

# EDDC Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2023

## Introduction

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory obligation on local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their area and develop and publish a strategy to prevent homelessness based on the findings of the review.

The timing of this strategy is particularly significant, arriving on the back of the introduction of the biggest change to homelessness legislation over the past forty years, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

In addition, there have been significant changes to the housing environment with homelessness rising both nationally and regionally against a backdrop of welfare reforms, reduced funding and cuts to services. Demand on the service has grown and this has created a need to update the way we tackle the challenges of preventing homelessness and assisting those who become homeless.

Homelessness can affect individuals and families and there is no typical 'homeless person'. The legal definition states that somebody is homeless if there is no accommodation that they are entitled to occupy or if they have accommodation but it is not reasonable for them to continue to occupy this accommodation. A person is also considered to be 'threatened with homelessness' if it is likely that they will become homeless within 56 days.

There is much focus on rough sleepers throughout this Strategy although within East Devon rough sleepers form a relatively small proportion of the homeless cases that we assist with. In East Devon the main causes of homelessness over the last five years have been the loss of accommodation in the private sector (the cause of homeless for 35% of individuals and households who have been owed the full homelessness duty) followed by relationship breakdowns (17%) and family evictions (16%).

Homeless Link (the national charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless) identify a number of factors that can make people more vulnerable to homelessness. Individual circumstances, such as poor physical and/or mental health, drug and alcohol problems, bereavement, or experience of the care system or criminal justice system all contribute to this. In addition, there are external forces that can exacerbate the situation, such as poverty, inequality, housing supply and affordability, unemployment, and welfare and income policies.

The impact of homelessness on the individual can be profound. Any existing problems can worsen, and the chances of developing mental or physical health issues or drug and alcohol problems increase.

Our starting point is prevention and early intervention, working to deliver the Council Plan commitment and Public Health Strategy for achieving healthy communities and contributing to our aim of encouraging communities to be outstanding. Living in one of the most outstanding natural environments in the UK, East Devon residents have a major opportunity to maximise health and wellbeing.

As a Council we also have a huge opportunity to influence a major determinant of health and wellbeing, the provision of high quality housing. We do this in many different ways:

- As a housing provider
- As a regulator of private rented housing
- As a planning authority for new and affordable housing
- As a regulator of building standards

## **Aims of the Strategy**

This Strategy will set out how the Council and its partners will work to reduce homelessness, minimise rough sleeping, and contribute towards the over-riding vision of the Housing Service to 'provide a decent home for all residents of East Devon'. It has been shaped to consider and address the changes to the housing environment and we will set out what our key priorities will be in tackling homelessness over the next five years.

## **Action plan**

This Strategy is a living document and will evolve to reflect and respond to change as required. Working with our internal and external partners, an action plan will be produced to implement the strategy. A working group will be made up of service users, council staff, members and colleagues from other organisations and agencies in order to co-ordinate and report on progress against agreed actions over the period of the strategy. The action plan will form part of the wider Housing Service Plan, and will be reviewed every six months.

## Homelessness Strategy at a glance

### Why does homelessness matter to us?

Homelessness is preventable.

Having a safe and secure home has a major impact on health and wellbeing.

Homeless people sleeping rough have a markedly shorter life expectancy.

#### **Our Priorities**

Maximise prevention activities and outcomes. Increase accommodation options. Minimise rough sleeping. Improve health and wellbeing.

We have a duty to provide housing to the most vulnerable people in our community - something we take very seriously.

### How we will meet our aims

Introduce measures across public and private sector housing aimed at maintaining tenancies and reducing evictions

Increase homeless prevention activities aimed at anyone at risk of becoming homeless to improve life skills and access to information

Focus on early identification of risk of homelessness and intervene to prevent it

Review our Empty Homes policy and identify any Council owned land/property suitable for temporary housing solutions

Work across the housing market to increase the range of options, particularly temporary, supported and single person accommodation

Increase communications and partnership working at local level, in particular, with community mental health and primary care teams

Equip frontline staff to work with our most vulnerable and complex clients to support recovery and improved health and wellbeing

Consider more outreach, floating services, and social prescribing to improve the health and wellbeing of those experiencing homelessness

Develop annual implementation plans with SMART objectives to progress our strategic priorities.

Set up a steering group of member, customer and officer reps to oversee implementation.

Report progress against outcome and evaluation measurements.

## How the Strategy was formulated

This Strategy has been produced by EDDC's Housing Strategy team in consultation with both internal and external partners. A full list of individuals, groups and organisations who have contributed towards this strategy can be found in Annex 1.

We have reviewed our previous strategy to determine where our past work to reduce homelessness has succeeded, and where more work is required. We have also taken into

account other EDDC strategies and policies to ensure that our approach to tackling homelessness links to broader Council objectives.

## **Key Legislation Changes**

Over the lifetime of the previous Homelessness Strategy we have seen key legislative changes come into effect that have served to shape the environment. The Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 have had the greatest impact.

### **Welfare Reform Act 2012**

Aims of this legislation include simplifying the benefits system and encouraging more people into work. Reforms continue to be rolled out throughout the district and have had a huge impact on the availability and affordability of housing. The key changes include:

- The ‘freezing’ of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates for all tenants living in the private sector for four years from 2016-17
- The under-occupation charge for Housing Benefit (‘bedroom tax’) for all working age tenants living in social rented housing
- The shared accommodation rate (SAR) for Housing Benefit tenants in private rented accommodation being extended to people aged between 25 and 34
- The benefit cap for working age adults who are not in employment or disabled. This is applied to Housing Benefit and Universal Credit payments, restricting the total amount of benefits a household receives
- Universal Credit, which has created administrative difficulties, proving unpopular with private landlords. There will also be a reduction in the instances where Housing Costs can be paid directly to the landlord via an Alternative Payment Arrangement

### **Actions taken**

To reduce some of the impacts of these reforms the allocation of funds for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) has increased. DHPs are additional funds to top up Housing Benefit or Universal Credit payments, usually for a limited period of time, to help customers cope with these changes. Our Revenues and Benefits Service also provides financial assistance with rent deposits and rent in advance to help customers move to affordable accommodation.

