

# Milton Keynes Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

2023-28



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## Forward from Emily Darlington, Cabinet Member for Adults, Housing and Healthy Communities

Milton Keynes City Council believes everyone deserves a good quality of life, to be healthy and safe and have somewhere they can call home. Taking a multi-agency approach working alongside community partners, stakeholders and the wider public has helped us to develop our new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

We recognise that homelessness is broader than people rough sleeping and includes those living in insecure accommodation. We also understand homelessness is a complex problem that is difficult to describe and doesn't have a simple solution. Tackling this challenge requires fresh thinking and will need us to apply new approaches to old issues, as we work towards our aim of minimising repeat and long-term homelessness, supporting individuals and families to find sustainable long-term solutions, which focuses on their needs and aspirations.

The strategy is designed to tackle this challenging issue alongside the community and partners who will support us to deliver for those who use our services.

Critical to how we resolve this issue includes working with individuals who have lived experience or who have been disproportionately affected by homelessness to help shape our services so that they best meet the needs of those who access them.

We welcome your support.

Cllr Emily Darlington  
Labour and Co-operative Councillor for Bletchley East  
Cabinet Member for Adults, Housing and Healthy Communities

March 2024

## 1. Introduction

The most visible form of homelessness involves people who are seen sleeping on the streets, but the issue of homelessness is much broader than that, including, for example, people living in overcrowded or temporary accommodation or who are threatened with eviction. Anyone can become homeless but issues such as unemployment, domestic abuse, poor physical and mental health will increase the risk of losing a home and being unable to quickly find another.

This new strategy confirms the council's commitment to prevent homelessness, provide appropriate homelessness support and eliminate rough sleeping (Milton Keynes City Council Plan 2022-2026). We will only deliver on this commitment by working with partners in the statutory, voluntary, charitable, and private sector.

A key driver of homelessness is the shortage of appropriate, affordable housing. Many of the households who we see would be able to resolve their housing need without intervention from the Council if there was sufficient rented housing available at prices they can afford. In addition, relationship breakdown, domestic abuse, drug and alcohol addiction, mental health needs and financial problems can all contribute to making households homeless. Some of those who are homeless have complex problems which require tailored solutions beyond simply a roof over their heads.

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local housing authorities to take strategic responsibility for preventing homelessness and to produce a homelessness strategy at least every five years. Our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023- 2028 for Milton Keynes has been based on two reviews completed in 2022 in preparation for this strategy. These reviews were completed by Neil Morland, housing consultant (April 2022)<sup>1</sup>, and the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (August 2022).

This strategy has been developed in collaboration with people who use homeless services and those organisations that provide housing and support services to homeless people. The Milton Keynes Homelessness Partnership were pivotal in encouraging involvement.

The aims of the strategy are to:

- Prevent people from becoming homeless
- Where homelessness cannot be avoided, help people to find suitable accommodation
- Improve access to support services and supported housing to those with complex needs
- Improve access to sustainable accommodation
- Make rough sleeping brief, rare and non-recurrent

To achieve these aims, the council will work with partners to realise the following objectives:

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<sup>1</sup> Audit of Homelessness and Housing Advice Service. Neil Morland (2022)

- Support those at risk of homelessness to remain in their homes whenever possible or to find a new home without an intervening period of homelessness.
- Improve access to a range of permanent accommodation.
- Minimise the use of temporary and emergency accommodation
- Improve access to, and the effectiveness of, support services.
- Prevent rough sleeping.
- Break the cycle of chronic and repeat street homelessness and rough sleeping.

The strategy covers the period 2023-2028 and the actions will be reviewed on regular basis to ensure that they are achieved, as well as to take account of any legislative, policy or funding changes.

## 2. Strategic Context

Our objectives and priorities are set within the council's broader strategic objectives, and in the context of other national and local strategies and plans. National examples include the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the National Rough Sleeping Strategy, and proposed private rented sector reforms.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017<sup>2</sup> legally obliges local authorities to assess and provide more meaningful assistance to all people who are eligible and homeless, or threatened with homelessness, irrespective of their priority need status.

The focus of the Act is on prevention and places a duty on local authorities to intervene early and attempt to prevent homelessness. Where it cannot be prevented, local authorities have a duty to relieve homelessness.

The government published a rough sleeping strategy in 2022, *'Ending Rough Sleeping for Good'*<sup>3</sup>. This strategy places an emphasis on prevention wherever possible and, where rough sleeping does occur, it should be rare, brief, and non-recurrent.

