

# Swindon Homelessness Strategy 2016- 2021

## 1. Approach

### What do we want to achieve?

To improve services to prevent or reduce the impact of homelessness on our most vulnerable residents.

### Why do we need a Homelessness Strategy?

Under Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 Local Authorities are required to periodically review homelessness in their District, and publish a Homelessness Strategy based on that review.

### What do we mean by homelessness?

Section 175 of the Housing Act 1996 states that a person is homeless if he has no accommodation available for his occupation, in the United Kingdom or elsewhere, which he—

- (a) is entitled to occupy by virtue of an interest in it or by virtue of an order of a court,
- (b) has an express or implied licence to occupy, or
- (c) occupies as a residence by virtue of any enactment or rule of law giving him the right to remain in occupation or restricting the right of another person to recover possession.

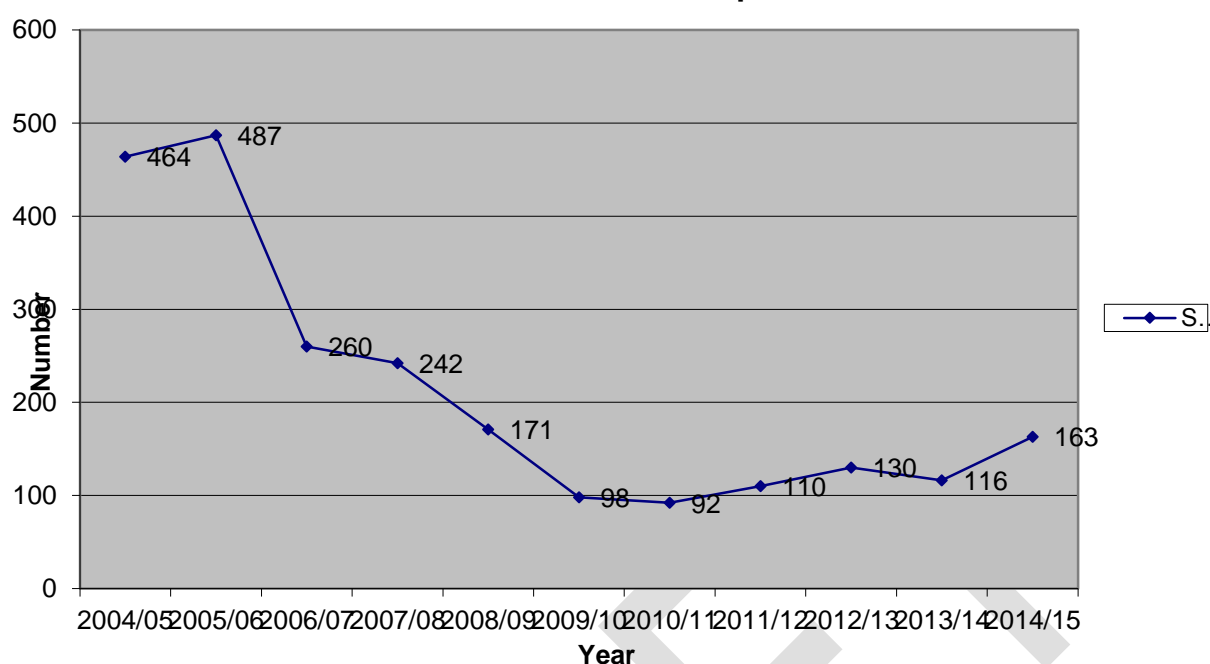
## 2. Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013

The Homelessness Strategy 2008 asserted the Council's view that homelessness can be prevented if the right choices are available and that early intervention at critical times is the most effective way of addressing homelessness. The strategic priorities for action were:

- Addressing the main reasons for homelessness *f*
- Increasing access to accommodation *f*
- Addressing wider causes of homelessness *f*
- Preventing homelessness *f*
- Provide support to vulnerable people and people at risk of homelessness

Figure A: The success of this approach is shown in the number of households accepted as homeless:

## Homeless Acceptances



This situation still holds true today and the Council will continue to apply these principals to its work. However, this Strategy seeks to focus on 4 critical issues rather than reasserting previous objectives. These are set out as follows:

- Ensuring victims of domestic abuse are appropriately housed.
- Improving partnership working to support homeless people with complex needs.
- Preventing homelessness for people with health and care needs.
- Ensure we make best use of our social housing to minimise homelessness.

