



Copeland Borough Council

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

2019 – 2024



Foreword

Councillor Mike McVeigh, Housing Portfolio Holder



I am proud to introduce this strategy, which sets out our objectives for homelessness and rough sleeping in Copeland. This 5 year plan aligns our work with the Council's corporate ambition to achieve social wellbeing for everyone, including the most vulnerable or excluded, and through it we will deliver this vital element of our Housing Strategy, which launched in 2019. Since the last strategy we have achieved great improvements in areas such as youth homelessness and providing safe houses for domestic abuse victims.

Locally our challenges are not necessarily the same or as visible as we see in big cities, with rough sleepers in doorways. Whilst of course street homelessness does exist from time to time in Copeland, we have an on-going problem with hidden homeless people sometimes known as "sofa surfers". We also don't have enough accommodation with support for those with risky and chaotic lifestyles and we need to continue our work lifting adults and children out of abusive situations.

Our aims:

- Prevent rough sleeping and reduce levels of hidden homelessness
- Prioritise homeless prevention
- Ensure appropriate accommodation - especially for those hard to reach, higher risk people and those at risk of abuse and exploitation

Working on homelessness solutions is not just about providing the roof over someone's head. It's about all those wrap around services that support that person to rebuild their confidence, their self-esteem and future lives. This is why our relationships with the voluntary sector active in the homeless community is so important. This strategy is as much about the wrap around services we need to put in place with our partners as it is about meeting our basic legal duties. Tackling homelessness is a partnership approach; we cannot do it alone. This 5-year strategy has been developed in conjunction with our community-based partners, because their role in delivering homeless services is critical to the Council meeting its legal duties and we thank them for their passion and willingness to work collaboratively with the Council.

Councillor Sam Pollen, Homelessness Champion

Our approach to homelessness, how we treat those people at their lowest ebb and crisis point in their lives, defines us as a Council. I'm proud to say we have a strong record and an excellent, compassionate and committed team. However, we face continued pressure to do more for more people and this strategy is vital to helping us navigate this demand and define our priorities.





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Executive Summary

Homelessness, specifically rough sleeping, is rising nationally and as a borough we have increasing numbers of people contacting us who are at risk of homelessness or are already 'hidden homeless' -i.e. staying with family and friends, roofless and at risk of having to sleep rough. We are seeing more people who have complex needs relating to drug or alcohol addiction or mental health issues, and rising numbers with more than one support need. Copeland has always been proud of its compassionate and preventative approach to homelessness, going over and above our statutory minimum requirements, and our new strategy continues our culture of person-centred services.

This strategy sits beneath the Housing Strategy, which was launched in August 2019 to reflect the Vision and Mission of Copeland Borough Council and our Strategic Aims – **Making Copeland a better place to live, work and visit**. The Housing Strategy has 3 themes: Housing for Investment, Housing for People and Housing for Place.

This Homelessness Strategy sits under the Housing for People theme with the vision:

Helping people before they reach crisis point by working with partners to provide support, ultimately enabling our residents to live healthy, happy lives.

The strategy also underpins the Council's Social Inclusion Policy and Delivery plan and is the means by which the Homelessness theme of the Social Inclusion Policy is delivered.

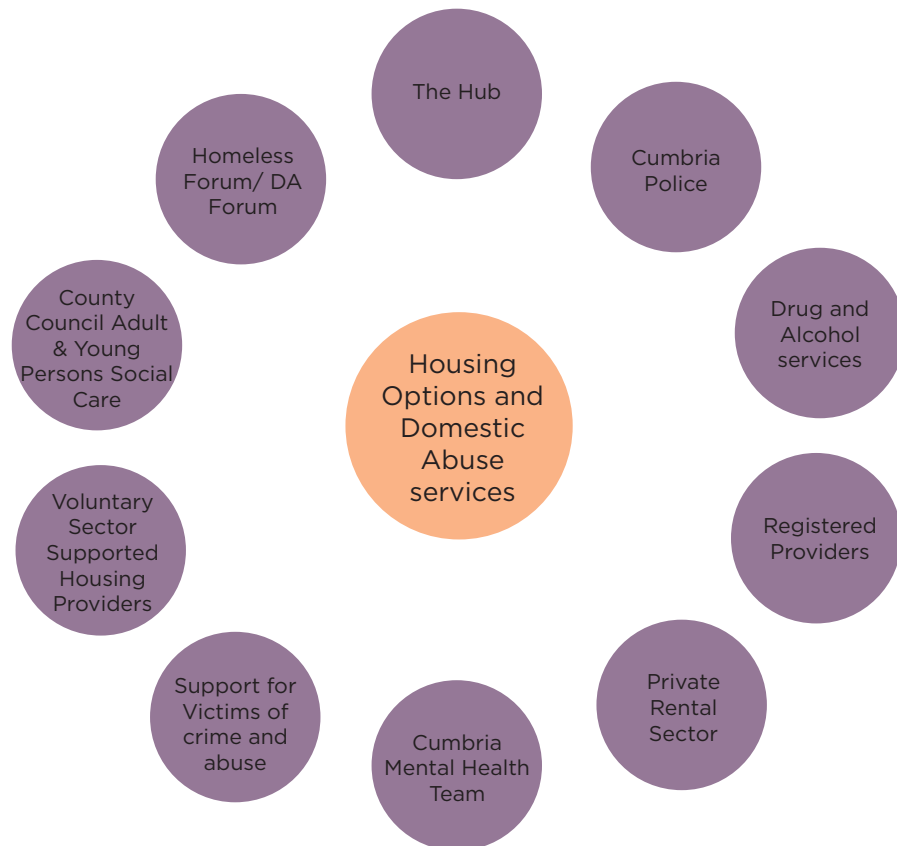
By preventing homelessness as much as possible we make direct savings on the cost of temporary accommodation and help reduce pressure on the wider services in the borough, such as Health and Social Services. The Strategy reflects the themes within and supports the delivery of the Cumbria Joint Public Health Strategy and specifically supports the topics of Human Capital and Social Capital.

