

**SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNCIL**  
**HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2019-2024**  
**FOR CONSULTATION**

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## **Aim of this Strategy**

The purpose of the Homelessness Strategy is to set out the council's strategic direction and specific priorities to prevent and tackle homelessness in South Gloucestershire.

While the Homelessness Reduction Act puts the person at the centre of resolving their homelessness problem, we want our Homelessness Strategy to go further than the legal requirements. It recognises the responsibilities of the local authority and its partners in creating the environment to make it possible to deliver a holistic and personalised response to those who need help.

Our Homelessness Strategy aims to prevent homelessness arising by recognising and identifying when a household is getting into difficulty, and by responding to homelessness when it arises.

The Homelessness Strategy recognises that in order to be effective, the council must work in partnership with organisations, services and residents in the area to tackle homelessness and its causes.

Through having the right support in place and resources available, we aim to make sure that South Gloucestershire Council and its wider partnership are responsive to the needs of those who are at risk of, or who are, homeless. We all have a joint responsibility to support our residents to access and maintain housing.

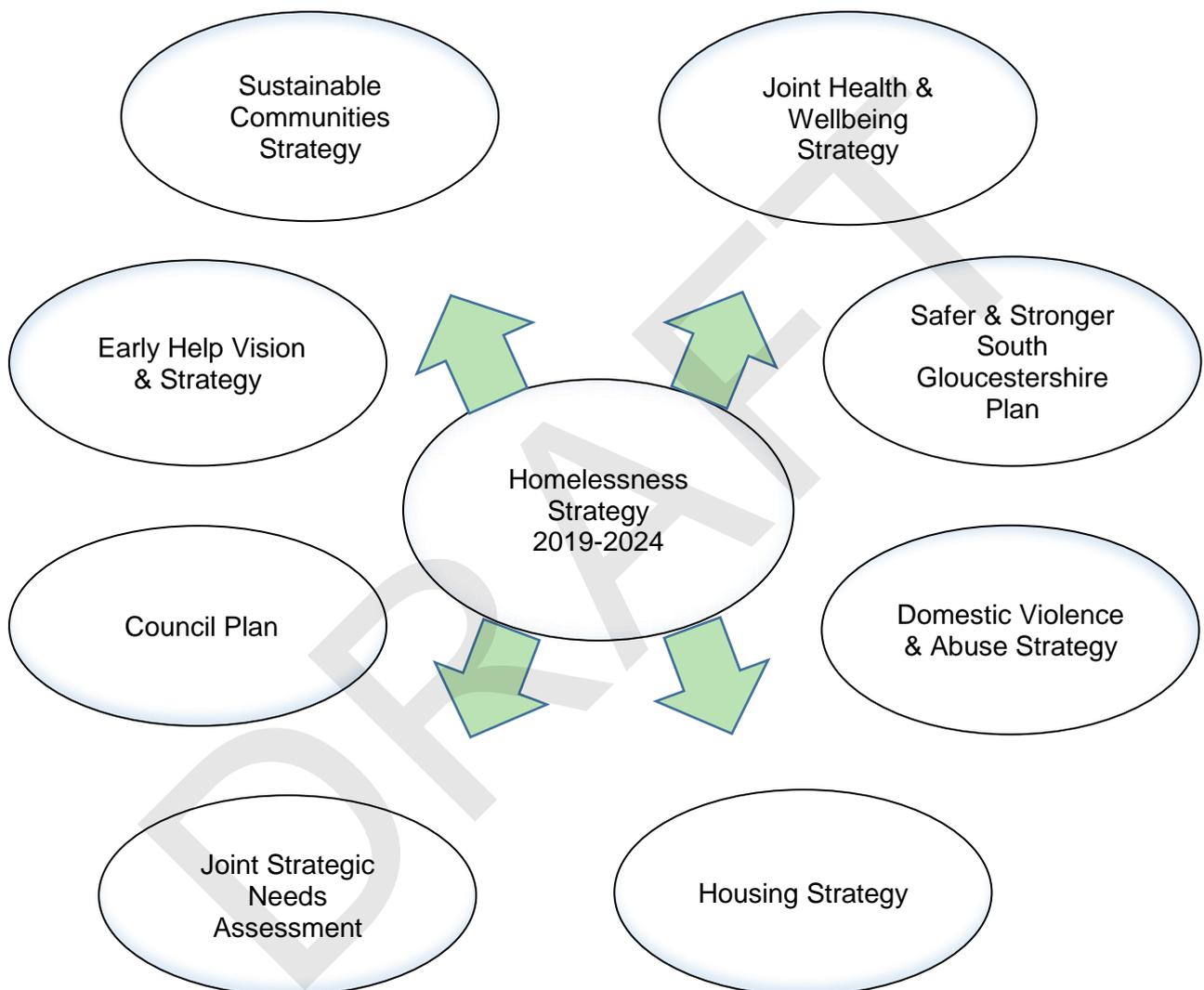
## **Scope**

The scope of this Homelessness Strategy recognises all types of homelessness needs:

- Those who don't have their own home and are considering their housing options,
- Those who are at risk of homelessness,
- Homeless families with children,
- Those who are homeless and have complex needs,
- Those who are roofless,
- Young people and care leavers who experience homelessness,
- Those who are moving on from homelessness into a settled home.

## Strategic Links

Homelessness is an issues that cuts across a number of other strategic priorities within the council and the infographic sets out many of these relationships. It recognises the important contribution that our partners and other agencies can make to address homelessness, and how tackling homelessness supports their own strategic aims.





## National Context

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017: Since the last strategy was adopted, the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and more recently, the statutory duty to refer, has seen significant changes in the legal framework that local authorities must follow when working with clients, who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness.

