

**ROTHERHAM'S
HOMELESSNESS
PREVENTION
STRATEGY 2014 -18**

“We will offer early intervention and support to ensure people don't become homeless.”

If you want to find out more information about homelessness services in Rotherham please visit the Council's website at www.rotherham.gov.uk.

Alternatively you can contact us by email:
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1. Foreword

Welcome to Rotherham's new Homelessness Prevention Strategy for 2014 to 2018 which is set within challenging times. Whilst the Government is making significant changes to the benefits system through the Welfare Reform Act, there remain high levels of unemployment both nationally and locally alongside a difficult housing market. Individually, these factors can increase the risk of homelessness. Collectively, they can produce an environment that is bound to have a considerable impact.

Homelessness is a complex problem with multiple causes. As such, tackling it requires flexible solutions. We work with statutory, voluntary and charitable organisations, as well as the private sector, to deliver effective early intervention and prevention. Through the commitment of all partners and by taking a holistic approach we have made a significant contribution in the reduction and prevention of homelessness.

The term homelessness is often considered to apply only to people 'sleeping rough'. Many of those officially recognised as being homeless are more likely to be threatened with the loss of, or are unable to continue living in, their current accommodation. Even so, in the face of rising levels of street homelessness nationally, rough sleeping in Rotherham is comparatively infrequent.

In Rotherham we work with support providers who offer accommodation specifically for young people and help to prepare them for independent living, as well as offering a loan scheme to support households in to privately rented accommodation to prevent homelessness.

Our priority is to sustain or find affordable alternative accommodation for customers and we aim to provide services that are personalised so that vulnerable people and excluded groups have increased access and choice of suitable accommodation.

The challenge within the current national climate is significant; however we remain ambitious in our vision and know that we have the experience and skill locally to rise to the challenge.

During the development of this Strategy we have consulted a wide range of local people and stakeholders and listened carefully to ensure their views are reflected in the Strategy. The document is short – less than 13 pages, as we want to get straight to the point and ensure it is accessible to a wide range of people. I hope you enjoy reading the new Homelessness Prevention Strategy.



Councillor Rose McNeely
Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods

2. Introduction

Preventing homeless in Rotherham continues to be a priority.

The term 'homelessness' is often considered to only apply to people 'rough sleeping'. However, it is rare that someone is homeless in the literal sense of being without a roof over their heads, and it is more likely that someone is threatened with the loss of, or are unable to continue living in, their current accommodation.

As a local authority Rotherham seeks to go beyond its statutory homelessness duties by having a clear focus on early intervention to prevent homelessness, and offering effective homelessness services, creating less disruption for the people experiencing this difficult situation.

This Homelessness Prevention Strategy outlines this early intervention work and the successful inter-agency homelessness prevention approach we will continue to undertake.

The Vision for the Homelessness Prevention Strategy is:

"We will offer early intervention and support to ensure people don't become homeless."

The Homelessness Prevention Strategy identifies how we aim to achieve this, by building on our existing services and successful partnerships, and expanding on these.

3. Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013

Various measures were introduced in the Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 and the main successes of these include:

- Implementation of outreach services in local prisons
- Prevented repossessions by implementation and increase awareness of the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
- Effective use of prevention and hardship fund to prevent homelessness
- Increased supply of private rented accommodation for homeless households
- Reduction in the usage of temporary accommodation by 50%
- Developed the Moving on Panel for 16 to 25 years old
- Introduction of homelessness ICT solutions
- Outreach surgeries
- Participation in Credit Crunch task group
- Developed and implemented a domestic violence sanctuary scheme
- Developed the enhanced housing options service
- Planned moves for refugees and asylum seekers to prevent homelessness

4. Local strategic context

At the local level, the overarching strategic plan for Rotherham is the Community Strategy 2012-15, which describes the vision for the future of the Borough and sets our key targets and actions that all partner organisations are committed to achieving.

The Homelessness Strategy also links to the priorities in the Council's Corporate Plan, CP 4 – 'Helping people to improve their health and wellbeing and reducing inequalities within the Borough,' the NAS Service Plan, Priority 5 – 'We will respond quickly to people's needs, mitigating the effects of poverty and helping them thrive,' and the Poverty Workstream in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

The Homelessness Strategy also links to Rotherham's new Council's Housing Strategy 2013-2043, and focuses mainly on Commitment 6, but also links to Commitments 1 and 9.