In this strategy, we identify three aims to address homelessness and fulfil our legal obligations:

- 1. Reduce the levels of hidden homelessness and potential rough sleepers**
- 2. Prioritise the prevention of homelessness**
- 3. Ensure sufficient and appropriate accommodation and support is available**

Partnership

Partnership working remains at the core of our strategic approach and our joint work with the third sector and neighbouring districts will drive many of our objectives. Tackling the causes and impact of homelessness remains a priority for the Council and we recognise the assistance and ongoing work of our partner organisations, both strategic and operational, in helping us achieve this.



National Context and Local Response

Homelessness, specifically rough sleeping, is rising nationally. The Government has committed to tackling this by introducing a Rough Sleeping Strategy in 2018 around the three pillars of Prevention, Intervention and Recovery and overhauling how local authorities address homelessness through the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2018. A Rough Sleeping and Homelessness Task Force has been also been established.

Whilst actual street homeless numbers are low in the district there is a marked increase in roofless people who are sofa surfing and their status hidden from view. This cohort is at risk of falling into rough sleeping at any point and proactive work is needed to stem this possibility. In 2019 the Council will benefit from inward investment through the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and by working with third sector partners and neighbouring boroughs we will deliver our objectives relating to rough sleeping and its prevention.

Overview of homelessness in Copeland

Analysis of data for 2018, following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act showed that:

- We assessed 401 people and made 91% of our decisions within the 56 day target
- We saw a 60% increase in the number of households placed in our temporary accommodation from 2017
- We saw an 83% increase in approaches for advice (541 compared with 295 in 2017)
- We saw a 73% decrease in the number of people entitled to a full homelessness duty (reduced from 23 in 2017 to 6 in 2018)
- 153 people presented to us having no fixed abode
- 14 people stated they were sleeping rough
- The main reasons people presented as homeless were loss of private or social tenancy, family and friends being unable to accommodate and relationship breakdowns
- The main support need identified for those presenting was mental health issues

Achievements

Copeland has always placed a focus on the prevention of homelessness and valued partnership working. Since the last strategy we have:

- Strengthened close working partnerships with the other Cumbrian Local Authorities under a Homeless Forum to share best practice, achieve savings and secure funding from central government around domestic abuse and rough sleeping
- Established The Hub in Whitehaven Police Station, managed by a Copeland Borough Council Officer, to deliver a multi-agency approach to anti-social behaviour, allowing us to intervene at an earlier stage
- Become a core member of the MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) for domestic abuse cases and the MAPPA (Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements) meeting to discuss high level cases for those leaving prison, providing a joined up partnership approach to preventing and addressing homelessness
- Enabled increased accommodation provision for young people and adults who need support – Whitehaven Community Trust reopened its hostel for young people under 25 and its Young Mums Project at Bakewell House; Calderwood House opened for over 25's with priority for ex-military personnel; The Foyer provides support and accommodation for 16-25's
- Developed a Strategic Joint working protocol for homeless 16-17 year olds with Cumbria County Council
- Secured funding for a Crisis and Prevention Support Officer to help victims of domestic abuse and sexual exploitation at risk of homelessness, who has worked with 100 women, men and children since being in post
- Introduced a Member Champion to promote the Housing Options service within the Council and wider borough
- Opened 3 safe houses for domestic abuse cases which benefit from enhanced security measures designed in conjunction with the Police Crime Prevention Service
- Provided funding to partners to deliver personal budgeting advice, as well as digital, financial and welfare support

▲ Opportunities and Challenges

Challenges:

