



**Denbighshire County Council**

**Homelessness Strategy  
2017-2021**

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## Foreword

This is Denbighshire County Council's first Homelessness Strategy following the implementation of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

The reasons for being homeless or threatened with homelessness are many and varied and often extremely complex. The expertise and specialist knowledge of a range of organisations, both statutory, non-statutory, and voluntary, is often of vital importance in ensuring that the right advice and support is given at the right time.

Factors such as poverty, poor physical and mental health, substance misuse and addiction, domestic abuse, chaotic lifestyles and offending history are often far too common in the lives of people threatened with homelessness. These issues cannot be addressed effectively by any single agency working on its own. The principle applies not only to how we help individuals but also to how we plan and develop our services.

Working closely together we can make a really positive difference across Denbighshire to homelessness and its impact not only upon those directly affected, but also to our communities and neighbourhoods.

This Strategy reflects our strong commitment to early intervention and prevention, by continuing to invest in and improve the effectiveness and response of front line homelessness services, and through working with partners to ensure that homelessness is prevented as early as possible whenever possible.

We seek to enable people to make their own informed choices for housing they can afford and sustain. Our approach is to develop person-centered solutions, minimising the impact of homelessness on people's lives, whilst developing local solutions to create opportunities to enable people to help themselves – with support when and where needed.

### Our vision is simple – To End Homelessness in Denbighshire

This Strategy provides the platform for making this vision a reality.



**Councillor Bobby Feeley**  
Lead Member for Well-being and Independence

## Introduction

Preventing homelessness is a key priority for Denbighshire County Council and its partners.

The economic and social cost of homelessness can be significant. At a personal level, homelessness can have a profound effect on health, education and employment prospects. At a social level, homelessness can impact on social cohesion and economic participation, affecting the community as a whole.

The implementation of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 signaled both a legislative and cultural shift in the Council's response to homelessness. Denbighshire County Council now places a high priority on tackling and responding to homelessness. Every case is treated as potentially preventable, with a focus on delivering individually tailored solutions with citizens.

This is Denbighshire's first Homelessness Strategy following the implementation of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. (Denbighshire's strategies for homelessness have previously been captured within the broader Housing Strategy.)

This strategy for 2017-21 will build on the successes achieved to date by the Council's Housing Solutions and Supporting People teams (now aligned as the Denbighshire Homelessness Prevention Team) and seeks to further develop and enhance existing services and initiatives.

This strategy has been developed in consultation with citizens and partner agencies. We recognise that homelessness cannot be tackled by the Local Authority working in isolation, rather it is dependent upon effective joint working between the Local Authority and all organisations who are working to prevent and respond to homelessness.

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 requires every local authority to carry out a review of homelessness in their area, and to develop a Homelessness Strategy based on the review findings. Under the Act, the Strategy must seek to achieve the following objectives in the local authority area:

- a) **The prevention of homelessness**
- b) **Suitable accommodation is and will be available for people who are or may become homeless**
- c) **Satisfactory support is available for people who are or may become homeless**

This Strategy has been developed in response to the findings of the Homelessness Review 2016, which provides a comprehensive understanding of homelessness across Denbighshire. The Review identified issues and gaps in service provision, which this strategy will seek to address.

Partnership working is fundamental to this Homelessness Strategy. Many people have multiple needs that extend beyond the basic need for a home. It is not possible for Denbighshire County Council to meet those needs in isolation. It is therefore essential to work in partnership in order to prevent homelessness and offer sustainable housing solutions.

This strategy should be seen as a multi-agency document. We have worked closely with our partners through the Preventing Homelessness Steering Group to produce this strategy. It is intended that the strategy be inclusive in its approach and partner agencies continue to work closely with the council to assist in its delivery.

The strategy will cover the period April 2017 to March 2021. Denbighshire's Homelessness Forum will play a key role in the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy's action plan.

## Our Vision

**Denbighshire's vision is simple: We aim to end homelessness.**

We will do this through a multi-agency approach to homeless prevention ensuring:

- Early intervention
- Holistic assessments and planning
- Access to safe and suitable accommodation
- Joint working & collaboration
- Support
- Tolerance
- Resilience & empowerment
- Follow up support where and when needed
- A focus on Tackling Poverty
- Support to move into employment and education

**Working in partnership is absolutely fundamental to achieving this vision.**

## Our objectives:

- To effectively prevent homelessness by offering good realistic advice and support together with practical help and individually tailored solutions.
- To understand and tackle the root causes of homelessness at a local level.
- Where people do become homeless, to help them to find and sustain suitable homes as soon as possible.
- To involve people citizens in planning services to meet their individual needs.
- To improve how we work together so services are easier to use and make the best use of available resources.
- To ensure our responses to homelessness promote citizen choice, equality of opportunity, reduce social exclusion and contribute to community cohesion.
- The delivery of high quality front line services, whilst making the best use of resources.

Our approach is to develop person-centered solutions, minimising the impact of homelessness on people's lives, whilst developing local solutions to create opportunities to enable people to help themselves and develop resilience – with support when and where needed.

### **Over the lifetime of this Strategy we aim to:**

- Reduce the number of households residing in temporary accommodation by 50%.
- Seek to end the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for all homeless households except as emergency accommodation to prevent rough sleeping.
- Ensure that no household has to sleep rough.
- Ensure that homelessness is prevented wherever possible through the delivery of bespoke personal housing plans and access to affordable and sustainable accommodation.
- Reduce youth homelessness and ensure that no 16/17 year olds are placed in B&B.
- Increase the provision and range of accommodation options available to single homeless people.

