



**Middlesbrough Rough Sleeper Action Plan
2019 – 2020**

**Middlesbrough Preventing Homelessness
Strategy 2015 – April 2020**

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2019 – April 2020

Working together to prevent, reduce and ultimately end rough sleeping in Middlesbrough

People sleeping rough in Middlesbrough mostly, if not exclusively, have complex, multiple needs. Their homelessness may increase their needs but may also be the result of them.

The responses to rough sleeping need to be as much about mental health, wellbeing, substance use and trauma as about housing. Safe, stable accommodation and support are vital to enable people to start to address their other issues and needs.

Level of Need

The Homelessness Needs Assessment (2018) revealed that the rate of rough sleeping in Middlesbrough is higher than the North East as a whole.

Middlesbrough, along with the other Local Authorities in the North East are now collating data on the number of rough sleepers identified in the area over each month. During the month of August 22 people were identified as sleeping rough in Middlesbrough and in September 15 were identified. An actual rough sleeper count was also carried out in September where 6 rough sleepers were identified, this 'snapshot' therefore does not truly reflect the extent of rough sleeping in Middlesbrough.

Hidden homelessness is hard to identify. Often known as 'sofa surfing' - it goes on behind closed doors and seems to be one of the main occurrences prior to street homelessness. Many people have no home and are moving from couch to couch just to keep themselves off the street. One way of estimating hidden homelessness might be to say that at any one time the sofa surfing population is approximately 7.5 times the population rough sleeping – this is based on a study of Core Homelessness carried out by Heriot-Watt University for Crisis and published in 2017¹. This would indicate that in Middlesbrough the sofa-surfing population at any one time might 135 households (based on an average over the two months August and September 2019).

Middlesbrough Homelessness Forum

The Homelessness Forum meets quarterly and is a partnership of organisations working together to prevent and address homelessness.

A Rough Sleeper Action Group meets fortnightly to assign actions to support the most entrenched rough sleepers in Middlesbrough and to secure accommodation where possible. Attendees include housing options officers; social services; probation; police; neighbourhood officers; accommodation providers and health services.

Middlesbrough homelessness prevention strategy and rough sleeper strategy is currently being developed with partners for the years 2020 to 2025. The actions below will support our priorities to

¹ Bramley, G (2017), *Core Homelessness in Great Britain*, Crisis, London

prevent, reduce and ultimately end rough sleeping in Middlesbrough and will be revised with partners for inclusion in the revised strategy 2020-2025.

Middlesbrough Rough Sleeper Action Plan October 2019 – April 2020

OUTCOMES:

- Reduce Rough Sleeping
- Prevent Rough Sleeping
- Change Lives

ACTIONS:

- Increase Rough Sleeper Assertive outreach
- Increase partnership response, in particular social services and health
- Ensure adequate supply of accommodation for SWEP & NSNO
- Increase the provision of somewhere 'Safe to Stay'
- Provide additional support to people vulnerable to sleeping rough once they are accommodated
- Work with stakeholders in the community to better prevent and reduce Rough Sleeping

Our Priorities

OUTREACH:

- Ensure every Rough Sleeper has a named case worker
- Secure additional funds/resources to increase the team
- Improve access to other services and support by establishing 'Drop-in' services

ACCOMMODATION:

- Ensure the provision of the sit up service continues after March 2020
- Review temporary accommodation provision
- Trial a housing first model
- Improve responses to people leaving prison and hospital who have no fixed abode

COMMUNITY:

- Work with partners to increase and improve training for staff to ensure better responses
- Maintain and further develop links with community services to quickly identify and engage with people at risk of rough sleeping
- Develop a 'Giving' scheme for members of the public to support rough sleepers

PARTNERSHIP:

- All partners will be asked to commit support to the prevention/rough sleeping strategy
- Services to move towards a multi – disciplinary team approach

FOCUS:

- Further joined up working between key services, with shared focus on preventing and reducing rough sleeping.

