



Prevention of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

2020 – 2024

Introduction

Dacorum Borough Council’s housing service owns around 10,000 rented properties, as well as the freehold of approximately 1,700 leasehold flats.

Having secure and affordable accommodation is a key foundation for living well. Losing a home is a traumatic experience, which has a real and lasting impact on every member of the household.

Each year, around 800 – 900 households approach the Council for advice and support to prevent them becoming homeless.

This strategy, reasserts Dacorum Borough Council’s corporate commitment to work with partners to prevent and tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.

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I am pleased to introduce our Prevention of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

This strategy sets out our approach to how we will effectively support those faced with homelessness.

We recognise that the impact of losing a home can be far reaching affecting amongst other things health, wellbeing, education, employment.

This strategy outlines how we will support and work with our Partner organisations to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping in Dacorum.

Councillor Mrs Margaret Griffiths

Our vision

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 brought new statutory duties to prevent and relieve homelessness for every household threatened with becoming homeless.

It also encouraged partnership working with a new statutory duty to refer for many public sector organisations.

The new duties bring an increased focus on earlier prevention and a more proactive approach.

Our vision is:

People living in Dacorum have access to a safe, affordable home that meets their needs; advice and support is available for those threatened with homelessness; effective early intervention means that no-one becomes homeless or has to sleep rough

This strategy supports the Council's corporate vision of

- A clean, safe and enjoyable environment
- Building strong and vibrant communities
- Providing good quality affordable homes,
in particular for those most in need

Building on our National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS) Gold Standard for our work in preventing homelessness, and by promoting our Strategy for the Prevention of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping, we outline how we can support residents of Dacorum who are at risk of homelessness or rough sleeping to access appropriate settled accommodation.



National and local considerations

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 brought with it new statutory duties to prevent and relieve homelessness for every household threatened with becoming homeless. The Act also encouraged partnership working by introducing a new statutory duty to refer for public sector organisations.

The number of people threatened with becoming homeless has continued to increase for several reasons, a few of which are because family and friends are no longer able to accommodate them, or because an existing private sector tenancy is being ended.

Within the borough of Dacorum and the wider county of Hertfordshire, there is a shortage of social and affordable housing. Demand for the Social and Affordable housing there continues to be high. There are nearly 6,000 applicants on the housing register for social housing in Dacorum. The greatest demand is for one and two-bedroom housing.

A rising number of households are under threat of becoming homeless because of domestic abuse. The most common household type for those threatened with becoming homeless is single adults. Single parents are the next most common household type.

Caps on the Local Housing Allowance has had a significant impact on affordability; despite the cap being recently lifted there will continue to be a gap between market rents and the level of housing benefit payable, which will result in some affordable and private sector properties being unaffordable, in particular to single people or single parent families.



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Since the Homeless Reduction Act 2017, public sector cuts have continued which has resulted in fewer support services for vulnerable households. Changes in working practices and welfare benefits have affected the ability of many households to pay their rent.

The needs of those threatened with homelessness have continued to become more complex with around half of those approaching the Council for advice having one or more support needs; these include support with mental health, physical health and domestic abuse.

Complexity and lack of knowledge of the range of services provided by different organisations, and how to access them can make it difficult for households to access the support they need.

Partnership working in the Borough is already strong but there is potential to review and improve current relationships to maximise partner contributions, and outcomes for homeless and vulnerable households.



Delivering a great service

Equality and Diversity

The council believes all residents should receive a good standard of service *regardless of*; age, disability, gender (including gender reassignment), race, religion or belief and sexual orientation (Equality and Diversity Act 2010). We are committed to being inclusive with our approach.

Value for Money

It is important to us that our residents feel they are getting good value for money. The Council, along with involved tenants and leaseholders, monitors the housing service's approach to managing the prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping and seeks to ensure that we have the resources to deliver excellent services at reasonable cost. As a service, we are proactive in identifying and applying for grant funding to support the delivery of our service.

Working in Partnership

Our strong relationships with our partners and many other public sector and voluntary organisations enables us to deliver an excellent level of service whilst maximising resources and avoiding duplication of effort.

Working with other agencies

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 encourages partnership working between local authorities and public sector organisations. By working effectively with our partner's we will



The Commitments

To develop this strategy, the Council considered the views of a range of stakeholders. A consultation event was held with members of the Homeless Forum, which included a range of stakeholders including, the Police, Probation, Health, local Registered Providers, Charitable organisations, elected members and several local voluntary support services.

Feedback was given by the Tenants and Leaseholders via the Tenant & Leaseholder Committee.

A full public consultation was completed in February 2020.

Feedback from service users was gained by holding a focus group with those who have experienced homelessness

Using this feedback and information, along with relevant legislation and requirements, we have set out our five commitments for the prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping strategy. These are:

Commitment One: Continue to work with partners to prevent homelessness wherever possible

Commitment Two: Improve access, security and stability within the private rented sector (PRS)

Commitment Three: Increase our effectiveness in preventing homelessness for those with complex needs (Mental Health, Drugs & Alcohol, Domestic Abuse & Modern Slavery)

Commitment Four: Provide services tailored to meet the needs of individuals

Commitment Five: Eradicate rough sleeping



The Commitments

Commitment 1: Continue to work with partners to prevent homelessness wherever possible

We recognise the importance and benefits of effective partnership working, and through this strategy, we aim to focus on continuing to develop this.