## Building upon Successes

While we still have a way to go to achieve our aims, since the introduction of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 Denbighshire County Council and its partners have made a number of significant achievements in relation to homelessness and its prevention, including:

- Establishment of a multi-agency Homelessness Prevention Steering Group.
- Launch of Denbighshire's Homelessness Forum.
- Restructuring of the Housing Solutions team in response to the requirements of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.
- Introduction of personal housing plans.
- Alignment of the Housing Solutions and Supporting People teams under one Team Manager, forming the Homelessness Prevention Team, resulting in effective collaborative working.
- Investment in additional posts within the Homelessness Prevention Team to focus on homelessness prevention
- Development of a triage service through the Wallich GIFT service
- Development of an effective private landlord offer, increasing the provision of affordable accommodation available to citizens.
- Relief of homelessness by assisting households to access accommodation in the private rented sector.
- Homelessness Prevention protocols introduced and processes developed to support the Act.
- Establishing the Renting Ready scheme.
- Introduction of effective Severe Weather Emergency Protocol.
- Development of a direct access emergency bed service (Ty Golau)
- Establishment of an outreach service.
- Development of a Young Persons Positive Pathway approach.
- Development of protocols between key partners such as Shelter, Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) and Community Housing
- Protocol developed between Homelessness Prevention and Public Protection to ensure safe housing is accessed.
- Prevention of homelessness through Citizens Advice county court advocacy service.
- Piloting of Supporting People Personal Budget projects for rough sleepers and people with complex support needs.
- Development of Denbighshire Supporting People Reconnection Guidance
- Funds secured from the Substance Misuse Action Fund to purchase home starter packs, to help people with substance use issues resettle after being homeless.
- Introduction of a Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH), which provides a single point of access for applying for social housing.

These successes have been achieved through the high priority placed on homelessness prevention and the continuing work in delivering practical homelessness solutions. As a consequence, a strong network of partnerships and services has been developed to support those who are either threatened with or experiencing homelessness.

**'Jane'** lost her accommodation following an illegal eviction. At first she moved in with her mum, but this was in an extra care scheme, so wasn't an option for the long term. She ended up feeling she had no other choice than to move back in with her ex-wife.

Jane is transgender, but circumstances with her ex-wife meant she had to dress as a male – seriously impacting on her mental health.

Jane hurried to find her own accommodation, and moved into a property on a short lease, in a poor state of disrepair. She had come into contact with the Homelessness Prevention Team, and been offered support, but felt she could not face going into temporary homeless accommodation with her teenage son – who, having severe epilepsy and a learning disability, was dependent on Jane for his care.

Jane's story shows how homelessness can affect anyone, and shines a light on some of the difficulties and barriers people can face in their journeys to prevent and resolve their homelessness – as well as the importance of early intervention. The Homelessness Prevention Team will continue to work with Jane to find more suitable accommodation for her and her son, where they can achieve better quality of life.

**'Helens'** landlord had just issued her with an eviction notice – they were selling the property.

Helen had several health problems, including having suffered a stroke. A Homelessness Prevention Officer (HPO) visited Helen at home, and saw that while friends and relatives provided invaluable support, Helen's quality of life wasn't as it should be – not able to manage the stairs, she was basically living in her bedroom. The HPO needed to help Helen to improve her quality of life, as well as prevent crisis point.

The HPO contacted SARTH (the Single Access Route to Housing), and explained the situation in detail. Based on this, Helen was put into Band 1, and was soon after allocated a bungalow just up the road.

Helen sent a card to her HPO, describing in just a few words the huge difference this had made to her life.

*"Thank you very much from the bottom of my heart for all your work on getting me my beautiful bungalow. You've made me very happy."*

**'Sally'** contacted the Citizens Advice Denbighshire court advocate prior to her possession hearing. She had been working previously, but due to mental health issues aggravated by stress, including dealing with a bereavement, she had to leave work approximately 12 months ago. Sally had taken a long time to apply for benefits after leaving work, which had left her in significant rent arrears (over £2,000) with her Housing Association landlord. Sally had also amassed other debts, and had kept all of this from her family

With the support of the Housing Association's Financial Welfare Officer, Sally had applied for a Discretionary Housing Payment. Following a 2 week adjournment of the hearing to await the outcome (and to allow Sally time to discuss the situation with her family), confirmation came that Sally would be given some financial assistance with her rent arrears. Further help was to be given, as long as Sally engaged with Citizens Advice to set up a more sustainable plan moving forward.

The lump sum persuaded the Judge to adjourn the matter generally at the next hearing. Sally is now working with Citizens Advice Denbighshire around managing her debts, and talking with her family about how they can work together to manage their finances in future.



## Summary of the Homelessness Review Findings

This Strategy is based upon the findings of a comprehensive review of homelessness across Denbighshire. This included both primary research and an in-depth desk-top analysis of data from the Council and other agencies to identify key issues and trends. This analysis has been supplemented by wider data on the population across Denbighshire, economic factors, health inequalities, and the housing market, alongside extensive consultation with citizens and other stakeholders.

The Homelessness Review provides a very detailed understanding of the levels and causes of homelessness in Denbighshire, together with an overview of the services available to those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The Review provides the evidence base upon which this Homelessness Strategy has been developed.