### 3. Homelessness Strategy Evidence Base:

What the evidence tells us:

The Homelessness Strategy Evidence Base tells us:

- There will be significant growth in future of people living alone, or as lone parents, which are the groups where housing affordability is the greatest problem.
- There is a forecast shortage of approximately 335 affordable homes per year above the 300 target from the Housing Strategy.
- There is a small but significant group of people who are rough sleeping, and who have complex needs.
- For over a third of women fleeing domestic abuse, leaving their home increased the abuse.

The evidence tells us that due to a shortfall of affordable homes, homelessness will continue to be a challenge in Swindon. Many of these issues are subject to national

policies, and the Council and its partners will continue to endeavour to do their best to meet needs in the current market conditions.

Our analysis also shows that although we have created a pathway out of rough-sleeping, it is not always sustained. Breaking the links that draw people back to the streets is not happening consistently.

Our homelessness service has improved significantly over the past 10 years due to a change of emphasis to earlier intervention and homelessness prevention, and this Strategy aims to set out a way to improve it further.

We need to build on the progress over the past few years, and develop our service in some specific areas to deliver further improvements.

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#### **4. Priorities:**

- Ensuring victims of Domestic Abuse are appropriately housed
- Improving partnership working to support homeless people with complex needs
- Preventing homelessness for people with health and care needs
- Ensure we make best use of our social housing to minimise homelessness

Due to the critical nature of these issues it is our view that we will focus policy and service development in these areas. It does not mean that other areas are not important, and we will continue to do our best to house people in line with our statutory requirements and best practice.

## Priority 1

### Ensuring victims of Domestic Abuse are appropriately housed

There are large numbers of victims of domestic abuse in Swindon, and only a small proportion become homeless as a result.

Figure B: Estimated prevalence of domestic abuse in Swindon

	Since age 16			In past 12 months		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
<b>Any DA (inc. family)</b>	<b>11,300</b>	<b>19,300</b>	<b>30,600</b>	<b>3,200</b>	<b>4,800</b>	<b>8,000</b>
Partner DA	9,300	17,200	26,500	2,500	3,700	6,200
Partner (non-sexual)	8,100	15,200	23,300	1,900	3,000	4,800
Partner (emotional, financial)	4,900	10,800	15,700	1,100	2,000	3,100
Threat or force	4,900	11,500	16,400	900	1,700	2,700
Threats	700	6,400	7,100	100	1,000	1,100
Force	4,600	10,400	15,000	900	1,400	2,300
Minor force	1,900	7,800	9,700	500	900	1,400
Severe force	3,900	7,700	11,700	700	1,000	1,600
Sexual assault	1,700	12,000	13,700	300	1,600	1,900
Stalking	6,300	11,700	17,900	2,100	2,600	4,800

Source: Crime in England and Wales 2010/11 (table 3.01) applied to Census-based SNPP for 2013

Figure C: Reasons for homelessness of households placed into temporary accommodation in Swindon:

14/15	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Termination of AST	12	19	15	4	50
Other reason	6	4	12	6	28
Parents no longer willing to accommodate	3	7	8	6	24
Violent breakdown of relationship	6	9	3	5	23
Left institution	3	2	1	2	8
Friends / Relatives no longer willing to accommodate	3	1	1	2	7
Mortgage Arrears	1	2	2	1	6
Non-violent breakdown of relationship	2	0	0	3	5
Private Sector Arrears	2	1	0	1	4
Other forms of violence	1	0	0	1	2
RSL Arrears	0	0	2	0	2

