



Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy (including Action Plan) 2025-2030



Chelmsford
City Council

Foreword	3
S1: Introduction	4
• Our Homelessness Ambition	7
S2: Strategic Links	8
• Our Chelmsford, Our Plan	9
• Housing Strategy 2022-2027	10
• Local Plan	11
S3: Review of Homelessness in Chelmsford	12
• Understanding the drivers of homelessness	13
• Main causes of homelessness in Chelmsford	15
• Rough sleeping	18
• Prevention & relief of homelessness	20
• Temporary accommodation	21
• Supported & specialist housing	23
S4: Developing our Strategy	25
S5: Strategy Consultation	28
• What have we learnt from our consultation?	29
S6: Our Ambition	36
Action Plan	39

Contents



Foreword

Many of us are fortunate not to have a direct experience of homelessness, but there are growing numbers of families in our district who do. In many decades of working in the housing sector in Chelmsford, this is the worst situation I can remember. Families with children don't instantly come to mind when most people think of homelessness, yet tragically, this is the biggest group we are dealing with. The risk of losing a home and not being able to find another is far greater and much closer for a larger number of people. This situation isn't only a problem for Chelmsford – but it's a national crisis that is also a problem for Chelmsford.

Over the last few years, more Chelmsford households than ever have been placed in temporary accommodation, as private rents have shot up and the number of social housing lettings has gone down. Council officers do their best to find emergency housing for all those to whom they have a duty of care, but it's hard to overstate the devastating impacts of living in TA that doesn't fit your needs: the anxiety of not knowing how long you'll stay in a place; growing up in conditions that might harm your development; the loneliness of finding yourself far from friends and family. These are the daily traumas of not having a permanent home and it's hard to overstate how damaging they can be.

That's why we must work harder than ever to understand the causes and consequences of homelessness in 2025, so that we can stop as many people as possible from losing their homes and work with our partners to better serve those who do. Over the last few years, some progress has been made in reducing rough sleeping in the city and increasing the supply of supported accommodation. We're proud of the work already being done to improve lives through partnerships in the Chelmsford community. The CHESST Turning Point project, for instance, is making a real difference, giving homeless single adults a safe and dignified place to stay and the chance at a new start.

We must now redouble our efforts to meet the urgent needs of today – keeping people in their homes wherever we can and creating more and better temporary accommodation and family homes for when we can't. We are already making some progress in improving the supply of affordable and supported housing, but it's essential that more people are aware of the limitations we face as prevention really is key. The housing crisis we are facing has been many decades in the making and it won't be fixed overnight, but this strategy is an important step in setting us on the right path. With a better awareness of today's problems and some fresh thinking, we hope to make a difference to more people when they need us most.

Councillor Lynne Foster, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for a Fairer Chelmsford

Section 1: Introduction



Local Housing Authorities must publish a strategy at least every five years setting out how they will prevent homelessness and meet their legal duties to those who become homeless, including those at risk of sleeping rough. The strategy should be based on a review of homelessness in the district.

The **national Homelessness Code of Guidance** outlines the key components that are expected to be included within a strategy:

- It should be consistent with other plans and strategies for the authority, demonstrating that all relevant departments and corporate partners are committed to delivering the aims of the strategy;
- It should take into account local trends such as the main causes of homelessness, changes since the last strategy and future needs and demands.
- It should include links with other local statutory and voluntary organisations in the area, especially those that are involved with health, social care, criminal justice and economic policy;
- It should recognise and build on opportunities for working with Essex County Council and neighbouring authorities, especially if the council is not a unitary authority, as is the case with Chelmsford City Council.

Over the last five years there have been a number of significant changes, in particular:

Cost of living	The cost of renting and maintaining a home has risen faster than inflation, placing a growing number of families into debt
Temporary accommodation	As the gap between the need and supply of affordable accommodation has grown, more and more families have been placed in temporary accommodation.
The Covid Pandemic	Introducing new and more flexible ways of working, closer ties with health and an increase in resources for those sleeping rough in Chelmsford.
The war in Ukraine	With several hundred Ukrainian families moving to Chelmsford to live temporarily as guests in people's homes, longer term plans for where they will live have been needed.
The withdrawal from Afghanistan	Families who were placed temporarily in hotel accommodation have now been helped to move into settled housing with additional resources for support and housing.
Provision of accommodation locally for asylum seekers	Some people will be granted leave to remain which will end their Home Office temporary accommodation, making them homeless.

In addition to these national challenges there have also been some additional local issues:

Private rented homes

Rents have risen and very few homes in Chelmsford are now affordable to those on low incomes and a growing number of landlords have sold up, reducing the local supply and choice. Homelessness from people being given notice in this sector has become the single greatest cause of homelessness in Chelmsford.

Affordable housing

In this and many other strategies you will often see the term 'affordable housing'. In terms of national planning policy this can apply to a number of different tenures from social rent provided by local housing authorities, Affordable Rented homes provided by Registered Providers (housing associations) which this Council aims to cap at Local Housing Allowance, through to sub-market rent, shared-ownership and discounted open market sale homes. It is only social rent, Affordable Rent and supported housing that is generally affordable in Chelmsford to those on low incomes who when at risk of homelessness. This does not preclude the possibility of some homes provided as private rent by landlords that may also be affordable and provide a solution for some but this is increasingly likely to be outside of the Chelmsford area. The term 'affordable' in this strategy therefore applies to homes of different tenures but not all as defined by national planning policy.

Nationally and locally the number of lettings (supply) of affordable homes has reduced each year over the last decade. The Council has enabled the development of more homes in addition to those that are required through our policies for new developments. This has made a difference, but only in slowing down the declining rate of supply.

Domestic abuse

Levels of domestic abuse have increased in Chelmsford, causing more families to become homeless. As a cause of homelessness, this is now three times higher in Chelmsford than the national average.

Supported housing

A growing number of those who become homeless in Chelmsford have a need for support, as well as accommodation, to enable them to cope with additional needs and be able to manage their home. Mental health, domestic abuse, physical disability and illness are the most common issues.

There has been some progress in helping to reduce the impact of some of these challenges over the last five years:

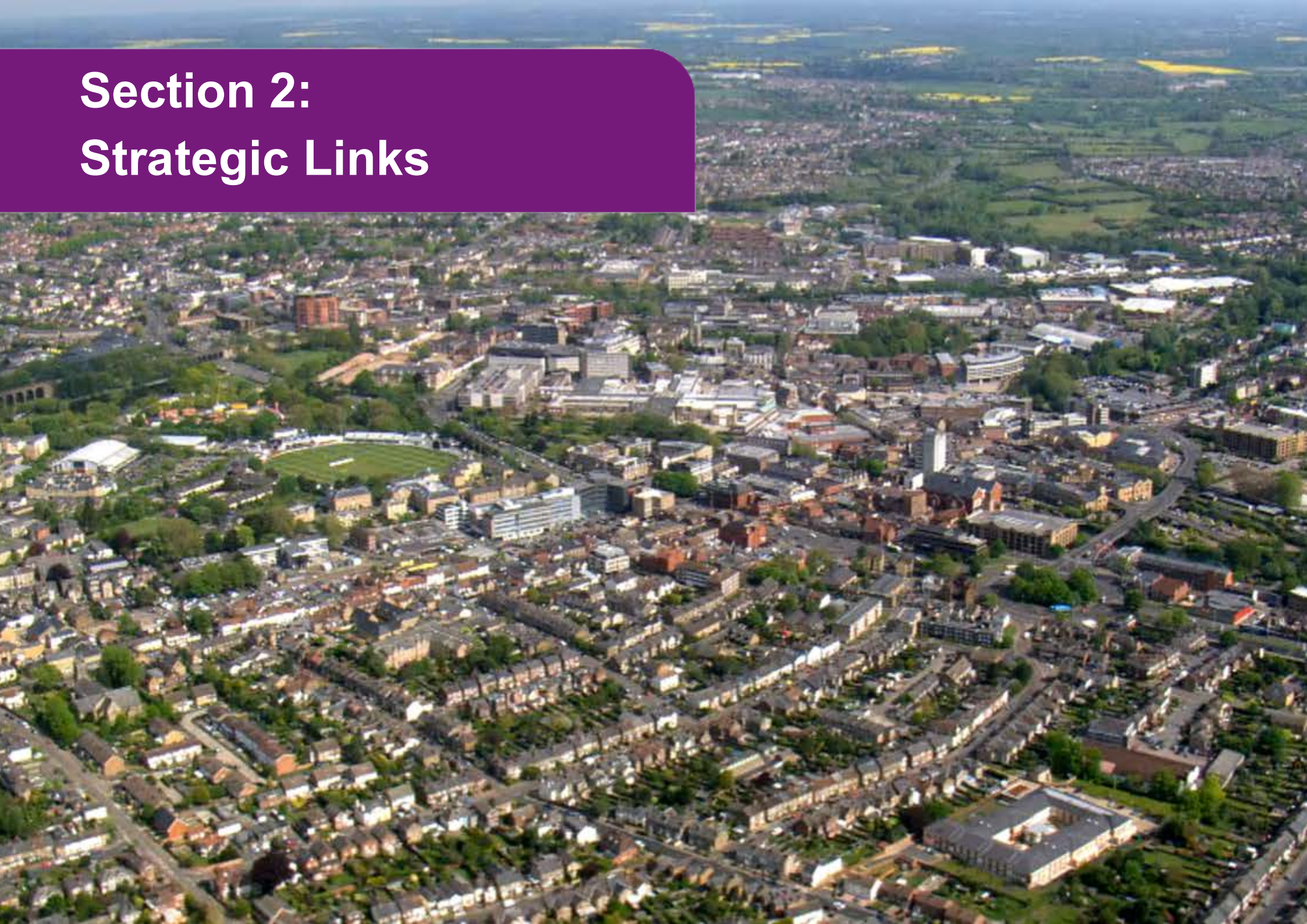
- More resources and better working with partners to reduce the level of rough sleeping in Chelmsford;
- Additional funding and staff to support homeless victims of domestic abuse and Ukrainian and Afghan families; and
- Changes to policies to extend housing options, ensuring the Council can meet its legal duties to those who in greatest need.
- Additional temporary accommodation in Chelmsford, working with our partners to keep the number of people in TA below that projected.

Our Homelessness Ambition

Our review of homelessness provides us with the evidence for the priorities of this strategy. There are also broad themes which will help us to create a sustainable service for the future. **Our ambition is:**

1	2	3	4
Universal prevention	Targeted prevention	Intervention and recovery through partnership working	An integrated approach to local housing options
To use our understanding of the causes and consequences of homelessness to develop a better awareness of the risks involved, and as a result, the importance for everyone of prevention wherever possible.	Our review of homelessness helps us identify the most frequent causes of homelessness. We want to make sure that these are addressed as effectively as possible, whether through prevention or relief.	Many aspects of homelessness are beyond the Council's expertise and resources. Issues such as domestic abuse, mental and physical poor health, debt and poverty cross over into the role of other agencies, statutory and voluntary. Only by building strong partnerships can we reduce homelessness and help those who have become homeless build a better future.	We associate homelessness with the loss of a home but it is the inability to find another home that makes a person or family homeless. We are now seeing the lack of supply as the main reason people in Chelmsford become and remain homeless. Whether this is due to the reducing supply of affordable homes, supported accommodation, or even temporary accommodation, we must do all we can to improve the supply of homes to those in greatest need through this and other streams of work.

Section 2: Strategic Links



Our Chelmsford, Our Plan

Our Chelmsford, Our Plan is the Council's corporate plan that sets out priorities to help create a greener, fairer, and more connected place. Our Chelmsford, Our Plan reaffirms our ambition for the area to be a highly sustainable and creative community at the heart of Essex, recognised as a leading regional centre and destination in the East of England.

Our Chelmsford, Our Plan' aims to deliver a fairer and more inclusive place.

- By promoting sustainable and environmentally responsible growth to stimulate a vibrant, balanced economy, a fairer society and provide more homes of all types.
- Bringing investment into the area, together with an increase in skills, jobs, and overall employment.
- Meeting the demand for new homes of all types and tenures, in particular homes to rent that local people can afford.
- By adopting an approach whereby growth and development also delivers a broad range of social, community and environmental benefits that are sustainable over time.



Our Chelmsford,
Our Plan

Priority

A

Set out the approach and planning principles to guide housing and economic growth, promoting sustainable development and helping to create greener, fairer and more connected communities.

Our Chelmsford,
Our Plan

Priority

B

Put in place measures to help tackle local housing needs so everyone can aspire to having a home that they can afford, and which help address the causes of, and mitigate the impacts of, homelessness.

Our Chelmsford,
Our Plan

Priority

C

Promote the area as a place for investment and business location, encouraging the creation of a wider range of jobs and excellence in education, skills, and vocational attainment, thereby improving income equality.

Housing Strategy 2022 - 2027



The priorities established in the Housing Strategy 2022-2027 are currently under review due to the changes and challenges of the housing market and the onset of new legislation which has renewed the focus on housing conditions in the private and public sector. However, the vision to address the housing needs of all Chelmsford residents is paramount, so everyone can reasonably aspire to having a home that meets their needs.

The priorities under consideration are:

1

Increase the supply of housing options across all tenures and price points in the housing market, with a focus on affordable.

2

Improve the housing conditions across all tenures.

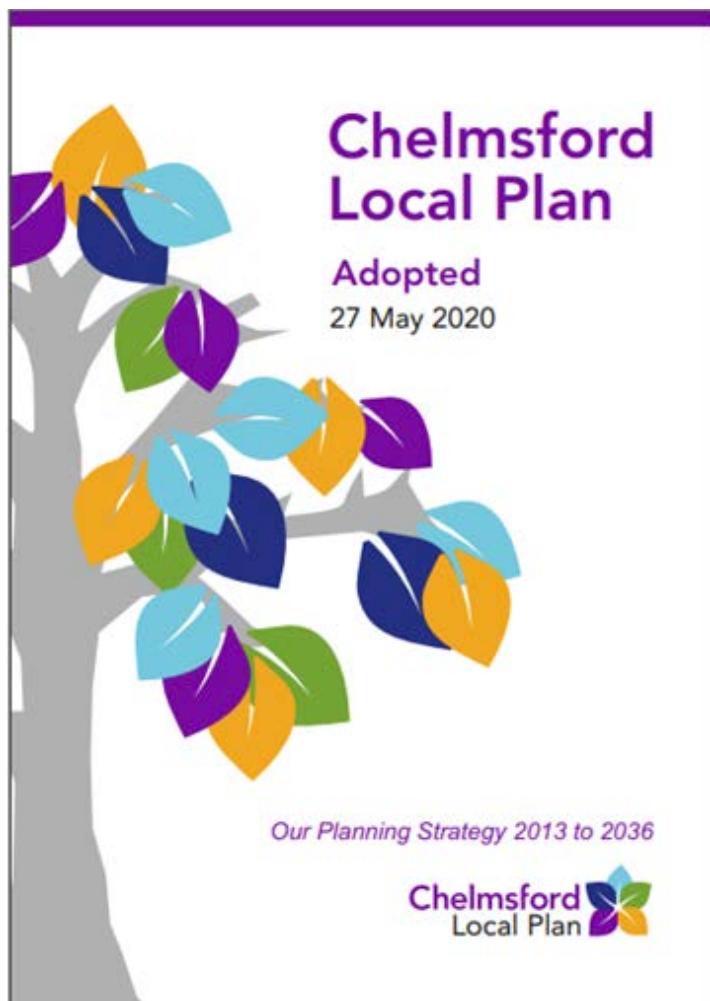
3

Enabling housing options & support options for vulnerable people, health and well-being, older people, people with complex needs and people experiencing homelessness / rough sleeping.

