



# BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN BOROUGH COUNCIL



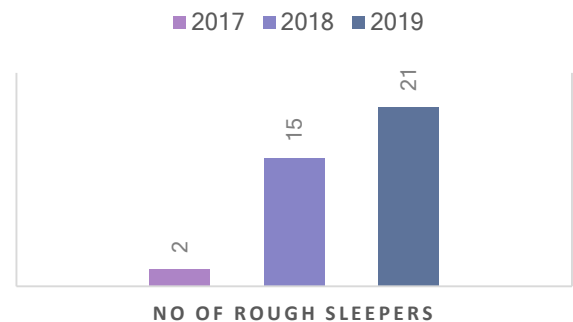
HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPER  
STRATEGY 2020 - 2025

## BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN HOMELESSNESS & ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires every local authority to undertake a review of homelessness every 5 years and to publish a strategy based on the findings of this review. Our 2020 strategy is based on the findings of the review we have undertaken and developed in the same spirit as the previous strategy. Both reflect the need for joint working from a wide range of organisations to address the challenges of homelessness, particularly relating to prevention. Our 2020 strategy also recognises the context has been significantly changed by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA), which places further requirements on the Council's Housing Needs and Homelessness services and also other public agencies.

What is clear is the need for homelessness services has increased over the last 8 years for a range of reasons; the impact of austerity, welfare reform, the freezing of Local Housing Allowance, amongst them. Average rents in the private-rented sector have increased and demand for social housing has grown. In 2017, more than 300,000 people, the equivalent of one in every 200, were recorded as officially homeless or living in inadequate conditions. In Blackburn with Darwen 1,251 households requested help to prevent or relieve homelessness in the same year. This equates to one in every 47 households. The number of households seeking assistance is predicted to increase again this year. The reasons for such circumstance are varied with the most common being their family no longer able or willing to accommodate them, relationship breakdown and termination of a private rental agreement.

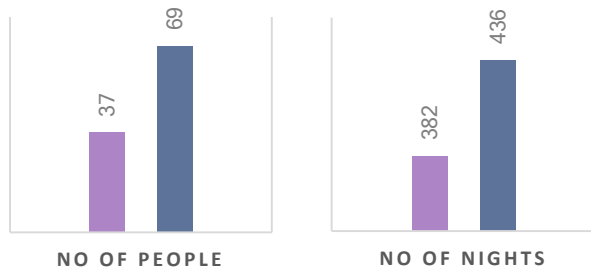
The number of people rough sleeping in England has increased year on year and this has been reflected in Blackburn with Darwen. In the 2017 count we recorded 2 rough sleepers, rising to 15 in 2018 and 21 in 2019.



The emergence of rough sleeping in the borough has become a real cause for concern from both the public and agencies working to prevent such occurrence. What is clear is this cannot be solved by the local authority alone. The prevention and relief of homelessness requires a partnership approach.

A good indicator of demand from the most vulnerable can be seen through the work of our emergency winter provision which is currently provided in partnership with the Salvation Army. While legally such support needs to be made available during adverse weather for example when the temperature is predicted to reach zero degrees for three consecutive days, we provide these service 7 days a week from November to March irrespective of the weather conditions. What it means is that no matter the circumstance there is always somewhere indoors for people to sleep, access warm clothes, and shower and have food.

In 2018 37 people used SWEP (severe weather emergency protocol) service for a collective 382 nights between November and March. In 2019 by the end of December 69 people have used the service for 436 nights; demand is up 50% in less than half the period the service is open for.

**SWEP Usage** ■ 2018 ■ 2019

This is a complex and challenging issue and Blackburn with Darwen are committed to working with its partners to support and protect those in need.

### **PARTNERSHIP WORKING AND STRATEGIC FIT**

This strategy aims to increase prevention activity in order to reduce the incidents of homelessness and where homelessness does occur to relieve it as efficiently as possible. This strategy acknowledges that a range of factors can affect homelessness – as such, it aims to complement other work streams in addressing these factors helping to protect our most vulnerable people.

This includes: -

- Homelessness as a cause and effect of physical and mental ill-health and an essential component in recovery.
- Offender resettlement acknowledging re-offending is more likely if settled accommodation is not made available.
- Suitable accommodation after admission to and discharge from hospital to help with recovery.
- Suitable move-on accommodation is essential for those who are in recovery from diagnosed substance addiction and following residential rehabilitation.