APPROACH:

- Service providers asked to develop and sign up to using a strengths – based approach (focussing on the positive attributes of the rough sleeper rather than the negative)

Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2015 (revised 2017)

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1. Foreword

- 1.1 This is the third statutory Homelessness Strategy to be produced by Middlesbrough Council, and it sets out the priorities for Middlesbrough's homeless response over the next five years. It has a Priority Action Plan which will be refreshed on an annual basis to ensure it remains current and deliverable. This strategy is informed and underpinned by detailed consultation and analysis of the issues in terms of the Homelessness Review.
- 1.2 At the core of this Strategy is the principle that homelessness in Middlesbrough should, where possible, be prevented. It also embraces the need for effective working solutions in a climate of reducing resources and unprecedented challenges to local authorities. Finally, it promotes opportunities for partnership working where efficiencies can be gained, duplication avoided, better customer outcomes achieved, and homelessness resolved and reduced on a more permanent basis.

2. Vision

- 2.1 The vision of Middlesbrough Council and its partners is to prevent homelessness where possible, and to provide customers with modern services, information and assistance that enables them to exit homelessness through a range of sustainable housing solutions suitable to their needs.

3. Developing the Strategy

- 3.1 This Strategy has been developed in consultation with the Middlesbrough Homelessness Forum and service users of accommodation and support services in Middlesbrough. It has largely been informed by the findings of the Homelessness Review², and has had regard to local and national policy frameworks.

Middlesbrough Homeless Forum

- 3.2 The Middlesbrough Homeless Forum is chaired by the Council but is otherwise a partnership of equals; it is well attended and has very committed and active participants. Its aim is to provide regular partnership focussed events that allow all homeless stakeholders from public, private and voluntary sectors to meet and discuss relevant issues in the borough. The objectives are: to promote good practice in preventing, tackling and resolving homelessness; to share information on new and existing schemes that might benefit other forum members and their service users; to work in partnership to respond to emerging policy, including consultation exercises, and funding opportunities; and, to work jointly to continually improve the homelessness response across all sectors in Middlesbrough. There is no statutory duty to have a Forum, but it is good practice,

² Middlesbrough Homelessness Review 2013/14, Appendix 3

and acknowledged to be one of the best tools in building responsibility and social capital towards preventing and tackling homelessness.

Stakeholder Focus Groups

3.3 Early discussions with the Homeless Forum showed a preference for the Homeless Review to examine particular causes and groups affected by the issue, and to ensure the findings and possible solutions were fed into the resultant strategy. To this end, a number of stakeholder groups were convened, around the following homeless causation/ vulnerability themes:

- Domestic violence
- Young people asked to leave
- People with drug and alcohol issues
- Offenders
- Those with mental health issues
- Those with complex needs

Representatives from a wide range of services, including Council services, statutory and voluntary sector agencies took part in the groups and provided information around key issues, current resources as well as identifying strategic solutions.

Service User Focus Groups

3.4 In order to validate findings, service users with direct experience of homelessness, and of the vulnerability/ causation issues highlighted above, were also consulted.

4. Strategic Objectives

4.1 Within this Strategy, the Homeless Forum have agreed the following key objectives:

- Prevent homelessness
- Reduce statutory homelessness
- Provide housing solutions that are sustainable

5. Strategic Fit

5.1 This Strategy supports the themes within the Council's overarching Sustainable Community Strategy, and it is further set in the context of a number of other relevant local strategies and policies, including:

- Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2013
- Housing Strategy
- No Second Night Out Policy
- Tees Valley Tenancy Strategy
- Common (Housing) Allocation Policy
- Private Rented Sector Action Plan

6. National Context

6.1 Local authority actions in respect of homelessness are governed by the requirements of legislation, which was enacted originally within the Protection from Eviction Act 1977. The Act has been amended several times since, most recently within the Housing Act 1996, Part 7, and the Homelessness Act 2002. This last required local housing authorities to carry out a review of homelessness in their area and to formulate and publish a strategy based on the results of this review by July 2003, and repeat this no less than five years after the adoption of the previous strategy. The focus was to:

- prevent homelessness;
- ensure sufficient accommodation and support for people who have or who may become homeless; and,
- ensure satisfactory advice, information and assistance for people who are or who may become homeless or who need support to prevent homelessness.