### The key findings from the Homelessness Review were:

- Affordability is a significant issue within parts of Denbighshire in relation to owner occupation and privately renting. Low levels of income and reliance on benefits among households in housing need further exacerbates the problem.
- The main causes of homelessness in Denbighshire are; loss of rented or tied accommodation, parents and relatives no longer willing to accommodate, relationship breakdown, domestic abuse and leaving prison.
- There is a need to develop a range of prevention tools focused at preventing the main causes of homelessness.
- The Homelessness Prevention service has had some success in preventing homelessness by assisting households to access private rented accommodation. However, more work needs to be done to fully embed a proactive prevention approach, with a particular emphasis on enabling households to remain in their existing accommodation.
- Over the last two years there has been an increase in the use of temporary accommodation. There are high numbers of households in temporary accommodation and too much use of Bed & Breakfast type accommodation. Work will need to be undertaken to reduce these numbers and ensure effective though put and move on.
- We need to continue to source more suitable temporary accommodation properties to avoid the use of Bed & Breakfast. Further work is needed to more fully understand the temporary accommodation requirements and how these are best met.
- There are a very high proportion of single people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Specific housing options and prevention solutions need to be developed to meet the needs of single people, including those who don't fall into a priority need category.
- There is a need to develop greater options and provision for single people under the age of 35 in particular, including lodgings, house shares and high quality bedsits/HMOs.
- Young people are over-represented in the homelessness statistics and Supporting People



data, when compared with census data, indicating a lack of suitable and affordable housing options for young people. It also indicates that young people are at a greater risk of becoming homeless.

- There is a need for a holistic approach that includes support around; debt, money management, resilience and worklessness. This approach needs to commence at the assessment stage and carry through to the delivery of the Personal Housing Plans.
- We need to strengthen our partnership working with key agencies such as Citizens Advice Denbighshire and Shelter Cymru to effectively prevent homelessness and stop it from reoccurring.
- There are a very high number of complex cases, including both single people and families with multiple and challenging needs. The Homelessness Prevention service has struggled to find sustainable solutions for these households. There is a need to have a better quantitative and qualitative understanding of these issues, alongside understanding if existing provision meets the needs of these citizens.
- There is a need to increase awareness of the Homelessness Prevention Service and other services available across Denbighshire to ensure that citizens and other partners are aware of what is available and how to access it. This is especially important if early intervention and prevention is to be achieved.
- There has been an increase in the number of evictions from social housing in 2015/16 due to rent arrears. It is essential that social housing tenants are able to access debt and money advice alongside the development of a pre-eviction protocol.
- In recent years significant work has been undertaken to improve the services for people who are sleeping rough. To build upon this a full 'No Second Night Out' offer needs to be developed, which may include the provision of Safe Seats, alongside looking to develop a 'No First Night Out' service. There is also a need to review the provision of day services to ensure a best practice approach to ending rough sleeping.
- There are high levels of demand for Supported Accommodation. Move on from Supported Housing can be problematic, with many single people struggling to find affordable and suitable move on accommodation.
- Former prisoners account for a very significant number of people accessing Homelessness Prevention services. There is a need to ensure that the Prisoner Pathway works much more effectively resulting in a more coordinated approach and better support for people leaving custody.
- The impact of welfare reform set against a backdrop of a difficult economic climate and on-going personal debt will continue to pose particular challenges and make it even more important that services for those at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness, are as effective as possible. There is need to work in partnership with a range of key agencies to prepare citizens for further changes to welfare benefits and identify a range of strategies to prevent homelessness as a result of welfare reform.

- There is a need to maximise access to social housing for households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Following the implementation of SARTH in April 2017 the development of any new Allocations Scheme should ensure that the needs of this client group are met, alongside promoting planned moves and supporting prevention activity.
- Consultation identified that the vast majority of citizens had a positive experience of the Homelessness Prevention service. However, responses indicate that there is inconsistency in the service citizens receive, and often a lack of ongoing contact. We need to build on the progress which has been made in strengthening the quality of this service.

An Executive Summary of the Homelessness Review can be found [\[web address to be inserted\]](#). The full Homelessness Review is available upon request from the Homelessness Prevention Team.

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## Strategic Context

Denbighshire's Homelessness Strategy has been developed in the context of a wide range of national, regional and local policies, strategies and plans. These are covered in considerable detail within the Homelessness Review, however the key ones are detailed below.

### i. National Strategic context

- **National Housing Strategy – ‘Improving Lives and Communities – Homes in Wales’**

The Strategy recognises that investing in housing is not only about bricks and mortar issues, besides improving people's homes, it brings benefits for people too, contributing to improving their health, wellbeing and quality of life.

The Strategy's priorities are:

- Providing more housing of the right type and offering more choice;
- Improving homes and communities, including the energy efficiency of new and existing homes;
- Improving housing-related services and support, particularly for vulnerable people and people from minority groups.

- **Ten Year Homelessness Plan for Wales**

In 2009 the Welsh Government published its 10 Year Homelessness Plan for Wales. The Ten Year Plan sets out some guiding principles for the development and delivery of homelessness services.

The strategic aims underlying the Plan are:

- Preventing homelessness wherever possible;
- Working across organisational and policy boundaries;
- Placing the service user at the centre of service delivery;
- Ensuring social inclusion and equality of access to services;
- Making the best use of resources.

The plan's vision is to reduce homelessness and its impact. At the heart of achieving this vision is ensuring that everyone can receive the help they need to avoid becoming homeless. Where homelessness cannot be prevented, the plan seeks to ensure that the amount of distress, deprivation and disadvantage that can be caused is kept to an absolute minimum. To do this, services need to be easily accessible, readily available, designed around and responsive to the needs of the people who use them.

- **Housing (Wales) Act 2014**

Part two of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 created multiple changes in the duties that Local Authorities owe to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days.

These changes include:

- New duties for local authorities to help prevent homelessness for anyone who asks for help



- Involving people in designing their own solutions, by jointly developing a Personal Housing Plan looking not just at immediate housing problems but also at any underlying issues
- Intervening early – within 56 days of homelessness – to prevent people’s situations escalating out of hand
- Removing automatic priority need for prison leavers
- Placing new duties on housing associations to cooperate in homelessness prevention; and
- Allowing local authorities to discharge homelessness duties with an offer of private rented accommodation without the consent of the applicant.

