



Homelessness Strategy 2018 - 2023



Foreword



I am very pleased to introduce Melton Borough Council's Homelessness Strategy.

In a rural area such as Melton, homelessness can sometimes go undetected. However, it is a very real problem and many of our residents do not have anywhere to call home.

Local house prices and rents continue to rise faster than local incomes and many families are finding it increasingly hard to find somewhere affordable to live.

Homelessness is not just about a lack of accommodation, it can have a profound effect on peoples lives; homelessness can affect our physical and mental health and wellbeing, educational achievement, ability to gain and sustain employment, and can put pressure on our personal and family relationships.

This strategy reinforces our commitment to prevent homelessness, rather than dealing with households at the point of a homelessness crisis, because it is better for those affected and because it can be more cost effective too.

Key to the homelessness strategy will be the Melton Local Plan, it will help us to build enough homes of the right type to meet the needs of our growing population, this includes more good quality homes that are affordable to rent.

No single organisation can prevent homelessness alone; we must be proactive in working together; to intervene earlier and prevent homelessness wherever possible. We will use the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act and our new Homelessness Strategy as an opportunity to review and strengthen working arrangements with our partners.

The proposed priorities for our new homelessness strategy will ensure we can help to prevent homelessness and ensure that people are in a better position to meet their own housing needs both now and in the future.

Councillor Alan Pearson

Chair - Communities and Social Affairs Committee

A Strategy to Prevent Homelessness in Melton

This homelessness strategy sets out Melton Borough Council's plans to focus on the prevention of homelessness, tackle the root causes of homelessness and to provide successful outcomes for people who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness. It has been developed in consultation with the public, voluntary organisations and other key partners and stakeholders and it identifies how we will work together to deliver a service that meets the needs of our community.

This homelessness strategy has been developed to be consistent with other local plans, strategies and programmes that aim to address the wide range of factors that could contribute to homelessness in the local area. This includes Melton's Corporate Plan, Sustainable Community Strategy, Housing Strategy, Local Plan, Economic Development Strategy, Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Tenancy Strategy and Allocations Policy.

Homelessness in Melton

The number of homelessness applications the Council receives varies from year to year. In 2016-17 there was total of 154 homelessness applications and we accepted a homelessness duty for 56 of these households. A further 71 households were offered advice and assistance to either help them remain in their existing home or find alternative accommodation.

There are two main groups who approach the council as homeless, single people and families with dependent children. There is no typical homeless household, every case will have its own unique factors, there are however, some commonly observed differences between these two groups.

Single people are twice as likely to be male and very few are considered to be vulnerable (no priority need). They are likely to become homeless because of a relationship breakdown or because family or friends say they can no longer stay with them. The average age was 36 for men and 32 for women; around 25% were young people under the age of 25 and 25% were over the age of 44. Single People make up just over half of all approaches for help but only around 20% of cases where we have a duty to assist.

Families with children are a mix of couples (25%) and single parents, mainly female (75%). About 20% are pregnant with no other children; 83% have two or fewer children. The main reason for homelessness for families is the end of an AST (private sector tenancy), followed by relationship breakdown (including some violent relationship breakdowns). Younger families and those who are pregnant with no other children are also likely to become homeless because family or friends say they can no longer stay with them. The majority were under the age of 44 (90%) with around 20% aged 18-24. The main issue for this group is the cost of privately renting a home and access to one, particularly if they are in need of housing benefits. They make up around 80% of homelessness acceptances, but only 40% of all approaches for help with homelessness.

Key Issues

The homelessness strategy is based on the findings of a comprehensive review of homelessness, which has been published and should be read alongside this strategy. The main issues highlighted in the homelessness review, were;

- A 'broken' national and local housing market, with falling levels of home ownership
- Increasing numbers of people living in less secure housing in the private rented sector, particularly those under 40.
- High levels of low paid and low skilled employment, especially within Melton Mowbray, which affects the ability of households to afford to rent or buy a home
- A private rented sector that is not accessible or affordable for those with low to moderate incomes
- A need for more housing, to meet the needs of our growing and aging population
- A need for more affordable housing, particularly to rent and for families with children
- A need to improve how we monitor and record cases of homelessness, including a need to better identify the root causes of homelessness.
- A need to adapt our homelessness service, to meet our new responsibilities to prevent and relieve homelessness (the Homelessness Reduction Act, 2017)



Our Priorities

Priority 1: A Strong Emphasis on Prevention

We want to actively encourage people to apply for help and support early on. We will promote our homelessness services and take steps to help identify those at risk of becoming homeless. We will maintain our flexible approach toward offering assistance where there is an evidenced risk of homelessness, recognising that it is more efficient and cost effective to provide early advice and support.

