

The Southend-on-Sea Homelessness Prevention Strategy

2014 – 2017

DRAFT

Foreword

*****DRAFT WORDING, TO BE REVIEWED, AMENDED & AGREED*****

Looking back over the ten years since the publication of the first Southend-on-Sea Borough Council Homelessness Prevention Strategy there has been real progress in tackling the issue which has so many negative effects on local individuals, families and communities. The use of Bed and Breakfast to house statutory homeless households has long ceased, a new prevention focused ethos has been introduced and many new initiatives and partnerships have developed which demonstrate the Council's commitment to working with others.

This, the fourth Homelessness Prevention Strategy for Southend-on-Sea however, comes at a time of unprecedented challenges. The challenging economic climate and reduction in government spending has necessitated new ways of thinking about how services are delivered and a renewed effort to achieve real partnership working across the public, private and voluntary sectors. This strategy clearly sets out the case for vigilance and careful coordinated planning from local agencies in order to ensure that the scope and affect of homelessness on local people is reduced.

The strategy reviews the success of current and previous initiatives, the context and challenges within which we are operating and most importantly highlights 5 key aims of and associated actions which will prevent and reduce homelessness within Southend.

**Councillor Lesley Salter,
Executive Councillor for Adult Social Care, Health and Housing**

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Aims of the Strategy

The five aims of the strategy represent the key areas and themes of homelessness where action is required and resources should be focused.

1. **Prevent and avoid homelessness**
2. **Minimise rough sleeping**
3. **Improve health & wellbeing outcomes for homeless people in the borough**
4. **Encourage provision of suitable accommodation for those who are, or may become homeless**
5. **Minimise youth & young person's homelessness**

Further details on the aims of the strategy and associated actions can be found in part 4 (p.33).

Part 1: Introduction and background

1.1 What is homelessness?

There are many definitions of homelessness but the one used for the purposes of this strategy will be as outlined in the Housing Act 1996. This definition determines that a person is homeless if:

- There is no accommodation they are entitled to occupy, or
- They have accommodation but it is not reasonable or possible for them to continue to occupy this accommodation

People who are staying temporarily with family or friends (also known as sofa surfing), people staying in a hostel or bed and breakfast accommodation, those at risk of domestic violence in their own home and people living somewhere they have no legal right to occupy, are all included in this legal definition of homelessness. The Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) also sets out Local Authorities statutory responsibilities to assist certain households and to provide advice and assistance to all who approach as homeless or threatened with homelessness.

1.2 What is a Homelessness Prevention Strategy?

Under the Homelessness Act 2002, A Homelessness Strategy is a strategy formulated by a Local Housing Authority for:

- **Preventing homelessness** in their district;
- Securing that **sufficient accommodation is and will be available** for people in their district who are or may become homeless;
- Securing the satisfactory provision of **support** for people in their district –
 - Who are or may become homeless; or
 - Who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council (the Council) has published previous Homelessness Strategies in 2003, 2008 and 2012.

1.3 Who will be involved in achieving the aims of this strategy?

Partnership working has always been crucial to the effectiveness of homeless prevention work. As well as the provision of a roof over someone's head there are often many other areas of support needed in order to secure and maintain a tenancy.

In the current financial climate, where public finances are under increasing pressures it is now more crucial than ever for the Council, local agencies, charities and faith groups to work together to realise mutually beneficial aims and to provide the best possible outcomes for Southend residents

Southend-on-Sea Homelessness Prevention Strategy Key Stakeholders

- Southend-on-Sea Borough Council- incl. Community Housing, Strategic Housing, Supporting People, Council Tax and Benefits, Adult Social Care, Childrens Services, Public Health
 - Health & Wellbeing Board
 - Mental Health Board
 - South Essex Partnership Trust (SEPT)
 - Southend Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP)
 - South Essex Homes
 - Drug & Alcohol Action Team
 - Homeless Action Resource Project (HARP)
 - Southend YMCA
 - Faith Groups
 - Southend MIND
 - Southend Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)
 - Essex Police
 - Southend University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
 - Essex Probation
 - Youth Offending Service
 - Private landlords and letting agents
 - South East Alliance of Landlords, Agents and Residents (SEAL)
 - Local Housing Associations
 - Floating Support providers
 - NHS Southend Clinical Commissioning Group
 - Jobcentre Plus
 - Thames Gateway South Essex (TGSE) and other local authority partners
 - Southend Association of Voluntary Services
 - Local Residents
-

The stakeholders listed in the table above is not exhaustive but provides an indication of the number of agencies and individuals that are involved in the formation and delivery of this strategy and committed to reducing homelessness. By working together to tackle homelessness these stakeholders will also be helping to alleviate other associated social policy issues in Southend.

1.4 How does this document link to other Council strategies?

The Homelessness Prevention Strategy links to, supports and builds on the other relevant strategies and plans for housing, support and community services in Southend and Essex. Collaborative working with the stakeholders responsible for the plans and strategies listed below is essential in order to realise the aims of this strategy.

The Southend Borough Council Housing Strategy 2011 – 2021

The Homelessness Prevention Strategy is informed by the overarching Housing Strategy for Southend which outlines the Council's vision for housing up to 2021.

The strategy outlines the Council's commitment to many areas which influence the success of homeless prevention activity. These include the promotion of good quality housing in the private rented sector, the bringing back into use of empty homes, the development of new affordable homes by the Council and partner housing associations and the management of the Council's own housing stock to best meet local needs.

Southend Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2012-2015

This strategy outlines the following key ambitions for promoting health and wellbeing in the borough:

- A positive start in life
- Promoting Healthy Lifestyles
- Improving mental wellbeing
- A safer population
- Living independently
- Active and healthy aging
- Protecting health
- Housing
- Maximising opportunity

The Health and Wellbeing Board, a statutory committee set up in accordance with the Health & Social Care Act 2012, play a key part in ensuring these actions are achieved. Implementing the homeless prevention strategy action plan, working with partners to

reduce homelessness and other prevention focused actions form part of the Health and Wellbeing strategy aims. Key to the success of this strategy is the board's commitment to **'...greater joint commissioning – Delivering health, social care and housing services in a more joined up way'**.

South Essex Joint Mental Health Strategy 2012

This document sets out a 5 year strategy for the commissioning of mental health services in South Essex. Aims within this strategy include improving 'the gateway into services so people are directed to the right support at the right time' and 'focusing on meeting the needs of higher risk groups who may have specialist needs.'

The implementation of the Joint Mental Health strategy will 'focus on equal access for all groups and meeting the needs of people who find it difficult to access services'

The Mental Health Board oversees the delivery of the Mental Health Strategy and will be a key stakeholder in the delivery of the Homelessness Prevention Strategy Action Plan.

Children & Young Peoples Plan 2010-2013

The Children & Young People's Plan has many priorities relevant to the long term prevention of homelessness, including:

- Lifting children and young people out of poverty
- Improving healthy living by reducing obesity, drug and alcohol misuse and teenage pregnancy and improving young peoples' sexual health
- Improving access to suitable housing for vulnerable 16-18 aged young people and for vulnerable families
- Continuing to improve the safeguarding of children and young people in Southend through multi-agency work
- Reducing the need for children and young people to be looked after
- Improving transitions into adult life for children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities
- Reducing the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people's life chances.
- Improving outcomes in service for children's mental and emotional health

The draft Learning Disability Strategy 2013 – 2018

The aim of this strategy is to 'help establish better lives for people with learning disabilities & their carers.' It's targets include aims intrinsically linked to the prevention of homelessness such as enabling 'people to live in their own homes as far as possible' and 'to provide equality of access to social care services'.

The Supporting People Commissioning and Procurement Plan 2012-15

This plan sets out how the Supporting People Programme will ensure that its contracts deliver high quality housing related support, value for money and meet the needs of Southend's vulnerable adults. Through commissioning and procurement the plan will deliver local priorities during a climate of reducing budgets whilst services will provide vulnerable adults with the skills to live fully independent lives and ensure they sustain tenancies and participate fully within their communities.

Supporting People commission supported housing for a range of vulnerable groups, including homeless people, so that they can acquire skills i.e healthy living, tenancy sustainment, registering with a G.P, to move on into independent living. The success of the programme resulted in 193 individuals helped to successfully move on from Supported Housing for homeless people in 2012/13.

The Southend-on-Sea Domestic Abuse Strategy 2012-2015

The domestic abuse strategy aims to 'reduce the harm caused by domestic abuse in Southend'. Domestic abuse is a significant cause of homelessness and the provision of suitable housing options in cases of domestic abuse is crucial

Local Policing Area South Strategic Assessment 2013/14

The strategic priorities for Southend Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) are Anti-Social behaviour, Burglary, Domestic Abuse and Night-time economy related crime & disorder. The CDRP have been involved in past multi-agency work involving rough sleepers.