4

Delivering through effective partnerships.

Local Plan

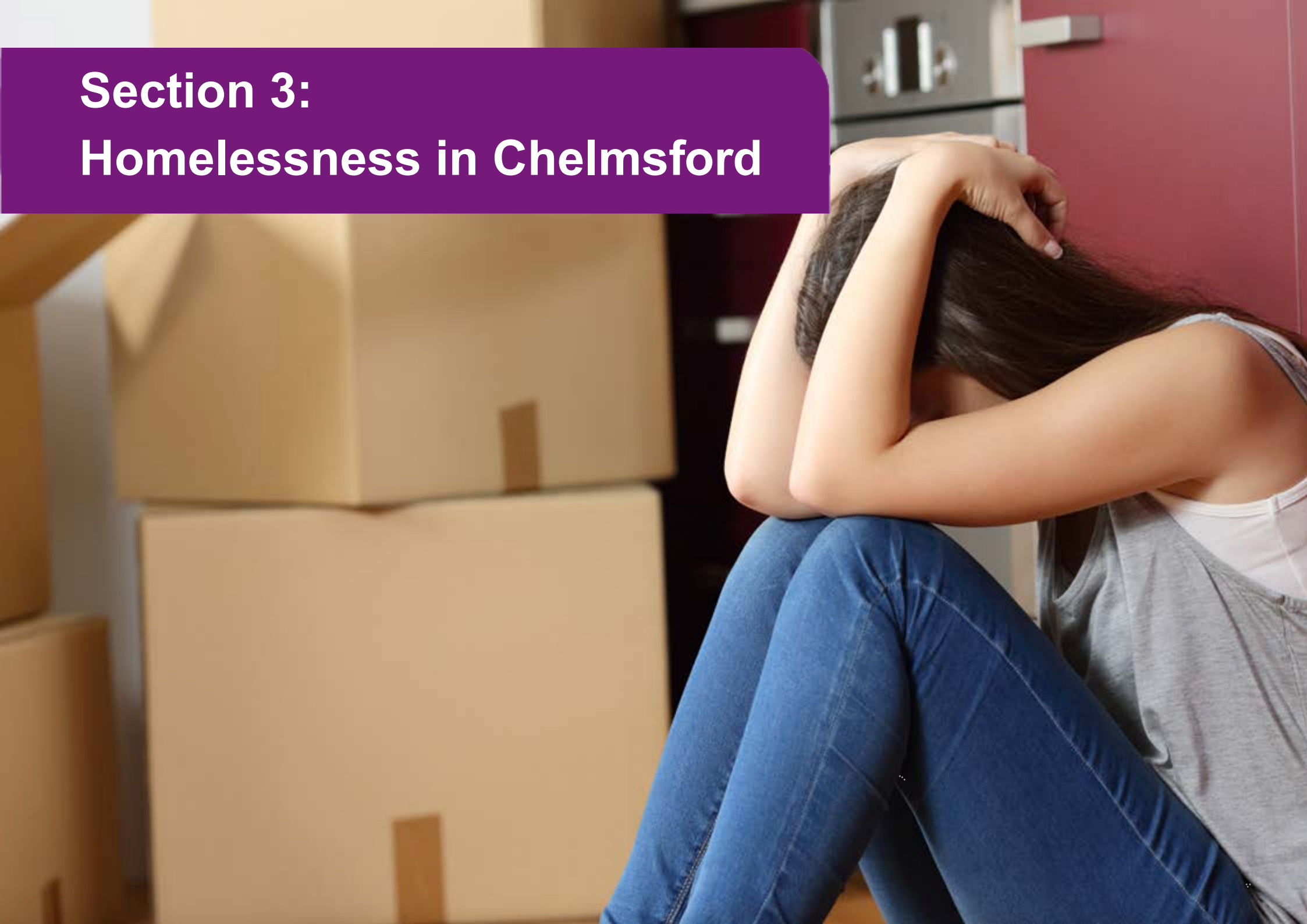


The Council's Local Plan sets out our vision for the future, ensuring there is an adequate supply of housing, infrastructure and services to meet the needs of every citizen of Chelmsford. This includes policies for the supply of affordable homes and specialist housing that can provide support to those who are homeless or in other types of housing need.

The review is informed by an updated Strategic Housing Needs Assessment. This highlighted how great the need is for both affordable housing and the specific type of affordable tenure required to bridge a growing gap for those unable to afford a home on the open local housing market in Chelmsford.



Section 3: Homelessness in Chelmsford



Understanding the drivers of homelessness



Understanding the main causes and changes since the previous strategy in 2019/20 in Chelmsford is crucial to the prioritisation of action and intervention.

Assessed homelessness applications:

- In 2019/20 there were 812
- In 2023/24 there were 1,135

The average number of cases per month has increased over the last five years from 68 to 95, an increase of nearly 40%.

The average caseload of active cases for each Homelessness Officer in March 2024 was 66, this is more than twice the number recommended by MHCLG. By the end of 2024 this has risen to 90+ cases.

Over the same period, the number of homes available to let through the Housing Register has reduced by 25%, from 316 at the start of 2019/20 to 235 by the end of 2023/24.

This gap between need and supply has in the past been offset by using privately rented homes as an alternative but the rising cost of this tenure has effectively ended this option for those on a low income. The table below shows the gap between Local Housing Allowance and the monthly average cost of a home by bedroom size in Chelmsford over the last five years.

Bedroom size	Shortfall Q4 2019/20	Shortfall Q3 2023/24	Shortfall Q4 2023/24
1-bed	£125	£450	£368
2-bed	£180	£655	£575
3-bed	£215	£738	£618
4-bed	£404	£1,155	£1,115



Despite an increase in Local Housing Allowance at the end of the 2023/24 financial year, there remains a considerable shortfall of around £100 to £250 per week for many families.

This gap between the need and supply of affordable homes in Chelmsford has contributed to the number in temporary accommodation increasing from 272 to 500 over the same period. An increase of 41% reflects a 40% increase in need alongside a 25% reduction in supply of affordable homes.

Image 1 (top):
Existing modular housing in Chelmsford



Image 2 (bottom):
Planned modular housing in Meteor Way

Main causes of homelessness in Chelmsford

1. Eviction by family or friends



2. Section 21 NTQs (all)



3. Domestic abuse



What has changed?

The largest variation has been in the number of cases where the reason for homelessness was not known - in many of these cases this reflected a lack of appreciation in the importance of accurately identifying and recording the causes of homelessness. Therefore, it is good to see that this has reduced to just two percent, giving a more accurate picture of the cause of homelessness in Chelmsford today.

The table below shows a comparison of the main causes of homelessness in Chelmsford over the last five years. The percentages will not add up to 100 as there were some other causes that are not so significant.

Reason for homelessness	2019/20	2023/24	Change
1. Eviction by family or friends	155 (21%)	359 (33%)	+204
2. Notice by private landlord	105 (14%)	277 (26%)	+172
3. Domestic abuse	80 (11%)	191 (18%)	+111
4. Notice by social housing landlord	103 (14%)	105 (9%)	+2
5. Non-violent relationship breakdown	49 (7%)	45 (4%)	-4
6. Leaving hospital, prison or other institution	11 (1.5%)	86 (7%)	+75
7. Other reason or not known	227 (31%)	20 (2%)	-207

1. Eviction by family and friends

It is likely that many of the cases where the cause was not previously recorded would have been for this reason, reducing the variation shown in the table above. This seems to have changed from a cause that was predominantly associated with eviction of older children by parents to one of adult children returning temporarily to the family home having lost other accommodation, or people relying on friends to help them when becoming homeless through other reasons.

By carrying out home-visits we can make families and friends aware of how hard it can be to find affordable housing in Chelmsford and a number of cases are prevented in this way through our 'Homeless at Home' scheme.

2. Notice by private landlord

This has more than doubled as a cause of homelessness over the last five years and reflects a regional and national trend.