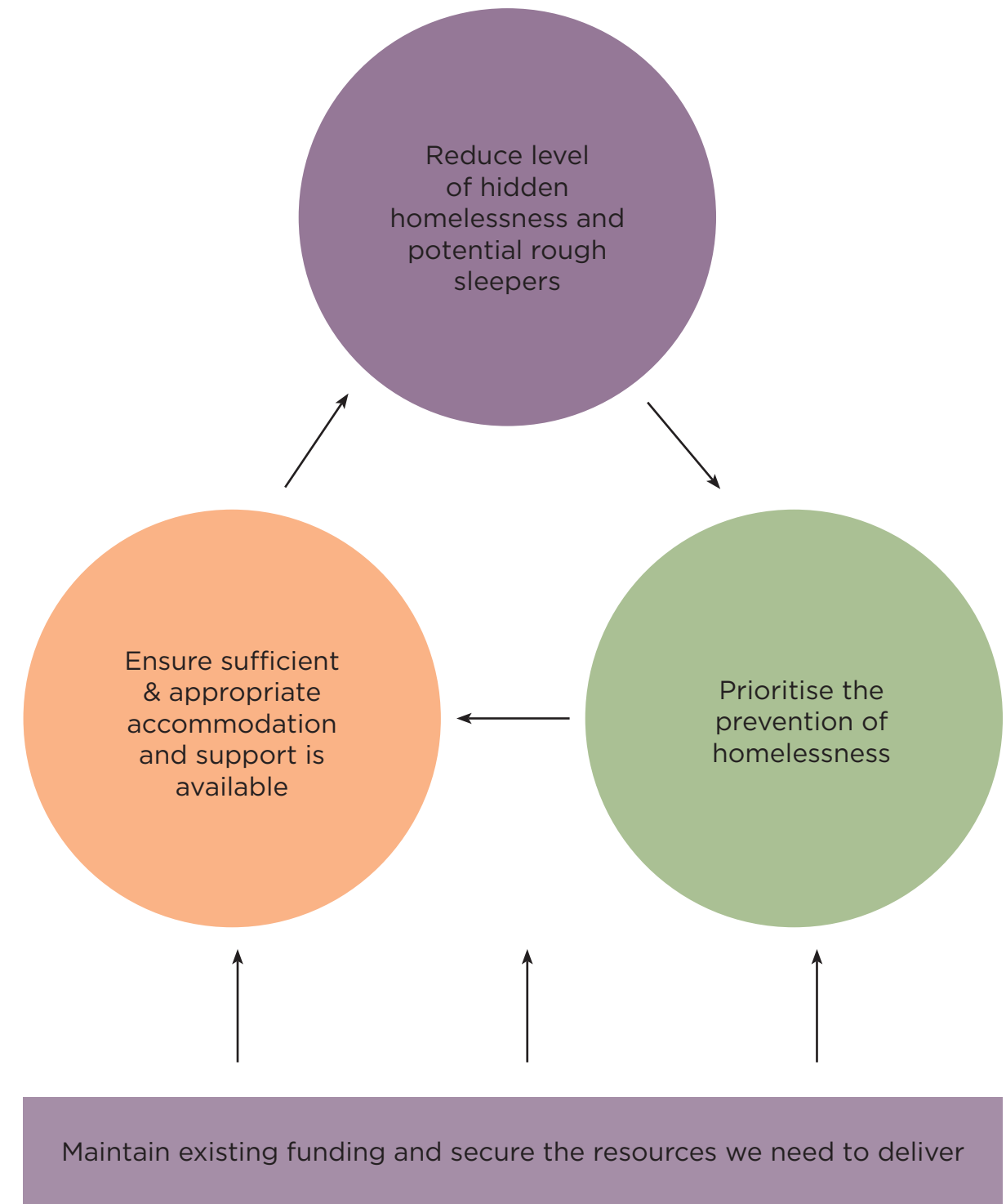
- Residents are still impacted by the measures brought in by the Welfare Reform Act in 2012, including:
 - Freezes to Local Housing Allowances
 - Housing-related benefit restrictions regarding under occupation of properties (the 'bedroom tax')
 - Housing-related benefit restrictions for under 35's
 - Roll out of Universal Credit
- Rise in use of foodbanks
 - 20% increase between 2016 to 2017
- Increase in child poverty
- Increase in people presenting with complex needs and chaotic lifestyles who are unable to access housing and support through established pathways
- West Cumbria has higher than average incidents of domestic abuse for population size
- 60.5% of Copeland's residents live in rural areas, making accessing our service challenging

Opportunities:

- **Legislation:** The Homelessness Reduction Act brought in several measures that provide more opportunity for us to prevent homelessness:
 - The 'duty to refer' under the Homelessness Reduction Act places a duty on public bodies to notify us when they believe someone is at risk of homelessness - this means we can intervene at an earlier stage to prevent or relieve homelessness
 - We can now end a main duty by securing a private rental for a minimum of 6 months rather than 12, giving more people access to the sector
- **Our strong partnership ethos:** We work in partnership with the Copeland Citizens Advice Bureau, Phoenix Enterprise Centre and West Cumbria Credit Union to help residents deal with Universal Credit issues, debt problems and general financial issues
- **Private Sector Potential:** We have set up a landlord forum to strengthen our relationship with local private landlords and explore opportunities to work together to address homelessness
- **A Can-Do Culture:** Our community leaders and third sector partners are driven, inspirational people with whom we can work to tackle challenges and create innovative solutions for our most hard to reach homeless people.
- **Digital Solutions:** Our new software makes it easier to interact with clients via email and online, which is key for those who live in our more rural areas and those with a chaotic lifestyle who prefer text communication
- **Investment:** We have a proven track record of securing inward investment to provide discretionary wrap around services supporting our statutory offer; this enables us to tackle the causes of homelessness and help people change their lives rather than just put a roof over their heads

▲ Aims of the Strategy

We are setting 3 main aims for the Strategy. Each aim has three delivery priorities and they will be supported by a detailed delivery plan:



Priority 1: Reduce the levels of hidden homelessness and potential rough sleepers

In 2018

Top 3 reasons for presenting as homeless:

1. Loss of social or private tenancy
2. Friends and family unable to accommodate
3. Relationship breakdown

248 people needed mental health support

153 declared as no fixed abode

14 people presented as rough sleeping

184 people owed a relief duty



Priority One: Reduce levels of hidden homelessness and potential rough sleepers

Objective 1:

Tackling the causes of homelessness:

Relationship Breakdown (including domestic abuse) is one of the main reasons for customers using our service presenting as threatened with homelessness.

