Ending Homelessness Together

Homelessness Strategy **2022-27**

Housing Executive

Ending Homelessness Together

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Foreword

It is our pleasure to present '*Ending Homelessness Together*', the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Homelessness Strategy 2022-27, following a 12 week publication on our draft strategy from November 2021 to January 2022. This strategy outlines our approach to addressing homelessness, with a focus on supporting some of the most vulnerable people and households across Northern Ireland. Responding to homelessness requires much more than the provision of a home. This strategy seeks to ensure the realisation of a fundamental human right and in the context of our role as the strategic housing authority, it is an organisational priority.

At the outset we would like to extend our thanks to the members of our implementation groups who have helped shape this strategy and to all of those individuals and organisations who engaged in the consultation process. This document reflects a genuine commitment to collaborate in its design and delivery. While the Housing (NI) Order 1988 identifies the Housing Executive as the organisation responsible for addressing homelessness in Northern Ireland, we can only achieve this goal by harnessing support and working in partnership with a wide range of organisations, both within and beyond the homelessness sector.

The message from partners who sit on our Homelessness Local Area Groups and Central Homelessness Forum has been clear: that the vision of '*Ending Homelessness Together*' should remain at the core of our efforts to address homelessness across Northern Ireland. Our collaborative efforts in the delivery of our previous Homelessness Strategy, demonstrate the potential for success, with the sectoral response to COVID-19 acting as an emphatic example of what we as a sector can achieve when we work together.

While there remain many challenges to be overcome in addressing homelessness, this strategy seeks to build on the success of the delivery of the previous strategy and, more recently, the COVID-19 Reset Plan.

Although we have met many of the immediate challenges the pandemic has presented in respect of public health, it is important to recognise that the other issues that the pandemic has generated will last into and beyond the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27.

The Local Government Association has noted that *'Homelessness is complex and often reflects other vulnerabilities or circumstances related to health, justice or social services. Successful homelessness strategies require all public services to contribute in a way that recognises the personal needs, strengths and assets of every household.'*[1] The Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 recognises the reality that in order to assist those who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, we must consider issues beyond housing. With this in mind, we acknowledge the impact of the Interdepartmental Homelessness Action Plan in the delivery of the previous Homelessness Strategy 2017-22 and look forward to working with the Department for Communities, and other government departments, in developing future actions that will be essential to the success of this strategy.

At the heart of this strategy is the lived experience of homelessness. We have listened carefully to people who are experiencing homelessness and are committed to ensuring these insights will shape its delivery. The objectives of the strategy are focussed on preventing homelessness, the interventions which are needed when it does occur and how we support people to gain access to and sustain settled accommodation.

The delivery of these objectives and associated actions will enable the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and its partners to achieve the aim of this strategy:

'Wherever possible homelessness should be prevented; but if homelessness cannot be prevented it should be rare, brief and non-recurring'.

[1] *THE IMPACT OF HOMELESSNESS ON HEALTH A GUIDE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES, Local Government Association (2017)* https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/22.7%20HEALTH%20AND%20HOMELESSNESS_v08_WEB_0.PDF

Foreword

We recognise that there will be barriers to overcome in delivering the strategy. Some of these difficulties can be anticipated, such as the economic and social consequences of the pandemic, the shortage of suitable accommodation and the problems of funding homelessness services. The lessons of the past two years have shown that other issues will emerge unexpectedly and, with this in mind, we have responded to feedback from our partners who feel that this strategy should be an iterative plan that will evolve based on experienced evidence, emerging pressures and new priorities.

This strategy has been published alongside the Year 1 Action Plan which is focused on delivering enablers that will help achieve our objectives. Any reference to enablers should note the significant focus on funding in our consultation responses and the impact this will have on our ability to deliver our strategic objectives on homelessness. On this issue we are committed to raising the profile of homelessness and emphasising the impact this funding can have in providing vital assistance to those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

In concluding our foreword, we are delighted that a number of consultation responses highlighted the positive engagement from the Housing Executive in developing this strategy both during the consultation, and during the period of pre-consultation which guided the draft version ahead of consultation.

As Chair and Chief Executive we make a commitment on behalf of the organisation that this will continue, both in the implementation of the strategy and the development of our annual action plans. While we are delighted that our efforts to collaborate have been acknowledged we too would like to recognise the support and cooperation from all of our partners in developing this strategy. We look forward to building on this partnership working over the next five years!

Professor Peter Roberts,
Chair

Grainia Long,
Chief Executive

Executive Summary

The need for a Homelessness Strategy:

In accordance with the Housing (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 the Housing Executive has a statutory duty to publish a new homelessness strategy at least every five years. The Homelessness Strategy 2017-22 was published in April 2017 and the need for a new homelessness strategy arises from both our statutory duty and the need to ensure that our work to address homelessness is reflective of current challenges, particularly in terms of the impact the pandemic has had on homelessness in Northern Ireland.

Background:

In line with the Housing (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 this strategy includes a significant focus on preventing homelessness in Northern Ireland and securing that sufficient accommodation is and will be available for people in Northern Ireland who are or may become homeless. While this aspect of the strategy reflects relevant legislation it also reflects the feedback of key stakeholders who worked closely with the Housing Executive in the development of this strategy.

The vision of this strategy:

The vision of *'Ending Homelessness Together'* reflects a continued need for the Housing Executive to work with our partners across the sector to address the varied and complex factors that lead to homelessness, many of which extend beyond the provision of accommodation.

The aim of this strategy:

The Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 considers the various ways in which the Housing Executive can deliver our overarching vision with the aim that:

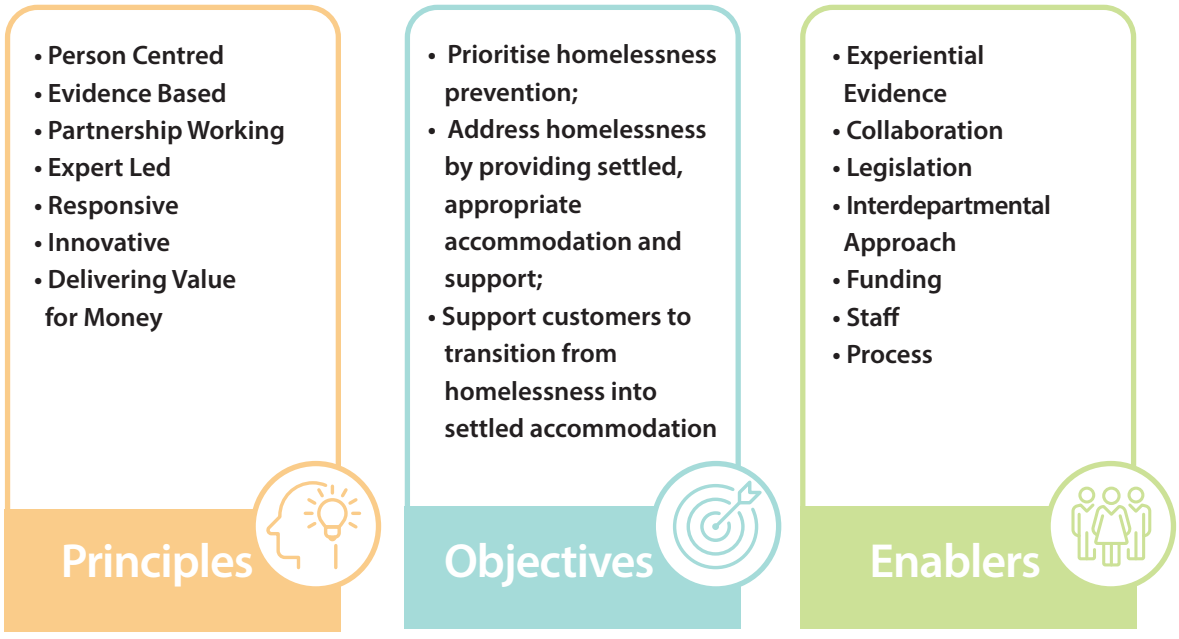
'Wherever possible homelessness should be prevented; but if homelessness cannot be prevented it should be rare, brief and non-recurring'.

The delivery of our vision and aim is supported by the principles, objectives and enablers in the diagram below and outlined throughout this document.

Over the next five years we will focus on the delivery of high level outcomes, priorities and actions which are set out under the three cross cutting objectives outlined below and detailed throughout this document.

How will it be delivered?:

The objectives and high level actions that guide this strategy will be supported by annual action plans that will be developed and delivered by the Housing Executive and our partners who sit on the various implementation groups who will ensure the strategy is effective at local and regional level. The consultation exercise for the draft strategy invited suggestions for actions in the Year 1 Action Plan which has been published alongside the final version of this strategy. The Housing Executive will report on progress in the delivery of the strategy in an annual progress report.



Executive Summary

Key changes from the Homelessness Strategy 2017-22

This strategy has been guided by extensive pre-consultation with our partners across the sector with a further 12 week public consultation having concluded in January 2022, the results of which are detailed later in this document. This has involved regular workshops with the Central Homelessness Forum which involves statutory and voluntary partners at a regional level. This regular engagement with the Central Homelessness Forum in the ten months prior to publication of the strategy was supported by a number of workshops with our Local Area Groups, which provided over 70 practitioners across a wide range of organisations and areas, with the opportunity to guide the development of this strategy. This approach ensured the strategic experience of the Central Homelessness Forum was complemented by the operational experience from the Local Area Groups.

In reflecting the views of our partners this strategy reflects a number of key changes from our previous strategy which include:

- A reduction in the number of objectives from five to three with these objectives reflecting the customer journey. In the first instance our objective will be to prevent homelessness and when prevention is not possible our second objective will switch to supporting those households who do become homeless. Upon the provision of settled accommodation our third objective will then switch to sustaining that accommodation.

- The development of annual action plans that can change as and when the needs of homeless households change. The previous strategy included actions that were agreed in April 2017 and while implementation plans reflected the evolving challenges of homelessness these implementation plans were guided by actions which generally remained the same over the course of the strategy. This strategy is guided by high level actions but contains a commitment to develop and publish action plans on an annual basis with this being noted as a key ask from our sectoral partners.

- An increased consideration of our baseline position and an intention to review our projected needs on an annual basis to improve our ability to meet the needs of those households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. In Year 1 of the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 this will consider our post-COVID landscape and our recovery from the pandemic.

- Over the past few years there has been an increased commitment to homelessness prevention, particularly in the delivery of our Homelessness Prevention Fund. This strategy will seek to build on this through a much greater focus and investment on homelessness prevention. This increase in focus and investment will be accompanied by a continued commitment to partnership working using mechanisms such as the Homelessness Prevention Fund.

- Finally, a crucial development since the last strategy is a commitment to consider the needs of those who have lived experience of homelessness. While the current strategy has seen increased engagement with operational staff via our Local Area Groups we recognise the importance of building on this with an increased consideration from those who avail of the services we offer. This will involve greater involvement of service users in service design and delivery.

Consultation Overview

The draft Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 was subject to a public consultation which commenced on 2nd November 2021 and closed on 25th January 2022. The draft Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 was sent to a variety of consultees as well as being available on the Housing Executive's website. Over the course of this consultation the Housing Executive received a total of 30 written responses. In addition, the Housing Executive facilitated a number of online consultation events which included a presentation and workshops for consultees to express their opinions on the vision, aim, principles, objectives and enablers of the draft Homelessness Strategy 2022-27. These consultation events took place on the following dates:

- 29th November 2021
- 13th December 2021
- 12th January 2022

These events were well attended by a wide range of internal and external stakeholders, with representation from the statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

In seeking consultation responses, the Housing Executive provided a series of questions on key issues throughout the document as part of a consultation response template. Within the 30 responses there was a number of consultees who chose to either use their own consultation response form or did not answer all of the yes/no questions within the Housing Executive's consultation response template.

There was significant support for the draft Homelessness Strategy 2022-27, as evidenced by the quantitative analysis, whereby the majority of questions delivered a 100% rate of agreement with further information noted below.

- 100% of consultees agreed with the vision of 'Ending Homelessness Together';

- 100% of consultees agreed with the aim of 'Wherever possible homelessness should be prevented, if homelessness cannot be prevented it should be rare, brief and non-recurring';

- 100% of consultees agreed with the principles that will guide the Strategy, both in their entirety and as per the individual principles below:
  - Person Centred
  - Evidence Based
  - Partnership Working
  - Expert Led
  - Responsive
  - Innovative
  - Delivering Value for Money

- 100% of consultees agree with Objective 1 - 'Prioritise homelessness prevention';

- 100% of consultees agree with the focus outlined in Objective 1 that will guide the Year 1 Action Plan. The draft Strategy outlines that actions identified in each year's Annual Plan throughout the lifespan of the Strategy will focus on the following:
  - Primary Prevention Activity
  - Secondary Prevention Activity
  - Tertiary Prevention Activity

- 90% of consultees agree with Objective 2 - 'Address homelessness by providing secure, appropriate accommodation and support;

- 90% of consultees agree with the focus outlined in Objective 2 that will guide the Year 1 Action Plan. The draft Strategy outlines that actions identified in each year's Annual Plan throughout the lifespan of the Strategy will focus on the following:
  - Understanding the needs of our customers
  - Improving Access & Inclusion
  - Flexible and responsive accommodation & support services at the point of need
  - Implementing 'Homeless to Home', Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation

- 100% of consultees agree with Objective 3 - ''Support customers exiting homelessness into settled accommodation';

- 100% of consultees agree with the focus outlined in Objective 3 that will guide the Year 1 Action Plan. The draft Strategy outlines that actions identified in each year's Annual Plan throughout the lifespan of the Strategy will focus on the following:
  - Housing Supply
  - Support
  - Community Integration

- 100% of consultees agreed with the enablers that are outlined in the Strategy, both in their entirety and as per the individual enablers below:
  - Experiential Evidence
  - Collaboration
  - Legislation
  - Interdepartmental Approach
  - Funding
  - Staff
  - Process

Given the almost unanimous support noted above there have been no major amendments following the consultation.

Introduction

Introduction

The strategy provides an overarching framework that will guide how we address homelessness over the next five years. Key considerations include how we respond to a post pandemic society, including the identification of innovative ways of working and the continued improvement of homelessness services, in order to achieve our vision of *'Ending Homelessness Together'.*

Ending Homelessness Together 2022-27 is a strategy written in unprecedented times during the COVID-19 global pandemic. The economic outlook is uncertain as the pandemic continues to cause disruption to normal life. The pandemic is putting more people at risk of homelessness and this is likely to present new challenges for the Housing Executive and our partner organisations.

Despite the challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic has also demonstrated what can be achieved when collaboration works at its best; it has highlighted the importance of a strong and agile response; it opened the door to exploring new and innovative solutions and different ways of working. Our proposed actions moving forward have been developed in this context.

Homelessness in Northern Ireland

What is Homelessness?

The most visible form of homelessness involves people who are seen living on the streets, but the issue of homelessness is much broader than that, including for example, people living in temporary accommodation, people living in poor conditions that are damaging to their health, people who are at risk of violence if they stay at their current accommodation, people staying with family or friends (often referred to as sofa surfing), people living in very overcrowded conditions and people living in a house that is unsuitable for their physical needs.

Anyone can become homeless, but issues such as unemployment, poor physical and mental health, alcohol and substance misuse, relationship breakdown, and combinations of all these, will increase the risk of losing a home and being unable to quickly find another. Crisis have noted that ' People become and stay homeless for a whole range of complex and overlapping reasons which are a combination of structural factors in society and individual support needs, decisions and actions. Solving homelessness therefore is about much more than putting a roof over people's heads.'[2] As well as the impact on the individuals, there are also recognised costs to the economy.