In Milton Keynes there is a high demand for social housing and a shortage of affordable accommodation<sup>4</sup>. There is also a shortage of accommodation in the Private Rented Sector, which has led to high rents. These issues are contributing to housing stress and homelessness locally.

In 2021 produced the Ending Rough Sleeping Plan (as required by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) that sets out our priorities to end rough sleeping in Milton Keynes by 2027.<sup>5</sup> Priorities are focussed on:

- Prevention
- Intervention, and
- Recovery

Rough sleeping has continued to reduce. Rough sleeper numbers reduced from 41 to 24, a decrease of 41%, between 2018 and 2022. The most recent annual rough sleeper count (November 2022) showed 50% of rough sleepers are of UK nationality, 92% were male and there were 4 (16%) rough sleepers aged 18–25-years. There were seven vacancies at the Old Bus Station on the night of the count (November 2022).

The Milton Keynes Homelessness Partnership (MKHP) is working together with public, private, and voluntary sector organisations for a real change. The Partnership's shared vision is to end homelessness, achieving homes for all and shifting from managing homelessness to ending

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<sup>2</sup> Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 ([legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk))

<sup>3</sup> Ending rough sleeping for good - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)) (2022)

<sup>4</sup> Milton Keynes Housing Strategy 2020-2025.pdf ([milton-keynes.gov.uk](https://milton-keynes.gov.uk))

<sup>5</sup> Milton Keynes Council Ending Rough Sleeping Plan 21/22

homelessness by wider engagement and a joined-up approach to provide a clear pathway to sustainable housing.

### 3. Vision and approach

#### Our Vision:

To prevent homelessness, provide appropriate homelessness support and eliminate rough sleeping (Milton Keynes City Council Plan 2022-2026).

#### Our Approach:

**Putting people at the heart of our services and adapting our services through listening to those with lived experience of homelessness.**

We will adopt the following approaches:

- **Early intervention to ensure that households receive the right support at the right time to prevent homelessness.**

Homelessness can happen to anyone at any time, generally associated with a period of crisis or trauma, including, or linked to poverty, abuse, mental health, relationship breakdown and loss of employment. Some people are more at risk of homelessness than others, for example those who are leaving care or released from prison.

- **Focus on an individual or households' strengths, rather than their deficits**

A focus on an individual's strengths rather than their deficits is known as a strengths-based approach. This involves identifying the individual's strengths, including personal, community and social networks, and to maximise those strengths to enable them to sustain their housing and maintain their wellbeing. This approach will enable individuals to determine their own solutions. A strengths-based approach can be incorporated into Personal Housing Plans to determine the most appropriate housing and support solutions.

- **Listen to those with experience of homelessness**

Those with lived experience of homelessness services have been involved in developing the Homelessness and Rough Sleepers strategy. Milton Keynes wants to build on this approach to enable people with lived experience of homelessness to shape services.

- **Support people to succeed with the right accommodation in the right area at the right time.**

Long term sustainable housing is essential to ensure that homelessness is not repeated. Ensuring that vulnerable homeless people move to appropriate accommodation, in a location which does not expose them to risk is critical to tenancy sustainment. Households who move from short term accommodation to independent accommodation often need to be provided with support to succeed in sustaining their accommodation.



- **Providing high standards of communication, co-ordination and partnership working**

We will aim to communicate and co-ordinate with all partners, as well as across the Council. The Milton Keynes Homelessness Partnership is pivotal in engaging statutory and voluntary organisations, concentrating effort to end homelessness and improve communication across the city. Partnership working and collaboration is essential to preventing homelessness. We are committed to improving our information to citizens, including our website.

## 4. Strategic Aims

The strategic aims of the strategy are to:

**Aim 1: Prevent people from becoming homeless**

**Aim 2: Where homelessness cannot be avoided, help people to find suitable accommodation**

**Aim 3: Improve access to support services and supported housing to those with complex needs**

**Aim 4: Improve access to sustainable accommodation**

**Aim 5: Make rough sleeping brief, rare and non-recurrent**

To achieve these aims, the Council will work closely with our partners.

# 1: Prevent people from becoming homeless

## Introduction

Early intervention is essential to ensuring that households receive the right support at the right time to prevent homelessness. Our 2022 audit of homelessness in Milton Keynes has shown that the two most common causes of people becoming homeless in Milton Keynes are the loss of a privately rented home and family or friends being no longer willing to provide accommodation. Together these account for more than half of all homelessness presentations the council receives in a typical year. In 2022 our most recent statistics show that relationship breakdown and family and friends being unwilling to accommodate now account for the vast majority of homelessness presentations.

