**North East Lincolnshire Council**

**Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy**

**2019 – 2024**

**CONSULTATION DRAFT**

[ insert illustration/picture ]

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**The following agencies are committed to delivering the aims and objectives of the strategy and are members of the North East Lincolnshire Homelessness Forum**

* North East Lincolnshire Council
* Lincolnshire Housing Partnership
* Longhurst Group
* The Salvation Army
* Grimsby & Humber YMCA
* Doorstep
* NEL Women’s Aid
* Humbercare
* Harbour Place
* Citizens’ Advice Bureau
* Department of Work and Pensions
* National Probation Service
* Community Rehabilitation Company
* NEL Clinical Commissioning Group
* Northern Lincolnshire & Goole NHS Trust?
* Shelter (HMP Hull)
* Humberside Police
* Humberside Fire & Rescue Service
* CARE
* EMERGE

***Tackling homelessness and addressing its causes is a long-term project that needs to draw on partners and organisations from across the public sector and cannot be solved by reactive homelessness services alone.***

Local Government Homelessness Commission, June 2019

**Foreword**

Portfolio Holder for Housing …

(to be completed following consultation)

**Overview**

Homelessness has increased both nationally and locally over recent years. The way that local authorities deal with and record homelessness has now changed, but the issues and numbers of people affected remain.

Housing problems can affect anyone. Loss of employment, relationship breakdown, debts, mental health or substance issues all make dealing with homelessness a challenge, especially if we do not have the skills or experience to manage with it or don’t know where to turn for help.

This strategy brings together the people, places and resources that can assist residents who find themselves in housing difficulty in our Borough.

We need to understand the causes and effects of homelessness: what we can do to prevent it happening; how we can assist when it does, and how we provide the most effective services and support to the people who need us.

We must ensure that we protect the most vulnerable whilst creating an environment where people are empowered to help themselves.

Our main focus will be on prevention and early intervention – the earlier we are able to intervene to prevent someone becoming homeless, the more successful we are likely to be.

The most visible form of homelessness is rough sleeping, though this affects a very small percentage of the homeless population. However, our new strategy specifically addresses this issue and incorporates the findings and recommendations of the Councillors’ rough sleeping working group, which investigated this subject in early 2019.

We know that using our available resources to prevent homelessness is more cost effective than having to deal with its consequences. The Council and our partners face ever-increasing pressure to deliver services to increasing numbers of customers, using the same or reduced resources. The supply of affordable housing is limited and the private rented sector is facing its own viability challenges. Access to affordable accommodation is vitally important to many people in our area, and the ambition of development and economic growth in our other strategies will help us in our aim to reduce homelessness.

**The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017**

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which came into force on 3rd April 2018, placed new duties on councils to assist people threatened with homelessness, regardless of their priority need (whether they are considered vulnerable or not).

The Act improved the ‘assessment process’ and focused on the homeless team on prevention activities and agreeing personalised housing plans for clients, however the main underlying causes of homelessness remain and the Act, in itself, does not prevent homelessness.

The main changes in the new Act are:

**Improving advice and information**

Everyone in the local authority’s area should be able to access free information and advice on –

* Preventing homelessness
* Securing accommodation when homeless
* The rights of people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, and the duties of the Council
* Any help that is available from the Council or anyone else
* How to access that help

**Extension of the period ‘threatened with homelessness’**

A person is threatened with homelessness if they are likely to become homeless within 56 days, or they have been served a valid section 21 notice that expires in 56 days or less (previously this was 28 days).

**Introduction of new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible people, regardless of priority need or intentionality**

Previously, most prevention and relief work undertaken by a housing authority sat outside of the statutory framework. This led to many single homeless people only receiving limited information to support them to relieve their homelessness.

Under the new Act, all eligible people who are found to be homeless or threatened with homelessness will be entitled to more tailored support from the housing authority, regardless of priority need and intentionality. Support to prevent homelessness is also available to everyone regardless of local connection.