Types of Homelessness in Northern Ireland

Statutory Definition of Homelessness

In Northern Ireland the Housing (NI) Order 1988 (as amended) identifies the Northern Ireland Housing Executive as the agency tasked with responding to homelessness. The Order places a statutory duty on the Housing Executive to provide interim and/or permanent accommodation for certain homeless households, dependent upon investigations and assessment of their circumstances. In order to be "accepted" as statutorily homeless, a household must meet the four tests of:

- Eligibility
- Homelessness
- Priority Need
- Intentionality

Any household that meets these four tests will be accepted as a 'Full Duty Applicant' (FDA) and will be owed a full housing duty. The full housing duty includes ensuring that accommodation is made available for the household as well as the provision of temporary accommodation where necessary and assistance with the protection of the household's belongings.

Other Homelessness - Non FDA

Households that fail to meet all four statutory tests may still be homeless, but not owed a full housing duty under the legislation. The devastating and long term impacts of homelessness are well known, therefore it is important that any homelessness strategy not only makes adequate provision for those who are statutorily homeless, but also ensures the provision of appropriate support services to assist all homeless households to find and sustain long term housing solutions. The Housing Executive has a duty to ensure that advice about homelessness, and the prevention of homelessness, is available free of charge to any person in Northern Ireland.

Hidden Homelessness

Hidden homelessness includes people living in a range of circumstances, for example, households that may be staying with friends or sharing with family because they have no accommodation of their own. It is necessary to ensure that these "hidden households" are provided with the means to access the housing and support services they may require. The Homelessness Strategy 2017-22 noted that 'It is necessary to ensure that these "hidden households" are provided with the means to access the housing and support services they may require.'[3]

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[2] *Crisis Policy Briefing: Introduction to Homelessness & Housing, Crisis (2010)* https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/introduction-to-homelessness-and-housing

[3] *Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland 2017-22, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2017)* https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Homelessness/homelessness-strategy-northern-ireland-2017-2022.aspx?ext=.

Introduction

The Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 will seek to ensure that relevant actions are developed around increasing awareness alongside the development of protocols for partner public services which will be delivered in order to engage with those who are considered as hidden homeless.

Legislative Context

Social landlords must ensure legislative criteria are applied when allocating accommodation or providing homelessness assistance to persons from abroad, including those persons whom it has been established have no recourse to public funds. No recourse to public funds covers those persons who are subject to immigration control and also persons from abroad who, while EEA Nationals do not have a right to reside. With regards to the Housing Executive this is set out in Article 7a of The Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 and Article 22A of The Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. Housing Associations have an obligation to adhere to this under Rule 9A of the statutory Housing Selection Scheme.

Persons subject to immigration control and other persons from abroad are entitled to free advice in relation to homelessness and the prevention of homelessness. Article 6(D)1 of the Housing (Amendment) Act (NI) 2010 provides for free advice to be available to all persons and may include referring the applicant to other support agencies. There is also a duty to provide homeless applicants with advice and assistance under The Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 prescribed in The Homeless Persons Advice and Assistance Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Where an applicant is ineligible but they are destitute and have a pre-existing care need [a pre-existing care need - should be similar to the priority need categories outlined in Article 5 of the '88 Order], they may be referred to Social Services under the Health & Personal Services (NI) Order 1972. In the same way, the Health and Social Care Trusts have a duty under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 to provide services for persons under 18 who are children in need. Therefore, a referral will be made to the relevant Health and Social Care Trust in such instances.

The Housing Executive's COVID-19 Reset Plan[4] outlined the 'Everyone In' approach whereby those who were rough sleeping (including those ineligible for housing assistance) were provided with assistance which sought to minimise the risk of those individuals contracting or spreading COVID-19. This assistance is being provided as part of the COVID-19 response via a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Housing Executive, Department for Communities and Department of Health. At the time of publication of the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 the MoU remains in place as a temporary arrangement until 31st March 2022, with any extension subject to Department of Health Approval.

What is the evidence – baseline position and impact of COVID-19?

The strategy, along with *'Homeless to Home'*, our Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation which was also subject to public consultation alongside the draft Homelessness Strategy 2022-27, is guided by a baseline position in respect of homelessness. This will be subject to an annual review so that annual action plans are based on data and experiential evidence, identifying and addressing any emerging trends. The pre-COVID position was as follows:

New homeless presentations remained largely steady over 5 year period
Total numbers of FDA applicants on waiting list was increasing year on year
Top reasons for homelessness remained consistent (accommodation not reasonable, sharing breakdown and loss of rented accommodation)
Proportion of homeless acceptances was increasing (67% in 2019/20) reflecting the increasing complexity of client needs
Demand for emergency accommodation was outstripping supply (reflected in the increasing use of hotel/B&B accommodation)
Around 70% of those leaving temporary accommodation move on to permanent social housing
There was a mismatch in temporary accommodation supply and demand both in terms of locations and client support needs; there were clients in supported accommodation who no longer needed support, whilst others with support needs were in unsupported accommodation, with the most complex often in hotels/B&Bs due to a shortage of accommodation for this cohort
Move on accommodation was identified as a significant blockage within the system
There are increasingly complex support needs associated with homelessness presentations with mental health and addictions the most prevalent
Total numbers of repeat homelessness presentations increasing marginally year on year, including a prevalence of single person homeless amongst repeat presentations

[4] *The Way Home Homelessness response to COVID-19, Housing Executive (2020)* https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Homelessness/homelessness-reset-plan-the-way-home.aspx?ext=.

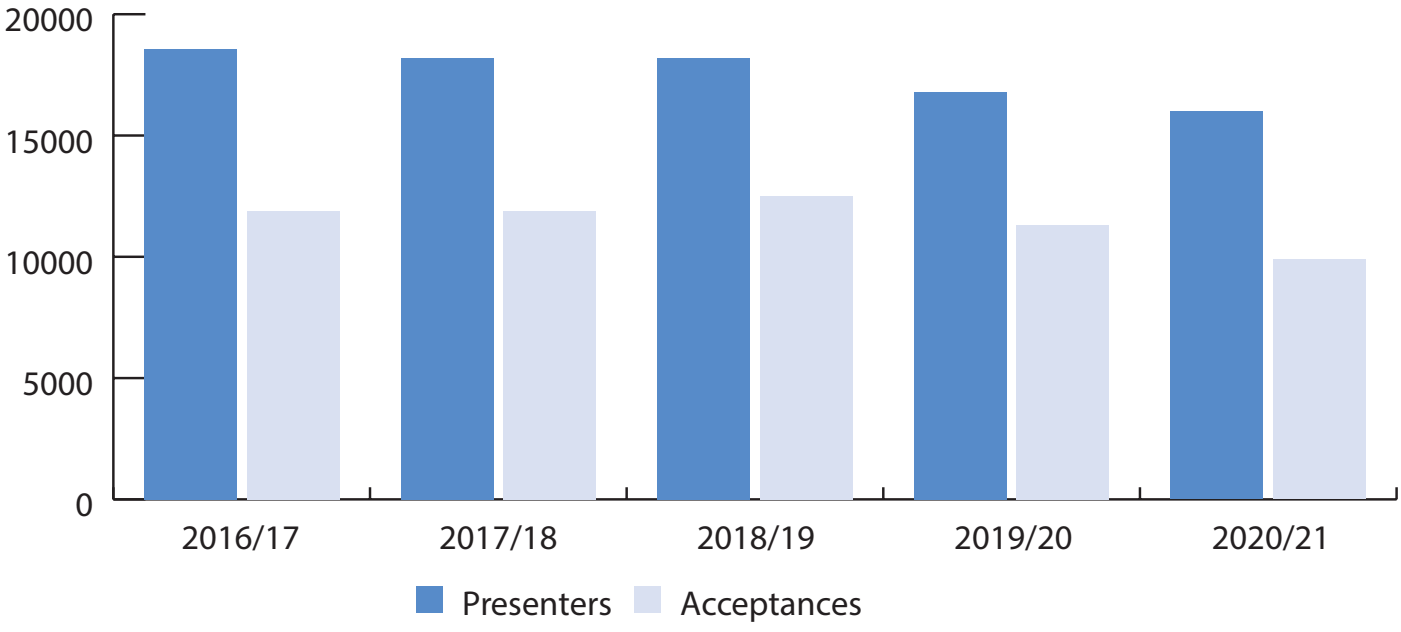
Introduction

The pandemic has had a profound impact on the homelessness system as recorded in our Reset Plan, 'The Way Home'. Its main impacts on the homelessness system can be summarised as follows:

Homelessness presentations have reduced by around 5% in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20
Breakdown of sharing overtook accommodation not reasonable as the top reason for homelessness
Temporary accommodation demand increased dramatically (placements increased by 115%), particularly among single households
Throughput from temporary accommodation has been reduced due to fewer social housing allocations during the pandemic
Young people have been particularly impacted, especially in Belfast where the number of placements quadrupled in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20
The 'Everyone In' approach was adopted to accommodate persons from abroad (PFA) who were ineligible for housing assistance
Supported housing capacity reduced to allow for Public Health Agency (PHA) guidance around social distancing and self-isolation
Night Shelters were adapted to operate as 'ordinary' hostels in the interests of public health concerns
An additional 650 units of temporary accommodation has been acquired to meet the demand
The number of households in non-standard accommodation (hotels or bed and breakfast facilities) each night has doubled when compared with pre-pandemic levels
Repeat homelessness presentations have increased by around 8% in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20

In the years prior to the pandemic there was a general pattern of increasing demands around homelessness particularly around homelessness acceptances and temporary accommodation placements. In 2020/21 there was a total of 15,991 households who presented as homeless with 9,889 of these households accepted as statutorily homeless. There was also a total of 1,188 repeat homelessness presentations with such households often being the most vulnerable with significant support needs.

Presentations and Acceptances - 2016/17-2020/21



Introduction

While new presentations and acceptances have shown a reduction over the past year the table below details the number of households to whom we owe a statutory duty and thus have entitlement to provision of temporary accommodation and furniture storage. This table highlights the continued demand for homelessness services as these households will remain entitled to temporary accommodation and/or furniture storage until such times as their duty is discharged via the allocation of a social housing tenancy or the refusal of three reasonable offers.

Year	FDA Applicants Only
Mar-17	16,356
Mar-18	17,520
Mar-19	19,629
Mar-20	20,951
Mar-21	22,217

The figures above are supported by the total number of placements in temporary accommodation over the past five years. While the figures for 2020/21 were heavily impacted by the pandemic there is a clear trend in terms of increasing demand for temporary accommodation even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Housing Executive has adopted a co-ordinated response to address the impacts of COVID-19 in terms of homelessness in Northern Ireland and this response remains active and ongoing. The full extent of the longer term impacts of the pandemic remain to be seen however the Housing Executive expects that the impacts will be significant and long lasting. In addition both the environment we operate homeless services in and how these services are delivered will change permanently post COVID-19.

It is important to recognise the longer term impacts of COVID-19 in terms of demand for homelessness services. A study produced by the British Academy on behalf of the Government Office for Science in England stated that 'With the advent of vaccines and the imminent ending of lockdowns, we might think that the impact of COVID-19 is coming to an end. This would be wrong. We are in a COVID decade: the social, economic and cultural effects of the pandemic will cast a long shadow into the future – perhaps longer than a decade – and the sooner we begin to understand, the better placed we will be to address them.'[5]

Year	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Number of Placements	2,746	3,024	3,354	4,527	9,752

As shown in the above table, the increase in new placements between 2019/20 and 2020/21 is 115%. Demand for temporary accommodation soared at a time when throughput in temporary accommodation stalled, leading to a significant need to acquire additional accommodation. In the earlier stages of the pandemic the demand came primarily from existing Full Duty Applicants who had been making their own temporary accommodation arrangements, for example, sharing with family/friends. These options were no longer available to many existing applicants who had no choice but to seek temporary accommodation from the Housing Executive. Latterly, there has been a shift in this dynamic with increasing demand from new applicants. Restrictions are being relaxed but the longer term economic and social impacts of the pandemic are already taking effect. There are increasing numbers of applicants presenting who are losing their private rental accommodation, whose accommodation is not reasonable or have no accommodation in Northern Ireland.

The Housing Executive produced its COVID-19 Reset Plan in 2020 which outlined our key aims in seeking to address and mitigate some of the long lasting impacts of COVID-19 given our concerns about the newly emerging need for homeless services as a result of the pandemic's wider societal and economic impacts. The themes of the Reset Plan have had a direct impact on this strategy and our planned strategic programmes.

The appendices of this document contains a range of tables outlining various homelessness data from 2016/17 to 2020/21 with these tables having informed the commentary above.

[5] *The COVID Decade: understanding the long-term societal impacts of COVID-19, The British Academy (2021)* https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/covid-decade-understanding-the-long-term-societal-impacts-of-covid-19/

Introduction

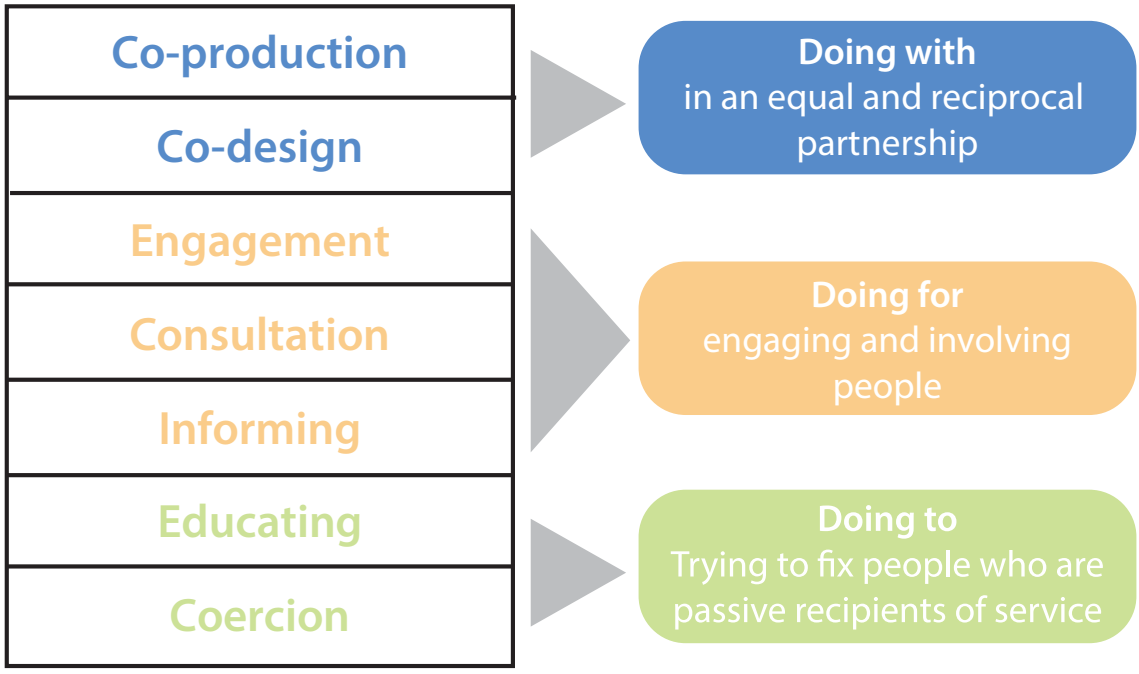
The Importance of Lived Experience

Individual voices and stories provide valuable insights around what the system looks like from within.

In addition to the three key objectives this strategy will aim to reflect the voice of those who have lived experiences of homelessness in all aspects of its design and delivery.

People with lived experience already have contributed to achieving the vision set out within the previous 'Ending Homelessness Together' Strategy 2017-2022. However, we want to build on this moving forward by providing a range of opportunities for people with lived experience to get involved in decisions that affect them with an aim to ensure that the services we deliver are both relevant and of value. Further consultation with Central Homelessness Forum will be undertaken separately on the development of a Homelessness Lived Experience programme aligned to the strategy.

Ladder of Participation - We will move towards Co-Production[6]



This strategy outlines how we will listen and respond to people with lived experiences of homelessness and recognises that their views are integral to the development of priorities, and to make sure that the actions we take are leading to real change and improvement for the people these services are for. Crucial to this is our commitment to ultimately have those with the lived experience involved in the co-production and co-design of strategy actions.

