

Oldham Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy 2021-26

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1. Foreword

As Cabinet Member for Housing I am pleased to introduce the Oldham Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy for 2021-26.

We are living in some of the most challenging times in our recent history due to the long-term effects of welfare reform, precarious public sector funding and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Homeless people are already amongst the most disadvantaged in society, with groups in Oldham particularly affected by poor mental and physical health and the need for tenancy and financial support being a common theme raised throughout consultation for the Strategy.

Oldham and the UK more widely, has a housing crisis. The pandemic has highlighted problems caused by a lack of social housing, an unregulated private sector, rising house prices putting homes out of the reach of many, cutting levels of Housing Benefit and the continuing impact of Right to Buy.

Change has been a theme throughout the lifetime of our last strategy – our homelessness and allocations services are once again directly delivered by the Council – and we need to harness the opportunities that change brings. Flexibility, control, new tools at our disposal and new relationships to explore and build.

The new strategy is the result of several months of consultation with key stakeholders in Oldham, who will work together in partnership to ensure the actions in its Delivery Plan are brought to fruition, preventing and reducing homelessness.

2. Introduction

Oldham Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy has been developed following a comprehensive review of homelessness in the borough between 2016 and 2020, particularly focusing on the latter two years since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) brought about the biggest change in homelessness legislation for over a decade, placing a statutory requirement upon local authorities to provide universal housing advice and to take reasonable steps to try and prevent and relieve homelessness amongst eligible groups.

With the introduction of the HRA has come an increase in applications from households seeking homelessness assistance, which local authorities must find appropriate ways to respond to within limited resources. The Homelessness Review undertaken, including our consultation with stakeholders including people using our services, is particularly important in helping to set the direction of this Strategy moving forward and how these resources need to be targeted.

Policies, services and delivery have changed significantly since the last Preventing Homelessness Strategy was published Oldham Council's partnership approach has yielded successes including:

- Thanks to the launch of 'A Bed Every Night' across Greater Manchester, Oldham now has dedicated outreach and accommodation provision for rough sleepers running 365 days a year
- A pledge is in place for Oldham care leavers up to the age of 25 that if they find themselves homeless they will be considered automatically in priority need and not intentionally homeless
- Initiatives such as 'Homeless Friendly' and 'Real Change' have launched across Oldham to help embed organisational change and raise funds for people experiencing homelessness and struggling to access necessities
- Strategic Housing at Oldham Council have delivered homelessness training to multiple partner agencies across voluntary, community and public sectors, helping to upskill colleagues to better assist the people they support.

Our previous Strategy has therefore provided us with strong foundations in building relationships across sectors, and creating services where gaps used to exist. However, we still have some way to go, particularly in tackling the root causes of homelessness and providing support at an earlier stage – that is why this Strategy in 2021 is about both Homelessness Prevention and Reduction, and plans to deliver:

- An increase in the number of households achieving a positive outcome after approaching services for help – for example, being able to remain in their accommodation or securing a new place to live;
- A decrease in households becoming homeless overall.

3. Our partnership

A theme running throughout our Review and our consultation is partnership working, something which Oldham embraces strongly as a cooperative borough. This Strategy has been developed in consultation with and will continue to be monitored by:

- Oldham Homelessness Forum, with multi-agency and lived experience representation from across the voluntary, faith, social enterprise and statutory sectors
- Oldham Strategic Housing Partnership, representing social housing providers developing and managing social housing in Oldham.

Our Delivery Plan has been developed in consultation with all Directorates across the local authority, who will help to drive forward implementation alongside the Strategic Housing team.

In delivering our Strategy, and our statutory housing services, we also work together with Oldham Safeguarding Adults and Children's Boards, a partnership of agencies and organisations whose aim is to safeguard adults and children who are vulnerable to, at risk of or are experiencing abuse and neglect.

4. Strategic Context

Oldham's Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy sits within a wider local, regional and national strategic context which aims to support the health, housing and other socioeconomic factors affecting our residents.