It is a concern that in a number of cases this is due to landlords selling the home and no longer being a private landlord. This means that not only would the proposal to end no-fault evictions not apply to these cases, but there is also a reduction in the number of homes of this tenure in Chelmsford.

An action of this new strategy will be to expand communication with landlords in this sector to help us improve our ability to plan for and manage changing trends and hopefully new opportunities to work together.

3. Domestic abuse

This has also doubled as a cause of homelessness over the same period. The Domestic Abuse Act was introduced in the intervening period with a number of new requirements that could help. These include: providing safe accommodation to those who lose their home for this reason; better use of court orders to keep perpetrators away from families at risk; a commitment that those in social housing will be considered for a like-for-like replacement; and a duty on upper-tier local authorities to provide strategies that set out how these and other aims of the Act will be delivered in their area.

As a cause of homelessness, this is three times higher in Chelmsford than the national and regional averages and has to be a priority in this new strategy.

Following consultation with partners and those who have become homeless for this reason, we can see a need to improve the way a range of services, from police, housing associations and local charities work together to make best use of resources and improve the help and options for those at risk.



4. Notice by social landlord

Taking into account the increase in other causes and the overall number becoming homeless, it is good news that this has remained almost the same over the last five years despite the cost-of-living crisis and other pressures local families face.

We are grateful for the help and support of local housing associations for the work they do in partnership with the Council and other agencies to avoid the risk of people losing their tenancies. We want to continue to build on this success to see if we can reduce this over the lifetime of this strategy.



5. Non-violent relationship breakdown

As a cause of homelessness this is likely to be more incidental to other factors, such as changes to the housing market, than some of the other causes making it difficult to proactively manage this as a cause. Improving the supply of affordable housing in general, and other options, would inevitably help make an improvement in the future.

6. Leaving hospital, prison or other institution

It was hoped that the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act and its accompanying duty on some organisations to help identify and refer people at risk of homelessness would have maintained, if not reduced, levels of homelessness. We are pleased that a growing number of people are being identified and referred but concerned by the limited opportunity to prevent homelessness in many of these cases. Some are very vulnerable, and there is a need to make referring agencies aware of this in order to manage expectations and to work more closely on preventing and relieving homelessness.

We have been successful in developing more supported accommodation for some groups with the help of other organisations, for example more homes for those leaving prison. However, significant gaps remain for others, such as those leaving hospital with poor physical or mental health.

Rough Sleeping

There has been a considerable improvement in resources available to help rough sleepers in Chelmsford over the lifetime of the last strategy, including:

- **46 additional bedspaces** with support funded through the Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP) and Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI), and an **additional 24 places planned for 2025**
- **12 additional bedspaces for those who become homeless after leaving prison** funded by the Accommodation For Ex-Offenders (AFEO) programme.

A local team of Rough Sleeper Navigators and Coordinator funded through the RSI programme, along with an outreach service for anyone reported as a rough sleeper through the [Streetlink website](#).

A dedicated mental health support worker jointly commissioned by Essex Partnership University Trust (EPUT). Alongside this, is the invaluable contribution made by local charities and voluntary groups, who together with Chelmsford City Council, work together as part of Chelmsford's Single Homeless Forum.

Whilst supportive of the government's aim to end rough sleeping we recognise through our experience over the last five years that there is always a risk of some people finding themselves having to resort to sleeping rough. Therefore, we aim to help them move off the streets of Chelmsford into accommodation as quickly as possible.



Many will be unaware of what help and support exists in Chelmsford. The first thing **we need to do is make sure we have an effective way to engage with new rough sleepers as quickly as possible**, promoting and using Streetlink as a source of information about any people sleeping rough in our city and working with local charities and other agencies to make contact.

We then need a supply of accommodation, often with support, that can be accessed as quickly as possible to help people move off the streets. Support is critical at this stage, as many people have other problems that can lead to them becoming homeless. Without help to overcome these challenges, some of which may be deep seated, there is a high risk that they will become homeless once again.

The number of people helped each year in Chelmsford demonstrates how effective this system is, but there is a small number who have become entrenched as rough sleepers despite offers of help and accommodation. In almost all of these cases there is a need for considerable levels of support just to build up trust and engagement. Any offer of accommodation will need to provide a similar level of high support, at least for the early stages, with a recognition that many will regress back at times. It is the ability to have accommodation and support that recognises this as part of the pathway to recovery that is so important.

Through this strategy and our work with partners **we aim to:**

- **provide longer-term supported accommodation for those who need more time to prepare for living independently**, and
- **re-establish the Home First scheme for those needing a high level of support** and time to adjust to living away from the streets and the problems they have experienced.



Prevention and relief of homelessness

The Homelessness Reduction Act formalised the work we previously did to prevent homelessness whenever possible. Under the Act, prevention means preventing homelessness so someone is able to remain in their existing home or can be helped to find somewhere else before they have to leave. Relief from homelessness means that although they have lost their home and become homeless, they have been helped to find somewhere else so the Council does not then have a duty to consider if they need other settled accommodation and temporary accommodation in the meantime.

Over the last five years, performance in prevention and relief of homelessness has remained consistent, as shown in the table below:

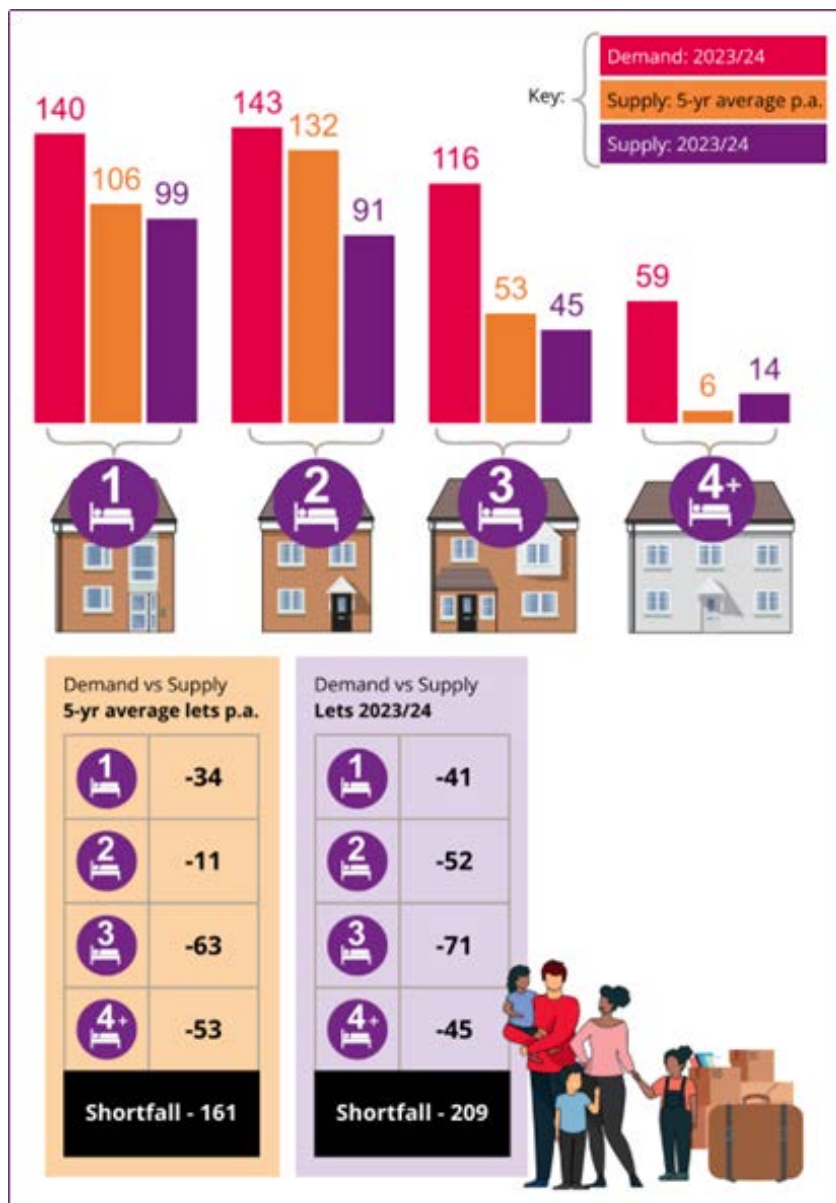
Number of successful cases	2019/20	2023/24	Change
Prevention	248	213	-35
Relief	96	112	+16
Total	344	325	-19

Naturally, we would like to be able to prevent more cases of homelessness, but this has to be seen in the context of a more challenging situation. There are rising levels of homelessness (more applications and growing levels of complexity) and a reducing supply of alternate options as the supply of affordable and supported housing reduces and the cost of private rent exceeds what many on lower incomes can afford.