In the longer term the Welsh Government has pledged to remove the intentionality test for all families. It is envisaged this will be introduced from April 2019.

- **Rent Smart Wales**

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014, also introduced the requirement for all private landlords to be registered. Rent Smart Wales ensures that all private rented property in Wales and their landlords are named on a central register. In addition, self-managing landlords and agents who let and manage property must have a licence. In order to get a licence people must be trained in their rights and responsibilities when renting out property to tenants.

- **Equal Ground Standard**

The Equal Ground Standard sets out guidelines to the standard of service that people should receive when they approach Welsh homelessness services. Organisations who sign up to the Equal Ground Standard will demonstrate their commitment to providing a quality, person-centred service. The Standard has been developed by past and current users of housing and homelessness services through the Shelter Cymru Take Notice Project.

- **Social Services & Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014**

The Act provides the legal framework for improving the wellbeing of people who need care and support and carers who need support and for transforming social services in Wales. The Act changes the way people’s needs are assessed and the way services are delivered, giving people more of a say in the care and support they receive.

- Services will be available to provide the right support at the right time
- More information and advice will be available
- Assessment will be simpler and proportionate
- Carers will have an equal right to be assessed for support
- There will be stronger powers to keep people safe from abuse and neglect.

- **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires public bodies to carry out their functions in a sustainable way which improves the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being – in practice, this means delivering preventative services, considering both short- and long-term needs, and working in collaboration with partners to deliver better outcomes and avoid duplication.

- **Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016**

The Renting Homes (Wales) Act will make it simpler and easier to rent a home, replacing various and complex pieces of existing legislation with one clear legal framework.

With a limited number of exceptions, the act replaces all current tenancies and licences with just two types of occupation contract:

- secure contract - modelled on the current secure tenancy issued by Local Authorities
- standard contract - modelled on the current assured shorthold tenancy used mainly in the private rented sector.

The Act will require landlords to issue a written statement of the occupation contract which clearly sets out the rights and responsibilities of landlords and those renting from them.

- **Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015**

The legislation aims to improve the Public Sector response in Wales to domestic abuse and violence. The Act will:

- Improve arrangements to promote awareness of, and prevent, protect and support victims of gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence
- Introduce a needs-based approach to developing strategies which will ensure strong strategic direction and strengthened accountability
- Ensure strategic level ownership, through the appointment of a Ministerial Adviser who will have a role in advising Welsh Ministers and improving joint working amongst agencies across this sector
- Improve consistency, quality and join-up of service provision in Wales.

- **Ten Year Welsh Substance Misuse Strategy -Working Together to Reduce Harm**

Working Together to Reduce Harm recognises that housing and homelessness prevention services have a vital role to play in helping substance misusers to access the accommodation they need. Housing must be seen as a core element of wrap-around services and be reflected in planning mechanisms.

- **Welfare Reform**

The Government has introduced a series of welfare reforms and changes to the welfare to work provision under the provisions of the Welfare Reform Act of 2012. Welfare Reforms include the introduction of Universal Credit, changes to Housing Benefit Regulations, and introducing a cap on the amount of benefits working aged people can receive.

The impact of welfare reform set against a backdrop of a difficult economic climate will continue to pose particular challenges and make it even more important that services for those at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness, are as effective as possible. In particular young people have been adversely affected by welfare reform and as a result the affordable accommodation options available to young people reliant on benefits has decreased.

## ii. Local Strategic context

### • **Supporting People / Homelessness Prevention Plan 2018/19**

Supporting People is a Welsh Government Programme funding support for people 16+ who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The aim is to prevent homelessness wherever possible, working with the community and partners to identify and tackle its causes and empower people to live as independently as possible. In Denbighshire there are a range of Supporting People Grant commissioned projects, supporting over 1,000 people at any one time. With statutory homelessness (previously known as Housing Solutions), Supporting People is part of the Denbighshire Homelessness Prevention Team.

The Plan's strategic priorities for 2018/19 are:

- Citizen Involvement
- The DCC Homelessness Strategy 2017-21
- The sustainability of housing related support
- Tackling poverty
- Joint-Commissioning/collaboration

### • **Denbighshire Strategic Partnership Board**

The Strategic Partnership Board (SPB) brings together a number of other strategic partnerships; to improve the way partners work to deliver the objectives set out in the Wellbeing Plan.

The Wellbeing Plan focuses on the theme of Independence and Resilience and aims that:

- People are active, connected and contribute to their community
- People take notice of what is going on around them and in doing so keep learning about their world
- People prioritise their wellbeing and actively plan to maintain their independence

### • **Local Safeguarding Children's Board**

The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) is responsible for protecting children and young people from significant harm, and for promoting their welfare. The LSCB has two main functions: to coordinate all agencies' work to promote the safety and welfare of children and to ensure the effectiveness of that work.

### • **Community Safety Partnership**

The Council is responsible for effectively tackling crime and disorder in Denbighshire. Through partnership working the Council aims to build safer communities and reduce crime, by tackling four key areas: substance misuse; domestic violence; anti-social behaviour and youth offending.

### • **Denbighshire Council's Corporate Plan 2012- 2017**

The Council's corporate plan's priorities are:

- Developing the local economy
- Improving performance in education and the quality of our school buildings
- Improving our roads
- Vulnerable people are protected and are able to live as independently as possible

- Clean and tidy streets
- Ensuring access to good quality housing
- Modernising the council to deliver efficiencies and improve services for our citizens.