Year	Strategy / Framework	Implications
2017	The Oldham Plan 2017-22	Empowering people and communities: 1. Inclusive Economy 2. Cooperative Services 3. Thriving Communities
2017	Oldham Domestic Violence Strategy	Tackling domestic violence is a priority for Oldham Community Safety Partnership. This strategy is currently under review taking into account the new Domestic Abuse Act due to come into place in 2021
2018	UK Strategy for our Veterans	Sets the intent for the delivery of public services to veterans across the UK so that by 2028 every veteran feels even more valued, supported and empowered and will never be disadvantaged as a result of their service
2019	Oldham Allocations Scheme	Introduced reasonable preference applicable to prevention, relief and other homelessness duties in line with changes brought about by the Homelessness Reduction Act
2019	Oldham Housing Strategy	Commitment to meet Greater Manchester Housing Provider Homelessness Pledges and develop a Temporary Accommodation Strategy

2019	Oldham's Corporate Parenting Strategy	Sets out a vision for improving the life chances of children looked after and care leavers, our shared approach for making this happen, and how we will know we are getting it right
2019	GM Housing & Mental Health Strategy	Introduced a commitment to supporting the role housing, health and social care provision has in addressing the needs of service users.
2019	GM Drug & Alcohol Strategy	Introduced a vision is to make Greater Manchester a place where everyone can have the best start in life, live well and age well, safe from the harms caused by drugs and alcohol.
2020	GM Integrated Health & Justice Strategy	Introduced to address the typically very poor physical and mental health of people, both victims and offenders, who come through the criminal justice system. Including a focus on earlier identification of health and support needs, more responsive interventions, and providing health and care services, which are equal to those available to people living in the wider community.
2021	Domestic Abuse Act	Introduced a new duty to provide support in safe accommodation and applied priority need to all victims of domestic abuse, amongst other measures

Moving forward into the lifetime of this Strategy we will continue to align with local, regional and national strategies – including the forthcoming Greater Manchester Homelessness Prevention Strategy – to ensure integration of support and maximisation of resources, as part of our Strategic Priorities.

5. Priorities

The priorities for the Oldham Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy are framed by our statutory duties to homeless residents. The rationale behind this is to provide a clear and transparent focus in the Council's mission to prevent and relieve homelessness.

- Advice and information
 - How we promote our services to residents in Oldham and ensure they have access to services to prevent them from becoming homeless
- Early identification
 - Ensuring everyone is aware of the 'Duty to Refer' people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness
 - How we develop local protocols to deliver more effective partnership working
- Pre-crisis intervention

- Delivering homelessness prevention activity – particularly through effective partnership working
- Prevent recurring homelessness
 - Using our Review data to identify groups who need additional support, such as rough sleepers, victims of domestic abuse and care leavers
- Partnership arrangements
 - Working together as a Cooperative Borough to prevent and reduce homelessness through shared resources, information, understanding and goals.