The homelessness data<sup>6</sup> shows that the main reasons for homelessness, or risk of homelessness, are as follows:

Family or friends unwilling or no longer able to accommodate	<b>27%</b>
End of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST)	<b>20%</b>
Domestic Abuse	<b>16%</b>
Non-violent relationship breakdown	<b>10%</b>

Source: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities: H-CLIC data 21/22

Other prominent reasons for households and individuals presenting as homeless, are evictions from supported housing and violence (including domestic abuse) and harassment.

The impact of the cost-of-living crisis on homelessness is not yet known, although there is evidence of an increase in fuel poverty and the use of food banks. A new group of people is likely to be drawn into poverty, thereby contributing to hidden homelessness. There is also some evidence of an increase in the number of Section 21 evictions by private landlords in recent months. There is evidence that households are having to make decisions which bills to prioritise. who struggling to pay their mortgages, along with other bills, and they will need access to money advice to prevent homelessness.

## Preventative Approaches

It is important to identify early those households who are at risk of homelessness and put in place the right support. Early intervention is less easy to encourage when homelessness is

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<sup>6</sup> Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities: H-CLIC data 21/22

predominantly caused by sudden personal crisis, but it is important that we continue to promote the message that homelessness is easier to resolve the earlier people seek advice.

Our statutory homeless services sits within Adult Services, alongside Adult Social Care, which enables a more connected approach to be adopted particularly where a person has complex and multiple needs associated with homelessness. Housing officers and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) teams play an important role in identifying people who may be experiencing housing stress that may lead to homelessness in social housing. At this stage appropriate support can be essential to prevent homelessness. In addition, we have a Community Support Team to who provide support to people who have particularly complex needs, including those who hoard, self-neglect or have drug or alcohol problems. Other social landlords have identified the need to have better access to mental health services to prevent tenancy breakdown.

Milton Keynes City Council is working with social housing landlords and PRS landlords to encourage them to engage early with the Council, where tenants are at risk of homelessness. This enables the Council to intervene in a timely way, rather than taking relief measures when households present themselves as homeless to Housing Solutions.

We have also commissioned services to provide preventative interventions. The Milton Keynes Citizens Advice Bureau (MK CAB) provides advice to households and individuals who are concerned about their housing situation. This service is well used by local citizens.

DePaul, a charity, is commissioned to provide a mediation service for young people up to the age of 25. To date the service has been under used, however joint assessments between DePaul and Milton Keynes' Housing Solutions officers now take place.

We want to improve the information on our website to enable local citizens to access good quality information and advice alongside the existing services that provide this support.

### **Housing Solutions Team**

The role of our Housing Solutions team is to prevent homelessness, where a household is threatened with homelessness, and to take steps to relieve homelessness where a household is homeless.

Following a period of Covid restrictions, when only telephone advice was provided, we are now seeing households face-to-face for pre-arranged appointments in our new appointment centre. We have developed a new approach where our officers will work in teams focussed around the following areas:

- Supporting people who are fleeing domestic abuse
- Working with family and friends who are not able to accommodate any longer
- Single homelessness
- Working with tenants and landlords where a Section 21 notices (no fault eviction)

Housing Solutions has also introduced champions for prison release, hospital discharge, children's services, domestic abuse and families. MK ACT are commissioned to provide training to Housing Solutions on domestic abuse issues to improve knowledge and understanding of this issue.

Housing Solutions is now adopting a strengths-based approach to Personal Housing Plans. This approach will enable these plans to focus on the strengths of individuals, including community and family resources that may be available to support them.

## **Domestic abuse**

Around 1 in 6 homeless presentations in Milton Keynes are due to a person fleeing domestic abuse. We work closely with MK ACT who are a local charity working with over 100 families every day. Our housing solutions officers complete joint assessments with staff from MK ACT. MK ACT provide a range of services including crisis intervention, counselling, and accommodation including an emergency refuge for twenty-eight families.

The Domestic Abuse Partnership in Milton Keynes has developed the Domestic Abuse Prevention Strategy<sup>7</sup>. One of our priorities within the strategy is to empower survivors by increasing the numbers of people accessing the Sanctuary scheme (measures for survivors homes to be secure) to stay in their own home. These types of schemes, where appropriate, can prevent homelessness and the upheaval of a survivor of domestic abuse leaving their home.