Additionally, all people found to be homeless and in priority need will be provided with interim accommodation. In determining who is in priority need, housing authorities will need to be aware that ‘an applicant may be considered vulnerable because of a combination of factors which taken alone may not necessarily lead to a decision that they are vulnerable (e.g. drug and alcohol problems, common mental health problems, a history of sleeping rough, no previous experience of managing a tenancy).’ Assessments of ‘vulnerability’ may require working with other agencies.

Applicants who have a priority need, were homeless unintentionally and whose homelessness has not been successfully relieved after 56 days, will be owed the main housing duty unless they have refused to co-operate. Applicants are owed a lesser accommodation duty if they are intentionally homeless.

**Introducing assessments and personalised housing plans, setting out the actions housing authorities and individuals will take to secure accommodation**

The assessment should include

* the circumstances that caused the applicant to become homeless or threatened with homelessness
* what housing the applicant needs, and what would be suitable and affordable
* whether the applicant needs support to obtain and keep accommodation

**Encouraging public bodies to work together to prevent and relieve homelessness through a duty to refer**

Effective prevention and relief of homelessness requires public bodies to work together to address the multiple factors that cause an individual’s homelessness.

Under the Act, public bodies in England will have a duty to refer an individual’s case (with consent) to a housing authority they identify. The duty provides an ‘impetus to develop effective referral arrangements and accommodation pathways that involve all relevant agencies to provide appropriate jointly planned help and support to prevent homelessness.’

The specified public authorities (see the Homelessness (Review Procedure etc.) Regulations 2018) subject to the duty to refer are (in England only):

* prisons
* young offender institutions
* secure training centres
* secure colleges
* youth offending teams
* probation services (including community rehabilitation companies)
* Jobcentres in England
* social service authorities (both adult and children’s)
* emergency departments
* urgent treatment centres
* hospitals in their function of providing inpatient care
* Secretary of State for defence in relation to members of the regular armed forces

**Homelessness in North East Lincolnshire**

**The NEL housing market**

North East Lincolnshire is an area of relatively low housing values and rents but also one of low incomes, which is the primary factor in making access to the housing market challenging for many people. We have a healthy private rented sector, with similar rent levels to homes in the social sector for certain areas, and many people move between the two tenures.

There are around 3,500 households on Home Choice Lincs, the housing register for North East Lincolnshire. Around 3,000 new households register every year, but with just under 1,000 applicants being housed annually, many people are unlikely to be successful in securing accommodation.

Whilst there is clearly high demand for social tenancies, some areas and some property types are of low demand and are offered on a first come first served basis.

Almost half of households on the housing register require one-bedroomed accommodation, of which there is a shortage in North East Lincolnshire due to the historic lack of investment in smaller units. Shared houses are often the only option for younger single people and projects around the selective licensing of houses in multiple occupation are aiming to raise standards in this type of accommodation.

The Council’s Local Plan has set ambitious targets for the provision of new homes in the borough, although the number of affordable units required (for social rental or low cost home ownership) is limited due to viability issues, particularly in the town centre areas.

Another area of increasing housing demand is supported housing and move-on accommodation. Our commissioned services (YMCA, Salvation Army, Doorstep, Women’s Aid and Longhurst) are consistently full to capacity and providing excellent services for people needing housing and support. An issue arises when clients are ready to move on: the lack of suitable affordable housing is often a barrier.

**Household incomes and poverty**

Some households in North East Lincolnshire face ongoing challenges in obtaining and sustaining accommodation due to pressures on household budgets. Benefit caps and delays of payment of Universal Credit also create problems in accessing accommodation.

Our average income is £23,388 (2017) and the average house price is £119,256 (2018), meaning that housing affordability in NE Lincs is challenging, with a ratio of over 5:1.

Welfare reforms, the benefit cap for larger families and the reduction of housing costs for under 35 year olds continues to add further pressure to households on benefits and those on low incomes with in-work benefits.

Child poverty in North East Lincolnshire is a significant issue: according to figures published in 2016, 8,800 children live in poverty – that is over 25% of the under 16 population. In our most deprived ward, this is as high as 41% of children.