### **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017**

This Act came into effect from April 2018 and expanded the current duties set out in the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002). Significant additional responsibilities have been placed upon local authorities with a statutory duty to assist individuals and households who are homeless. The definition of being threatened with homelessness has been extended from 28 days to 56 days.

The main aim of the Homelessness Reduction Act is to give people the help they need to avoid becoming homeless in the first place, and to give those already experiencing homelessness access to help regardless of whether or not they are considered to have a priority need or are intentionally homeless. Everyone will receive assistance and local authorities are expected to intervene at earlier stages.

The three main new duties for local authorities are to:

- Assess all eligible applicants and agree a personalised housing plan (PHP)
- Take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness and
- Relieve homelessness by helping the applicant secure accommodation

The expected impact on EDDC and the preparation that has been put in place for the implementation of the Act have formed part of the review. With such major changes, the key requirement has been for a culture change in the way we deal with homeless approaches and the way we, with our partners, tackle homelessness on a larger scale. Culture change will be a consistent theme throughout this Strategy.

### **Actions Taken to Prepare for the Act**

EDDC operate two full time Housing Advice drop in services for customers who are homeless or threatened with homelessness over two locations, Exmouth and Honiton. The ethos is to assist people at the earliest opportunity in order to intervene at an early stage and provide the best opportunities for the customers to access assistance. Home visits are arranged if customers cannot access either available service.

The new Act resulted in a review of the homelessness service and also required a significant overhaul of the way the service is provided. The review included a restructured Housing Options service, redesigned processes and procedures, implementation of a new IT system, new protocols for partner agencies to refer in and briefings for staff, members and partner organisations.

Prior to the introduction of the Act the Housing Options team consisted solely of Housing Officers who worked generically to deal with every aspect of the responsibilities of the service. To prepare for the responsibilities of the Act the team has been significantly restructured to include new roles with specific roles, allowing the Housing Officers to concentrate on preventing homelessness and assisting those who do become homeless. The new roles include:

- Triage Officers, who will deal with and process new approaches and verify circumstances as the first point of contact for new customers
- A Temporary Accommodation Officer who will assist customers in emergency and temporary accommodation, sustaining tenancies and scoping new accommodation
- A Private Sector Liaison Officer who will assist customers who are facing problems in accommodation in the private sector, promoting and improving access to the private sector in order to prevent and relieve homelessness

Furthermore, and in line with the theme of 'culture change' that will be consistent throughout the Strategy, there is a recognition that we need to adapt the way we work

within Housing Services and as a Council to reduce homelessness and the impact of homelessness on the health and wellbeing of individuals.

### **Impact of the Act for EDDC**

The implementation of the Act has resulted in major workload implications for the Housing Options Team. We have seen increases in:

- Interview times (assessments currently take two and a half hours when they were previously an hour)
- Caseloads and timescales for casework
- Numbers of customers being placed in temporary accommodation, and for longer periods
- Reviewable decisions

### **Duty to Refer**

From 1<sup>st</sup> October 2018, as part of the Homelessness Reduction Act, public bodies are bound by a “duty to refer” - an obligation to refer anyone to a local authority if they are homeless or threatened with homelessness. All eleven local authorities in Devon and Cornwall are working together to ensure a consistent approach to implementing the duty to refer with a clear process in place.

## **Strategic Context**

Within East Devon, there are a number of policies and strategies that link either directly or indirectly with the Homelessness Strategy. It is important to map how the Homelessness Strategy feeds into overarching Council strategies to ensure that the needs of people who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless are included and addressed.

### **Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP)**

This plan is in the process of being drawn up and will address the overall spatial strategy and level of housing and employment land to be set aside in the Greater Exeter area up to 2040. This plan is due to be adopted in 2021.

### **Local Plan 2013 - 2031**

This plan contains strategies for the development of affordable homes in the district and the provision of accessible and adaptable dwellings as part of any new developments. This will eventually be superseded by the GESP.

### **Council Plan 2016 - 2020**

Priority 1 of the Council Plan is 'encouraging communities to be outstanding.' There is a focus on providing 'More good quality, local homes for local people' and this contributes directly to improving the health and wellbeing of local residents. Identified actions include 'extending the housing options service and reducing numbers on the housing register.' As a housing provider and landlord, we take a broad view of our responsibilities in improving individual and community resilience which contributes towards reducing the risk of homelessness.

### **Housing Strategy**

One of the main priorities of the Housing Strategy is 'providing a decent home for all residents of East Devon' with a focus on working towards having no homeless individuals or households. The objectives highlighted are:

- continuing to provide a wide range of housing options accessible to all
- maintaining a commitment to end rough sleeping
- addressing the wider causes and impact of homelessness
- providing help in finding rented accommodation in the private sector
- providing help to maintain tenancies or move to more appropriate housing
- providing permanent and accessible housing advice services in Exmouth and Honiton

Partnership working to tackle homelessness is also identified.

Many of the other objectives and actions relating to the supply of affordable housing and improving the quality of housing stock also impact on the causes of homelessness and will be taken into account in developing the Strategy.

What this highlights is that the actions of all teams within the Housing service have the potential to contribute towards the objective of reducing and preventing homelessness.

### **East Devon Public Health Strategy 2019 - 2023**

The East Devon Public Health Strategy has the following strategic aims:

- To help more people to be healthy and stay healthy
- To enhance self-care and support community resilience
- To integrate and improve support for people in their homes

Having a home is one of the vital ingredients identified in improving and maintaining health and wellbeing so reducing and preventing homelessness will have a major impact on the health and wellbeing of our residents.