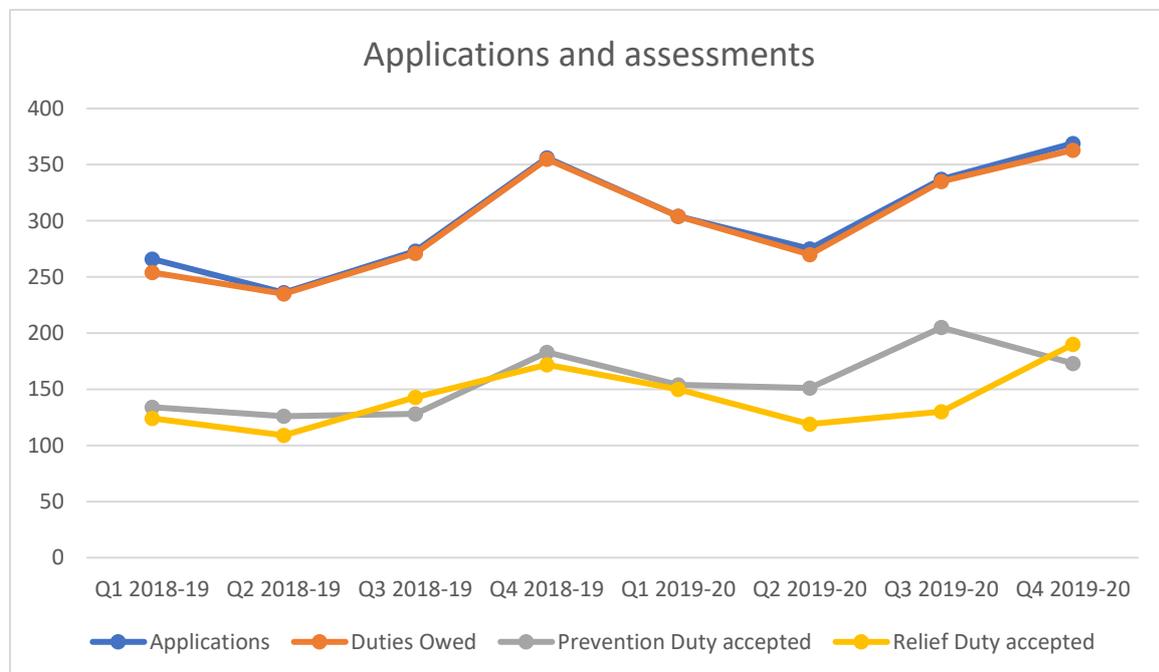
6. Homelessness in Oldham

The following provides a brief overview of the key statistical data from the Oldham Homelessness Review 2016-2020 which has been used to inform the Delivery Plan behind the Homelessness Prevention and Reductions Strategy 2021-26.

6.1 Applications and assessments

The Homelessness Review takes provides an in-depth analysis of trends in homelessness in Oldham between 2016-2020, with a particular focus on the period since the introduction of the HRA.

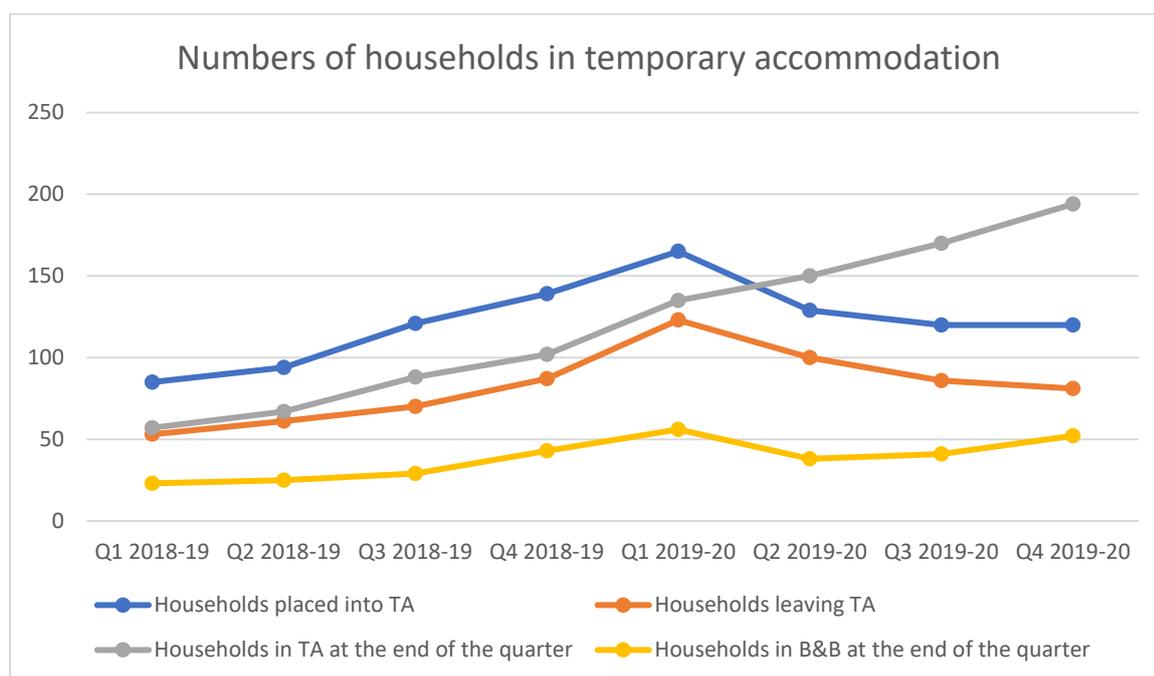
Applications to the local authority for homelessness assistance have been subject to seasonal increase and decline, but overall have risen across the Review period. Alongside this there has started to be a slight rise in the number of households approaching the local authority once already homeless – and subsequently owed the Relief Duty – rather than at a stage where homelessness can still be prevented. Our goal for the new Strategy is to try and reverse this trend through effective advice and pre-crisis intervention, as outlined in our priorities.