We will take steps to identify and help people who may be at risk of becoming homeless at an early stage. This will include monitoring the impact of universal credit and other welfare reforms as well as helping young people transition to adulthood and develop the skills they need to successfully live independently.

We will also develop protocols and strengthen working relationships with other public authorities, private landlords, housing associations and other agencies, to identify and help people who may be at risk of becoming homeless at an early stage.

Priority 2: A Person Centred Approach

We will treat people facing homelessness with empathy, dignity and respect. We want people to feel that we have listened and understood their situation. We will undertake a holistic examination of an individual's background, current situation and support needs. We will ensure that people;

- are given clear relevant information appropriate to their circumstances;
- have their say in making and agreeing their housing plans;
- have their wishes and preferences, as well as their needs considered and recorded;
- receive regular communication about their case

We will develop a greater emphasis on working with service users to help them to resolve their housing needs themselves. We will agree actions with them that both they and we will be responsible for and we will encourage people to think about their long term housing aspirations and the steps they will need to take to meet them.

We recognise that housing and homelessness issues can often relate to wider social and economic issues. Affordability is a function of a household's income as well as housing costs. There are clear links to our Economic Development Strategy and our ambition to enhance aspirations, skills and economic activity; to help households to be in a better position to meet their own future housing needs and aspirations. For others, there may be a need for other types of help or support. We will use personalised housing plans to identify and help people to address any wider need for skills or support; we will work collaboratively with other service providers, in line with our *Me and My Learning* ethos. We will also develop specialist advice for vulnerable groups such as care leavers and victims of domestic abuse.

We recognise that for some vulnerable people this partnership approach will not always be straightforward or achievable. So we will also ensure that we take steps to identify those who are the most vulnerable and work with partners help them to get the support that they need.

Priority 3: Provide Enough Housing of all Tenures to Meet Local Housing Needs, Including the Need for More Affordable Homes to Rent

We will start by ensuring that we have a good understanding of local housing needs. We will undertake regular local assessments to understand how the population and households are expected to grow and change, to ensure that we are planning for enough housing, of the right types, to meet local needs.

We will then plan to meet these identified needs. The Melton Local Plan sets out the spatial vision for Melton to 2036 and it will provide a range of housing to meet local needs, including the need for more affordable housing. It is expected to increase the provision of affordable housing locally, which is expected to have a significant positive impact on meeting local housing needs including the needs of homeless households. We will monitor and regularly review the Local Plan to ensure its policies are effective. We will also develop a supplementary planning document to ensure that the affordable homes we deliver meet local needs, including the acute need for more family housing to rent, which will have the greatest impact in helping us to meet the needs of homeless households.

We will also ensure that we make the best use of existing homes to meet local needs. We will ensure that our other policies and strategies have regard to the Homelessness Strategy and needs of homeless households; this includes our Housing Strategy as well as our Allocations Policy, Tenancy Strategy, Housing Asset Management Plan and Discretionary Housing Payments Policy.

We will consider flexible and creative housing solutions to meet local housing needs that will genuinely help those most at risk of becoming homeless; we want more housing that is accessible and affordable to rent to those with lower to moderate incomes, regardless of tenure. We will work with local private sector landlords and their agents to identify any steps we can take to reduce homelessness in or increase access to the sector.



Priority 4: Deliver an Efficient and Effective Homelessness Service

We will aim to provide excellent advice and assistance to all households and for all tenures. We will ensure that our advice both addresses the needs of the general population, who may simply require some advice and signposting to resolve their own housing needs, as well providing more specialised advice and support for those with more complex needs. We recognise that how people communicate with us is changing and we will look at ways to improve our digital offer and online services.

Better intelligence is required to increase our understanding of homelessness, to ensure that our services are effective at meeting local needs and responsive to change. We will improve how we monitor homelessness; we will review our Homelessness Strategy annually and fully update it at a minimum every five years, sooner if required. Statistical data only provides part of the story, so we will also listen to peoples lived experience of homelessness and take into consideration the wider social impacts homelessness can have. We will use personalised housing plans to help us to understand and address the fundamental root causes of homelessness.

The Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) is the biggest change to homelessness services in 15 years. To ensure that we prepare for the implementation of the Act in April 2018, we will;

- review operational practices and consider how the homelessness service and personalised housing plans will be delivered and resourced;
- review advice services, looking closely at the areas prescribed in the Homelessness Reduction Act, identifying what works well, what needs to be improved and where any gaps are; and
- review our prevention and relief practices, again identifying what works well, what needs to be improved and where any gaps are.

We will also undertake a review of homelessness temporary and emergency (B&B) accommodation, to ensure we have the right amount and type to meets local needs and identify ways to reduce both the use of it as well as the time spent in it.

We have produced an action plan to support the delivery of objectives of the homelessness strategy which has been published alongside it. The action plan will be regularly reviewed and updated at least annually.