6.2 The Coalition Government published a rough sleeper's strategy, *No Second Night Out*³ which was followed by an overarching housing strategy, *Laying the Foundations*⁴ and finally a broader homelessness strategy, *Making Every Contact Count*⁵. The central tenets of its homeless strategy is the promotion of joined up services, and of a modern homeless response where a preventative approach is taken to all individual homeless cases; families are not placed in Bed & Breakfast accommodation; and, action is taken to help end rough sleeping.

6.3 There is a sharper focus within *Making Every Contact Count*, on the response to those who are non-statutory homeless, but nevertheless persistently affected by it. This group includes rough sleepers, single homeless, and couples without dependents. The rationale is that in taking a more considered approach to all homeless clients, authorities and communities can yield significant benefits and savings, not least by reducing exported demand to other agencies. It notes, for example, the cost to the public purse in dealing with a single homeless person is in the region of £26k.

Gold Standard

³ No Second Night Out, DCLG, 2011

⁴ Laying the Foundations, 2012

⁵ Making Every Contact Count, DCLG, 2012

- 6.4 In order to achieve better joint working and improve outcomes for homeless people, the Government is promoting its 'Gold Standard', a ten point challenge encouraging local authorities to develop strong local leadership and partnerships, and ensure essential links are made between services. Full details of the challenges can be found at Appendix A.

National statistics

- 6.5 Homelessness has risen in England in recent years, following a long term downward trend since 2003. Since 2012, the total number of acceptances nationally was 53,450, which was an increase of 10% from 48,510 in 2011. The number of temporary accommodation placements (including Bed & Breakfast) also rose by 9% from 48,340 to 53,130. Around 10% of these were placed in Bed & Breakfast type accommodation⁶.

Funding opportunities

- 6.6 In line with the central strategy, Communities & Local Government announced, in 2011, a £400m investment in a number of funding opportunities for councils and voluntary sector partners, primarily through bids to the Homeless Transition Fund and Crisis Private Rented Access Scheme. Preventing Homeless Grants were increased to the end of Spending Review period and allocations of Discretionary Housing Payments have been increased year on year to assist with welfare reform impacts.

Discharge of homeless duties into the Private Rented Sector

- 6.7 The Localism Act 2011 introduced a new power for local authorities, enabling use of suitable offers of accommodation in the private rented sector and allowing this sector to be used to discharge the main homelessness duty. Against the backdrop of high demand but a shortage of accessible, affordable social housing, the sector has increasingly become a valuable resource for offering a range of more easily accessible housing solutions for homeless households, but elements of poor management are noted to contribute to repeated homelessness. In view of the Act's requirement around suitability, it will be important to ensure Middlesbrough's Private Rented Sector offer has well designed management and access schemes, for instance, through Private Landlord Licensing and Social Lettings Agencies. As well as potentially effecting long term positive change in the sector, it specifically yields considerable benefits to homeless households by offering long term tenancies, as well as strengthening local communities and reducing negative impacts to authorities.

Welfare Reform Act 2012

- 6.8 The Welfare Reform Act 2012, with its aim of reducing welfare budgets, and encouraging people into employment, has introduced many changes to welfare entitlements, some of which, most notably the Shared Accommodation Rate, Benefit Cap and Under-occupancy Charge, are acknowledged to pose a potential risk of homelessness to those affected.

⁶ CLG Statistical Release, Statutory Homelessness: England 4th Quarter 2012, 22 March 2013

7. Local Context

7.1 Middlesbrough Council outsourced its Homeless & Housing Advice service to stock transfer partner, Erimus Housing, in 2004. This partnership has been successful and in the lifetime of its two Homelessness Strategies⁷, a significant reduction of 81% had been achieved in statutory homelessness between the end of 2004 and the end of 2012'. An operational shift from crisis intervention to prevention has been achieved, but the cost of service delivery has increased with Erimus evidencing a burden on its own revenue budgets that is not sustainable. In addition, the Council, as a result of Coalition Government public spending cuts, must find savings of £67m over the next three years. Reducing the cost of the overall service, therefore, whilst meeting statutory obligations, is a priority but this will potentially impact on service delivery as a result. Looking towards more integrated information technology solutions will be critical to developing a more affordable service, with an emphasis on self-service and making use of local support networks. A comprehensive review of the homelessness and advice services and complementary provision was undertaken in 2014, as the current contract for the homelessness and advice service concluded in November 2014, and a recommissioning process commenced.