With consideration to the above diagram from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, along with key ideas and principles from Homeless Link[7] we will strive to work towards 'Doing with' rather than 'Doing to'. In recognition of feedback received from the sector during the consultation process it is however accepted that for some hard to reach people we will need to start at 'Doing to' as the first part of our engagement process, we will work with our partners across the sector in order to build the capacity to achieve our vision of *'Ending Homelessness Together'.*

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[6] *Coproduction and service user involvement, National Council for Voluntary Organisations (2019)* https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/organisation/collaboration/coproduction-and-service-user-involvement

[7] *Co-Production – working together to improve homelessness services - Overview of key ideas and principles, Homeless Link (2017)* https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Introducing%20Co-Production%20March%202018_0.pdf

[8] *Homelessness Service User Journeys, Housing Executive (2021)* https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Research/Homelessness/Homelessness-Service-User-Journeys.aspx?ext=.

Introduction

Homelessness Service User Journeys

In 2021 the Housing Executive published Homelessness Service User Journeys[8], an independent research project carried out by Fiona Boyle of Fiona Boyle Associates. In seeking to ensure that lived experience is at the core of this strategy there are a number of conclusions which shape the aim, objectives and actions in the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27. The conclusions include:

- Complexity of the risk factors, triggers and causes of homelessness – These factors were linked to recurring or repeat presentation within a service user's homeless journey. As these risk factors, triggers and causes can often involve non-accommodation based issues the vision of Ending Homelessness Together is emphasised;

- The homeless journey itself – The initial presentation is often linked to 'their additional needs in terms of the triggers, and the barriers/obstacles to concluding the homeless journey and becoming permanently rehoused and settled' and less about housing and accommodation requirements;

- Importance of intervention at the start of the homeless journey – The user journeys highlighted the need for more time to be spent with the person when they first presented, at the outset of their homeless journey, so that their issues and needs could be better identified and recorded;

- The need for more support – 'stakeholder feedback highlighted a pressing need for more support to prevent tenancy breakdown in the first place (thus avoiding unnecessary homeless journeys) and to ensure placements and new tenancies are sustained (thus preventing perpetuation or repeat homeless journeys).

- Multiple moves - bouncing around the homeless system and sector – the need for collaboration was highlighted with the report noting 'the journey within the homeless system and sector was erratic and chaotic, with the service user jumping in and out of different settings, including temporary accommodation hostels, harm reduction services, mental health units, prison and rough sleeping.';

- The lack of suitable temporary accommodation and lack of affordable, accessible permanent accommodation – Feedback noted that 'irrespective of a person's homeless journey and the full range of interventions at critical points, the lack of suitable temporary accommodation and a lack of affordable, accessible permanent accommodation were dual stumbling blocks to firstly moving out of the state of homelessness and secondly, remaining housed';

The individual stories that shaped this research have been crucial in shaping the vision, aims and objectives of the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27. The Housing Executive is committed to building on this to provide consistent integration of the views of service users in how we deliver our homelessness services over the next five years.

Service users were content to share their story, talking about how it had affected them, in particular as they noted - if it could help even one other person.

Introduction

Projected Needs

This strategy will monitor projected needs on an annual basis with these assumptions included as part of the publication of our annual progress reports which will be available on the Housing Executive website. The projected needs for Year 1, some of which are shared with the ***'Homeless to Home'***, Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation, are noted below.

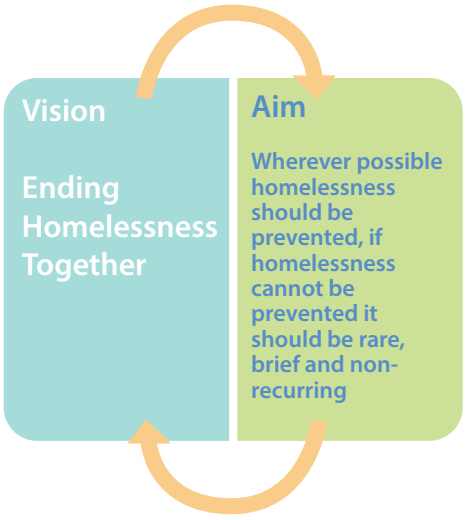
Trends from the first quarter of 2021/22 indicate a return to pre-pandemic levels of homelessness demand in terms of presenters following a decrease in 2020/21. Presentation reasons are also returning to pre-pandemic trends e.g. Accommodation Not Reasonable during quarter one of 2021/22 has again emerged as the reason for homelessness with the highest number of presentations. This compares to the pandemic period in 2020/21 where family/sharing breakdown was the reason with the highest number of presentations.
Whilst the number of presentations due to loss of private rental decreased during the pandemic, numbers are currently returning to pre-pandemic levels and it is assumed that this will further increase to above pre-COVID levels when mitigation measures are ended i.e. when the protection in respect of NTQ for private rented tenants is ended.
It is assumed that single households will continue to be the most significant and growing customer group, as this group is likely to be impacted by financial hardship, rising unemployment and growing social problems, including worsening mental health issues, addictions and offending behaviours, to a greater degree than other household groups.
Young people who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, will continue to need accommodation and support. New models are required as, based on levels of repeat placements, the current range of solutions are inadequate.
Homelessness data from the first quarter of 2021/22 has indicated a return similar to pre-pandemic levels of presentations from pensioner households. The COVID-19 Reset Plan noted that 'older people were identified as a vulnerable group in respect of COVID-19 and so the risk / perception of risk of moving is greater within this group.' Risk/perception of risk has decreased due to a number of factors including vaccine uptake leading to a return to pre-pandemic levels of demand from this household group.
Trends from the first quarter of 2021/22 indicate a return to pre-pandemic levels of homelessness demand from families. The COVID-19 Reset Plan previously noted 'It is also anticipated that there will be an increase in families presenting for a period when mitigation measures are ended i.e. when the protection in respect of NTQ for private rented tenants is ended and when the furlough scheme ends. These may then return to pre-lockdown levels after a period of time.'
Whilst the number of rough sleepers was initially reduced due to the 'Everyone In' approach and the efforts of assertive outreach services (in Belfast) and Housing Executive staff to get those individuals into temporary accommodation, recently there has been an increase in street activity and a return by some to rough sleeping. It is assumed that continued efforts will be needed to engage with these individuals and we will also seek to work with the Department for Communities and Department of Health to clarify the protection and support to be afforded to those without recourse to public funds.
Levels of support needs will continue to grow, particularly related to mental health and addictions, issues which have worsened during the pandemic due to an inability to access or deliver sufficient support services. Multi-disciplinary support services will be required to effectively meet these needs.
It is acknowledged that there may be increased demand arising from households arriving to Northern Ireland e.g. individuals seeking asylum.

Introduction

Developing the Strategy: A Collaboration

The Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 has been developed in partnership with key stakeholders who sit on the Homelessness Strategy 2017-22 implementation structures. This extensive pre-consultation was followed by a public consultation which outlined the Housing Executive's proposed approach.

Our engagement with the sector, and subsequent consultation, emphasised the view that the vision of 'Ending Homelessness Together' remains relevant. The Homelessness Strategy 2017-22 included a vision of 'Ending Homelessness Together in recognition of 'the need for a multi-agency approach to tackling homelessness'. This multi-agency approach will remain central to our approach in addressing homelessness over the next five years.

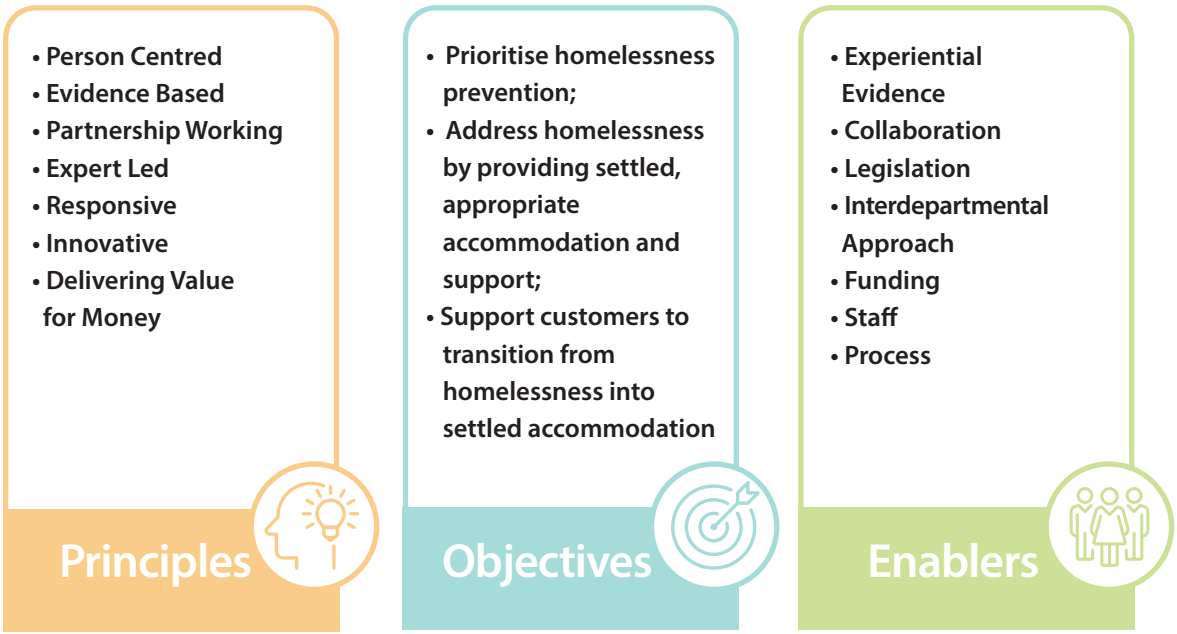


The vision of 'Ending Homelessness Together' and aim of 'Wherever possible homelessness should be prevented, if homelessness cannot be prevented it should be rare, brief and non-recurring' is supported by three key objectives, each with priority actions that will be reviewed on an annual basis.

The Housing Executive's COVID-19 Reset Plan which was published in November 2020 noted that there would be a need to reflect the impacts of the pandemic in our longer term plans and this has been a recurring theme throughout our engagement on the development of this strategy. As a result, these objectives and associated actions reflect challenges that are direct impacts of the pandemic and therefore seek to build on the work of the COVID-19 Reset Plan.

The following chapters outline the key drivers of the strategy as noted below:

- Principles that will guide the delivery of this strategy;
- The importance of collaboration across a range of organisations which is crucial to our vision of Ending Homelessness Together;
- An overview of our objectives and high level actions that will guide annual implementation plans and;
- Enablers which will be crucial to the successful delivery of this strategy.



Introduction

Equality Screening and consideration of Rural Needs

The Housing Executive has considered the following in the preparation of the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27

a) Equality and Human Rights – to assess the potential impacts on Section 75 groups, human rights implications and opportunities for promoting good relations; and

b) Rural Needs Impact Assessment– to assess the potential impacts of this strategy on people living in rural areas.

All partners will work together to identify appropriate measures which will ensure and demonstrate an equitable service is provided to all clients irrespective of their difference or circumstance and we will continue to monitor our performance per our obligations under the Equality Legislation.

We will also monitor our performance in keeping with the Housing Executive's Rural Strategy and the requirements under the legislation. Appropriate place-based responses will be developed, which are informed by local needs, context and capacity. Enhancing the role and capacity for regional and local area decision making is important to help make sure the right responses are delivered in the right places, 'Think Local'. Our Local Area Groups will play a key role in ensuring this strategy is meeting the needs of our population, whether they live in urban or rural areas.

The range of difference in households presenting as homeless can be significant - young people, elderly people, simple and complex cases, disability, linguistic and cultural barriers, religious and sectarian considerations, sexual orientation, gender including transgender etc. It is therefore essential that services are tailored to meet the needs of individuals to appropriately take into account those differences. Equality issues are central to this strategy and will also be central to monitoring the delivery of the strategy.

In developing this strategy the Housing Executive has considered the views of organisations representing a range of client groups. While this strategy will adopt a person centred approach in meeting our equality obligations we will also engage with stakeholders across the homelessness sector to ensure that our annual action plans are reflective of any emerging equality issues. This approach was evidenced in the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy 2017-22, and COVID-19 Reset Plan with both being fluid in reacting to emerging needs.

Strategic Alignment

The development of the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 has been guided by key partners and a recurring theme from feedback is for the need for this strategy to align with a number of other priority strategy areas that have the potential to significantly impact on the lives of those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. This strategy has been developed in the context of the Housing Executive's overall vision that 'Everyone is able to live in an affordable and decent home, appropriate to their needs, in a safe and attractive place'. We will also ensure that we support the Housing Executive's core values which state that 'We are committed to making a difference through fairness, passion and expertise'.

The diagram below outlines key documents that will support the Housing Executive in delivering the vision of this strategy, *'Ending Homelessness Together'*. These strategies and action plans reflect the importance of accommodation based issues such as housing supply and non-accommodation based issues such as the support that is often required to maintain a tenancy.

Introduction

- **Supporting People Strategy**[9]– As homelessness is one of four thematic groups supported by the Supporting People programme and therefore responsible for funding a significant amount of homelessness services there is a need to ensure that the priorities of this strategy align with the Supporting People Three Year Strategic Plan and COVID-19 Recovery Plan. We will work with Supporting People to ensure alignment across both strategies and this is a commitment that is also made in the Supporting People Strategy.

- **Interdepartmental Homelessness Action Plan** – The delivery of an Interdepartmental Homelessness Action Plan which aimed to address non-accommodation based issues relevant to homelessness was one of the key successes of the Homelessness Strategy 2017-22. The Housing Executive welcomes the support provided by the Department for Communities and other government departments in the delivery of the previous strategy and we are committed to continuing this collaborative approach in order to address those issues which require the support of other government agencies.

- **Housing Supply Strategy** – Our engagement with the sector in developing this strategy noted housing supply as an area that will shape the success of our approach to addressing homelessness in Northern Ireland. The Housing Supply Strategy has recently been subject to a call for evidence and the Housing Executive will work with the Department for Communities as and when the Housing Supply Strategy is developed.

- **Customer Support and Tenancy Sustainment Strategy**[10] – Alignment with this strategy is key, particularly with regards to delivering our third Objective of *'Support customers to transition from homelessness into settled accommodation'.* There have been numerous examples of alignment between the Homelessness Strategy and Customer Support and Tenancy Sustainment Strategy since its publication in 2019 and the Housing Executive will build on this over the course of the next Homelessness Strategy and any future versions of the Customer Support and Tenancy Sustainment Strategy.

- **The Way Home COVID-19 Reset Plan** – The COVID-19 Reset Plan contains a commitment to Post COVID-19 planning and transition to the 'new normal'. The Housing Executive will ensure that the action plans associated with the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 are reflective of any trends as we emerge from the pandemic. Going forward, the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 will also include actions to assist those who are experiencing chronic homelessness and build on the work of the Chronic Homelessness Action Plan . The inclusion of these actions in the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 is in response to feedback which noted a benefit in streamlining the number of action plans/strategies linked to homelessness.

- **Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation** – The publication of a Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation alongside the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 reflects the Housing Executive's intention for both action plans to complement and support each other. This is evidenced by a number of shared actions and we will ensure that our approach to the development of future annual action plans also reflects the shared priorities across both documents.

It should be noted that where possible documents have been referenced as a footnote. A number of the documents noted above remain in development and a link will be added as soon as they have been published.

[9] *Supporting People Three Year Draft Strategic Plan and COVID-19 Recovery Plan 2022-25, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2022)* https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Consultation-Draft-Supporting-People-Strategy/Supporting-People-Draft-Strategic-Plan-COVID-19-Re.aspx

[10] *Customer Support and Tenancy Sustainment Strategy, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2019)* https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Chronic-homelessness/Chronic-Homelessness-Action-Plan.aspx

Introduction

Evaluation of the Homelessness Strategy 2017-2022

The Housing Executive has commissioned an independent research project which will evaluate the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy 2017-22. While this project will review the delivery of the previous strategy its interim findings have played a key role in the development of the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27.