We will secure external funding to maintain our Domestic Abuse Worker role and work proactively with partners to ensure that customers at risk of homelessness due to abusive relationships have access to the support they need, for however long they need it, to break free and find suitable accommodation.

Parental eviction leads to young people becoming vulnerable and in need of greater support from statutory services. With more young people staying at home for longer and tensions rising we are seeing more cases of parents asking young people to leave home.

We will provide advice and mediation services between young people and their parents and wherever possible enable them to remain in the family home, working proactively with the County Council where 16/17 year olds are involved.

Evictions due to arrears and other tenancy breaches are one of the main reasons for homelessness.

We will intervene at an earlier stage, through voluntary arrangements with our registered partners and private landlords; **we will** target our prevention funding and the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme to prevent evictions and then work with our partners to provide the necessary long-term support.

Objective 2:

Improve early identification of high risk groups

We will establish a new Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) with our neighbouring authorities and use the RSI funding to identify and reach out to hidden homeless people and rough sleepers.

We will promote and monitor take up of the Duty to Refer and ensure it is effectively used as a first trigger, as well as establishing discretionary referral systems.

We will encourage non-public sector bodies such as Registered Providers to adopt the Duty to Refer voluntarily, to capture more people earlier when tenancies are failing.

Objective 3:

Provide access to a wider range of housing options

We will develop a step up-step down model, co-ordinating all our services across all sectors to ensure individuals can move between housing services as their needs change, and use the Rapid Rehousing Pathway funding (RRP) to provide tenancy sustainment support.

We will work with third sector partners and local churches to set up a night shelter for Copeland, from which individuals will be linked into our Rough Sleeper Initiative and given a bespoke housing pathway.

We will explore provision of supported accommodation for those homeless people experiencing mental health issues.

Priority 2: Prioritise the Prevention of Homelessness

In 2018

91% of decisions made within 56 day target
49 prevented from losing current accommodation
143 people owed a prevention duty

401 people assessed under the Homelessness Reduction Act
140 contacts for general housing advice



Priority 2: Prioritise the prevention of homelessness

Objective 1:

Help the customer remain in their home wherever possible

We will work with our strategic partners through the Council's Social Inclusion Policy and Delivery framework to ensure people have access to the advice and support they need.

We will mediate with Registered Providers, Private Sector Landlords and family members on behalf of the customer and provide practical interventions and support to address issues leading to the threat of homelessness.

We will monitor the impact of fixed term tenancies where these are introduced by registered providers to ensure that any potential impact is mitigated.

We will work with partners in the County Council, health and third sector to ensure that those with drug or alcohol dependencies can access the support and accommodation they need and link this in with our RRP project.

Objective 2:

Maximise financial support and access to financial support and advice.

We will make effective use of the Discretionary Housing Payment budget, prioritising keeping people in their accommodation when it suits their needs.

We will continue to work with, and financially support, partnerships between Citizens Advice, Credit Union, Phoenix Enterprise Centre and Job Centre Plus to resolve benefit issues and associated debt problems to make paying the rent more achievable.

We will improve access to services in rural areas and for those who find it difficult to access services in the main towns.

Objective 3:

Address the housing needs of 16/17 year olds

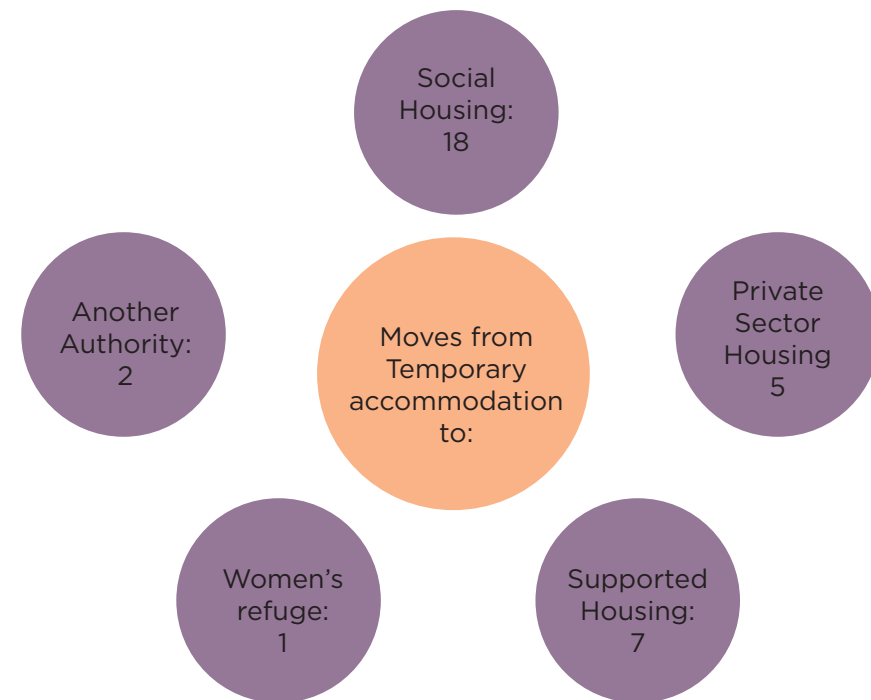
We will work with Children's Services to identify/develop appropriate move on accommodation for young people.

