



Preventing
Homelessness
Board

Main Body document

Preventing Homelessness Strategy (PHS) 2013-18

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Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2013-18

Foreword

This is Bristol's second Preventing Homelessness Strategy (PHS) and comes at a crucial period in the economic and political cycle. The state of the economy is putting increased pressure on housing and homelessness services, whilst at the same time, welfare reform and the reductions in Housing Benefit introduced by the government are increasing pressure upon households' ability to manage their finances. Other economic impacts are outlined later in the PHS. Please note the term **household** in the PHS means anything from a single person to a large family.

Major reductions in public spending have increased pressure on both statutory and voluntary sector agencies. It is therefore no surprise that nationally and locally there are strong predictions that the numbers of households presenting as homeless will rise over the coming years.

The period up to 2010/11 saw a steady reduction in homelessness acceptances and an increase in homelessness prevention cases in Bristol. The council and partners also achieved a low level of rough sleeping through positive partnership working. However, over the two year period since there has been an increase in homelessness by most measures and this is expected to continue; partly as a consequence of the ('lagged' effects of the¹) economic climate and partly because of welfare and housing reforms.

This strategy draws on collective experience and achievements to date; and sets out how the council and partners² can build on solid foundations to best use capacity to deliver within available resources. It is informed by the review process which includes all the evidence in the annexes to this report, plus consultation and the response to that consultation (see 'You said, we did' report); and finally all the reviews that have been carried out under the homelessness 'umbrella' of services, making it effectively a 'review of reviews'. Therefore the PHS is transparent about the best use and balance of limited resources to assist people at immediate risk of homelessness and in intervention, advice and assistance to all those potentially threatened by homelessness. This mirrors the council's approach to customers more generally as set out at: [Hyperlink to BCC Customer Strategy](#)

This strategy sets out:

- short introduction;
- aims and outcomes for the strategy and the priorities (and actions) to deliver them;
- strategic context, national, regional and local; and
- delivery, how the council and partners will continue to prevent homelessness.

¹ Homelessness Monitor published by the University of York.

² The 'council and partners' means all those agencies statutory or voluntary who are involved with preventing homelessness; part of this Strategy's early intervention approach is to widen the range of partners

The PHS supports and compliments the city's corporate Housing Strategy (HS) and also links to and supports strategic objectives around e.g. public health, Children & Young People's Services (CYPS)³ and Health & Social Care (HSC). It must be taken into account in the exercise of the councils' housing and social services functions.

The strategy will be supported by an Action Plan (to be Annexe A) that sets out some key actions for the council and partners, and by when, to help deliver the PHS's aims and priorities. The Action Plan will be regularly monitored and updated to ensure delivery of the strategy. A number of other Annexes support the PHS.

1. INTRODUCTION

Format and Scope of Strategy

Welcome to Bristol's second Preventing Homelessness Strategy (PHS) 2013 - 2018. It has been developed in partnership by Bristol City Council (BCC) with the Preventing Homelessness Board (PHB) (see Annexe C - Glossary) and following consultation with a wide range of stakeholders.

What's in a name?

It's called the Preventing Homelessness Strategy - not the Homelessness Strategy - to emphasise that it's not just about responding to homelessness after the event, though that is crucially important, but about proactive intervention as early as possible to stop homelessness. This strategy is part of a process to move all agencies working with those at risk of homelessness away from crisis response and towards the earliest intervention. From the client's perspective "the longer you are left without help, the more difficult it will become to get back on your feet"⁴.

Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to publish a Strategy based upon a review of homelessness in their area. It is a five-year, 'rolling' strategy; 'rolling' means it will be a flexible strategy reviewed at least annually, especially the Action Plan. It won't be changed for its own sake, but if it needs reinvigorating because of changing priorities (e.g. in response to emerging national housing and related policy changes) then it will be.

The PHS will influence and be influenced by the Bristol's multi-agency Housing Strategy, Health & Wellbeing Strategy, and the BCC Corporate Strategy, more below.

Equalities

An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been undertaken for this PHS, the EqIA process is informed by the PHS and the review which underpins it and vice versa. The action it engenders must ensure services are available to all equalities groups. Young people are a major focus of priority 1 but race, age, gender, maternity and pregnancy, disability, religion, sexual orientation, marriage/civil partnership and

³ Including its' Children & Young People's Strategy which in turn encompasses/links to the child poverty agenda

⁴ A Place To Call Your Own – Homeless Link

gender reassignment are all considered where required in planning for services. Because this is a living, regularly reviewed Strategy an objective is to try and future proof it for changing demographics.

The gender specific, housing related needs of homeless women in Bristol were considered by the University of Bristol in 2010⁵. Recommendations from this Study have informed the commissioning of homelessness services e.g. the need for emotional and physical safety and the recognition of the complexity of homeless women's lives. There is separate provision for women where this is needed – including emergency beds for those in crisis such as women sex workers. Domestic abuse is another area where women (the majority of those affected) need to be found safe accommodation. Domestic abuse is given as an example of a multi-agency response (page 11) led by Safer Bristol. Agencies looking to prevent and respond to crime, work hand in hand with agencies preventing/responding to homelessness as they are often inextricably linked. Services as provided may not always be a perfect fit with service as needed so the council is open to looking at ways to resolve this.

For all equalities groups the tendering process allows examinations of equalities policies but also monitoring of service use and practice to ensure services are welcoming to a diverse range of clients. Commissioning plans have specifically asked for specialist training for staff on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues to ensure they offer the right services. The review of the council's in-house homelessness, advice and prevention services (HAPR) (pages 14 -15 under Priority 2) is committed to improving monitoring for those services. Annexe H was added to this PHS to give an overview of homelessness commissioning services at June 2014.