Commitment 1 – We will deliver Council Housing that meets people's needs

Commitment 6 - We will help people to access the support they need

Commitment 9 – We will help to improve Rotherham's private rented sector

We also measure performance on the number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation. This is a local indicator, and our target for 2014/15 is not to have more than 26 households living in temporary accommodation at the end of each month. The monthly performance report also includes the reasons for the placement into temporary accommodation, and the measures we are taking to reduce these numbers.

To achieve these aims we work extensively with local organisations, both statutory, voluntary and charitable, as well as with the private sector, to deliver effective early intervention and prevention that has a positive impact for customers to successfully sustain or find affordable alternative accommodation

5. The Review Process

Under the Homelessness Act 2002, local housing authorities must produce a homelessness prevention strategy to assist those at risk of becoming homeless. In Rotherham we also offer comprehensive housing options and advice, in all cases where someone has a housing need, in addition to those who face becoming homeless.

This new strategy will seek to tackle homelessness and has been written following:

- A comprehensive Review of the Homelessness Service
- A review of the Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013

- A review by the Improving Places Select Committee Scrutiny Review group
- Consultation with homeless people and those who have been threatened with homelessness, support providers, statutory and voluntary organisations, Councillors, staff and residents

Consultation

An extensive programme of consultation has been carried out over a period of 18 months. This has included workshops with current and future applicants and users of the service, both on an individual basis and at public and community events, presentations at Area Assembly meetings throughout the borough, Rotherham Older Peoples group and at Rotherfed. Discussion with the Learning from Customer sessions, regional homelessness forum, consultation with staff and other housing and support providers along with many stakeholders, including local charitable organisations, has also taken place.

Focus on homelessness in Rotherham

As part of the Strategy we have also considered the information we have about our customers in Rotherham. In 2012/2013, the following numbers of households were considered statutorily homeless:

Age Range (main applicant):	Number of Households
16-24	55
25-44	54
45-59	20
60-64	2
65-74	3
75 or over	1
Total	135

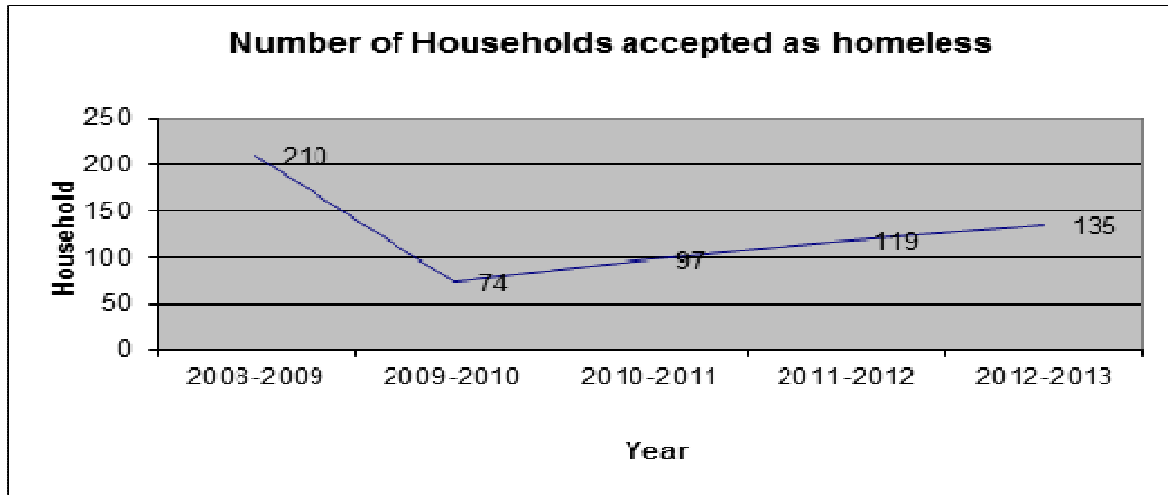
The top 5 reasons for homelessness in Rotherham are:

- 21% Parents no longer wishing to accommodate
- 20% Other relatives or friends not wishing to accommodate
- 20% Loss of rented or tied accommodation (including assured shorthold tenancies)
- 10% Loss of rented accommodation (other)
- 7% Mortgage Arrears

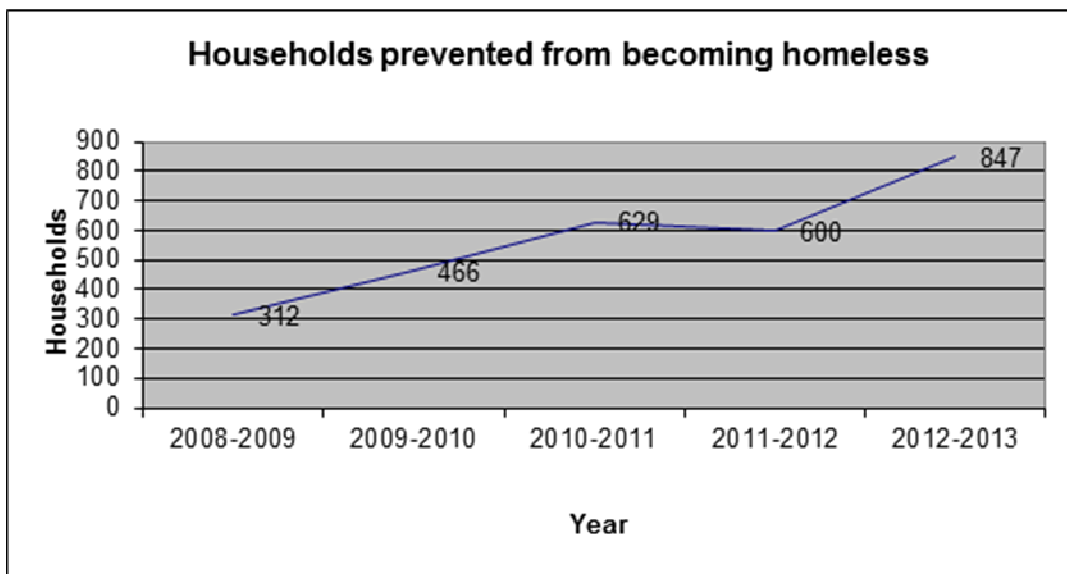
The Top 5 Priority Need Categories were:

Applicant whose household includes dependent children	33%
Applicant who is, or whose household includes, a pregnant woman and there are no other dependent children	17%
Vulnerable due to a mental health illness or handicap	15%
Vulnerable due to a physical disability	14%

Since 2008/9 we have seen a significant reduction in the numbers of households accepted as statutorily homeless, as the table below shows:



During the same period the following tables show the number of households prevented from becoming homeless:



During 2012/13 there were 847 households prevented from becoming homeless, of these 257 were assisted to remain in their existing homes mainly by providing:

- assistance in resolving housing benefit issues
- assistance to remain in private or social rented accommodation
- mortgage arrears interventions or mortgage rescue
- crisis intervention - providing emergency support
- negotiation with family and friends

Our ultimate aim is to be a town where homelessness is prevented from occurring in the first instance rather than reacting to resolve it once it has happened.

6. Our Priorities for 2014-2018

We have considered the review findings and identified that the following areas must be our priorities:

- **Supporting Young People to live independently**
- **Ending Rough Sleeping in Rotherham**
- **Providing quality information on all housing options**
- **Reviewing the provision of temporary accommodation**
- **Reducing the risk of people becoming homeless due to financial difficulties**
- **Helping more people to access and sustain private rented accommodation**
- **Improving access to suitable accommodation for people leaving supported and institutionalised establishments**

Priority 1 - Supporting young people to live independently

The results of the reviews and consultation have shown that there is a high volume of vulnerable young people presenting as homeless each month, often through failed tenancies and parents not willing to continue to accommodate them. The youth offending team have also provided evidence of additional need for support of offenders being released from prison without any accommodation.

