



Chelmsford City Council

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

2020 - 2024



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Foreword

Every five years, we are obliged to review and update the City Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. We have consulted on our draft version during the autumn of 2019 and are pleased to now have a new strategy in place.

But we want to make a step-change in our approach this time, going much further than merely complying with our statutory responsibilities, to allow us to develop and deliver a much more ambitious strategy. Our objective is to enable everyone in Chelmsford to have or at least look forward to having a place to live in that they can call their own and that meets their family's needs. This is a much bolder ambition that will take time to work through. So this document is also intended to be the start of a bolder discussion about how we achieve this ambition.

Homelessness reflects wider problems in the supply of housing: chronic lack of affordable housing over recent years has resulted in

acute problems for those who are homeless, are worried about the possibility of losing their home or are living in accommodation that doesn't meet their family's needs. Homelessness is now a structural problem of the housing market. The long-term solution is to improve supply. We have established the Affordable Housing Working Group to consider long-term housing needs. We will deliver our Housing Strategy next year, focused on improving the supply of affordable and specialist accommodation in Chelmsford.

But as well as developing tomorrow's vision, we also need to deal with today's realities. It's shocking that, in the 21st century, we still have people sleeping rough on Chelmsford's streets. We need to ensure that help is available so that rough-sleepers' immediate needs are met, that charities and public services work together to give rough-sleepers hope of a better future, and that we can prevent people falling into rough-sleeping in future. However, it is important to understand that rough-sleeping only accounts for 2% of the overall homelessness issue and our strategy must also address the

wider population of homeless people who are not always as visible. This includes people fleeing domestic abuse, those with physical and mental illnesses and many other complex issues which means they need a safe place to live, but can't necessarily pay market rates for it. Our strategy includes these types of homelessness.

In June 2019, a cross-party Working Group was created to progress this overall strategy. This will need to be Chelmsford's strategy, not just the Council's. That means we need to join up and bring together the ideas and services of all the many organisations and voluntary groups that are committed to helping rough-sleepers. The Working Group's role to facilitate a cross-collaboration approach will continue over the coming months as they consult with the various organisations to consider ideas and best practice which will all feed into our overall strategy and delivery.

We welcome your feedback through this formal consultation process, and also on an ongoing basis, to help us to shape a strategy which meets the needs of Chelmsford. Our objective is to build an approach which is flexible, enables innovation and challenges us to

continuously improve the way we work with others; those at risk of homelessness and the wider agencies who support them. Our strategy is intended to provide a network which will allow greater collaboration between all relevant organisations to reduce the main causes of homelessness.

We look forward to your input and involvement and the opportunity to build a fairer, safer and more connected Chelmsford together.

Cllr Chloe Tron, Cabinet Deputy for Affordable Housing



Executive Summary

A number of legislative and local council changes over the last year have led to our introduction of a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy.

This new Strategy is up to date with the latest requirements and expectations, whilst introducing a more comprehensive approach; going beyond the legal framework to build upon the support from our local community to achieve more and really make a difference to all those at risk of becoming homeless. Our strategy therefore seeks to tackle both the causes of homelessness and the impact that results from homelessness on others, particularly the vulnerable who may need more than just accommodation to help them overcome the problems of homelessness.

The availability of housing is fundamental to dealing with homelessness and we have already begun work on a Housing Strategy to ensure we have a better supply of housing.

Our aim is to use the energy and innovation from the development and delivery of our new Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy as a catalyst for future working relationships with others. This, in turn, will improve the supply of homes to meet a broader range of local housing need in the future. In consultation with others, it was agreed that producing a strategy today that anticipates all that may

be needed over the next five years is unrealistic, so we want to take a more agile and responsive approach; we want the discussions that were part of the consultation to continue as conversations throughout the lifetime of this strategy, building stronger partnerships and better understanding, developing a “whole-system” approach to tackling homelessness in Chelmsford. To support this, our cross-party group of elected members and officers of the Council will continue to work together on the delivery as well as the development of this strategy.

Our aim for this housing strategy is to be part of our three-pronged approach, linking with our Local Plan and Housing Strategy planned for 2020 to create a fairer Chelmsford, with fewer people at risk of homelessness and a better supply of homes to meet local housing need, creating a fairer Chelmsford.

Inevitably the main aim of this strategy has to be reducing the main causes of homeless and this begins with prevention and changing the way we work in accordance with the Homelessness Reduction Act. Our action plan has been laid out so it reflects the new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness. We have also taken on board the

aims of the national Rough Sleeper Strategy and dedicated considerably more action and plans to this than ever before.

The key outcomes of this strategy will be:

- To begin working on the elimination of the need for anyone to sleep rough in Chelmsford by improving and expanding the range of services;
- To strengthen our work on the prevention of homelessness so that a greater proportion of households in the future will be helped to avoid becoming homeless;
- To build stronger and more effective partnerships with other agencies, creating pathways that link support with housing;
- To improve awareness and understanding of homelessness, reducing the stigma of being homeless;
- To increase the choice of housing options for those in the most urgent housing need; and
- To improve the quality and reduce the need for temporary accommodation.

We are aware that housing policies and legislation are often complex, which is why we have presented this strategy in a simpler format—to make understanding the options for particular types of homelessness clearer.

We do not want to lose focus on the scale and detailed aspects of homelessness, whether this is dealing with an individual household or professionally with a range of partners so we shall also be

introducing changes to the way that we work, from making first contact with those who may be at risk of homelessness through to the way that this strategy is monitored, reviewed and developed.

Ultimately, we shall continue to carry out regular reviews of homelessness so that all causes and support needs are captured and catered for.

Introduction

The Homelessness Reduction Act took effect from April 2018 and has been described as one of the biggest changes to the way local housing authorities deal with homelessness since the introduction of the basic framework of homelessness legislation in the 1970s. It creates a statutory duty on all councils to prevent homelessness and for a number of other public bodies to become more involved in supporting this work.

Chelmsford City Council has carried out a restructure of its Strategic Housing Service, investing in a new team to implement these changes and creating more capacity to improve its strategic role, working in a proactive way to tackle all forms of homelessness beginning with prevention. This will reduce the hardship faced by those who are at risk of homelessness, at a time when the need for affordable housing is so great and will make best use of limited resources.

In the summer of 2018, the government announced a range of proposals to help those who are street homeless; although this is one of the smallest elements of homelessness we recognise the high risk to those who are roofless and vulnerable, and the concern caused to the public.

Throughout 2018, all the District Councils in Essex worked with Essex County Council and others on the Essex Vision, looking at ways to adopt a 'whole systems' approach to reducing homelessness in Essex. This has helped build stronger links with neighbouring districts who share the same challenges along with agencies such as health, criminal justice and voluntary organisations who all have an important role in helping us prevent homelessness. Some of the aims and actions of Essex Vision are included within our own action plan.

This 'whole system' approach is something that we want to bring forward, through this Strategy, into the way that we work as Chelmsford City Council, preventing and relieving homelessness. Very often those who face homelessness will have other support needs, sometimes because of the risk of homelessness, sometimes it may be these other needs which have led to them becoming homeless. As a local housing authority the Council is limited in its ability to meet these wider needs but we will work to develop and improve our ability to recognise these needs for support as well as the need for housing and put in place not just a system for referring to other agencies but where necessary, ways of working in collaboration with partners to improve the overall network of support, joint working and collective understanding.

This strategy replaces the previous one and reflects these changes—aiming to improve our approach at both a strategic and operational level. Our priority will be to reduce the number of households in Chelmsford becoming homeless, inevitably this will deal with the three main causes:

1. Ending of non-secure tenancies with private landlords;
2. Eviction from the home by parents, family or friends; and
3. Domestic abuse

We will also be improving the way that we and others work to reduce the need for those who are homeless to sleep rough, on the streets in Chelmsford.

Better ways of engaging with those in need and working with our partners will mean we can improve our service, not just to the groups outlined above but to everyone we work with, so that everyone's needs are assessed and our review of the strategy does not overlook any aspect or person.

The main aims of this strategy

All of these aims will be tracked through the monitoring of Key Performance Indicators and the annual service plan for the Council's Strategic Housing Service.

To increase the number of households that are prevented from becoming homeless –

We will do this by developing pathways for each of the main causes of homelessness. Over the lifetime of this strategy we shall review and refine these as well as developing additional ones for other groups. Homelessness is a complex issue and only through developing a wide range of actions, pathways and interventions can we hope to be able to increase prevention and reduce homelessness in Chelmsford.

To increase the involvement of other agencies supporting the Council to prevent homelessness –

In the section Our Pathways and Actions, we have presented our aims in a way that shows by particular groups what we aim to provide in order to prevent and relieve homelessness, making it easier for partners to understand the steps we may take with the people they are supporting. In the section Reviewing and Updating the strategy we will also aim to introduce new ways of engaging and working with our partners to encourage a joint approach to working on the aims of this strategy.

Understanding
&
Awareness

To increase choice and options for those at risk of homelessness –

We want to continue to expand the work we do with private landlords, reducing the demand and reliance on social housing so that we are able to use a wider selection of accommodation to prevent homelessness and discharge our main duty. This will be complemented by the development of a Housing Strategy which will be developed throughout 2019/20 that will also look at improving the supply of housing to meet local need.

To improve the quality and reduce the cost of temporary accommodation –

The Council has recently invested in new modular units as temporary accommodation that are affordable and local. In our section on Temporary Accommodation we explain how we shall be reviewing the supply, cost and quality of these homes.

Development of our strategy

We want our Strategy to be the starting point for the way that we work with people and partners, explaining our duties, the main causes of homelessness and ways that others can work with the Council to help us tackle the challenges that we face dealing with homelessness. We hope that the design of this Strategy will help improve understanding and stimulate closer partnership working.

The Homelessness Reduction Act has been described as one of the biggest changes to the way that local housing authorities deal with homelessness, so we have presented some of the Strategy in a way that we hope will make it easier to understand how we will be working with the new Act. We know that the legislation we use to make our decisions can seem complex, so we want this strategy to also be a helpful guide, explaining what we do, why we do it and what we want to do in the future. This is important to us as well because tackling homelessness often comes down to two key issues:

1. Reducing the risk and impact of homelessness – which is the aim of this strategy, and
2. Improving the availability of homes that are suitable and affordable – which is the aim of our Housing Strategy.

The Council transferred its housing stock over 15 years ago, so we must rely on housing associations and private landlords to help us provide homes. Following on from this strategy, we shall begin work on a new Housing Strategy aimed at making best use of existing and new homes.

The lack of suitable supported housing means that this will be a priority for our Housing Strategy, taking evidence from our review of homelessness and the development of this strategy as the basis of evidence for what is needed to meet the combination of housing and support. By dealing with these gaps in provision we can reduce the impact of moving from homelessness into independent living, and have accommodation-based solutions for those who need

support to help prevent them from becoming homeless in the future.