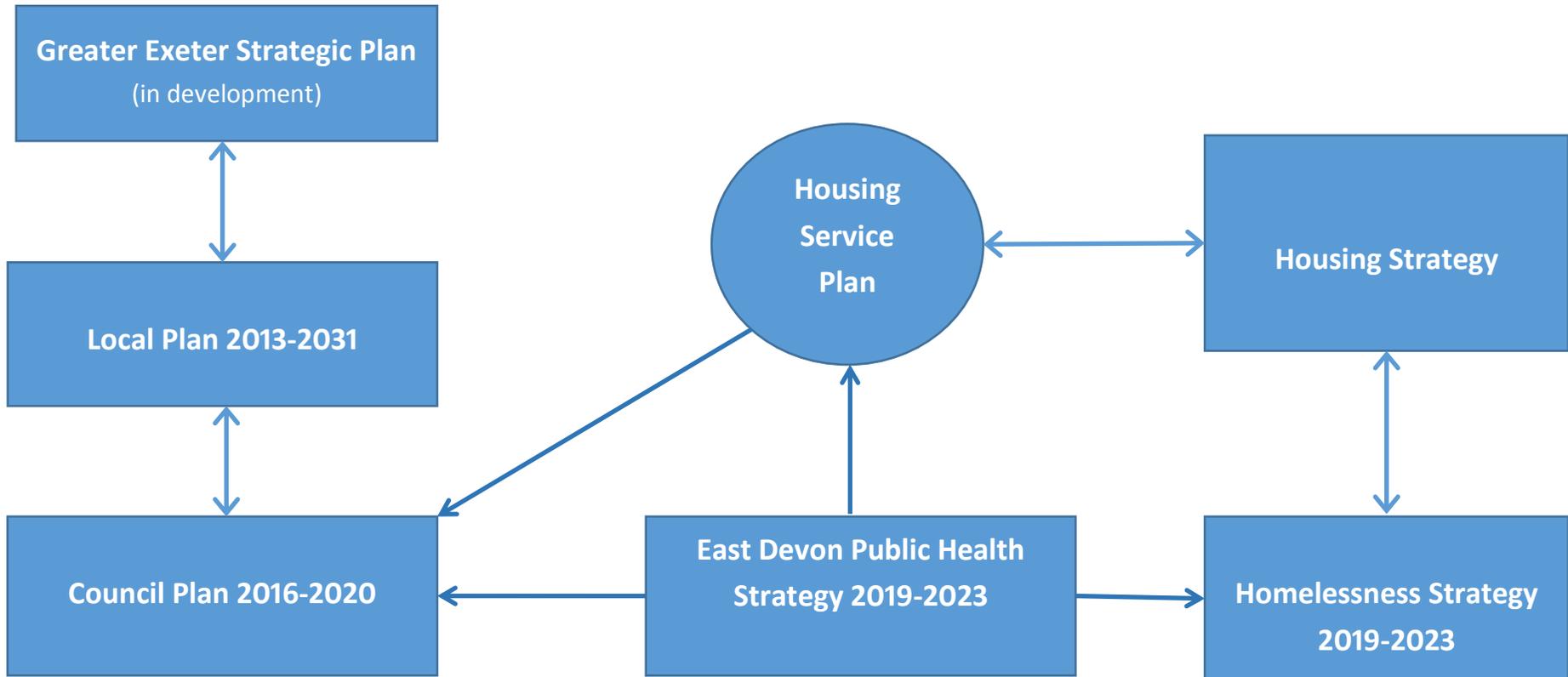
Our community development activities with some of our most deprived communities and individuals will continue to enhance self-care and support community resilience. More explicit links with other Council Departments (e.g. the Countryside team) and partner agencies in East Devon will be made to create opportunities for meaningful activities to support those identified at higher risk of homelessness.

Drug and alcohol dependency, long term ill health or disability - mental or physical - and social isolation are potential reasons that lead to people losing their homes. The Homelessness Strategy will address how we can work with partner agencies to reduce the impact of these factors on finding and keeping a home.

### **Housing Service Plan**

Actions generated from the Homelessness Strategy will sit within the annual Housing Service plan which is linked to the overarching priorities of the Council Plan.

## Summary of Strategic Context



# Homelessness Strategy 2019–2023 - Review at a Glance

This section provides a summary of the review which was carried out in order to inform this strategy. The full review document is available on the EDDC website.

## Local Context

<b>East Devon Population Key Facts</b>
138,141 people
Average Age 50.3 years (Nationally 40)
Average life expectancy is 82 years
Across Exmouth there is a difference of 15.5 years in life expectancy
98.41% have a white British background
Average household size is 2.2 residents
Average income in 2017 - £26926 (below South West and England averages)
<b>Over the 10 years 2014-24</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The population is expected to rise by 6%</li> <li>• 65+ age group will increase the most</li> </ul>

<b>East Devon Affordability Factors</b>
In the top 25% nationally of all districts for house prices
In the bottom 25% nationally in the affordability index
Private rent levels are amongst the highest in Devon

<b>East Devon: Areas of Deprivation from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exmouth Littleham</li> <li>• Exmouth Town Centre</li> <li>• Exmouth Withycombe - Raleigh Moorfields Road</li> <li>• Honiton Dowell Street area near High Street</li> <li>• Cranbrook</li> </ul>

<b>East Devon Property Key Facts</b>
63,881 properties 59,071 households
74.9% homes are owner occupied
13.6% homes are privately rented
9.3% homes are social rented
3.8% (2400) are holiday homes
387 empty for 6 months+ (1 April 2018)
94 empty for 2 years + (1 April 2018)
EDDC owns 4200 properties (December 2018)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2855 are general needs properties</li> <li>• 1345 are sheltered properties</li> </ul>
High proportion (15.3%) in Council Tax Bands F, G, H
Lowest proportion in Devon are in Band A (9.2%)

## Review of Homelessness Strategy 2013-18

Table 1 summarises East Devon’s main homelessness statistics collected in national returns 2013-2018:

**Table 1**

Year	Approaches*	Prevention cases**	Full homeless duty accepted	Snapshot Figure of Households in Temporary Accommodation
2013-14	524	282	27	21
2014-15	394	245	7	14
2015-16	371	241	6	9
2016-17	320	287	19	11
2017-18	261	230	28	32

*\*approaches made directly to EDDC where there is a genuine threat of homelessness.*

*\*\*cases where homeless situations were relieved and potentially homeless situations prevented, including prevention activities from other agencies and organisations funded by EDDC.*

Note: The figures for 2017-18 appear contradictory. There were less approaches which explains the fewer prevention cases. However at the same time there were increases in acceptances and temporary accommodation. This can be attributed to the housing environment and the increasing difficulty faced in being able to prevent homelessness (i.e. reductions in supported accommodation, rises in rent levels in the private sector and affordability issues created through Welfare Reforms). More details can be found in the Review document.