We must therefore, work with support providers to ensure the correct provision of accommodation and support exists in Rotherham, to give young people the best start in adult life. We want to provide information and support to young people, and develop the skills and knowledge they need to enable them to live independently and sustain a tenancy

How we will deliver this priority:

- We will provide information for young people on their housing options to prevent homelessness
- We will undertake housing advice sessions in colleges and secondary schools
- We will work with support providers to find the best housing solutions for young people
- Help young people who wish to move by providing more information about a local area
- We will undertake an annual review the young person's moving on panel to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to live independently, and understand the responsibilities of being a tenant

Priority 2 - Ending rough sleeping in Rotherham

A slight increase in rough sleeping has been identified in Rotherham. This is one of the most destructive forms of homelessness, and must be dealt with quickly and effectively. Rotherham is working with other Local Authorities in the Sub Region (Barnsley, Doncaster, and Sheffield) towards the 'No Second Night Out' Nationwide Protocol which is a commitment to end rough sleeping.

We will therefore work with partners to ensure we provide advice and support to rough sleepers in Rotherham, through our 'No Second Night Out' protocol

How we will deliver this priority:

- Work with partners to ensure we provide advice and support to rough sleepers in Rotherham
- Review and monitor rough sleeper data through the No Second Night Out protocol
- Work with partners to access accommodation
- Support rough sleepers in the most appropriate way and provide advice and assistance
- Develop outreach surgeries at Shilo and offer appropriate housing advice to prevent homelessness

Priority 3 - Providing quality information on all housing options

The Scrutiny Review Group recommended that the provision of information on all housing options for customers who are faced with homelessness, should be easily available, and provided in a clear and consistent way, ensuring vulnerable people receive the right help at the right time, and prevent problems worsening. We also want to improve the customer experience by providing more information online and offer self- service options.

We will therefore provide information on all housing options for customers who are faced with homelessness, in a clear and consistent way, using all means of communication available to us. We will also improve the customer experience by providing more information online including self-service options.

How we will deliver this priority:

- Give clear information to customers and utilise all housing options available
- Increase opportunities to self -service and access information on the website, and in local libraries throughout the borough to avoid people having to travel in to Rotherham
- Develop a homelessness prevention pack for customers offering advice and where to get help
- Deliver training to Ward Members and colleagues on all aspects of homelessness
- Work proactively with Area Housing Officers and Housing Income Champions to support tenants who are experiencing difficulties sustaining their tenancies to prevent eviction and homelessness

Priority 4 – Reviewing the provision of temporary accommodation

When customers are faced with homelessness it is important that we provide suitable temporary accommodation, and take into consideration their needs. We must ensure that the “crash pads” we use provide a safe and suitable environment for short term stays. Therefore the Scrutiny Review group recommended that we undertake a review of temporary accommodation so that we can have the right type of accommodation in the right locations.

We will therefore ensure that all temporary accommodation we use take in to consideration the customer’s needs, that it provides a safe environment for short term stays, and that provision is of a good quality, affordable and suitable for its purpose, and is reviewed regularly to ensure accommodation is located in the right place and that it meets people’s needs, and explore the potential for the availability of bed spaces in sub regional hostels.

How we will deliver this priority:

- Assess the availability and quality of temporary accommodation/direct access hostels in Rotherham
- Undertake reality checks of temporary accommodation
- Work with providers to ensure services offered are appropriate
- Identify how a customer in Rotherham may access a bed space and what is their experience when they get there
- Carry out a 6 monthly review of crash pads and move on accommodation, location, standards and information available to the customer on arrival

Priority 5 – Reducing the risk of people becoming homeless due to financial difficulties

The current economic climate, national trends and changes to government policy means that the numbers of homeless presentations is expected to rise, and we must prepare to provide support for people facing financial difficulties and reduce the risk of people losing their homes. We will assist by negotiating with landlords, and mortgage providers, and offer assistance with affordability. We must also consider the impact of the new ‘spare room subsidy,’ which makes it more important that people are living in homes that are not larger than they require.

We will therefore address under-occupancy where tenants are affected by the spare room subsidy, and advise on the Council’s Downsizing Policy and Homeswapper.

We will also utilise the opportunities the Localism Act 2011 gives by providing more power and flexibilities to set our own Allocation Policy rules according to assessed local need. The new Allocation Policy will help people in housing need and maximise the use of the Council’s housing stock.