A national picture of the impact of the new Act is not yet available, but the outcome of similar legislation in Wales, introduced in 2015, has had a positive effect on the number of cases where homelessness was prevented<sup>1</sup>.

Homeless Acceptances: The introduction of this legislation in England follows a steady increase in annual homelessness acceptances since 2009/10. In 2016/17, 59,000 homelessness duties were accepted across England, a 48% increase from 2009/10.

Temporary Accommodation: Since 2010/11, homeless placements in temporary accommodation have also risen sharply by 61% up to 31 March 2017.

Reasons for Homelessness: The vast bulk of the recently recorded increase in statutory homelessness is attributable to the sharply rising numbers made homeless from the private rented sector. This now accounts for more than 30% of accepted cases.

Welfare Reform: Changes to welfare benefits including a reduction in the benefit cap imposed in November 2016 and the freezing of the Local Housing Allowance has impacted on the affordability of private rented accommodation. The number of Housing Benefit/Universal Credit claimants who are private tenants is now approximately five percent lower than when the Local Housing Allowance reforms began in 2011, despite the continuing strong growth of the private rented sector overall.

Rough Sleeping Data: Over the last eight years, there has also been an upward trend in officially estimated rough sleeper numbers. There has been a 169% increase in reported numbers between 2010 and 2017.

Homeless Prevention: Whilst there is clear evidence of increased pressure on homelessness services throughout the country, as shown in the increase in statutory homeless acceptances, there has also been an increase in the number of cases where homelessness was either prevented, or relieved with a 30% increase since 2009/2010. This shows the greater focus on earlier intervention evident across the country<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>Post-implementation evaluation of Part 2 of the Housing Act (Wales) 2014: Final Report: Welsh Government Social Research: 19.07.18

<sup>2</sup> The homelessness monitor: England 2018 - Crisis report (published April 2018)



## Local Context

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017: The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 means that more households now fall within the scope of homeless legislation. In Q1 & Q2 of 2018/19, 471 homeless applications were taken, which is almost twice the number taken during the whole of 2017/18 (258).

The introduction of the duty to refer in October 2018 should also result in an increase in the number of households seeking advice although it is too soon to make meaningful comparisons on the impact in comparison with previous years.