The following themes have been developed for Denbighshire's new Corporate Plan 2017-2022:

- A place where younger people will want to live and work and they have the skills to do so
- Communities are connected and have access to goods and services locally, online or through good transport links
- The Council and communities work together to overcome challenges; devising and delivering joint solutions
- People can live independent and fulfilled lives in strong, caring, safe and resilient communities
- Events bring people together, creating active communities and helping business to prosper
- An attractive and protected environment that supports communities' wellbeing and economic prosperity

- **Denbighshire's Housing Strategy 2016-2021**

Denbighshire's Housing Strategy's vision is that *"Everyone is supported with pride to live in homes that meet their needs, within the vibrant and sustainable communities Denbighshire aspires to."* In order to deliver this vision the Strategy is based around the following five themes:

- More Homes to Meet Local Need and Demand
- Creating a Supply of Affordable Homes
- Ensuring Safe and Healthy Homes
- Homes and Support for Vulnerable People
- Promoting and Supporting Communities

- **The Denbighshire Local Development Plan 2006-2021**

Covering 2006-2021 and adopted in June 2013, Denbighshire's Local Development Plan (LDP) provides guidelines as to what can be built and where over the course of a 15 year period. Denbighshire's LDP has set aside land available for the development of 7,500 homes over the 15 year life of the plan, some of which has already been delivered.



## Strategic Priorities

The magnitude and complexity of the issues that face the Council and its partners over the next 4 years must not be under- estimated. However, we will strive to address these challenges in partnership, ensuring that our citizens are able to access safe, secure and sustainable accommodation.

This 4 year strategy covers the period 2017 – 2021 and seeks to further strengthen the partnership approach to tackling homelessness across Denbighshire and to continue to make significant improvements across homelessness services. This will be achieved through adoption of the following priorities. Key actions across each of the priorities are detailed in the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan.

The following strategic priorities have been adopted and are based upon the Homelessness Review findings:

**Priority 1** – Developing a holistic Homelessness Prevention Service

**Priority 2** – Prevention of homelessness against the main causes

**Priority 3** – Reducing the use of temporary accommodation and seeking to end the use of Bed & Breakfast

**Priority 4** – Improved access to accommodation

**Priority 5** – Developing an integrated approach for homeless people with complex needs

**Priority 6** – Preventing youth homelessness

## Priority 1 – Developing a holistic Homelessness Prevention Service

Denbighshire County Council recognises that early intervention and prevention is the key to successfully tackling homelessness, alongside addressing the underlying causes of homelessness.

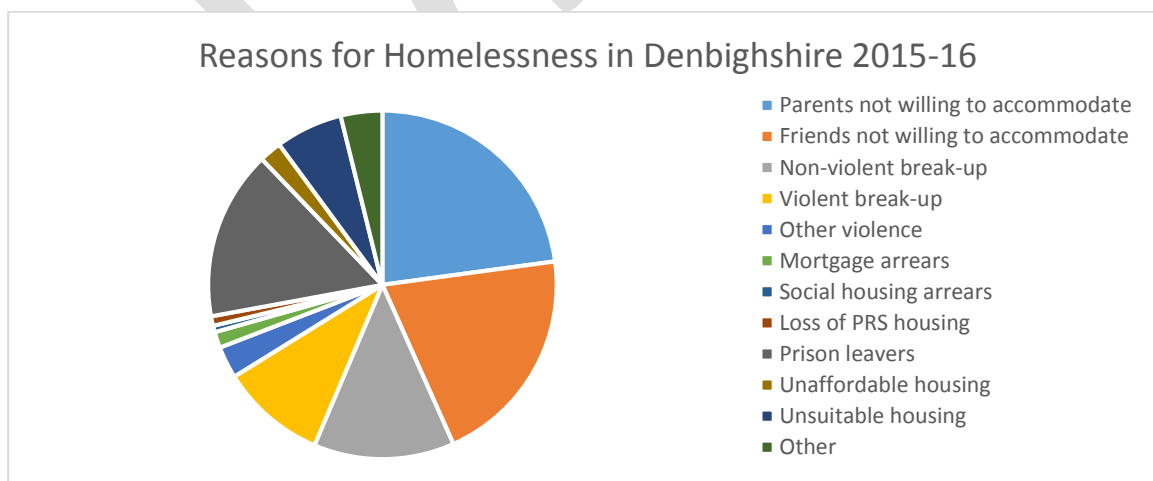
Integral to this approach is the provision of good quality housing advice, bespoke personal housing plans and a range of housing options. In developing our Homelessness Prevention Service it is essential to tackle a dependency culture by promoting choice, building resilience and empowering people to find their own housing solutions.

The provision of good quality timely housing advice is integral to an effective Homelessness Strategy. 1210 households presented to the Housing Solutions service, with a housing need in 2015/16, the vast majority of these citizens were homeless or threatened with homelessness. Information from the Homelessness Review identified that many of these individuals only approached the service when they were in crisis. Consultation with both citizens and partners revealed a lack of awareness of what help and support is available to those threatened with homelessness.

To enhance opportunities for effective homeless prevention it is essential that citizens contact the Homelessness Prevention service as soon as they begin to experience housing problems. We will therefore invest in an awareness raising campaign to raise the profile of the service internally within the Council, with partners and the wider public. In addition to this we will develop resources, including advice factsheets to empower individuals to resolve their own housing issues. In the longer term an interactive Homelessness Prevention ICT package will be able to provide citizens with personal housing solutions plans.

There is a need for a holistic approach that addresses debt, money management, resilience and worklessness. This approach needs to commence at the assessment stage and carry through to the delivery of the Personal Housing Plans.