Gypsies, Travellers and other 'less settled' communities are known to have much worse health outcomes than the population more generally (see Page 18 of Annexe C).

A Well Supported Strategy

Political commitment

In one of his earliest statements after becoming Bristol's first elected Mayor, George Ferguson said "Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping is a key priority for the city".⁶ The PHS is a strategy owned beyond the council and within the council it is owned by all departments and has corporate commitment (page 10).

The PHS is approved by the Mayor/Cabinet and formally supported by the Bristol's Health and Wellbeing Board (H&WB); supported by the H&WB because of the important connection between homelessness and health issues. The PHS and its Action Plan will be monitored by the PHB ('Governance' page 12)

Partners must not underestimate their successes, examples include:

⁵ Mapping Study of Services for Homeless Women in Bristol – University of Bristol, School of Policy Studies

⁶ Press release 19/12/2012

- Bristol's continued minimal use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) despite higher demand (but use now rising); and
- 45% of all empty homes returned to use being used for preventing homelessness.

2. AIMS, PRIORITIES AND OUTCOMES

PHS Aims

Resolve and prevent homelessness with innovative, practical and proactive early intervention

Provide integrated and accessible services that enhance life chances and encourage independence

Deliver focussed, preventative support and in doing so stop the escalation of homelessness issues, reduce repeat homelessness and significantly reduce the call on other statutory duties⁷

Secure the accommodation that is necessary for people who are or may become homeless

See also aim for young people on page 14.

PHS Priorities

Six key priorities have been identified for this PHS based on current work and from consultation with partners:

1. Minimise homelessness through early intervention⁸ by understanding and tackling the (often complex) reasons behind it, with special emphasis on young people⁹.
2. 'Early Bird' - consistency of approach, timely advice and earlier referrals from all agencies, even ones not always involved with homelessness.
3. Improve: access to, the amount of, stability and quality of the Private Rented Sector (PRS); using homelessness prevention fund, myth busting and encouraging new build, leasing, licensing and accreditation.
4. Continue to assertively tackle rough sleeping; target those clients with complex, multiple needs.
5. Make more direct links between homelessness and the housing, health and wider policy agenda¹⁰.

⁷ E.g. less likely to have to use Accident & Emergency services

⁸ E.g. work in schools, support for those in debt

⁹ This emphasis on young people coined as 'Early Intervention Squared', this is a classic example of needing to 'catch them young'

6. Ensure the right support is in place and that those ready to do so move-on promptly and reduce repeat homelessness.

Also relevant (across all priorities)

All housing advice and homelessness services will play their part to mitigate the negative impacts of welfare and housing reforms.

Primary Outcome / Outcomes

Primary outcome

- Reduce homelessness, especially prevent crisis homelessness, youth homelessness and repeat homelessness

Secondary outcomes

- Encourage employment, education, training and/or volunteering
- Reduce re-offending
- Reduce drug and alcohol misuse
- Promote good physical health, mental health, psychological wellbeing, healthy relationships and healthy lifestyles
- Ensure personal safety (e.g. need for appropriate, safe accommodation)
- Enable sustainable accommodation and lives¹¹

This PHS will also contribute towards and align with ‘outcomes’ from the Housing Strategy. Link to Summary.

http://www.bristol.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/housing/find_a_home/affordable_housing/Bristol%20Housing%20strategy%20Summary%20JULY%202011_0.pdf

What are outcomes for? – All agencies providing homelessness and related services need to ask: ‘are my actions contributing to achieving these outcomes’? The council and its partners will develop long-term monitoring around outcomes including what works locally?

Approach

Bristol’s approach to homelessness will be to act in a proactive and integrated way with statutory and voluntary sector partners to ensure services are complementary, efficient and effective in adding value to improve people’s lives.

Partners will strive to maximise the housing and other opportunities available to all clients, including those threatened with homelessness, despite the challenging economic and financial climate.

¹⁰ Think ahead (future proof) all related policy and physical development for all tenures

¹¹ Includes in the sense of not losing their accommodation

BCC has reviewed, or is in the process of reviewing and commissioning internal and external homelessness services to prepare for increased and emerging need and to provide greater value for money.

Holistic approaches will be adopted where complex needs¹² exists. Of particular importance to Bristol is the bid for Fulfilling Lives (Lottery) funding (page 17). A successful bid would really help agencies in the city to better assist those clients with the most complex needs. This issue has been the subject of research by Heriot Watt University who have called it multiple exclusion homelessness; such research will help agencies develop better intervention approaches.

<http://www.sbe.hw.ac.uk/research/ihurer/homelessness-social-exclusion/multiple-exclusion-homelessness.htm>

BCC's Customer Strategy is also relevant, **an objective** is to deal with low complexity, high volume, universal services as cost effectively as possible and invest time and money in services for 'at risk' and 'high needs' customers. Link at page 2.

Guiding Principles

BCC and partners will:

- achieve value for money
- help people to help themselves (build resilience)
- make services responsive (services fit clients, not clients fit services)¹³
- have a unified response (preventing homelessness through effective partnership working)
- prevent and reduce homelessness while achieving wider outcomes (page 5)
- focus intervention and support for those most at risk of homelessness
- provide well regarded services/positive customer experience

For examples of the cost effectiveness of homelessness prevention see page 10

All homelessness services are being periodically reviewed whether delivered by external to the council partners or by the council directly, see Annexe C.

Strategic context

This second PHS provides an overarching framework ('overpinning') and sets the direction for the future delivery of homelessness services. In particular the strategy provides the context for aligning corporate and other partner activity to its six priorities. It also has a role in helping stakeholders understand homelessness in a non-technical way. One voluntary sector partner described the way co-operation works: "to contribute through advice and support with our clients, our best understanding of realistic housing options...and cooperate fully with other agencies..."