Substance Misuse Strategy

A substance misuse strategy for Southend is currently being developed by DAAT which will include the substance misuse issues of homeless persons in Southend and develop policy responses to help support this vulnerable group.

Close working and buy-in from the owners of the strategies above will be required in developing the actions outlined in Part 4 of this strategy, e.g.

- **Further improve joint working between Children's Services & the Housing**
- **Improving approaches for dealing with entrenched rough sleepers/those with complex needs**

Part 2: Learning from the 2012-14 Homelessness Prevention Strategy

2.1 Achievements of the 2012-14 Homelessness Prevention Strategy

The preceding Southend Homelessness Prevention Strategy set out a number of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic & Timely) actions for which different agencies held responsibility. Considerable progress was made in meeting these aims through partnership working and regular monitoring at Homelessness Prevention Strategy steering group meetings.

A summary of progress towards meeting the aims of the 2012-14 Strategy are outlined below.

Aim 1: To implement & monitor the Allocations Policy to better match local need

- A new social housing Allocations Policy has been implemented which focuses resources on those who have a realistic chance of being re-housed, increased priority for local people and those in the armed forces and retained priority for homeless and threatened with homelessness.
- A Homelessness Discharge of Duty Policy was introduced that enables the Council to better meet the needs of statutory homeless/potentially homeless households through re-housing in suitable private rented properties.
- New Local Lettings Policies were agreed to give priority to people who are in housing need, in work or volunteering.
- New Nomination agreements agreed with housing association partners to ensure that a greater proportion of social housing is available to those on the Council's register

Aim 2: To continue to improve the effectiveness of homelessness prevention support in the town

- Partnership work between the Council, HARP and local church groups resulted in a winter night shelter operating 7 days a week between November 2012 & February 2013, providing food and shelter for 155 different homeless people over the winter months.
- A Hospital discharge protocol has now been put in place with the hospital Social work team and is being further developed.
- The Council appointed a Welfare Benefits Advisor who contacted those due to be impacted by the new Social Housing Size Criteria and Housing Benefit Caps.
- Drop-in sessions, an informative pamphlet, and a personal welfare benefits calculator were made available to all Council tenants, raising awareness of welfare reforms.
- 64 people at risk of domestic violence were able to remain in their homes through the provision of the Sanctuary Scheme.
- A Health Needs Audit of Southend's Homeless was conducted.

Aim 3: Close working with clients and commissioners to ensure a suitable range of Housing Options are provided for vulnerable groups

- Funding secured & works commenced on new HARP training & accommodation centre, which includes an additional emergency accommodation units.
- New recovery-orientated supported accommodation model for substance users being delivered by HARP which, together with treatment, focuses on long term recovery agents such as accommodation, education & employment and social/familial functioning.
- Enhanced HARP website created which includes promotion/access to 'Streetlink'

which enables members of the public to report rough sleepers.

- Re-tendering of mental health services has led to £50k savings and enabled increased provision, improved quality of service and accommodation and a move towards fully accessible accommodation over the first 2 years of the contract.

2.2 Ongoing Actions

There have been a number of changes since the 2012-14 strategy was published which are reviewed in this document. However, many of the fundamental issues relating to homelessness and the actions that local agencies can take to improve the situation remain unchanged.

As such, a number of the actions from the 2012-14 Strategy are ongoing and will be included within and/or further developed with the new action plan, these include:

- Further developing relations with Private Landlords and our Private Rented Sector Offer
- Knowledge sharing on impacts of Welfare Reforms
- Reporting on the outcomes of Southend's Homeless health needs audit
- Developing and refining hospital discharge protocols
- Increasing awareness of homelessness in secondary schools
- Improving links between partner groups
- Appropriate signposting for those with No Recourse to Public Funds
- Ensuring a severe weather provision and churches winter night shelter is provided
- Reviewing nominations agreements with Registered Providers
- Developing a sub-regional single persons homeless scheme

Part 3: Reviewing homelessness in Southend & the strategic context

3.1 An overview of Southend

Southend-on-Sea is the largest conurbation in the East of England and the closest seaside resort to London. It is located on the north side of the Thames Estuary approximately 40 miles east of Central London, and is bordered to the north by Rochford District and to the west by Castle Point District. Southend has many geographic, demographic and economic characteristics that make it distinctive compared to other areas. Excluding the London Boroughs, Southend is the seventh most densely populated area in the United Kingdom. It enjoys a diverse economy and unlike many of the traditional seaside resorts is not wholly reliant on its tourism industry for employment; however it is not without deprivation that is often found in seaside towns.



Indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) are used to measure relative disadvantage across England and take into account employment, income, health, education/Skills/training, access to housing & services, living arrangements and crime. When calculating IMD, locations are broken down into small areas of approximately 1,500 people called Lower Layer Super Output Areas(LSOA).

In Southend, 8.4% of LSOA's fall within the 10% most deprived in the country. 29.9% of LSOA's fall within the 30% most deprived.¹ Southend has a relatively a high proportion of privately rented properties and at 13%, the proportion of people claiming housing benefit for this type of tenure is higher than the Eastern and England average²

The TGSE Strategic Housing Market Review 2013 found that whilst incomes vary across LSOA's in the sub-region, the average minimum income required in Southend to rent (without Housing Benefit or other financial support), or buy at the least expensive quartile, is £20,000. It also found that house prices 'effectively doubled' between 2001 & 2012 and that affordability has worsened in the last 10 years with the average house price over 7.5 times medium full time earnings in the town.

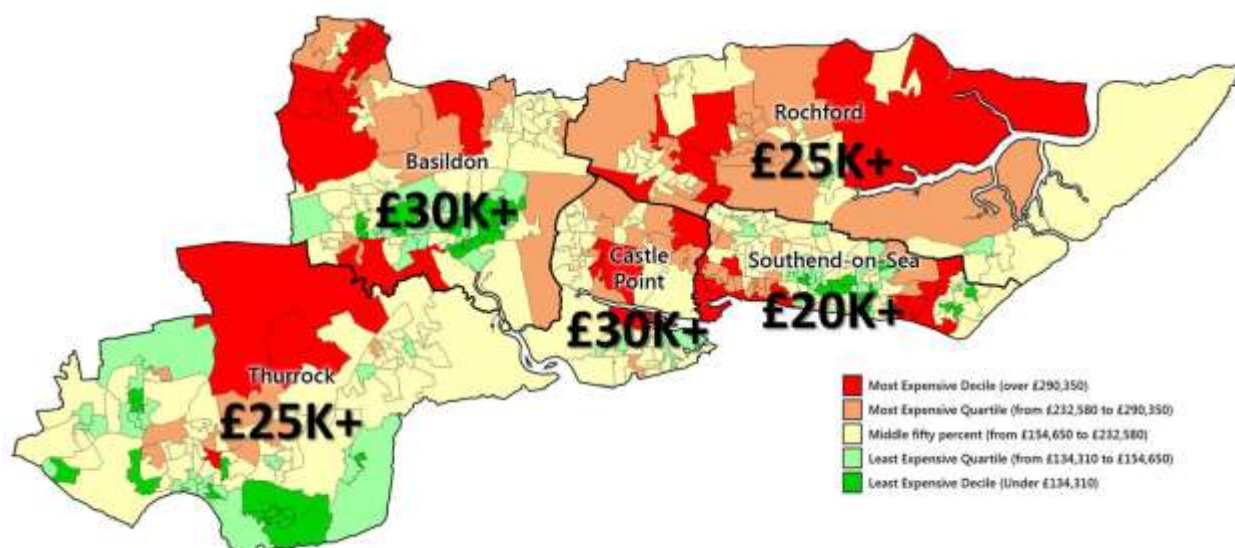


Figure 1: Relative House Prices and Income thresholds for Market Housing to buy or rent

(source: TGSE Strategic Housing Market Assessment review 2013)

3.3 An overview of Homelessness in Southend

Statutory Homelessness and Homeless Prevention

Under the Housing Act 1996 as amended and extended by the Homelessness Act 2002, Southend Council have a statutory duty to accommodate certain categories of homeless people.

¹ CLG (2010) *English Indices of Multiple Deprivation + SBC*: www.southend.gov.uk/info/200041/equality_and_diversity/1307/southend_insights/2

² ORS (2013) *Thames Gateway South Essex Fundamental review of Strategic Housing Market Assessment Review 2013*

Where applicants notify the council that they are at risk of being made homeless, the Housing Options Team will work with them to try to prevent this.