The objectives of the evaluation are:

- To explore the effectiveness of the Homelessness Strategy 2017-22 and the extent to which the outcomes, objectives and actions in the Homelessness Strategy have been delivered;
- To explore the effectiveness of inter-agency working in the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy 2017-22 and any aspects of this which could be improved in the development and delivery of the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27;
- To explore any key legislative changes in neighbouring jurisdictions which have had a positive impact on the ability of statutory organisations to deliver homelessness strategies;
- To identify key themes/objectives/actions to be considered in the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27;
- To identify any additional challenges/lessons arising from the ongoing pandemic response that should be considered as key themes/objectives/actions in the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27.

An Interim Report on the Evaluation of the Homelessness Strategy 2017-22 has been provided to the Housing Executive outlining preliminary findings on the impact of the Homelessness Strategy 2017-22. The findings are based on engagement with a range of stakeholders from across the homelessness sector who are currently involved in delivering homelessness services. Further engagement is continuing and a full report will be published on the Housing Executive website in due course. While the interim report has helped guide the development of the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 the final report will play a key role in assisting the Housing Executive to identify actions over the course of this strategy.

Respondents were asked about the Objectives of the Strategy and whether they had been achieved.

The interim report concludes 'Respondents generally suggested that most had been achieved or progress made on objective 3 (chronic homelessness) followed by objective 1 (homelessness prevention) with less movement on objective 2 (accommodation and support services); albeit that all respondents caveated their response in relation to objective 2 noting the various resource, funding and structural factors which negatively impacted the opportunities, and possibility, of full delivery of this objective.'

Objective One: To prioritise homelessness prevention

The balance of responses acknowledged 'great strides' in prioritising prevention over the last five years, however a significant amount of work still needed to happen to embed the prevention agenda. A key advance was the introduction of the Homelessness Prevention Fund with respondents highlighting successful projects within their locality which have made a positive impact. However, the tight timescales, short turnaround and short term nature of the funding were cited as difficulties as projects could not be embedded long term. There was also a call for a more collaborative approach to prevention with more 'upstream' interventions such as health and education programmes. It was also felt that defining prevention work was difficult and therefore hard to measure success. These comments have also been reflected in the consultation responses through the development of the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27.

Objective Two: To find sustainable accommodation and appropriate support solutions for homeless households

The interim report states 'consensus of responses in terms of achievement of Objective 2 in the current 5-year strategy was that progress had been made in terms of the provision of temporary accommodation and appropriate support, but that significant elements still remained to be done under this heading. There was also an overarching thread that this objective was difficult for the Housing Executive to achieve on its own, and that COVID-19 had both negatively impacted progress on the one hand, and on the other hand had created the environment for a faster response in some actions'. There was an acknowledgement of progress in the greater use of support services, the Common Assessment Framework, better understanding of client need, the roll-out of shared tenancies for young people, dispersed housing and support solutions with wraparound support and an increased provision and use

[11] *Chronic Homelessness Action Plan, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2020)* https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Chronic-homelessness/Chronic-Homelessness-Action-Plan.aspx

of Queen's Quarter. However, increasing demand for temporary accommodation, a lack of housing supply to facilitate move on from temporary accommodation, the finite nature of the Supporting People budget and the increasing complexity of need among clients were all cited as reasons why respondents felt that this objective had not been fully achieved. Again, these comments have been reflected in the consultation responses.

Objective 3 – To further understand and address the complexities of chronic homelessness across Northern Ireland

Respondents felt this objective had been partially achieved during the 5-year strategy, in particular in terms of further understanding of chronic homelessness. However, a general viewpoint was that some work had been done to start to address the complexities of chronic homelessness, but much more was needed. Respondents were positive about the broadening of terminology from rough sleeping to chronic homelessness, the fact that Northern Ireland was the first part of the UK to have a Chronic Homelessness Action Plan and various pieces of research undertaken during the 5-year period to better understand and define chronic homelessness. However, respondents also felt that the Chronic Homelessness Action Plan had been stalled somewhat due to the demands raised by COVID-19 and while they welcomed the fact that chronic homelessness was 'part of the language', delays had meant that the required evidence base needed to identify service gaps had not been built up.

Objective 4 – To ensure the right mechanisms are in place to oversee and deliver this strategy

The interim report concludes 'the majority of respondents largely felt this objective had been achieved at a functional level'. It was felt that the structures in place were much better than under the previous Strategy. Most respondents felt that the Local Area Groups worked well but there were variations in membership and approach with suggestions that a more standardised approach should be taken. There was acknowledgment of the impact of COVID-19 on the Service User Forum and its ability to meet, meaning that the service user voice was lost to some extent.

Objective 5 - To measure and monitor existing and emerging need to inform the development of appropriate services

The interim report concludes "In general respondents felt the production of Annual Plans and Annual Reports was good and at the right level to measure, monitor and feed into planning services".

Overall Impact: Ending Homelessness Together

There was a clear consensus of opinion in relation to the impact of the delivery of the current Homelessness Strategy. Firstly, it was acknowledged that the Vision of *Ending Homelessness* had not been fully achieved in totality, but equally there was recognition that this had been done on a case-by-case basis. It was acknowledged that there are a myriad of reasons why it had not been possible to end homelessness, particularly if that responsibility just lay with the Housing Executive. These reasons included the lack of move-on and available housing stock versus demand, the complexity of the issue both at an individual and community level and a range of other factors impacting the 'homeless demand' and curtailing or preventing the 'homeless response.'

Wider Context

In the wider context COVID-19 was cited as having a major impact – delaying some aspects while fast tracking new approaches.

Principles

Principles

Overarching principles of the strategy

At the core of this strategy there are a number of guiding principles that will underpin our approach to both the development and delivery of homelessness services throughout its lifespan. These principles, which are outlined below, have been co-produced with the wider homelessness sector and will be incorporated across each theme to achieve our vision of *'Ending Homelessness Together'*.

These principles are underpinned by the Housing Executive's core values which are 'We are committed to making a difference through fairness, passion and expertise.'

1. **Person Centred** – treating each person as an individual and seeking to put in place the right response tailored to individual needs; seeking to adapt our services when needs change, new needs emerge or where there are gaps in service provision.
2. **Evidence Based** - improving our information base in order that decisions can be better informed by facts and data by using detailed data analysis to ensure decision making and priority setting is informed by experiential evidence and relevant contextual evidence.
3. **Partnership Working** – based on partnership working ensuring effective structures are in place to design and deliver appropriate and flexible responses collectively.
4. **Expert Led** – being led by those who have lived experience of homelessness, by professionals working in the sector, including those working at the 'coal face' of service delivery.
5. **Responsive** - ensuring that we are able to act quickly and positively to changes in need, supply and throughput in homeless services.
6. **Innovative** - encouraging and supporting innovation; we will embrace the opportunity to learn from others and adopt a "test and learn" approach in order to foster new ideas and approaches.
7. **Delivering Value for Money** – ensuring services are economical, efficient and effective with the aim of generating greater value from public funds. We will develop and implement arrangements to assess value for money in the delivery of the Strategy.

Principles

Understanding our different roles

The objectives in this strategy will be delivered in the context of our vision of *'Ending Homelessness Together'* which recognises that a multi-agency approach is required to support those households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. By defining and understanding our respective roles, we can achieve greater clarity about how we will work together to reach our vision and where we can affect the greatest positive change. The diagram above outlines the various roles involved in the delivery of this strategy with the person with lived experience to be at the core of everything this strategy seeks to deliver.

By collaborating and co-designing with people with lived experience, the community sector, voluntary sector, business and government, we will design and deliver appropriate and flexible housing options and services that respond to the diverse needs of our community.

Who is responsible for ending homelessness together?

Our engagement in developing this strategy noted a need to identify the roles of those we wish to involve in the implementation of this strategy. Key stakeholders include:

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive

As the organisation with the statutory responsibility for responding to homelessness in Northern Ireland the Housing Executive will lead on establishing links with all of those other organisations crucial to supporting the person with lived experience. Following the introduction of our Housing Solutions and Support approach several years ago our staff provide person centred services which are tailored to meet the needs of individual customers with a view to support them to achieve sustainable housing solutions. Our staff will engage with our customers to prevent homelessness where possible, pulling upon the necessary support from other agencies to assist clients.

Voluntary Sector

The voluntary sector has played a key role in both the development of this strategy and the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy 2017-22. This is evidenced in a range of accommodation, advice, and floating support services, being represented at all levels within the strategy implementation structures. In cases where Housing Executive staff provide referrals to support agencies it is the voluntary sector who play a crucial role in providing support to those households most in need.

Community Sector

This strategy will seek to build on relationships with the community sector and recognises that in some cases, initial engagement for some households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness may not be with organisations such as the Housing Executive or voluntary sector organisations within the homelessness sector. In recognising this the Housing Executive will seek to engage with the community sector in the delivery of this strategy, in order to ensure that, where needed, organisations such as the Housing Executive or other statutory/voluntary organisations are engaged with at the earliest possible opportunity.

Principles

Statutory Bodies

Our work in developing this strategy has highlighted the importance of multi-agency working as being crucial to ensuring that households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness can transition between services without a detrimental impact to their circumstances.

The Northern Ireland Executive

The Interdepartmental Homelessness Action Plan has provided significant developments in delivering actions on non-accommodation based issues over the course of the Homelessness Strategy 2017-22. The Housing Executive will seek to build on this work with the continued support of the Department for Communities who chair the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group which contains representation from all of the departments within the Northern Ireland Executive.

Business

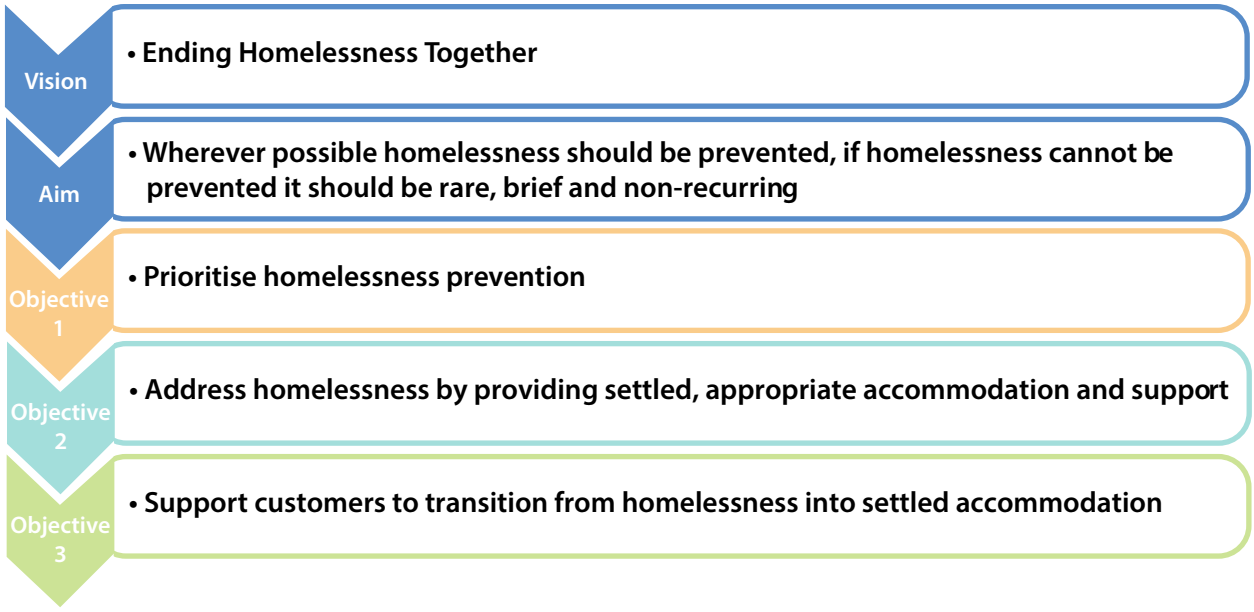
Stakeholder engagement has noted a need for this strategy to engage with the business sector in assisting those households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. This engagement can range from raising awareness of homelessness so the business sector can also help vulnerable households avail of support at the earliest possible opportunity or via more innovative measures.

General Public

Our work with partners in developing this strategy has emphasised a view that homelessness is everybody's business. In order to ensure the person with lived experience is at the core of this strategy, our actions will seek to ensure the general public is aware of what homelessness is and the support that is available when homelessness is identified.

Objectives and Enablers

Objectives and Enablers



Ending Homelessness Together 2022-2027 is a 5 Year Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland that sets out a vision of Ending Homelessness Together. We will achieve this by doing more of what is working well, recognising and building on our strengths and finding new ways to improve our collective response to homelessness.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how broader economic, health and social factors can impact on the homelessness system in an unpredictable way. Therefore it is essential that the actions set out within this strategy are subject to continual review based on ongoing analysis of data and trends. This strategy sets out the ambitions we are aiming to achieve over the next five years with these actions to be guided by an annual implementation plan which we will develop with our key partners.

The Housing Executive will produce an action plan on an annual basis rather than providing a 5 year action plan upon publication of the strategy. The annual action plans will be developed with consideration to the views of our partners who sit on groups such as the Local Area Groups and Central Homelessness Forum and evidences our intention to be guided by a principle of responsiveness. The annual action plans will be published as part of our Annual Progress Reports. This strategy contains an overview of our baseline position and projected assumptions and it is intended that the annual progress report will evaluate the baseline position on an annual basis and this will ensure that any projected assumptions are reflective of the most up to date data and trends.

This strategy has been developed around three key objectives:

- Prioritise homelessness prevention;
- Address homelessness by providing settled, appropriate accommodation and support;
- Support customers to transition from homelessness into settled accommodation.

Objectives and Enablers

Objective 1 – Prioritise Homelessness Prevention

Prioritising prevention is crucial to the Housing Executive's plans to end homelessness.

Our current response to homelessness in Northern Ireland is still focussed largely on responding to people who find themselves in crisis situations. Our ambition is to prioritise homelessness prevention through the provision of the right support at the right time with an aim to prevent homelessness from happening in the first place.

In the Homelessness Strategy 2017-2022 homelessness prevention was recognised as a key objective in delivering the overall aim of *'Ending homelessness Together'*. In delivering this objective the Housing Executive introduced its Housing Solutions and Support approach to ensure frontline staff had a focus on homelessness prevention in the delivery of our statutory homelessness services. We also introduced a dedicated prevention fund in order to provide funding to other agencies working with those most at risk of homelessness or undertaking activities which contributed to our overall homeless prevention objective.

Homeless Prevention in Practice

The Housing Executive introduced the "Homelessness Prevention Fund" in 2019/20. Overall the Fund has been very successful in terms of the diverse range of services provided, the numbers of beneficiaries of the services and the outcomes achieved.

This funding has led to a range of prevention initiatives and has included:

a) **Intervention Models** - either by mediation and/or counselling or through direct financial support.
b) **Training Models** - to empower and equip sector workers who have been identified as working with those at risk of homelessness.
c) **Personal Development Models** – to provide a structured training programme to empower and equip participants who have been identified as at risk of homelessness.
d) **Awareness Models** - which seek to raise awareness of the complex nature of homelessness and available support services among the general public, sector workers or individuals who have been identified as at risk of homelessness.
e) **Social Enterprise Model** – to improve communities, tackle social issues and provide access to employment and skills training for individuals identified as at risk of homelessness.

Case Study 1 – Financial Inclusion Managers, Housing Executive

Financial Inclusion Managers were introduced by the Housing Executive to help tenants with any issues they may have regarding money worries, debt advice and/or benefits. The service forms a key strand of our tenancy sustainment efforts and will be extended to those applying as homeless with the appointment of a number of new staff in Autumn 2021. Financial inclusion helps people become financially confident and competent. It can also help people to manage their finances in the future. Managing money better can help our customers to:

- Prioritise rent payments;
- Reduce money worries;
- Avoid fuel poverty and fuel debt;
- Control and reduce arrears and;
- Sustain their tenancy.