To achieve this, we will:

- Provide an up to date directory of services for those threatened with homelessness;
- Continue to promote Duty to Refer particularly amongst hospitals and health sector organisations, including mental health. Extend a voluntary duty to refer to other organisations;
- With partners, work to ensure agile services which can flex to meet changing need;
- Work towards earlier intervention including predicting households at risk of becoming homeless;
- Research/pilot data-sharing approaches including shared support plans owned by customer who can share across agencies;
- Ensure the Homelessness Forum works proactively to ensure the provision of holistic services;
- Encourage Registered Providers to provide early notification of planned evictions from social housing.

Commitment 2: Improve access, security and stability within the PRS

We would like to ensure that private sector stock with the Borough is of an acceptable standard, and provides a stable and appropriate housing option.

To achieve this, we will:

- Launch a new scheme to support greater access into the private rented sector, drawing on recent stock condition survey and other information sources to ensure it is tailored to the needs of Dacorum;
- Maximise the impact of Better Care Funding particularly for adaptations; ensuring appropriate priority to households threatened with homelessness;
- Continue to work with landlords to promote good housing management and to enable tenants to remain in their homes;
- Continue to work with local lettings agents, seeking to influence them to accept households who have experienced homelessness.
- Explore a new incentive scheme to allow us to encourage Private Landlords to work with us to prevent and relieve homelessness.
- Utilise the Private Sector Assistance fund to enable people to stay in their own homes.

The Commitments

Commitment 3: Increase our effectiveness in preventing homelessness for those with complex needs (Mental Health, Drugs & Alcohol, Domestic Abuse & Modern Slavery)

We understand that people threatened with Homelessness may sometimes have complex support needs, and we aim to provide a holistic service considering this.

To achieve this, we will:

- Develop improved pathways for those with complex needs to prevent and tackle homelessness, supported by clear, documented and robust procedures;
- Educate staff to enable them to signpost to support agencies, and empower them to be confident to challenge when other organisations are not delivering;
- Work with mental health services staff to increase the number of referrals made under the Duty to Refer;
- Work with Herts County Council to ensure newly commissioned housing-related support services give an appropriate priority to those with complex needs;

Ctd:

- Work with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to maximise impact of new services in preventing and tackling homelessness (system-wide ? project, community navigators, social prescribing);
- Work with colleagues to deliver aspects of the Community Safety action plan, particularly building ongoing relationships between housing, homelessness and the prevention of crime;
- Review services for those suffering domestic abuse in light of the proposed new legal duties under the Domestic Abuse Bill;
- Working with our Rough Sleeper Outreach Worker, and Community Engagement & Recovery Worker we will continue to provide support to Dacorum's rough sleepers to access all the support services available to them.
- Continue to work with the Community Safety Action Group, to collaborate on public safety issues.
- Review services for those subject to modern slavery, including accommodation options.

Commitment 4: Provide tailored services to meet the needs of different groups

We are committed to providing holistic and inclusive services, which consider the needs of different groups.

To achieve this, we will:

- Promote greater awareness of range of services for young people;
- Provide appropriate accommodation options for younger people including specific Mother and Baby provision, including supported housing and working in partnership with registered social landlords
- Review and promote homeless prevention services for older people, making the most of our sheltered accommodation.
- Working in partnership with Bedford Prison to ensure that we have prior knowledge or any ex-offenders due for release to avoid them becoming street homeless.

Commitment 5: Eradicate rough sleeping

We are committed to eradicating rough sleeping within the Borough, by supporting those individuals to find a suitable and settled home.

To achieve this, we will:

- Continue No Second Night Out approach with partners;
- Evaluate Housing First model when current pilot ends in 2021;
- Work with Herts County Council to ensure new housing-related support services meet needs of rough sleepers in the Dacorum area;
- Continue to coordinate the Multi Agency Response Panel to tackle rough sleeping, by providing support and ensuring agencies working a joined up way.
- Conduct a bi-monthly street count to monitor rough sleeping and identify homeless people who need support
- Provide each homeless applicant with a Personal Housing Plan, to work actively with the applicant to prevent or relieve homelessness.

Conclusion

To conclude, this strategy demonstrates Dacorum Borough Council's commitment to the prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping.

Throughout the four commitments, we outline how this will be achieved by providing a holistic service, which is individual and tailored to each individual's needs.

We understand that working with others helps us to provide a joined up service, which makes the best use of resources available, and provides the best possible service to those who at threat of homelessness or are rough sleeping.

Finally, we acknowledge that to be successful we have to be adaptable. That is why we are committed to continuously improving our services and taking an informed approach to service delivery so that we can continue to meet housing need in the future.

This strategy will be monitored annually by the Strategy, Improvement and Engagement team, in conjunction with annual service plans and the HRA Business plan.