- Engaging with those who are rough sleeping to support them in accessing suitable accommodation helps reduce wider risk factors; to include begging and anti-social behaviour affecting businesses and communities and exploitation and victimisation of rough sleepers themselves.
- Provision of refuges and move on accommodation is essential to protect and support victims of domestic abuse to safeguard against homelessness  
Protecting young people unable to live with a carer or family to prevent homelessness and maintain education.
- Supporting care leavers as part of the transition to adulthood.
- Access to suitable housing is essential to help integrate refugees given leave to remain.

The breadth of local strategies that this work is going to engage with is testament to the partnership ethos of effectively responding to the matter of homelessness and achieving a positive outcome for those in need.

The partner strategies are listed below:

- Adolescents Strategy
- Alcohol & Substance Misuse Strategy
- Community Safety Strategy
- Domestic Abuse Strategy
- Health and Well Being Strategy
- Public Health Outcomes Framework
- The Borough's Corporate Plan
- Vulnerable Persons Strategy

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy objectives and outcomes are also reflected in the cross cutting Transforming Lives programme and in commissioning, including the Supporting People Programme, Making Every Adult Matter and substance abuse commissioning.

## THE CHALLENGE LOCALLY:

Blackburn with Darwen has one of the highest rates of death amongst the homeless population with 8 recorded deaths in 2018. This places us the second highest in the UK; and in the top 5 consistently since 2013. Recorded deaths are not just for those sleeping on the streets: it also includes those that were living in direct access hostels and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO).

The borough has over 800 bed-spaces in HMO's of which 550 are in 8 large HMO's close to Blackburn town center. This is an over-supply compared to our population with approximately 3 times the places available in comparable towns across the UK. The quality of such accommodation and the support offered is also a concern reflected in the importance placed on holding the owners of such properties to account in this strategy and those that complement it.

This Strategy is the product of reflective learning from other similar work and wider learning from adult reviews and housing programs including the Homeless Trailblazer Programme. Therefore, this strategy is grounded in providing a bespoke, user focused, ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience) aware approach for service users

The collaboration between those who are homeless and respondent services demonstrates an expansion of the commitments made through previous iterations of our homelessness strategies.

The Strategy sets out a clear vision and values that have framed the work of the Partnership:

**VISION: To end Rough Sleeping and Reduce Homelessness in Blackburn with Darwen.**

## VALUES:

**We believe that everyone who is homeless have a right to:**

- A safe, secure home and appropriate support that is required to maintain that home.
- The full protection of the law and not to be subjected to violence, abuse, theft and discrimination
- Equality of opportunity to employment, education, training, volunteering and leisure activities to support their engagement with their community and wider society.
- Equality of access to information and services.
- Respect and a good standard of service.

We believe that those who work with the homeless have a collective responsibility to ensure that we have good communication and a consistent approach to all services that are delivered, and that the lived experience of homelessness remains central to our approach.

## Objectives:

The strategy has four strategic objectives:

- Prevention and relief of homelessness
- Limiting the use of B&B and the provision of suitable temporary accommodation
- Tackle and reduce the levels of rough sleeping
- Addressing the over-supply of houses in multiple occupation:

### Objective 1: Prevention and relief of homelessness

As noted, partnership working is vital in order to provide interventions at the earliest stage. Those who receive timely interventions are less likely to become homeless.

At the core of this objective is the need to address inequalities that may exist in accessing employment, education and health services across the borough all of which can lead to homelessness in the future. We need services to actively support the prevention of homelessness, acknowledging the links to their own services and the services offered by others.

#### We can promote prevention by:

- Ensuring that those who have experience of homelessness are involved in designing services that are accessible.
- Encouraging services across all sectors to work better together, not in isolation.
- Making sure that people are not discharged from one service directly on to the streets: particularly those discharged from prisons, mental health services and hospitals.
- Ensuring that we are good corporate parents to our care leavers, helping them access the correct services and pathways so that they are not at risk of becoming homeless when they leave care or as they transition to adult services.