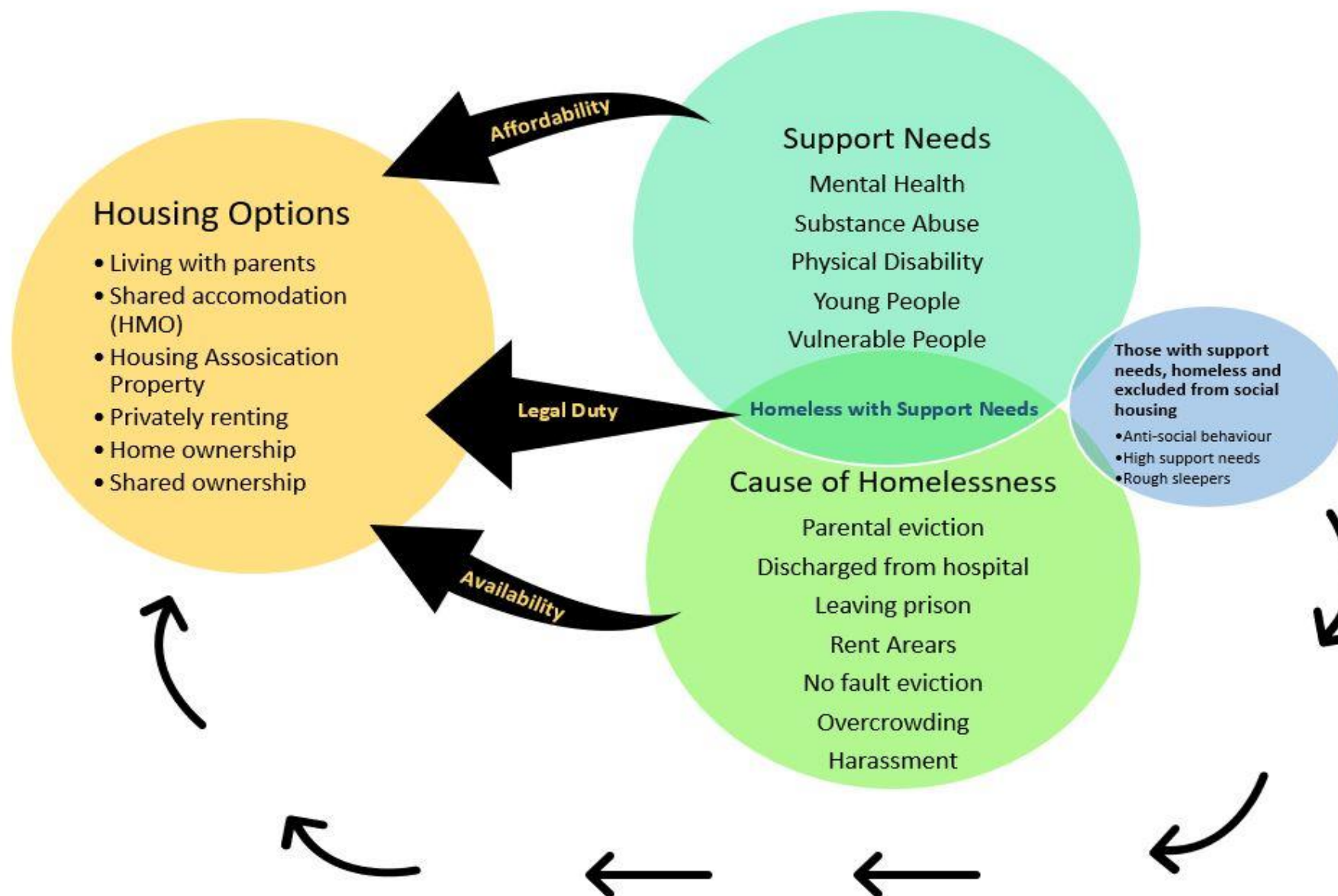
The diagram below shows how supported housing is important in helping us meet the need of some who become homeless. With suitable support, such as adaptations or help from other services, the housing options in the circle on the left may be suitable for most people with support needs in the top circle on the right as long as they can afford to move or are able to remain where they are. Likewise, if someone becomes homeless for one of the reasons in the circle at the bottom right, one or more of the options on the left may help prevent or relieve homelessness. Where the two circles on the right overlap, many of those in this sub-group may be entitled to accommodation under the homelessness legislation but the need for support will continue to be needed, whether in specialist housing or in one of the options in the circle on the left with visiting or 'floating' support.

In some cases, people with support needs may become homeless but the duty to relieve may only be for a short time, if for example there is no local connection to Chelmsford, or in cases where they have made themselves intentionally homeless. There is therefore a

need to make sure that there is also suitable accommodation for these groups as well, which may often include those who are sleeping rough, with the capacity to help them move back to areas where they may be a local connection.

In developing this strategy, it was clear that there is a lack of suitable accommodation in Chelmsford for those who have become homeless due to domestic abuse, those with poor mental health, very young parents and rough sleepers. Just as importantly is the ability to help people move on as well to prevent these schemes from becoming blocked. When people do move on, many have identified this as a time when the need for support may increase – and yet the provision of support decreases or even ends, with the risk of further homelessness.

We therefore want to work with others, not only to improve the supply of supported housing especially for those groups we have identified as a priority but also to help provide timely move-on and see that where needed, support also follows to help people settle into sustainable long-term independent living.



Help and Support

Many who are at risk of becoming homeless have additional support needs, which if not helped will mean the risk of further homelessness will still exist even when housed.

As well as working with partners in the development and implementation of a new Housing Strategy, we also want to make sure that best use is made of existing services that provide housing related support, such as Peabody's floating support service and drop-in and outreach services provided by others in Chelmsford. We will continue to work with a wide range of partners to make sure that their services are more closely linked with ours and where there are gaps, we will deal with these as a priority. As with the causes of homelessness, we shall continually review the need for support as well as housing for those at risk to improve our ability to prevent and relieve homelessness in the future. The table to the right shows the range of support based upon evidence from those presenting as homeless in 2018. Many had a combination of support needs, such as both alcohol and drug abuse.

Support needed based upon information provided by applicants

<i>Physical health / disability</i>	42%
<i>Mental health</i>	34%
<i>Domestic abuse</i>	30%
<i>Offending</i>	16%
<i>Previous history of rough sleeping</i>	13%
<i>Drug abuse</i>	7%
<i>Alcohol abuse</i>	6%
<i>Learning disability</i>	6%
<i>Young person leaving care</i>	2%
<i>Sexual abuse / exploitation</i>	1%
<i>Ex-armed forces</i>	< 1%

Reviewing and updating

We will be consulting with partners on ways to keep them informed on issues of homelessness and progress with this Strategy to achieve as an outcome better awareness and understanding of homelessness in Chelmsford. We believe that forums can be helpful to present general issues about homelessness but may not be so effective in dealing with some more specialised issues such as domestic abuse, mental health or rough sleeping. We therefore want to introduce a new approach to the way that our Housing Service develops and builds links with others, with more focus on some of the background issues that will help us, and others gain a better understanding and build more effective solutions.

In developing this Strategy, we carried out a review of homelessness in Chelmsford in accordance with the government's Code of Guidance. We will provide an annual update on trends, initiatives and achievements to show how we are meeting our aims to prevent and relieve homelessness in Chelmsford. This will also be the basis for

setting our aims and actions for the following year, creating a continuously evolving plan of action.

We have already demonstrated our corporate commitment to supporting this strategy by creating a working group which will report to the Council's Policy Board; overseeing the development of the draft strategy and the feedback from the consultation process. From this we will take account of guidance and best practice, putting in place arrangements for the future governance and oversight of the strategy, supporting partners and maintaining a consistent momentum of improving performance and quality of service.

At a strategic level, dealing with homelessness is very complex, working with those who commission services, provide services and volunteer, to achieve the best outcomes for Chelmsford across a wide range of housing and support providers. We see the need for a more agile and innovative approach if we are going to really make a difference, encompassing the breadth of services and issues, and

having the ability to carry out 'deep dives' into some aspects that will need greater understanding and collaboration.

We want to make sure that throughout this, those that we are helping remain at the heart of what we do and we will therefore introduce ways of getting feedback from agencies as well as individuals to help us learn and work more effectively.



Homelessness in Chelmsford: Facts and Figures

What do we mean by 'homelessness'?

We are aware that the lack of affordable housing means there are many living in Chelmsford who are unable to afford a home of their own—most of whom are living with family, sharing with friends or moving ('sofa surfing') from place to place. Thankfully most will not become homeless but many in this group are at risk, if for example they are asked by friends or family to leave or are given notice by their landlord. Moreover, this is why we see the development of a Housing Strategy that will improve the supply of affordable and supported housing. This is imperative to our approach for meeting housing need and homelessness, as well as being integral to improving the supply of homes for those who actually do become homeless.

The legal definition which local housing authorities work to is essentially defined as *not having anywhere settled to live*. This may be because a family has been given notice to leave their home by a landlord, or asked to leave the family home by parents, or it is no longer reasonable to remain in their home because of the risk of

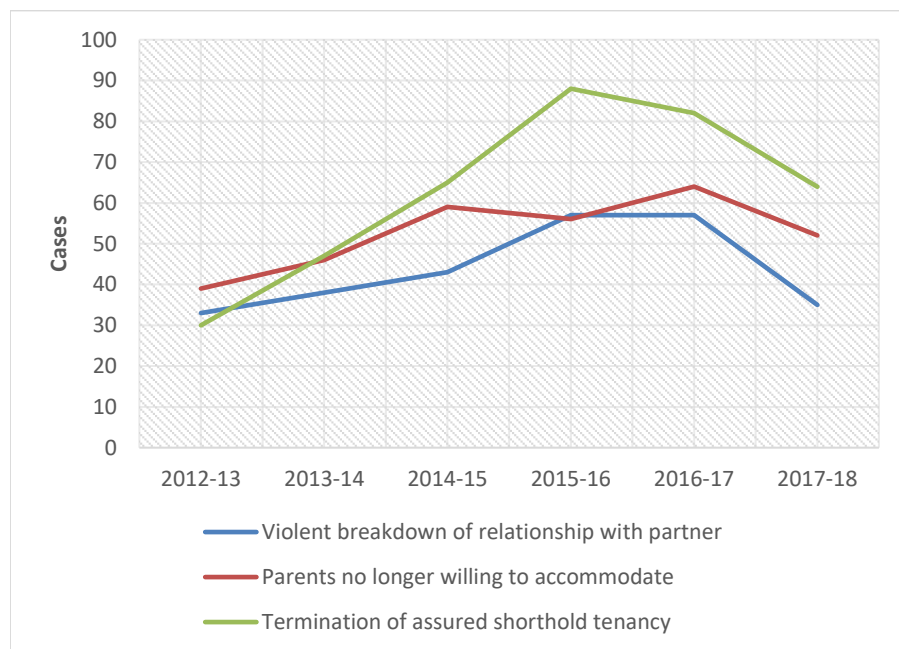
violence. In many cases, people will have to ask others to help 'put them up' while they look to see if they can find somewhere else, their local Council may have to provide temporary accommodation, or they may have needed to move into supported housing, care or hospital with no idea about where they may be moving on to.