We will comply with the Young Person's Protocol with Social Services to facilitate a joined up service and clear process for under 18's at risk of homelessness. We will attend the monthly Protocol Implementation group meeting to address any issues arising from the protocol and provide effective resolution.

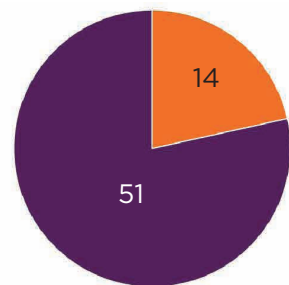
We will comply with Local Care Leaver Protocols, provide additional support for care leavers through our benefits and council tax system and have a single point of contact for such cases.

Priority 3: Ensure sufficient and appropriate accommodation and support is available

In 2018

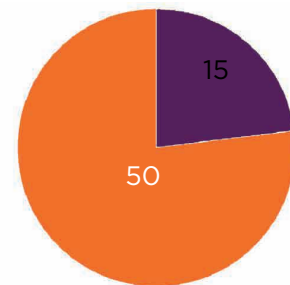


CAP Referrals 2018



Accepted ▲ Refused ▲

Calderwood House Referrals 2018



Accepted ▲ Refused ▲

Number of Temporary Accommodation Units:



Priority 3: Ensure sufficient and appropriate accommodation and support is available

Objective 1:

Improve accommodation available for medium to high risk customers

Many of our customers are not accepted into supported housing as they are deemed too high risk or they do not engage consistently and so we have a growing group of people we are unable to help into settled housing through existing pathways.

We will work with the other Cumbrian district councils and the County Council through the Homeless Forum and Cumbria Supporting People Group to review referral criteria and establish county wide protocols.

We will monitor the CAP process and analyse the reasons people are refused access to supported housing and engage with Cumbria County Council to address the issues through improved commissioning of services.

We will work with registered providers, County Council and Homes England to explore the potential for housing for those experiencing mental health and homelessness.

Objective 2:

Improve access to the Private Rented Sector

The private rental sector is growing both nationally and locally and we need to improve access to this provision.

We will address the barriers that prevent our clients accessing private rented accommodation by building relationships with local landlords and understanding what assistance they need to open up the market through our forum and one to one support for landlords.

We will hold two landlord forums per year, publish a guide for services users and support landlords to understand their legal positions and incentives offered.

We will launch our Rapid Rehousing Pathway Project, working with partners to secure housing quickly for those in insecure situations and at risk of rough sleeping, which underpins all our work in this area.

Objective 3:

Review our temporary accommodation provision

We will carry out a review of our current accommodation locations, our overall offer and charging structure to ensure services provided meet needs and costs are recovered.

We will reduce our average stay by introducing a landlord rent guarantee scheme and work with private landlords to establish an incentives framework, linking with our Private Rented Sector Initiative and funding stream.

We will reduce repeat homelessness and use of B&B by ensuring access to move-on/ transitional support for all those moving from TA into permanent accommodation to help them sustain their future tenancy.

Implementation and Monitoring

This Strategy sits within the framework of the Housing Strategy and the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which reports into the Council Executive and Full Council and will oversee implementation. KPIs are in place and reported through to Full Council quarterly.

Progress against the delivery plan will be reported to the Copeland Housing Partnership at a local level, and via the Homelessness and Domestic Abuse Forums (sitting under the Cumbria Health and Wellbeing Group sub group) under the Cumbria Housing Group.

As the Strategic Housing Authority we recognise the contributions made by other Public Bodies and third sector agencies regarding the prevention of homelessness - and the delivery of this Strategy - and we restate our commitment to working with the other Local Authorities in Cumbria to share best practice and offer consistency across the County.

Through the life of the Strategy, we will monitor the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act in the borough and countywide and how it affects resources and service delivery.

The strategy is accompanied by a detailed delivery action plan, setting out how each objective will be addressed through the life of the plan, which will be reviewed annually.



Appendix

Legal Requirements

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires every Local Authority to have a homelessness strategy and to publish a new one every five years. The Strategy should be kept under review and Local Authorities may modify it accordingly.

Under section 3(1) of the 2002 Act a homelessness strategy means a strategy for:

- (a) preventing homelessness in the district
- (b) securing that sufficient accommodation is and will be available for people in the district who are or may become homeless and,
- (c) securing the satisfactory provision of support for people in the district who are or may become homeless or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Homelessness Reduction Act increases the requirements for Copeland Borough Council to help all eligible applicants - rather than just those with a 'priority need'.



Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

An applicant with a priority need is defined as

- (a) a pregnant woman or a person with whom she resides or might reasonably be expected to reside
- (b) a person with whom dependent children reside or might reasonably be expected to reside
- (c) a person who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness, learning disability or physical disability or other special reason, or with whom such a person resides or might reasonably be expected to reside
- (d) a person aged 16 or 17 who is not a 'relevant child' or a child in need to whom a local authority owes a duty under section 20 of the Children Act 1989
- (e) a person under 21 who was (but is no longer) looked after, accommodated or fostered between the ages of 16 and 18 (except a person who is a 'relevant student');
- (f) a person aged 21 or more who is vulnerable as a result of having been looked after, accommodated or fostered (except a person who is a 'relevant student')
- (g) a person who is vulnerable as a result of having been a member of Her Majesty's regular naval, military or air forces
- (h) a person who is vulnerable as a result of:
 - (i) having served a custodial sentence;
 - (ii) having been committed for contempt of court or any other kindred offence; or,
 - (iii) having been remanded in custody;
- (i) a person who is vulnerable as a result of ceasing to occupy accommodation because of violence from another person or threats of violence from another person which are likely to be carried out
- (j) a person who is homeless, or threatened with homelessness, as a result of an emergency such as flood, fire or other disaster.

Duty to Refer

All public authorities (such as the NHS, schools, social care) are required in law to notify Copeland Borough Council if someone they are working with is facing or threatened with homelessness. This is called the duty to refer and can be made using the email dutytorefer@copeland.gov.uk or via the Council website link.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 adds two new duties:

1. Duty to take steps to prevent homelessness: Copeland Borough Council now has to help people at risk of losing suitable accommodation as soon as they are threatened with homelessness within 56 days, and to provide a bespoke Personal Housing Plan to address their housing needs.

2. Duty to take steps to relieve homelessness: Copeland Borough Council will have to help all those who are homeless to secure suitable accommodation, regardless of whether they are 'intentionally homeless' or priority need. This means that all eligible households are given tailored advice via a Personalised Housing Plan and offered help to find a home, ensuring that the true scale of homelessness is recorded.

If neither of the above steps work and the household becomes, or remains, homeless then a main duty decision will be made and those that are found in priority need and unintentionally homeless will be entitled to further assistance, but non priority households will not be entitled to further help.

The Government provided £72.7 million funding to support the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act and to help Councils prepare for the changes. Copeland Borough Council received £41,770 split over three years. In preparation for the Act the Housing Options Team underwent intensive training with a recognised expert in the sector and invested in new software to enhance the customer experience and provide the statistical information required to monitor the impact of the Act. Customers are now provided with a Personalised Housing Plan after their initial interview and can contact their Housing Options Advisor via email through the online software, as well as in person or by phone, to update their plans or raise a query.

Homelessness – The National Context

In December 2018 the number of homeless families and individuals placed in temporary accommodation nationally rose to 83,700, a rise of 5% on 2017 figures.

A national estimate taken in the autumn of 2017 counted 4,751 people sleeping rough, an increase of 15% on the previous year. In 2018 the figure decreased by 2% to 4,677.

Government has pledged to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminate it completely by 2027. The established Task Force, Rough Sleeping Strategy and the Homelessness Reduction Act introduced in 2018 indicate its commitment to doing so, and funding has been made available to Local Authorities through the Rough Sleeping Initiative and Rapid Rehousing Pathway to tackle rough sleeping and its impact.

'Rough Sleeping Strategy' MCLG August 2018

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/781567/Rough_Sleeping_Statistics_2018_release.pdf

Homelessness – Local Context

Copeland does not have the same issues with rough sleeping when compared with the National statistics – in 2016 and 2018 no rough sleepers were counted in the official count, and in 2017 only one was recorded. However, in 2016, 29 people presented to us as rough sleeping; in 2017 this reduced to 22.

Following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 168 people presented to us as rough sleeping or having no fixed abode. The reality behind these figures is that Copeland has a high number of hidden homeless or roofless households including families and single adults, who are staying with friends and family.

In 2016 we were approached by 393 households for advice, reducing to 295 in 2017 but increasing to 541 in 2018 following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act. Of these households, 13 in 2016, 23 in 2017 and 6 in 2018 were accepted as entitled to the full homelessness duty. These households were predominantly single parents or single adults. The reduction in 2018 reflects the change of focus under the Homelessness Reduction Act and the successful prevention activity.

Housing Provision

For Young People:

Since the last strategy the housing offer for Young People under 25 has increased significantly.

Whitehaven Community Trust has re-opened its hostel for single under 25's on Lowther Street in Whitehaven and also established a Mother and Baby hostel on Irish Street, providing young mothers with accommodation and support before and after their babies are born. The project also supports young women fleeing domestic violence.



The Whitehaven Foyer, which opened in 2016 but was officially opened by HRH Prince Charles in 2017, provides supported accommodation for young people aged 16 to 25 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and who require support to develop vital life skills and access formal training, educational and employment opportunities. Copeland facilitated the opening of two move on accommodation units on site and provided £5,000 funding for furnishings.



Care leavers in the borough aged 18-25 are either exempt from Council Tax or entitled to a discount dependent on the number of other residents in their property, helping them make the transition from being supported by Cumbria County Council and living independently.

For Adults:

Calderwood House, which opened its doors in 2015, provides accommodation and support to over 25's, giving priority to ex-military personnel. It is abstinence based, with regular drug and alcohol testing, and provides vital support to Copeland's Housing Options Team by being prepared to give people a second chance



Partnership Working

We work in strong partnerships with various organisations, both statutory and voluntary, to ensure customers who present as homeless or at risk of homelessness receive the support and help that they need.

The Council's enabling role - bringing together and supporting key partners to establish schemes and freeing up barriers to progress, providing match funding and in kind support - has successfully resulted in increased hostel and temporary accommodation provision. Copeland now has access to a range of supported housing provisions including for 16-25 year olds, young mothers and low risk rough sleepers.