As part of our renewed strategic approach we aim to improve awareness of the growing gap between the need and supply of affordable and supported accommodation in Chelmsford. This will link to our Housing Strategy which aims to improve the supply of both these options. We believe that by having a better and wider understanding of this problem:

- **Local residents will recognise the need to seek help and advice as soon as possible**, giving more time to see how homelessness can be prevented and encouraging more flexibility over options to relieve homelessness; and
- **Local partners will recognise the need and importance of early referrals of those they are working with**, along with the need to work together to prevent homelessness whenever possible. Even though current accommodation may not be ideal, it may still be preferable to the consequence of becoming homeless and having to move into temporary accommodation.

Temporary accommodation



An inevitable consequence of rising need and reducing supply has been an increase in the number of households having to live in temporary accommodation. There will always be a need for emergency accommodation, for example when families are made homeless due to fire or flood, or other cases when there has been no prior warning of someone becoming roofless and time is needed to investigate their circumstances.

In March 2024, there were 458 households in temporary accommodation. Two-thirds of these had been accepted under the main duty of needing settled accommodation and were waiting for a suitable home to become available. **By March 2025, the number had risen to 500**, but this shows a slow down in this rate of increase as we put more resources into the management of temporary accommodation.

Improving the supply of affordable homes is an objective of the Council's Housing Strategy and there have been some improvements as a result of this, in particular improving the supply of larger family homes and temporary accommodation in Chelmsford. Despite this, the gap between the need and supply of affordable homes continues to grow, which highlights how critical the prevention of homelessness is.

The graphic (left) below shows the number of households by bedroom size in temporary accommodation at the end of 2023/24, alongside the supply (lettings) of affordable homes in 2023/24 and the average supply over the last five years.

- 458 total in temporary accommodation (2023/24)
- 249 total lettings (2023/24)
- 297 total average 5-year annual lettings (2019-2024)

The Council has invested in additional temporary accommodation over the lifetime of the previous Homelessness Strategy. All of these homes are in Chelmsford which reduces the impact of disruption to families.

The current portfolio of Council-owned temporary accommodation is:

- 57 two, three, and four-bedroom homes owned by the Council.
- 79 one, two, three and four-bedroom homes leased by the Council from private landlords
- 18 one and two-bedroom modular homes

This provides a total of 154 properties. In addition to this, there are also 56 homes owned and managed by local Registered Providers also all in Chelmsford.

This total of 206 properties would be more than enough to meet the needs of those who need temporary (or interim) accommodation pending enquiries to establish whether or not there would be a permanent duty to accommodate. It is the reduction in the supply of general needs affordable homes to rent which is causing the growing backlog and number of households in temporary accommodation.

The additional need is currently met by private providers who make properties available at a daily rate, often referred to as 'nightly lets'. Most of these are also in Chelmsford but there is a finite number and we are increasingly having to place people into nightly let accommodation outside of Chelmsford.



In 2024 the Council introduced a new Temporary Accommodation Placement and Procurement Policy ([weblink to be added](#)) which provides more information on how we will ensure there is an adequate supply of temporary accommodation that meets the needs of those who are homeless and the legal duties of the Council.

Throughout the lifetime of this new strategy we want to continue to increase the supply of more affordable temporary accommodation in Chelmsford, improving the quality and reducing the cost. We also aim to increase the supply of supported accommodation, which for many of the most vulnerable who become homeless will be a better alternative.

Supported and specialist housing

Ten most prevalent support needs for 2022/23:

Support requirement	Cases	%
1. Mental health	311	31.1%
2. Physical ill health & disability	212	21.2%
3. Domestic abuse	146	14.6%
4. Learning disability	95	9.5%
5. Repeat homelessness	78	7.8%
6. Abuse (not domestic)	71	7.1%
7. Offending	71	7.1%
8. Rough sleeping	70	7.0%
9. Access to education and training	62	6.2%
10. Drug dependency	36	3.6%

Many people who become homeless have a need for support as well as accommodation. Everyone who becomes homeless and is helped by the Council will have a Personal Housing Plan and as part of this we identify where there may be a need for support.

These are the principal support needs identified by applicants and in some cases there may be more than one support need, but this still gives a good indication of the most common problems many of those who are homeless in Chelmsford face. This helps us match the supply of supported housing alongside the likely need. Our Housing Strategy sets out the following actions, which remain relevant:

(1) Complete the programme for providing supported accommodation for those at risk of rough sleeping

Since 2022, we have worked with partners to double the amount of supported accommodation for rough sleepers in Chelmsford. In 2024/25 we hope to see an additional 24 new units provided by CHEAD as part of the Single Homeless Accommodation Programme (SHAP). We also want to replace the 8 units of high-level support that were provided as a Housing First scheme by Home Group until March 2024.

(2) Identify opportunities and bring forward plans to meet the needs of those who need support and accommodation due to mental ill-health

We have not been able to make progress so far with this action and want to identify partners who can help us meet this objective as we have no nomination rights to any schemes like this despite the large number of homeless people who identify themselves as needing this support. Over the period of the strategy's consultation, we have begun to work with specialist housing associations and national charities who have expertise in mental health to gain a better understanding of possible opportunities to meet this need.

(3) Provide suitable temporary accommodation for those with physical disabilities and publicise the Disabled Facilities Grant

There are very few properties suitable for wheelchair use which can be provided at short notice for those who become homeless. As we are seeing a growing number of people who are homeless as the result of leaving hospital with this need we must continue to work to achieve this aim.

(4) Ensure there is an adequate supply of specialist accommodation for those experiencing domestic abuse

There are only 12 places in the local refuge suitable for families and 4 other bedspaces for single people, which is only one-tenth of the annual number who are homeless as a result of domestic abuse. There is clearly a need for more safe accommodation with support in Chelmsford to meet the needs of a diverse range of households.



(5) Improve the provision of temporary accommodation for young people

Although we do not have an especially large number of young homeless people, those who do become homeless may be particularly vulnerable and in need of additional support in homes where there is some additional protection from older people. We will continue to work with partners such as the YMCA to progress plans for improving this provision.

Section 4: Developing our strategy



Taking into account our review of homelessness in Chelmsford, existing plans and strategies and our ambitions, we now seek feedback to help us prepare a final version of a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy, including actions to be delivered over the next five years.

1. Rough Sleeping

Continue to develop a more comprehensive and evidence-based approach to reducing the need to sleep rough by:

A. Recognising the distinction between those who are new to rough sleeping whose main need is accommodation, those who experience repeat homelessness and may need a higher level of housing with support, and those who are entrenched and whose primary need is access to specialist support whilst sleeping rough.

B. Replacing the provision of accommodation and support of the eight units previously provided by Home Group as on a 'Housing First' basis

C. Refining the links between the Council's Rough Sleeper Navigators and CHESS outreach service to get the best outcome from these two services.

D. Developing a wider range of supported accommodation for single people to reduce the need for temporary accommodation.

E. Improve awareness of local services to help those sleeping rough, and communication and cooperation between these organisations so they are helped to understand and respond to gaps in services.

2. Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse spans various agencies and issues. It needs a multi-faceted approach, working across several fields of expertise including the criminal justice system, housing management, adult and young people's social care and the voluntary sector using the Domestic Abuse Act as a framework for partnership working.

We have seen how a focus on rough sleeping over the last five years has transformed this aspect of homelessness in Chelmsford and we now want to adopt a similar approach to those at risk of homelessness due to domestic abuse, including:

A. Better use made of existing supported housing to allow people time to understand their options and make informed decisions;

B. Better understanding of housing pressures and options across various agencies to stimulate more innovation and development of housing options and support for those at risk of homelessness;

C. Innovation in dealing with perpetrators to make them rather than their victims responsible for their actions, removing them rather than others from the home;

...continued on next page..

2. Domestic abuse continued..

D. Developing local reciprocal arrangements to enable victims to retain a like-for-like home if they can not be helped to remain safely in their current home;

E. Better supply of safe accommodation for a more diverse range of people to eliminate the risk of exclusion;

F. Better provision of support to those who have to be placed into generic temporary accommodation.

G. Create a forum of local service providers to improve the quality of support to those at risk of abuse and homelessness, improving cooperation and opportunities

3. Mental health

A. Retain and expand the pilot scheme of providing support to single homeless through the Mental Health Navigator with EPUT

B. Develop accommodation with support for those who are at risk of homelessness and suffering with mental health to avoid the risk of rough sleeping.

4. Young People

A. Continue to develop plans with partners for supported housing for young people to avoid the need for temporary accommodation.

5. Temporary accommodation

A. Progress plans for the procurement and management of temporary accommodation in Chelmsford to improve the quality and reduce the cost.

B. Work with partners to improve the level of support provided to those placed into temporary accommodation, especially where this has to be outside of the Chelmsford district.

C. Explore the opportunities to create housing with support for vulnerable families as an alternative to temporary accommodation.

D. Progress plans to provide temporary accommodation that is suitable for people with physical disabilities.

Section 5: Strategy Consultation



What have we learnt from our consultation?

A draft version of this strategy was published last autumn and since then we have engaged with people through the use of surveys, workshops, and face to face meetings including with those who have recent lived experience of becoming homeless in Chelmsford. We have also continued to monitor data and compared this with national and local data to see if and where homelessness in Chelmsford varies.

Rough sleeping

There is a clear distinction between those who are new to sleeping rough in Chelmsford and those who have been sleeping rough over many months, even years. The main need for most of the former is access to affordable accommodation with a low level of support, which we have increased during the lifetime of our previous strategy. For the latter, although homeless, their needs are often more complex and in some cases yet to be assessed and identified.

- **We have managed to keep levels of rough sleeping stable over the last few years, even though numbers have increased nationally by 20% in the last year alone.**
- **We aim to retain existing services which focus on reducing the time those new to rough sleeping spend on the streets.** By re-launching the Housing First scheme, which ended in 2023, we will provide the best opportunity for some of the smaller number of the most entrenched rough sleepers in Chelmsford to also move on.

- **Nearly one in four of those with a history of rough sleeping become homeless once again in the future.** To prevent this, we want to work with those who provide support to help those currently living in supported and temporary accommodation be better prepared for managing a tenancy when they move on.
- **Often those who find it harder to move away from sleeping rough in Chelmsford have a need for support which requires more specialist help along with accommodation.** For example, those who have been victims of domestic abuse, have a history of mental health or substance abuse. Developing an additional supply of other forms of supported housing would help, and could be an opportunity to prevent others from becoming homeless.

Domestic abuse

Chelmsford has three times the national level of homelessness caused by domestic abuse but a large proportion of this is the result of people presenting from other areas.

Learning from the approach we took in our previous strategy for tackling rough sleeping, we want to establish a local group of organisations to improve understanding and coordination in response to those who are at risk of homelessness for this reason.

This will help us, amongst other things, create a better supply of safe accommodation that provides specialist support as an alternative to temporary accommodation.

- The Domestic Abuse Act requires us to provide safe accommodation to all those who become homeless due to domestic abuse. However, for the majority of these cases, including some of the most serious, the main option is conventional temporary accommodation, so **we urgently need to increase the supply and access to housing that is safe with support.**
- The critical lack of suitable affordable homes means we must seek to improve to prevent this as a cause of homelessness, working with others to protect existing accommodation as well as the families to reduce the impact of homelessness. **We shall therefore begin to look at ways we can remove perpetrators instead of victims from family homes, work with Registered Providers to transfer instead of evicting their tenants and provide realistic and comprehensive information about housing options** so victims can make informed decisions.

- **We also need to work to eliminate the risk of anyone needing safe accommodation from being excluded**, due to their sex, ethnicity, household composition or for other reasons.



Mental health

The majority (around 80%) of single people who are accepted as statutorily homeless will have a need for support due to their mental health.

- **We want to find a way to re-establish the Mental Health Navigator role** which helps with the assessment of those who are homeless and reduces delays in them accessing support and treatment.
- **Many will need supported housing to aid their recovery and help them prepare for living in general needs housing** if we are to prevent further cases of homelessness and a deterioration in their health and welfare, sometimes leading to serious risk of harm.
- **We therefore also aim in the lifetime of this strategy to enable a supply of supported accommodation specifically for those with this need for support**, reducing the reliance on temporary accommodation and improving the prospects of those at risk.

During the consultation of this strategy Essex County Council has withdrawn funding of Accommodation Based Housing Related Support for two schemes in Chelmsford. These have been invaluable in meeting the need of supported housing for single homeless, many of whom suffer with poor mental health. Chelmsford City Council intends to meet the cost of retaining this support in order to avoid the need to be reliant on generic temporary accommodation for this group.



Young people

Levels of homelessness in Chelmsford for this group are proportionately similar to other areas but there is no specialist accommodation.

Young people leaving care are at higher risk of homelessness, exploitation and harm. Many other young people may not be taken into care but are also vulnerable to similar risks.

- **We will be supporting the development of a Foyer scheme in Chelmsford** which could provide safe accommodation for young people with support to help them prepare and move on into their own independent home.



Families

Two thirds of those in temporary accommodation are families with children. In the majority of cases, this is due to the shortfall in supply of affordable family-size housing in Chelmsford, which is being addressed in our Housing Strategy.

Some families are at a higher risk of homelessness, such as single parents in privately rented accommodation, especially those affected by the benefit cap.

- **We will continue to work with our partners**, Essex County Council's Families Team and the Department of Work and Pensions **to help these parents access training and employment**, improving their income and reducing the risk of homelessness.
- **We will also review the role of our Tenancy Sustainment Officer**, ensuring we are helping families as soon as possible so we can prevent them from the risk of eviction.
- In recognition of how different this group is from rough sleepers and single homeless, **we also want to re-launch the Homeless Families Forum**, raising awareness and understanding of the risks of homelessness and ways we can work together in Chelmsford to support these families.

Young people

Since the publication of our previous strategy, Chelmsford has become home to families displaced by wars in Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine. Each, in turn, has created a larger number of people presenting as homeless and innovative national policies and programme to provide assistance that have helped reduce the number of homeless households.

Currently, all families from Syria and Afghanistan, including those who were previously living in temporary accommodation provided by the Home Office in Chelmsford, are now living in settled accommodation.

- There remain around 40 Ukrainian households still living with their sponsors under the Homes for Ukraine scheme in Chelmsford. **We estimate around 100 Ukrainian households have been helped to move on, preventing homelessness or after living in temporary accommodation.**
- Throughout this period **we have built links with a number of voluntary and statutory organisations.** We shall continue to develop this network of mutual support to help us meet the needs of other refugees. It is not usually possible to prevent homelessness in this case, but we have found it necessary to manage expectations with these agencies so we can work together on providing suitable housing options that are realistic.

Ex-offenders

This is a relatively small group but often impacts on a number of organisations and can be a complex area of work.