Financial Inclusion Managers provide an impartial money advice service to customers to help maximise their income and sustain their tenancy through:

- Completing benefits checks and 'better off' calculations to ensure customers are receiving all the benefits they are entitled to;
- Providing assistance to resolve benefits related problems;
- Helping to create a budget and;
- Providing advice to help reduce debts and assist customers to make the most of their household income.

Case study:

A single woman with 4 children approached the Housing Executive for help as she was in financial difficulty and struggling to pay the shortfall in her rent to her private landlord. She was in arrears with her rent and at risk of eviction. Although she was in receipt of Universal Credit, she was subject to the Benefit Cap and the Housing Costs element did not cover her full rental liability. The Financial Inclusion Manager completed a benefits check with her and identified that the amount of Welfare Supplementary Payments she was receiving due to being affected by the Benefit Cap had been calculated incorrectly. The Financial Inclusion Manager liaised with Universal Credit and the Supplementary Payments Team to have her entitlement corrected, resulting in an additional amount of £222 per month being awarded and an underpayment of almost £5,000 for the period that the entitlement had been incorrect. This allowed the customer to clear her rent arrears and sustain her private tenancy.

Objectives and Enablers

Case Study 2 – Bolster Community, a project supported by the Homelessness Prevention Fund

During 2021/22 the Homelessness Prevention Fund is supporting 42 projects across Northern Ireland. This supported Bolster Community to deliver Counselling and Mediation services where the Community Navigator would triage referrals, provide 1-1 advice, mediation and navigation services in order to maximise proactive interventions.

The project was overseen by a multi–disciplinary community navigation hub which enabled local stakeholders and agencies to take a coordinated approach to supporting vulnerable young people, rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness. Bolster Community has worked closely with the local Housing Executive office to create an effective referral pathway and Bolster continues to provide a multi – agency partnership.

Evidence of the effectiveness of upstream homelessness prevention can be shown with the example of two families where relationships between teens (16/17yr olds) was fractured and parents had indicated they intended to ask the young people to leave their respective homes. Further to the referral to the family support hub, Community navigators engaged with both families in order to mediate and provide support with the objective of resolving the issues to allow the young people to stay in the family home. One parent went on to engage with a recommended Parenting programme provided by Bolster community. She stated the relationship between her and her son is now better than it has ever been. In both instances the risk of eviction dissipated and families continue to be open for support and guidance.

Key messages from the homeless sector…

- We need to focus on addressing service gaps which have been highlighted during COVID-19.
- While prevention funding is welcomed it can be very difficult to strategically set up services when the opportunities for additional funding is provided at short notice with very specific parameters.
- Upstream prevention should be a priority, we need to educate people but particularly young people about homelessness with an aim to equip them with life skills to prevent homelessness.
- There needs to be better support for people who have recently transitioned from homelessness to help them sustain their tenancy.

While progress has been made it is vital that we make even greater efforts to prevent homelessness. Feedback from the broader homelessness sector also highlights the need to make further progress in terms of Homelessness Prevention - to take a more proactive approach to homelessness prevention including through funding, addressing service gaps, particularly for at risk groups, preventing new cases of homelessness as a result of the impacts of COVID-19, and preventing repeat homelessness.

Objectives and Enablers

It is clear our interventions should be at the earliest opportunity and be proactive. If our action is successful our activities will become more focussed on housing management and support as we will have prevented the majority of households reaching the point of requiring statutory homelessness services.

The Strategic Review of Temporary Accommodation has noted that often the current homelessness response is crisis led, with a need ultimately to provide emergency accommodation. A systemic and cultural shift towards homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing is required. The Chronic Homelessness Action Plan noted rapid rehousing as making sure the needs of an individual are assessed and they reach a settled housing option as quickly as possible rather than staying too long in temporary accommodation. Evidence is clear that longer term housing and health outcomes are improved by minimising time in temporary accommodation and stopping people from getting into the terrible position of being homeless in the first place.

Our Reset Plan, which outlines our priorities in terms of dealing with the continued impacts of COVID-19 for homelessness services, also identifies homelessness prevention as a key theme. The full extent of the longer term impacts of the pandemic remain to be seen however the Housing Executive expects that the impacts will be significant and long lasting.

During the pandemic it has been further highlighted that effective homelessness prevention is critical and is not primarily a housing issue.

Our ambition in terms of COVID-19 recovery is to prioritise effective prevention to create as much capacity as we can in homeless services and make a long term commitment to the extension of Housing Led and Housing First provision. It should be noted that 'Housing Led' applies to lower intensity services (in terms of support intensity, range or duration) which may also be targeted at lower needs groups of homeless people who are not chronically homeless. In contrast 'Housing First' is used to describe services that are not following the Pathways model exactly but which reflect or are influenced by the Pathways core philosophy or paradigm.[12]

It is recognised that it will take time to achieve our ambitions and in the short term our focus will continue to be on supporting those currently in crisis but it should be in tandem with shifting the focus to true prevention and rapid rehousing so that in the longer term homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurrent.

The Housing Executive is seeking to implement a holistic approach to homelessness prevention. We recognise that much good practice already exists and it will be important to build on this to ensure prevention is embedded in the work we do to end homelessness in Northern Ireland.

Actions identified in each year's Annual Plan throughout the lifespan of the strategy will focus on the following:[13]

- **Primary Prevention Activity** – Universal policies and interventions for the population as a whole which will not only be related to housing. This will also include raising awareness to assist in the public's understanding of the complex nature of homelessness to ensure households approaching crisis can access support.

- **Secondary Prevention Activity** - Identifying and targeting particular groups which are at the highest risk of homelessness to undertake pre-crisis intervention. This can take the form of advice and mediation services; proactive interventions and targeted services at known risk points.

- **Tertiary Prevention Activity** - Tackling recurring homelessness, including ensuring tenancy sustainment is central to preventing repeat homelessness.

What is our aim?

Our aim is to create a preventative environment where homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurrent. In focussing on homeless prevention we will seek to ensure that early preventions are the interventions of choice, services are person centred and that homeless prevention is not seen only as a housing issue.

[12] *'Housing First' or 'Housing Led'? The current picture of Housing First in England, Homeless Link (2020)* https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Housing%20First%20or%20Housing%20Led.pdf
[13] *Effective Homelessness Prevention?*
Explaining Reductions in Homelessness in Germany and England, Volker Busch-Geertsema & Suzanne Fitzpatrick (2008) https://www.feantsa.org/download/article-3184121735584584244 6.pdf

Objectives and Enablers

What will success look like[14]?

What will we do to deliver our aim?

In order to deliver our homelessness prevention aim in the lifespan of the Strategy, the Housing Executive will be seeking to deliver the following:

Primary Prevention

- Ensure there is a cross departmental focus on homelessness prevention in the Interdepartmental Homelessness Action Plan to address homelessness;
- Raise homelessness awareness through programmes which are co-designed with those who have lived experience of homelessness;
- Improve housing options[15] to help people stay in their homes or find suitable accommodation before any homeless crisis.

Secondary Prevention

- Extend the Prevention Fund in terms of seeking to mainstream key projects which best deliver homelessness prevention outcomes;
- Develop new preventative pathways for the groups at highest risk of rough sleeping and homelessness;
- Develop preventative services to respond to the most common reasons people present as homeless before they lead to homelessness;
- Target those groups most impacted by COVID-19 or address issues exacerbated by the pandemic which increase the risk of homelessness.

Tertiary Prevention

- Increase the focus on sustaining tenancies ensuring that support is available for those who need it both in the social and private rented sectors;

- Implement measures to ensure people transition from homelessness as quickly as possible with the right support. It should be noted that prevention of repeat homelessness is a key driver behind this action.

What is needed to enable the delivery of our aim?

The Housing Executive has identified a number of key enablers which if in place will improve the likelihood of delivering our strategic aim in terms of homelessness prevention. Work to deliver these enablers will also be reflected in the annual action plans. More information on the enablers for the strategy as a whole is included separately in this document but for this objective will likely include:

Legislation

The homelessness legislation in Northern Ireland has remained largely unchanged since its introduction in 1988. The Housing Executive will seek to work with the Department for Communities and other key stakeholders to initiate a review of the primary legislation to consider changes, mirroring those made in other jurisdictions of the UK, in order to place a statutory focus on the prevention of homelessness and provide more person centred statutory homelessness services.

Interdepartmental Approach

Homelessness prevention requires a holistic response across government departments as it is not simply a housing issue. The homelessness legislation should be seen as the safety net when all other preventative actions have failed.

Currently much of the focus of our homelessness activities are on crisis response but if we are to achieve our aim in terms of homelessness prevention, then any action taken has to significantly reduce the numbers of individuals and families falling into homelessness by investing more in primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. This will require an interdepartmental approach and the Housing Executive welcome the priority this has been given in the Department for Communities Interdepartmental Homelessness Action Plan.

[14] *It should be noted that the Housing Executive will seek to develop criteria/measures by which to assess success. Additionally, housing supply is considered a key primary prevention measure with this explored in more detail in Objective 3.*
[15] *Following consultation clarification was sought on 'improving housing options' – this may include services such as family mediation or landlord liaison which are designed to prevent the need to make a homelessness application.*

Objectives and Enablers

Resources

The activities identified in each year's Annual Plan to support the delivery of this strategy will require a significant investment in terms of funding and the commitment of resources across both statutory and third sector organisations. The mechanisms to commit funding and resources recurrently will also need to be explored in order to fully embed homelessness prevention in our approach to addressing homelessness.

Outcome Informed Planning

Critical to delivering the strategic aim in terms of homelessness prevention will be our ability to measure the success of any interventions adopted. To do this we will need to develop and analyse key outcomes data in order to guide and measure progress, assess social and economic impacts and revise our plans based on experiential evidence.

The starting point for measuring the success of our prevention activity was the agreement to a shared definition of homelessness prevention by the Central Homelessness Forum. This will provide the foundation for identifying key outcomes which can be measured throughout the lifespan of the strategy on a cross organisational basis. A definition was agreed, in principle, by the Central Homelessness Forum in February 2022 and the Housing Executive will work with a range of partner agencies to embed this definition over the course of 2022/23 with a view to full implementation in 2023/24.

Objective 2 – Address homelessness by providing settled, appropriate accommodation and support[16]

Of equal importance is the efforts to address homelessness, and how we collectively respond if and when it does happen. This includes the arrangements in place to understand and assess need, delivering responsive services and flexible support to meet these needs and achieving a fundamental shift to rapid rehousing. We must also be able to develop and adapt services to meet changing and emerging needs.

Our ambition is to ensure that we create the capacity to provide all our customers with solutions that meet both their accommodation and support needs at the point of need.

Understanding the circumstances which have led someone to become homeless and getting the right support and resources in place to respond to their needs quickly will be a crucial part of our actions to end homelessness.

Key to developing effective responses will be our ability to collect, analyse and interpret information on homeless trends in respect of demand and the supply of services so that we can plan and adapt services to meet new or changing needs. This will also improve the collection and sharing of information to facilitate support.

If we are to deliver against our ambition we will need to have a range of accommodation and support options to meet our customers' needs. For some, the most appropriate response may be rapid rehousing for others it will be accessing specialist, supported accommodation and appropriate health, social care and housing support. Solutions will also need to include models for particular groups of customers, for example, for young people with community hosting/support models or shared tenancies, specialist services for those who have experienced domestic abuse and Housing First for those with multiple needs who are chronically homeless. We will also seek to work with the Department for Communities and Department of Health to clarify the protection and support to be afforded to those without recourse to public funds.

In the life of this strategy we will also deliver 'Homeless to Home', our Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation which will seek to ensure that significantly fewer people spend time in temporary accommodation; and that those who do require temporary accommodation spend significantly less time in it before moving on to an appropriate settled home, with the support they need in place from day one.

[16] *It should be noted that following consultation 'settled' has replaced 'secure' to ensure consistency across Objectives 2 and 3.*

Objectives and Enablers

The Objective in Practice

In the years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic there was a general pattern of increasing demands around homelessness particularly around homelessness acceptances and temporary accommodation placements.

New homeless presentations remained largely steady over the 5 year period prior to March 2020 but the number of full duty applicants on the waiting list has increased year on year. The proportion of homeless acceptances was also increasing (67% in 2019/20) reflecting the increasingly complex support needs associated with those presenting as homeless; with mental health and addictions the most prevalent.
As an action of the Homelessness Strategy 2017-22, the Housing Executive initiated the Strategic Review of Temporary Accommodation in January 2019 with the goal of assessing how effectively the current temporary accommodation portfolio meets the needs of homeless customers and culminating with an action plan for temporary accommodation.

The findings of the Review are outlined in more detail in *'Homeless to Home'*, our Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation but broadly it found demand for temporary accommodation is outstripping supply and there is a mismatch in supply and demand both in terms of location and support needs. These issues have only been further compounded since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) for Supporting People was commissioned and completed in late 2020. On homelessness it notes the following key points:

- Currently housing support need is 28% higher than supply;
- Need is likely to increase; it is projected that in 3 years this gap will increase to a 30-42% shortfall;
- Needs are more complex and multi-faceted now and this is likely to continue in the future;
- Increased need in the future will place significant pressure on services which have already pressure points throughout the year; and
- There is a need to adapt services to meet these needs based on stakeholder feedback.

(Source: Supporting People: Strategic Needs Assessment report Nov 2020)

The Housing Executive introduced its Housing Solutions and Support approach in 2018 to ensure frontline staff had a focus on homelessness prevention and providing support to access settled housing. This approach operates in tandem with our statutory homeless duties.

We seek to engage with our housing customers to understand their individual needs and explore their housing/support options and choices by taking a case management approach to meeting their needs. Feedback from both our customers and key partners is that this approach has ensured our services are more person centred, collaborative and outcomes focussed. It is acknowledged however that this approach is impacted by the lack of housing options for many customers and gaps in the supply of support required by these customers. Prior to the outbreak of the pandemic the Housing Executive and a number of homeless service providers worked collaboratively to develop a Common Assessment Framework which provides a single assessment tool which the Housing Executive uses to share information relating to the background of, accommodation and/or support needs of individuals. The Common Assessment Framework has been facilitated by the development of a data sharing agreement between the Housing Executive and providers and allows two way sharing of information. This ultimately helps improve the assessment process in terms of removing duplication, minimising distress for vulnerable customers and assisting organisations in facilitating quicker decisions. Currently the Housing Executive and the vast majority of service providers are operating with the Common Assessment Framework.

Both before and during the pandemic, we have also worked collaboratively to develop new services. This has included work to develop a number of pilot projects to test various models of temporary accommodation including a bespoke facility of temporary accommodation, shared tenancies for young people, community hosting (paused due to pandemic), use of dispersed Housing Executive voids for temporary accommodation and a modular housing scheme (under development). As a response to the pandemic we also developed a range of dispersed support services in order to provide wraparound support in different accommodation settings. Many lessons have been learned during the pandemic as we worked collaboratively to keep our customers safe; these are detailed within the Reset Plan. Events of the past year have shone a spotlight on both the strengths and weaknesses of our current service provision. In delivering our new strategy we aim to build on the collaborative approach developed during the public health crisis, and ensure the speed and flexibility demonstrated in the emergency response can be built upon and maintained going forward.

Objectives and Enablers

Case Study 1 – Dispersed Support, Homecare

The main focus of the Dispersed Outreach approach is to provide support to individuals who have been placed in non-standard and non-supported accommodation. Dispersed support caseworkers provide varied levels and forms of support depending on the individual's needs and preferred levels of engagement. Significant numbers of referrals fall into the category of hard to reach individuals with complex and challenging needs, who have either disengaged or struggled to engage with more traditional support services due to the complexity of their need or their chaotic lifestyles. Most outreach providers have adapted their approach, taking measured steps to gain trust and rapport and ensuring that the support is provided at a pace preferred by the client.

An example of the effectiveness of this project, which was introduced as part of our COVID-19 response and is flexible to provide support in any accommodation, can be found in the example of a 59 year old male who at the point of referral was staying with a friend after release from prison. His friend was only expecting him to stay very short-term (e.g. a week) and as this went on longer, the relationship between them was breaking down. There was no support from family due to a previous conviction. There was alcohol and drug dependency as well as mental health issues.