Leaving NASS	0	0	1	1	2
Violent breakdown of relationship involving associated persons	0	1	0	0	1
Racially motivated violence	1	0	0	0	1
LA Rent Arrears	0	0	0	0	0

The evidence<sup>1</sup> shows that re-housing victims does not always stop the abuse occurring, and can be a trigger for the abuse to escalate. In future more thought should be given to the best housing solution for victims, rather than an assumption that rehousing will resolve matters. Nevertheless re-housing in a planned and supportive way is still a key component of enabling victims to escape abusive situations. The Council's experience indicates that Refuges are the safest places for victims and their families.

**Actions:**

Improve information for partner agencies to support choices of victims.

Improve move-on options for refuge residents to ensure availability of specialist supported housing.

**Success Measures:**

Due to the enduring nature of domestic abuse it is unlikely that the Homelessness Strategy will reduce its prevalence. However, if successful the Council and its partners will be able to demonstrate a reduction of repeated incidences of abuse of people who have received housing assistance.

We will seek to improve move-on options to reduce the average length of stay in the local Refuge, in a safe way, to ensure the Council is getting optimal value for money from this significant asset.

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<sup>1</sup> See Page 29 of Appendix 2, Homelessness Strategy Evidence Base.

## Priority 2

### Improving partnership working to support homeless people with complex needs

The prevalence of rough sleeping is increasing at the moment, having been fairly stable for a number of years. The Rough Sleeper Estimate for Swindon has been approximately 10 for the past 3 years, and this in 2015 increased above 20. This may be due to issues such as welfare reform, and reduced availability of affordable housing. However, it is the view of practitioners that the complexity of the support needs of rough-sleepers is increasing. Analysis of individuals tells us that many of those rough-sleeping in Swindon have been stuck in a revolving door of homelessness for a number of years.

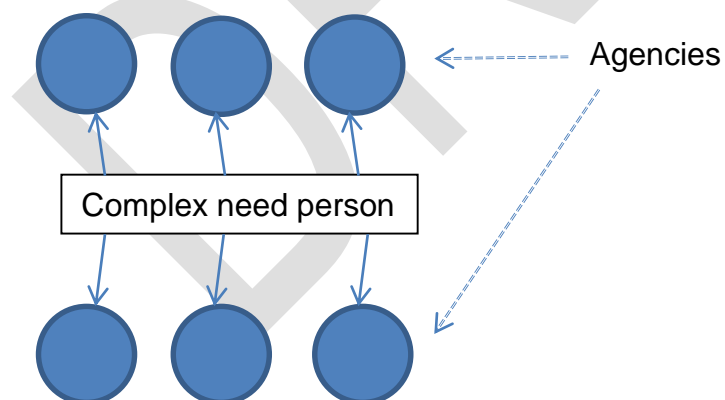
The Homelessness Strategy will prioritise actions for individuals demonstrating 3 or more of the following risk indicators:

- Mental Health problems
- Offending
- Substance misuse
- Domestic Abuse

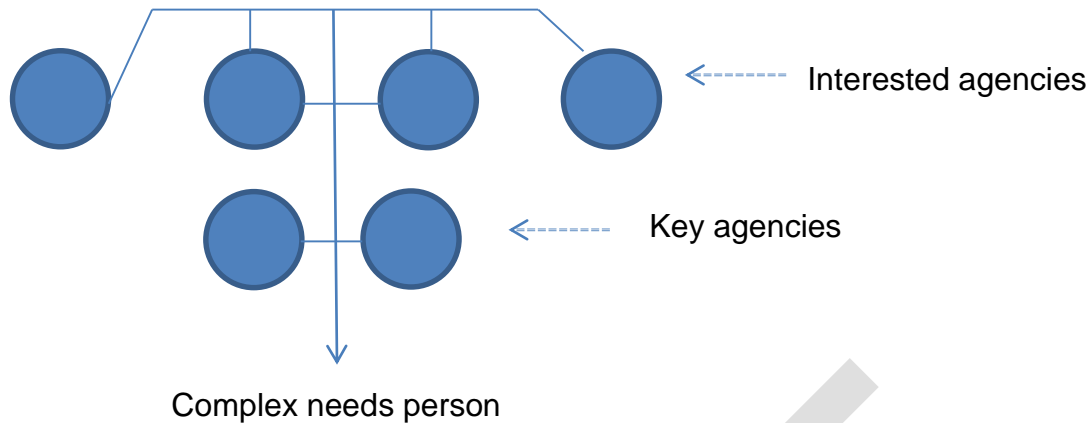
The Strategy identifies this as the critical aspect to reducing rough-sleeping, and the plan is to improve partnership working in this area.