To be owed a statutory homelessness duty, a homeless applicant must be unintentionally homeless, in priority need³ and eligible for assistance. There are strict criteria for falling into these categories and therefore not everyone who makes an application for assistance to the Council is owed a statutory duty.

The outcomes of decisions taken on homelessness applications by the Council received are shown below in Figure 3.

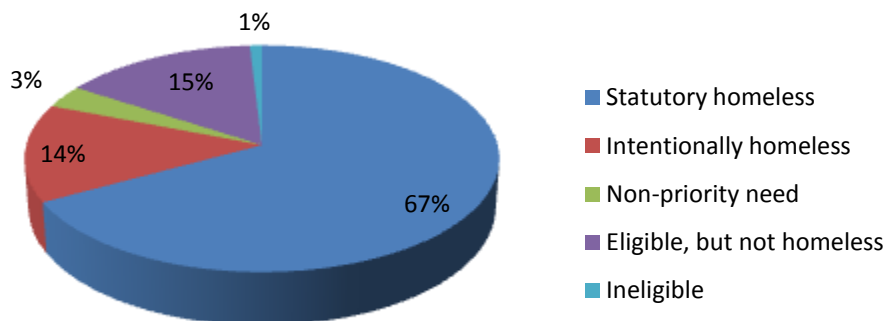


Figure 3: Outcome of decisions taken by Southend Borough Council on homelessness applications 2012/13

Source: National Practitioner Support Service statistical compiler/DCLG p1e returns & SBC Homeless Database

Figure 4, below, shows the outcome of approaches to the Council for homelessness assistance between 2004 and 2013. The overall trend during the period shows a sharp fall in the number of approaches for homelessness assistance from a high of 456 decisions 2004/5. The fall in the number of homeless applications has from 2007/08 been maintained through the adoption of the housing options model which has seen the redesign of the homelessness services towards greater preventative action leading to a high of 299 households being assisted before they became homeless in 2011/12.

³ To have a priority need a client must be vulnerable on the grounds of: old age, mental illness, handicap, physical disability, as a result of leaving certain institutional backgrounds or other special reason, or; be pregnant, have dependent children, be aged 16-17 years old, under the age of 21 and previously in LA care between 16 & 17 years, fleeing domestic violence /the threat of domestic violence, or be homeless/threatened with homelessness as a result of an emergency such as flood, fire or other disaster.

There has been a steady rise, in the number of homeless acceptances from the low of 50 in 2007/08 to 144 in 2012/13. During this period the number of prevention cases has also increased leading to a notable increase in the overall number of approaches (total number of *decisions* plus *preventions*),- 503 in 2012/13 compared to 262 in 2009/10.

This trend suggests that there has been a gradual increase in the demand for homelessness assistance from 2007 onwards with a more marked increase since 2012.

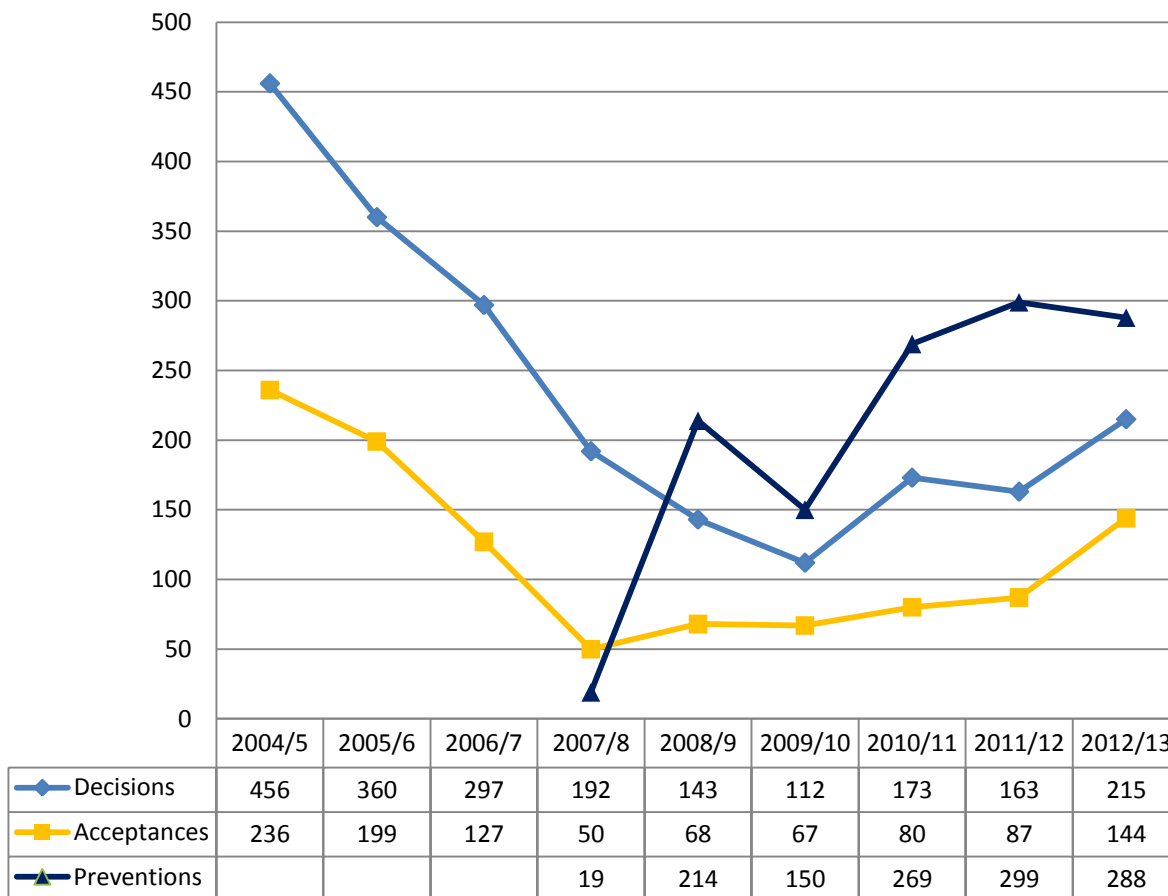


Figure 4: Number homelessness decisions, acceptances and preventions undertaken by Southend Borough Council 2004/5-2012/13

Source: DCLG P1e returns & SBC Homeless database (data for preventions not available prior to 2007/08)

Reasons for Homelessness

Figure 5, below, lists the major reasons for statutory homeless acceptances in 2012/2013 were due to parental evictions, friends or family evictions or termination of Assured Shorthold Tenancy (relating to private rental properties). These were also the most common reasons for statutory homelessness in Southend in 2011/12. Both violent

and non-violent relationship breakdowns and other reasons for homelessness represented significant, if less frequent, reasons for homeless approaches.

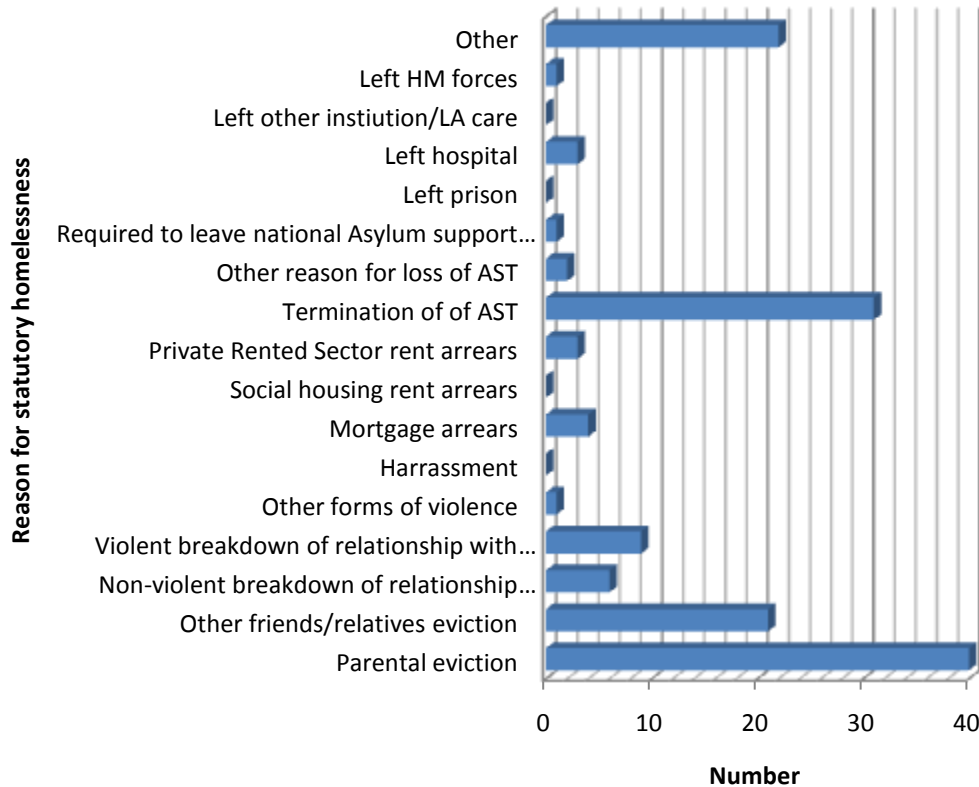


Figure 5: Main Reasons for Statutory Homelessness in Southend 2012/13

Source: SBC Homelessness database

Temporary Accommodation

The number of households placed in temporary accommodation by the Council has increased in recent years, which is one of the outcomes we would expect to see as a result of the increased number of homeless applications requiring decisions. However, the time spent in hostel accommodation is less than half of what it was in 2011, before the previous Homelessness Prevention Strategy was implemented and reflects success in being able re-house people more quickly.