We provide dispersed housing with support provided by MK ACT for those who need to leave their own home because of domestic abuse, but do not want a place in a refuge. The dispersed accommodation is mainly for women but can include men who are experiencing domestic abuse.

We also want to work with our neighbouring authorities to ensure that they provide support to their residents who are fleeing domestic abuse.

## **Young People**

A lot of prevention work with young people takes place around family breakdown. We have commissioned mediation services for young people to intervene and prevent homelessness. Where family breakdown occurs young people often present themselves as homeless.

There is a Reconnect and Night Stop service provided in Milton Keynes for young people who become homeless. Night Stop involves a young person being placed with a volunteer 'host' for a short period, while other accommodation options are explored including returning to their family home. Although Night Stop is an important resource, young people who are higher risk can be refused, for instance where there is substance misuse.

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<sup>7</sup> Milton Keynes Domestic Abuse Prevention Strategy 2020-2025

There is a need to work on prevention further upstream in schools and with a wide range of youth groups. Prevention needs to be different in the youth space and take a more creative approach.

## Communication and Information sharing

Communication is essential to making prevention of homelessness work effectively. We are committed to improving our communication as follows:

- Encouraging landlords and tenants to contact us when there is a concern over the sustainability of a tenant in the private rented sector
- Ensuring that our information is clear and accessible so that people can obtain advice quickly
- Work closely across partners in Milton Keynes via the Milton Keynes Homelessness Partnership to share information and collaborate to reduce homelessness.
- Involve people with lived experience of homelessness in developing pathways and services.

There is also a need to ensure that all new Housing Solutions staff are aware about all the services that are available in Milton Keynes for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness.

Work on improving the Council's web site has already started and this should improve access to advice for households who might be at risk of homelessness.

## We will:

- Encourage private landlords and letting agencies, social housing providers, owner occupiers and tenants to contact the Council at an early stage when a home is at risk.
- Better support people to main living with family or friends until a new home can be found.
- Ensure that households and individuals are aware of the support available to mitigate the cost-of-living crisis.
- Improve the Council's website to enable people who are at risk of homelessness to access improved information and advice online.
- Review the effectiveness of financial advice and tenancy sustainment services for council tenants.
- Housing Solutions to continue to implement the specialist strands of work and monitor the outcome of this approach.
- Housing Solutions to embed a strengths-based approach to Personal Housing Plans.
- To explore the greater use of Sanctuary schemes, where they are appropriate, and to increase the awareness of this option.

- Develop creative approaches to working earlier with young people in schools and youth groups to prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place.
- Improve engagement with prisons, hospitals, and probation.
- Improve communication and information sharing between the Council and partners and to improve the information available for those at risk of homelessness.

## 2: Where homelessness cannot be avoided, help people to find suitable accommodation

### Introduction

The Housing Act 1996 sets out those households and individuals who have a priority need for accommodation need e.g. pregnant women, families with dependent children and vulnerable people. Priority need is one of the tests which a homeless person needs to pass for the local authority to decide what help with housing they might be entitled to. Other tests include whether the person is eligible for homeless assistance in terms of their immigration status, actually homeless, homeless through no fault of their own or intentionally homeless and has a local connection with the local authority where they are making their application. Priority need is different to priority on the housing waiting list.

The number of households living in temporary accommodation (TA) significantly increased from 2010 because of a sharp increase in homelessness, this is consistent with other English authorities. During 2020 the number of households in TA reached over 900 but has since decreased due to action taken by the Council.

As part of the development of this strategy a survey was carried out of those households and individuals living in TA. A key finding of the survey was there needs to improve the support provided to individuals who living in TA. In-person contact and ongoing conversations with people were highlighted as ways for us to respond to specific cases, act with empathy, and prioritise those who need help the most.

### Use of temporary accommodation

The use of temporary accommodation by Milton Keynes compared with England and the Southeast is shown in the table below for June 2022 based on Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities data.

Area	Number of households in TA	Number of households in TA per households in the area per (000s)
Milton Keynes	892	8.23
England	94,870	3.97
South East	11,150	2.89

Source: Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

The number of households in TA<sup>8</sup> has now reduced to 772 as a result of steps taken by Milton Keynes Council that includes:

- Asking people to come to us at an earlier point so that homelessness can be prevented

<sup>8</sup> 30 November 2022



- Supporting households and individuals to move to permanent housing with additional resource to make this happen
- Exploring all accommodation options with people presenting as homeless and in priority need.