Unemployment in North East Lincolnshire has reduced by approximately 6% since 2012, however in the period from March 2018 to March 2019 unemployment has increased by 1% to 6.2%.   The number of claimants of out of work benefits at July 2019 was 4,225 (4.4% of our local population).

However, insecure employment and underemployment affects relatively high numbers of households, with 33.8% of workers being in part-time employment (compared with 32.5% nationally based on 2017 NOMIS data).

**Households needing housing advice and assistance**

The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) in April 2018 changed the way the Council delivered services and recorded instances of homeless advice provided, homelessness prevented and homelessness relieved.

In 2018/19, over 3,000 households approached our service for advice and assistance around their housing problem. 276 households were successfully prevented from becoming homeless and in 375 cases where a household was already homeless, their homelessness was relieved.

The Council previously operated a ‘drop-in’ facility for housing advice, but had to cease this service due to not having suitable interviewing and waiting space to accommodate clients with challenging behaviour. As clients are now required to be offered a full interview, by appointment, it may be that a drop-in is no longer needed – but we do need to ensure this is not a barrier to people contacting the service for help. A drop-in service is still available for debt advice.

**Homelessness Prevention**

Under the HRA, the Council has a duty to prevent a household’s homelessness for up to 56 days, regardless of whether they are priority need (vulnerable in some way) or have a local connection to our area. We must conduct an interview with that household and agree with them a tailored personalised housing plan. The plan will contain actions for the homelessness officer and for the client, in order to work together to prevent homelessness.

Clients are very often threatened with homelessness due to issues with rent payments: this may be due to benefit or debt problems or the property becoming unaffordable over time.

Our main causes of homelessness currently are:

Being served with a section 21 notice – this is a ‘no fault’ eviction, but there is often an underlying reason, such as rent arrears;

Relationship or family breakdown;

Family and friends no longer willing to accommodate;

Being released from prison.

The above graph shows prevention and relief activity in North East Lincs for the last eight years. Prior to the HRA there were relatively few relief cases (relieving someone’s homelessness after they became homeless) as a statutory homeless decision would have been made once prevention work had not succeeded.

The service’s aim is to prevent homelessness wherever possible. We do this using the following means:

* Negotiating with landlords or mortgagees, occasionally providing a loan or grant to clients if their financial situation can be resolved in the longer term;
* Resolving benefits issues;
* Discretionary housing payments (DHP) – awarding a sum of money in order to pay a deposit or assist with moving expenses to enable a client to relocate to a more sustainable property;
* Increasing banding on Home Choice Lincs – providing evidence of need to increase the chances of a client being housed through the housing register;
* Providing housing related support to enable a client to maintain an existing tenancy;
* Providing housing and legal advice to tenants threatened with eviction;
* Accessing supported accommodation for eligible people;

**Statutory homelessness**

The Council will owe the “full housing duty” (a duty to find settled accommodation) in cases where a household is eligible for services, homeless, in priority need, is not homeless intentionally and has a local connection to North East Lincolnshire. This decision is made once the 56 day Relief Duty has ended: it is hoped that as many homeless households as possible are accommodated before this formal decision is made.

Previous years’ ‘full duty’ statistics are as follows:

In 2018/19, following the introduction of the new Act, just 37 households were found to be owed the full housing duty. It would appear, from the statistics, that statutory homelessness has been reduced by the new Act. However, households who are actually homeless have been assisted under the 56 day ‘relief duty’ before they have needed to receive a statutory homeless decision.

**The main causes of homelessness**

The main causes of homelessness among the households who present to the Council for assistance are:

* Losing a private sector tenancy
* Relationship breakdown
* Family/friends no longer willing to accommodate

The main underlying reasons for homelessness occurring are:

* Poverty – welfare reform, benefit cap, sanctions and the limitations of the local housing allowance.
* Lack of affordable housing – shortage of available social tenancies and shortfall of development by registered providers -
* Lack of affordable single person accommodation -
* Lack of support – for mental health, substance misuse and general tenancy maintenance

**Temporary accommodation**

The Council has a duty to provide temporary accommodation in cases where a household is eligible, homeless and in priority need.