To help those who are in fact homeless but not actually roofless, we have amended our policy for the allocation of housing through our Housing Register so that additional priority and choice can be given to those who have no settled accommodation as well as those who need temporary accommodation.

In some cases, individuals may find themselves having to sleep rough, in outbuildings or even on the street. Thankfully this is a very small proportion of homelessness, about 3% of all cases in Chelmsford. However, this is an example of how homelessness creates additional risks to health and wellbeing. The same can be said for those who are at risk of domestic abuse or suffering from poor mental health because of the stress of not knowing where their family will be living from one day to the next.

Homelessness in Chelmsford

What are the main causes of homelessness in Chelmsford?



The main causes of homelessness in Chelmsford has followed national trends as shown in the graph. Nationally there has been an increase in homelessness but the increase in Chelmsford has been proportionally much higher than the county-wide and national average, as has the proportion of applications which have been accepted as statutory homeless. The year 2017/18 is not an accurate indication, coinciding with the restructure of the Council's Housing Service and the transition and implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act. Review of need and performance in 2018/19 and 2019/20 shows the level of need is still around 300 a year but with a lower proportion of acceptances as the Homelessness Reduction Act helps increase the number of cases of prevention and relief.

Despite the increasing number of affordable homes in Chelmsford over the last 10 years, the doubling in the number of households becoming homeless seems to be linked to the reducing number of affordable homes becoming available as re-lets, as fewer households move within the social housing sector, the lower rate of churn along with the rising cost of alternative privately rented accommodation and welfare reform means there has been an overall reduction in choices for those who become homeless.

Statutory Homeless Decisions 2010-2018

	Main Housing Duty (Acceptances)	Intentionally homeless	Homeless but not priority Need	Eligible but not homeless	Total decisions	% decisions accepted as homeless
2010-11	124	9	8	37	178	70%
2011-12	170	9	20	49	248	68%
2012-13	174	17	21	43	255	68%
2013-14	218	21	21	53	313	70%
2014-15	282	17	7	68	374	75%
2015-16	305	21	11	58	395	77%
2016-17	337	20	4	45	406	83%
2017-18	244	18	15	30	307	79%

Who is likely to be homeless in Chelmsford?

We know that certain groups are more likely to be at risk of becoming homeless because of other factors, such as low income, lack of family support, poor mental or physical health.

Physical ill health is the most common issue for those needing support (18%) followed by risk or experience of domestic abuse (15%). 60% of those who were homeless were female and the most common age group was 25-44 years (52%).

In terms of financial status, the highest proportion were in either full- or part-time employment (30%), with 22% being unable to work due to illness or disability and 21% registered unemployed.

What are the Council's duties to those who are homeless?

The Council makes its decisions on prioritising assistance to those who are homeless based upon the legal framework which applies to all local housing authorities. The 'main duty' to provide accommodation, which means somewhere that is suitable and is likely to be available for at least 12 months does not apply to everyone who is homeless. The diagram below shows the key stages of the decision-making process determining the minimum level of duty to those who are homeless.

The circumstances of every case are different but will be assessed in the same way:

Eligible for assistance?

Only people who are homeless but not subject to immigration control are eligible for assistance under the legislation.

Homeless?

This means not having access to suitable accommodation anywhere – not just in Chelmsford, or even the UK. Anyone who meets both these criteria is entitled to advice.

Priority need?

People who are especially vulnerable, for example because they have young children living with them, may be entitled to emergency accommodation if they are homeless.

Intentionally homeless?

Even if homeless and in priority need, any accommodation that is provided may only be for a short period if someone has made themselves homeless.

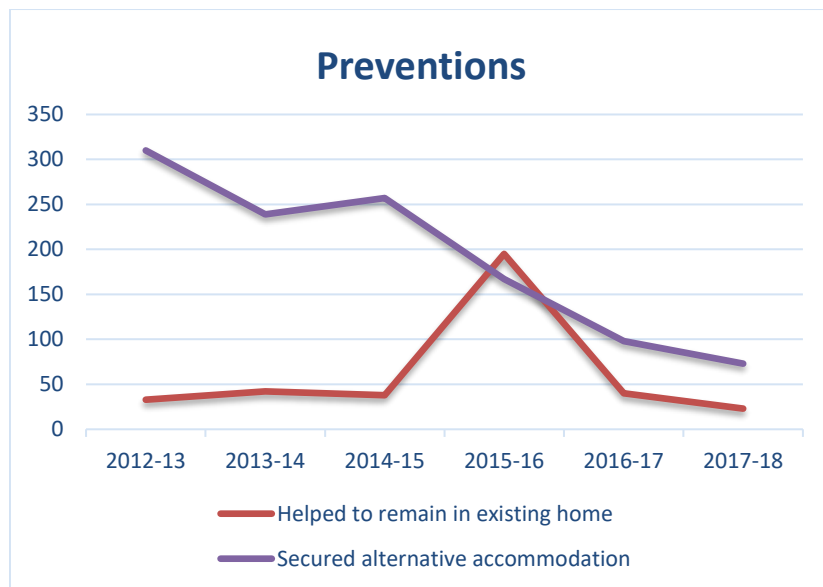
Local connection?

Most councils will only consider offering settled accommodation as their main duty to those who have a local connection to their area

How does homelessness in Chelmsford compare with other areas?

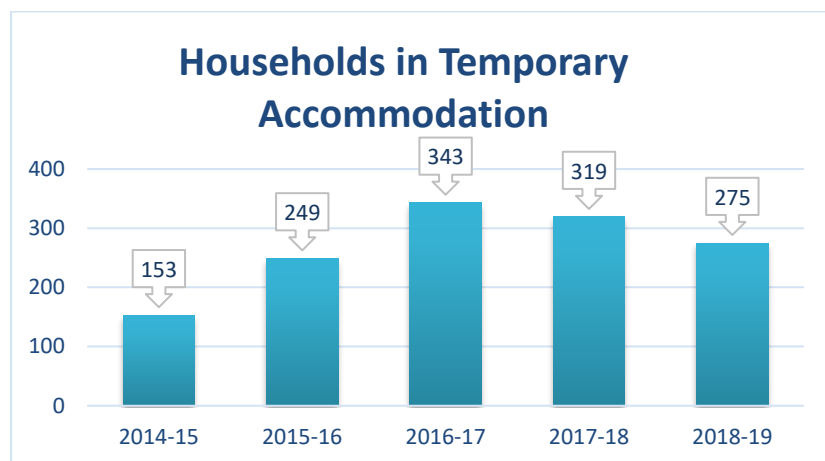
We look at levels of homelessness in terms of per thousand households, making it easier to compare different districts which each have very different levels of population. We can see that the proportion of households accepted as homeless in Chelmsford has been higher compared to other neighbouring parts of Essex and the national level.

District	Acceptances (2017-18)	Per 1,000 households
<i>England (excl London)</i>		2.08
<i>Braintree</i>	55	0.85
<i>Basildon</i>	202	2.59
<i>Brentwood</i>	26	0.8
Chelmsford	244	3.30
<i>Colchester</i>	184	2.37
<i>Epping</i>	63	1.14
<i>Maldon</i>	41	1.51
<i>Rochford</i>	80	2.29



The reason for this higher level of acceptances is likely to be due to the proportionately lower supply of affordable homes from the existing stock of social housing as Epping and Brentwood have comparable levels of rents and housing costs, if not slightly higher, than Chelmsford. The rising cost of housing, especially private renting, has meant that it has become harder to use this as an option to prevent homelessness and this has not helped reduce levels of homelessness in Chelmsford. The brief increase in the number helped to remain in their home (see chart above) was due to changes in the way that prevention was reported and recorded in 2015/16.

Temporary accommodation



There are times when we need to provide temporary accommodation, as part of our work in relieving homelessness and when there is a main duty to provide settled accommodation but there is nothing suitable and available.

We have almost eliminated the use of shared-accommodation and B&B for homeless families and we want to reduce the number of families in temporary accommodation because it is unsettling and expensive for the households. It is also not cost-effective and often does not fully meet the needs of families. Towards the end of 2017/18 we began to manage a reduction and we want this to continue.

The two main ways we can do this are:

By preventing more cases of homelessness; this is a better outcome for everyone, especially if it means that there are more opportunities for people to move to more suitable homes in a planned way, which is a key part of this strategy;

&

By improving the supply of homes that are suitable and affordable, this does not only rely on a better supply of new homes being built, it also means improving the use and supply of existing homes of all types, and this is something we will deal with in our Housing Strategy.

This will mean that we can;

1. Eliminate the use of Bed and Breakfasts
2. Reduce the length of time spent in temporary accommodation
3. Reduce the number of families in temporary accommodation

The Council has invested in new temporary housing to meet these standards and we want to use this as our benchmark for all other temporary accommodation. Throughout the lifetime of this Strategy we will work with providers to improve standards and reduce costs wherever possible, reviewing Service Level Agreements and seeking new opportunities to meet this need.

Some level of temporary accommodation may always be needed but we want to make sure that this meets our standards in the future:

- ✓ **Affordable** – reducing the cost to residents and the Council
- ✓ **Local** – wherever possible within the district
- ✓ **Condition** – clean, safe and comfortable
- ✓ **Access to services** – providing support where needed to help residents manage at the moment and prepare for the future

We will use our standards as a benchmark for what we expect from those providing temporary accommodation and want to reduce if not eliminate the use of accommodation that falls below these criteria.

Housing Need and Supply

Supply of affordable rented and social general needs homes

Year	New homes	Re-lets	Total Lets	Acceptances	Households in TA
2016/17	79	297	376	337	343
2017/18	34	308	342	264	319
2018/19	44	324	339	177	275

The need for temporary accommodation is driven by the number of people becoming homeless and the availability of suitable, affordable housing for them to move on into.

The issue of housing need and supply is something that we shall deal with in more detail as part of our Housing Strategy, but it is helpful to see in the table above how variable the supply of new build homes and the supply from re-lets of existing stock is.

The table above shows the supply of Affordable and Social Rent homes over the last three years. We have not included other types of affordable housing such as shared-ownership, nor age-restricted homes such as sheltered housing because these are not predominately able to meet the needs of those who are homeless.

This gives an overview of the level of homelessness and the supply of homes to meet this and other housing need.

The table above also shows how the reduction in the need for temporary accommodation is most closely linked to the number of households accepted as homeless more than supply. It also shows that in 2016/17 roughly 90% of all general-needs homes would have been allocated to those accepted as homeless but this had reduced to around 70% the following year. With a steady and constant supply, the key to managing need and therefore the number of households needing temporary accommodation begins with the ability of the Council and others to prevent homelessness wherever possible. Our Housing Strategy will deal in more detail with how we aim to improve the supply of homes to meet local need.