There are 543 households in TA with children and total of 1,182 children living in this type of accommodation. The average length of stay in TA in Milton Keynes is 241 days.

In January 2022 we have 130 households accommodated in bed and breakfast. Bed and breakfast accommodation can only ever be an emergency offer. We now only use bed and breakfast as a last resort and on average we have five households in this type of accommodation at any one time.

We work closely with our 16-25 team ensuring that young people leaving care do not present as homeless and should not be placed in temporary accommodation.

Our Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy sets out our approach to the placement of households in temporary accommodation both in and outside of Milton Keynes. It covers interim placements made under Section 188 (1) Housing Act 1996 while homelessness enquires are undertaken, and longer-term temporary accommodation placements for households accepted as homeless under Section 193 Housing Act 1996.

MKC has clear procedures in place to ensure that those who are eligible are provided with temporary accommodation of reasonable quality, but this is not always the most suitable or appropriate for the homeless household as too much of it is out-of-borough.

We are no longer procuring new TA on a nightly cost basis, as this arrangement is very expensive. Instead, we are procuring more appropriate TA and not renewing nightly let leases. This approach will reduce the cost of temporary accommodation.

A recent innovative approach has involved replacing some of the existing temporary accommodation with seventy units of modular housing for use as TA for families.

## **Support in Temporary Accommodation**

Some households in temporary accommodation require additional support, mainly related to physical, mental health and substance misuse problems.

Temporary accommodation should be accommodating people for a short period of time, to ensure their wellbeing. However, once households are placed in TA they tend to remain in this type of accommodation for some time, until they receive an offer. Milton Keynes is working on reducing the amount of time people spend in TA.

Households in TA are not being case managed addressing the issues that might have contributed to homelessness, therefore the focus is whether they are accepted for rehousing or not. The TA survey highlighted that having a dedicated case officer to oversee each case would help remedy any ongoing communication issues and help make those living in TA feel supported throughout the process. As the number of people in TA is reducing, there may be opportunities for us to consider more support to households who need help. This support could transfer with the household or individual to help them settle into permanent accommodation, as there is no specific team to support them to move on.

### **We will:**

- Further develop plans to reduce reliance on temporary accommodation.
- Continue to ensure that no young person leaving care presents themselves as homeless.
- Continue to ensure that temporary accommodation is of a good quality.
- To continue to explore innovative ways in which to provide temporary accommodation.
- To reduce the length of time that households remain in temporary accommodation.
- Explore a case management approach for those in temporary accommodation.
- Consider extending the existing support services for households in temporary accommodation including support following move to permanent accommodation.

## 3: Improve access to support services and supported housing to those with complex needs

### Introduction

This aim is intended to ensure that homeless households can access the right support services at the right time.

The most significant support need identified for those owed a homelessness duty relates to mental health problems (23%)<sup>9</sup>. Other support needs were also identified in respect of domestic abuse, drug and alcohol issues, offending and rough sleeping. Of those owed a homelessness duty, 10% had three or more support needs, which demonstrates that there is a group of people with complex needs (150 people), who require access to support services as well as accommodation.

Supported housing for vulnerable homeless people and rough sleepers in Milton Keynes accommodates homeless people with multiple needs. Many supported housing residents have significant mental health needs and some have dual diagnosis. There are difficulties with moving people on from supported housing, due to the lack of independent accommodation options, and this has resulted in preventing new referrals being accommodated.

### Access to mental health and substance misuse services

There are a variety of primary care mental health services provided by Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust (CNWL), including mental health workers based in primary care and in A&E.

A recurring theme arising from the homelessness review is the need for mental health interventions for those at risk of losing their tenancy or when a household or individual is in temporary or supported accommodation.

CNWL has a dual diagnosis (mental health and substance use) team who work with people who are, or at risk of rough sleeping.

Although the work carried out by the CNWL mental health services is considered to be useful, and they are visible in the community, there is insufficient capacity to meet needs of those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Partnership working is essential for providing a joined-up response to individuals with mental health needs, to avoid duplication. There is regular communication between CNWL and Milton Keynes' mental health social work team. To increase capacity there is a need to be think

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<sup>9</sup> Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. H-CLIC 21/22

creatively about the mental health workforce including working closely with the voluntary sector.

## **Access to support provided to a person at home (floating support)**

We have recently reviewed the support available to people living at home (floating support). Our review of the floating support services will create greater efficiencies and increase capacity. Milton Keynes is also exploring funding sources for floating support for people who have very complex needs and who have previously been rough sleeping or are at risk of rough sleeping.

