

# **DRAFT:** Portsmouth Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023

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"Working together to prevent  
homelessness"

## **Executive Summary**

Welcome to Portsmouth City Council's draft Homelessness Strategy for 2018 - 2023.

This strategy maintains the commitment to prevent homelessness in the city. With new duties placed on local authorities by the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017), the city council aims to work closely with its partners to be able to prevent homelessness whenever possible. This approach aligns with the city council's corporate priority, which outlines the desire to:

"Make Portsmouth a city that works together, enabling communities to thrive and people to live healthy, safe and independent lives"

In line with the corporate vision, and in response to the problems of rough sleeping, the city council has developed a model ('Accommodation First, Not Accommodation Only') and a strategy (the Street Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Partnership Strategy 2018-2020) that informs the approach to supporting anyone facing homelessness in the city. This strategy recognises that people often need more than just a place to live to be able to live healthy, safe and independent lives.

It is vital to work together to tackle the causes and effects of homelessness. This model captures the commitment evident across the city already to provide help and support through the various agencies and community support available. The city council want to build on this to enhance, support and co-ordinate the city to work together to prevent homelessness.

To achieve this, five key aims of the strategy have been identified:-

1. Prevent Homelessness
2. Reduce rough sleeping
3. Relieve homelessness
4. Sustain tenancies
5. Direct the strategy

The city council is committed to working together to prevent and relieve homelessness in Portsmouth wherever possible.

## **Consultation**

Consultation on this strategy will take place between 30<sup>th</sup> January- and 30<sup>th</sup> April 2019. The council would like to hear from anyone who has an interest in the issues surrounding homelessness in the city, either in response to this draft strategy, or with other constructive information which could be used to form the final strategy and action plan.

The main three points we would like to hear from consultees on is as follows:

1. Are the five strategic aims of the strategy, set out in Part Two of this document, correct and fit for purpose? If not, why not and what should they be?
2. Are the actions in the draft action plan correct? What further actions should be considered and why?
3. What oversight and monitoring structures should be in place to ensure that this strategy is delivered? We are interested to hear from organisations who believe that they have a role to play in supporting this function

Responses, or questions of clarification, can be made in the following ways:

Email ([housing.strategy@portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:housing.strategy@portsmouthcc.gov.uk)) or

Post Consultation on Homelessness Strategy  
Housing Options (Floor 1)  
Portsmouth City Council  
Civic Offices  
Guildhall Square  
Portsmouth  
PO1 2AL

Please state if your response is on behalf of an organisation (and if so which), or in a personal capacity.

## 1. **Overview**

- 1.1. Section 1(4) of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires housing authorities to publish a homelessness strategy. This strategy develops on from the previous homelessness strategy and its focus on preventing homelessness in Portsmouth. It defines a clear model of intervention and support: 'Accommodation First, not Accommodation Only' (see p.8, Fig. 1). This model of approach promotes the need to fully understand the individual circumstances which cause homelessness and offer a tailored response to support people to resolve their housing need, and sustain accommodation. The fundamental premise of the model is to ensure that life events do not result in having nowhere to live.
- 1.2. The strategy demonstrates the city council's understanding of, and approach to, responding to the complexity of homelessness, recognising both the causes, and potential impacts, of its consequences on individuals and their families.
- 1.3. Across England, homelessness has significantly increased over the last decade (ref: National Audit Office). Between 2009 and 2017 local authorities experienced a 48% increase in statutory homelessness, a 60% increase in the provision of temporary accommodation and 169% increase in people sleeping rough (ref: The Homelessness Monitor: England 2018) across its towns and cities.
- 1.4. Events that could lead to homelessness, such as a relationship breakdown or a tenancy coming to an end, are everyday life experiences that anyone could face. However, not everyone has the necessary resources or social support networks available to them to resolve their situation and avoid homelessness. Individuals who do not have the means to immediately respond to these events or who have additional vulnerabilities and needs that leave them overwhelmed by the experience of facing or being homeless, find it much more difficult to resolve their own situation.
- 1.5. Prevention continues to be the driving force of the city council's strategy to tackle homelessness, recognising the financial impact of dealing with the consequences (Ref: DCLG report 2012) of homelessness and also in prevention's ability to create positive outcomes for those affected by homelessness.
- 1.6. The focus on prevention has been further supported by the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017), which was implemented in April 2018. The Act asserts the role and responsibility of local authorities to prevent and provide early intervention for anyone facing homelessness. This includes a

'Duty to Refer' (ref: HRA 2017) requirement for many of the statutory partner agencies (for example probation, health, social care) to ensure that help and support can be offered to anyone facing homelessness at the earliest opportunity, which came into force in October 2018.