The **Homeless Forum**, sitting underneath the Cumbria Housing Group and meeting quarterly, was set up to allow the six Cumbrian District Councils to meet and share best practice and knowledge. In response to the Homelessness Reduction Act a new IT system was jointly procured and considerable savings achieved through partnership working.

The establishment of **The Hub** in Whitehaven to offer a multi-agency approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour means that we have a wider understanding of the issues facing some customers and allows us to be involved with some customers at an earlier stage. Our Officers regularly attend MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) meetings to discuss high level domestic abuse cases; LMAP (Local Multi Agency Partnership) meetings to discuss town centre and anti-social behaviour issues and MAPPA (Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements) meetings to discuss high level cases for those leaving prison, to ensure early intervention for those who may have more complex housing needs.

The **Housing Options** Officers work closely with partners such as Unity, Health and Well Being Coaches (HAWCS) through Social Services, the Cumbria Mental Health Team, The Freedom Project and Victim Support to ensure customers access the help and advice they need regarding addiction and other social issues, so that they have a greater chance of maintaining tenancies and keeping their homes.

The **Joint Protocol for Homeless 16-17 year olds** has been in place since 2015. This is a strategic document which sets out how partners across the county will work together to prevent/relieve homelessness for 16-17 year olds and is underpinned by the Local Commitment for Copeland. The Local Commitment was developed by a range of local partners including CBC and Cumbria County Council and translates the strategic document into our local offer. The implementation of this work is overseen by the Protocol Implementation Group, (co-chaired by our Housing Options Team Leader and an Officer from Children's and Families Service), which meets on a bi-monthly basis and is regularly attended by CBC, CCC, Impact, Whitehaven Community Trust, Inspira and Lakes College. We have good joint working in place for 16-17 year olds who present as homeless and are engaged in drafting a Care Leaver's Protocol with the CCC Youth Homeless and Housing Team.

Copeland provides grant funding to partner agencies and organisations to deliver personal budgeting advice and digital, financial and welfare support which is tailored to customers' individual needs. We are approved foodbank voucher holders and have seen the use of these rise in line with national figures

Temporary Accommodation Provision

Copeland Borough Council has seven temporary accommodation units, rented from a registered provider, to house customers who are considered to be in priority need, including three safe houses for domestic abuse cases. These premises have been assessed by the Police crime prevention specialist and benefit from enhanced security and target hardening measures such as safe rooms. Having this temporary accommodation available means we can reduce the use and overall cost of bed and breakfast accommodation.

Most households who are placed in our temporary accommodation are assisted to move into general needs social or private housing, with some being allocated supported or sheltered housing. Customers can stay in this accommodation for up to 56 days under the new legislation.

Financial Exclusion

Changes and reductions in benefits under the Welfare Reform Act in 2012 have put some of our residents under significant financial pressure and at risk of building or increasing debt. Following on from freezes to Local Housing Allowances, rent restrictions within Housing Benefit due to the under-occupation of social housing properties have led to a demand for smaller accommodation that the market cannot meet and so some customers remain in properties that they cannot afford. Restrictions on the amount payable via the benefit system for rent for under 35s limit the accommodation that is affordable for that age group and result in people taking on accommodation that they cannot afford.

Universal Credit has now been fully rolled out in the borough. Copeland residents have experienced many of the same issues as have been reported widely in the national media - delays in payments being made, large deductions being taken unexpectedly for rent or other arrears, issues with payments for rent being made directly to the customer rather than the landlord - and these put significant pressure on people's ability to meet their housing costs. As a Council we work closely with The Department of Work and Pensions to mitigate these issues.

The borough has seen increased use of Foodbanks in recent years in line with national figures - there was a 20% increase in use from 2016 to 2017, with people presenting as homeless increasing by 7%. The Trussell Trust cites the top three reasons for use of a food bank nationally in 2017/18 as Low Income (28.49%), Benefit Delays (23.74%) and Benefit changes (17.73%) and these are reflected in the local figures for Copeland.



In January 2018, 3,368 children in Copeland were deemed to be in Child Poverty (22.6% of all children in the Borough). Households are deemed to be in poverty if their household income is less than 60% of the average. Of the 23 households that Copeland accepted as homeless in 2017, 15 had dependent children. Research has identified childhood poverty in particular as a powerful predictor of all forms of homelessness.

The Council is a lead member of the West Cumbria Child Poverty Action Group and provides in kind resources and promotional opportunities to bring partners together and create integrated approaches to tackling child poverty.

We will continue to work with partners to ensure that our residents can access support and advice regarding welfare benefits, debt services and health services to enable them to move out of poverty where possible. Copeland Borough Council along with its partners such as Copeland Community Fund has funded the Citizens Advice, Whitehaven and District Credit Union and Phoenix Enterprise Centre to deliver tailored debt, financial and digital support where it is needed, and provides in kind support for local initiatives to tackle poverty and health issues.

Glen Bramley & Suzanne Fitzpatrick (2018) Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk?, Housing Studies, 33:1, 96-116, available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02673037.2017.1344957>



Complex needs

One of the challenges the Council faces is how to support customers with complex issues and chaotic, high risk lifestyles who are unable to access housing and support using the established pathways. We need to seek innovative ways to resolve this problem whilst influencing County wide policy and commissioning through influencing the work of the Supporting People team.