Table 2 summarises the numbers of rough sleepers in the district, taken from annual estimates based on weekly outreach sessions, reports and local intelligence:

**Table 2**

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
4	6	8	5	6	5

It is important to note that, common to other seasonal resorts, the levels of rough sleeping increase significantly in the summer months. This is not effectively demonstrated in the table above which takes a snapshot of verified rough sleepers on a set date in November each year.

Our previous strategy had three main targets:

1. To increase the number of households who are prevented from becoming homeless, aiming for a year on year increase
2. To maintain the number of homelessness acceptances below 30 households in any one year
3. To reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation, aiming for a year on year decrease with less than 20 households by 2018

We achieved some success in:

- Achieving a high level of homeless preventions (between 200 and 300 each year since 2013-14)
- Keeping the number of rough sleepers at a low level, between 4 and 8

And some initial success in:

- Significantly reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation (from 21 in 2013-14 to 9 in 2015-16) before the numbers began to rise.

## **The Housing Environment**

During the lifetime of the previous strategy EDDC has struggled to maintain the level of its social housing stock, losing 169 properties through the right to buy scheme between 2013 and 2018. The district has also benefitted from large scale development at Cranbrook, a new town in East Devon, increasing the supply of housing.

Benefit claimants in private and social rented housing faced financial restrictions under the Welfare Reform Act 2012, potentially placing more people at risk of homelessness due to affordability. Demand for shared accommodation, which is in short supply in East Devon, increased particularly from younger adults.

In addition to EDDC housing stock, a number of Housing Associations provide social housing in the district. Despite this, demand for accommodation outweighs the supply of suitable accommodation within the area. The lack of supported accommodation to assist people with specific issues, such as mental health, proves to be a contributing factor when assisting people who are homeless or become homeless.

## **Housing Need and Homelessness**

### **Trends from Homelessness Statistics**

EDDC experienced a decline in the number of homeless acceptances until 2016, then a significant increase back to 2013 levels. Homeless preventions have reduced over the five year period, although there was an increase in overall activity in 2016-17. The number of households in temporary accommodation was reduced significantly and maintained at a low level until 2016-17. Since then, numbers have rapidly climbed up from 11 at the end of December 2016 to 33 at the end of December 2018, placing pressure on resources.

The additional duties arising from the Homelessness Reduction Act will potentially increase the demand for, and length of time spent in, temporary accommodation and our strategy will need to address this.

Individuals and households needing support and preventative action by the Housing Options Team often cite rent arrears or affordability, and family or relationship breakdown as reasons for seeking assistance.

### **Devon Home Choice Registrations:**

EDDC are signed up to Devon Home Choice, alongside several other councils and Housing Associations, to manage the allocation of social housing for local residents. A housing need assessment is completed on registration and a banding applied A – E, with ‘A’ indicating the highest housing need, and ‘E’ no housing need.

<b>Devon Home Choice Key Facts December 2018</b>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Registrations</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">East Devon has nearly 4000 (the highest in Devon)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">1700 of these are in Bands A – D indicating a housing need</p> <p style="text-align: center;">57% are in Bands A – D (977) are for one bed homes (i.e. for single people or couples)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Housing Need</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">26% said they were at risk of being homeless – the proportion amongst 16-24 year olds is higher at 36.5%.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">7.8% said they needed to escape violence or harassment.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">42.6% said their health and/or wellbeing was made worse by their current home – this increases progressively with age - 52% of 71-80 year olds, 62% of over 80s.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">5.9% said they had to move because their current home is in very poor condition.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Allocations 2017/18</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">305 general needs homes were allocated in East Devon</p>

The reliance on the private rented sector combined with high private rental levels creates an environment where people find it increasingly difficult to afford to rent privately, and existing tenants are placed at increased risk of homelessness.

### **Partnership working**

EDDC appreciates that we cannot tackle homelessness alone, as a local authority, and we have a strong history of partnership working. We cannot, and should not, deliver this

strategy alone and delivery of the objectives requires effective partnership working. We are grateful to our partners that work with us to tackle homelessness, and who have helped us to draw up this strategy, and will work with us to address our key priorities in the future.

**Table 3 Summary of Our Main Partners and Prevention Activities:**

<b>Multi Agency groups</b>	<b>EDDC Services</b>	<b>EDDC Funded Support</b>	<b>Other Services and Projects</b>
Devon and Cornwall Housing Options Partnership (DCHOP)	Housing Service Drop In and Appointment Service in Exmouth and Honiton	Young Devon Provide support and assistance to 16 – 24 year olds	Alexandra House, supported housing provider in Exmouth
Devon and Cornwall Rough Sleeper Partnership (DCRSP)			Julian House, specialist support and outreach for rough sleepers
Devon Home Choice Partnership	Rent Deposit and Bond Scheme	CAB court desk weekly advocacy service at Exeter County Court	Open Door Centre, support for rough sleepers in Exmouth
Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)			
Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)	Sanctuary Scheme	SPLITZ domestic abuse support services	Gateway Homeless Action Group, support for rough sleepers in Sidmouth
Exmouth Police Link meetings	Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)	Homemaker financial advice and support	Honiton Community Action Trust manage local projects including debt advice and a foodbank
Homeless Prevention Panel			
Domestic Violence Forum			Exmouth Community Larder provide support and food

The NHS Long Term Plan 2019-2029 promotes new service models based on integrated care systems. It identifies a key role working with Local Authorities on preventative activities and the expansion of practices that support self-help and build resilience, linking patients in primary care with sources of support in the community. This comes at the right time to facilitate joint work on the actions needed to implement this strategy, and we want to be directly involved with our NHS partners at local level to prevent and reduce homelessness.