On 30th June 2018, the number of households in temporary accommodation in England was 82,310, up five per cent from 78,540 on 30th June 2017, and up 71 per cent on the low of 48,010 on 31 December 2010. Meanwhile the number of families in B&B style accommodation has more than tripled in the same period. This has drastic effects on already vulnerable people and is extremely costly.

Local authorities in England spent £1.39bn on homelessness services in 2017-18. There are also significant knock-on costs. In 2015, Crisis estimated the average cost to the public purse, across a range of service areas, of a single homeless person rough sleeping for twelve months was £20,128.

North East Lincolnshire has seen similar increases.

**Rough sleeping**

Rough sleeping is just the very tip of the homelessness iceberg, but it is the most visible form of homelessness and one that is a cause of concern for the public. The greater problem is one of ‘hidden homelessness’ – people who drift in and out of hostels and the night shelter, and stay on friends’ sofas.

Nationally, rough sleeping has increased by 165% since 2010 – local figures are shown below.

**Who is rough sleeping and why?**

We currently have a cohort of around 40 people who drift in and out of rough sleeping between spells in the night shelter, in hostels and supported accommodation or on friends’ sofas. Most have issues with drugs or alcohol, and many have suspected mental health problems.

The majority of rough sleepers are male, and the average age is 37 years. Many people in the current rough sleeping cohort have previously been assisted into accommodation and all are known to services, although some individuals refuse to engage with any services at all.

The Council and our partners carry out an annual estimate of the rough sleeping population (based on intelligence collected on one day in the year). In addition, colleagues at Harbour Place have also carried out a physical count over the last 6 months. The results are as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Count / estimate** | **Number of Individuals** |
| Autumn 2010 (estimate) | 4 |
| Autumn 2011 (estimate) | 2 |
| Autumn 2012 (estimate) | 9 |
| Autumn 2013 (estimate) | 6 |
| Autumn 2014 (estimate) | 7 |
| Autumn 2015 (estimate) | 6 |
| Autumn 2016 (estimate) | 13 |
| Autumn 2017 (estimate) | 22 |
| September 2018 (count) | 18 |
| Autumn 2018 (estimate) | 13 |
| January 2019 (count) | 10 |
| March 2019 (count) | 8 |
| May 2019 (count) | 25 |
| July 2019 (count) | 17 |

The peak in 2017 lead to the Government inviting North East Lincolnshire Council to bid for funding under the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI). The successful bid allowed the Council to support Harbour Place to expand and improve their night shelter provision for up to 15 people – The Hope Centre – and provide additional street outreach services, and some mental health and substance misuse in-reach services. This funding will assist the centre with running costs until March 2020.

Rough sleepers find themselves homeless for many of the same reasons as other homeless people: loss of a tenancy, relationship breakdown, release from prison and so on. The difference is that people sleeping rough then find it much harder to resolve their housing problems. This might be due to being excluded from accommodation due to behavioural issues or substance misuse or a general inability or reluctance to engage with services.

**Services for rough sleepers**

In 2018, the Council successfully bid for government funding under the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI). Working with our partners at Harbour Place, they extended their night shelter provision, permanently accommodating up to 15 rough sleepers each night. In addition, mental health and substance misuse support is being provided, as well as street outreach services.

**The Government’s Rough Sleeping Strategy**

The Government published a Rough Sleeping Strategy in August 2018. The ambitious aim is to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and to end it for good by 2027.

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733421/Rough-Sleeping-Strategy_WEB.pdf>

North East Lincolnshire benefitted from funding released through the government’s Rough Sleeping Initiative, which enabled Harbour Place to expand their night shelter and street outreach provision.

The government’s 2027 vision is: *Prevent, Intervene, and Recover*.

Key measures include:

Providing funding for pilot projects around prison leavers and care leavers with complex needs;

Reviewing legislation, including the Vagrancy Act;

Improving understanding around LGBT individuals’ experience of homelessness, and the links between modern slavery and rough sleeping;

Ensuring that rough sleeper deaths or incidents of serious harm are investigated;

Looking at affordability in the private rented sector;

Additional funding for mental health and substance misuse treatment;

New training for frontline staff;

New funding for non-UK nationals who sleep rough and a Rough Sleeping Support Team.