- 1.7. The success of this strategy is not without its challenges, particularly in ensuring there is sufficient availability of suitable and affordable accommodation. Provision of and access to accommodation remains a significant strategic component to the city council's ability to achieve its aim of preventing homelessness.

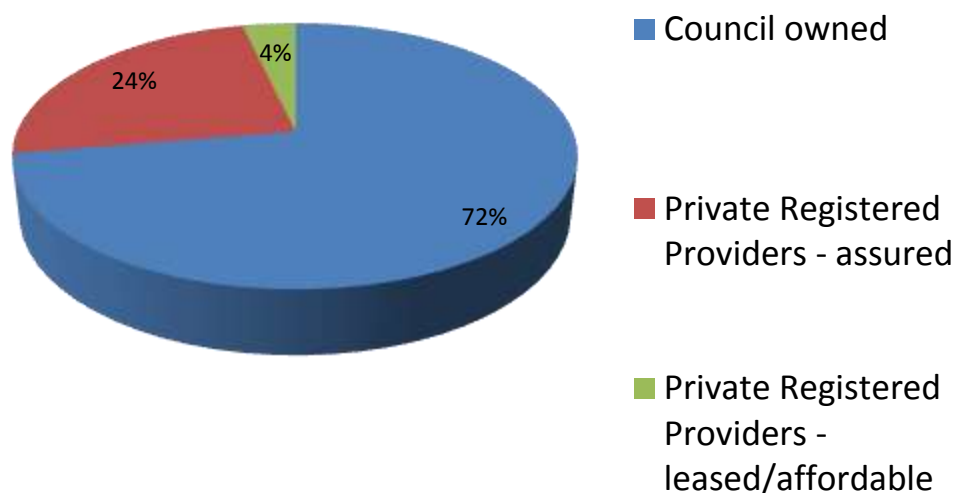
# PART ONE

## 2. Portsmouth: HOMELESSNESS IN CONTEXT- The Local Picture

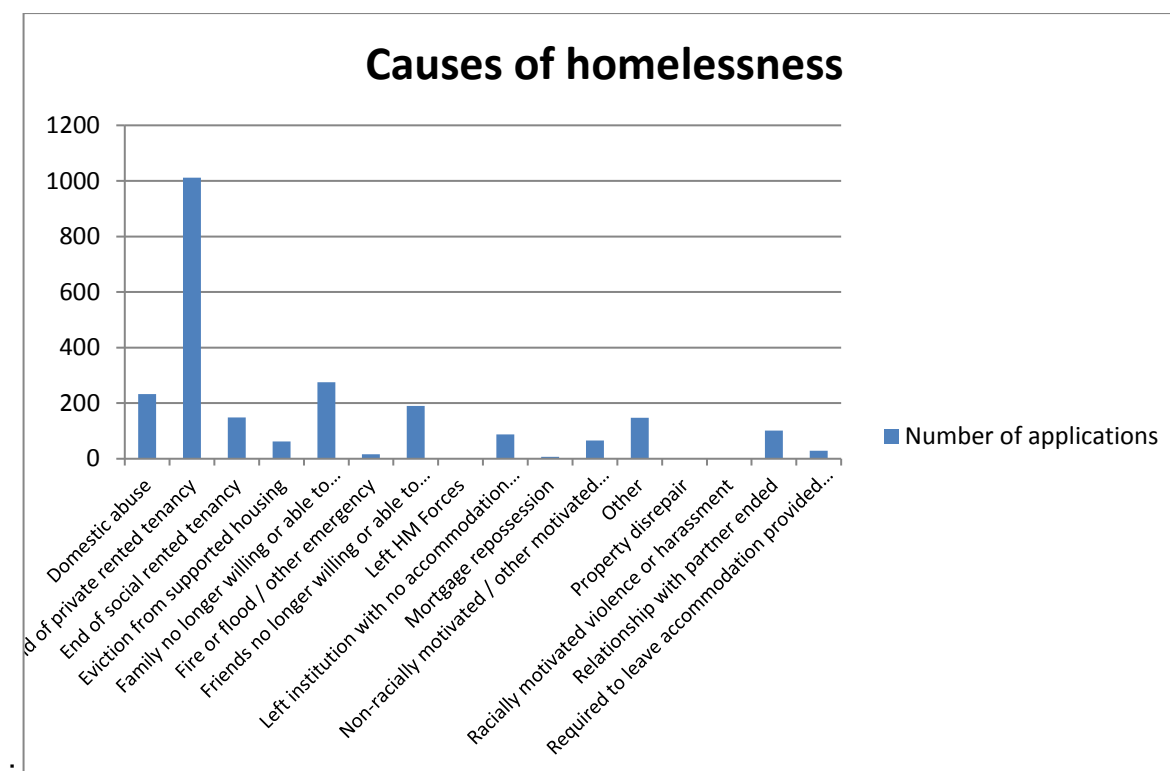
2.1. Between April 2016 and March 2018, the increase in the number of people approaching the city council's Housing Options team for help has highlighted the increased challenges faced by residents to meet or respond to changes in their housing circumstances.