6.2 Temporary Accommodation

Establishing why this crisis point has been reached, and what can be done to avoid it occurring, needs to be a focus of the new Strategy – not least to reduce the number of households needing temporary accommodation, which have also increased.

Oldham Council has focused considerable efforts on reducing the use of bed and breakfast accommodation since these numbers were last reported, with numbers on a downward trajectory thanks to a new Temporary Accommodation Strategy in development. This will be supported by the Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy, including sourcing appropriate support for households in Temporary Accommodation to prevent recurring homelessness, as outlined in our priorities.

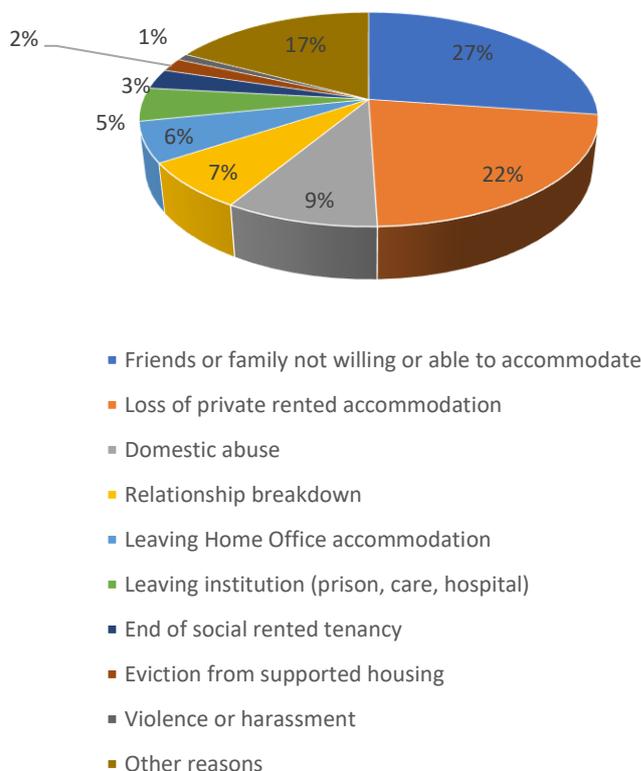


6.3 Reasons for Homelessness

The main reasons for homelessness in Oldham have remain largely unchanged since the previous Homelessness Strategy was published in 2016. These reasons are not dissimilar to the rest of the country, but the numbers may be exacerbated by local issues such as overcrowding, health inequalities and the local housing market. For example:

- Oldham has a higher level of households asked to leave by family and friends
- Oldham has a higher level of people given a notice to leave their private rented accommodation (although not necessarily becoming homeless from this)
- Oldham has a higher level of people leaving Home Office accommodation than the national average