At the moment Swindon has a number of agencies supporting individuals with complex needs, but the person is responsible for managing the partnership:

From this:



To this:



The person is supported in much the same way, but has to navigate fewer agencies and is no longer responsible for the communication between agencies. This allows the person to work with the agency that most meets their need, that they work best with, while at the same time reducing the workload on agencies they would rather not work with. This is based on the Family Intervention model.

The success of the Homelessness Strategy will then be measured by its impact on reducing demand from complex needs individuals. This will be assessed by identifying the 4 key risk areas, and the number of people who drop a risk indicator. This is an innovative approach for this client group, so setting a target will be a matter of judgment and refinement once we have a longitudinal dataset.

### **Actions:**

Undertake a full review of joint-working for complex needs individuals to improve outcomes.

Promote improved partnership work with mental health agencies to ensure that vulnerable people are housed, supported and can access treatment in the most appropriate way.

Identify longer term options to support people who have experienced homelessness to prevent returning rough-sleeping.

### **Success Measures:**

Success will be measured by the implementation of a new Partnership Working Protocol across key partners.



Furthermore, the Council will target a reduction in the number of people with complex needs rough sleeping in Swindon, as well as a reduction in repeat street homelessness.

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### **Priority 3:**

#### **Preventing homelessness for people with care needs**

For too many people with care needs, accommodation is provided through the Council's homelessness service. If a client in care becomes homeless there should be appropriate and current assessments on the quality of the care that is offered. The target should be for all clients in receipt of care to be supported into suitable housing in a planned, supportive way to ensure the best outcome for the person and where possible reducing the care within a given timescale.

#### **Actions:**

Establish a Housing & Care Panel to match clients in housing need and suitable vacancies.

Improve partnership working to ensure that housing aspirations are discussed regularly as part of people's care planning.

#### **Success Measures:**

Success will be measured by improved understanding of the housing needs of clients with care needs, and a reduction of homelessness presentations people with care needs.

A wider variety of housing options will be developed to support this, as stated in the Housing Strategy.

## **Priority 4**

### **Ensure we make best use of our social housing to minimise homelessness**

Swindon has nearly 300 households in temporary accommodation, some of whom are prevented from bidding for social housing due to historical housing debts. There should be a more flexible approach, using direct matching of empty social housing properties to ensure that households in temporary accommodation do not remain there for excessive periods of time. Being in temporary accommodation can have negative impacts on families, in particular children and reducing the number of people in temporary accommodation can lead to improved wellbeing for those families.

The evidence base tells us that there is a resistance in the private rented sector to provide accommodation for those who have become homeless. This means that we have to ensure that we use this asset in a targeted way. Having lots of families in privately rented housing allows us to meet our statutory obligations, but it also reduces the amount of privately rented housing available to people willing to rent directly from landlords which can increase demand on Council services.

#### **Actions:**

Amend the Allocations Policy to offer a proportion of social housing voids in a targeted way to homeless households.

#### **Success Measures:**

This will be measured by a reduction in the average length of time households spend in temporary accommodation, as well as a reduction of the number of households in temporary accommodation.