Calendar Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Number of households	143	169	187	197	218
Average length stay (weeks)	28.09	17.81	36.25	26.14	14.36

Table 1: Temporary accommodation usage by Southend Borough Council 2009 – 2013

Source: SBC Homeless database

Non-statutory homelessness in Southend

A significant proportion of single homeless people do not have a priority need for housing under the definition of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) and associated case law so are not entitled to statutory assistance from the Council but only advice and assistance.

In addition, the third and voluntary sector, supported by the Council, offers a valuable resource to non-statutory homeless persons in Southend.

The Homeless Actions Resource Project (HARP) is a Southend Based homeless charity which provides services including a day centre, an emergency night shelter, accommodation dedicated to people who have been through the criminal justice system, accommodation for long term rough sleepers and other accommodation for single vulnerable homeless people.

The main reasons for potential homelessness amongst HARP clients in 2012/13 were, being required/asked to leave home, being evicted from an assured-shorthold tenancy and relationship breakdowns. These reasons for homelessness match the most common reasons for statutory homeless approaches (Figure 5).

Figure 6, below, shows the total number of people approaching HARP as homeless/potentially homeless has increased in the last 3 years.

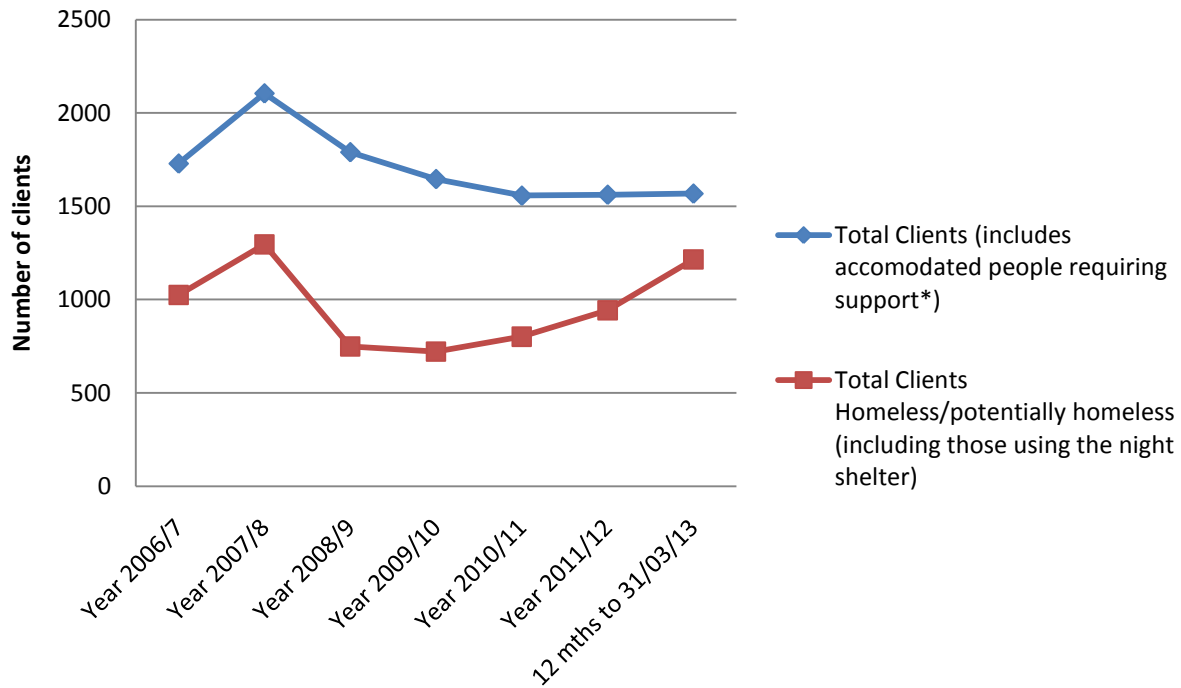


Figure 6: People using HARP's services

Source: HARP

* Total includes those accommodated by HARP but continue to use the day centre for general support (advice / meal / clothing / food parcel / washing clothes etc) also a number of people that are in accommodation but come in for housing/benefits/health/general financial advice etc.

The number of people using HARP's night shelter marginally reduced in 2012/13 from 213 to 209, however, over the course of the year, 157 people were turned away due to lack of space.

Rough Sleeping in Southend-on-Sea

The Autumn 2013 rough sleeper estimate was arrived at using Intelligence from the Council, Streetlink⁴, street pastors and HARP to help co-ordinate a patrol of Southend to count the number of rough sleepers during the night of 12/11/2013.

Patrol areas included:

- Southend high street
- Disused commercial properties
- Stairwells & rear areas of commercial properties.

The final 2013 estimate, verified by Homeless Link was 19 rough sleepers, this represents a rise of 4 compared to the 2012/13 estimate. The Council is aware that the number of rough sleepers in the town on any one night will vary.

⁴ Streetlink.org.uk is a Government funded website that enables the public to report sightings of rough sleepers, or for rough sleepers to report themselves.

Mortgage and landlord possessions

The ability for households to maintain rent and mortgage payments is determined by the state of their personal finances which is directly linked to the health of the wider economy.

Nationally the number of repossessions stood at 33,900 in 2012 and during the period since the Global Financial Crisis the rate has not risen to anywhere close to the rates experienced during the last recession which rose to a high of 75,500 in 1991.

Figure 7 shows the number of mortgage repossessions in Southend have fallen since Bank of England interest rates were cut to an all-time low of 0.5 percent 5 years ago. There is a risk that when interest rates rise again, that some mortgage holders will struggle to make repayments. A study⁵ by the Resolution Foundation uses 5 year growth projections from the Office for Budget Responsibility to predict that the number of households spending over 50% of their disposable income on debt repayments could double by 2018 to over 1 million, thus increasing chances of defaults and repossessions.

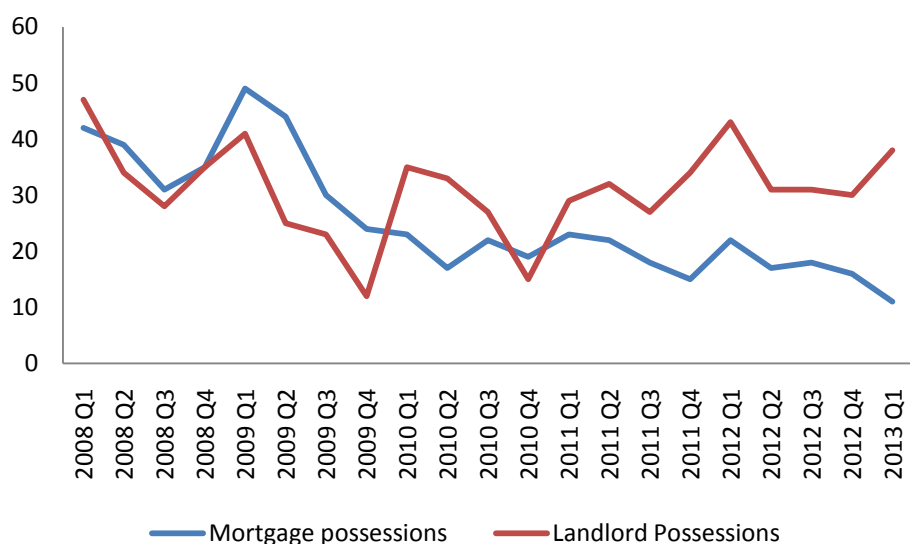


Figure 7: Landlord & mortgage possessions in Southend-on-Sea 2008-2013

Source: Ministry of Justice Mortgage and landlord possession statistics⁶

⁵ Whittaker, M (2013), *Closer to the edge? Debt repayments in 2018 under different household income and cost scenarios*

⁶ Ministry of Justice Mortgage and landlord possession statistics
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mortgage-and-landlord-possession-statistics--2>

The number of private rented possessions in Southend has fallen since 2008 but the rate has been erratic in the interim period. The increasing size of the private rented sector in Southend means that the trends within this sector will have greater importance on homelessness in the future. Working with local landlords to improve standards to provide suitable accommodation options and prevent evictions is paramount.