## **Supported housing pathway**

We have supported housing pathway for vulnerable single homelessness and rough sleepers, which involves all supported housing applications being considered by a supported housing panel. This panel covers services funded by the Council.

We are reviewing the supported housing pathway to look at a better fit of services in relation to what is needed and the future funding for these services. Most of the supported housing for single homelessness and rough sleepers is funded through the Government's Rough Sleeping Initiative programme, which is reducing over the next two years.

Milton Keynes is due to recommission the supported housing pathway for homeless people and rough sleeping and this process will need to ensure so that there are different offers available. We have started to explore whether a specialised provision for people who need or want to continue to drink but need a safe space to sleep; commonly referred to a wet house, or to adopt a more flexible approach that includes harm reduction as part of an existing service.

The homelessness review identified that commissioning own front door clusters of supported housing flats may be a useful model for those who want their own accommodation, but with opportunities to get together to reduce isolation. Also, the introduction of psychologically informed environment (PIE) principles to commissioned supported housing services was considered a helpful approach to provide a trauma informed environment.

There is a 28 bed refuge in Milton Keynes run by MK ACT and the Domestic Abuse Partnership has recently arranged for a review of its capacity, as the refuge has come under pressure from increased demand. There is a good success rate in terms of those being rehoused from the refuge, with most ending up being housed permanently and very few returning.

There is a separate mental health panel that provides access to supported housing commissioned for people with mental health problems. These services are separately commissioned to the homelessness and rough sleeper services, although individuals with mental health problems who are homeless or rough sleeping are considered by the mental health panel.

Referrals to supported housing not funded by Milton Keynes City Council are not managed by the supported housing panel. A standardised approach may need to be considered for anyone going into supported housing, including non-commissioned services. This would involve non-commissioned providers participating in the supported housing panel.

The process of moving people through the supported housing pathway may also need to be reviewed, as those who need to move from one service to another have to go through another referral and application process before being considered by the panel. An expedited process would enable people to move more easily.

### **We will:**

- Increase capacity for floating support that will be delivered more cost effectively
- Review the supported housing services to sustain and build on the current supported housing provision in Milton Keynes.
- Review pathways so that people can move into the right service at the right time and then move onto greater independence.
- Consider commissioning supported housing provision that can support people who actively use alcohol or drugs.
- Include psychologically informed environment (PIE) principles in the specifications for supported housing.
- Extend the supported housing panel to include those services not funded by MKCC.
- To explore how generic short term resettlement support can be provided to help those that move on from supported housing.

## 4: Improve access to sustainable accommodation

### Introduction

This aim is to support people to succeed with the right accommodation in the right area at the right time.

The main cause of homelessness in Milton Keynes is the lack of affordable housing. The increased cost of buying a home in Milton Keynes has resulted in more households moving into the PRS, which itself has resulted in increased rents. Affordable housing has not been delivered to the volumes planned in Milton Keynes, increasing pressure on the PRS.

Milton Keynes' Housing Strategy 2020-2025 commits the Council to a step change in the number of new affordable homes being built, by working collaboratively with developers, housing associations and Homes England.

### Access to the Private Rented Sector (PRS)

Milton Keynes City Council has developed a strategy for the Private Rented Sector (PRS)<sup>10</sup> to raise standards, encourage landlords and maximise the use of the PRS. The PRS has an important role in meeting demand for rented accommodation.

Milton Keynes has good incentive schemes for accessing the PRS. There is a rent deposit and rent in advance scheme, as well as a rent guarantee scheme. This approach improves the opportunities for accessing the privately rented sector. The main difficulty is that most private landlords will not accept LHA rates and therefore rents for those under the age of 35 are usually unaffordable.

The homelessness review found that some landlords may be interested in entering a management arrangement with another organisation to let their house of multiple occupation (HMOs), rather than managing them themselves. There may opportunities to increase access for homeless households through such an arrangement. Care has to be taken with these arrangements as there can be additional costs e.g. repairs and maintenance and void loss.

In the longer term we need to influence the private rented sector to meet the ongoing need in Milton Keynes, for example larger properties for larger families.

### Access to social housing

There is limited access to social housing in Milton Keynes due to the lack of supply. Access to both council housing and housing association accommodation is an important resource for vulnerable homeless people.