- **Working with the Ministry of Justice we have been able to enable accommodation with support in Chelmsford** for those who have become homeless as a result of leaving prison. This has helped reduce the level of rough sleeping and re-offending.
- **With additional funding in 2025/26 we hope to recruit a Housing and Probation Navigator,** enhancing the level of joint work between our two organisations. This post will help us develop and hopefully expand existing provision as well as extend our ability to prevent homelessness for this group.



Substance abuse

As with ex-offenders, this is a small number, but often with high and complex needs.

- In consultation with others **we have identified the need to develop and improve the way our Rough Sleeper Navigators work** with services commissioned by Essex County Council, ideally extending this beyond helping those sleeping rough to supporting them as they move into and on from temporary and supported housing into independent living.
- The need for accommodation for those embarking on a **programme of detoxification and rehabilitation** has been identified as part of the consultation process. This is not something that a local housing authority is resourced to provide or responsible for commissioning but **we have given a commitment to our partners to support them in exploring the feasibility of such a scheme.**

Temporary accommodation

Conventionally this has been incidental to the main issues covered by Homelessness Strategies but **we can no longer consider the costs (financial and social) tolerable. Nor can we overlook the risk of this supply being exhausted within the lifetime of this strategy.**

Temporary accommodation continued..

- Throughout our consultation, the need for a better supply of supported housing has been highlighted. **We are preparing for the implementation of the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 and expect to be preparing a strategy outlining the need and supply within 12 to 18 months from the launch of this strategy.** We do not know what additional funding may be available to develop additional properties for unmet need in the future, but this would be a better option than temporary accommodation for many.
- In the meantime, **we will continue to improve the quality and reduce the cost of temporary accommodation** as outlined in our action plan.
- **We shall also continue to review performance** in the management of temporary accommodation.
- **From April 2026, a new rent and charging policy** creates a fairer and more transparent system for those in temporary accommodation. This also **helps streamline the management of properties and we hope reduces the time and cost enforcing agreements.**

Communication

Our consultation has revealed how unaware many people are of the housing situation in Chelmsford, whether applicants, voluntary or statutory organisations.

- Whilst we acknowledge our responsibility as a Local Housing Authority to understand and respond to the need for housing, as this strategy highlights, **tackling homelessness inevitably requires a multi-agency approach** and therefore a common understanding of the key issues.
- Over the last few years we have managed to slow down the decline in supply of affordable homes and the increase in the need for temporary accommodation but **the longer term forecast indicates that the gap between the need and supply of affordable homes in Chelmsford – and therefore homelessness – will remain as challenging as it is today throughout the lifetime of this new strategy.**
- **We have therefore begun to pilot ways to explain as clearly as we can the reasons for people becoming homeless in Chelmsford, along with the problems we face in relieving their homelessness.** We hope that this will help with two outcomes: a greater realisation of the importance of preventing homelessness, and an increase in engagement from all partners to commit to the aims of this strategy.



Section 6: Our Ambitions



1. Universal prevention

- **Improve communication** about the housing situation in Chelmsford to help our partners understand and manage expectations, recognise the importance of prevention and the consequences of becoming homeless.
- **Continue to work with and expand the work of Chelmsford's Single Homeless Forum and Homeless Families Forum**, sharing and promoting good practice and highlighting those most at risk and in need of help.

2. Targeted prevention

- **Develop a multi-agency strategic approach** to reducing homelessness for those at risk of domestic abuse
- **Work with partners to provide advice and support to others who are more likely to experience homelessness:** single parents in privately rented accommodation, refugees from Ukraine, asylum seekers granted leave to remain, those who have previously experienced homelessness.
- **Review and develop the role of our Tenancy Sustainment Officer** to help those at risk of eviction.



3. Intervention and recovery through partnership working

- **Continue to develop our work with those accommodated through the Homes for Ukraine scheme** and explore how this could be expanded to help other refugees;
- **Develop more options with partners to support vulnerable households** in temporary accommodation;
- **Extend the work of the Mental Health Navigator;**
- **Review and develop the Accommodation for Ex Offenders (AFE0) scheme** with probation service and others.
-

4. An integrated approach to local housing options

- **Implement, review and develop our policy for the use of privately rented accommodation** as an alternative to social housing for those accepted as homeless;
- **Implement, review and develop our Temporary Accommodation Placement and Procurement policies**
- **Renew our Tenancy Strategy** with registered providers to make best use of existing housing stock;
- **Prepare and implement the requirements of the Supported Housing Act**





Action Plan 2025-2030

(1) Rough Sleeping

	Issue	Action	Resources	Partners	Timescale
1.1	Entrenched rough sleepers	Re-launch Housing Led approach for those who have not engaged with other existing options	Revenue funding for CHP support worker – MHCLG + CCC	CHP and other registered providers, MHCLG	New scheme agreed with partners 2025/26. Operational by 2026/27
1.2	Complex needs	Ensure everyone sleeping rough in Chelmsford has access to diagnosis and support for mental health, substance abuse, risk of offending through closer integration between agencies	CCC Rough Sleeper Navigators, ECC DAS Team, Probation Service Revenue Funding: NHS, MHCLG, Probation, Sanctus and other voluntary organisations	CCC, ECC Social Care, ICB, Probation	Review existing agreement with ECC April 2025. Consider need for further development of scheme and funding requirement for 2026/27
1.3	Prevention of future homelessness	Provide extended accommodation and support in 24 new homes for those who have more complex needs to prepare for independent living – reducing the risk of repeat homelessness	MHCLG – SHAP Funding CCC – capital grant CHESS – fund raising	MHCLG, CHESS, CCC	New units for allocation from summer 2025
1.4	Coordination of outreach services	Review and adjust existing services to ensure best use of resources and outcomes	Existing resources	CCC, CHESS, ECC	Summer 2025

(1) Rough Sleeping

	Issue	Action	Resources	Partners	Timescale
1.5	Better coordination and planning of services for rough sleepers provided by statutory and voluntary organisations	Support for and sign up of a local charter to reduce rough sleeping in Chelmsford	Within existing resources	Chelmsford Single Homeless Forum	Overseen and supported by CCC (Rough Sleeper Coordinator)



(2) Domestic abuse

	Issue	Action	Resources	Partners	Timescale
2.1	Better cooperation between commissioners, providers and other agencies to improve the quality and quantity of services to prevent and relieve homelessness	Create a local multi-agency Domestic Abuse Forum	Within existing resources	CCC	Better cooperation between commissioners, providers and other agencies to improve the quality and quantity of services to prevent and relieve homelessness
2.2	Eliminate the risk of exclusion of victims from existing and future provision	Work with partners on review of existing provision to identify and plan for those who may be excluded due to protected characteristics	Within existing resources	Accommodation providers, Vol orgs, Review of case reviews	Autumn 2025
2.3		Ensure appropriate support is provided to those who have to be placed into temporary accommodation by quantifying need and consulting with partners on options for providing additional support.	Domestic Abuse Act funding Homelessness Prevention Grant	ECC Registered Providers, Domestic Abuse charities, Essex Police, Fire and Rescue	Review and assessment – autumn 2025 Extended support – spring 2026

(2) Domestic abuse

	Issue	Action	Resources	Partners	Timescale
2.4	Better supply of safe instead of temporary accommodation	Work with partners to increase the number of safe places that provide support to those who become homeless due to domestic abuse	Capital and revenue – Homes England, Registered Providers, CCC, ECC	ECC Registered Providers, Homes England, MHCLG	Throughout the duration of this strategy
2.5	Improve the prevention of homelessness for those at risk	Pilot scheme to remove perpetrators from joint tenancies in social housing	Domestic abuse and Homelessness Prevention Grant, Tenancy Access Scheme, Commissioned private landlords	CHP, Police, SETDAB	2025/26
2.6	Improve options for those at risk of homelessness	Create 'direct access' accommodation with support so victims can be helped to make informed decisions about their housing options prior to making homeless applications	Better use of existing properties	Registered Providers, Local Housing Charities, CCC Homelessness Officer time, ECC commissioned services	2025/26 and 2026/27