The PHS will be delivered and monitored most visibly through its' Action Plan, which will be an engine for delivery and improvement. The Preventing Homelessness

¹² People experiencing complex and multiple problems with high levels of need (defined as mental health, homelessness, offending and substance misuse)

¹³ This is not just about saying 'one size **does not** fit all' but ensuring services are appropriate for women, for ethnic minorities etc. see Equality Impact Assessment Annexe H.

Board has primary (but not sole) responsibility for ensuring it is delivered and is deliverable. Tackling the causes and effects of homelessness is important, since homeless people are among the most socially excluded and because their lives can become far worse without the help of positive interventions. They are often excluded from 'life chances' such as education, employment and good health.

The PHS will influence work with partners, including housing associations, to maximise the supply of decent, affordable homes in the city. The council along with its partners will build on initiatives to further reduce severe overcrowding and make better use of existing homes. In 2013/14 BCC and partners will undertake a review of the HomeChoice Allocations Scheme in the light of the new flexibilities in the Localism Act. The resulting scheme will be aligned to Bristol's wider strategic housing objectives. This PHS has regard to the existing allocations scheme whilst at the same time influencing the emerging scheme (see Priority 5 on page 17).

The PHS will demonstrate how in Bristol the ten local challenges of the government's Homelessness Strategy 'Making Every Contact Count' are being met and exceeded. This is demonstrated throughout this strategy and more specifically at Annexe D; e.g. Bristol has also adopted the 'No Second Night Out' approach to rough sleeping, a key part of 'Making Every Contact Count'.

In an environment of cutbacks this PHS shows how the council and partners are working effectively for households threatened with homelessness. Partners will use the good practice and evidence therein to win resources from sources such as the Lottery, government and to develop shared services e.g. with health providers¹⁴.

3. POLICY CONTEXT - NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL

National

In August 2012 the government published a homelessness prevention strategy 'Making Every Contact Count: a joint approach to preventing homelessness'.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7597/2200459.pdf

The strategy posed ten local challenges; these are set out in Annexe D with a brief response as to how Bristol is progressing against them. However Bristol's PHS as a whole addresses the ten local challenges and much more.

In 2010 government announced proposals to reduce public expenditure as part of their plans to cut the structural budget deficit. The context for this strategy is a period of severely reduced public spending and significant welfare and housing reform, details of which are set out below. These changes will have a significant impact upon the ability to respond to the above challenges and sustain Bristol's progress

¹⁴ A useful source of emerging practice to influence how things go forward locally will be the NHS Commissioning Board who are working on a national charter to encourage health and housing organisations to work closer together. Source: Inside Housing 23/11/12). There is already much good practice around this in Bristol.

towards an intervention/prevention approach to homelessness and provision of support those who need it.

Welfare Reform and Legal Aid Changes

The 'knock-on effects of welfare reform are leading to more homelessness. This is reflected elsewhere in this PHS. A number of other reports have explored this. More in-depth detail of this is at Annexe G. [Include LINKS to reports.](#)

Localism Act 2011

The Localism Act 2011 outlines significant changes to the way housing services are delivered to households in need and represent the most significant changes to housing in a generation. Key changes include:

- **Social housing:** social housing providers will be able to offer fixed term tenancies of no less than two years for new tenants. In its' Tenancy Strategy the council has stated that there should normally be a minimum tenancy term of five years and lifetime tenancies for some groups e.g. older people in sheltered housing. The PHS has regard to and is consistent with the Tenancy Strategy.
- **Homelessness:** local authorities will be able to fully discharge their duty to secure accommodation for homeless households through an offer of a suitable property in the PRS. It is unlikely that BCC will make mainstream use of this new power, preferring generally to use access to the PRS for homelessness prevention rather than for crisis-led discharge of its' statutory homelessness duty.
- **Housing Allocations:** local authorities have been given the freedom to decide whether to continue operating an open housing register or introduce local eligibility criteria which would determine who qualifies for social housing. Consultation around Bristol's HomeChoice Allocations Review starts in 2013.

More information can be found on the CLG website at:

www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1896534.pdf

Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England

Published in November 2011, the Coalition Government published its housing strategy, a copy of which can be found on the CLG website at:

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/housingstrategy2011

Key implications for the PHS are from the Localism Act summarised above and the No Second Night Out programme see page 16.

Regional

The West of England¹⁵ local authorities (LAs) work closely together and monitor homelessness trends across the sub-region. All four LAs have identified that securing emergency accommodation, particularly in Bristol is getting more and more difficult. Over the past two years they have all seen an increase in households approaching them for help and assistance although statutory homelessness acceptances have not risen significantly. There has also been increasing difficulty

¹⁵ Bristol, South Gloucestershire, Bath & North East Somerset and North Somerset

accessing the PRS in Bath where there is no market for local housing allowance claimants, there are similar areas in Bristol and polarisation of the PRS is shown in Annexe B. LAs within the Avon & Somerset Rough Sleeping Group will be carrying out peer reviews about how successful each council has been at meeting the government's ten local challenges.

Local

This new Preventing Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan will support delivery of Bristol's Housing Strategy (HS) 2010-2015. A copy of the HS can be found on the council's website at:

<http://www.bristol.gov.uk/page/housing-strategy-2010-%E2%80%93-2015>

This PHS is aligned to the priorities of Bristol's HS especially:

- accessing the PRS in ways to better meet housing need;
- ensuring quality advice and intervention by all housing agencies; and
- delivering as many new affordable homes as possible.