Our Performance

Since our 2011 Homelessness Strategy, the proportion of accepted homeless households and the number of people residing in temporary accommodation has risen. This may have been partly due to local issues such as rising housing costs and the supply of homes. However, these are not factors unique to Chelmsford and we can see that other areas with similar costs and supply have not seen the same levels of increase in need.

In 2017 we began to review our Housing Service and in 2018 we invested both time and money to improve our capacity and skills to provide a better strategic housing service. This is one of the reasons why we have now decided to launch a completely new Homelessness Strategy, which also coincides with the Homelessness Reduction Act and the national Rough Sleeper Strategy.

We shall continue to monitor our performance by setting and reporting on key performance indicators and a set of wider indicators. These indicators include local rent levels and the supply of affordable homes on a monthly basis. We will also carry out a review every six months, using data supplied to central government, to monitor current trends of homelessness including prevention and relief. This will be used to maintain a focus on continuous improvement and the actions of this strategy.



Since 2017/18 we have:

- ✓ Reduced the number and proportion of homelessness in Chelmsford
- ✓ Increased the proportion of cases of prevention
- ✓ Reduced the number of households in temporary accommodation
- ✓ Improved the quality of temporary accommodation

From 2019/20 we aim to:

- Bring levels of homelessness and temporary accommodation in line with, if not better than, national average;
- Further reduce the cost and improve the quality of temporary accommodation;
- Increase the ways we work with partners to increase and improve options for accommodation and support for those at risk of homelessness in Chelmsford.

Working with our partners

As a local housing authority, we are responsible for preventing and relieving homelessness.

However, as we no longer have our own housing stock, partnership working is essential to us in meeting our statutory duties.

Our partners include those who;

Have a duty to refer their clients if they are at risk of becoming homeless: agencies working in the criminal justice system, hospitals, social, job centres and the armed forces;

Provide housing, such as housing associations, supported housing providers, and other landlords;

Provide advice and support such as CAB, floating support, outreach and drop-in services




Fund and commission services such as those above, for example the health authority, Essex County Council, Ministry of Housing, Police and Crime Commissioner, local and national charities.

We want to make sure that through this strategy, our partners understand what is needed to reduce homelessness and how important their contributions are.

Whilst we see the need to continue with a forum to highlight the aims of this Strategy with our partners, we shall also look at ways of being more focussed in developing and delivering some of our actions through dedicated workstreams, such as domestic abuse, rough sleepers or young people. We are proposing that our Homelessness Strategy Working Group will continue with the work that began with the development of this strategy, continuing the conversations that started with the consultation process into the implementation and further development of this strategy.

We will support the aims and adopt the proposals of Essex Vision which involves a whole-systems approach. By adopting a multi-agency approach, we will prevent homelessness across a wide spectrum of groups. We will continue to play an active role working across Essex through Essex Housing Officers' Group, and at a local level; leading and supporting statutory and voluntary organisations to reduce homelessness in Chelmsford.

Rough Sleeping

-  **In August 2018** the government published the first national strategy with the aim of alleviating rough sleeping by 2028. Amongst the proposals was the recommendation that all local housing authorities incorporate the aims of the strategy into their Homelessness Strategies.
-  **In November 2018** we carried out our first rough sleeper count, having previously relied on estimates and we are grateful for those who volunteered to help. This showed a slight reduction that reflected the increase in capacity of the local night-shelter.
-  **From December 2018** we contributed towards the cost of CHES providing its Winter Project, creating additional spaces for those at risk of rough sleeping. The evaluation of this project, including information on the background and needs of those using this project, has helped us build a better understanding of ways we can work with others to reduce the risks of others having to sleep rough in Chelmsford in the future.

We know that historic levels of rough sleeping have been higher in the main settlement areas of Essex and this is not only because of larger populations but as the next table shows it is also higher as a proportion of the local population.

District	2010	2017	Number per 1,000 households (2017)	2018
Braintree	1	0	0.00	5
Brentwood	1	0	0.00	2
Basildon*	9	24	0.31	12
Castle Point	1	0	0.00	0
Chelmsford	10	17	0.23	14
Colchester*	10	20	0.26	13
Epping	0	2	0.04	3
Harlow*	7	24	0.66	9
Maldon	1	1	0.04	0
Rochford	0	11	0.31	3
Southend*	8	72	0.91	11
Tendring	0	6	0.09	6
Thurrock	2	9	0.13	9
Uttlesford	0	2	0.06	0

www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-in-england-autumn-2017

*Districts received Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding 2018/19

The table also shows how in some cases, funding from the government's Rough Sleeper Initiative has led to a reduction in rough sleeping and having now been successful in receiving funding we want to learn from these other areas what works best.

The reasons for these concentrations of rough sleeping in the past may be due to a combination of factors including the availability of services and the visibility and awareness of need in these areas. During 2018 Basildon, Colchester, Harlow and Southend received Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) Funding from government and have used this to improve services leading to a reduction of street homelessness in these areas.

Rough Sleeping: Our Approach

With recorded levels of rough sleeping just below the highest levels of other towns in Essex, Chelmsford missed out on receiving Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding in 2017/18. Recognising the central location of Chelmsford and that this means that some of those sleeping rough in the city come from other areas,, we have worked with other mid-Essex districts to secure RSI Funding for 2019 to provide a more consistent outreach service across mid Essex, additional space within our local night-shelter and more help for those moving on to access and sustain their accommodation in Chelmsford and across mid Essex.

This increases the opportunity for securing funding and support, improving also our ability to work more strategically. As part of our successful application for RSI funding in 2018/19 we identified the need to look at where those who sleep rough come from, not only geographically but also there last place of settled accommodation and the reasons why they became homeless; without being able to get to those who are at risk in these areas, we can not prevent and reduce the number sleeping rough in Chelmsford in the future.

We also identified the frequency of those with a background of rough sleeping needing help when they do move on into settled accommodation, ironically it is often at this stage when help and support disappears – just because someone is no longer sleeping rough doesn't mean that many of the problems and risks have disappeared. Helping people sustain their tenancies is just as important a part of prevention and avoiding homelessness in the first place.

From 2020 we intend to have Homelessness Navigators, funded by MHCLG, working in Chelmsford and with our neighbouring districts to work with those sleeping rough and the agencies who can help them move off the streets into accommodation.

As well as working more closely with partners, encouraging others to identify those at risk before they become homeless, improve the way we all work together to help people access accommodation and then helping them maintain independence and reducing the risk of cyclical homelessness. We have also worked with Essex County Council and others to learn and build on success elsewhere.

Combined with some of the plans that we now have with others, including those developed as part of the Essex Vision project, this pathway will help us meet the aims of the government's strategy. We will carry out an annual review of local need and our progress in meeting the aims of this national strategy as part of our overall review of homelessness in Chelmsford.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733421/Rough-Sleeping-Strategy_WEB.pdf



Homelessness Reduction Act

The Homelessness Reduction Act has been described as one of the greatest changes to the way that local housing authorities deal with homelessness. The new Act came into effect from April 2018, it did not make any change to the main duty (see above) but it puts some additional steps in place with the aim of improving the prevention of homelessness for a greater number of people.

Before making a decision under the main duty, **all local housing authorities in England must now work with anyone who is at risk of becoming homeless within 56 days to:**

- 1) Agree and help them with a Personal Housing Plan for the next 56 days that will:
- 2) Seek to prevent them from becoming homeless, irrespective of whether or not they are in priority need, may be intentionally homeless or have a local connection and if this fails:
- 3) Seek to relieve their homelessness by helping them to find somewhere else, if they are still homeless after 56 days then consider what the Council's duty is under the main duty.
- 4) Everyone seeking assistance is required to agree to the actions of their personal housing plan, if they refuse to cooperate then the Council does not have to offer any further help and is no longer under any duty to help.
- 5) From October 2018, some organisations such as hospitals, prisons, social care and the armed forces are now under a duty to refer anyone who wants help because they may become homeless within 56 days to a local housing authority of their choice.

Under the Localism Act (2011) when there is a main duty to secure accommodation this does not need to be a council or housing association property and can be a home that is rented from a private landlord

Our resources



We have set out below a summary of our main resources that will be used to meet the aims of this Strategy based upon data from 2018/19.

Staff: 20.5 FTE

Projected staff costs: £535,404

Temporary Accommodation	Private Rented	Rough Sleepers	Government Funding
Housing Association Properties 69	Homes 2 Lease (Private Sector Leasing Scheme) £1,088,900 -Paid to Landlords	CHESS provision of rough sleeper outreach services = £15,000 per annum	New Burdens Grant (implementation of Homelessness Reduction Act) = £44,820
Council Owned Stock 43	Homes 2 Lease £1,034,400 -Paid in Rent to CCC	Winter project = £52,000	Flexible Homelessness Support Grant = £461,351
Private Sector Leased Properties 86	Rent Deposit Scheme/ Tenancy Access Scheme £107,065 -Paid to Landlords		Rough Sleepers Initiative (for mid Essex 2019/120) = £180,000
Private Nightly Let 77			Cold Weather reimbursement = £14,000

Our Pathways and Actions

Prevention	Relief	Main Duty	Actions
The way we prevent homelessness will vary depending on the cause and type of person			Existing options may still need to be reviewed along with our performance to make sure they are effective
We are aiming to increase the proportion of cases where we prevent homelessness			
Encourage people to use our on-line Housing Wizard to identify risk of homelessness			
Personal Housing Plans – supporting people to take responsibility for avoiding homelessness	Personal Housing Plans – supporting people to take responsibility for finding alternate accommodation		
	In cases where we can't prevent homelessness we will see if we can help relieve homelessness by helping people find other accommodation		We will continue to review and plan to help people access temporary accommodation and support when needed to relieve homelessness.
		If we have been unable to prevent or relieve homelessness we will then look to see what other duties may apply	We will produce a new Housing Strategy in 2019/20 supporting our Corporate Plan to improve the supply of homes to meet local need.