One of the problems identified is that people with a history of mental health problems and /or substance misuse problem can be allocated social housing in areas with a high level of ASB,

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<sup>10</sup> Private Sector Housing Strategy 2021-2026

which then puts their tenancy at risk. Milton Keynes has put a local lettings plan in place for central Milton Keynes to try to develop more of a mixed community. This has included introduction of CCTV and work with local shops. The purpose is to try and avoid areas where there are concentrations around the use of drugs and alcohol.

Housing associations that are Registered Providers have also engaged with Milton Keynes City Council to provide hard to let units on Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs). This enables homeless households to access this accommodation as an alternative to ASTs in the private rented sector.

## Other housing options

Milton Keynes uses an organisation to provide accommodation out of area, as long as people are happy to live away from Milton Keynes. This arrangement makes the accommodation more affordable, and the process has been quite successful. The accommodation is for families and single people who have a desire to live elsewhere.

There are other housing initiatives being adopted by Milton Keynes, including working with PRS landlords to fill the gap between LHA rates and market rented accommodation.

## Tenancy sustainment

An important aspect of sustaining a tenancy is to obtain the right support at the right time. Milton Keynes has a few specific floating support services, that are due to be reviewed and consolidated, but no longer commissions a generic floating support service that is available to anyone who is experiencing problems sustaining their tenancy.

Milton Keynes needs to deploy the limited resources that are available for tenancy sustainment, in the most efficient way possible. This means not only reviewing how the capacity of the specific floating services can be increased, but also how existing resources can provide help with tenancy sustainment e.g. housing officers, ASB officers, mental health professionals, Community Support Team etc.

## We will:

- Continue to increase the number of affordable homes as set out in our Housing Strategy
- Consider new initiatives that result in increasing the housing options for people in Milton Keynes, including affordable rented housing as well as low-cost home ownership.
- Continue to provide financial support and incentives to access the private rented sector.
- Continue to work with landlords to help shape the sector and to explore new arrangements over lettings and management arrangements.
- Maximise the use of existing resources to provide tenancy sustainment support to those at risk of losing their tenancies.

## 5: Make rough sleeping brief, rare and non-recurrent

### Introduction

Rough sleeping has continued to reduce. Rough sleeper numbers reduced from 41 to 24, a decrease of 41%, between 2018 and 2022. The most recent annual rough sleeper count (November 2022) showed 50% of rough sleepers are of UK nationality, 92% were male and there were 4 (16%) rough sleepers aged 18–25-years. There were seven vacancies at the Old Bus Station on the night of the count (November 2022).

Rough sleeping is well served in Milton Keynes with the Council working in collaboration with Milton Keynes Homelessness Partnership and there has been a considerable focus on supporting people to move off the streets.

In 2022 we opened our shelter for single men at the Old Bus Station. This service is wholly funded by Milton Keynes City Council and is helpfully located above the services provided by Milton Keynes Winter Night Shelter (MK WNS) including information, advice, and food. Our rough sleeper navigators often work within the MK WNS. The Old Bus Shelter demonstrates that this type of invention can work, with a recent count finding only four who were new to rough sleeping. The outreach service is aware of the flow of new rough sleepers onto the streets, as well as those who are entrenched. We are concerned that there are nine people who have been living on the street for more than a year. Our approach to these people is robust and includes joint work with adult social care and health services.

### Rapid intervention

Milton Keynes has an inhouse Rough Sleeping Initiative funded Rough Sleeper Team, which operates an outreach service seven days a week enabling new rough sleepers to be picked up quickly. The outreach service assesses the presenting needs of those found rough sleeping and establishes whether they would like assistance from the Rough Sleeper Team and access to safe accommodation.

The approach taken by outreach workers, especially with the more entrenched group or those who are not ready to engage, is to work with them slowly and encourage individuals to access the shelter for rough sleepers. Once rough sleepers have engaged, then the higher needs cases are passed onto navigators who take a holistic and personalised approach.

Milton Keynes Council and its partners have opened a shelter for rough sleepers at the former bus station in Central Milton Keynes - the Old Bus Station (OBS). This initiative aimed to understand whether this model could work in Milton Keynes and the Council is committed to this type of service going forward.

The Old Bus Station provides an emergency night shelter seven nights a week for up to nineteen men on the first floor, who would otherwise be sleeping out. The service enables people to be safe and warm and provides access to 'one stop shop' of services including a GP,



laundry and barber. The ground floor is used by charities to provide services such as hot food and clothes.

One of the most significant gaps identified is the lack of mental health input for those who use the shelter. CNWL could potentially provide a weekly mental health session at the shelter, using a therapist or a psychologist, their work is trauma informed as it often trauma that has led people to sleep on the street.