The support provided included multi-agency working with Probation to ensure he was meeting all relevant regulations. The customer was a Full Duty Applicant with the Housing Executive and eligible for temporary accommodation but private rented accommodation was looked at as an alternative.

Dispersed Outreach workers linked in with the customer who was soon successful in securing a tenancy with a Housing Association.

Dispersed Outreach supported the service user to access services and to move into his new accommodation with the following support;

- Application to discretionary support which enabled him to purchase white goods/furniture/flooring/blinds etc.
- Signposted to local charities in the area such as SVDP for assistance with outstanding furniture and food vouchers.
- Engages with harm reduction plan re. alcohol and drug misuse which he is doing really well with as he remains abstinent.

The customer has started rebuilding relationships with family members and his friend which has improved his mental health. The customer continues to receive support to assist with money management to meet basic needs and settle into his new tenancy. Dispersed Outreach staff plan to cease support soon due to independence and with the customer having settled well into his new home.

Feedback from the broader homeless sector also highlights the importance of adopting a person centred approach to service delivery which ensures services are organised to understand and respond to customer needs, support is available and accessible and we identify the current demand and unmet need for homeless services so as to influence the future commissioning of services.

Key messages from the homeless sector…

- We need to focus on addressing service gaps which have been highlighted during COVID-19;
- We need flexibility of approach for rural/urban areas;
- There is a need to review current support models, support needs to be available 24/7;
- We cannot deliver on a person centred approach if we do not have the supply at a local level;
- More short-term supply solutions are needed to meet the immediate needs of those experiencing homelessness with wrap around support;
- We need to build on the good work seen throughout the COVID-19 response, the pandemic has proved how adaptable we can be.

Objectives and Enablers

In the Strategic Review of Temporary Accommodation, in addition to the gap between need and current supply, we identified that accommodation and support options should be flexible to support customers with a range of needs and also to respond to changes in an individual's support needs without the customer having to move accommodation. The Action Plan developed as a result of the Review aims to set out how we will transform our temporary accommodation responses over the next five years to achieve the following four ambitions:

The Housing Executive is seeking to address homelessness by fully understanding our customers' needs, and meeting both their accommodation and support needs at the point of need.

Actions identified in each year's Annual Plan throughout the lifespan of the Strategy will focus on the following:

- **Understanding the needs of our customers** – at an individual customer level, this will include common assessment tools, collaborative case management arrangements, effective and efficient systems for sharing information, matching customers to services as well as client tracking. At a strategic level it will also include our methodologies for analysing data and trend information in relation to customer needs in order to predict and plan for future demand for services.

More detail on how these ambitions will be delivered is outlined in the 'Homeless to Home', our Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation which was published for consultation in tandem with this strategy.

Our Reset Plan, which outlines how we will seek to both reflect the lessons learned from the COVID-19 response and minimise its longer term impacts, identifies priority areas which we, in conjunction with our sectoral partners, must consider as part of our review of strategic and operational plans to tackle homelessness. This includes considering what needs to change in our strategic plans to recognise the changing circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and how we make the most of current opportunities.

This will include working with the homeless sector to remodel/reconfigure services to meet changing or new service user needs as a result of the pandemic and considering the commissioning priorities for new services.

- **Improving Access & Inclusion** - this will include actions in relation to pathways in and out of homeless services, sustaining placements in support services and digital enablement.

- **Flexible and responsive accommodation & support services at the point of need** – actions will seek to develop a housing-led system which provides stable, appropriate accommodation and any necessary support as quickly as possible to people who are homeless or at risk of it. Services need to be organised in such a way that people experiencing

homelessness can expect an urgent and person-centred response. Actions will seek to ensure we have a range of accommodation and support options which are flexible to respond to changing needs. It will also include actions to resource and support front-line staff in their work with people experiencing homelessness.

- **Implementing *'Homeless to Home'*, Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation –** actions to transform our temporary accommodation responses ensuring that significantly fewer people spend time in temporary accommodation; and that those who do require temporary accommodation spend significantly less time in it before moving on to an appropriate settled home, with the support they need.

What is our aim?

Our aim is to address homelessness when it cannot be prevented by providing customers with solutions that meet both their accommodation and support needs at the point of need.

What will success look like?[17]

What will we do to deliver our aim?

Understanding our customers' needs

- Extend and further develop the use of collaborative arrangements in service delivery including common assessment tools, case management, systems for sharing information, matching customers to services, as well as client tracking.
- Ensure arrangements are in place through which we will listen and respond to people with lived experience of homelessness in the design and delivery of services.
- Develop arrangements to regularly collect, analyse and interpret information on homeless trends.
- Consider the most effective arrangements for the future commissioning and reconfiguration of services.

Improving Access & Inclusion

- Consider the mechanisms to introduce a central access point for all homeless services.
- Identify actions to ensure accommodation and support services are available and accessible. We want to ensure that everyone is able to access homeless services in a way that fits with their needs.
- Implement arrangements which help sustain placements in temporary accommodation and support services.
- Consider the mechanisms whereby we can reduce inequalities and disruptions to accessing statutory services, community resources or other support that might be needed for people who are homeless and/or living in temporary accommodation.

Flexible and responsive accommodation & support services at the point of need

- Work with our sectoral partners and commissioners towards closing the gap between need and supply for homeless services ensuring there is a continuum of accommodation and support options to meet need.
- Continue to implement the identified priorities in the Housing Executive's Reset Plan to minimise the long term impacts of COVID-19.
- Continue to identify and test new models for service delivery to address identified needs and deliver better outcomes for customers including more flexible housing support options in terms of support intensity, duration and location which are responsive to needs.
- Support frontline staff in their work with people experiencing homelessness - this will include those providing the Housing Executive's statutory services and those in the wider homeless sector.
- Consider mechanisms to reduce reliance on non-standard accommodation (hotels and bed and breakfast facilities) and introduce arrangements to ensure families with children are not placed in this type of temporary accommodation.

[17] *It should be noted that the Housing Executive will seek to develop criteria/measures by which to assess success.*

Objectives and Enablers

- Explore alternative routes with the Department for Communities and the Department of Health through which to provide accommodation and support to people with no recourse to public funds when the current arrangements as part of the COVID-19 response end.
- Use digital solutions to develop and deliver innovative and flexible services and processes including development of assessment and access IT solutions.

Implementing the Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation

- Implement the recommendations of the Action Plan.
- Review Action Plan reflecting on experiential evidence, emerging pressures and priorities.

What is needed to enable the delivery of our aim?

The Housing Executive has identified a number of key enablers which if in place will improve the likelihood of delivering our strategic aim in terms of effectively addressing homelessness. Work to deliver these enablers will also be reflected in the Annual Action plans.

Alignment of Homelessness Strategy and Supporting People Strategic Objectives

In delivering the Homelessness Strategy we need to ensure strong alignment across strategies, and in particular in the delivery of the Supporting People programme given almost two thirds of the funding for homeless services comes from the Supporting People programme in Northern Ireland. The delivery of this particular objective is also likely to require transformational change both in terms of the review and reconfiguration of existing services and the development of new services.

A Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) for Supporting People was commissioned and completed in late 2020. On homelessness it notes that housing support need is higher than supply and is likely to increase. It also highlights that needs are more complex and multi-faceted now and this is likely to continue in the future.

The Supporting People Three Year Strategic Plan and COVID 19 Recovery Plan 2021-2024 acknowledges the Homelessness Strategy as a key complementary strategy and supports the implementation of the strategic actions from the Strategic Review of Temporary Accommodation including the need for specialist accommodation based services.

Resources

The activities identified in each year's Annual Plan to support the delivery of this strategy will require a significant investment in terms of funding and the commitment of resources across both statutory and third sector organisations. The mechanisms to commit funding and resources recurrently will also need to be explored to deliver key actions linked to this strategic theme.

Collaboration

To deliver this objective we will need to ensure effective structures are in place to design and deliver appropriate and flexible responses collectively. This will involve multi-agency collaboration and consensus as well as the commitment of shared resources.

We must be clear about who is responsible for delivering the services, interventions and commitments to address homelessness in Northern Ireland.

Outcomes Measures & Person Centred

Services cannot be assessed and evaluated without examining the outcomes for individuals following service intervention, which itself should be underpinned by a person-centred approach.

To do this we will need to develop and analyse key outcomes data in order to guide and measure progress, assess social and economic impacts and revise our plans based on experiential evidence.

Objectives and Enablers

Objective 3 – Support customers to transition from homelessness into settled accommodation

Key in the delivery of our Homelessness Strategy will be the arrangements to ensure individual households' experiences of homelessness are one-off occurrences and to support transitioning from homelessness. Our aim is to ensure that we support them to access and maintain settled housing. Settled housing can include a range of options such as permanent housing or sustainable shared housing arrangements.

Every household should have access to a good quality, affordable and sustainable home that is appropriate for its needs. Particularly for those at risk of homelessness or transitioning from homelessness, settled housing is the foundation for a person to tackle an array of challenges including poverty, addictions, mental health, physical health, learning disability, employment, and avoiding offending and reoffending.

The first strand of achieving this objective relates to housing supply. This includes both the supply of suitable temporary accommodation from which households can successfully transition into settled housing. In the case of the latter this will also relate to permanent housing for the provision of housing led solutions. We want to see a significant shift towards rapid rehousing including Housing First for those it is appropriate for. It provides ordinary, settled housing as a first response for people with multiple needs, i.e. those who are chronically homeless.

As previously outlined we will implement 'Homeless to Home', our Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation in order to deliver the Strategic objective to address homelessness in Northern Ireland. Our aim is to transform our temporary accommodation responses over the next five years, ensuring that significantly fewer people spend time in temporary accommodation; and that those who do require temporary accommodation spend significantly less time in it, experiencing less breakdown of placements, before moving on to an appropriate settled home, with the support they need in place from day one.

Key is to achieve a system in which customers who transition from homelessness to permanent tenancies succeed in those tenancies. During their time in temporary accommodation they should be supported to develop skills for independent living. The transition to permanent housing can be challenging for those transitioning from homelessness; if support is withdrawn at this critical stage it can be very detrimental. Support should continue to remain available to customers at this key juncture in order to prevent repeat homelessness. Where applicable ongoing support will be required and a managed transition between support providers should take place, where appropriate.

The achievement of this objective also requires enabled communities with the capacity for sustainment, who recognise that sustainable communities start with sustaining one tenancy at a time. Enabled communities are viewed as being communities which are supported by organisations such as the Housing Executive to do more, in this case helping to sustain tenancies. An example of this can be found in the Housing Executive's Sustaining Tenancies Funding Programme 2021-2024 which launched in November 2021. The fund will support our tenants in creating more:

- Resilient, sustainable tenancies in the short, medium and long term and;
- We particularly want to help vulnerable customers at greater risk of tenancy breakdown.

The Objective in Practice

In the years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic there was a general pattern of increasing demands around homelessness particularly around homelessness acceptances and temporary accommodation placements. In 2020/21 there was a total of 15,991 households who presented as homeless with 9,889 of these households accepted as statutorily homeless. There was also a total of 1,188 repeat homelessness presentations with such households often being the most vulnerable with significant support needs.

The Homelessness Strategy 2017-22 included an indicator for the number of cases of repeat homelessness whereby a household has presented as homeless within 365 days of a previous presentation. The figures for the past five years are noted in the table below with an analysis of these presentations having been carried out as part of the Chronic Homelessness Action Plan. Key trends from this analysis noted:

- The prevalence of single person households amongst repeat homelessness presenters (64% in 2019/20); and
- The percentage of presentations from the tenures of sharing/private rented (53% in 2019/20).

Year	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Number of Repeat Homelessness Presentations	1,246	1,016	1,088	1,101	1,188

Objectives and Enablers

The Housing Executive's strategic programmes on homelessness are concerned with both better understanding the causes and experiences of homelessness and the long term resolution of homelessness for individuals.

As part of the delivery of the last strategy we undertook a range of research to better understand homelessness in Northern Ireland and in particular the experiences of those who have lived it. This research has included work on homelessness service user journeys, experiences of youth homelessness, impact of chronic homelessness on women and evaluation of day services. All research is available on the Housing Executive website upon completion.

Chronic Homelessness

Chronic homelessness is a state at the most severe end of the homelessness spectrum which can affect all household types from individuals, to large family units. Those identified as chronically homeless have very pronounced and complex support needs and find it difficult to transition from homelessness and/or the cycle of homelessness.

Although individuals and families experiencing chronic homelessness account for a minority of the homeless population, their diverse needs, mental and physical health issues, addictions, legal and justice issues and the discrimination issues they may face tend to be much more severe. Moreover, in spite of their smaller numbers, the services required to address chronic homelessness require proportionately more resources from the homelessness system. This group is much more likely to experience catastrophic health crises requiring medical intervention and a greater prevalence of contact with the criminal justice system.

Research indicates that the longer an individual or household is homeless, the greater the impact on their health and well-being. Consequently, social and economic isolation increases, making it much more challenging to reverse the cycle of homelessness and reintegrate into the community.

Rough sleeping is widely acknowledged as being the most visible form of chronic homelessness but those experiencing chronic homelessness extends beyond those who sleep rough. Characteristically, individuals who are experiencing chronic homelessness tend to have multiple support needs which leads to their inability to sustain a permanent tenancy, or a temporary accommodation placement, and can result in episodes of non-engagement with support services.

We published our Chronic Homelessness Action Plan in January 2020 to explore the extent and nature of chronic homelessness in Northern Ireland, the impact of this experience on their lives and how the Housing Executive can play its part in effectively addressing the issues surrounding chronic homelessness. The Chronic Homelessness Action Plan seeks to measure and understand the scale of the problem and to improve early intervention which will lead to a reduction in the number of individuals or households affected by chronic homelessness. The delivery of the Action Plan was paused to focus on our response for homelessness to COVID-19, although there are significant areas of overlap in terms of priority actions. The continued delivery of the Action Plan and efforts to address chronic homelessness will be prioritised in the new Homelessness Strategy.

Complex Lives

The Housing Executive are working as part of a Strategic Leadership Group aimed at addressing homelessness and the inter-related societal challenges linked to drugs, alcohol and mental health in Belfast. Partners include Health (PHA & BHSCT), Housing (NIHE), Probation (PBNI), PSNI, Local Government (Belfast City Council) and the Community and Voluntary Sector primarily via the Belfast Drug and Alcohol Coordination Team.

The multi-agency approach adopted follows the Complex Lives approach developed and implemented initially in Doncaster. The approach brings a range of agencies and services across housing, health, criminal justice, employment and skills and other support together in a shared, agreed, and sustainable way of working, to engage with people experiencing homelessness in order to improve outcomes.

This initiative is an opportunity to support some of our most complex people into more positive and secure lifestyles by working together through a multi–disciplinary team approach and generate learnings and insights that will inform the establishment of the complex lives approach for all those vulnerable households who need it as part of the new strategy.

Tenancy Sustainment

The prevention of homelessness through encouraging tenancy sustainment activities is now an increasingly important area of our business as a Landlord, particularly given the increasing complexity of some tenants. Our aim is to help tenants sustain long and happy tenancies by identifying needs early on and providing advice, support and signposting to other statutory authorities to help minimise tenancy breakdown, prevent homelessness and promote stable, thriving communities.

Objectives and Enablers

Our vision and objectives are set out in the Customer and Tenancy Sustainment Strategy. This strategy is underpinned by an extensive action plan organised around 5 pillars of sustainment; housing support, money support and budgeting advice, employment support, proactive and responsive support for at risk customers, and neighbourhood and community support.
The Customer and Tenancy Sustainment Strategy notes the acute understanding of the link between prevention of homelessness and cross-tenure care, support and advice to sustain tenancies for our customers. The vision of the strategy is 'to ensure that our customers' homes are the stable foundation upon which they can build happy and fulfilling lives'. Our aim is to offer effective, relevant housing advice and information at the earliest possible stage which will let our customers make choices about which option is best for them across a range of tenures.