2.2. The city council's housing register received 2,384 social housing vacancies to let between April 2016 and March 2018. It has also seen a rise in the number of people applying for social housing over the last two years. In August 2016, 1677 people were waiting for an offer of a home. At the time of writing this strategy, 2,374 applications are waiting, equating to a 41% increase in demand for social housing.

**Portsmouth Housing Register: Social Housing Vacancies**



2.3. Between April 2016 and March 2018 Portsmouth took 2382 homeless applications from people threatened with, or who were, homeless. For almost half of those applications, a privately rented assured shorthold tenancy coming to an end was the reason that homelessness was being faced.



2.4. Of these:

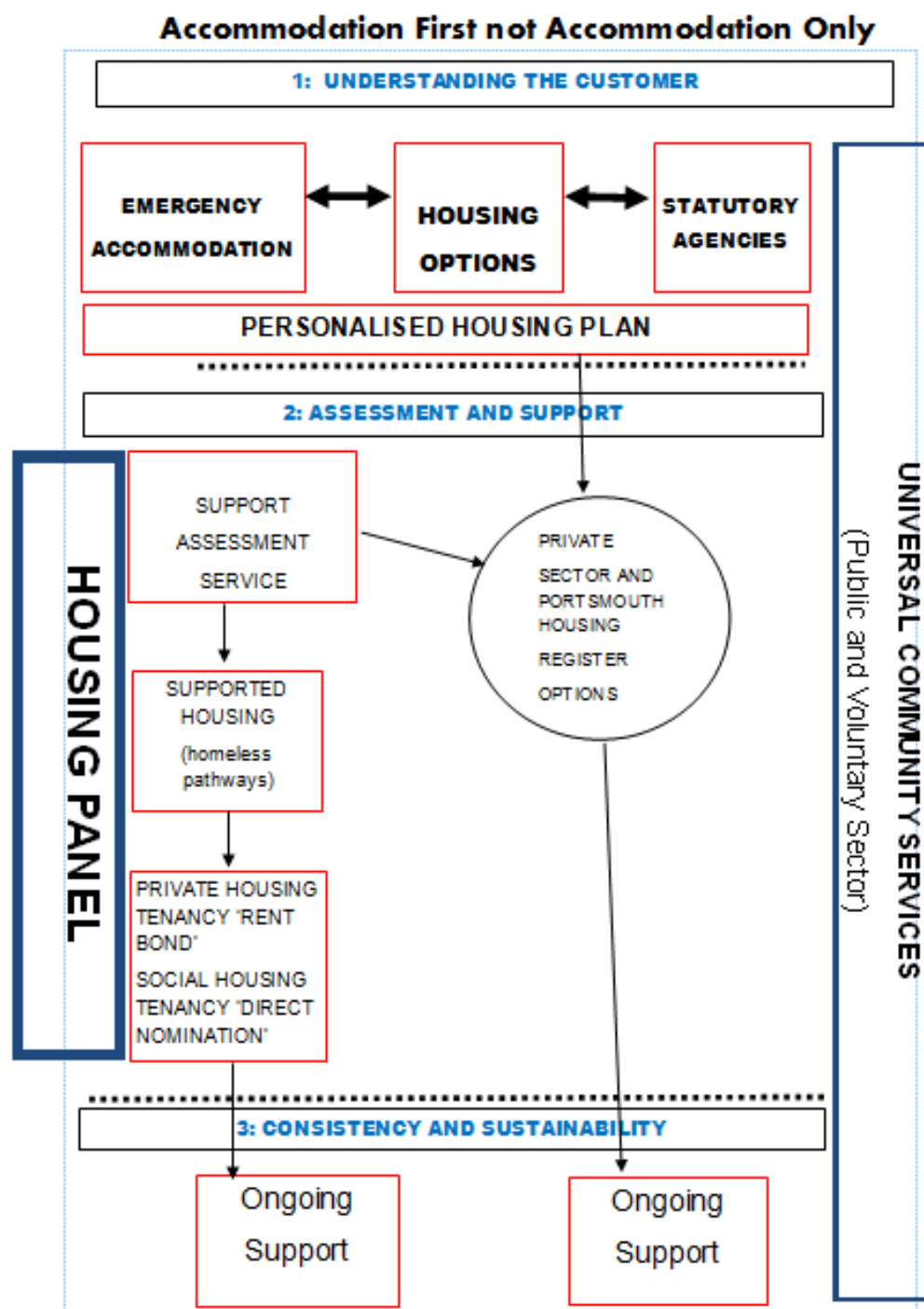
- **256** homeless situations were prevented with advice, help and support that enabled them to stay in their existing home, or to secure somewhere else to live
- **964** homeless households were accepted and resulted in the provision of long term, settled accommodation
- **683** were provided with emergency accommodation during the application assessment process
- **76** homeless households were provided with self-contained temporary accommodation while long term, settled accommodation was found.
- The annual national Rough Sleeping Count identified **37** individuals sleeping on the city's streets in **2016**, increasing to **42** individuals in **2017**.

2.5. In April 2017 a Homelessness Working Group was established in Portsmouth to understand the increase in the numbers of people becoming homeless. This coincided with a period where Portsmouth was experiencing a marked increase in the number of people sleeping rough on its streets. In response

the Group undertook a review of homelessness, with a particular focus on the needs of single adults.