We will also seek to tackle the underlying causes of homelessness and address the wider needs of citizens including money-management, education, employment and training. This will provide a bespoke package of advice and assistance to tackle not only homelessness but the wider social problems associated with homelessness.



Tackling homelessness requires a partnership approach by many organisations. We will work with partner organisations to ensure that citizens receive quality housing advice, referrals to the Homelessness Prevention Service at the appropriate time and services work together to provide a holistic package of advice and assistance. We will develop protocols further with key partners, complete joint training and ensure effective referral arrangements are in place to assist with the delivery of personal housing plans.

Consultation was an essential component of the Homelessness Review and the Strategy will build on this by ensuring that the citizen sits at the heart of service delivery and that services are developed in response to their needs. Services will be accessible, flexible and responsive to the needs of each homeless household. Citizens will be involved in the planning of services and how they are delivered; this will be achieved by adopting the Equal Ground Standard.

What we will do to provide a Holistic Housing Solutions Service
1. Ensure a consistent high quality and accessible Homelessness Prevention Service
2. Ensure all staff have access to appropriate training
3. Implement the Equal Ground Standard to ensure that person centred principles are embedded in service delivery
4. Increase the accessibility of the service by providing outreach surgeries, online and telephone advice and explore further opportunities for service delivery through the use of technology
5. In partnership develop an integrated and holistic approach to tackling the underlying causes of homelessness, through joined up service delivery, joint protocols and effective referral arrangements
6. Develop resources, including website material and factsheets to be used by citizens and partners
7. Undertake an awareness raising campaign in relation to homeless prevention and specifically the Homelessness Prevention Service

## **Priority 2 - Prevention of Homelessness against the Main Causes**

The Homelessness Review identified that we have achieved success in preventing homelessness; in particular in assisting households to access private rented accommodation. However more needs to be done to enable citizens to remain in their existing accommodation.

Welfare reform, economic uncertainty, together with new regulations in the private rented sector is reducing the housing options available for working age low income households. The economic crisis has led to uncertainty in the employment market, reduced wages and an increased cost of living, putting pressure on low income households.

It is anticipated that these factors will continue to place increased demand on the Homelessness Prevention service and as such service delivery models need to be reviewed to ensure effective and strategic approaches to customer demand management.

In order to strengthen our approach to tackling homelessness we will gain support from the whole council to prevent homelessness. We will seek commitment from both Members and Senior Managers across all service areas to work together to deliver a joined up and holistic approach to preventing and ending homelessness.

We will work across the Council to develop a coordinated approach to homelessness prevention across a range of services and programmes, including; Community Support Services, Housing Services, Children and Family Services, Community Mental Health Services, Communities First, Families First, Flying Start and the Intensive Family Support Service. We will also seek to strengthen our partnership with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board in addressing this issue.

We will continue to commission and work with our partners to deliver effective, pro-active homelessness prevention services. These services will be strategically targeted, accessible and be able to respond to the diverse needs of all citizens, providing innovative and flexible solutions.

We will work with households to enable them to remain in their current home or assist with planned and timely moves into suitable and sustainable accommodation. We will do this through the delivery of housing options advice, personal housing plans and appropriate referrals to support organisations. Bespoke personal housing plans, advice and support will be provided to all households threatened with homelessness within 56 days.

<b>What we will do to Prevent Homelessness against the Main Causes</b>
1. Ensure that we have a strong corporate commitment to a joined up approach to ending homelessness across all services.
2. Ensure homelessness is prevented through an effective homelessness prevention toolkit targeted at the main causes.
3. Ensure effective tools are in place to prevent end of assured shorthold tenancies leading to homelessness, through effective landlord and tenant support and mediation.
4. Develop and implement a pre-eviction protocol with Community Housing and Housing Associations.

**Priority 3 - Reduce the use of Temporary Accommodation and seek to end the use of Bed & Breakfast Accommodation**

We will undertake a review of our approach to temporary accommodation to ensure that it meets the current needs, ends the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation and supports our intended approach to use private sector offers to discharge the homeless duty. This review will respond to the immediate need, but will take a longer term approach to ensuring a model that is flexible and responsive to the changes that Universal Credit will bring in relation to both demand and funding subsidies.

We will continue to source more suitable temporary accommodation properties to no longer necessitate the use of Bed & Breakfast. Further work is needed to more fully understand the temporary accommodation requirements and how these are best met.

We will work to reduce the number of households placed in temporary accommodation and to minimise their length of stay. We will actively work with households in temporary accommodation to continue to review their housing options and plan their move into settled accommodation. We will aim to use temporary accommodation for emergency purposes only and where it is most appropriate for the needs of the citizen, but for no longer than is absolutely necessary.

We will work closely with providers of accommodation, to ensure that while households are in temporary accommodation they are provided with all the necessary advice and assistance to enable them to sustain future permanent accommodation and access training and employment.

<b>What we will do to reduce the use of Temporary Accommodation and Bed &amp; Breakfast</b>
1. Carry out a review of the use of temporary accommodation, identifying future need and appropriate delivery arrangements
2. Minimise and in the longer term end, the use of unsuitable B&B accommodation
3. Develop a policy and procedure to discharge the main homeless duty with an offer of accommodation in the private rented sector
4. Ensure that appropriate accommodation is available for 16 and 17 year olds so that they are not placed in B&B
5. Develop a range of monitoring arrangements, processes and performance management measures to monitor and manage the use of temporary accommodation

#### Priority 4 - Improved Access to Accommodation

We are committed to delivering more homes to meet local needs and demand. Alongside our strategic commitment to the development of affordable housing, we recognise the increasingly important role that the private rented sector plays in meeting the housing needs of the community, including those citizens who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

We have successfully developed an effective landlord offer which increases the provision of private sector housing available to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The scheme has provided good quality, well managed, private sector accommodation in the local area. However, there is a need to review this offer to meet the needs of landlord's, whilst seeking to increase the availability of private sector accommodation.