- Working with the private rented sector and social landlords to establish new approaches to prevent evictions.
- Ensuring that there is easy access to specialist advice across the community where there is a risk of homelessness, and that day centres for the homeless can support people who arrive at a point of crisis

#### We will support people to maintain their tenancy by:

- Providing advice and information to support people to access services that could prevent them becoming homeless.
- Working across services and organisations to proactively prevent and reduce homelessness
- Early identification where households may be at risk of homelessness and supporting agencies to recognise at-risk families or individuals and refer.
- Engaging with private and social landlords to develop protocols that help to reduce the number of evictions
- Bringing in other services that might be needed where antisocial behaviour could put someone at risk of homelessness

#### We will support people who are required to move to do so in a managed way by:

- Creating opportunities for accessing suitable housing for their need(s) which is of the right quality.
- Working to reduce recurring homelessness, by identifying influencing factors for that individual and connecting people to appropriate local services.
- Ensuring that all discharges from the health sector are planned, with continuity of treatment and support where needed.

## **Objective 2: Limiting the use of B&B and increasing the provision of suitable temporary accommodation**

Since the commencement of the HRA, the reliance on B&B accommodation has increased particularly for single individuals. The use of this unsupported temporary accommodation is not ideal and so it has been, and will only be, used as a last resort in emergency situations.

In response to this issue the authority currently leases 22 properties made up of flats and houses from Registered Providers as an alternative to B&B placements. These are furnished and maintained to a standard above that expected in legislation and the 'Code of Guidance' and are managed by the Housing Needs Team who also provide the services of a support worker. 5 of these properties are specifically for use by victims of domestic abuse who may not be able to access refuge accommodation. They are supported by an additional specialist IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advocate) from within the Housing Needs Team.

The borough also makes use of specialist temporary accommodation for families and single parents with access to a purpose built property containing 10 self-contained 2 and 3 bed apartments with 24-hour support.

Despite the availability of temporary accommodation, we remain committed to the ethos that this is a last resort and have adopted the following working practice:

- Where B&B is the only option we will ensure that it is of a good standard and keep in daily contact with occupants to ensure they are fully supported.

- Ensure that people placed in temporary and supported accommodation integrate fully into their community and that they aren't isolated or disadvantaged through being placed in this type of short term accommodation.
- Ensure that every family placed in temporary accommodation receives dedicated support from an experienced support worker.
- Minimising the need for temporary accommodation over time by preventing people becoming homeless.
- Understanding the current and future demand and unmet need for supported and temporary accommodation to influence the future commissioning of services and improving access to supported accommodation.
- Working with those who have lived in temporary and supported accommodation to design, commission and deliver future services that are accessible to all.
- Ensuring that specialist support (for example support for those who have experienced domestic abuse) is available and accessible.
- Engage with SERCO (holders of the asylum seeker accommodation and support contract) and the Home Office to monitor and effectively manage asylum trends and demands.

### Objective 3: Tackle and reduce the levels of rough sleeping

The emergence of rough sleeping in the borough has become a significant issue that cannot be solved by the local authority alone.

We have a good partnership approach to this issue and utilise various tools to help achieve a reduction in numbers and support the very vulnerable in our community. Blackburn with Darwen led a successful bid to secure Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Rapid Rehousing Pathway funding which has allowed us to employ 2 case navigators based alongside the homelessness team. They actively engage with rough sleepers and beggars supporting them off the streets and into suitable accommodation should they chose to. There remains a cohort of rough sleepers who for whatever reason choose not to take up offers of assistance and accommodation.

The borough has also commissioned the Salvation Army to provide our official SWEP accommodation. Under Government guidance SWEP should be provided during the winter months when the temperature is forecast to be below zero on 3 consecutive nights or when other extreme weather is prevalent. We believe this is unsatisfactory, so we have commissioned the SWEP service every night between 1<sup>st</sup> November and 31<sup>st</sup> March irrespective of the predicted temperature. This service provides overnight accommodation along with hot food and drinks and showering facilities for all irrespective of circumstance or previous issues and behaviour. A number of individuals have historically been too chaotic for the SWEP provision, putting other users and staff at risk: we have therefore commissioned security at the Salvation Army in order to allow those individuals to stay on an overnight basis.