Female rough sleepers are less visible and harder to engage. There are a mix of issues that can include sex working and drug and alcohol problems. An accommodation-based pilot for women was not well used and has been decommissioned. There needs to be a specific offer developed for women who are rough sleeping.

Winter shelters are provided in churches and other venues. While it is easy to access these shelters the rough sleepers who use them tend not to have much engagement with Milton Keynes Council. Some voluntary sector partners are concerned that this lack of engagement with the Council leads to rough sleeping reoccurring and consider that there needs to be a partnership arrangement with the winter night shelters, involving access to an accommodation pathway.

Some stakeholders mentioned the need to educate the public to not give money or food to rough sleepers, as this can keep people on the streets as there is less motivation to seek help.

There is a group of people who have a street lifestyle, who are not rough sleeping. These individuals often congregate around the train station and beg for money and food.

## **Rough sleeper accommodation and support pathway**

The accommodation pathway for rough sleepers is managed through the Homelessness Reduction Act by Housing Solutions The main outcomes are:

- Supported housing
- Private rented accommodation
- Reconnection
- Social housing

The navigators work with individual rough sleepers to help them engage with Housing Solutions to obtain offers of suitable accommodation.

The supported housing pathway for vulnerable homeless people and rough sleepers is managed by the supported housing panel. The supported housing pathway will be recommissioned, as many of these services have been developed in response to funding opportunities and a more coherent pathway needs to be mapped out.

Some individuals need to be reconnected, either with another authority or abroad. Some rough sleepers have a connection with London authorities, as there are good transport links between the capital and Milton Keynes. Individuals with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) can be

accommodated at the Old Bus Shelter and Barka (a not-for-profit organisation working with Eastern European migrants) works with us to reconnect individuals abroad, particularly in Eastern Europe, making travel arrangements to their country of origin and ensuring they have somewhere to stay.

Housing First has been introduced to provide a long-term solution for more entrenched rough sleepers in Milton Keynes. Many of the 130 Housing First tenancies have failed, as the individuals were not ready for independent living, and most were allocated in City Council accommodation in areas with a considerable amount of ASB and substance misuse. In contrast Next Steps Accommodation Programme has been very successful due to the level of floating support provided and the location of the accommodation, with 27 of the 30 individuals still accommodated.

The Rough Sleeper Team links into Milton Keynes City Council's own mental health team, which is a social work team that includes a dedicated worker for rough sleepers. The team uses a strengths based tool to identify their support needs, assesses what they can do for themselves and helps them access appropriate secondary mental health services. The single largest gap identified is access to the CNWL's community mental health services, due to lack of capacity within CNWL.

The Rough Sleepers Team works with Milton Keynes ARC in relation to drug and alcohol interventions, which is part of CNWL. Feedback suggests that some rough sleepers find it difficult to access drug and alcohol services as there is no assessment on the streets.

## We will:

- Continue to work to reduce the numbers of people rough sleeping in Milton Keynes
- Develop a long term vision for very short accommodation for rough sleepers
- Explore the provision of a warm safe place during the day at weekends
- Work with CNWL to explore whether a weekly mental health session could be provided at the Old Bus Station.
- Develop an appropriate response for women who are rough sleeping.
- Explore greater coordination with the winter nightshelters
- Develop a more coherent supported housing pathway for rough sleepers
- Review the Housing First approach

## 4. Implementation and Monitoring

Milton Keynes City Council and the Milton Keynes Homelessness Partnership will jointly own the strategy and will monitor progress of the implementation of the strategy.

This strategy will be accompanied by a detailed action plan for years 1 and 2, which will be outcome focused, with clear targets for delivery. The detailed action plan will be developed in collaboration with partners to deliver on the key actions identified by the strategy.

Detailed actions for subsequent years will be developed on an annual basis, based on a broader delivery framework. This approach is to allow flexibility in exactly how the objectives and priorities outlined in the strategy are to be achieved, accounting for changing needs and circumstances and the resources available over time. This is particularly important in the current context of uncertainty around the full impact the current cost of living crisis on homelessness and rough sleeping and on the funding available to tackle the issues involved.

Implementation of the Strategy will require close partnership working across a wide spectrum of partners.

Achievement against the action plan will be monitored on an ongoing basis through the Milton Keynes Homelessness Partnership. An annual outcomes report will be scrutinised by the Council's Corporate Leadership Team and the Community and Housing Scrutiny Committee.