Reasons for homelessness: 2018-20

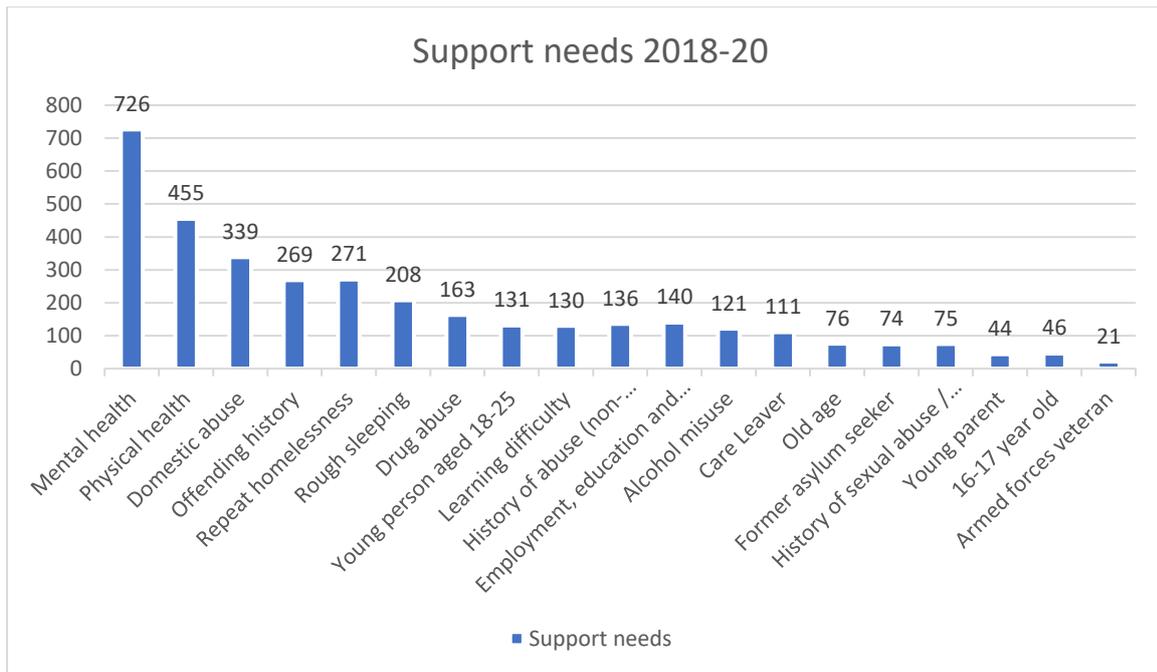


6.4 Support needs

The introduction of the HRA introduced Personal Housing Plans, and a requirement for Local Authorities to consider the support needs of applicants in helping them to secure suitable accommodation.

The data on support needs is self-declared and may not, therefore, reflect diagnosed conditions within datasets such as the JSNA (Joint Strategic Needs Assessment) or Social Care records. However, combined with feedback from consultation it provides valuable insight into how to tailor future services and address unmet need, and will be used to formulate the Strategy delivery plan.

Reflecting the main reasons for homelessness, Oldham is not unique in finding that mental and physical health issues feature prominently alongside domestic abuse, substance misuse and rough sleeping – all prominent issues intertwined with homelessness. However, self-declared learning difficulties and historical abuse are higher than the national average, and there are relatively high levels of applicants stating to have experienced repeat homelessness and rough sleeping. As part of our priorities we will set out actions to prevent recurring homelessness and put in place partnership arrangements to ensure those with support needs are access a suitable service.



7. Consultation

The Homelessness Review consulted our key partners including service users, Elected Members and stakeholders from across a range of sectors to establish what they saw as the key issues and priorities to address. Despite consultation having to take place remotely due to the Covid-19 Pandemic there was a great deal of synergy between the responses, which have been used to drive forward the priorities in this Strategy:

Services needed		
Members	Stakeholders	Service users
Tenancy Support	Tenancy Support	Tenancy support/Pre tenancy training
Domestic Abuse	Rough sleeping	Financial help
Mental Health	Mental Health	Mental health
Mediation/Counselling service		Mediation
Supported accommodation	Supported accommodation	Advocacy

Key Priorities		
Members	Stakeholders	Service users
Domestic Abuse	Mental Health support	Rough sleeping
Rent arrears/Termination of AST	Tenancy Support	Rent arrears
Family breakdown	Affordable housing	Family Breakdown
Affordable housing		Relationship breakdown

8. Monitoring

Sitting beneath these priorities will be a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, , Realistic, Time-Bound) delivery plan that is reviewed annually by our partners:

- Oldham Homelessness Forum
- Oldham Strategic Housing Partnership

Responsibility for day-to-day monitoring, including of financial resources allocated to the Strategy and the Housing Options Team, will be the responsibility of the Strategic Housing service at Oldham Council.