3.4 The impact of National & Local Policy change

Many national and local policy changes have had an impact on homelessness and homelessness services. A selection of the main legislative/policy changes that will have an impact on future levels of homelessness and shape local policy responses are outlined below.

Welfare Reform Act 2012

The Welfare Reform Act has and will introduce a number of changes to the benefits system with the intended aim of 'simplifying the welfare system and making work pay' and reducing public expenditure on welfare so that it is on a more 'sustainable footing'.⁷

In August 2013, a report⁸ commissioned from the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion found that by 2015/16, both the proportion of claimants affected by Housing Benefit reforms, and the financial losses they face are higher in Southend than the national average – a trend common amongst coastal towns. Without, appropriate management, support, access to alternative housing

and cultural shifts, the reforms could lead to rent arrears, which could in turn increase homelessness.

The Council is aware of the potential challenges that residents face in adjusting to welfare reforms and the action plan of this strategy is designed to support ongoing work to assist individuals affected. A summary of the major reforms are outlined below:

Local Housing Allowance (LHA)

The reduction of LHA rates has made fewer private rented properties affordable to Southend residents.

Council tax benefit

The removal of council tax benefit has resulted in Southend Council having to fund council tax reductions. Due to reduced budgets (10% in 2012/13), less people are going to be entitled to Council Tax reductions. As of April 2013, 19,209 Southend residents were eligible for Council Tax Reductions; this is 1,042 less than were in receipt of

⁷ DWP Reform, DWP's Welfare Reform agenda explained
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/269568/dwp-reform-agenda-explained-dec-2013-1.pdf

⁸ Local Government Association, 2013, *The Local Impacts of Welfare Reform: An assessment of cumulative Impacts and mitigations*

Council Tax Benefit. Those on Job Seekers Allowance and income support now have to pay a small, weekly charge.

Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR)

Most single people under 35 are no longer eligible for LHA on a 1 bedroom flat, instead, they are entitled to the Shared Accommodation Rate.

Previously the age at which a claimant could receive an allowance for a whole flat was 25. 761 Southend residents are currently affected by the SAR. This change is likely to increase demand for good quality, affordable, shared accommodation.

Local Welfare Assistance (Previously social fund community care grants/crisis loans for general living expenses)

The Council have taken responsibility for part of the Social Fund scheme previously Administered by the Department for Work & pensions, which has led to a new 'Essential Living Fund' scheme being created to help ease exceptional pressure on households. The scheme uses vouchers, all pay cards, recycled furniture from local charities and white goods from local business to help eligible applicants access e.g. furniture, furnishings, a bike, household utensils, clothing/footwear and general living expenses.

The Spare Room Subsidy/ 'AKA Bedroom Tax'

As at August 2013 the spare room subsidy affected 762 working age under-occupying Social Housing

Tenants in Southend-on-Sea. This 14 – 25% reduction in housing benefit resulted in an average loss of £836.81 per annum per household⁹.

Initiatives¹⁰ carried out under the lifespan of the previous homelessness prevention strategy have gone a long way to mitigating the impacts of the spare room subsidy, but further work is still required: As of 31st October 2013, 44% of South Essex Homes tenants subject to the spare room subsidy were in rent arrears.

A January 2014 DWP announcement reveals that those who 'have been continuously entitled to housing Benefit since at least 1 January 1996 and have occupied the same dwelling since that date' should be exempt from bedroom tax and that the legislation will shortly be amended. Work is currently being undertaken to identify if this impacts any Council tenants.

Benefit Cap

The overall benefit cap, currently set at £26,000 per annum for couples and families or £18,200 for single people has impacted 187 Southend residents since its introduction, the majority of whom are families in private sector housing. If a claimant is receiving more than the cap

⁹ DWP, 2013 in National Housing Federation: www.housing.org.uk/media/press-releases/new-data-shows-how-many-east-of-england-families-are-really-being-hit-by-th

¹⁰ Southend Borough Council give under-occupying Social Housing tenants the highest priority to move under the council's Allocations Policy, financial grants to those who move to smaller social properties and advance notice of reforms

threshold, a deduction is taken from the Housing Benefit element.

Non-dependent deductions

Non-dependent adults living within a household are expected to contribute to rent and council tax and therefore the amount a benefit claimant receives is reduced. Non-dependent deductions have increased over the last 2 years.

Personal Independence Payments (PIP's)

PIP's replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and are based on a points-based assessment by a health professional. Those on DLA will not automatically receive PIP's; instead, once the phased re-assessment reaches Southend (2015 or later), they will be invited to make a claim for PIP. If a DLA claimant does not respond within 28 days, or does not follow the claims process, they may face having their payments suspended or terminated. The DWP's plan for supporting vulnerable PIP claimants is outlined in their Personal Independence Payments toolkit¹¹.

Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) Sanctions Regime

When JSA/ESA (Employment Support Allowance) claimants sign up for their benefits, they are expected to adhere to certain requirements attached to receiving their payment. Those who do not adhere to these rules are sanctioned, that is, they have their

¹¹ DWP, 2013, *Supporting Personal Independence Payment (PIP) claimants who are in a vulnerable situation*

JSA/ESA payments reduced or stopped for a period of time. October 2012 saw the introduction of a new sanctions regime¹², with penalties rising from 1 – 26 weeks to 4 – 156 weeks.

A Homeless Link study¹³ into the effects of sanctions on homeless people found that:

'Sanctions are disproportionately affecting homeless people. Although on average 3% of JSA and 2.7% of ESA claimants receive a sanction, our research found that a third of homeless people on JSA and nearly one in five on ESA had received a sanction.'

Homeless Link, 2013

Homeless Link's study makes a number of recommendations that Homelessness Services and Jobcentre Plus can take to ensure that the most vulnerable or excluded are not disadvantaged which have been considered when defining our action plan.

¹² The Jobseekers Allowance (Sanctions)(Amendment) regulations 2012: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2012/9780111526408/contents

¹³ Homeless Link, 2013, *A High Cost to Pay: The Impact of benefit Sanctions on homeless people*

Universal Credit

Universal credit is a single, monthly benefit payment paid direct to claimants. It replaces income-based Employment & Support Allowance, Income Support, Working Tax & Child Tax Credit is currently being rolled out across the country.

At the time of writing this strategy, The Work & Pensions Secretary has announced that the 'vast majority' of working age claimants will have moved to Universal Credit by 2017.

Direct payments & budgeting

- The first challenge to maintaining tenancies under Universal Credit is the cultural shift social tenants face, with payments being made directly to the claimant rather than their landlord, as is presently the case.
- A further budgeting constraint is introduced by the fact that payments will be made monthly; whereas rents are due weekly.
- The government have announced there will be exceptions to direct payments in exceptional circumstances¹⁴ (DWP, 2013)

13 Week Protection

- Families will no longer receive short-term help to cover their rent if they lose their job and their rent is over

the Housing Allowance levels.¹⁵

- The removal of this provision could push those with recent work experience (thus potentially more likely to find employment sooner than those who are long term unemployed) into arrears, increasing the risk of eviction.

Further welfare reforms

Further Welfare Reforms, including the potential introduction of an overall cap on welfare spending are likely in the future. The Council will review our Homelessness Prevention Strategy Action Plan annually, to respond to how these changes may impact on homelessness locally.

The Localism Act 2011

The Localism Act introduced a number of new powers and duties available to Local Authorities. The Council have introduced new policies and strategies outlining the local response to changes brought in by the Act:

The Southend-on-Sea Borough Council Tenancy Strategy

Under powers introduced by the Localism Act, social housing landlords may choose to grant fixed term, or flexible tenancies to new tenants. The use of these tenancies allows for the better management of social housing by

¹⁴ www.gov.uk/government/news/freud-lga-supporting-vulnerable-claimants-on-universal-credit

¹⁵ Shelter, 2013, *Universal Credit 13 week protection: Families to lose short term help with their rent if they lose their job*

ensuring that more properties are available to those in the greatest need. At the end of a fixed term (which is generally 5 years) if their circumstances have changed in such a way that does not make best use of housing stock (e.g. if they are under-occupying the property) the tenant may be given notice to leave and assisted to find alternative accommodation. The Southend-on-Sea Tenancy Strategy supports Registered Providers operating in the borough to use flexible tenancies where appropriate.