The PHS also aligns to the city's 20:20 Community Strategy's key outcomes and actions. The council and partners cannot realistically achieve the 20:20 outcomes 'reduce health and wealth inequalities' or 'raise the aspirations and achievements of children, young people and families' if they don't assist those threatened with homelessness.

The PHS supports the corporate parenting responsibility of the council to care leavers and help for those on 'the edge of care'. BCC has undertaken work to ensure the council's in-house Homelessness Advice & Prevention Review, First Response and Troubled Families¹⁶ projects all link up.

The PHS links to BCC's Corporate Strategy and in particular to the 'homes and communities' and 'a flexible and enabling council' priorities. This first priority recognises the diversity of housing needed and the second the fact that services and support need to be integrated with input from those receiving them. The values in the Corporate Strategy also inform the PHS, for example "cooperation - we will work together with our partners..." and "creative – we will be flexible, innovative and proactive..."

BCC now has responsibility for leading health planning for the city and the new Health and Wellbeing Strategy includes preventing homelessness as one of its goals under the theme of "Bristol is a city where health inequalities are reducing". The importance of integrating health and housing responses to those threatened by homelessness and improving access to services and support are priorities/goals of both strategies.

¹⁶ Homelessness Advice...Review see page15; First Response is a CYPS led project to set up a multi-agency Bristol Children First Response Team as the first 'port of call for all requests for help or concerns about children /young people; Troubled Families is a Govt programme led by CYPS in Bristol to assist 'Families' in serious crisis and includes out of work parents, children who are not in school or commit crime and members who are persistently involved in anti-social behaviour. Unless helped, certain factors - commonly debt, homelessness, mental health issues, domestic violence, poor parenting, illness or substance misuse can prevent a family from moving forward.

Bristol's Response to national policy

In addition to developing this PHS, the council and partners have a number of key projects designed to help mitigate the negative impacts of welfare and housing reforms introduced by the government. A corporate programme has been set up to identify the households impacted by the changes, and what actions can be taken to help them prepare for the reforms and become more resilient. The council has also worked with a range of partners (some listed below) to raise awareness of the changes and to seek feedback on the areas to focus on locally.

Bristol is also committed to increase the supply of housing options that will benefit homeless households; this strategy's priorities reflect that. Supported by the Mayor Bristol wants to make a 'step change' in the delivery of new, genuinely affordable homes. From a peak of 561 affordable homes built in 2009/10, 300 were achieved in 2012/13 and a further fall is expected in 2013/14. The Mayor wants to reverse this downward trend by achieving in the region of 600 homes in 2016/17.

Corporate Approach

The PHS is a statutory, corporate strategy for BCC with sign-up by all departments but also owned by a wider 'external to the council' group of stakeholders. This corporate approach is vital to tackling the causes and impacts of homelessness. This is linked to the corporate recognition of the importance of housing to a household's health and wellbeing providing a 'springboard for life'. All customer facing council departments¹⁷ are represented on the PHB and will sign up through the Board. Co-ordinated activity is required to address certain areas for example domestic abuse/violence and re-offending – and to ensure early intervention (e.g. at prison release) to minimise the potentially damaging and costly effects of homelessness on health, educational and economic outcomes for residents. The increase in the number of homeless and large families with children is causing real problems as large accommodation is difficult to access in both the PRS and the social sector and welfare changes are making housing particularly unaffordable for large families (Annexe G page 28 'Effects of Welfare Reform').

The cost effectiveness of early prevention

Research by Heriot-Watt University calculated:

- the cost of preventing someone from becoming homeless was £1,700 compared with the £5,300 cost of helping someone after they become homeless
- the average cost of running a deposit bond scheme, where the council lends money for a rent deposit, was 37 times cheaper than the average cost of dealing with a statutory homelessness case

An advice note from Communities and Local Government department, 'demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of preventing homelessness', published in 2010, outlines the cost savings too:

¹⁷ Neighbourhoods & City Development; Children & Young People's Services; Health & Social Care; Public Health

- The cost of mediation - for example, resolving family disputes to avoid someone becoming homeless - is nine times less expensive than finding someone new accommodation
- Advice on housing options, such as how to solve benefit problems or helping people to manage their finances (i.e. debt advice, benefit take-up), is also estimated at nine times less expensive than finding someone new accommodation
- The costs of a rent deposit scheme are estimated to be eight-and-a-half times less than the costs of providing accommodation under the main homelessness duty.

Bristol's Homelessness Prevention Fund which pays for deposits, deposit bonds and rent in advance loans, to help households who are homeless/or threatened with homelessness into the PRS represents a better quality of life option because it secures proper homes for people rather than more temporary solutions such as B&B. There need to be clear, 'joined up' value for money assessment of alternative ways of accessing emergency and temporary housing. In the first instance sustainable solutions need to be pursued for homeless larger families and this is likely to be reflected in the Action Plan. Homeless Link has concluded that – 'Homeless people use a variety of public services in an inefficient and costly way'. Preventing a homeless episode or ensuring speedy transition into stable permanent housing can result in significant cost savings, as well as dramatic improvement to the lives of homeless people.

Governance

The governance arrangements for the PHS are that it will be monitored and further developed by the Preventing Homelessness Board (PHB). The PHB is a sub group of the Homes4Bristol Partnership¹⁸. Because of the very detrimental effect homelessness has on people's health the new Health and Wellbeing Board have agreed to endorse and champion the PHS. This will get homelessness issues to 'the heart' of the health agenda. The PHS is a statutory requirement of each local council so final approval will rest with the Mayor and Cabinet. The Neighbourhood and Communities Scrutiny Commission¹⁹ have also considered the PHS.