In order to meet the additional demands presented by the Act, the council has restructured and expanded the HomeChoice team, the council's housing advice and options service, so that it can deal with the increased number of customers approaching the service for assistance. The changes implemented have focused resources on front line preventative services, designed to engage with customers at an earlier stage to minimise the number of households who become homeless.

Reasons for homelessness: Loss of private sector accommodation continues to be the main cause of homelessness in South Gloucestershire followed by parental eviction & non-violent relationship breakdown.

Rough Sleeping: The number of rough sleepers identified in the annual rough sleeping estimate in November 2018 was 4. Whilst this figure remains low, especially in comparison with neighbouring Authorities in the West of England, the number of referrals received through Streetlink, the government funded body set up, so that members of the public can report rough sleepers, has shown an increase.

Private Rented Sector: The private rented sector in South Gloucestershire has continued to grow over the last five years. Accessing, or maintaining accommodation in the private rented sector remains the most likely solution for many households threatened with homelessness, however the demand for accommodation, especially affordable homes, remains high.

Social Housing: The demand for social housing remains high with nearly 4,000 households on the council's housing register. Whilst South Gloucestershire Council has delivered a strong pipeline of affordable homes in partnership with Registered Providers in the district, this has not met the overall demand for housing. In 2017/18, 856 properties were let of which 613 were general needs homes.

Welfare Reform: The issue of welfare reform is highlighted in the previous strategy and it continues to have a significant impact on households seeking/maintaining accommodation in the district. There are a number of issues of concern including the number of households claiming housing benefit/universal credit where there is a significant gap between the benefit entitlement and actual rent. We have yet to see the full impact of the Universal Credit rollout in South Gloucestershire, however this will also impact on the ability of many households to manage their finances effectively.

