient accommodation for this age group.

- **Never place a family in B&B except in exceptional circumstance.** If we do it will be for no longer than 6 weeks.
- **Ensure that there is an appropriate awareness of care leavers** circumstances to reduce the risk of them experiencing homelessness.
- **Explore relevant opportunities to attract and maximise funding and investment** to improve and deliver services or support.

Section 9: Priority Three – Achieving Better Outcomes, Better Lives

Priority Three – Achieving Better Outcomes, Better Lives

A property is not the end, but the start of the journey, we will support people to live independently and lead meaningful quality lives to create a home.

Ensuring we address systemic inequalities might require us to take steps to remove the barriers that some of our residents encounter. We aim to create services that are equitable in their approach where people at risk of or experiencing homelessness have the best chance of better life outcomes.

Our objectives are:

1. Supporting people with complex lives

We will:

- **Jointly prepare a single multi agency plan** for complex individuals and expand our work through the Housing and Vulnerability Forum.
- **Build upon our co-located team approach** and expand this offer.
- **Continue to transform systems** through our Multiple and Complex Needs Alliance (Growth in Action).
- **Ensure there is ongoing flexible and agile support** as and when needed.
- **Develop a strategic plan for Housing and those with Complex Needs** in Torbay.
- **Work collaboratively with our Public Health colleagues** to inform service provision.

2. Building peoples resilience

We will:

- **Establish local networks to provide support to sustain tenancies** including furniture, access to food banks, help with budgeting, benefits advice and offering employment and skills training so they can increase their income.
- **Develop peer advocacy, employment, volunteering, and training** offers to help improve opportunities.

- **Provide practical and ongoing support that will meet the individual needs of households.** This will include engagement with mental health and other services, specialist support to victims of domestic abuse or young people and working with marginalised families.

3. Building upon experience to develop and improve services

We will:

- **Be proactive in understanding and responding to current homelessness causes and risk factors** by undertaking research and evaluation with households who have engaged with homelessness services – which will inform continue service improvements and design of future housing provision.
- **Continue to learn from local experience with 16 and 17 year olds and care experienced young people** to transform systems and increase overall effectiveness in preventing homelessness amongst this cohort.
- **Understand the actual cost of homelessness both as an organisation and wider system** to inform and make the case for homelessness services and prevention activities.
- **Work collaboratively to achieve the objectives of the Housing Strategy** to provide affordable accommodation in Torbay.
- **Raise the profile of homelessness** ensuring that it is visible within the Council and embedded in other strategies. Recognising specifically the impact that rough sleeping can have on the wider community.
- **Convene a new Torbay Homeless Partnership**, to implement and develop our response to address homelessness in Torbay.

Section 10: How we will monitor success

We will drive the Council ambitions and strategy through a dynamic three-year action plan.

- Dynamic by design – flexible and resilient to the changes that occur during the course of the strategy.
- Dynamic in its implementing – capturing activity across Torbay, by Council services and the public and voluntary sectors.

The action plan will be owned by all Torbay Council services, and members of the newly formed Torbay Homelessness Partnership, that will be convened. We expect many actions will involve collaboration between one or more partners from across different sectors.

Performance metric will monitor the success of our strategy and make progress available for Security Board, Strategic Housing Partnership and Senior Leadership Team.

Section 11: Appendix

Plan on a page to be inserted following consultation of the strategy.

This document can be made available in other languages and formats. For more information, please contact Housing.Advice@Torbay.gov.uk