- 2.6. The review incorporated the 'Complex Needs' work-stream, led on by the Safer Portsmouth Partnership, and the Supported Housing Review developed by Housing Options. The Complex Needs and Supported Housing Review work informed the Group's review and identified the need to develop a Street Homeless and Rough Sleepers Partnership Strategy which was endorsed by the city council in September 2018 and is currently in the process of consultation. This strategy seeks to develop a co-ordinated response across the city, recognising the need for a collaborative approach across statutory and non-statutory services in both understanding the needs of and appropriate response to help prevent rough sleeping in Portsmouth.
- 2.7. The Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (MHCLG) launched its national Rough Sleeping Strategy in August 2018 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/733421/Rough-Sleeping-Strategy\\_WEB.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733421/Rough-Sleeping-Strategy_WEB.pdf) with a commitment to halve the number of people sleeping rough by 2022 and eliminate it by 2027.
- 2.8. The city council was one of 83 local authorities to be awarded additional funding as part of the national strategy's Rough Sleeping Initiative, to support local plans to reduce rough sleeping. The funds will expand the support on offer to people at risk of or who are sleeping rough in line with the Accommodation First not Accommodation Only model approach to homelessness.
- 2.9. The Street Homeless and Rough Sleepers Partnership Strategy 2018-2020 also outlines the working model 'Accommodation First not Accommodation Only'. This model (Fig. 1) has been further developed to underpin the prevention focus of this strategy, ensuring that a cohesive offer of help is available for anyone facing homelessness.
- 2.10. Additional challenges come in the form of the supply and affordability of accommodation for those on welfare benefits or on low incomes. Homelessness as a result of eviction due to rent arrears is often due to the affordability of the accommodation.