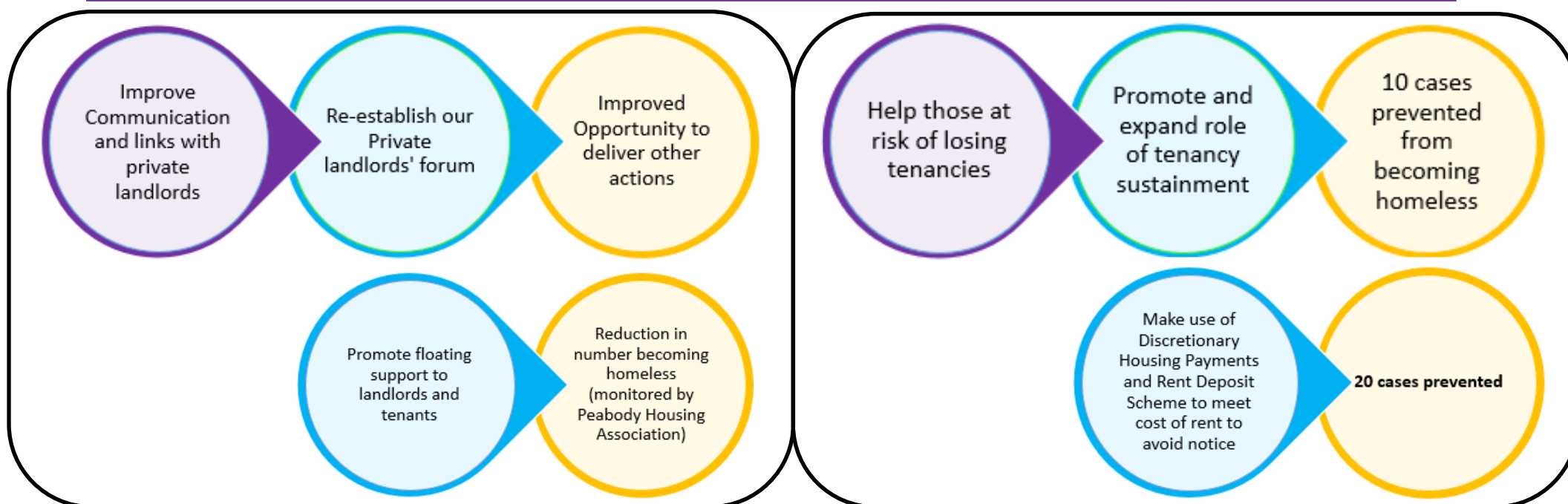
The following tables show how we will deliver the aims of the Homelessness Reduction Act to prevent and relieve homelessness before considering if there is a need to make a decision as to our 'main duty' to secure settled accommodation for the main causes of homelessness and other groups.

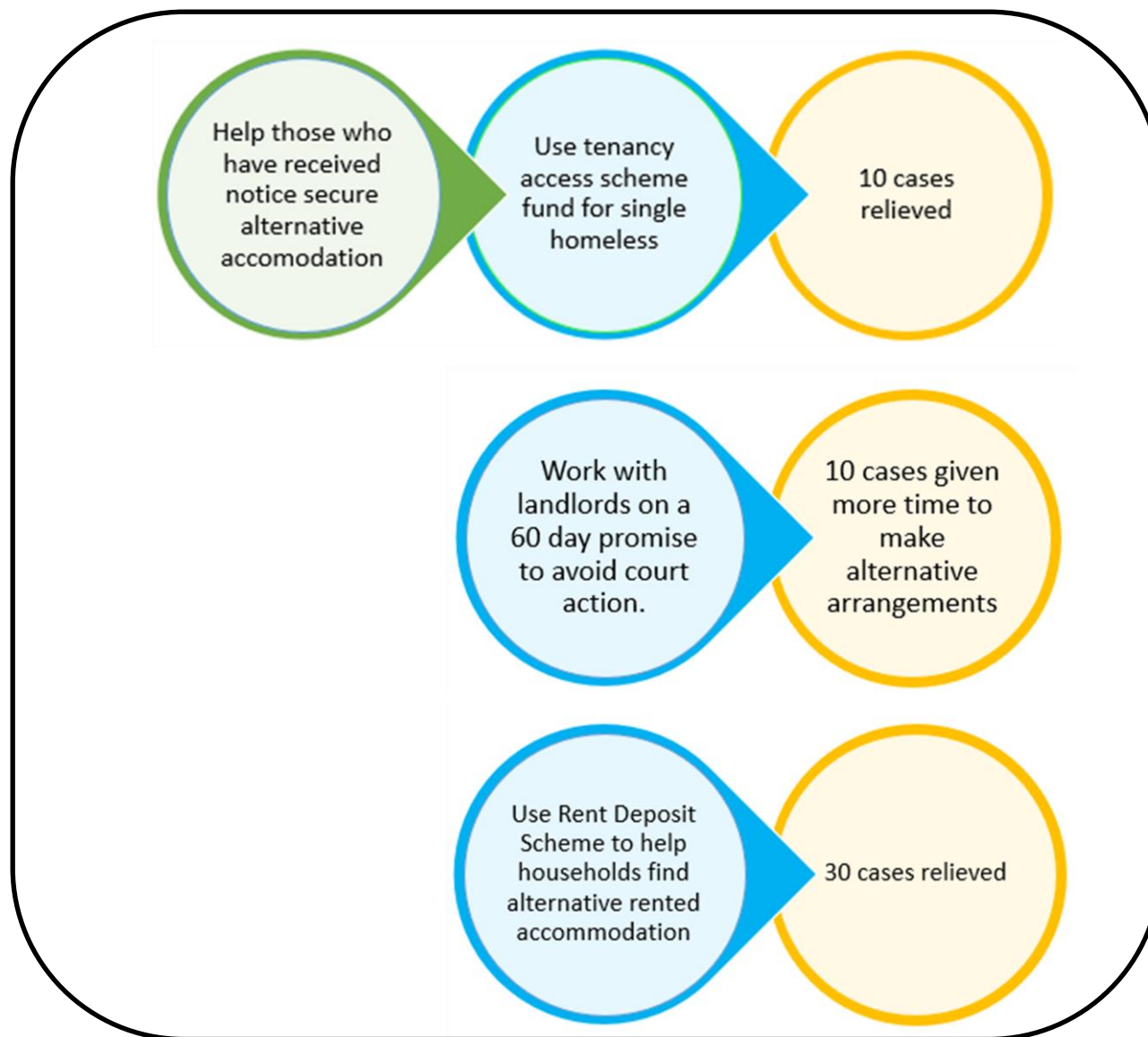
All of our actions are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic (resources) and time-bound). Our agile approach to implementing this strategy means that we want to keep our action plan under constant review, all actions are planned for delivery in 2020 with the intention of reviewing and resetting on an annual basis.

Assured Short-hold Tenancies

This is the single greatest cause of homelessness in Chelmsford, Essex and nationally.

There are approximately 80 households a year becoming homeless in Chelmsford for this reason.

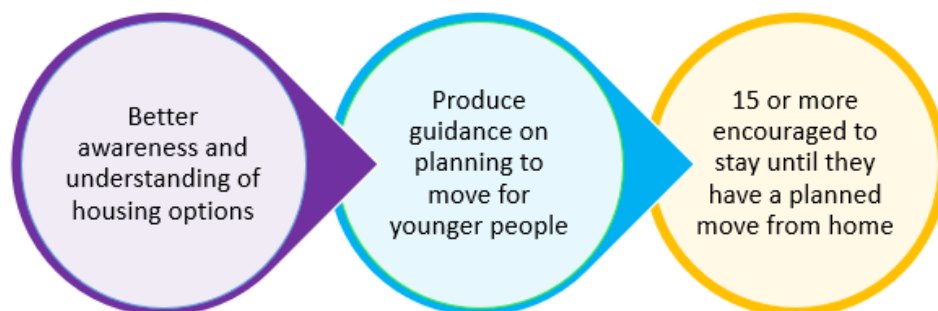




Eviction by Family and Friends

There are about 60 cases a year accepted as homeless for this reason.

There is no specialist housing suitable for young people who become homeless in Chelmsford, making them especially vulnerable and at risk if homeless



Eviction by Family and Friends

Help moving to alternative accommodation

Provide financial assistance with Rent Deposit Scheme and Tenancy Access Funding

25 cases helped to relieve homelessness

Work with partners to explore the potential for a local Night Stop scheme

Possible relief of 5 – 10 cases

Work with Moat Homes and others to bring local parent and child scheme back into use

Potential to provide 6 homes for young parents who become homeless

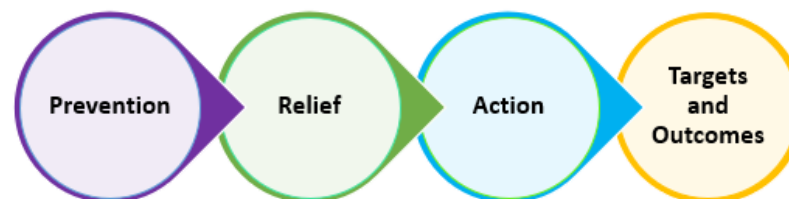
Appoint a Young Persons' Champion in Housing Service

Better communication and working with partners to help reduce homelessness

Agree protocol with Essex County Council for young people at risk of homelessness

Improved partnership working and joint commissioning for services to reduce homelessness

Domestic Abuse



There are about 60 cases a year in Chelmsford of households being made homeless because of domestic abuse. Last year, there was a weekly average of three women killed by their partners in a domestic incident. There is only one scheme in Chelmsford with a small number of rooms for those made homeless as a result of domestic abuse.

Approximately five times more families have to rely on temporary accommodation without help or support

Reduce number
needing to leave
their home

Appoint a
Domestic Abuse
Champion in
Housing Service

Better
coordination
with other
services and
quality of advice
to those at risk

Work with Essex
Domestic Abuse Board
and partners on
improving understanding
importance of preventing
rather than relieving
homelessness for those
at risk

Reduction in cases
advised to consider re-
housing as an easy option
– reduced disruption to
those who are at risk

Consult with agencies
on possibility of a local
domestic abuse board
to improve the quality
and range of services
in Chelmsford for those
at risk.

Better use and
opportunity for
resources, more
effective working
between agencies.

Develop links
between Next
Chapter outreach
service and those
at risk to help
them avoid the
loss of their home

15 cases helped to
take action that
avoids the need to
leave home

Domestic Abuse

Relief

Increase options for those unable to remain in their home

Consult with local housing associations and others in mid Essex on opportunities for tenancy transfers to reduce the impact of needing to move

More households able to retain a secure and affordable tenancy, reducing the risks of homelessness for other reasons in the future

Use Homefinder to help access secure tenancies in other areas for those unable to remain in Chelmsford

5 or more helped move to affordable homes and secure tenancies in other areas

Provide short-term supported accommodation

10 or more helped to take effective action against perpetrators and return to their home

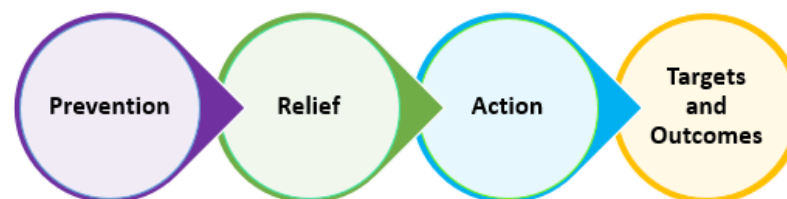
Provide additional supported accommodation

15 or more helped to move, access support and make planned moves into safe accommodation.