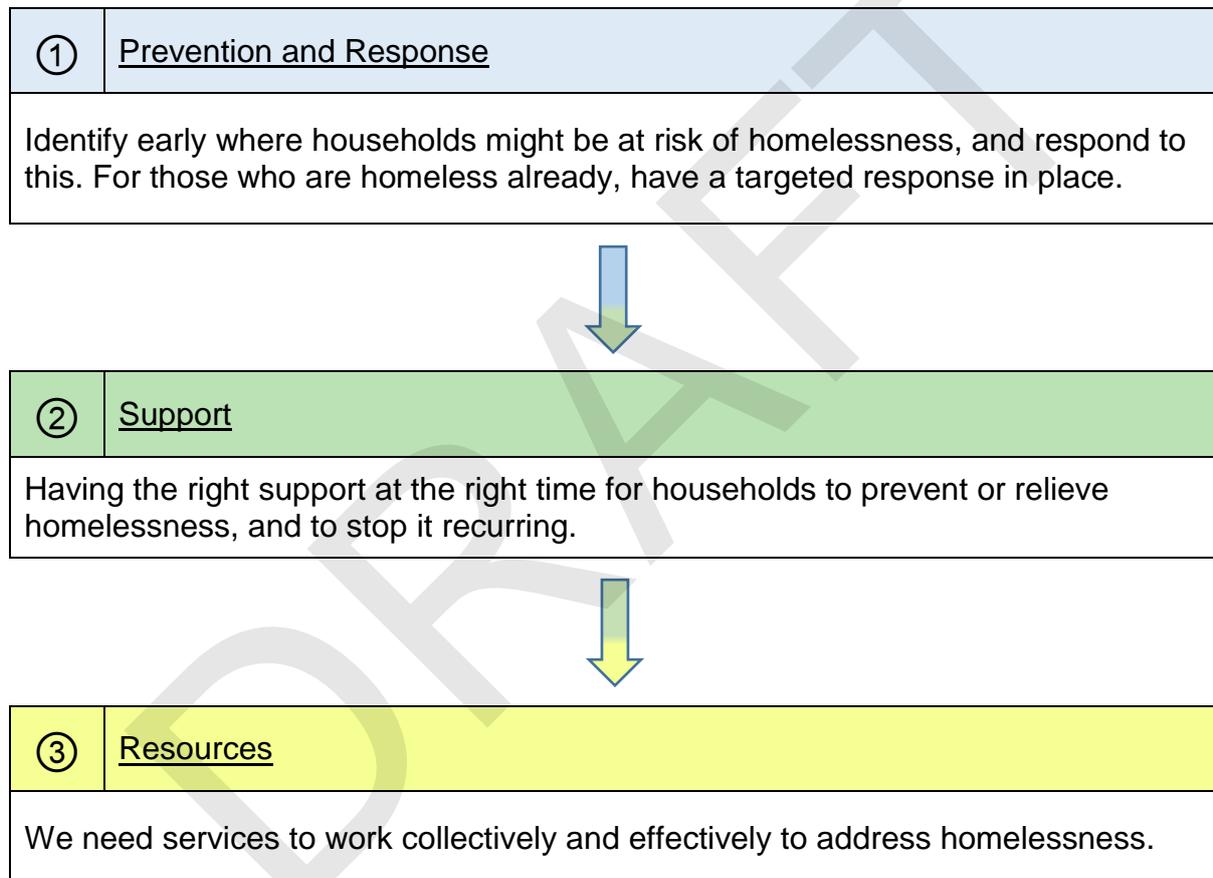
# Homelessness Strategy

## Vision

*‘To work with our partners to help everyone who is at risk of homelessness, or homeless, to maintain or find their home, and then provide them with the support to keep it’.*

## Main Priorities

The Homelessness Strategy has the following three main priorities,



These priorities are expanded upon here.



<p>① Prevention &amp; Response</p> <p>Identify early where households might be at risk of homelessness, and respond to this. For those who are homeless already, have a targeted response in place.</p>	<p>② Support</p> <p>Having the right support at the right time for households to prevent or relieve homelessness, and to stop it recurring.</p>	<p>③ Resources</p> <p>We need services to work collectively and effectively to address homelessness.</p>
<p>Ensure access to information &amp; advice that is easily accessible and is clear as to next steps into the appropriate services.</p>	<p>Understand the role of partner agencies, what they can contribute and how their involvement will benefit the customer.</p>	<p>Achieve a shared understanding of what can be achieved from working together, to the benefit of customers, working effectively and efficiently.</p>
<p>Engage with organisations not subject to the duty to refer in a prevention and response agenda, e.g. Registered Provider, commissioned services, and voluntary sector agencies,</p>	<p>All pathway plans to have the person at the centre of the response to their situation, with particular emphasis on entrenched issues.</p>	<p>Have a clear package of resources available to households affected by homelessness.</p>
<p>Ensure that personal circumstances and complex needs are not a barrier to accessing services and receiving an appropriate response.</p>	<p>Have in place a comprehensive tenancy training programme to gain the confidence and skills to live independently.</p>	<p>Bring forward innovative programmes offering new access to housing.</p>
<p>Being on top of what's happening locally and nationally that could give rise to homelessness</p>	<p>Give extra support to those who might need it to overcome complex issues.</p>	<p>Understand the current &amp; future demand to influence decisions around the commissioning of services.</p>

## **Implementation Plan**

An implementation plan of SMART actions will be developed to deliver the main Strategy aims. A sample of actions that could be included is set out here:

- Develop a Homelessness Charter that partners can sign up to commit to preventing and relieving homelessness,
- Develop a range of options for temporary accommodation and move-on,
- Explore the possibility of 'peer to peer' training and support, for example for young people,
- Map support and advice services in the district and meet with them to agree shared working practices,
- Establish a clear outcomes framework linked to service specifications, including prevention of homelessness indicators and targets,
- Address affordability issues and ensure partner awareness of assistance available for homeless households,
- Have an advice hub in place for landlords to advise of their obligations and the help available should they face difficulties.

## **Monitoring and Oversight**

The Council intends to create a Homelessness Forum. This will be responsible for leading on the successful delivery of the Homelessness Strategy Implementation Plan, and for developing and publishing progress reports.