Housing Associations provide social housing across the district, helping to provide affordable housing to those in need. We are keen to work with them in partnership not only to further increase the supply of social housing but also to seek their assistance in our wider preventative agenda.

# **EDDC Homelessness Strategy 2019-2023– Consultation and Research**

## **Consultation**

We have worked with both internal and external partners throughout the composition of this Strategy. A series of workshops were conducted with Housing service colleagues, other Council departments and our external partners, focusing on the following key areas in relation to preventing homelessness:

- Our preventative and supportive work within the private sector
- Our preventative and supportive work with rough sleepers
- Our preventative and supportive work as a social landlord
- Increasing accommodation options in order to meet the rise in demand

In each workshop we began by establishing what we currently do well and what more we could do to meet our aspirations. We then looked at what barriers there are stopping us from achieving our goals and how we might overcome those challenges.

We have also met with our Tenant involvement Forum and presented the strategy to our Housing Review Board, a strategic scrutiny panel consisting of tenant representatives and local councillors. Having the approval of elected members in relation to our approach to tackling homelessness is vital to the success of the strategy. At the outset of the strategy we met with the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Homes and Communities in order to plan how the review would be conducted and how the strategy would be formulated. Council Members have been consulted throughout the process.

## **‘Your Home, Your Wellbeing’ – a 3 year research project**

We have been able to talk with a number of former service users in order to benefit from hearing from their real life experiences when homeless and rough sleeping. This has formed part of an ongoing longitudinal study.

The three year research study has been developed in partnership with the University of Birmingham and LiveWest Housing Association. The study was developed as a new and improved approach to providing a better and deeper understanding of the experiences of people living in different types of housing. It goes beyond snap-shot satisfaction surveys and looks at the relationship between housing, wellbeing and longer term life chances and opportunities whilst exploring possible tenure effects across the housing sector.

Major changes in policy from rent reductions to welfare reform will also start to challenge housing providers and local populations in new ways. By running the study over three years we will be able to monitor and measure these changes and adjust service delivery if appropriate.

Supporting the statistical findings from a survey a sample of social tenants, private rented tenants, some in shared ownership and some who have experienced homelessness have been interviewed about their housing experiences and their wellbeing.

The results of the survey and interviews will inform our services and local and national debate. They highlight the difficulties, challenges and successes experienced during periods of homelessness. Other relevant findings from the study that support the objectives of this strategy will also be used for monitoring purposes and informing future service planning.

The longitudinal study and consultation with service users will contribute towards our aims of better understanding and addressing the wider causes and impact of homelessness.

The initial results from the study are available on the EDDC website.

## **EDDC Homelessness Strategy 2019-2023– Priorities**

This strategy will build on the work of the last five years, renewing our commitment to maximising practices and activities that prevent and relieve homelessness, whilst responding to the increased responsibilities that have accompanied the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

### **Key Priorities for the Future**

We have identified four key priorities for the next five years. These have been developed following the review of our performance over the last five years and giving due consideration to public health, demographic and housing contexts. We have also taken into account the impact of the Welfare Reform Act upon the local housing environment and the major legislative changes accompanying the Homelessness Reduction Act.

Our four key strategic priorities are:

- 1- Maximise prevention activities and outcomes
- 2- Increasing accommodation options
- 3- Minimising rough sleeping
- 4- Improving health and wellbeing

## **Action plan**

The commitments outlined in this section will inform the detailed action plan, referred to on page 2. The additional layer of how we will successfully go about achieving the aims will be included in the action plan which will be regularly updated and added to in order to reflect the changes in the environment and the changing priorities. It will evolve to ensure that our actions are constantly relevant.

## **Priority 1 – Maximising prevention activities and outcomes**

### **Scene Setting**

We have adopted a preventative approach over the lifetime of our previous homelessness strategy and this has been successful in keeping the numbers of rough sleepers and need for temporary accommodation relatively low. Early intervention is key, the ethos has been to prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity rather than assisting once people have lost their accommodation. Homelessness prevention has now become a legal duty placed on local authorities since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

Gradual increases in homelessness, combined with the additional legislative responsibilities, ensure that we now need to take improved and additional steps towards preventative activities. This approach is reinforced in the NHS Long Term Plan 2019 – 2029 which promotes wider action on prevention and the expansion of practices that support self-help and build resilience by linking into support within the community.

### **Consultation – key findings**

- Whilst the key aim of the Housing Options team is to prevent homelessness it has emerged that some priorities of other Housing teams, whilst sensible in a departmental context, have been conflicting with the broader preventative agenda. It is clear therefore that more work is required to align the priorities of the whole Housing service if we are to maximise the prevention of homelessness in East Devon. We need to take a council-wide approach towards preventing homelessness.
- We also identified the need to work more with the private sector in relation to maintaining tenancies at risk of breakdown and the need to help our tenants with skills to help them maintain a tenancy, setting them up to succeed. Consultees identified a number of potential partnership working opportunities.

- Our policy, planning and development activity to provide sufficient housing for the population now and in the future is key in ensuring the supply of good quality homes. Alongside this, prevention activities need to be increased to ensure anyone who is at risk of becoming homeless receives the advice and support they need to reduce the risk and avoid this.

## **Actions - how we will maximise prevention activities and outcomes**

### **Additional support**

It was recognised during consultation that there was more that could be done to support tenants in the social and private sector at higher risk of homelessness. A working group will be set up to look at taking forward some of the suggestions raised during consultation.