We will develop a process that ensures we discharge our homelessness duty through the offer of a suitable private rented sector property. It is anticipated that this approach will underpin and strengthen existing housing advice and homelessness prevention activities and ensure homeless households are able to access suitable and secure accommodation. To ensure the sustainability of this tenancy model, effective and timely support to both tenants and landlords is critical.

We will make the most effective use of our own housing stock in meeting the needs of our communities, including those that are at risk of becoming homeless. We will regularly review our Allocations Policy to ensure that it is working for those in the greatest housing need and supporting the prevention of homelessness. We will also explore using Council stock for developing temporary accommodation solutions as well as sourcing other properties, such as private Landlords. We must liaise closely with Housing Strategy, Planning and Public Protection to ensure we take up all opportunities to improve the availability of quality accommodation and that our current properties are compliant with regulations and maintained to a good standard.

We are working with Housing Strategy to establish a corporate approach to developing house shares to meet the needs of young single people within the County. This effective partnership approach will include the development of a house share market position statement, together with exploring the use of Council stock, alongside the private rented sector, to facilitate house shares.

The role that supported housing plays in preventing homelessness is critical. We are committed to developing supported housing models which act as a place of change, not only meeting the housing needs of homeless people; but supporting people to tackle the underlying causes of homelessness, raising their aspirations, empowering change and assisting them to access training, education and employment.

The Welsh Government's Supporting People programme funds a range of supported housing accommodation and floating support services for those that are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Denbighshire. The Homelessness Review identified that demand for supported accommodation is high, therefore it is essential that we make the most effective use of the current provision ensuring that referrals are appropriate and based on a comprehensive assessment of need and that vacancies are prioritised to those in the greatest need.

Alongside this, it is essential that there is effective move-on from supported accommodation. Move-on planning is critical and this can best be supported by a multi-agency approach.

The Local Housing Allowance cap will apply to all new tenants living in supported housing from April 2019. While the Government have indicated that there will be ring fenced top ups, the future

funding and sustainability of supported housing remains unclear. We will work with all providers of supported accommodation locally to identify a sustainable model moving forward.

<b>What we will do to improve access to accommodation</b>
1. Develop a coordinated approach to increase the supply of affordable private rented accommodation.
2. Ensure the best use of Council Housing stock to meet customer need through the Allocations Policy, tenancy sustainment approaches and shared tenancies.
3. Develop a coordinated approach to increase the provision of and move-on from, supported accommodation to meet identified needs
4. Ensure that existing and new supported accommodation provision and floating support meet the diverse needs of our citizens.
5. Develop a range of affordable accommodation options to meet the needs of single people under 35.
6. Work with accommodation providers to prepare for the Local Housing Allowance cap to Supporting Housing



## Priority 5 - Developing an integrated approach for homeless people with complex needs

We recognise that many homeless people can have multiple and complex needs. Many have a transient lifestyle and the complexity of their needs can prevent or exclude them from being able to access or engage with mainstream accommodation and services.

In particular too many rough sleepers are living chaotic lives and often don't receive the support they need to help them overcome their problems. They can face a combination of problems, in addition to homelessness, which can often include mental health issues, substance misuse and challenging behaviour. These issues are complex and mutually reinforcing, often having their roots in entrenched disadvantage and leaving people socially and economically excluded.

*For example, amongst the rough sleepers in Rhyl there is a very high prevalence of mental health problems (92%) and drug and alcohol use (84%) alongside physical health issues (67%).*

The Homelessness Review identified that there are a very high number of complex cases, including both single people and families with multiple and challenging needs. There is a need to have a better quantitative and qualitative understanding of these issues to ascertain if existing provision meets the needs of these citizens. It will be essential that health services and drug and alcohol services work with the Outreach team to provide specialist support to these individuals.

Addressing one support need in isolation from others is unlikely to lead to successful outcomes for people who face complex issues. We must further develop a holistic approach to recovery, supporting citizens to address all of their issues simultaneously. Moving forward, therefore, we should explore joint commissioning arrangements, involving social care, drug & alcohol services, health and the criminal justice system, so that services can address the multiplicity of needs that complex homeless individuals and families face.

Within Denbighshire there is a range of services for rough sleepers and single homeless people; including day centres, assertive outreach, floating support and supported accommodation services. However, we must ensure that these services are both effective and responsive to the needs of rough sleepers, where we challenge a street based lifestyle and work to end rough sleeping through a transactional exchange model.

We will work with the Substance Misuse Action Fund to consider the role of the Day Centre, to ensure that it provides a real opportunity for Rough Sleepers to engage with services and end rough sleeping.

We will also review the outreach service provision to ensure an assertive approach to outreach, which adopts a tailored approach to both new and entrenched rough sleepers. There will continue to be a focus on effective reconnection.

We will ensure that no one in Denbighshire has to sleep rough through the continuing development of a 'No Second Night Out' Offer. In the longer term we will develop a 'No First Night Out' Offer. We will also ensure that effective preventative work is targeted at groups who have a greater likelihood of becoming homeless and rough sleeping.

Former prisoners account for a very significant number of people accessing the Homelessness Prevention service. We will work with the criminal justice system to ensure that the Prisoner

Pathway works much more effectively resulting in a more coordinated approach and better support for people leaving custody.