**Fig 1** 'Accommodation First not Accommodation Only' schematic

### 3. Portsmouth's Housing Market

- 3.1. Portsmouth is the most densely populated city outside of inner London, with 205,100 residents. Of the 87,000 households in the city, a fifth live in social rented housing and there is a higher than average amount of terraced housing. It also has a University which caters for 23,000 students.
- 3.2. Historically there were approximately 2,000 empty properties in Portsmouth. Once the circumstances surrounding an empty property have been explored, this identifies 180 properties where the city council has any legislative powers to take action and bring those properties back into the housing market (purchase or rent). Legislative rules and regulations restrict the number of empty property situations where the local authority can take enforcement action to address. The city council currently have an Empty Properties Strategy which is out of date and is being reviewed during the first half of 2019. This strategy will look to explore ways to enhance the authority's advice and support offer to owners of empty homes to encourage them to take steps to make the property available for occupation. This could be through sale to get it back into use through the home ownership side of the market, the private rental market or through leasing the property to the council.
- 3.3. Working in collaboration with its partners, the city council takes a 'Portsmouth First' approach to property investments, as outlined in the city's corporate priorities. Attention is also being given to making sure there are more good quality homes that local people can afford, including council homes.
- 3.4. The city council also seeks to utilise all opportunities to develop further accommodation to increase the availability of housing to meet the needs of the city.

#### 4. Household income and Poverty

4.1. The city includes some of the most deprived areas in England. Research by Bramley and Fitzpatrick\* has found that: *"Poverty, particularly in childhood, is by far the most powerful predictor of homelessness in early adulthood. Health and support needs, such as serious drug use, also contribute to the risks, but their statistical explanatory power is less than that of poverty"*. 38(1).

Postal area	Number claiming HB	Of which, how many...		
		are in employment	have a rental liability greater than their HB entitlement	have been awarded DHP to help meet their rental liability
PO1	4195	868	1726	118
PO2	3407	982	1924	128
PO3	985	331	562	32
PO4	2216	648	1377	70
PO5	3088	621	1331	85
PO6	2609	661	1307	87
PO7	268	19	85	3
PO8	428	63	114	5
PO9	2216	340	856	69
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>19412</b>	<b>4533</b>	<b>9282</b>	<b>597</b>

4.2. The Private Rented Sector is now larger than social housing provision. Affordability of housing has therefore become a significant feature of both the options available and causes of homelessness in Portsmouth, with rent increasing while incomes are at risk from welfare reform. The city council's Tackling Poverty Strategy recognises the significance of financial deprivation for many households across the city. The impact of welfare reforms for Portsmouth residents has significant consequences for low income households in terms of their ability to meet essential costs relating to housing, energy and food (Bill Sargent Trust; 2013). This reinforces a key consideration for this strategy being the availability of affordable private rented sector accommodation, and to work with landlords to address the shortfall between Local Housing Allowance entitlement and rental charge.

4.3. The three priorities of Portsmouth's Tackling Poverty Strategy (2015-2020) that closely align with the focus of this strategy are:

- Priority Three - Helping residents to be financially resilient
- Priority Four - Helping people move out of immediate crisis, but also helping them to solve their problems longer term.
- Priority Five - Improving residents' lives by recognising the links between poverty and health inequalities.

- 4.4. Housing plays a significant part in the health and wellbeing of our residents. It remains vital that the strategy to prevent homelessness is aligned with the Health and Wellbeing strategy for the city to help residents resolve health challenges, ensuring the provision of good quality accommodation that promotes and supports wellbeing.
- 4.5. Portsmouth's Health and Wellbeing Strategy highlights the feature of homelessness alongside a multitude of circumstances for some of the most vulnerable members of our community. Learning from the Complex Needs work concludes that severe and multiple deprivation (SMD) means homelessness co-exists alongside adverse childhood experiences, substance use and mental health needs for a number of people, which makes resolving their housing needs more challenging.