The Council will:

- Work to identify and maintain existing informal support networks for tenants
- Investigate upskilling or recruiting specialist support officers to offer more intensive support to tenants
- Explore how transitional support to help tenants settle into new accommodation can be provided
- Examine how floating support into private sector properties can be delivered

### **Life skills**

Our stakeholders stressed the benefits of working in the community to assist with life-skills in order to prevent homelessness. These activities will be planned and coordinated with initiatives developed by the Environmental, Countryside, Culture and Arts teams aimed at improving health and wellbeing.

The Council will:

- Introduce more personal budget education for tenants
- Tie in personal development and life skills into each housing applicant's personal housing plan before sign up
- Address isolation through promoting and supporting meaningful activities
- Identify working and volunteering opportunities for tenants and rough sleepers to increase skills

- Tap into existing and develop new life-skills projects in partnership with the Community Development Team

### **Partnership working**

Our consultation with the Private Sector Housing team identified a number of opportunities where we could work with private sector landlords to minimise the risk of tenancy failure. In addition, liaising with other support agencies and with other Housing teams within the Council will also help to meet our goals.

The Council will:

- Engage with landlords at an earlier stage to reduce the risk of evictions – intervening at the earliest opportunity when rent arrears arise, or other tenancy breaches are identified
- Share training opportunities with partner agencies and volunteers so that we can increase the skills of all partners
- Identify and build up links with support workers in the community
- Work with all Housing teams to ensure that procedures focus on early identification of potential risk of homelessness and intervention to prevent homelessness from occurring

### **Referrals**

One of the new responsibilities detailed in the Homelessness Reduction Act is the implementation of the duty to refer process. The aim of this process is to capture the risk of homelessness at an earlier stage through placing a responsibility on staff in specified organisations to refer to EDDC's Housing Options team. This is likely to increase the number of people that the team need to work with to prevent homelessness, and the number of personal housing plans to address housing needs and reduce the risk of becoming homeless. This should also help to prevent instances of repeat homelessness for those at highest risk (e.g. those leaving custody). However, this duty does not extend as far as we would like and more work is required to ensure we are made aware of individuals at risk of homelessness as early as possible.

The Council will:

- Ensure that protocols are in place to successfully implement the duty to refer
- Produce a clear referral process for GPs
- Work with Community Mental Health teams to streamline a two-way referral process
- Adopt duty to refer principles across all Council teams to facilitate referrals of customers who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

## **Publicity**

It is key that people are aware of the support that we can provide to them if they are at risk of becoming homeless.

The Council will:

- Provide more information on what support is available and existing responsibilities for tenants and landlords
- Produce a communications plan to ensure that any messages are distributed as widely as possible
- Produce and publicise a simplified summary of the Homelessness Reduction Act duties

## **Priority 2 – Increasing accommodation options**

### **Scene Setting**

Our housing strategy provides the framework for the overall housing provision in East Devon. We also need to address the specific needs of people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless to ensure that the most vulnerable individuals and groups can access appropriate, affordable accommodation. For this to be successful, we need to address the range of different types of accommodation available, as well as increasing the housing options for individuals and families who find themselves homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

### **Consultation – key findings**

We know that social, economic, and health status all impact on the housing options available to individuals and this reinforces why we need a Council wide approach to tackling the causes of homelessness. Through our interviews with people who have been homeless, it is also evident that life experiences and traumatic events increase the vulnerability of individuals, making them less able to cope in general and increasing the risk of becoming homeless.

We have been identifying more opportunities to work across our Housing service to prioritise allocations for homeless households, address affordability at the start of the allocation process, coordinate action to identify those at risk of homelessness at an early stage and work with those at risk of eviction because of rent arrears. Our internal communications and understanding of each team's contribution to preventing homelessness will improve in support of this strategy.

In East Devon, there is very limited provision of supported accommodation particularly for those with drug and alcohol addiction. We also need to increase the range of 'move on' accommodation where people who have been homeless can stay and receive support from local agencies to improve their capability and skills to manage and sustain accommodation in the future.

## **Actions - how we will increase accommodation options**

### **Planning and policy**

In East Devon there is a strong tradition of social housing provision including sheltered housing for those in need of support to maintain independent living. Some of the older sheltered housing has become harder to let to those who need support and may be better utilised for general needs or temporary accommodation.

The Council will:

- Make use of data becoming available from the longitudinal study created in partnership with Birmingham University and LiveWest Housing Association
- Review our Empty Homes policy with the wider Housing teams including Rentals and Private Sector Housing to coordinate and agree the most appropriate use of empty properties
- Provide robust data on the need for different types of accommodation and work with the planning team to ensure that temporary and move on accommodation is spread across the district
- Provide clarity on the role of Housing staff in meeting the needs of residents in all accommodation, taking account of more complex needs and the increased need for support of some residents

### **Supported accommodation**

We need to clearly define what supported accommodation for rough sleepers looks like and will explore options to address this.

The Council will:

- Explore a 'Housing First' model for the most vulnerable applicants to build resilience to address addiction or other issues before moving to mainstream accommodation. The model is designed to provide open-ended support to long-term and recurrently homeless people who have high needs.
- Look to increase supported accommodation in partnership with other districts, public bodies and Housing Associations

- Identify any privately run supported accommodation and scope for referring into this accommodation
- Identify the need for women only temporary hostel accommodation
- Explore the possibility of allowing pets in temporary accommodation

### **New types of accommodation**

We will need to expand the range of accommodation options available to us.

The Council will:

- Identify any suitable Council owned land/property which could be used for temporary housing solutions (e.g. adapted containers, modular, pre-fab buildings, caravans)
- Explore alternative tenure options (e.g. rent to buy, short-term move on accommodation to equip people to manage and sustain a tenancy)
- Increase options for single people including self-contained accommodation as an alternative to shared accommodation
- Explore 'fostering'/supported lodging schemes similar to those in place for young people and care leavers
- Work with the planning team to encourage more purpose-built shared accommodation for all age groups (including older people)
- Encourage responsibility and stability through tenure agreements (licences/tenancies)
- Explore more affordable accommodation schemes
- Develop the role of the Council's recently established Housing Company to flexibly address specific housing need

### **Partnership working**

We need to work across the housing market to maximise opportunities to increase the range of accommodation options for homeless people and those at risk of becoming homeless.