Welfare Reform in Middlesbrough

7.2 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 has introduced many changes and challenges to residents of Middlesbrough. Key reforms and impacts in Middlesbrough are known to be:

- the Benefit Cap, i.e. maximum of £500 per week, has affected around 222 households, with an average loss of £65 per household per week. Around 50 households incurred a loss of £100 or more;
- The new Council Tax Support scheme affected in the region of 14,000 working age benefit claimants, requiring them to pay around 20% of their Council Tax bill;
- New size criteria benefit regulations has affected around 3,000 under-occupying households in social housing, causing an average reduction of £10.76 each week;
- The extension up to 35 years of the age eligibility criteria for private rented Shared Accommodation Rate has affected almost 500 households who were living in one bedroom accommodation;
- Personal Independence Payments budget has been cut by 20% and many households are likely to lose a proportion, and possibly all, of their current allowance;
- Universal Credit will replace all previous means tested benefits for new and existing claimants and will be paid monthly, and accessible only through an on-line claim facility; and,
- Social Fund administration has transferred to local authorities, with reduced budget allocations.

⁷ Middlesbrough Homelessness Strategies 2003 and 2008

7.3 In terms of the previous homelessness strategy, the majority of the action plan has been achieved. Some actions continue to challenge, largely due to scarce resources, and these have been picked up where necessary as part of this strategy action plan.

Approaches to the Homeless & Housing Advice Service

7.4 Table 1 shows performance information for the last five years on the main areas of homeless provisions that the Council is required to measure.

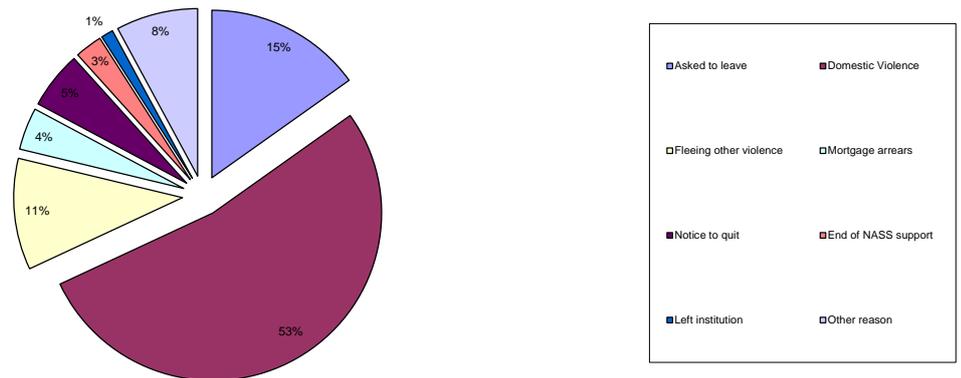
TABLE 1: 2009-2014

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Homeless decisions made	29	163	174	148	164
Homeless applications accepted	8	79	87	63	77
Temporary Accommodation Placements (snapshot last day of year)	3	18	14	9	1
Homelessness Prevented Cases	350	529	402	513	589
New housing advice enquiries	1881	1858	1835	1780	1503

Main causes of homelessness

7.5 The Homeless Review found that the main causes of homelessness over the past five years to be as follows:

PIE CHART: 2009-2014



Temporary Accommodation Placements

- 7.6 Significant progress has been made against previous Government targets to halve the use of temporary accommodation (TA), with particular reference to reducing family placements and the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation. From a baseline of 33 in 2004, Middlesbrough achieved the reduction target in 2008. While figures for placements in TA have varied since then, they have not returned to or increased beyond pre 2008 levels.

8. Objective 1 – Prevent Homelessness

What did the Homeless Review find?