The Southend-on-Sea Borough Council Allocations Policy

The revised policy has introduced changes to the amount of time that homeless applicants wait before receiving an offer of accommodation. If an applicant had not been successful in obtaining a private or social property within 4 weeks, a Housing Officer will allocate them a direct offer of accommodation suitable to their needs. This reduces the length of time they are homeless and the length of time spent in

temporary accommodation.

The Southend-on-Sea Borough Council Discharging Homelessness Duty Policy

Powers brought about by the Localism Act have enabled better use to be made of the large private rented sector in the town to discharge the Council's statutory homeless duty. The new policy means the Council can now make a suitable

Private Rented Sector Offer to applicants, reducing homelessness and offering a wider choice of potential move-on properties. The demand for social housing in the borough far outstrips supply and the new policy has freed up social housing for other people in Housing Need. The policy is currently supported by the Rent Deposit Loan scheme enabling accepted homeless households to access funding for a deposit to secure private rented accommodation

3.5 Reviewing our approach to tackling homelessness

The government's report: '*Making every approach count: A joint Approach to preventing Homelessness*'¹⁶ brings together much existing knowledge on homelessness and uses it to set Local Authorities 10 challenges that, if adopted should lead to 'a Gold standard service'. Councils that adopt this challenge are making a pledge to 'strive for continuous improvement in frontline housing services'.

The Council are taking the Gold Standard challenge which means the Council will be peer reviewed by other local authorities and the findings of this can be used to further develop homelessness services locally. The 10 challenges as a useful tool in reviewing our services; therefore these will help to inform the aims and actions of this strategy.

The ten 'gold standard' challenges

1. Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
2. Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
3. Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
4. Adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative
5. Have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
6. Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
7. Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
8. Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs
9. Not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
10. Not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks.

¹⁶ DCLG, 2012, *Making every contact count: A joint Approach to ending Homelessness*

Corporate Buy-in, Partnership work & Pathways (challenges 1, 2 & 5)

The achievements of the last homelessness prevention strategy (section 2) demonstrate the positive impact that can be realised through internal and external commitment and partnership work.

Consultation has revealed that there is a will to improve partnership working and to have clear pathways available for service users for young homeless people and entrenched rough sleepers with complex needs, but that high level corporate buy in is required in order to fully realise this ambition:

Entrenched rough sleepers & those with complex needs

Consultation with key stakeholders has revealed wider issues about how services are delivered to those with complex needs, whether current methods of engagement are effective and whether duplicated work is taking place through a lack of clear pathways/options available.

A client with complex needs is at higher risk of homelessness/remaining homeless and may be defined as having any combination of the following:

- Problematic drug and/or alcohol use
- Mental health issues
- No accommodation

- Domestic Violence issues
- Criminal convictions/ASBO
- A perceived or identified risk towards practitioners
- A learning difficulty or disability
- A chaotic lifestyle
- Ineffective contact with services

Different statutory & voluntary services have a vested interest in helping such people but a consistent approach to dealing with such clients is required to ensure efficiency and effectiveness of staff involvement.

There has already been some positive outcomes from ad-hoc case conference meetings and Operation Zest set up by Essex Police to tackle street begging and homelessness. However, a more formalised and properly resourced multi-disciplinary team case conference approach could potentially increase the number of people helped and the options available to them. Stakeholders including Essex Police, Community Housing, The Drug & Alcohol Action Team, HARP, SEPT and Family Mosaic are in support of developing small, case-conference approaches to improve outcomes for people with complex needs by working together.

Further detail regarding Multi-agency partnership approaches to responding to complex needs/helping our most entrenched rough sleepers is given in Part 4.5 of this strategy: 'Improving the

health & wellbeing outcomes of homeless applicants in the borough')

Young Homeless people

Case law and best practice dictates that homeless and children's services departments work jointly in assisting 16 & 17 year olds who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The Council has made progress in developing joint processes and a protocol for dealing with these cases. Further work is required to investigate new ways that the Council departments can work together to improve outcomes for this vulnerable group and this will be acknowledged within the action plan.

A key action for this strategy is supporting agencies in the development of a more coordinated approach to service provision, especially for those clients with complex needs

Adopting a No Second Night Out Model/Single Persons Homelessness Scheme. (Challenge 4)

Over the last 2 years, rough Sleeping has increased locally, regionally and nationally. The No Second Night Out initiative began in London where it aimed to help rough sleepers straight away, before the dangers and trappings of a life on the streets could impact them. The Government has since encouraged the role out of this initiative

nationwide¹⁷. The Council was successful in bidding for £391,000 in grant monies to lead a similar scheme, operating in a DCLG defined sub-region (Epping, Brentwood, Harlow, Thurrock, Brentwood, Castle Point, Rochford & Basildon Council.)

This is a fantastic opportunity for the Council to help single homeless people who often fall outside the priority needs group that authorities have a statutory duty to re-house.

Using the sub-regional funding to develop a Single Persons homeless scheme will be one of the actions we take to achieve the aim of minimising rough sleeping.

Housing Options Prevention Service & Mortgage Rescue scheme (Challenges 6 & 7)

The success of adopting the Housing Options Approach is demonstrated in figure 4, which shows that over a 4 year period over 1,000 cases of statutory homelessness were prevented.

The success of the housing options approach has been based on the use of various initiatives and prevention techniques which tackle the main causes of homelessness in Southend:

¹⁷ DCLG, 2011, *Vision to End Rough Sleeping: No Second Night Out Nationwide*

- Rent and Deposit Loan schemes
- Guaranteed direct payments (whilst housing Benefit is within SBC control)
- Mortgage Rescue scheme advice
- Sanctuary schemes for victims of Domestic Abuse
- Negotiation with landlords
- Mediation with parents
- Debt and money advice/signposting

A range of other measures are also provided to ensure that homes remain suitable for occupation e.g. Disabled Facilities Grants.

The Housing Options Service is promoted to encourage early approaches and interventions. Assistance given by the team ranges from advice, signposting and referrals to other agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, floating support, HARP (all of which receive funding from the Council), Housing Benefit, Crime Reduction Initiatives (CRI), Social Services etc.

Full case work can involve taking an advocacy role, mediating and other interventions.

The success of the Housing Options Advice service and continuation of the homeless prevention methods is key to achieving the aim of reducing homelessness

Private Rented Sector Offer (Challenge 6)

The council understands that the Private Rented Sector offers a valid, and in many instances, the only realistic choice for homeless applicants. The continued effort to improve standards of private rented accommodation is paramount to ensure that is a suitable housing option for Southend residents.

Enforcement action is taken on landlords whose properties do not comply with the Housing Health and Safety Rating system. The South East Alliance of Landlords & Tenants requires landlords to adhere to their code of conduct to maintain standards, perform regular property checks and manage their properties well. The code of conduct also requires SEAL members to notify the council of tenancy related issues and the serving of section 21 notices in order that the Council has more time to work with tenants to prevent homelessness occurring.

The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 requires the council to assess the suitability of any Private rented sector offer before using it to discharge a statutory homelessness duty. A number of these suitability requirements go beyond minimum standards outlined in the Housing Act 2004. The Council is committed to working with local landlords and agents to ensure that they can meet these requirements and provide suitable accommodation for homeless households.

The Council will continue to work with private landlords and agents through the landlords forum, SEAL and other avenues to promote good quality housing and management and build partnerships that aim to reduce the number of households who become homeless from the private rented sector.

The Council will work to extend the number of landlords signed up to SEAL and provide training to landlords so that they are aware of their obligations, with a view to:

- **Reducing the need for enforcement action on landlords**
- **Improved property standards/suitability for residents**
- **reduced fear of reprisal from tenants who complain**
- **Increased opportunities for the council to utilise the private sector when preventing or addressing homelessness.**

The Council will also be asking landlords to notify us of properties as and when they become available so that their suitability can be assessed for discharging a homelessness duty or preventing homelessness.

Bed & Breakfast Accommodation (*Challenges 9 & 10*)

It is illegal to use Bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless households unless in an emergency and event then for no more than 6 weeks. However, the number of homeless

families with children living in bed and breakfast accommodation is at its highest in 10 years and many councils do exceed the 6 week limit¹⁸. Southend borough Council has an excellent track record of not using any bed and breakfast accommodation, thanks to the provision of temporary accommodation at hostels, homeless prevention activity and positive partnership working with partner agencies.