**We are committed to reduce the level of rough sleeping and ensure that appropriate support and provision is available by:**

- Proactively engaging with the HMO's to find ways of reducing the evictions that lead to rough sleeping.
- Utilise the case navigators to engage with rough sleepers and facilitate pathways into suitable accommodation.
- Offer financial support as a means of accessing accommodation where there is a commitment to tenancy sustainment.
- Relocate individuals that are from out of area and do not have support networks in the borough or who need a fresh start away from people who do not act in the individuals' best interests.
- Engage with neighbouring boroughs about out of area placements of chaotic individuals ensuring they do not discharge their own statutory duty by placing individuals in this borough who do not have support networks or links here.
- Look at innovative ways to engage entrenched rough sleepers who consistently choose not to accept offers of accommodation and remain on the street.
- Always maintaining an open door policy no matter how many times they refuse assistance
- Ensuring the service is accessible and available all times of the day and night to everyone in the borough.
- Work with supported housing providers to develop pathways into accommodation that affords individuals a 'second chance'
- Provide temporary beds and bedding and any other support required for the provision of over-night accommodation for vulnerable single people.
- Scope the development of a vulnerable person's hub that ensures specialist support services are available in a 'one stop shop' to include housing, substance misuse, Probation, debt and welfare advice etc.

## **Objective 4: Addressing the over-supply of houses in multiple occupation:**

The HMO's in the borough fall within different categories; from those provided by registered social landlords and charities through to those operated by private individuals, businesses and families for profit. Collectively they present a significant challenge for a number of reasons:

Firstly, we are concerned for the welfare of individuals in a number of these properties. Given their vulnerabilities they are at risk of being taken advantage of by other tenants, and criminal networks whom target concentrations of vulnerable people.

There are now multi-agency arrangements that meet regularly to monitor and address issues faced by residents of HMO's. Membership includes Community Safety, Police, Safeguarding, DWP, Housing Needs, Probation, Planning, Housing Standards and case Navigators.

The above multi-agency partners aim to improve the standards in privately run, poor performing HMO's and where we can evidence malpractice, crime or safeguarding risks then all enforcement options will be made available.

Secondly, demand placed on support services by those residing in HMOs is significantly higher than those in other types of accommodation. The percentage of HMO occupants who have challenges around substance misuse, mental health and wider health and social needs is high when compared to users of other housing types.

The Select Committee report on Regenerating Seaside Towns and Communities (April 2019) looked at the wider issues regarding housing and suggested that local services were struggling to meet the needs of the population inhabiting HMO accommodation stating that:

“One of the major impacts is on local services in both the public and voluntary / community sector

who are left to address the problems caused. Services across both sectors, with limited resources and budget cuts over recent years, have been stretched and struggle to address the problems in meaningful ways. One example is the reduction in Supporting People budgets and cuts to Adult and Social Care, which means that the wider support for tackling complex and challenging problems (mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues) is substantially affected”

Research conducted by Adele Irving (2015) into the health and wellbeing of those living in HMOS found that HMO residents typically have multiple needs, with alcohol dependency and mental health problems being most prevalent.

Thirdly whilst all HMO's are governed by fire and housing standards legislation the care and support provision is not dealt with in the same way. This is an issue and we need to constantly ensure that care and support in private HMO's reach an appropriate standard and landlords actually support the needs of their client group or customers.

In response to these challenges:

### **We will work to address the over-supply of HMO's by:**

- Closely examining all planning applications for new HMO's including both new developments and changes of use.
- Enforcing standards and taking action against those flaunting regulation and good practice.
- Finding ways to work with owners in order to ensure that those with a local connection are prioritised over others.
- Closing HMO's that pose a risk to their residents.



**We will improve the experience of those living in HMO's by:**

- Operating a targeted approach in managing poor performing HMO's.
- Providing outreach support to HMO residents ensuring that they are not excluded from specialist services.
- Developing move-on pathways from the privately run HMO's towards the supported projects and independent housing with support.
- Assisting individuals from out of area to fully reconnect back to their own borough with support to access suitable housing via the local authority
- Encouraging partners to deliver services in the HMO's and the owners to allow and encourage these services within their building
- Report any incidents of criminality to the relevant partner and ensure a robust response.