The initial Delivery Plan below will be a live document reflecting changing needs and demand amongst homeless households. An annual update will be produced reporting against completion, removal, or addition of actions.

9. Delivery Plan

Advice and information				
Aims	Promote housing advice services to residents in Oldham to ensure they can access appropriate information and resources to prevent them from becoming homeless			
Actions	Resources Required	Partners	Timescale	Progress
Improve advice and options available to departing partners in instances of relationship breakdown, including on legal rights, mediation and relationship counselling	Staff	VCSE; GP surgeries;	Year 3	
Ensure housing advice is promoted to emerging communities to ensure awareness of housing rights and increase prevention vs. relief	Staff	Emerging Communities; SERCO; VCSE; GP surgeries	Year 2	
Increase the availability of self-service advice online such as web chat with Housing Advisors so applicants can seek early advice more easily	Staff; budgetary; ICT	Unity (IT)	Year 5	
Investigate the delivery of new digital inclusion signposting services to such as social media campaigns, stakeholder e-resources, web links etc.	Staff; budgetary; ICT	Communications	Ongoing	

Early identification				
Aims	Work together as a partnership to identify groups who might be vulnerable to homelessness at the earliest possible stage and put appropriate interventions and referral pathways in place to offer them the help they need			
Actions	Resources Required	Partners	Timescale	Progress
Ensure staff in homelessness and related services are equipped to respond to vulnerable applicants in a psychologically informed way via delivering appropriate training	Staff; budgetary	Pennine Care; IDVA; Oldham Safeguarding Adults Board	Year 3	
Review accommodation pathways for offenders leaving custody in light of changes to Probation arrangements	Staff	Probation; GMCA; Greater Manchester Prison Service; Shelter	Year 2	
Undertake promotion of referrals to local housing authority to landlords following the easing of evictions following the Covid-19 pandemic	Staff	Oldham Strategic Housing Partnership	Year 1	
Review transitions process for Children Looked After reaching 17 th Birthday to plan move-on options at earliest opportunity	Staff	Children's Services	Year 2	
Deliver training to partner agencies to promote early identification and referrals for housing advice	Staff	All partners	Ongoing	

Pre-crisis intervention				
Aims	Proactive engagement with groups who might be affected by homelessness in the future, and ensuring it isn't left too late			
Actions	Resources Required	Partners	Timescale	Progress
Review the current young person's mediation scheme to ensure it meets demand and need	Staff; budgetary	Children's Services; Procurement	Year 2	
Review structure of the Housing Options Service to ensure it is sufficiently prevention focused within resources available, including capacity for home visits and co-location	Staff	Human Resources	Year 1	
Ensure housing options for older people are sufficiently explored and well presented, and meet the needs of those with more complex needs e.g. substance misuse	Staff; budgetary	Adult Social Care; Oldham Strategic Housing Partnership; Turning Point; Pennine Care	Year 4	
Increase options available via the Bond Scheme targeted at single households, e.g. en-suite rooms in shared houses / studio apartments	Staff; budgetary	PRS Landlords; Environmental Health	Ongoing	
Review and promote financial relief funds available to clear arrears and help applicants to access and sustain housing	Staff; budgetary	VCSE; Welfare Rights	Year 4	

Review current debt and money management provision and promote availability	Staff; budgetary	Welfare Rights; VCSE	Year 4	
Participate in MASH and Adult Social Care front door review to consider potential future housing links	Staff; budgetary	Adult Social Care	Year 2	