The Council will:

- Liaise with Managing agents and larger estate companies to explore options for increasing and improving accommodation, including incentives to become a 'social' landlord

- Develop and implement a Landlord Charter to encourage good practice and cooperation with private sector landlords in avoiding eviction
- Build relationships with Housing Association colleagues to develop accommodation options for people who become homeless in East Devon
- Work with accommodation providers to build positive relationships with people who become homeless

## **Priority 3 – Minimising rough sleeping**

### **Scene setting**

We share the Government’s vision to half rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027, as outlined in the Government’s Rough Sleeping Strategy which takes a three-pronged approach to ending rough sleeping through prevention, intervention, and recovery, setting out steps for how this vision can be achieved.

### **Consultation – key findings**

Our consultation workshops highlighted that our external partners and commissioned services are already doing great work to help rough sleepers. This is reflected in the consistently low number of rough sleepers in our district in the last 5 years. However, the recent seasonal increases in numbers of verified rough sleepers in our area throughout the summer period is of concern.

It was also noted that there were some issues that still need resolving. Opinion of the Council amongst the rough sleeper population can be improved, as we are often seen as ‘enforcers’ rather than an organisation trying to help. It was also highlighted that rough sleepers find it hard to engage with health services, particularly as many rough sleepers have mental health and other complex support needs.

Consultation has highlighted the lack of supported accommodation provision in East Devon. We currently have access to supported accommodation projects for rough sleepers in other areas, but many rough sleepers reject this as an option and we need to understand this and explore whether local provision is a feasible alternative.

## **Actions - how we will work to minimise rough sleeping**

### **Developing a new ethos**

We will need to adopt a more flexible approach to working with this complex client group if we are to successfully reduce rough sleeping in our district.

The Council will:

- Proactively engage with rough sleepers with greater flexibility, adapting to individual circumstances and needs
- Take a holistic approach to supporting rough sleepers by not just focusing on problems, but also identifying skills, aspirations, hobbies, and other interests
- Improve public awareness of what to do if they suspect that someone is sleeping rough

### **Partnership working**

There are already examples of great partnership working in action. Monthly multi-agency police-link meetings are held in Exmouth enabling agencies to share information on rough sleeping. Julian House provide training and information guides to other voluntary and charitable organisations to help spread good practice. However, there is more we can do by building on existing relationships, particularly with the NHS to better support rough sleepers.

The Council will:

- Investigate ways of breaking down the barriers and building trust with rough sleepers through joint working with our partners.
- Liaise with Community Mental Health Teams and other health services to develop better ways of working with rough sleepers.

### **Additional support**

Stakeholders identified that there has been an increase in rough sleepers presenting to agencies with more complex needs. There is help out there to assist rough sleepers with complex needs but more has to be done to make these services more accessible, as the chaotic lifestyle of some rough sleepers can lead to non-engagement.

The Council will:

- Work with health services to further develop the range of outreach services to people who experience homelessness.
- Better communicate with rough sleepers to explain the support that is available, making clear the responsibilities that fall on them.
- Investigate whether additional Mental Health training can be given to Housing Officers to support rough sleepers into accommodation.

## **Supported accommodation**

Currently rough sleepers connected to East Devon have access to supported accommodation in other areas, most notably Exeter. However, stakeholders have identified that this is not always appropriate for rough sleepers. Some do not wish to leave the area they know and have a support network in place.

Our consultation also highlighted the additional benefits of night shelters. They provide an opportunity for support workers to engage with rough sleepers. There is also scope to bring in other agencies to offer their services.

Bearing these things in mind, the development of more local night shelters/hostels in our area should be considered.

The Council will:

- Work with our partners to identify viable areas to offer night shelters in East Devon
- Investigate if shelters should be available year round, or restricted to times of extreme weather.
- Investigate the merits of 'pop-up' night shelters
- Look to develop 'Safe Sleep' schemes, and investigate if churches might be a possible location for these schemes.

## **Temporary accommodation**

In the summer months, there has been an increase in the number of people sleeping rough in our seaside towns. Consultees questioned if there was scope for providing temporary sites where rough sleepers could safely stay over the warmer months.

The consultation also revealed that there has been a significant increase in the number of female rough sleepers nationally over the last year and concern was raised about the increased risks women rough sleepers may face.

The Council will:

- Consult on whether the establishment of a designated area or areas for rough sleepers to sleep outdoors would be a positive way forward.
- Establish whether there is a need for a women-only hostel in East Devon.
- Explore using alternative accommodation options, including a Housing First model

## Priority 4 – Improving Health and Wellbeing

### Scene Setting

Much of our activity as a Council impacts on the health and wellbeing of everyone living, working and visiting East Devon, including people who become homeless. Being without a secure and stable home severely limits the ability of people to benefit from this, and targeted action is required to provide:

- Access to physical and mental health care services.
- Support to individuals to make sustainable changes to circumstances and, where appropriate, behaviour.

We believe that securing appropriate accommodation and minimising the threat of homelessness through early preventative action has the biggest single impact on the health and wellbeing of people experiencing and at risk of homelessness. The need has been established for a Council-wide commitment to address the causes of homelessness and to assist people who become homeless.

Our approach going forward will be in line with the NHS Long Term Plan which cites supporting rough sleepers as a priority and increasing community and specialist mental health support to the most vulnerable groups.

### Consultation – key findings

Having a secure and stable home is a basic pre-requisite for positive health and wellbeing. Without a home, health and wellbeing is likely to decline because of the difficulty in:

- Staying physically healthy when unable to keep warm and dry, sleep under cover, prepare food and drink, or maintain basic personal care and hygiene.
- Staying mentally healthy, maintaining self-respect, confidence and personal dignity when often regarded with hostility and threatened with verbal abuse and violence.
- Getting money for day to day needs (e.g. food and travel).
- Keeping in touch with family and friends, particularly if a breakdown in relationships has contributed to being homeless.
- Accessing education, training or employment without an address.
- Engaging in meaningful activities when faced with the immediate needs of securing food and drink and finding somewhere to sleep.