- 8.1 Prevention initiatives have been commissioned and become embedded since the last Strategy, and they are acknowledged to be pivotal in resolving crises by offering sustainable solutions. There are good services for the majority of issues that could lead to homelessness. However, due to wide scale cuts to central delivery grants, it has been necessary to discontinue local authority funding for some schemes, for instance, Family Mediation Scheme, acknowledged to be an effective tool for preventing youth homelessness, particularly among 16/17 year olds. A number of broader changes have also occurred in recent years, affecting customers and other stakeholders directly, e.g. unemployment, Welfare Reform, and transformation of public services towards digitalised access routes. It will be necessary, therefore, to ensure customers can access help from a range of available services to prevent crisis.

What's happening in Middlesbrough?

- 8.2 Specific resources, across the piece, that can prevent homelessness include:

- Sanctuary Scheme
- Social Lettings Agency, and other rent bond guarantee schemes
- Frontline Homeless Prevention Fund
- Repossession Prevention Fund

- No Second Night Out Service
- Free legal advice services (Erimus Housing Advice, CAB, Trading Standards, Money Advice, Welfare Rights, National Housing Advisory Service, solicitors, Court Duty Scheme)
- Increased Discretionary Housing Payments Allocation
- A good range of hostels and supported housing schemes
- A range of tenancy support services
- Choice Based Lettings (Compass) Scheme
- Let's Help You Private Sector Advertising Facility

Actions for the future

8.3 It will be necessary to increase homeless prevention activities, awareness and outputs through the following actions:

- Improve, update and promote advice and information on preventing and resolving homelessness, including web based and social media solutions
- Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
- Use existing resources more effectively by increasing homeless prevention outputs, and seek new funding opportunities for prevention initiatives
- Actively engage in preventing rent and mortgage repossessions where possible, and carry out referrals to debt advice services
- Offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to clients threatened with homelessness, including those in statutory and non-statutory client groups
- Agree homeless prevention protocols with social and private landlords so that evictions are minimised wherever possible
- Have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs
- Ensure that all clients who approach the Homeless & Housing Advice Service indicating a vulnerability issue receive a referral to an appropriate support or treatment service

8.4 It will further be necessary to develop positive and productive partnerships with the voluntary sector and other local partners to address health, education, employment and training needs:

- Support funding submissions by voluntary sector agencies to resource support and outreach work with socially excluded households at threat of homelessness
- Promote available employment, education, training and health improvement opportunities that can be taken up by homeless households, or jobless households under threat of homelessness
- Work in conjunction with Public Health to seek funding for development of a health facility in STAGES Academy
- Implement a Hospital Discharge Protocol with South Tees Foundation Trust and Tees, Esk & Wear Valley Health Trust

- Offer a comprehensive package of training on Homelessness, Housing Advice and local housing solutions that can be used as a resource by voluntary sector and other partners

9. Objective 2 – Reduce Statutory Homelessness

What did the Review find?

- 9.1 Stakeholders and service users fed back, that, while great strides have been made in preventing homelessness or relieving it as quickly as possible, there are still missed opportunities for offering assistance to vulnerable customers at key crisis points, and that more work needs to be done to ensure those who become homeless are resettled into proper housing pathways as soon as they can be. It was felt that 'silo' working, unnecessary duplication and a lack of awareness of the negative impact of temporary accommodation on health and wellbeing needed to be addressed. All those involved in the review were keen to see improvements in communication with customers to support the resettlement process, and to ensure move on from temporary accommodation. It was also felt that to help the homeless service to be proactive and not become reactive, it is essential that their activities use a triage structure which supports delivery of early information and interventions that can offer resolution to threatened homelessness. Stakeholders felt, too, that it was important that the work of agencies should promote independence, and that tools already available could be better used, such as Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP), single person's social housing stock, private rented accommodation and supported accommodation.

What's happening in Middlesbrough?