Work with Next Chapter and Safer Places to provide specialist advice and support to those who need to be housed in temporary accommodation

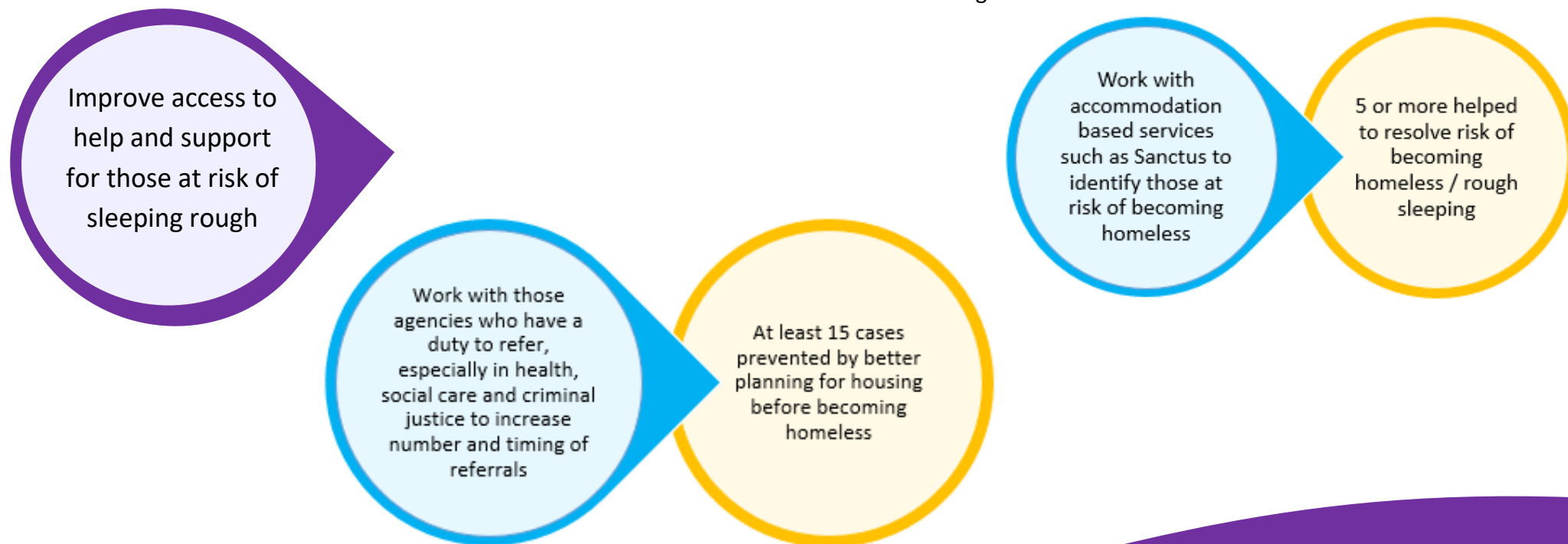
15 or more helped maintain safety and independence, working with the Council to make planned moves

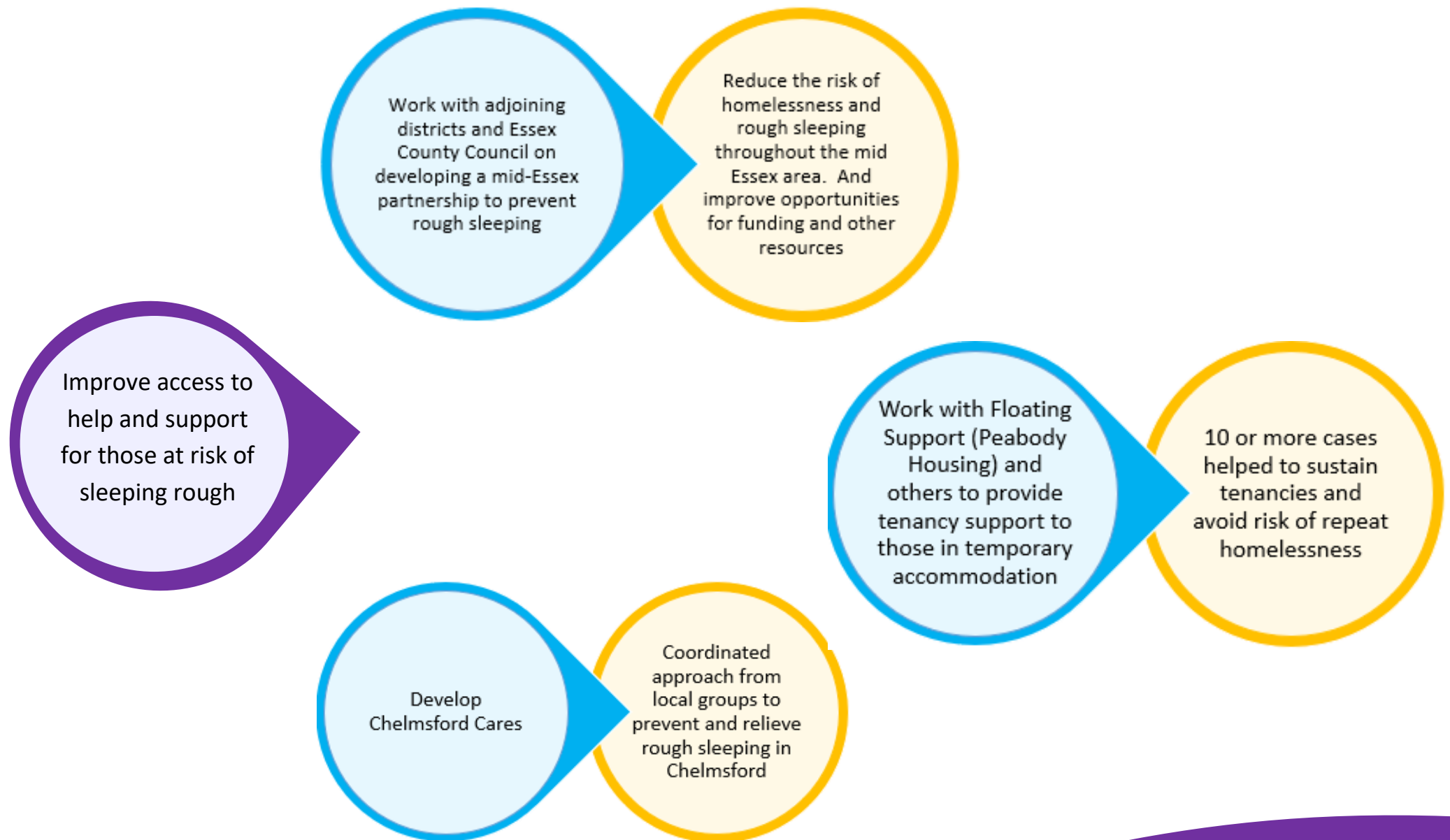
Rough Sleepers



We estimate that there are 60 or more people sleeping rough in Chelmsford through the year. Some will be from Chelmsford, others may have come to the area and then become homeless, be passing through or have come once homeless to access services which are not available in other areas. The majority will have come from other parts of Essex.

A significant proportion will have other needs as well as shelter, such as mental health which may have caused homelessness or be a barrier to accessing accommodation.





Rough Sleepers

Relief

Increase
resources and
options to help
those sleeping
rough

Secure funding
to appoint
Navigators to
work with those
sleeping rough

20 or more
helped to move
from rough
sleeping into
settled
accommodation

Support funding
for outreach
funded by MHCLG

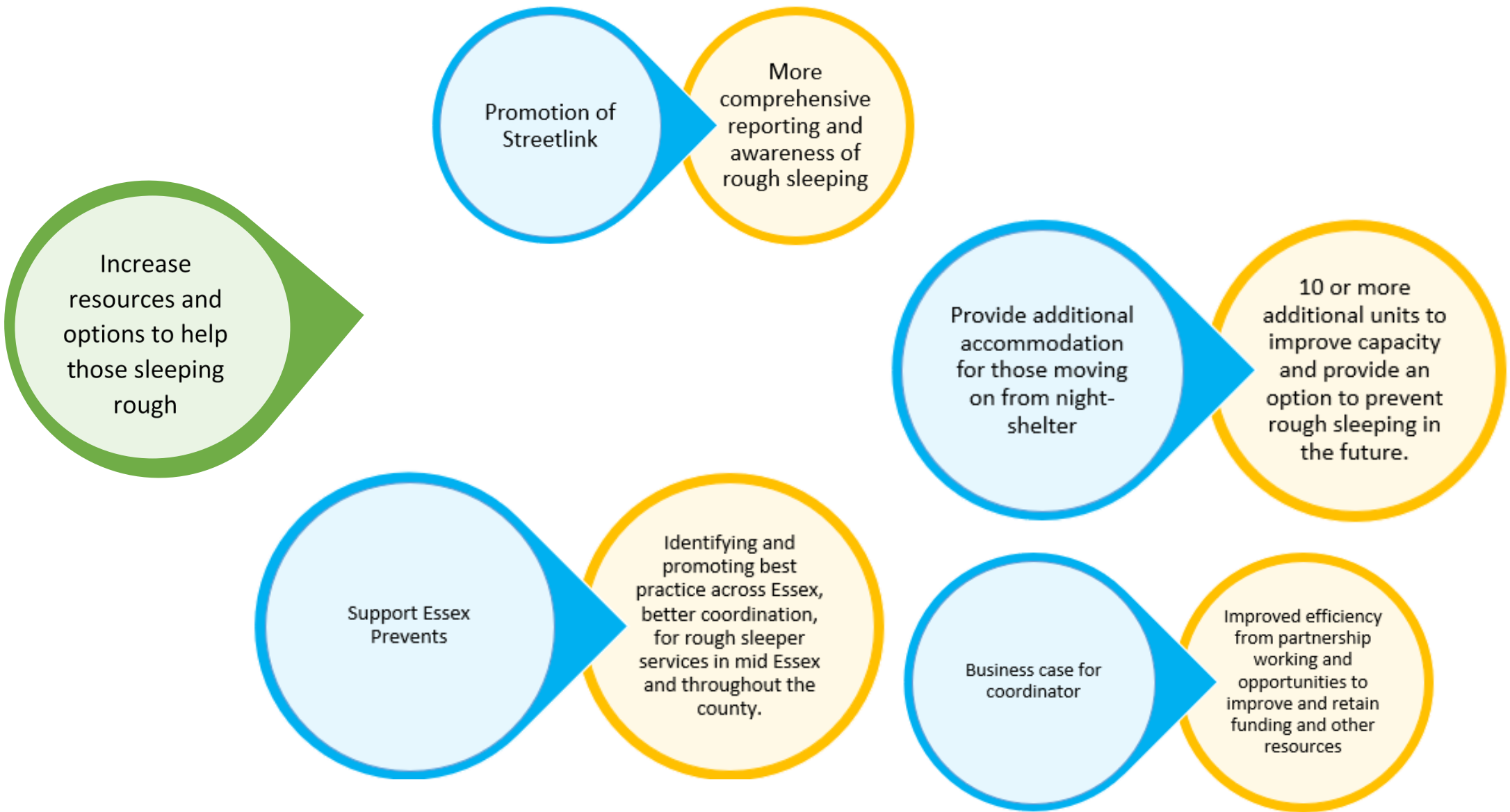
Help to engage 30
Or more and access
shelter provided by
CHES night-
shelter for those
sleeping rough.