We will also work with Children's Services and Community Housing and RSL's to develop an integrated approach to working with complex families, through the provision of accommodation, intensive support and a focus on tackling the underlying causes of homelessness.

There is a lot of evidence to suggest that homelessness, especially rough sleeping, has significant and adverse consequences for an individual's health. It is widely recognised that there are strong correlations between homelessness and severe physical and mental health conditions, alongside significantly reduced life expectancy.

We will work to improve access to health services for single homeless people to address both immediate and longer term needs, ensuring that they are given the same choices in relation to accessing health care service as the general population, while recognising that homeless people may not find it easy to access mainstream service provision. We will learn from and contribute to the 2025 movement, established to end avoidable health inequalities in North Wales.

<b>What we will do to develop an integrated approach for homeless people with complex needs</b>
1. Develop a coordinated approach to ending rough sleeping in Denbighshire through the development of No Second Night out and No First Night Out Models
2. Consider the role of the Day Centre and Outreach provision to ensure that it meets the Council's strategic vision to end rough sleeping
3. Ensure that the Prisoner Pathway works effectively to prevent homelessness on release from custody
4. Develop an integrated approach to working with complex families to ensure homelessness and repeat homelessness is prevented.
5. Improve access to appropriate treatment and health care and reduce unplanned admission to hospital

## Priority 6 - Preventing Youth Homelessness

The Homelessness Review identified that young people are increasingly disadvantaged by the combined impact of high unemployment, low incomes, welfare reform and limited housing options. A growing proportion of young people are leaving care or presenting as homeless from the parental home with complex needs – for example a combination of mental health problems, behavioural problems, substance misuse and offending behaviour. Their needs do not fit into any one service area and responses from public sector agencies can be fragmented, reactive, often ineffective and have a high cost.

The Review identified that young people are over-represented in the homeless population in Denbighshire; there has also been a recent increase in the number of young people sleeping rough. Further welfare reform is likely to adversely affect young people, further reducing the housing options available to them.

We want to ensure that our young people have the best start in life and are able to develop well so that they can fulfill their potential and meet their aspirations.

We will continue to commission effective homelessness prevention services for 16 and 17 year olds and review existing services to ensure that they effectively prevent homelessness and meet the needs of young people with complex and multiple needs. We will also commission education work in schools and other youth provision, to raise awareness of the available housing options and the reality and risks of homelessness.

We will intervene as early as possible to prevent housing instability and homelessness from occurring or persisting. Prevention will focus on supporting young people to remain at home with their family, or in wider family networks, where appropriate and safe to do so. Where young people do become homeless, the strategy supports the commissioning of specialist services to provide respite, emergency and longer term accommodation and support that can effectively address young people's housing and support needs.

We will ensure service pathways are planned and integrated to better meet the needs of young people. Through the Young People's Positive Pathway we will ensure a joined up approach with Children's Services, ensuring young people get the right advice and support at the right time.

We will safeguard young people who are at risk because of housing instability or homelessness. We will work to ensure that care leavers do not become homeless upon leaving care and that their accommodation is maintained, ensuring necessary safeguards and support are in place.

We will make better use of available resources to maintain a sufficient range of accommodation-based services with support for young people experiencing housing instability and homelessness. We will do this by negotiating better value for money and re-modelling existing service provision.

<b>What we will do to prevent youth homelessness</b>
1. Prevent youth homelessness through education, peer mentoring, mediation and emergency respite accommodation
2. Continue to fund and review the Young People's Positive Pathway to ensure an integrated approach to responding to youth homelessness
3. Develop an effective care leaver accommodation and support pathway
4. Remodel accommodation based support services to ensure an integrated approach that meets the needs of young people with multiple and complex needs

## Governance and Delivering the Homelessness Strategy

In order to meet our commitment to deliver the strategic priorities we need to ensure that together with partners, we have the skills, services, resources and infrastructure for the delivery of the Strategy's objectives.

To achieve the strategic priorities and objectives an action plan has been developed in partnership with partners and stakeholders, to outline key actions to be delivered over the lifetime of this strategy.

The Homelessness Prevention action plan will be reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs, policy and legislative changes and achieves the priorities contained within it.

The Homelessness Forum will be involved in the delivery and monitoring of this Homelessness Strategy and action plan. The Forum, which is made up of a range of organisations who work across the area, meets on a quarterly basis and provides a joint approach to tackling homelessness by information sharing, improving joint working and contributing to the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy action plan. The action plan will be governed and monitored by the Supporting People Planning Group, which will ensure both effective governance arrangements, alongside a coordinated and comprehensive approach to the prevention of homelessness.

A joined up partnership approach is critical to delivering the ambitious and innovative plans detailed within this strategy and meeting Denbighshire's vision for homelessness.

By adopting the Homelessness Strategy, Denbighshire County Council is making a commitment to end rough sleeping and prevent homelessness.

## Commissioning of Homelessness Services

The Council will commission services that support and directly contribute to meeting the objectives set out in this strategy.

The Homelessness Strategy will inform the Supporting People/Homelessness Prevention Plan. Services will be commissioned that meet the objectives contained within this Strategy and the Supporting People/Homelessness Prevention Plan priorities.

Commissioning homelessness services in Denbighshire will be underpinned by the following key principles:

- Early intervention and prevention
- Putting citizens at the centre of commissioning.
- Social value and local benefit.

Commissioned services must also:

- Be based on a robust analysis of need and intelligence, focused on evidence based interventions, and guided by early help and prevention.
- Assure high quality provision by specifying outcomes and using effective financial mechanisms.
- Demonstrate a strategic link to national, regional and local priorities.
- Meet the aims of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.