- 9.2 There are a number of services and processes already operating in more joined up ways, working in conjunction with the Homeless Service and making use of locally available tools to help their client groups out of crisis, get stabilised and resettled as quickly as possible, for instance:
- MyPlace (Integrated Youth Support Service)
 - Common Assessment Framework process (for children and young people)
 - Troubled Families Initiative
 - Middlesbrough Recovering Together (Hope North East & Tees Valley Housing)
 - Stepping Forward Service (Middlesbrough MIND)
 - My Sister's Place (one-stop-shop for victims of domestic violence)
 - Harbour refuge, outreach and support services for victims of domestic violence
 - Nightstop North East (DePaul UK)
 - Changing Lives (formerly Cyrenians) Adults facing Chronic Exclusion (No Second Night Out) Outreach Service
 - Local rent bond schemes both promoting and using the Let's Help You website

Actions for the future

- 9.3 It will be important to offer a modern, fit for purpose, homeless response that provides sustainable solutions to a range of housing needs, which is focussed on

reducing rough sleeping and which provides rapid response help to those affected by it to access advice and accommodation pathways:

- Develop self-serve solutions that support and empower customers to resolve their housing needs
- Ensure the Choice Based Lettings Policy gives reasonable preference to homeless and urgent housing need groups
- Increase access for under 35s to suitable, well managed accommodation through rent bond schemes and tenancy support; and,
- Improve the Private Rented Sector offer for all client groups through a Landlord Licensing Scheme to effect improved management and standards within the sector, and achieve a long-term reduction in the culture of 'tenancy hopping', i.e. the practice of households who are frequently homeless due to anti-social behaviour, and who may be aided by rogue landlords to move around the sector, which prevents underlying behavioural issues from being tackled and which blights local communities.
- Adopt a No Second Night Out (NSNO) model where rough sleepers and members of the public can ask for help and advice
- Work in partnership with multi agency groups to problem solve rough sleepers with complex needs and help them off the streets
- Explore funding opportunities to continue the pilot NSNO outreach service which targets rough sleeping sites, and engages with rough sleepers to get them into appropriate accommodation
- Work with Public Health and Social Care to enable households with identified vulnerabilities such as mental health, drugs and alcohol, offending etc. can access accommodation and support suitable for their needs

10. Objective 3 – Providing housing solutions that are sustainable

What did the Review find?

- 10.1 Stakeholder's feedback that some services and initiatives fail homeless and vulnerable clients because they are placed in inappropriate temporary accommodation, or not moved on when ready for independent living, and that this is detrimental to their health and wellbeing. The range of hostel accommodation was acknowledged to be relatively plentiful, but there are some key gaps including young homeless people, those with multiple and complex needs, and the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation for homeless households, including families.

What's happening in Middlesbrough?

- 10.2 The following services are already in operation:

- Social lettings agency
- Other rent bond schemes
- Compass choice based lettings scheme
- Delivery of a Middlesbrough No Second Night Out service pilot to reduce rough sleeping

- Two pilot schemes, that provide emergency and medium term accommodation for women with complex needs
- Tees Valley Shared Tenancy Scheme for 16-25 year olds

Actions for the future

10.3 It will be particularly important to ensure that:

- Offer a holistic approach to individual homeless cases by offering services alongside accommodation that will engender sustainable housing solutions
- Explore and utilise all sustainable housing solutions, including private sector lettings, before placing any household in temporary accommodation
- Have a housing pathways action plan for households placed in temporary accommodation that includes move on to appropriate accommodation and support
- Increase the amount of homelessness prevented and relieved
- Support families and carers to be able to keep young people at home through available mediation discretionary assistance resources
- Develop more suitable accommodation options for young people in need of emergency assistance, such as Crash Pads, Nightstops, supported housing schemes and Foyers
- Ensure that all homeless 16 and 17 year olds receive a Child In Need Assessment to address their support needs
- Procure additional self-contained temporary accommodation in the private sector for use by vulnerable groups
- Use more suitable forms of temporary accommodation such as self-contained family hostels, and Private Sector Leased accommodation units
- Address bed blocking issues in existing self-contained temporary accommodation units through collaborative working on move on action plans
- Ensure that any family placed in Bed & Breakfast is referred to Wellbeing, Care & Learning teams to ensure dependents receive educational and health support
- Ensure that any family placed in Bed & Breakfast is moved on as quickly as possible and their stay does not exceed the statutory 6 week limit