Secure agreement
from adjoining
districts to support
re-settlement for
those accessing
services from
outside Chelmsford

10 or more helped
to relocate outside
of Chelmsford

Develop plans for
day-centre /
assessment hub for
rough sleepers in
Chelmsford

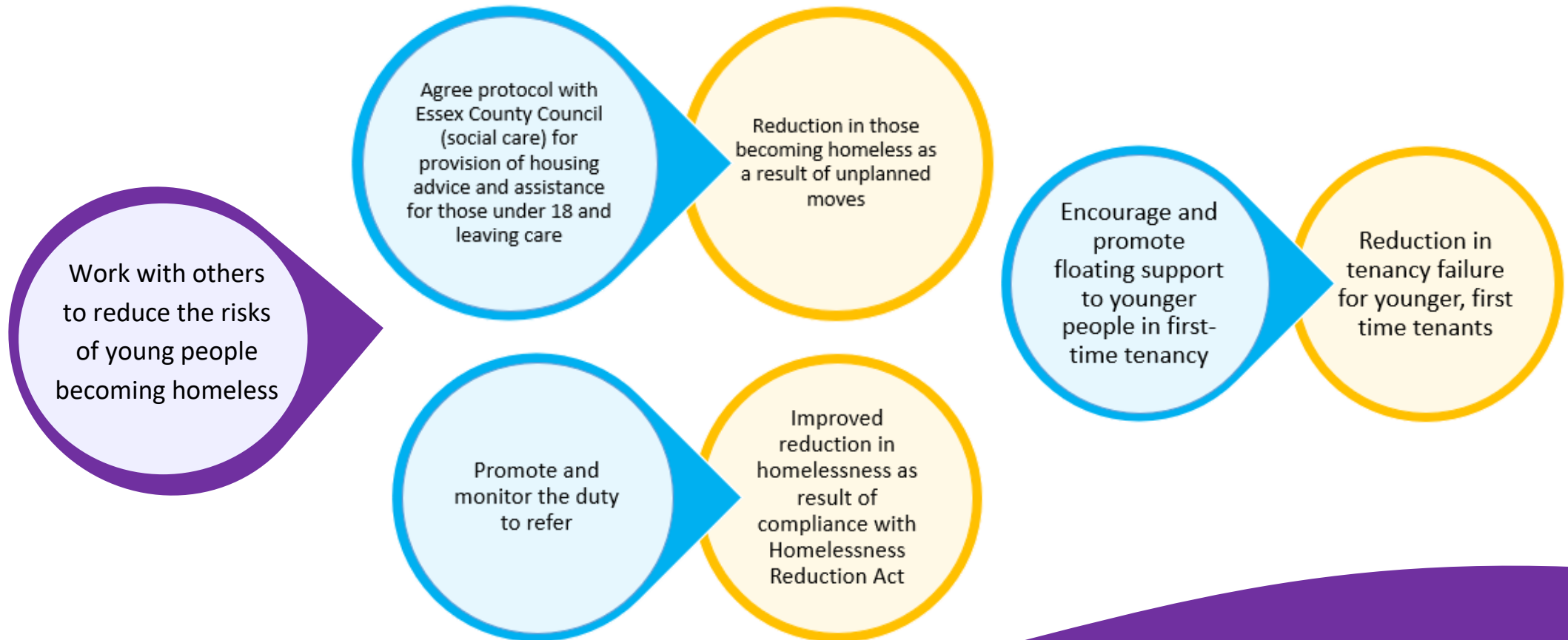
Potential to improve
engagement and
further increase
number helped to
move on from being
street-homeless

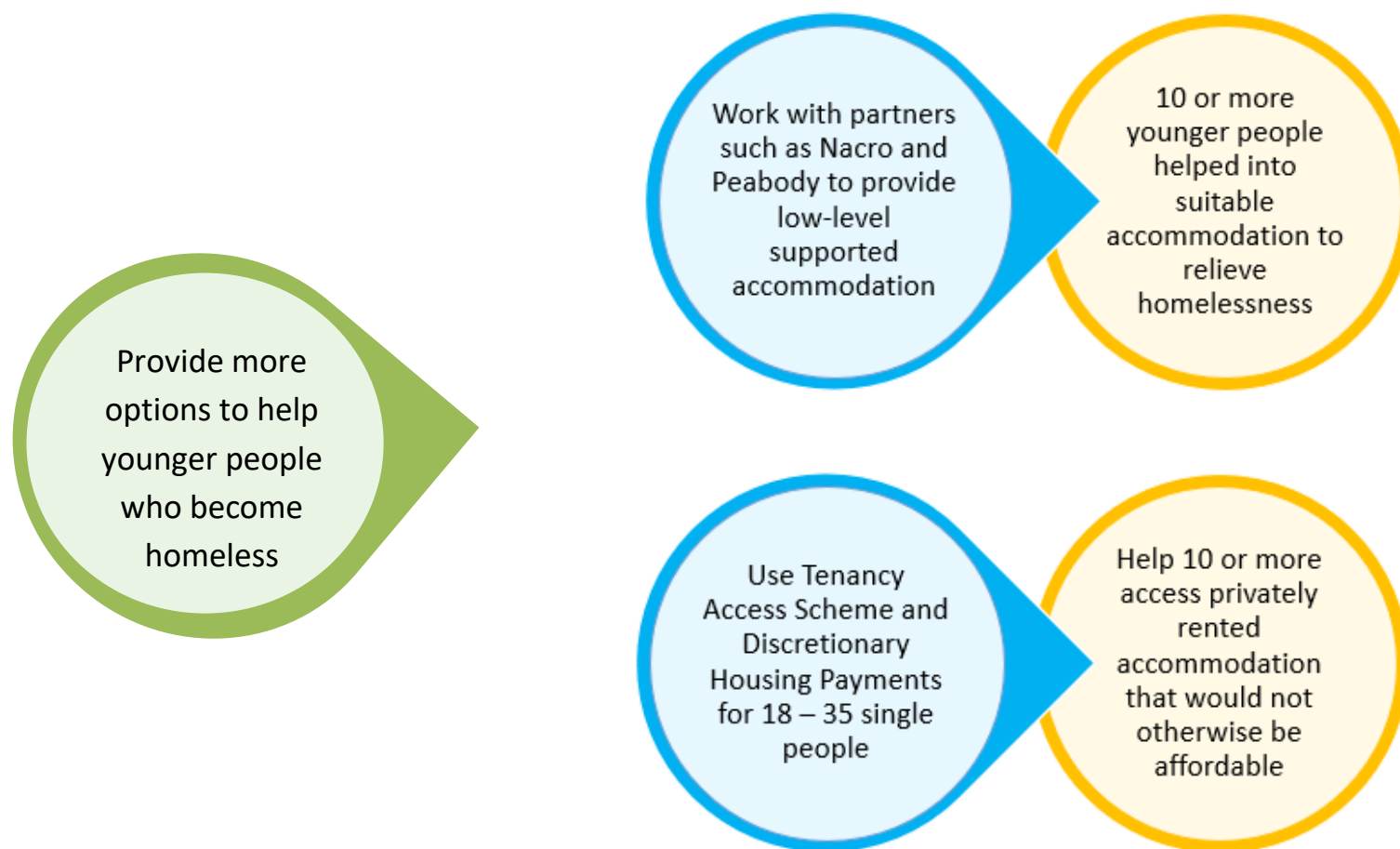


Young People

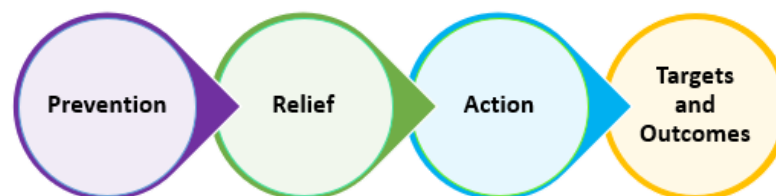


Anyone who is homeless under the age of 18 is likely to be a 'child in need' and will come under the care and duty of social care (Essex County Council) and the Children Act. Those leaving care at 18 are in priority need if homeless, other young people who become homeless can become vulnerable and may also struggle to manage a tenancy for the first time. Some of the actions relevant to this group will be the same as those for eviction by family or friends (above)





Mental and Physical Health

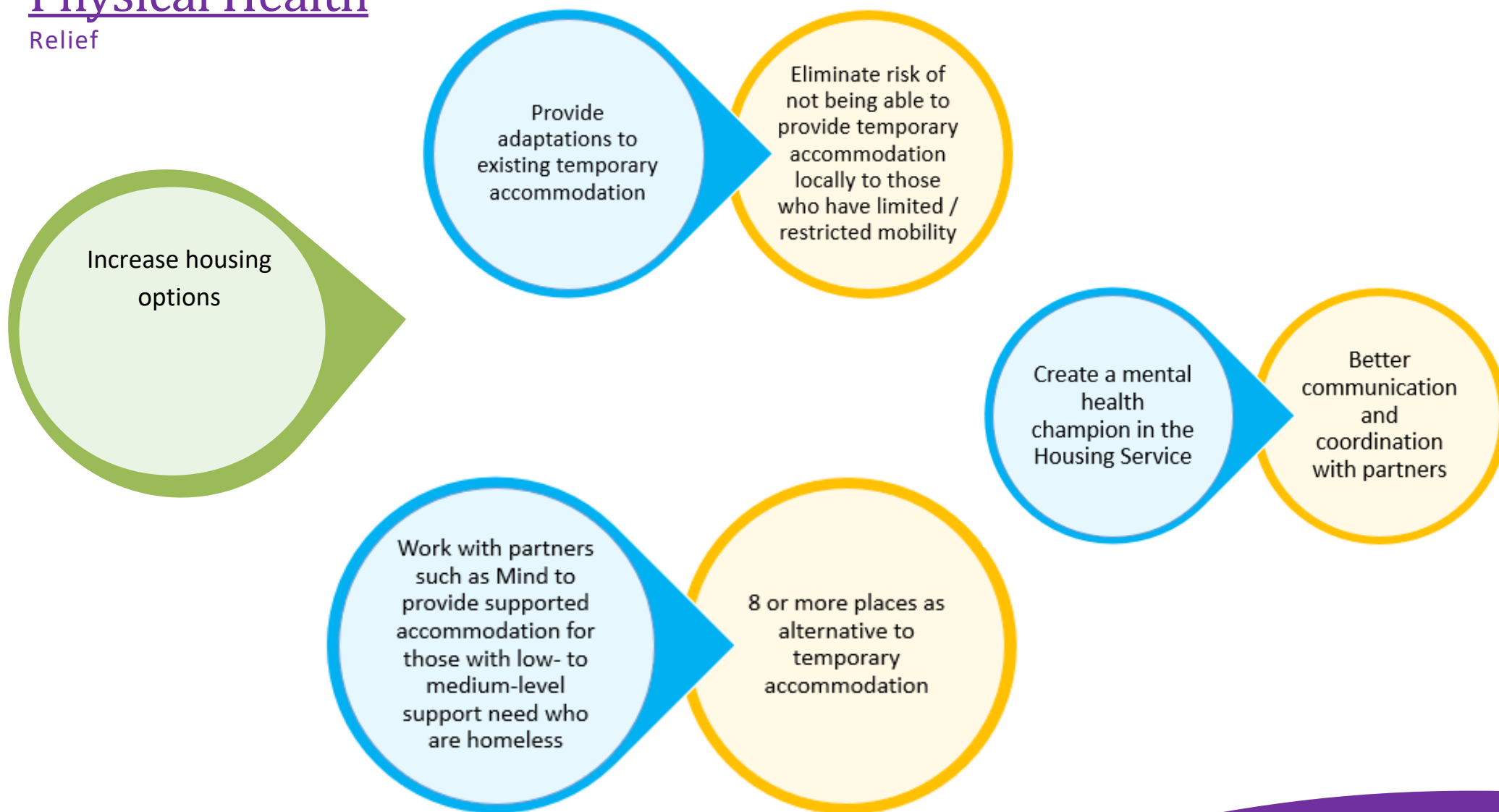


These are the two main needs for support of all those who become homeless in Chelmsford, without recognising and responding to these needs, accommodation may not be suitable or could breakdown leading to repeat homelessness.