The strategy acknowledges the many and varied risk factors that can lead to tenancy failure, with these risk factors often multiple and reinforcing one another.

Case Study 1 – MACS Shared Tenancies

MACS provide a Shared Tenancies model with funding initially awarded through the Homelessness Prevention Fund 2019/2020 to coordinate the development and delivery of the pilot shared housing model.

The MACS project initially intended to include housing solutions in longer term private rentals or social housing. Generally those who are tenancy ready have been unable to afford a tenancy of their own in the private rented sector (even a shared one) and did not have enough points to secure an allocation of social housing. The following case study outlines the effectiveness of this model.

Please note the following example contains a case study where personal details have been changed

When Stephen was 14 and living in England he experienced mental health issues after the death of his mother. Following this, Stephen's siblings went to live with an uncle but this did not include Stephen. Stephen did not feel he had support from family or professionals. Stephen was then given the opportunity to move to Belfast to live with family friends, however after a year the relationship with the family friends became strained and they asked him to leave.

Stephen became homeless and was registered with the Housing Executive who referred him to MACS Shared Tenancy Service in March 2021. At this time, Stephen was sofa surfing or staying with his girlfriend before being moved into temporary hostel accommodation. Whilst living here Stephen experienced significant mental health difficulties after a break up with his girlfriend and due to incidents within the hostel environment.

Through MACS Shared Tenancy Service Stephen completed a "Getting to Know You" assessment and "Housemate checklist" and engaged in the Tenancy Ready Programme. He was matched with a young person. Unfortunately, the initial match was not a success. Stephen was then re-matched with another young person. Their first meeting went well and Stephen decided to progress to sharing a property with the young person. Since the move, Stephen has been supported to maintain his tenancy; from cleaning, budgeting for utilities, and sourcing new furniture to making his new property a home. Stephen has said this is the first time he has felt supported and safe. Stephen has applied for college and has been supported to apply for bursaries for educational equipment and travel cards to access education. Stephen has been supported with his mental and emotional wellbeing, he has been encouraged to seek professional help and has been referred to MACS Wellbeing Service for support to manage his mental health, loneliness and isolation. Stephen continues to engage in support to manage and maintain his shared tenancy.

Objectives and Enablers

Case Study 2 - DePaul , Housing First

Crisis[20] have noted that 'Housing First is a system of support for homeless people with high and complex needs which is designed to deliver a sustainable exit from homelessness, improve health and well-being and enable social integration. Housing First provides immediate, non-conditional and secure accommodation and uses ordinary housing, such as private rented or social rented flats. It is designed to house formerly homeless people with high needs in their own, settled homes as quickly as possible and to provide the support they will need to sustain an exit from homelessness in their own home.'

Please note the following example contains a case study where personal details have been changed

Sandra (not her real name) had a long history of homelessness, alcohol dependency, mental health issues and an alcohol related brain injury. She had been in a cycle of homelessness, offending behaviour and had been in and out of prison for over 15 years. She was referred to Depaul's Housing First service by the Housing Executive's Housing Solutions Team. With the support of Depaul Housing First, Housing Association accommodation was eventually secured and she moved into the property supported by Depaul Housing First.

Depaul's Housing First staff, taking a case co-ordinated approach, engaged relevant support to meet Sandra's immediate needs. They applied for a 'starter pack' which was provided by CHNI so she had the essential small items to start making a home. Housing First staff also contacted Habitat for Humanity who were able to provide a bed and a chest of drawers. The Welcome Organisation also provided Sandra with other items of furniture.

Staff supported Sandra to apply for her benefits to ensure she had money to pay her bills, purchase food and personal items. They supported her to apply for a discretionary payment for all other items required to make her house a home. Referrals were made by Housing First to relevant support agencies in order to support Sandra manage her alcohol use and support her with managing and sustaining her tenancy.

Sandra continues to maintain her tenancy with the support in place. She is settled, safe and is doing well, engaging regularly with her support services. She loves her home and takes real pride in it.

Depaul's Housing First continue to work in partnership with the agencies involved and meet regularly through Case Conferences to ensure that Sandra's supports are appropriate to her needs and she continues to sustain her tenancy.

Feedback from the broader homeless sector also highlights the need to make further progress in terms of access to housing and support for those transitioning from homelessness - consensus being those transitioning from homelessness should have access to settled housing and services should be person centred, easy for customers to navigate and have the flexibility to help people for as long as they need it.

Key messages from the homeless sector…

- People find themselves at risk of or experiencing homelessness for many reasons and require a range of supports in addition to safe, appropriate and affordable housing.
- Support needs to follow the person.
- There needs to be better support for people who have recently transitioned from homelessness to help them sustain their tenancy.
- Empower us to help people in our own communities.
- There needs to be an ambition to increase housing supply and a direct link with the Housing Supply Strategy.

The findings of the Strategic Review of Temporary Accommodation demonstrate that the lack of settled housing to move to is a significant blockage within the homeless system and access to permanent housing needs to be improved so that individuals move to settled accommodation at the earliest opportunity and minimise time spent in temporary accommodation.

Ambitions to reduce numbers in temporary accommodation depend on the delivery of broader housing supply options. An adequate supply of social and affordable housing is fundamental to any long term goal to end homelessness.

A key ambition identified in the Strategic Review is to achieve a system in which customers who move on from temporary accommodation to permanent tenancies succeed in those tenancies. It identifies 3 elements to this success – enabled customers, enabled providers of services and enabled communities.

Our Reset Plan, which outlines our priorities in terms of dealing with the continued impacts of COVID-19 for homeless services, identified potential long term impacts which include greater numbers of people presenting as

[20] *Housing First Feasibility Study for the Liverpool City Region, Crisis (2017)* https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237545/housing_first_feasibility_study_for_the_liverpool_city_region_2017.pdf

Objectives and Enablers

homeless or requiring support in order to sustain their tenancies. Society is bracing itself for difficult times over the coming months and years as the longer term impacts of this public health crisis become clearer. Along with financial hardship, rising unemployment is likely to bring with it growing social problems, including worsening mental health issues, addictions and offending behaviours. These issues often go hand in hand with homelessness. It can therefore be predicted that the challenges facing our customers and partners across the sector will continue to grow.

One of our ambitions in the Reset Plan is to ensure we create the capacity to provide all customers with accommodation which meets both their accommodation and support needs at the point of that need. Our focus initially is on immediate accommodation needs but ultimately must include how we improve the long term housing options for homeless households.

The Housing Executive is seeking to improve access to settled housing for those transitioning from homelessness, minimise time spent in temporary accommodation and ensure these households can access support to sustain their tenancies.

Actions identified in each year's Annual Plan throughout the lifespan of the strategy will focus on the following:

- **Housing Supply** - Homeless people face significant barriers accessing housing and actions will seek to transform temporary accommodation as well as consider how we can prioritise settled housing for all. This will include better access to the private rented sector as well as Housing Led and Housing First models for those who need support. While access to the private rented sector will facilitate additional options for some households our consultation process noted challenges associated with the sector in terms of affordability, fitness, and security with these issues to be recognised in any work to align the work of the Housing Supply Strategy and Homelessness Strategy 2022-27.

- **Support** - Actions will be identified to ensure that support is available to all customers who need it for as long as they need it to prevent repeat homelessness. This will include actions to ensure that significantly fewer people spend time in temporary accommodation; and that those moving on to an appropriate settled home have the support they need from day one.

- **Community Integration** - Will include actions to build enabled communities in order to embed tenancy sustainment and community support for those most at risk of repeat homelessness.

What is our aim?

Our aim is to ensure homeless households have access to good quality, affordable[21] and sustainable housing that is appropriate for their needs including the provision of support to sustain it.

What will success look like[22]?

What will we do to deliver our aim?

Housing Supply

- Deliver the Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation to improve temporary accommodation options.
- Consider a range of measures and delivery models to expand housing options across all tenures.
- Extend Housing First provision in Northern Ireland on a cross tenure basis with a focus on improving access to permanent housing for these customers.[23]
- Contribute to the delivery of the Department for Communities Housing Supply Strategy.

[21] *Our consultation process noted a distinction between the term 'affordable', which is used in this strategy around housing supply, and the need to ensure a distinction with current proposals to increase supply of 'affordable' products, like Intermediate Rent and Private Rented Sector leasing. It should be noted there is explicit recognition within the current proposals that these products are unlikely to be suitable for households who are experiencing homelessness.*

[22] *It should be noted that the Housing Executive will seek to develop criteria/measures by which to assess success.*

Objectives and Enablers

Support

- Implement mechanisms to ensure people transition from homelessness as quickly as possible with the right support.
- Deliver actions to assist those who are experiencing chronic homelessness, reflecting on the lessons learned both from the Strategic Review of Temporary Accommodation and the COVID-19 Homelessness Response.
- Evaluate and extend the Complex Lives approach in Northern Ireland, subject to a successful evaluation.
- Introduce flexible housing support options in terms of support intensity, duration and location which are responsive to needs and include a focus on transition periods (e.g. leaving care, hospital, prison) and using critical time intervention models in order to prevent homelessness; this should include appropriate protocols and joint working arrangements.
- Increase the focus on sustaining tenancies ensuring that support is available for those who need it both in the social and private sectors.

Community Integration

- Utilise our existing tenant and community involvement structures to consider the range of factors which impact on tenancy sustainment from a community perspective and explore community based models to prevent repeat homelessness.
- Provide support including funding to community groups to raise awareness of issues facing those transitioning from homelessness and consider actions which provide community support to sustainment.

What is needed to enable the delivery of our aim?

The Housing Executive has identified a number of key enablers which if in place will improve the likelihood of delivering our strategic aim in terms of person centred and housing led services. Work to deliver these enablers will also be reflected in the Annual Action plans.

Alignment of Homelessness Strategy and Supporting People Strategic Objectives

In delivering the Homelessness Strategy we need to ensure strong alignment across strategies, and in particular in the delivery of the Supporting People fund given almost two thirds of the funding for homeless services comes from the Supporting People programme in Northern Ireland. A Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) for Supporting People was commissioned and completed in late 2020. On homelessness it notes that housing support need is higher than supply and is likely to increase. It also highlights that needs are more complex and multi-faceted now and this is likely to continue in the future.

The Supporting People Three Year Strategic Plan and COVID 19 Recovery Plan 2021-2024 acknowledges the Homelessness Strategy as a key complementary strategy and supports the implementation of the strategic actions from the Strategic Review of Temporary Accommodation including the need for specialist accommodation based services.

Resources

The activities identified in each year's Annual Plan to support the delivery of this strategy will require a significant investment in terms of funding and the commitment of resources across both statutory and third sector organisations. The mechanisms to commit funding and resources recurrently will also need to be explored to deliver key actions linked to this strategic theme.

Outcomes Measures & Person Centred

Services cannot be assessed and evaluated without examining the outcomes for individuals following service intervention, which itself should be underpinned by a person-centred approach.

To do this we will need to develop and analyse key outcomes data in order to guide and measure progress, assess social and economic impacts and revise our plans based on experiential evidence.

[23] *This will include improving access to Housing First in tenures such as those provided by social housing landlords.*

Enablers

Enablers

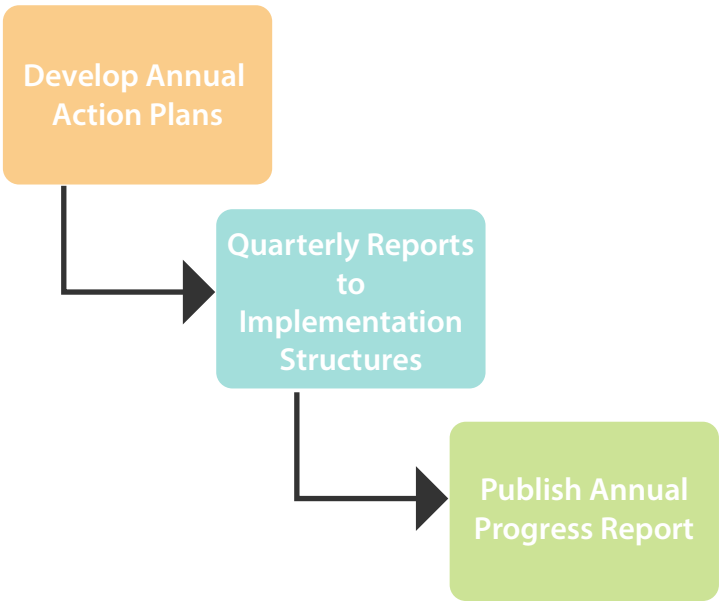
This strategy will evolve based on experiential evidence, emerging pressures and priorities. It is our intention to work towards the defined success criteria outlined in this document by developing the *'enablers'* and pulling all levers available to us. These enablers are as critical to the success of the strategy as the delivery of the objectives themselves. Relevant actions will be included in the Annual Action Plans to reflect key actions associated with the enablers below.

Experiential Evidence	Collaboration	Legislation	Interdepartmental Approach	Funding	Staff	Process
• We will expand the range of information sources utilised to plan services • We will ensure high quality data and implement excellent quality assurance processes • We will commission research to support our own monitoring and analysis of trends • We will review our policies to ensure we are meeting the needs of our customers	• We will improve how we work collaboratively to deliver for our customers • We will work towards co-design of relevant services • We will share information with relevant stakeholders within data protection safeguards • We will ensure customer voices are at the heart of service development	• We will ensure the strategy is delivered within the relevant legislative frameworks • We will work with partners across the sector to guide the development of legislation as necessary to ensure the best outcomes for clients	• We will support the delivery of the Interdepartmental Homelessness Action Plan to address non-accommodation based issues relevant to homelessness • We will work with agencies across the statutory and voluntary sectors to ensure the successful delivery of this strategy	• We will plan and adopt a test and learn approach to make best use of funding • We will be open and transparent about how money is spent • We will prioritise and target funding to where it will make the most impact • We will deliver on agreed outcomes • We will support the creation of jointly funded projects and services	• We will support staff to deliver high quality, customer focussed services • We will promote a culture of empowerment, ownership and trust • We will promote training and development opportunities • We will encourage and enable staff participation in service development	• We will develop outcomes focused processes • We will ensure good governance • Our processes will be clear, as simple as possible and deliverable • We will make it as easy as possible for customers to interact with us

Delivery and Monitoring

The Housing Executive is committed to publishing an annual progress report which will outline our delivery of the actions in the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27. This will replicate the approach of the Homelessness Strategy 2017-22 with the progress reports available on the Housing Executive website[24].

We will report progress on a quarterly basis to the Central Homelessness Forum and Homelessness Strategy Steering Group. The evaluation of the Homelessness Strategy 2017-22 will investigate the effectiveness of the current implementation groups and should these be changed for the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 the Housing Executive will continue to report on a quarterly basis to any replacement groups.



[24] *Homelessness Strategy Annual Progress Reports, Housing Executive (2018 onwards)* https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Housing-Help/Homelessness/Homelessness-strategy

Outcomes and Indicators

The Housing Executive will seek to align with any Programme for Government, as and when developed by the Northern Ireland Executive. With the draft Framework having been subject to public consultation earlier this year the Homelessness Strategy will again align with the outcome of 'We care for others and help those in need' from the draft Programme for Government 2016-21. Our engagement with the Central Homelessness Forum has noted broad agreement as to the appropriateness of the current indicators and these will continue with the baseline to be figures for 2021/22 or the earliest year for which figures are available for any figures which are not currently published/collated.

Outcome 1 - We have support that prevents us from becoming homeless

- Number of households presenting to the Housing Executive as homeless
- Number of households accepted by the Housing Executive as statutorily homeless
- Number of cases recorded as homelessness prevention (cross-sector and subject to ongoing work on agreeing a definition)

Outcome 2 - We live in suitable homes

- Average length of time spent in temporary accommodation
- Number of households placed in temporary accommodation
- Number of FDA duties discharged

Outcome 3 - We have the support we require to access and/or sustain a home

- Number of instances of repeat homelessness
- Number of applicants presenting to the Housing Executive recorded as experiencing chronic homelessness

Funding the Strategy

The Housing Executive's ambitions as outlined in our Homelessness Strategy 2022-2027 will set the path for the next 5 years in our efforts to prevent and tackle homelessness in Northern Ireland. However, the delivery of these plans have major implications in terms of the funding required for homelessness services in Northern Ireland.