Prevent recurring homelessness				
Aims	Identify groups who need additional support, such as rough sleepers, victims of domestic abuse and care leavers			
Actions	Resources Required	Partners	Timescale	Progress
Carry out a review of domestic abuse services in the borough and commission an appropriate response in line with the new Domestic Abuse Act	Staff; budgetary	IDVAs; Refuge; Early Help; VCSE; Adult Social Care; Children's Services; Police; Domestic Abuse Partnership	Year 1	
Undertake a peer review to establish why repeat homelessness occurs, and put measures in place to prevent this happening	Staff; budgetary	VCSE; GMCA	Year 5	
Together with Children's Services, develop young people's housing strategy with a particular focus on sufficiency for 16-17 year olds and care leavers	Staff; budgetary	Children's Services; Procurement	Year 2	
Review current commissioned services and ensure preparations are	Staff; budgetary	GMCA; Emerging Communities; Adult Social Care; Children's Services	Year 1	

made for the closure of the EU Settlement Scheme				
Source funding to extend the RSI Team or other service to support 'sofa surfers' to more proactively intervene given their transient nature and focus on more proactive interventions	Staff; budgetary	VCSE; GMCA	Year 1	
Review sources of resettlement support for rough sleepers to prevent return to the streets	Staff; budgetary	VCSE; GMCA	Year 1	
Source longer term funding to provide stability for current rough sleeping services, including RSI Team and A Bed Every Night	Staff; budgetary	VCSE; GMCA	Year 1	
Publish temporary accommodation strategy including procurement for temporary accommodation services to achieve value for money and sustainable move-on	Staff; budgetary	Procurement	Year 2	
Proactively monitor and review people being released from prison or discharged from approved premises to prevent them being released without an	Staff	Probation; Greater Manchester Prison Service	Ongoing	

address or appropriate support in place				
Seek longer term funding to continue co-locating a housing officer within Oldham Hospital	Staff; budgetary	Adult Social Care; GMCA	Year 1	

Partnership arrangements				
Impact	Working together as a Cooperative Borough to Prevent and Reduce Homelessness through shared resources, information, understanding and goals			
Actions	Resources Required	Partners	Timescale	Progress
Work to improve landlord / tenant relations through education and information on rights and responsibilities	Staff	PRS landlords; Environmental Health	Year 3	
Work together with registered providers to develop 'right-sizing' initiatives	Staff	Oldham Strategic Housing Partnership	Year 4	
Ensure homeless applicants have fair access to GP and other primary care treatment, and effective pathways into vaccination and other programmes	Staff	Homeless Friendly; Adult Social Care; Pennine Care	Year 2	
Continue to develop the role of the Local Authority Asylum Support Officers (LAASLOs) or similar service to support the integration of refugees and migrants and	Staff	Emerging Communities	Year 2	

deliver early intervention to prevent homelessness				
Work with partners to support applicants into employment to ensure they can better access and sustain housing	Staff	DWP; Get Oldham Working	Year 3	
Consider co-locating the Housing Options service within place-based integration initiatives, or upskilling relevant colleagues	Staff	Communities; Strategic Housing Partnership	Year 4	
Review protocols with and streamline access to services to promote move-on from Temporary and Supported Accommodation and access to services such as Local Welfare Provision, Jobcentre Plus and Discretionary Housing Payments	Staff	DWP; Welfare Rights; VCSE	Year 2	
Continue to lobby for long-term revenue and capital funding from bodies such as MHCLG	Staff	MHCLG; GMCA	Ongoing	
Work together with Oldham Strategic Housing Partnership to secure capital and revenue funding for long-term accommodation	Staff	Oldham Strategic Housing Partnership	Ongoing	

Review the supported accommodation gateway process in line with an updated needs assessment	Staff	Internal gateway partners; Registered providers	Ongoing	
Encourage, promote and support where required voluntary, faith & charitable sector organisations to submit relevant funding applications which enhance and support our local offer to homeless households	Staff	VCSE	Ongoing	

10. Glossary

DHP: Discretionary Housing Payment

DWP: Department of Work and Pensions

GM: Greater Manchester

GMCA: Greater Manchester Combined Authority

IDVA: Independent Domestic Violence Advocate

JCP: Job Centre Plus

MOPP: Move-On Planned Protocol/Partnership

NASS: National Asylum Support Service

PRS: Private Rented Sector

VCSE: Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise

11. Contact

Oldham Council Strategic Housing

Housing.options@oldham.gov.uk