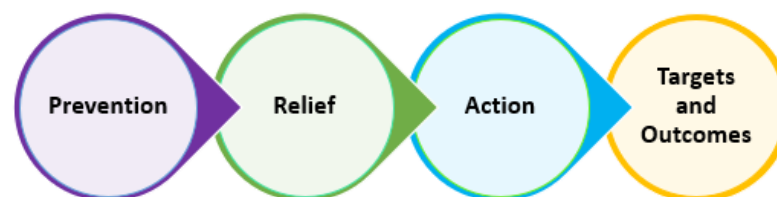


Mental and Physical Health

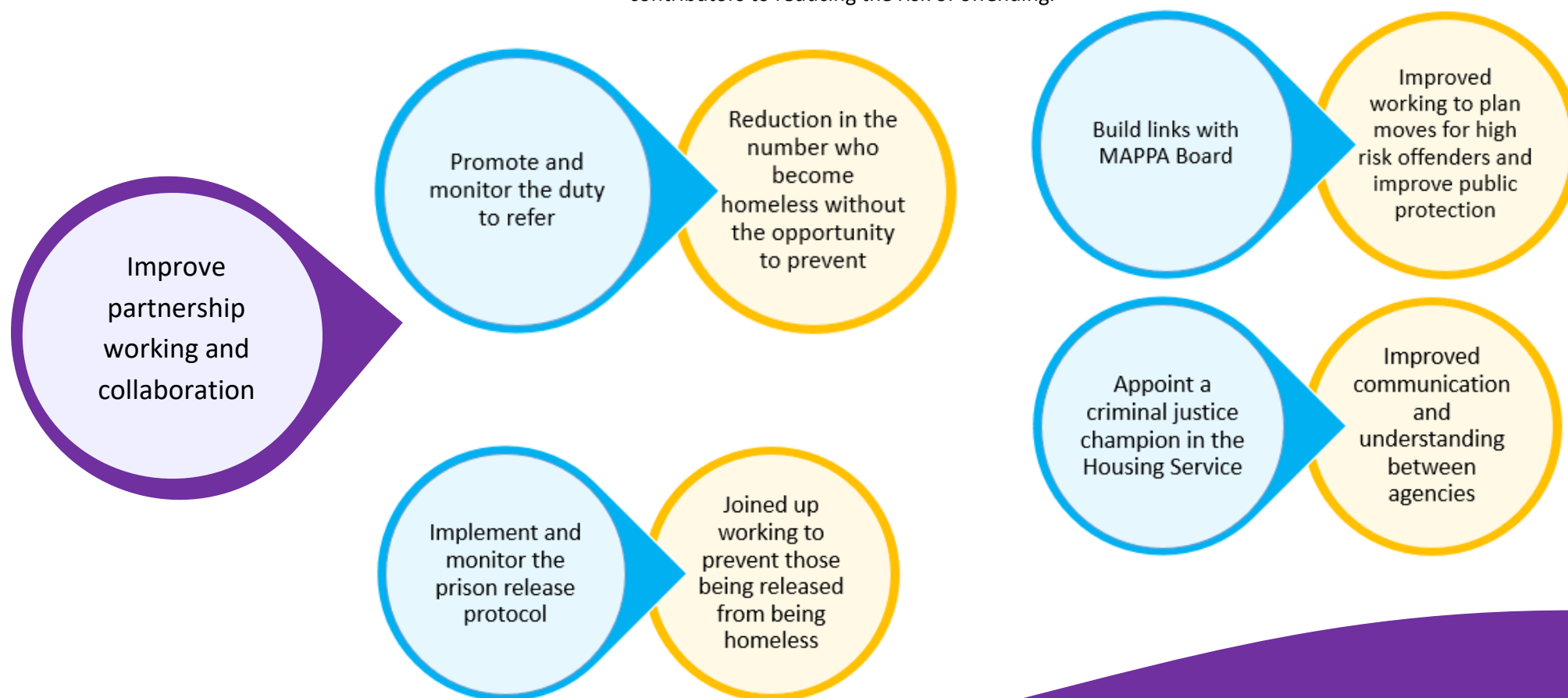
Relief



Criminal Justice

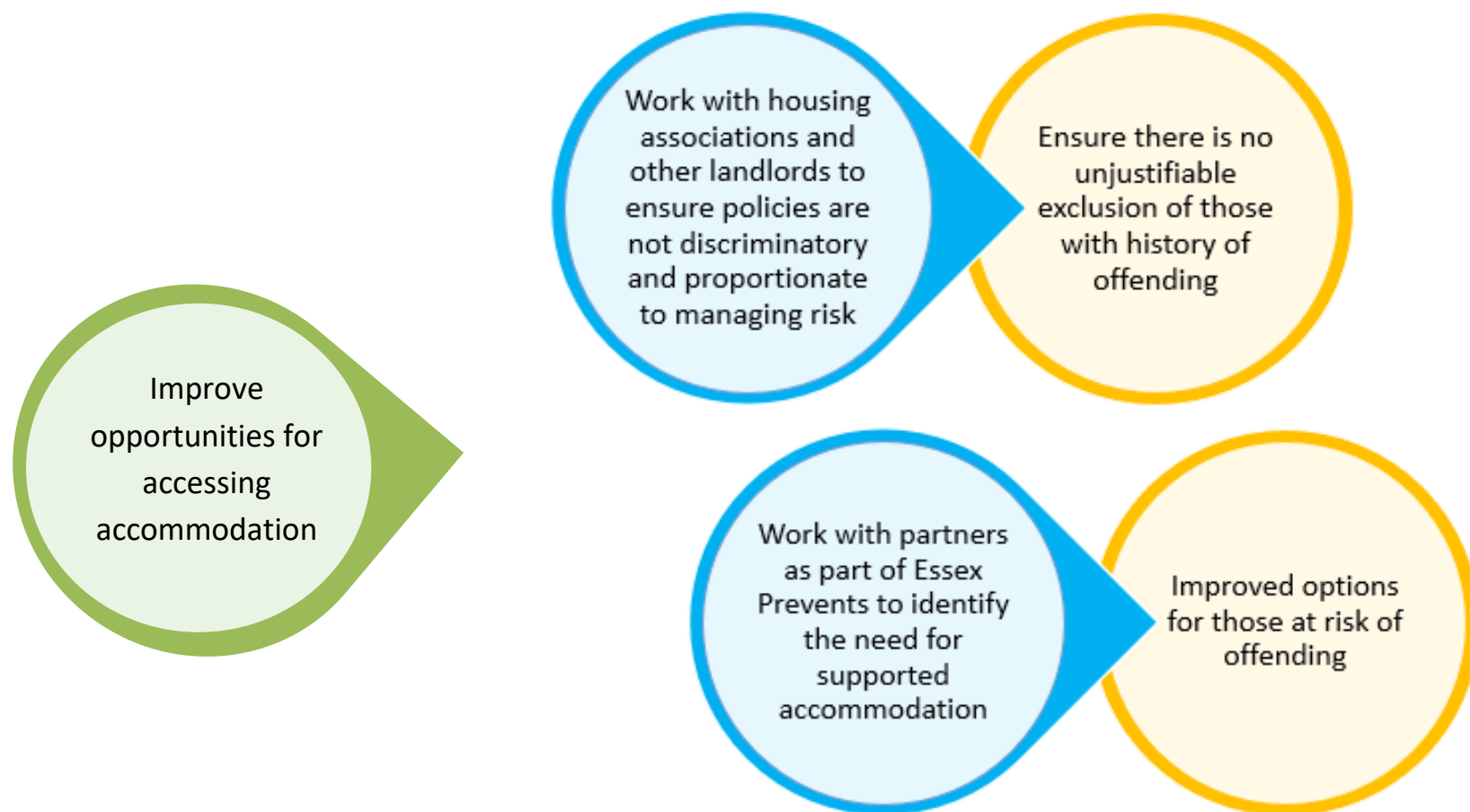


Just over 15% of those who are homeless in Chelmsford have a background in offending. This can be a barrier to accessing housing even though the provision of settled accommodation is one of the main contributors to reducing the risk of offending.



Criminal Justice

Relief



Next Steps



Our new agile approach to tackling homelessness in Chelmsford and delivering this strategy means that we want to continue the conversations we have started with partners, continuously monitor our performance and keep looking for better ways to prevent and relieve homelessness.



We need to work in partnership with a wide range of organisations, from those who are new and very local up to and including central government departments, always retaining the focus on preventing or relieving homelessness. We don't expect everyone to become an expert in everyone else's business, so we will work as best we can to explain to you what others can do to help.



We want to create an open and ongoing discussion with and between partners, building a network of support that can help people access and retain housing and move on when they need to. To keep this up to date, we will use the information we collect as we monitor our Housing Service and the progress our action plan to drive forward continuous improvement in tackling homelessness in Chelmsford, sharing this through regular updates and a process of formal reviews. This means that we want to start (and in some cases complete) all of the actions in this strategy in 2020, creating a new action plan after an annual review each year, based on our achievements and learning from the year before.

Other Actions

- Work with partners on ensuring full compliance with armed forces covenant
- Protocols in place for all those with duty to refer
- Work with others on explaining homelessness, tackling perceptions and improving understanding
- Explore potential for Housing First
- MoU for cross-district working and locally within Chelmsford to prevent and reduce homelessness
- Supported housing for mental health – through Housing Strategy
- Supported housing for young parents – through Housing Strategy

Aspirations / Explore:

Accommodation for those with most complex need / substance abuse

Accommodation for offenders / perpetrators