Also, funding for supported lettings, housing first pilots, and homelessness experts in every Jobcentre Plus.

**Councillors’ rough sleeping working group - January 2019**

A councillors’ working group to investigate rough sleeping was commissioned by the Communities Scrutiny panel, initially in response to concerns about begging but subsequently broadening out to focus on the growing number of rough sleepers.

The cross party group of Councillors, conducted interviews with Home Options staff, Homeless Forum members, supported housing and social housing providers, food bank and meal providers, Police and Safer Communities representatives, and drugs/alcohol and mental health workers. They visited the night shelter and various other services, and spoke to rough sleepers on the streets.

The Working Group was an opportunity for services and agencies who assist rough sleepers to feedback on their challenges and suggest ways in which, collectively, we can assist rough sleepers to get back on their feet.

The recommendations of the working group are as follows:

* That the Housing First model be explored to see if it will help deal with multiple and complex needs around rough sleeping in North East Lincolnshire;
* That external agencies be involved in discussions about certain individuals to improve communications between services based on the MARAC model of best practice;
* That the process for early intervention be explored to incorporate drug, alcohol and mental health services with social housing providers;
* That additional single person, move on and one bedroomed housing accommodation be considered;
* That the use of empty homes be explored further with our partner agency Engie, for the use of single/shared housing and Housing First accommodation;
* That a dual diagnosis service [for individuals with both mental health and substance misuse issues] be explored;
* That the use of social housing that is potentially being considered for demolition or disposal be explored to be used as move-on accommodation for rough sleepers;
* That the Council’s Home Options Team explore how they can engage more with private landlords;
* That the potential to review historical debt with all providers be explored, as this is a barrier to all individuals trying to access social housing;
* That the Food Providers Forum be re-visited with additional support to help the forum be re-energised;
* That the Council’s Safer Communities Team and Communications Team work together to produce publicity to deter people from donating to beggars.
* That the North East Lincolnshire Clinical Commissioning Group be requested to review accessibility to GP and dental services, with a view to providing a list of practices offering services to rough sleepers;
* That services available to rough sleepers be identified if enquiring through the Single Point of Access (SPA)

Where these recommendations are not currently being delivered, they will be incorporated into the Action Plan accompanying this strategy.

**North East Lincolnshire Homelessness Forum**

Members of the NEL Homelessness Forum, when recently asked for their views on the current housing and homelessness situation, gave the following feedback:

What is working well?

* Partnership working between local agencies and regular meetings to discuss clients;
* Harbour Place provision for rough sleepers;
* Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) being processed and agreed by the Homeless Prevention Team;
* Home Choice Lincs choice-based lettings system;
* Securing social properties for people over 50;
* The Support Gateway and provision of floating support;
* The ability to reconnect clients to their families or home towns;
* The Ugly Mugs scheme (identifying perpetrators).

What needs to be improved / addressed?

* Access to accommodation, securing deposits;
* The ability to access services for/by chaotic and high needs clients;
* Enforcement action on illegal evictions and disrepair – empowering clients to complain;
* Earlier intervention to prevent homelessness;
* Easier/quicker access to mental health services;
* Increase the supply of one bedroomed accommodation;
* Better feedback to clients/agencies from the Support Gateway;
* Universal credit (UC) deductions rendering clients unable to afford a tenancy;
* Supported housing rents being too expensive for clients who gain employment;
* Agencies working together more closely;
* Council website can be difficult to navigate;
* Budgeting support for clients on UC who have difficulty in managing their finances;
* Floating Support provision does not suit everyone;
* The supply of suitable, affordable accommodation for single people under 35 years old, in all areas of the Borough;
* The provision of emergency accommodation;
* Better engagement with social housing providers;
* Better engagement with private landlords;
* Advice and assistance to reduce and prevent rent arrears;
* Accessing advice, information and signposting;
* Recognised housing pathways tailored to specific groups;

**Strategic Aims and Priorities**

[Subject to amendment following consultation]

The Council’s focus when it comes to homelessness is: to offer high quality and timely advice to people in housing difficulty; to prevent homelessness wherever possible through early help and intervention; to offer support to enable people to help themselves; and to safeguard homeless vulnerable people.