Key fora and partners

Preventing homelessness is done by a range of partners to achieve this strategy's priorities for tackling homelessness.

All working parties / groups around homelessness (who don't already have one) should develop an action plan. This encourages tangible achievements and accountability.

Multi-agency Partnerships	Preventing Homelessness Board – brings together the key statutory and voluntary agencies to help tackle homelessness on a more strategic basis, includes service
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¹⁸ Bristol's multi-interest Strategic Housing Partnership

¹⁹ A commission of 'backbench' councillors which holds BCC to account

	<p>user representation</p> <p>Homes4Bristol – Bristol’s strategic housing partnership</p> <p>Bristol Housing Partnership – all major housing associations in the city</p> <p>West of England Housing Options Group – links LAs across the sub region</p> <p>Bristol Supported Housing Forum – supported housing providers in the city</p> <p>Private Rented Sector Working Group – inc. private landlords, agents and tenants</p> <p>Joint Planning Board for Welfare Reform & Advice Provision</p> <p>Youth Housing Delivery Group (YHDG)</p> <p>Reducing Re-offending Board and Bristol Offender Accommodation Forum</p> <p>(Shelter arranged some service user consultation)</p> <p>Supporting People Strategic Management Board</p> <p>Meaningful Occupation Group</p> <p>Ad hoc Case Conferences as required</p>
Internal Council Partnerships	<p>Housing Benefit – Discretionary Housing Payment Working Group</p> <p>Customer Services Point of Contact Meetings</p>
Other Statutory Agencies	<p>Avon & Somerset Police Service</p> <p>Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust</p> <p>Clinical Commissioning Groups²⁰</p> <p>Department for Work & Pensions (Job Centre Plus)</p>
Non statutory agencies	<p>The six Equalities Fora</p> <p>Community groups</p> <p>Advice Centres for Avon - housing advice agencies (on Homes4Bristol)</p> <p>VOSCUR - voluntary sector agencies</p>
Service users specifically	<p>Have been a major part of the commissioning reviews which inform this PHS</p>

4. DELIVERING PRIORITIES AND ACHIEVING OUTCOMES

There are significant challenges arising from recent housing and welfare changes, and public expenditure cuts that will require working even harder in collaboration with partners to ensure Bristol can find sustainable solutions for those threatened with homelessness and other households in housing need in the city. Partnership working and early intervention underpin the delivery of the aims and priorities in this PHS.

²⁰ Via the Health & Wellbeing Board

Bristol partners want to stop homelessness, because tackling the causes early will reduce the social and economic burden on households who experience or who are at risk of it, and for society in general. To do this, services need to be regularly reviewed against agreed outcomes and partners need to work collaboratively to provide a range of good quality services that deliver the outcomes required. Advice agencies including the council's own Welfare Rights and Money Advice Service (WRAMAS) are carrying out a lot of work identifying unclaimed entitlement, assistance with claims, and dealing with problems, including appeals to tribunal.

1. Minimise homelessness through early intervention by understanding and tackling the (often complex) reasons behind it, with special emphasis on young people.

The more effective solutions are not necessarily the most expensive. Emergency options (e.g. B&B) are, by their very nature, less planned, and often expensive and poorer quality.

Keeping people in their existing homes if they are suitable and sustainable is imperative. The council and partners will encourage and work with housing providers to improve tenancy sustainment and resilience. All sorts of tenancy sustainment work (e.g. extra money advice, financial inclusion work and assistance for new applicants and existing tenants) is operating in the social sector; and low level floating support services already operates in the social and private rented sectors. It is vital these are used effectively for clients and to sustain and initiate tenancies. BCC believes it is essential to help sustain communities. To help mitigate the impact of welfare reform, BCC and partners have been helping people to either remain in their existing homes through negotiation with landlords or be provided with advice on alternative, affordable housing options.

Bristol Mediation works in partnership with 1625 Independent People to provide mediation for people to:

- Sustain their current tenancy;
- Return home to family, friends or relatives to allow time to move to independent accommodation in a planned way;
- Maintain/increase their confidence in sustaining independent living.

Improving homelessness prevention and intervention is a key driver of a review of in-house homelessness, advice and prevention (known as HAPR for short) services which is currently underway (more detail under [2](#). below). The review included consideration of a 'diagnostic tool' that households threatened with homelessness and their advisors could use.

The PHS has coined the expression 'Early Intervention Squared' for intervention with young people (YP). This PHS favours early intervention for all clients, but recognises that for YP stopping homelessness at the start of their 'housing journey' and the right, early action can avoid them getting into 'a cycle of homelessness' and improve their life chances. Some YP will be 'households' in their own right and other YP and children will be 'dependents'.

Bristol Youth Links is the name for (12-17) youth provision in the city, the contracts for these services include early warning of potential housing issues as well as related issues such as illegal drug use. Link to Youth Links web page:

<http://www.bristol.gov.uk/page/children-and-young-people/bristol-youth-links>

The trend among providers in the social rented sector has been towards self-contained accommodation. BCC has begun a dialogue with social landlords to consider some shared units to mirror the situation in the PRS more generally. BCC's Private Renting Team are looking at working with landlords of multi-occupied dwellings. There is some evidence that there may be some surplus former student housing in North Bristol from 2013. The safety and quality of properties will of course be paramount.

The council and partners need to address the 'transition' issues of access to housing for young people in the 18 + age group, currently in young peoples' services but now needing to access services via adult care; this includes those with mental health issues or undiagnosed learning difficulties, or diagnosed with ADHD²¹.

Partners including CYPS will look at the possible effectiveness of early intervention work with excluded from school children and 'missing from home' children. Both these actions will be referred to the Youth Housing Delivery Group.