The Department for Communities has already committed significant additional funding in the last 2 years both directly to the Housing Executive's homelessness budget and more broadly to the Supporting People programme in Northern Ireland in order to deliver our homelessness response to COVID-19 while continuing to deliver our statutory services.

Expenditure on addressing homelessness has necessarily increased since March 2020 as the Housing Executive pro-actively moved to predict, plan for, and deliver against the increased need as a result of the pandemic. Had the investment in the approach not have been made the impact on the homeless population could have been catastrophic in terms of housing and health outcomes.

The Housing Executive produced its COVID-19 Reset Plan in 2020 which outlines our key aims in seeking to address and mitigate some of the long lasting impacts of COVID-19 given our concerns about the newly emerging need for homeless services as a result of the pandemic's wider societal and economic impacts. The themes of the Reset Plan, supported and approved by both the Housing Executive Board and Department for Communities, have also had direct influence on our 5 year Homeless Strategy (2022-2027) and our planned strategic programmes.

The Housing Executive works with the Department for Communities to produce homelessness funding projections on an annual basis. These reflect the many factors which impact on homelessness in Northern Ireland and the demand for services, not least of which is the continued heightened demand for services as a result of COVID-19. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the national finances, and consequences for wider public spending are a concern. Addressing the additional demand as a result of the pandemic along with the continued operation of services to meet our statutory homelessness duties must be prioritised.

It is recognised however, that our strategic programmes are critical if we are to achieve our overall aim of ending homelessness in Northern Ireland. The Housing Executive's strategic programmes on homelessness are concerned with long term resolution of homelessness for individuals. As with the pandemic response, it is necessary to invest now to save in the medium and longer term. If we deliver actions in pursuit of our strategic objectives, this, in the longer term, will not only benefit individuals and communities but will also deliver wider economic benefits.

The Housing Executive is working to develop business cases for the key strategic programmes identified in the strategy in order to ensure that any funding secured is put to use in a way that delivers the maximum value. The Housing Executive will also, with our partners, look to develop new funding opportunities, in order to develop new initiatives such as those included in our Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation. We want to maximize available opportunities and be in a position to identify and apply for funding in order to deliver on our commitments in the new strategy. We will also seek to support and develop capacity of those delivering homeless services to access alternative funding streams.

Appendices

Appendices

Appendix One – Homelessness Data

Table 1 – Presenters by reason

Reason	Sharing breakdown/ family dispute	Marital/ relationship breakdown	Domestic abuse	Loss of rented accomm	No accomm in Northern Ireland	Intimidation	Accommodation not reasonable	Release from hospital/prison / other institution	Fire/ flood other emergency	Mortgage default	Bomb/ fire damage civil disturbance	N'hood harassment	Other reason	No Data	Total
2016/17	3,971	1,739	865	2,668	1,406	661	4,119	435	72	188	53	1,519	668	209	18,573
2017/18	3,744	1,776	917	2,679	1,404	558	4,201	402	132	181	44	1,494	528	120	18,180
2018/19	3,890	1,804	1,174	2,779	1,245	481	4,588	339	54	123	44	1,448	174	59	18,202
2019/20	3,650	1,683	1,147	2,327	1,304	335	4,239	361	44	89	46	1,415	88	74	16,802
2020/21	4.166	1,752	1,222	1,689	1,012	286	3,576	366	63	37	53	1,639	81	49	15,991

Table 2 – Presenters by household

	Household Type	Single males: 16-17 yrs	Single males: 18-25 yrs	Single males: 26-59 yrs	Single males: Total	Single females: 16-17 yrs	Single females: 18-25 yrs	Single females: 26-59 yrs	Single females: Total	Couples	Families	Pensioner households	Undefined	Total
2016/17		102	1,606	4,336	6,187	122	1,366	1,843	3,331	813	5,851	2,335	56	18,573
2017/18		69	1,552	4,350	5,971	106	1,274	1,749	3,129	827	5,805	2,445	3	18,180
2018/19		66	1,429	4,353	5,848	89	1,252	1,874	3,215	794	5,843	2,502	0	18,202
2019/20		68	1,322	4,245	5,635	90	1,195	1,722	3,007	751	5,093	2,237	79	16,802
2020/21		50	1,457	4,312	5,819	84	1,285	1,673	3,042	687	4,595	1,802	46	15,991

Table 3 – Top Three Reasons (Presenters)

Year	Presenters Top 3 Reasons		
	Accommodation Not Reasonable	Family/Sharing Breakdown	Loss of Rented Accommodation
2016/17	22.2%	21.4%	14.40%
2017/18	23.1%	20.6%	14.70%
2018/19	25.2%	21.4%	15.30%
2019/20	25.2%	21.7%	13.8%
NB – Top 3 reasons changed during 2020/21 as noted below			
	Family/Sharing Breakdown	Accommodation Not Reasonable	Marital/ relationship breakdown
2020/21	26.0%	22.4%	11.0%

Table 4 – Acceptances by Reason

Reason	Sharing breakdown/ family dispute	Marital/ relationship breakdown	Domestic abuse	Loss of rented accomm	No accomm in Northern Ireland	Intimidation	Accommodation not reasonable	Release from hospital/prison / other institution	Fire/ flood other emergency	Mortgage default	Bomb/ fire damage civil disturbance	N'hood harassment	Other reason	Total
2016/17	2,140	796	852	1,546	708	387	3,652	295	63	102	29	988	331	11,889
2017/18	2,106	867	904	1,502	764	355	3,674	286	77	99	27	952	264	11,877
2018/19	2,307	929	1,124	1,681	710	374	3,955	236	38	65	31	931	131	12,512
2019/20	2,135	846	1,088	1,375	707	255	3,606	240	24	51	27	899	70	11,323
2020/21	2,173	748	1,101	985	430	256	2,794	217	30	21	26	1,067	41	9,889

Table 5 – Acceptances by Household

	Single males				Single females								
Household Type	**16-17 yrs**	**18-25 yrs**	**26-59 yrs**	**Total**	**16-17 yrs**	**18-25 yrs**	**26-59 yrs**	**Total**	**Couples**	**Families**	**Pensioner households**	**Undefined**	**Total**
2016/17	52	678	2212	2,942	74	816	1,238	2,128	497	4,346	1,941	35	11,889
2017/18	31	681	2225	2,937	56	799	1,220	2,075	532	4,306	2,027	0	11,877
2018/19	33	655	2373	3,061	53	828	1,351	2,232	545	4,535	2,139	0	12,512
2019/20	32	666	2248	2,946	44	776	1198	2,018	492	3,979	1,888	0	11,323
2020/21	17	594	2,096	2,707	36	781	1,092	1,909	440	3,451	1,374	8	9,889

Table 6 – Top Three Reasons (Acceptances)

Acceptances Top 3 Reasons			
	Accommodation Not Reasonable	Family/Sharing Breakdown	Loss of Rented accommodation
2016/17	30.7%	18.0%	13.0%
2017/18	30.9%	17.7%	12.6%
2018/19	31.6%	18.4%	13.4%
2019/20	31.8%	18.8%	12.1%
NB – Top 3 reasons changed during 2020/21 as noted below			
	Accommodation Not Reasonable	Family/Sharing Breakdown	Domestic Abuse
2020/21	28.3%	22.0%	11.1%

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Appendix One – Homelessness Data

Table 7 – Presentations by Council Area

Council	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Antrim & Newtownabbey	1,398	1,229	1,336	1,201	1,353
Ards & North Down	1,483	1,659	1,565	1,276	1,276
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	1,262	1,259	1,253	1,099	1,144
Belfast	5,395	5,879	5,747	5,270	4,573
Causeway Coast & Glens	1,050	1,002	1,001	949	885
Derry & Strabane	1,936	1,996	2079	1,994	2,084
Fermanagh & Omagh	754	691	672	669	609
Lisburn & Castlereagh	1,701	1,045	946	1,034	845
Mid & East Antrim	1,559	1,515	1,516	1,427	1,298
Mid Ulster	829	770	843	669	659
Newry, Mourne & Down	1,206	1,135	1,244	1,214	1,265
Total	18,573	18,180	18,202	16,802	15,991

Table 8 – Acceptances by Council Area

Council	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Antrim & Newtownabbey	1,029	904	1,052	936	952
Ards & North Down	986	1,160	1,156	947	931
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	542	593	790	694	608
Belfast	3,593	3,940	3,790	3,325	2,686
Causeway Coast & Glens	789	716	689	690	579
Derry & Strabane	1,259	1,203	1,315	1,222	1,146
Fermanagh & Omagh	418	432	467	467	353
Lisburn & Castlereagh	928	675	716	756	552
Mid & East Antrim	1,003	997	1,088	1,051	928
Mid Ulster	481	468	542	388	362
Newry, Mourne & Down	861	789	907	847	792
Total	11,889	11,877	12,512	11,323	9,889

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Appendix One – Homelessness Data

In addition to the data over 5 years outlined in previous tables, the tables below are based on the overall presentation and acceptance figures for additional data breakdowns. In coming years, these tables will be updated so that further analysis can be carried out over a five year period of time.

Table 9 – Accommodation Not Reasonable Breakdown (Presentations)

Reason	Accommodation not reasonable*	ANR: Financial hardship	ANR: Mental health	ANR: Other	ANR: Overcrowding	ANR: Physical health/Disability	ANR: Property unfitness	ANR: Violence	Total
2018/19	719	193	460	227	162	2,548	162	117	4,588
2019/20	22	233	572	260	169	2,660	168	155	4,239
2020/21	0	190	628	194	206	2,028	148	182	3,576

*It should be noted that the introduction of sub-categories for Accommodation Not Reasonable in 2018/19 resulted in a subsequent decrease in the use of Accommodation Not Reasonable to the point that it is no longer used.

Table 10 – Intimidation Breakdown (Presentations)

Reason	Intimidation-ASB	Intimidation-Disability	Intimidation-Paramilitary	Intimidation-Racial	Intimidation-Sectarian	Intimidation-Sexual Orientation	Total
2016/17	98	0	477	28	45	13	661
2017/18	61	1	425	19	42	10	558
2018/19	60	3	377	15	19	7	481
2019/20	51	0	246	18	14	6	335
2020/21	27	1	236	6	9	7	286

Table 11 – Accommodation Not Reasonable Breakdown (Acceptances)

Reason	Accommodation not reasonable*	ANR: Financial hardship	ANR: Mental health	ANR: Other	ANR: Overcrowding	ANR: Physical health/Disability	ANR: Property unfitness	ANR: Violence	Total
2018/19	269	104	468	203	140	2,540	130	101	3,955
2019/20	0	134	541	195	141	2,375	96	124	3,606
2020/21	0	91	561	146	146	1,647	72	131	2,794

*It should be noted that the introduction of sub-categories for Accommodation Not Reasonable in 2018/19 resulted in a subsequent decrease in the use of Accommodation Not Reasonable to the point that it is no longer used.

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Appendix One – Homelessness Data

Table 12 – Intimidation Breakdown (Acceptances)

Reason	Intimidation-ASB	Intimidation-Disability	Intimidation-Paramilitary	Intimidation-Racial	Intimidation-Sectarian	Intimidation-Sexual Orientation	Total
2016/17	49	0	310	13	10	5	387
2017/18	31	0	286	10	25	3	355
2018/19	49	2	297	7	12	7	374
2019/20	51	0	246	18	14	6	357
2020/21	12	1	230	4	5	4	256

Table 13 – Acceptances by Priority Need

Year	Dependent Children	Emergency	Pregnant	Violence	Vulnerable	Total
2018/19	3,516	63	454	1,591	6,888	12,512
2019/20	2,992	36	384	1,634	6,277	11,323
2020/21	2,702	95	377	1,644	5,071	9,889

Table 14 – Social Housing Allocations

Year	Total Number of Allocations	Allocations to Full Duty Applicants	% of allocations to Full Duty Applicants
2017/18	7,373	6,467	87.7%
2018/19	7,696	6,949	90.3%
2019/20	6,654	6,423	96.5%
2020/21	5,844	5,295	90.6%

Table 15 – Number of Instances of Repeat Homelessness

Year	Number
2017/18	1,016
2018/19	1,088
2019/20	1,101
2020/21	1,188

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Appendix Two – Temporary Accommodation

Table 16 – Average Length of Stay in Temporary Accommodation

The table below outlines the average length of stay in temporary accommodation in days by type of accommodation.

Year	Bespoke Facility of Temporary Accommodation	Crash: Voluntary Sector	Single Lets	DIME*	Voluntary Sector Hostels	Housing Executive Hostels	Hotel/ B&B	Total
2017/18	N/A	N/A	394	125	245	223	48	282
2018/19	N/A	N/A	437	128	231	208	18	281
2019/20	N/A	N/A	451	135	233	216	36	275
2020/21	32	20	443	91	160	219	14	175

*DIME refers to Dispersed Intensively Managed Emergency Accommodation

Table 17 – Placements in Temporary Accommodation

Total Number of Placements in Temporary Accommodation					
Year	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Total	2,746	3,024	3,354	4,527	9,752

It should be noted that the Annual Progress Reports published as part of the delivery of this strategy will include figures on temporary accommodation provision. The Annual Progress Reports can be accessed via this link https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Housing-Help/Homelessness/Homelessness-strategy

If you have any further queries in relation to homelessness data please email: Homelessness.Strategy@nihe.gov.uk

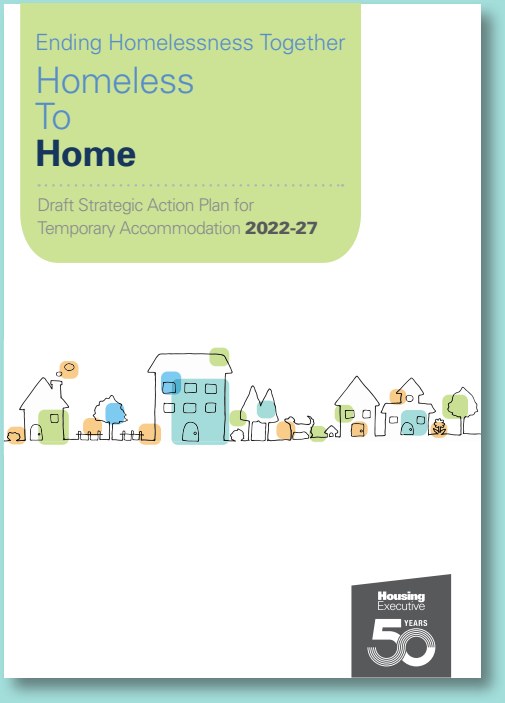
Appendices

Appendix Three – Financial Investment

Table 18 – Financial Investment in Homelessness

	Temporary Accommodation	Homelessness Services	Voluntary Sector Funding	Supporting People	Leased Properties	Private Rental Sector Access Scheme	Misc	COVID-19 Funding	Total
	Top Up and Supporting People Costs	Furniture Storage & Taxi	Homelessness Services	Floating Support for homelessness projects & schemes	Private Sector emergency accom.	Facilitate creation and sustainment of private sector tenancies	Misc		
2016/17	£26.7m	£1.4m	£2.3m	£5.8m	£956k	£450k			£37.6m
2017/18	£25.6m	£1.7m	£2.4m	£6.0m	£958k	£483k			£37.1m
2018/19	£24.8m	£1.8m	£2.3m	£6.0m	£989k	£360k			£36.2m
2019/20	£27.2m	£1.8m	£3.35m	£6.1m	£1.05m	10k	£100k		£39.6m
2020/21	£28.0m	£1.6m	£3.6m	£6.1m	£1.22m	£46k	£43k	£6.6m	£47.2m

*NB – Figures above are rounded to one decimal place which may result in overall total not aligning to figures of various funding streams.



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