Currently customers in Cumbria who require supported accommodation are referred into the County Council Supporting People service known as CAP (Central Access Point) to be matched to suitable available accommodation, though many are rejected due to the complexity of their needs or because they do not appear to engage with the process. In 2016/17 28% of referrals made into CAP were accepted, in 2017/18 30% were accepted and in 2018/19 21% were accepted. The main reasons for people being declined were that they were not contactable or did not attend appointments, or the customer was deemed too high risk to be accepted.

Our Housing Options Team will continue to monitor the outcomes of referrals made and strive to improve the offer to our customers to ensure that these customers can access housing via this route.

Domestic Abuse

Domestic Abuse is a significant issue in West Cumbria with higher than average incidents for population size. This can be a key cause of homelessness and at the same time a hidden problem with those suffering abuse remaining in long term relationships unaware of how to break free. Through our Crisis and Prevention Support Officer and relationship with the Police and support agencies we look to raise awareness of the help available, build confidence in reporting and address associated issues such as Sexual Exploitation, 'County Lines' drug use and Modern Slavery in the Borough. 'County Lines' refers to the exploitation of vulnerable children and adults by gangs for the transportation and dealing of drugs around the country and is of growing concern in the County.

Private Rental Sector

We are working to establish better links and mutually beneficial relationships with our local landlords and have re-introduced a Landlord Forum to facilitate this. Copeland has seen an increase in the number of people renting privately in the borough and we will support our customers to view private lets as an alternative option to Social Housing.

All private rental properties are inspected before any introductions to landlords are made or any homeless prevention funding released to ensure that they are of a decent standard.

The Homelessness Reduction Act gives Local Authorities the authority to end a main duty by securing a private rental for a minimum of 6 months for our customers, and by establishing strong relationships with our local landlords we improve our ability to do this.

We are ambitious regarding addressing the empty homes in the borough and can see opportunities to address these and our need for affordable settled accommodation for customers threatened with homelessness, and will explore these through the life of this strategy.

Cumbria Choice Based Lettings



The Cumbrian Local Authorities and the majority of the Registered Providers have formed a partnership to provide a Choice Based Lettings System across the county called Cumbria Choice. The partnership has adopted a shared allocations policy and this is the means by which social housing property is let in all the districts. Cumbria Choice operates a needs-based banding system which is set out below. The bands are arranged to reflect housing need with the highest Band, Band A, indicating the greatest need for housing. We have recently amended the wording of the banding to reflect the Homelessness Reduction Act.

The system is a vital part of the Housing Options service, replacing the old Nominations System whereby the Council would "nominate" homeless people to the social landlords to rehouse. Cumbria Choice is used on a daily basis, giving the Council the ability to allocate banding and support applications to ensure they are expressing interest in properties and can be rehoused as soon as possible.

Customers wishing to move or secure accommodation register their details and preferences for housing, and can bid on-line for available properties to rent.

Banding

The main bands that the Housing Options Team use are as follows:

Band A: Households who have made a statutory homeless application to the Local Authority under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 and have been determined by the Council as owed the main homelessness duty under sections 193(2), 195(2) or 193C (4) of the Act. This band will only be allocated once the s189b duty ends and the customer is in priority need and unintentionally homeless.

Band B: Households who have made a homeless application and the Local Authority has accepted the s189B Relief duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Customers owed the relief duty may include;

- Rough sleepers
- Those moving between friends and relatives
- Those who have accommodation, but the Local Authority do not consider it's reasonable to occupy
- Those living in temporary accommodation

Band C: Households who have made a homeless application and the Local Authority have accepted the s195 Prevention of homelessness duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Challenging Cases

On occasion applicants who are eligible and are at the top of the short list are 'skipped' for management reasons, often due to their tenancy history. This sometimes happens even when properties have not been advertised/noted to the Local Authorities as sensitive lets.

A Task and Finish Group was set up between registered providers and Local Authorities to discuss these issues and any sensitive lets are now highlighted as such at the point of allocation to avoid abortive work at district level.

This approach means that challenging cases are managed locally, through discussions and negotiation led by Local Authorities under a case conference type model, to see what can be achieved through partnership working and what would be needed in each case to allow access to housing. The number of cases affected are monitored and discussed at the Partnership Board.

Financial Issues

Copeland Council has a long standing history of supporting and funding Homeless prevention services through external grants and core revenue funding and has a track record of early and successful interventions to prevent homelessness. However, along with many of our partners the Council faces increasing financial pressure and has to deliver its statutory services with reduced budgets. We will continue to work with our partners to deliver the best service to our most vulnerable customers and seek innovative solutions to address their needs.

Whilst we have been successful in securing external funding for two key roles we need to ensure that we can continue to support these in the longer term and so need to identify further funding sources for when the current funding expires.

Copeland Borough Council provides funding to Citizens Advice, Cumbria Law Centre, Phoenix Enterprise Centre and Whitehaven and District Credit Union so that all residents can access budgeting, legal and debt advice as well as digital support, and this support is especially vital to our customers who are at risk of homelessness.



Strategic Housing
Copeland Borough Council
Market Hall
Whitehaven
Cumbria
CA28 7JG

01946 598300

info@copeland.gov.uk

www.copeland.gov.uk