## **5. PORTSMOUTH: HOMELESSNESS ADVICE AND SUPPORT SERVICES**

- 5.1. Portsmouth's Housing Options service is the central point for anyone seeking help and advice in respect of a housing issue/ need. The Local Authority's statutory responsibility to assess the needs of residents who are experiencing homelessness has been further extended, following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) (2017). This offers the opportunity to look at options to prevent and relieve homeless situations at the earliest opportunity, whilst retaining the long standing statutory duty, where prevention or relief options are not achievable, to reach a decision about any other statutory duties the Local Authority may owe a homeless applicant.
- 5.2. The Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) has extended the Local Authority's responsibilities to prevent people becoming homeless. The Act amended Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 to include duties for the prevention and relief of homelessness which emphasises the duty to 'help to secure' accommodation for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. This does not mean that the Local Authority has a duty to directly find and secure accommodation but involves the Local Authority working with people to agree reasonable steps that will be jointly taken to find and secure suitable accommodation.
- 5.3. Key to the success of this preventative focus is early identification and early help. The Homeless Reduction Act outlines a 'Duty to Refer' requirement for public authorities, which includes many of the partner agencies including hospitals, prisons social care and the Job Centre. Portsmouth has joined a Hampshire wide protocol, recognising the cross boundary use of many of these services and institutions to ensure we are working closely with our partner agencies and neighbouring local authorities to identify and respond to information about a Portsmouth residents housing need at the earliest opportunity.
- 5.4. The city's Private Registered Providers (PRP) are embracing a 'Commitment to Refer', to mirror the Duty to Refer requirement of specified public authorities. They have responded to this by developing Prevention Teams to work closely with the local authority as they seek to support their tenants to avoid eviction action becoming necessary.
- 5.5. Portsmouth Housing Options has made additional funding available to enable PHPs to work flexibly and creatively with individual circumstances to prevent homelessness.
- 5.6. To enhance its early help offer, particularly to families and young people, the city council's Housing Options service has started working collaboratively

with the city council's Children's Social Care service to identify, at the earliest opportunity, families and 16/17 year olds who need some additional help beyond accommodation needs. Arrangements are in place to refer households with children to Early Help services where preventing homelessness is possible with specific identified support.

5.7. The Portsmouth Staying Close Project has been set up by Children's Social Care, with funding support from the Department for Education. The project has been developed from research which shows that young people who have been in care experience far poorer life outcomes than their peers. The purpose of the project is to enhance the development of life skills for young people, better preparing them as they progress on to living independently of support and sustaining accommodation.

5.8. The council are also exploring opportunities to prevent homelessness as a result of inpatient admission or any resulting change in health circumstances affecting suitability of housing.

5.9. The Homelessness Reduction Act's duty to refer and PRP's commitment to refer will further enhance our Housing Options service's in responding proactively to situations.

5.10. The city council commissions a service, Advice Portsmouth, for its residents to obtain advice and support, particularly with regards to financial difficulties. This offers the opportunity to prevent these difficulties escalating and impacting on housing circumstances. Alongside this commissioned service, there are a number of voluntary agencies, for example Citizens Advice Portsmouth, who work proactively in offering advice, guidance and support to people facing difficult circumstances that could result in homelessness.

- Prison release. Portsmouth has developed and maintains a good working relationship with probation and CRC (Community Rehabilitation Company) services, particularly in working together to support individuals who have served long custodial sentences or are considered high risk offenders. However, there are challenges where prison release planning relates more to lower risk individuals and those on shorter sentences.
- Care leavers. To prevent young people leaving the Local Authority's care and finding themselves with nowhere to live, the Staying Close Project will provide accommodation to support young people through the transitional period as they leaving care plan progresses.
- Veteran Outreach Support. There is a Veterans Outreach Support (VOS) provision based in Portsmouth, offering a monthly drop in for

people to access advice on a variety of issues, including health, finances and employment. Working closely with this service provides the opportunity for the Local Authority to identify people who require support to prevent homeless situations from arising or explore options to relieve homelessness.

5.11. Portsmouth has a well-established supported housing provision which forms three pathways,

- families,
- young people and
- adults

5.12. A review of the adult pathway highlighted the need to develop a different approach to understanding individual circumstances and providing support to promote the long term sustainability of accommodation and break the cycle of repeat homelessness.