More generally partners need to ensure services support CYPS's aim "Bristol's children, YP and families grow up in strong communities and are well supported to enjoy their lives, to learn, to develop and have successful futures".

The massive fall in the use of B&B for YP is strongly linked to the use of crash pads. A mini review of crash pads is proposed answering the questions how effective are they and are there enough?

Partners will be encouraged to provide/access services to get homeless people out of the cycle of unemployment by preparing them for a return to work and other meaningful activity and to integrate this with other interventions.

BCC and partners identify the underlying factors that lead to homelessness in order to target available resources at appropriate initiatives that will help tackle these and build resilience. Early intervention means tackling the shared trigger points of:

- age (youth specifically)
- drugs and alcohol issues
- domestic abuse
- exclusion from services due to behaviour (incl. school)
- generational homelessness
- generational worklessness
- learning disabilities
- leaving care
- leaving the armed forces
- lone parenthood (incl. teen pregnancy)
- mental ill health

²¹ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

- offending
- physical ill health
- rent arrears
- sexual abuse (in childhood and adulthood)

2. 'Early Bird' - consistency of approach, timely advice and earlier referrals from all agencies, even ones not always involved with homelessness.

A major review of homelessness, advice and prevention (HAPR) is underway to improve:

- the experience of people receiving those services
- make services more consistently efficient and effective
- improve customer information (for customers and about customers)
- make services more evidence based
- make maximum use of appropriate ICT.

The HAPR includes renewed impetus for the Early Bird headline action from the HS which is all advice agencies and even some agencies not always considered as advice agencies 'pulling together' to intervene early in potential homelessness cases. This approach would help to deliver priority 1.

The HAPR is consistent with the BCC Customer Strategy work referred to on pages 2 and 6. A number of BCC agreed design principles will inform its' reviews and commissioning. Three are featured here, and they inform the services which deliver this PHS.

- Customers at the heart of what we do
- Source best network of providers (external or internal)
- Pursue a shared service services agenda (for appropriate processes)

3. Improve: access to, the amount of, stability and quality of the PRS; using homelessness prevention fund, myth busting and encouraging new build, leasing, licensing and accreditation.

The PRS has been an increasing source of good quality, accessible accommodation over the past five years. Local Housing Allowance (LHA), reforms will make access to a sustainable and adequate supply of homes in the PRS much more challenging. For the last two years the number of PRS lets BCC has been able to procure for people in need has remained stable at about 355 per year, but was higher in 2009/10. There is increasing polarisation in the PRS in Bristol and the majority of the sector caters for open market rentals. When LHA was restricted to the bottom 30% of the PRS market it was estimated 7,500 properties²² were taken outside the reach of households on benefits.

Bristol will look at the feasibility of Private Leasing schemes – successfully being used in other LA areas – with outputs of: priority for households that might otherwise have faced homelessness and longer term tenancies. With so much demand for

²² Guardian

access to the PRS it is hoped leasing-specialist providers will be able to attract landlords to house more vulnerable households.

Welfare reform presents significant challenges for young single homeless people and their ability to obtain accommodation in the city. Supported housing providers have expressed their concerns about the lack of move-on accommodation for many of their residents. The Move-on Policy Project seeks to address this, see page 19.

Improve the stability of the PRS – in dealings with private landlords BCC will seek to encourage use of longer term (up to five year) tenancies e.g. Shelter's Stable Rental Contract.²³ BCC would also seek to encourage longer tenancy periods through private leasing in the city. At present too many households are 'falling out' of the PRS with some presenting as homeless.

See also the possibility of more shared accommodation on page 14 above.

There needs to be particular attention to how bonds and deposits could work for ex-offenders to access the PRS. This is likely to be referred to Bristol Offender groups for their Action Plan linked to the PHS.

BCC convenes a PRS Working Group with landlords, tenants and agents. Part of its' remit is to make the sector work better for all parties. One on-going action of this Working Group is to dispel the myth that tenants on benefits equals less desirable tenants. Helping households to access the PRS has been and will continue to be a major plank of the prevention approach in the city.

4. Continue to assertively tackle rough sleeping; and target complex needs.

For clarification, these two client groups have been included in one priority but the PHS recognises that they are two distinct client groups and certainly not all rough sleepers have complex needs or vice versa. Preventing rough sleeping and addressing their needs is being spearheaded by Bristol's local 'No Second Night Out' (NSNO) project delivered by St Mungo's and funded by BCC over three years, this is helping keep numbers as low as possible. The Compass Centre delivers a range of services to homeless people and those threatened by homelessness: a range of medical and mental health services (akin to a specialist GP plus service for homeless people), employment and meaningful activities projects such as the Bridge the Gap.

Partners will also look at local/national info exchange to see how the needs of rough sleepers who have no recourse to public funds can be better met (likely to be in Action Plan). BCC will examine whether street counts – at different times, including of those 'living the lifestyle though not necessarily asleep' might help refine partners' understanding.

²³ A five year contract for the PRS would bring it into line with new fixed term tenancies now offered in some cases in the SRS

With the rise in rough sleeping during 2012/13 (average 9.2, as high as 13 in one monthly count²⁴), meetings were held between BCC and St Mungo's to address issues and develop joint working. Actions included:

- St Mungo's Alcohol Worker has linked up with BCC's Streetwise Team and is working with street drinkers in the Stokes Croft area.
- NSNO Senior Co-ordinator and NSNO Case Worker started with the team and are liaising with Jamaica Street hostel and Logos House around providing a mini hub for clients (funded through the Homelessness Transition Fund).
- Coordinated approach to working with vulnerable long term rough sleepers who do not want to be placed in hostels has been established.