(3) Mental Health

	Issue	Action	Resources	Partners	Timescale
3.1	Reduce the number of people with mental health support need becoming homeless and going into temporary accommodation	Enable additional supply of supported accommodation for single homeless suffering with mental health	Partner RP funding and properties, MHCLG / Homes England funding, Local Authority Grant from CCC	Registered Providers, ECC social care, Integrated Care Board	By 2027
3.2		Explore how to extend existing hospital discharge protocol to include those leaving hospital with mental health support needs	Officer time	NHS / Linden Centre, ICB, ECC Social Care, CCC Homelessness Team	2025
3.3	Reduce the risk of those in temporary accommodation and moving on into settled accommodation from future risk of homelessness	Re-instate role of Mental Health Navigator and explore opportunities to develop additional floating support to prevent and relieve homelessness for those with mental health support needs	New revenue funding	ICB, Social Care, Supported housing providers, MHCLG	End of 2025/26

(4) Families

	Issue	Action	Resources	Partners	Timescale
4.1	Improve access to help and support for families at risk of homelessness	Relaunch Homeless Families' Forum to improve awareness and prevention of homelessness for families in Chelmsford	Within existing resources	Local voluntary organisations and charities, CVS, Registered Providers, Children and Families team	Summer 2025
4.2	Reduce homelessness in Private Rented Sector	Identify ways to target those most at risk of eviction – single parents in privately rented homes affected by benefit cap	DWP funded caseworker	DWP ECC	Summer 2025
4.3	Improve ability to relieve homelessness	Review and maintain programme for improving the supply of affordable family homes through new development and re-lets of housing association properties	Capital investment from Homes England, RP Resources, Local authority grant	Homes England, CHP, Local housing associations	Review autumn 2025

(5) Offending

	Issue	Action	Resources	Partners	Timescale
5.1	Maintain and seek to increase provision of supported accommodation for those who are homeless with history of offending	Secure funding for Accommodation for Ex Offenders (AFEO) programme and opportunities for expansion	MHCLG Funding	Housing Dilemmas, Probation Service, HMP Chelmsford, Private landlords	From April 2025
5.2	Reduce risk of homelessness on release from prison	Review existing protocol with HMP Chelmsford and process for released from court	Within existing resources	HMP Chelmsford Probation, Courts Service, ECC	By end of 2025
5.3	Improve joint working between housing and probation	Appoint Housing and Probation Navigator to support both agencies and their cases with housing options	Ministry of Justice funding	Probation Service Ministry of Justice	Aim to recruit to new role by summer 2025



(6) Young People

	Issue	Action	Resources	Partners	Timescale
6.1	Increase supply of supported accommodation for young people in housing need	Work with YMCA on development of new Foyer scheme in Chelmsford	Homes England, Local authority grant	YMCA, Homes England, ECC	Commencement of scheme in 2026
6.2	Reduce risk of homelessness for young people leaving care	Review and update joint protocol with Essex County Council for care leavers	Within existing resources	ECC	By end of 2025



(7) Substance Abuse

	Issue	Action	Resources	Partners	Timescale
7.1	Improve access to help and advice for those at risk of sleeping rough in Chelmsford	Develop close working arrangements between the Council's Rough Sleeper Navigators and Essex County Council's Drug and Alcohol team	ECC / MHCLG funding	ECC DAS Team	From April 2025
7.2	Identify opportunities for housing with support for those recovering from homelessness and substance abuse	Work with health and social care to assess options and feasibility of accommodation for rehabilitation	ECC Public Health NHS / ICB Homes England / MHCLG. Requirement for revenue and capital	ECC DAS Team, NHS, ICB, Registered Providers, Commissioned health providers	Review progress December 2025



(8) Refugees

	Issue	Action	Resources	Partners	Timescale
8.1	Continue to develop options for those housed under the Homes for Ukraine scheme	Need to plan for those still living with sponsors as access to private rent in Chelmsford becomes more challenging	Home Office / ECC funding	ECC Integration Team, Local voluntary and faith groups, MHCLG, EELGA Strategic Migration Board	Annual review and updated plan in place from August 2025
8.2	Reduce the risk of homelessness for asylum seekers granted leave to remain	Work with other local and national organisations to improve information about local housing options to those seeking asylum living in Chelmsford	Within existing resources	CVS, Red Cross, Clear Springs, Reed Partnership	From April 2025



(9) Temporary Accommodation

	Issue	Action	Resources	Partners	Timescale
9.1	Reduce the use and cost of temporary accommodation	Increase the supply of suitable supported housing to reduce the need to use nightly lets for those who are homeless and in need of additional support	Homes England – capital and revenue, MHCLG – revenue, Local Authority Grant – capital and revenue	MHCLG, Specialist Registered Providers, General Needs Registered Providers	Target of 30 additional units in 2025. Review progress of plans for domestic abuse, rough sleepers, mental health and ex-offenders Oct 2025 to inform future planning
9.2		Increase the supply and use of modular homes for families to reduce the reliance on private providers	MHCLG, Homes England, Local Authority Grant, Council owned land	Suppliers of modular units, One Public Estate / PBH Homes England	30 additional units to be completed by April 2026



(9) Temporary Accommodation

	Issue	Action	Resources	Partners	Timescale
9.3	Reduce the use and cost of temporary accommodation	Review contracting of nightly let providers to reduce increase in costs and maintain access to properties in Chelmsford	Within existing resources	Local letting agents providing temporary accommodation	Quarterly monitoring and annual review from December 2025
9.4		Review and update agreement with CHP for the allocation of their TA units and management of CCC stock	Within existing resources	CHP	New agreements in place from Oct 2025
9.5		Engage with county-wide Test and Learn pilot scheme for better procurement and reduced need for TA	Funded by MHCLG and Cabinet Office	Essex Local Housing Authorities, ECC, MHCLG LGA, Cabinet Office	Outcome of review June 2025



(10) Communication

	Issue	Action	Resources	Partners	Timescale
10.1	Lack of awareness of the problem relieving homelessness in Chelmsford and the importance of prevention	Produce information on the availability of affordable homes on a regular basis for local organisations	Within existing resources	Internal marketing and communications team	From summer 2025
10.2		Produce 'myth-busting' information to address misconceptions about homelessness to explain local issues and manage expectations	Within existing resources	Internal marketing and communications team	From summer 2025

(11) Monitoring and Review

	Issue	Action	Resources	Partners	Timescale
11.1	Need to ensure actions are progressed, continuous engagement with partners and plans are updated and remain relevant to changing needs and demands	Conduct six-monthly review and progress report. Annual review of emerging issues to be included in revised action plans.	To be identified as required	All consultees	Every six months from launch of strategy

Thank you to everyone who has assisted with the development of this strategy and the supporting action plan

- MHCLG Advisors
- Probation Service
- HMP Chelmsford
- Essex Drug and Alcohol Service
- CHP
- CHESS
- Chelmsford CVS
- CRH
- Nadiya
- Homeless Link
- Sanctuary Housing Assoc
- Essex Integration
- EPUT
- Public responses
- Reed Partnerships
- Home Group
- Sanctus
- Safer Places
- Next Chapter
- Essex University Law Clinic
- Essex Police
- Homes England
- Prisoners Building Homes
- Essex PFCC
- EELGA
- Mind
- Red Cross
- Springfield Furniture Project
- Chelmsford Food Bank
- Safe Steps
- Essex Re-Offending Board
- Nacro
- Maldon District Council
- Braintree District Council
- Essex County Council
- CAB
- DWP
- Housing Dilemmas
- Cool to be Kind
- SETDAB
- DCN
- Essex YMCA
- Ideas Hub
- Peabody
- Mid Essex NHS
- Local churches
- Phoenix Futures



Civic Centre, Duke Street, Chelmsford, CM1 1JE



01245 606400



www.chelmsford.gov.uk/housing



<https://forms.chelmsford.gov.uk/contactus-housing/>



Chelmsford
City Council