5.13. Voluntary Sector services in the city have established Circles of Support. This offer of support is provided through outreach or via six main foodbanks in the city, and is available to anyone in crisis and facing hardship in relation to circumstances including debt and homelessness.

5.14. Additional services for single people at risk of or who are sleeping rough are available through our Homeless Day Service, which is commissioned by the local authority as an extension of the Housing Options service with a specific focus on providing advice and support to people with additional/complex needs associated with rough sleeping. This service includes outreach work for individuals who find accessing services difficult. The day service is currently supported with the provision of a Homeless Night Service, which offers 45 overnight bed spaces.

5.15. Portsmouth City Council is a signatory to the Armed Forces Covenant; a promise to people who serve or have serviced in the British military that they will not be disadvantaged by their service. In 2016, the Solent Armed Forces Partnership Board (SAFPB) was formed to oversee local delivery to meet needs. In respect of the issue of homelessness, whilst there has been a reduction in the number of street homeless ex-service personnel, the SAFPB highlights that some veterans struggle to secure suitable, affordable housing after service.

5.16. The existing MOD housing offer is scheduled to transform to the Future Accommodation Model (FAM), a model that will offer a broader range of housing opportunities to align the provision with that of the general population

in terms of finding accommodation and meeting housing related costs. It is not yet clear what this change in approach could impact on local housing demand or support to prevent homelessness.

- 5.17. The Portsmouth Housing Register is an option available to anyone who is eligible to make an application and has a housing need, and where it is assessed as a reasonable option to help someone find and secure a home and access to this is outlined in the city council housing Allocations Policy. However, Portsmouth experiences demand that is greater than the supply of social housing and is therefore often a barrier to this being a realistic option to relieve homelessness.
- 5.18. Portsmouth City Council works alongside the private rented sector to explore housing opportunities to prevent and relieve homelessness. To develop opportunities to enhance this relationship, Portsmouth has developed 'Rent it Right', a website for landlords and tenants providing information and advice, and the facility for accredited landlords to advertise their properties. We are in the process of developing a variety of offers for private sector landlords to help remove the current barriers for some homeless households in accessing the private sector. This may include a letting agency service, a full property management service, or a rental top-up arrangement for some households on benefits. Rent it Right will be the platform for working in partnership with private sector landlords and for advertising landlord offers.
- 5.19. As outlined already in the Accommodation First not Accommodation Only model approach, support to sustain accommodation forms a key element to this approach to prevent homelessness from re-occurring, which historically has been a regular pattern of their housing cycle. Portsmouth City Council has well established supported housing pathways in the city for young people, adults and families. The supported housing review of the contract and commissioning of existing supported housing provision for adults has led to a different approach to the offer of support within this context.
- 5.20. Using the Rough Sleeping Initiative funding, 'floating support' provision has been enhanced, to reflect the Accommodation First not Accommodation Only ethos for adults who secure accommodation in the private rented sector and need additional support to sustain the tenancy.
- 5.21. Portsmouth City Council's Housing Management teams have undergone a process of change over the last decade, evolving the approach to social housing tenancy management to understand what tenants need to help them sustain their tenancy.



## **6. Current context of homelessness in Portsmouth: A summary**

- 6.1. Rough sleeping, the provision of emergency accommodation and limited availability of permanent housing are significant issues for the city, highlighting the need to enhance our prevention work as well as making more homes available.
- 6.2. A settled secure home is the basis from which other support can be achieved and maintained. Alignment with the Tackling Poverty and Health and Wellbeing strategies facilitates the opportunity for residents to have a stable housing situation from which to improve their wellbeing and financial resilience.
- 6.3. It is from gaining a full understanding of the context of homelessness in Portsmouth that the following strategic aims and priorities have been formed.

## PART TWO

### Strategic Aims:

- |                                 |                    |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. <b>Prevent</b> Homelessness  | - DEMAND           |
| 2. <b>Reduce</b> Rough Sleeping | - DEMAND           |
| 3. <b>Relieve</b> Homelessness  | - AVAILABILITY     |
| 4. <b>Sustain</b> Tenancies     | - SUSTAINABILITY   |
| 5. <b>Direct</b> the strategy   | - REVIEW/CHALLENGE |

### **Priority One - Prevent homelessness (DEMAND)**

Developing meaningful personalised housing plans with people, working flexibly and creatively with individual circumstances.