A 'Fulfilling Lives' BIG Lottery bid²⁵ led by Second Step (a supported housing provider in Bristol) could secure up to £10m over eight years (potentially from 2014) to put in place a more systematic approach to helping service users with the most complex needs. This has fantastic potential to assist a 'client group' which has been a major concern.

5. Make more direct links between homelessness and the housing, health and wider policy agenda.

This priority is about ensuring that the housing needs of those affected by homelessness are 'at the table' when policies (leading to services) are being designed. Examples include designing the Allocations Review and deciding the priority for the type of homes built as part of the 'step change' increase in affordable housing supply. It's also about continuing to do what Bristol has been 'good at' and that is recognising that the approach to one area of activity (e.g. education, employment) has knock on effects for homelessness further down the line. A 'Bristol Housing Futures' project by the University of the West of England, the Bristol Housing Partnership and BCC is forecasting future change in demand for housing and developing solutions to meet that demand.

Linking housing and health responses is of major importance as poor health (physical and/or mental) can lead to homelessness and a period of homelessness often exacerbates and causes further issues. Support services commissioned by BCC are taking an holistic approach to their clients needs that includes a psychologically informed approach that just accommodation is not the answer and that deeper issues such as health need to be addressed too. Public health is represented on the PHB, and the NHS fund health service for homeless people at the Compass Centre as a primary care service. Hospital discharge workers operate from the BCC housing advice team to ensure people leaving hospital have the housing and support they need. The business case for getting the health needs of homeless and vulnerable people treated early is being progressed as the alternative is often accessing much more expensive services such as A&E departments. It is important that homeless households should have access to the same services as other households where this is the best option. For example in September 2013 the NHS Bristol Clinical Commissioning Group got the 'green light' to explore how to

²⁴ Nine monthly counts from Jul 2012 to Mar 2013

²⁵ Not to be confused with a completely separate Fulfilling Lives Lottery bid in Bristol to help address loneliness for older people

extend the services for 'End of Life Care' for homeless people in Bristol. This is
would include training for hostel workers and support for the clients.

6. Ensure the right support is in place and those ready to do so move-on promptly and reduce repeat homelessness.

Funding for supported housing in Bristol comes mainly through what used to be known as the Supporting People (SP) programme. This was a ring-fenced budget from government that was to be spent on ‘housing related support’. The ringfence was removed in 2009 and now the money is paid as part of the area-based grant. Each LA can determine how much money to spend.

In Bristol short-term support (expected to be for up to two years) is provided in two distinct areas (table below) and funding for long-term (likely to be permanent) support e.g. sheltered housing and for disabled people is in two other areas. ‘A strategy for people with mental health needs, learning difficulties and autism’ is currently being developed by the council and will link to this PHS and the Housing Strategy. Spending against these areas is overseen by a Strategic Management Board (SMB) while the work is carried out within the relevant division.

	BCC department	Value 2013/14
Preventing homelessness short-term services	Neighbourhoods & City Development	£8.99 million
Safer Bristol (drugs and alcohol, domestic abuse)	Neighbourhoods & City Development	£1.7 million
Older people and physical and sensory impairment	Health & Social Care	£4.3 million
Mental health and learning disability	Health & Social Care	£5.4 million

Preventing homelessness services (historically commissioned through SP) are all being commissioned in line with the Enabling Commissioning Framework which seeks to ensure that outcomes are achieved for individuals by having the best possible services in place at the right price. There is an ongoing cycle of ‘analyse, plan, do and review’.

The preventing homelessness ‘pot’ is reducing but homelessness is increasing and likely to continue do so.

2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
£10.6 million	£9.8 million	£8.99 million	£8.67 million

BCC has re-commissioned (or is re-commissioning) all preventing homelessness services. The purpose has been to ensure that there is a strategic fit between all services, but also making the most of providers' own expertise and ability to innovate. These services include a pathway that will support people away from homelessness towards greater independence – clients can enter the pathway at whatever stage is most appropriate, but they are supported to move towards social and economic inclusion²⁶.

²⁶ Homelessness prevents many households from feeling part of and contributing to society

In the commissioning process and in this PHS, BCC and partners want to harness the best practice that is going on in the field, want services to complement one another, and be part of a strategic whole. To achieve this tender specifications for reviews have encouraged a focus on outcomes. Reviews specify services that focus holistically on people's independence, work in a psychologically informed way to improve the wellbeing of clients and staff, and make use of peer expertise - through peer support, and ensuring that clients play a central role shaping of services.

The commissioned services have been divided into workstreams, for more detail of the reviews see Annexe C.

Progressing these reviews

This review work is carried out by the Commissioning and Policy; Housing Services team overseen by the PHB. Decisions are taken by the Service Director, Strategic Housing (following recommendations from the PHB) unless they are key decisions (e.g. over £500k) in which case they are taken by the Mayor. If there is a tender, an evaluation panel assess the tenders and then make a recommendation to the Service Director who will make the decision.

Risks - The approach presents significant challenges to both BCC and providers; Commissioning and Policy team can provide details.

Advantages - The Enabling Commissioning Framework allows BCC to be confident that the right providers are in place so that the sector is best placed to meet the key challenge of decreasing budgets at a time of increasing need.

The Housing Support Register (HSR) ensures fair and effective usage of a range of supported housing, access to family and young parents accommodation will now also be managed thru' the HSR.