The Council has not used B&B accommodation to house homeless families since 2005 and assisted by the actions in the strategy aims to maintain this record in the future

3.6 Consultation

Initial consultation was carried out during September – November 2013 and has helped us to review the services provided, how they could be improved and what the priorities should be in the future. The Consultation included a multi-agency workshop, inter-team meetings, discussion with frontline staff and an online public survey which included the option for additional comment/ideas. 32% of people who completed the online consultation were homeless and 41% work with those who are. A number of key themes emerged which have helped to inform the strategy and action plan:

¹⁸ <http://www.localgov.co.uk/Homeless-families-housed-in-BBs-reaches-10-year-high/29124>

- Inter-agency support available for homeless people with a dual diagnosis' and/or additional complex needs, such as our most entrenched rough sleepers, could be developed through a coordinated, sustained, case-conference approach.
- Those working with clients felt access to, and engagement with mental health services can be a challenge.
- Closer Joint working could improve outcomes for homeless 16/17 year olds
- Noted success of Churches winter night shelter and opportunity to improve provision through statutory agencies taking opportunity to engage with these 'hard to reach' clients
- Support for those with No Recourse to Public Funds is limited and

agencies are often unsure where to signpost people.

Over 70% of those who completed the online consultation felt that minimising rough sleeping, youth homelessness, dual diagnosis' and complex needs and homeless people's access to drug and alcohol services were high priorities for the strategy and that the proposed outlined actions we intend to take will help tackle these.

Part 4: Aims & Actions

4.1 Introduction

This section explains the aims of the 2014-2017 Homelessness Prevention Strategy and the actions we intend to take to achieve these. The aims and actions have been arrived at based on review of evidence in this strategy, likely future trends and consultation with key stakeholders.

To help make our aims and actions achievable, an annual SMART Homelessness Prevention Strategy Action Plan will be developed in liaison with key stakeholders and the boards of relevant strategy groups throughout the lifetime of this strategy. The Action Plan constitutes the active part of this strategy and will be key to monitoring progress towards the five aims.

4.2 Aim 1. Prevent and avoid homelessness

Why do we need to do this?

The Homelessness Act 2002 signalled a change in approach towards homelessness placing a duty on local authorities to prevent homelessness and address the main causes rather than simply reacting to it. This was in response to increasing numbers of homelessness acceptances and high use of temporary accommodation nationally.

The Council has made great progress, with the help of its partners, over the last ten years in preventing homelessness but vigilance and planning is required to ensure that this continues. As outlined in section 3 there has been a rise in homeless applications over the last three years and in 2012/13 the number of people being accepted by the council as statutory homeless was at its highest since 2005/6.

A rise in homelessness puts an increased strain on the Council's ability and resources to deal with those approaching them for assistance and according to a 2012 Government report, the cost of homelessness can range from £24,000 - £30,000 per person.¹⁹ It is imperative that given the predicted reduction in available funding in the coming years that services should focus on preventative interventions in order to

¹⁹ DCLG, 2012, *Evidence review of the costs of homelessness*, DCLG, (Aug 2012)

improve outcomes for homeless persons whilst offering better value for money for local agencies. The successful achievement of the actions developed under this aim will assist the Council and partners to continue to promote prevention as the first option.

Actions we will take to prevent and avoid homelessness

- Investigate and implement ways of managing any negative impacts from Welfare Reforms (Housing Benefit)
- Continue to provide Southend Residents with advance notice and support with adapting to welfare reforms
- Organise and promote yearly 'Save for life' (money saving) event (South Essex Homes)
- Provide, promote & improve opportunities for residents to learn skills that will help them to sustain their tenancies. Review opportunities for partner agencies to commission advice services in a joined-up way.
- Provide viable Housing Options service to Southend Residents with a range of preventative tools for statutory homeless households (Community Housing)
- Partnership working to tackle short and long term worklessness (Jobcentre)
- Provide a definitive list of monetary & volunteering schemes, courses & support groups across Southend (Housing Benefit)
- Enable any Southend resident who has No Recourse to Public Funds but cannot/can no longer support themselves/their family to be given the correct legal advice & signposting for practical & support options
- Build a better picture of non-statutory homelessness and success of any associated interventions. (HARP)

4.3 Aim 2: Minimise Rough Sleeping

Why do we need to do this?

A rough sleeper's life expectancy is 30 years shorter than the average population²⁰ and exposure to severe weather conditions can lead to serious health conditions and death²¹. Those who are rough sleeping can be subject to multiple exclusions which make it difficult for them to access and retain housing.

19 rough sleepers were counted in a one night, intelligence lead patrol of Southend in Autumn 2013. A number of those included in the count are known to local agencies to

²⁰ North West London PCTs

²¹ Homeless Link, 2013, [SWEP and Extended Winter Provision: Engaging Rough Sleepers in Winter](#)

have been rough sleepers for some time previously. This aim is therefore closely linked to our aim of improving health & wellbeing outcomes for homeless people.

Both HARP and the Council have recently received funding to help rough sleepers in the sub-region and locally. Furthermore, to prevent deaths caused by winter weather, Local Authorities are advised²² to provide a Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP), whereby if the temperature falls below zero° C for three consecutive nights, accommodation is provided, irrespective of whether the client has a priority need.

In previous years, collaboration between Southend Council, HARP and local churches has enabled a winter night shelter that provide food and shelter for rough sleepers over the winter months to be set up. The Churches Winter Night Shelter provides an opportunity to commence additional, longer-term support to guests and the action plan will seek to encourage stakeholders to do this.

Actions we will take to minimise rough sleeping

- Work in partnership to provide a Winter night shelter (Community Housing & Churches Winter Night Shelter co-ordinator)
- Ensure a Severe Weather Emergency Provision is in place for instances when the Winter Night Shelter cannot be used (Community Housing)
- Commission a single persons homeless scheme to help homeless people escape a life on the streets, including:
 - A sub-regional private rented property for single homeless people
 - A Private Rented Sector Bond Scheme (Community Housing)
- Conduct a robust rough sleeper count to help build intelligence of rough sleeping in our town (Community Housing)
- Re-commission Single Homeless Supported Housing provision (Supporting People)
- Deliver an additional 11 units of emergency provision for those new to the Streets (HARP)

4.4 Aim 3. Improve health & wellbeing outcomes for homeless people

Why do we need to do this?

Homelessness is a complex issue that cannot be resolved through bricks and mortar

²² Homeless Link, 2013, *SWEP and extended winter provision*

alone. Those who are homeless are more likely to suffer mental and physical health problems than the average population. They also have greater difficulty accessing services²³.

A homeless client with a dual diagnosis or multiple needs is likely to need support with their condition if they are going to be able to access or retain housing. Liaison with staff/ partners and homeless persons has revealed that such clients face difficulty in having their needs addressed as, even if they successfully engage, a client may experience difficulty in receiving support from multiple services each of whose primary remit focuses primarily on one issue i.e. substance misuse. The *Making Every Adult Matter* (MEAM)²⁴ approach to partnership working/ tackling complex needs has been used in other areas resulting in improved outcomes for client groups and also substantial net savings to services.²⁵

The Health & Wellbeing Board²⁶ brings together the Southend Clinical Commissioning Group, Healthwatch, the NHS, Public Health and the Council's Corporate Director for People and Chief Executive and seeks ways to deliver health, social care and housing services in a more joined up way. This partnership provides the opportunity to help realise the ambition of improved multi-agency responses to homeless people with complex needs.

A report on the Homeless Health Needs Audit, undertaken as an action under the previous homelessness prevention strategy, is currently being drawn up by Public Health. A key aim of the audit is to inform recommendations to commissioners to improve the health of homeless people and reduce health inequalities and will also help to inform the action plans produced over the three years of this strategy.

Actions we will take to improve the health outcomes of homeless people in the borough

- Improve multi-agency working for people with complex needs through case-conferencing our most entrenched rough sleepers and exploring how to improve the way services are jointly delivered. (DAAT)

²³ Homeless Link, 2010, *The Health and Wellbeing of People who are Homeless: evidence from a national audit*

²⁴ www.themeamapproach.org.uk

²⁵ Cambridgeshire's Chronically excluded adults service saw a 31% (£100,000) reduction in client costs to the criminal justice system due to clients being cautioned, arrested, required to attend court or spend time in police custody less frequently.

²⁶ A statutory committee, set up in accordance with the Health & Social Care Act 2012.

- Have complex needs included as part of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. (Public Health)
- Further develop hospital discharge protocols, to ensure that provisions are put in place to allow the individual to access accommodation necessary to their recovery upon their discharge. (Public Health)
- Use evidence from the Homeless Health Needs Audit to inform commissioning activity (Public Health)
- Utilise the resources & design of the new Bradbury training & accommodation Centre to further develop the health, training & support needs of HARP clients (HARP)

4.5 Aim 4: Encourage provision of suitable accommodation for those who are, or may become homeless

Why do we need to do this?

To ensure that the Council can continue to meet its statutory duty to house certain categories of homeless people, it must make best use of the resources at its disposal.