For people experiencing homelessness with existing physical or mental health conditions and people with addiction issues, there may be problems in:

- Accessing health services when needed if not registered with a GP
- Keeping to treatment plans if regular medication or travel to appointments is required
- Recovering from illness or hospital treatment if discharged without accommodation
- Accessing accommodation and support for those with drug or alcohol addiction

For people at a higher risk of becoming homeless (e.g. having been served an eviction notice, or struggling financially because of the high cost of accommodation) or people with no permanent home (e.g. sofa-surfing, staying with relatives temporarily) the worry and stress of this may impact negatively on their health and wellbeing, affecting:

- Relationships with family and friends
- Behaviour and emotional wellbeing
- The ability to cope with work
- The ability to cope with responsibilities of day to day living, including caring responsibilities

For others with long term physical or mental ill health or disability, and their carers, the security of their home may be compromised by the inability to commit to permanent or full-time work to maintain sufficient income.

## **Actions - how we will improve health and wellbeing**

### **Working with local GPs to improve access**

Access to primary care, and GPs in particular, provides the gateway to other more specialist investigations and treatment. All residents should have the same access rights. For rough sleepers and other people experiencing homelessness local access is even more important to maintain basic health and provide continuity of care.

We want to encourage closer working between the Housing service and local health services, particularly GPs and community teams.

The Council will:

- Promote shared understanding of roles and the need to act jointly to address the housing and health needs of vulnerable individuals
- Explore the possibility of extending the provisions of the duty to refer, introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act, to GPs in East Devon

- Explore what can be done to remove current barriers and improve access to primary care services locally for people experiencing homelessness
- Explore potential social prescribing options for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

### **Access to mental health and drug and alcohol addiction services**

A high proportion of rough sleepers have mental health, drug or alcohol addiction problems which are likely to have contributed to becoming homeless. Breaking out of that situation is extremely difficult without help and support.

The Council will:

- Work more closely with Devon Partnership Trust and the local agencies providing support for drug and alcohol addiction to ensure the needs of people experiencing homelessness are taken into account in their service plans
- Explore the Housing First model and supported housing as a means of providing a more stable base for the most vulnerable people to address the issues impacting negatively on their health and wellbeing
- Implement the actions arising from the forthcoming Housing Mental Health Strategy

### **Advice and support**

There is the possibility that the Council is likely to be regarded negatively by rough sleepers as opposed to assisting and enabling access to accommodation and support. Relationships need to be developed for this to change. Most statutory public services are set up with the expectation that service users will engage where services are located. For people experiencing homelessness this is often unrealistic and the issue needs to be addressed.

The Council will:

- Apply principles from the Public Health Strategy into our approach to improving the health and wellbeing of people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- Equip our frontline staff with appropriate information and skills to work with our most vulnerable and complex clients to influence behaviour towards recovery and improved health and wellbeing, as part of personalised housing plans
- Improve partnership working with local homeless support organisations and agencies who deliver drug and alcohol support services
- Improve cross-department and multi-agency working to identify people with support needs at the earliest opportunity as part of our homelessness prevention work
- Consider the inclusion of people experiencing homelessness in Community Development, initiatives to improve life skills and resilience

- Increase understanding of, and facilitate signposting to, community support and resources across the Housing service
- Explore the options for more outreach, floating services, and social prescribing to promote improved health and wellbeing

## **EDDC Homelessness Strategy 2019-2023– Next Steps**

### **Future planning**

In order to prepare as effectively as possible for the future and to understand the local housing environment we will use a variety of assessment measures. We will constantly review key performance indicators, waiting list figures and quarterly statistical returns for the homelessness service. Measuring customer experience and satisfaction will also help to shape the service and support future planning, alongside acting on the findings of the Council's longitudinal study.

### **Culture Change**

The whole Housing service, along with other teams within the Council, will need to work together to help prevent homelessness. All teams will need to be open to these challenges and work together to overcome them as they arise. It will require a significant culture change to align all priorities towards this common goal. This will be achieved by:

- All relevant services adopting a corporate commitment to work in partnership with the homelessness service (Housing Options team) to prevent and relieve homelessness
- Each service setting actions in its annual delivery plan that will contribute to a new 'whole council' responsibility to prevent and tackle homelessness
- Acknowledging the need for culture change exists throughout the Housing service in order to tackle the more complex cases we are now dealing with and the increased responsibilities of the service

### **Action Plan Review**

This Strategy is a living document and will evolve to reflect and respond to change as required. Working with our internal and external partners, an action plan will be produced to implement the strategy providing details on how we can realistically achieve the aims recorded in this Strategy. A working group will be made up of service users, council staff, members and colleagues from other organisations and agencies in order to co-ordinate and report on progress against agreed actions over the period of the strategy. The action plan will form part of the wider Housing Service Plan, and will be reviewed every six months.

## **Individuals and Organisations Contributing to the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy**

### **EDDC Council Members**

Councillor Jill Elson  
Councillor Pauline Stott  
Councillor Cherry Nicholas  
Councillor Simon Grundy  
Councillor Phil Twiss  
Councillor Ian Hall  
Councillor David Key  
Councillor Darryl Nicholas  
Councillor Douglas Hull  
Councillor Megan Armstrong  
Councillor Jim Knight  
Councillor Mike Allen

### **Organisations**

Devon and Cornwall Police – Neighbourhood Policing Team Exmouth Town  
Open Door, Exmouth  
Gateway, Sidmouth  
Julian House  
Honiton Kings Centre  
Alexandra House  
Young Devon  
Citizens Advice Exeter  
Citizens Advice East Devon  
Devon and Cornwall Housing Options

### **EDDC Teams**

Housing Needs & Strategy  
Landlord Services  
Private Sector Housing  
Revenues and Benefits  
Streetscene  
Public Health