Move-on from temporary accommodation - The lack of suitable move-on accommodation for those ready to move into independent accommodation is a major barrier to reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation (TA). This leads to many households particularly single people waiting in TA for their 'ideal' which is social housing. The new Move-on Policy aims to address this through changes to Bristol's pre-existing Priority Move-on Scheme, the introduction of PRS access scheme and encouraging providers to develop and utilise creative solutions to move-on through the commissioning of new low level support services where a commitment to this will be required. A bespoke Action Plan is being developed to deliver the Move-on Policy Project; it will be linked to this PHS's Action Plan.

Also relevant (across all priorities)

All housing advice and homelessness services will play their part to mitigate the negative impact of welfare and housing reforms.

With significant changes to welfare benefits and housing reforms, partners need to communicate well and minimise the impact on residents and service providers. This will be achieved by working with partners and other key stakeholders, including

resident representatives. BCC including its WRAMAS will also continue to organise events that provide information and support for homelessness providers and housing and debt advice agencies as well as community groups and residents who are likely to be most affected.

A key area of concern for the voluntary sector is the impact of debt upon the incidence of homelessness. Tight household finances raises the prospect of households not being able to afford rent / mortgage payments or other essential household bills, including fuel; with benefit reductions these pressure will be further compounded.

It will also be increasingly important to provide support for working and non-working households to find ways to maximise their incomes. This has implications for the delivery of housing services and service redesign may be necessary to provide the necessary protections for residents and social housing landlords. For example: enhanced housing options services to include advice on affordability and budgeting, providing welfare benefit entitlement and employment advice to social housing tenants as part of core housing management services. See Annexe G for more detail on the Welfare Reform changes.

Use of Homelessness 'Reserve'

As part of the high support commissioning process £1m was set aside in case of a significant upsurge in homelessness. £200k is being used for the Homelessness Prevention Fund in 2013/14 (page 11). The remainder is to be used for a number of proactive solutions. These would need to be projects where 'seed funding' puts in place a service which then is self-sustaining going forward. Ideas could be:

- Avoid move towards more institutional settings / fund self-sustaining initiatives to minimise impact if increase in numbers of e.g. rough sleepers, homeless families with children
- Encourage solutions from partners – offer seed / pilot / leverage funding, opportunity for innovation and good practice 'grants'

Both the above guidelines have the potential to make partnership in the city even closer.

Larger families

If partners don't plan very carefully the challenges and costs of homeless larger families may become 'the perfect storm'. A combination of Universal Credit, exempt accommodation rules and the expectation of greater demand in this area (see Annexe E) all combine to make this a major problem to be proactively managed. For this reason a project specifically to find VFM solutions (as sustainable as possible) will probably be in the Action Plan and needs to kick off ASAP. This will include the council and partners working to source larger family accommodation (possibly some re-modelling of existing accommodation) as an alternative to expensive emergency accommodation or even B&B.

End of Priorities section *****

Consultation feedback

In order to produce this new PHS (and modify the city's approach to preventing homelessness) there has been consultation with statutory agencies²⁷, voluntary organisations and other appropriate people.

There are three main strands of consultation that has taken place on this PHS:

- a) Developing it under the auspices of the PHB
- b) Carrying out a survey at the early stages to gauge partner expectations
- c) Posting the draft PHS on the council's Consultation Finder site for comment

The consultation from the PHB and the 'partner expectations survey' is already reflected in the PHS and the Draft that was posted on Consultation Finder (CF). A more detailed report on the partner expectations survey is available on request.

The issues raised and fed back from the CF consultation will be included in an Annexe to the PHS entitled 'You said, we did' which will show how the consultation responses were conscientiously taken into account and inform the PHS.

Funding streams

The delivery of the actions set out in this strategy will rely upon the resources of the council and partners. To maximise combined resources it will be important to work together, sharing expertise and good practice, avoiding duplication, identifying and meeting gaps in provision, jointly funding or procuring projects and making joint bids for any available funding streams to secure additional resources to help tackle homelessness in the city.

The context is challenging: less money, increasing demand. Social / affordable housing not keeping pace with demand and there are access barriers to PRS. Innovation and seizing opportunities will be crucial too and Bristol's homelessness partners have a good track record of this.

In terms of the direct resources the council's total budget for the three teams most directly providing homelessness services in 2013/14 is £2.2m. These are the Housing Advice, Private Renting and Single Point of Access teams.

The gross cost of finding PRS housing for households threatened with homelessness (deposits, rent in advance etc.) in 2012/13 was £344k with £199k in unrecovered costs carried over from previous years. The gross cost of B&B in 2012/13 was £193k but almost 83% was recoverable through Housing Benefit.

£8.99m of support services (the former Supporting People grant) pays for short term accommodation ranging from homeless hostels to women's refuges, as well as range of floating support. This budget is no longer 'ring fenced' and an ongoing saving of about 3.5% is required each year (pages 18-19).

²⁷ AKA "public authorities"

DCLG Homelessness Grant - in 2013/14 this was just under £1.1m and the indicative amounts available for the next two years are at the same level. Over 68% of this is used to purchase service provided by external to the council partners e.g. the services at the Compass Centre (page17); 30.5% pays for services directly delivered by the council e.g. hospital discharge posts.

Partners also provide services for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness which provides additional resources not accounted for above, including floating support and supported housing services.

Implementation of this Strategy

The PHS Action Plan to be finalised after BCC budget setting in February 2014 will be at Annexe A and will set out key actions for the council and partners over the period covered by the strategy.

Not least with significant welfare and housing reforms still 'working thorough' and the uncertainty around their full impact at a local level, it will be prudent to review the Action Plan regularly to ensure the actions and available resources are effectively targeted at delivering good outcomes in terms of homelessness intervention, prevention and supporting those who do become homeless.

The PHB will monitor the Action Plan at least six-monthly and help undertake its annual review/refresh and measure progress against delivery of priorities.