We know there is a shortage of affordable housing in our Borough, particularly for single people/couples, people with disabilities and larger families. Our Local Plan, planning guidance documents and Housing Strategy address these issues. A revised Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) will further quantify the housing deficit. Delivery is a key challenge.

The Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan gives details on how we, working with our partners, aim to prevent and relieve homelessness and assist rough sleepers.

**Preventing homelessness**

* To effectively discharge our duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
* To receive early approaches and referrals to the service to allow the opportunity to prevent homelessness rather than to relieve it after it has occurred.
* Ensure that accessible, timely, relevant and high quality advice and information is available from the Council’s Homelessness Prevention Team to the general public and partner agencies.
* Ensure that our prevention activity focuses on the root causes of homelessness, such as loss of tenancies, debt and relationship breakdown.
* Work with the voluntary, charity and community organisations to support access to financial and welfare benefits advice.
* Promote access to support services that equip residents with the skills to sustain accommodation and promote wellbeing.

**Reducing rough sleeping**

* To support the provision of effective outreach services to identify, engage and assess the needs of rough sleepers.
* Facilitate the provision of emergency beds and supported accommodation.
* Support projects that provide accommodation and support for rough sleepers, particularly those who have multiple and complex needs.
* Work with accommodation providers to secure suitable move-on accommodation.
* Explore, with partners, the Housing First model and ways in which this model can be adopted in the borough.
* Ensure that adequate emergency beds are available, particularly during the winter months, to meet peaks in demand.
* Minimise street begging by working with partners to communicate to the public better ways of assisting the homeless community.

**Accommodation provision**

* Work with the private rented sector, housing developers, and providers of social and supported housing to increase supply.
* Work with Registered Providers to make best use of available social housing stock and ensure that the housing allocations policy recognises the housing need of households threatened with homelessness.
* Pursue affordable housing contributions on new development sites, in accordance with planning policy
* Eradicate the use of B&B accomodation for families with children
* Ensure suitable emergency accommodation is available for people with disabilities
* Support partners to provide new or improve existing accommodation, particularly one-bedroomed units for homeless single people.

**Support provision**

* Ensure that Personal Housing Plans are effective in identifying housing and support needs of clients.
* Ensure that commissioned Housing Related Support services are relevant, meet client needs, are good quality and offer value for money
* Develop clear housing pathways for specific groups, for example, those leaving prison, hospital or social care
* Continue to develop multi-agency meetings to resolve complex homeless cases.

**Partnership working**

* Encourage wider participation in the North East Lincolnshire Homelessness Forum, establishing an independent chair and making it an effective forum for meeting the challenge of homelessness and keeping our strategy under review.
* Be an integral part of the Council’s approach on assisting victims of modern slavery.
* Arrange suitable training for agencies and volunteers who are working with people who are homeless
* Ensure that organisations who have a ‘Duty to Refer’ are meeting these requirements and we are assisting them to do so.
* Revise and refresh existing homeless prevention protocols (for example hospital discharge, 16/17 year olds)
* Form closer relationships with social and supported housing providers to reduce the instances of tenancy failure and abandonments.
* Ensure that our information sharing agreements and consent forms are GDPR compliant
* Work collaboratively with partner agencies to ensure that information, advice and guidance is linked-up, consistent and accurate, and that vulnerable clients are referred to services as quickly as possible.

**Consultation Feedback**

What communities and agencies have told us during strategy consultation.

Public Health rough sleeper health survey results/conclusions

**Action Plan and Delivery**

The commitments above are set out more fully in our Strategy Action Plan, which can be viewed or downloaded from:

Weblink - TBC

**Monitoring**

Strategy monitoring arrangements - TBC

**Feedback/Suggestions**

Contact details - TBC