In Southend the demand for social housing exceeds supply, with an average of 12 properties becoming available a week and over 1,000 people on the Housing Register. Southend also has a higher proportion of private rented housing compared to the England and TGSE sub-region average²⁷, resulting in the need to better utilise private sector stock to address homelessness.

Welfare reforms have meant that less private rented sector properties are affordable to low income households. The Thames Gateway South Essex Strategic Housing Market Assessment Review²⁸ demonstrates a need to provide more accommodation in Southend to account for a growing population with a proportion of this to be affordable.

In the past 25 year the majority of new build affordable housing has been provided by Housing Association partners with the Council receiving nomination rights. The Council

²⁷ Census 2011, in TGSE Fundamental review of Strategic Housing Market

²⁸ ORS (2013) *Thames Gateway South Essex Fundamental review of Strategic Housing Market Assessment Review 2013*

is committed to continue working with Housing Association partners to bring forward developments with the support from the Homes and Communities Agency.

New powers under the Localism Act also mean that there is increasing scope for the Council to consider ambitious plans for developing new housing itself thus making the best use of its own land and resources.

Developing more affordable housing, making best use of existing stock and improving our use of Southend's large private sector market will help us ensure that more accommodation becomes available for homeless people and those who may become homeless.

Actions we will take to enable adequate accommodation to become available for those who are homeless or could become homeless

- Continue work to bring long term empty homes back into use (Strategic/Private Sector Housing)
- Enable more affordable housing to be developed in Southend (Strategic Housing)
- Further utilise the private rented sector to address homelessness, by developing links with landlords, including SEAL & the Landlords Forum and asking for advance notification of any properties that become available. (Community Housing)
- Re-commission supported accommodation for single homeless people (Supporting People)
- Continue to review nominations agreements with registered providers in the borough to maximise lettings made through Southend-on-Sea Borough Council's Allocation Policy (Strategic Housing)
- Re-commission support for ex-offenders and victims of domestic abuse (Supporting people)

4.6 Aim 5: Minimise youth & young person's homelessness

Why do we need to do this?

Youth homelessness can have lasting socio-economic impacts. Studies show that homeless young people are disproportionately more likely to be not in education, employment or training (NEET), that their health is negatively affected and that their

experiences can contribute to/exacerbate substance misuse issues.²⁹ Children who are homeless are subject to a plethora of disadvantages including the risk of developmental delays and mental health issues.

Wherever possible, safe and reasonable the first option for homeless young persons should be to remain or return to live with their family. Where this relationship has broken down support may be required through mediation to rebuild trust and allow the young person to return home.

However, it is recognised that in a number of cases returning to family may not be possible or desirable and in these cases alternative options are required. The success of young person’s supported housing in Southend is high, with an average 23 individuals within the YMCA (for 16 – 25 year olds) or Youth Offending Provision being supported into education, training and/or employment, out of a total of 33 units of provision. However, young people often have to go into hostel accommodation whilst waiting for supported housing and units run at full capacity.

Both HARP and the Council have seen a rise in youth homelessness and have also observed that young people are accounting for an increasing proportion of their total client base. In 2012/13, 16 – 24 year olds made up 42% of all statutory homeless acceptances, demonstrating a need to target this client group.

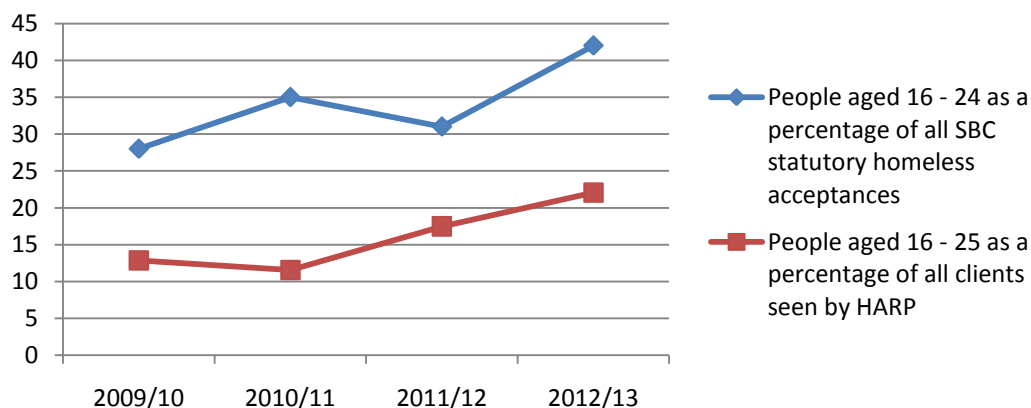


Figure 8: Young people as a proportion of those assisted by Southend Borough Council and HARP

Source: Homelessness database & HARP summary stats

²⁹ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008, *Youth Homelessness in the UK: a decade of progress?*

Actions we will take to minimise youth & young persons homelessness

- Provide an additional 13 units of Young Persons Supported accommodation (Supporting People)
- Set up a Working party to explore the feasibility of commissioning more young person's housing, including those who find it difficult to maintain a tenancy (Housing)
- Further collaboration between the Council's Children's Services & Housing Options team around 16/17 year olds who are homeless/threatened with homelessness (Community Housing & Children's Services)
- Raise awareness of, and funds for youth homelessness through the promotion of the 'Sleep Easy in Schools' campaign. (YMCA + Services for Schools)
- Explore feasibility of carrying out home visits for those at risk of parental eviction (Community Housing)

4.7 Resources available to prevent and reduce homelessness

The government's most recent spending review confirmed that Local Authorities and other publicly funded bodies will continue to receive reduced government funding at least in the medium term.

The provisional Local Government Financial settlement indicates a £7.6million reduction of funds for Southend Borough Council in 2014/15. It is anticipated there will be a further reduction in government funding of £9.8 million in 2015/16, equating to an overall reduction of 23% over two years.³⁰

Careful consideration will be given as to how each action on the action plan can be resourced. Given the nature of budget setting resourcing for each action, beyond the first year of the action plan, will need to be reviewed annually.

The Council has a proposed 2014/15 Housing Options gross expenditure budget of £308,000 to fund its statutory homeless responsibilities, in addition to this the Housing

³⁰ www.southend.gov.uk/news/article/1322/southend-on-sea_borough_council_receives_76m_cut_in_government_funding

Options Team administers the following grants aimed to prevent and reduce homelessness.

- CLG single homeless/rough sleeper grant: £391,000, sub regional one-off grant.
- Mortgage Rescue grant: £39,875
- Homeless Prevention Grant: £27,500

To date, January 2014, the Council have invested £134,003 over the 2013/14 financial year in providing rent-deposit loans, as a means of preventing homelessness and discharging statutory homelessness duty. This is a £49,800 increase from the entire 2012/2013 financial year and reflects the increased use of the private rented sector following the adoption of the April 2013 Discharging Homelessness Duty Policy. The loans are set at an affordable repayment rate generally over a period of three years and are 0% interest. All the monies for this scheme are recycled into further loans creating a sustainable medium-long term approach.

Further council funds also contribute to the prevention/avoidance of homelessness, including any capital investment in housing development and funds allocated to/distributed by internal teams such as social services, Supporting People, Drugs & Alcohol and Housing Benefit.

Two budgets administered by the Housing Benefit Team that are of particular significance to the aims of this strategy are the Discretionary Housing Fund (Government contribution 2013/14- £581,762) and the Essential Living Fund (£504,548.00 for 2014/15). The DWP will be withdrawing the funding for ELF from 2015/16 and therefore steps are being taken to secure the scheme for the future.

As well as moneys allocated to internal teams working to prevent/address homelessness, the Council also commission housing related support and allocate funds to outside bodies such as the Homeless Action Resource Project and Southend Citizens Advice Bureau, who's work contributes to the aims of this strategy.

The Council is committed to funding statutory services and works in partnership with other agencies to secure funding wherever possible.

A significant resource to the delivery this strategy is the time, hard work and expertise of Councillors, Council and stakeholder staff, landlords and volunteers. Volunteers are particularly valuable to the delivery of this strategy as without their generosity the churches winter night shelter would not operate.

4.8 Implementing & monitoring the Strategy

We will meet the aims and actions of this strategy by:

- Developing a SMART Homelessness Prevention Strategy Action Plan with key stakeholders.
- Monitoring the progress of the action plan on a regular basis
- Setting up working parties tackling specific issues
- Hold regular meetings to review Action Plan progress
- Review the Actions Plan on a yearly basis to take account of emerging/changing needs relevant to the aims of this strategy and resource implications
- Using statistics on homelessness in the town to measure the success, including ones used as Performance Indicators. As well as statistics collated by the Council on homelessness, we will be asking partners to share relevant homelessness data