Working collaboratively with our partners in being able to identify and be responsive to housing need at the earliest opportunity.

Exploring initiatives that can provide responsive joined up arrangements where people are leaving environments such as the armed forces, hospital, prison or care.

### **Priority Two - Reduce Rough Sleeping (Demand)**

Working together as a city to take an 'Accommodation First Not Accommodation Only' approach to support and safeguard anyone sleeping or at risk of sleeping on the streets of Portsmouth.

### **Priority Three - Relieve homelessness (Availability)**

Developing meaningful personalised housing plans with people that work flexibly and creatively with individual circumstances to relieve homelessness.

Ensuring that social housing accommodation is utilised as effectively and equitably as possible.

Building on 'Rent It Right' and its collaborative approach between the Local Authority and Private Landlords to develop opportunities to provide good quality, affordable accommodation across the city.

Working with the regeneration and planning teams to keep up to date on the changing picture of housing need in the city and make sure there are good quality homes that local people can afford.

**Priority Four - Sustain tenancies (Sustainability)**

Putting our learning into practice to inform how we commission and contract support provision to help people sustain accommodation.

Developing collaborative/multi agency working relationships that help people build resilience.

Extending the reach of the approach of social housing tenancy management to the private rented sector; understanding what help tenants need to sustain their tenancy.

**Priority Five - Direct the strategy (Review/Challenge)**

Offering dynamic direction to this strategy through the co-ordination of a collaborative group to support and challenge the development of the strategic priorities.

Responding to changing needs and issues by reviewing the priorities of the strategy as required.

## PART THREE

### Draft Action plan to be developed to progress the priorities. To include:

This document proposes a number of actions that currently are, or could in the future, support the delivery of a successful strategy. We are keen to hear from consultees about what actions they believe should be added or changed and how partner organisations could support in the delivery on those.

Proposed Action	Priority One	Priority Two	Priority Three	Priority Four	Priority Five
1. Reduce the use of emergency accommodation through the increased provision of alternative temporary housing options			✓		
2. Develop our working relationship with partner agencies in gaining a full understanding of individual circumstances to inform and develop practical and effective Personalised Housing Plans (PHPs) to prevent or relieve homelessness.	✓				✓
3. Work with advice services to make sure more residents at risk of homelessness are identified at an early stage, when support could prevent homelessness.	✓	✓			
4. Work more closely with Welfare Benefit team to be able to work proactively in the prevention of homelessness situations arising. For example, data held by Housing Benefit will identify opportunities to reach out to households at risk of homelessness and ensure that relevant advice, help and support is offered.	✓				
5. Identify and develop collaborative working opportunities with statutory services. For example: Staying Close Project. Housing and Children's Social Care are developing this project, working together to identify suitable, affordable and settled housing options for young people leaving care.				✓	

6. Rent It Right - Working with private landlords registered with this scheme, we can better understand the issues they face and explore how additional advice, support or guidance could increase the availability of affordable privately rented accommodation			✓	✓	
7. Explore ways to increase funding to increase the availability of homes for people in the Private Rented Sector. This is particularly relevant to those families and single people who are identified as a low income household, or subject to benefit caps due to household size or age			✓		
8. Use our learning from the review of supported housing services for single homeless people to inform the contract and commissioning process for young people and families' supported housing services.				✓	✓
9. Develop working relationships between different stakeholder groups, including policies and procedures, to work together to help prevent homelessness or sustain accommodation					✓
10. Explore the potential to extend the Local Authority housing tenancy management approach to offer similar support in the private rented sector. For example, the first time a tenant misses a rent payment ('Welcome Visits').	✓				
11. Increase the signposting of the rent deposit schemes available to those who become homeless, and look to expand the council's own scheme	✓		✓		
12. Greater use of guarantors to help homeless people access the private rental sector	✓		✓		
13. Increase information for landlords and tenants on good tenancy management with the aim of reducing the number of evictions.	✓			✓	