With enquiries expected to rise due to the current economic climate, we must also be able to provide support for people facing financial difficulties and reduce the risk of people losing their homes. This will include the offer of support from money advice and help with gaining employment, as well as offering advice on the Council's Housing Allocation Policy.

How we will deliver this priority:

- Implement new rent policy
- Implement changes to the Council's Housing Allocations Policy
- Increase knowledge of the Allocation Policy rules to partners and stakeholder
- Introduce local advice surgeries and offer services locally and avoid customers having to travel for face to face advice
- Advise new tenants on availability of household items through funds for change and the furnished scheme
- Increase access to employment and training

Priority 6 - Helping more people to access and sustain private rented accommodation

We have a growing need for affordable housing and in the short term there is likely to be an increase in the need for privately rented accommodation. It is therefore critical that we use our influence to drive up standards and ensure the private sector can offer affordable, decent and stable homes for people in housing need. Due to this increased demand we will continue to develop the opportunities the private rented sector has to offer, in providing suitable and affordable accommodation, and make use of Private Rented Sector Offers to discharge homeless duty, if prevention of homelessness is not possible. One of the main homeless prevention strategies utilised in Rotherham is to assist households into the Private Rented Sector through initiatives such as rent in advance or paper bonds and by working with the local Credit Union, as well as with private landlords and accommodation providers.

We must also take into account that during 2012/13 one of the top reasons for homelessness was due to the loss of private rented accommodation. We must therefore ensure tenants are supported to sustain their tenancy.

How we will deliver this priority:

- We will encourage homeless applicants to consider private rented sector accommodation, where appropriate
- Review the Key Choices Property Management Service
- Ensure private sector tenants are supported to sustain their tenancy
- Work with landlords and letting agents, to negotiate bond and rent in advance options
- Develop and implement services to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness, including reviewing the Rent in Advance scheme and the paper bond scheme
- Implement Private Rented Sector Offers to discharge homelessness duty to the private rented sector, ensuring suitability and affordability

Priority 7 • Improving access to suitable accommodation for people leaving supported and institutionalised establishments

For people who have, for whatever reason, been away from community living for a period of time and living in institutionalised accommodation, either in hospital or in prison we must consider suitable accommodation and appropriate support for people who are discharged for hospital or residential establishments, or released from prison without a home to return to.

We will therefore ensure that people who have a mental health illness are appropriately housed on discharge from hospital, working in partnership with specialist agencies, and that there are appropriate resettlement and support services available for people being discharged from prison

How we will deliver this priority:

- Undertake advice surgeries in Swallownest Court
- Core meetings to be held prior to discharge from mental health unit, to decide on most appropriate accommodation on discharge
- We will continue to work with providers and the offender accommodation service to ensure that appropriate support services are available for those being discharged from prison
- Carry out assessments whilst the offender is still in prison, providing a planned approach to rehousing on release

7. Homelessness Prevention Strategy Action Plan

The action plan (Appendix 2) sets out the actions required to achieve the objectives of the strategy and ultimately make the vision a reality. The responsible partners are identified for each action, and also how the outcomes of the actions will be measured.

The findings of the Homelessness Review underpin many of the actions we plan to undertake, to tackle the problem of homelessness and to build upon the preventative work put in place over the past five years thus continuing our proactive approach to delay or prevent homelessness occurring.

Performance measures, which are part of the P1E returns and the Housing Excellence Plan, will be considered as essential tools for monitoring outcomes of the action plan. Work will continue with the Scrutiny Review Group throughout the life of the Homelessness Strategy. To help us meet the objectives we will set relevant targets (or measurements) for the actions contained within our strategy delivery plan. These targets will also be linked to the monitoring regime for the strategy.

We want our targets to be ambitious, however they must also be realistic and have consideration for the changeable environment in which they will be based over the next 5 years, and that we will be able to work towards positively influencing and producing solutions.

We want to make sure our measurements are SMART and focused on outcomes rather than numbers, that actions prove successful and are sustainable homelessness prevention solutions.

We will be delivering a wide range of initiatives and improvements through collaborative working with our valued partnerships in the Borough. We will monitor and continuously review the new Homelessness Prevention Strategy which will be refreshed in 2018, and you will be able to read about our progress against our priorities in our first annual update in April 2015.