Appendix 1

Huntingdonshire District Council

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026–2031 – Consultation Draft

Preventing Homelessness, Supporting Recovery and Ending Rough Sleeping

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Foreword

Everyone deserves a safe, secure and affordable place to call home. Housing provides the foundation from which people can build healthy, independent and fulfilling lives. When that foundation is lost, the impacts can be profound, affecting health, wellbeing, employment, education, family relationships and community cohesion.

Like many areas across England, Huntingdonshire is experiencing increasing pressure on its housing system. Rising housing costs, limited affordability, increasing demand for homelessness assistance and growing complexity of support needs continue to create significant challenges for residents and partner organisations alike. At the same time, the rural nature of our district presents unique challenges, with residents often facing barriers to accessing services, support and suitable accommodation.

Despite these challenges, Huntingdonshire remains a place of opportunity, innovation and strong partnership working. Across the district, public services, housing providers, health organisations, voluntary agencies, town and parish councils and community groups are working together to improve outcomes for residents experiencing housing difficulties.

This Strategy sets out our shared vision for tackling homelessness and rough sleeping between 2026 and 2031. It establishes a clear framework for action based on prevention, early intervention, partnership working and housing-led solutions. It reflects the Government's ambition that homelessness should be rare, brief and non-recurring.

Our commitment is simple: wherever possible, we will prevent homelessness before it occurs. Where homelessness cannot be prevented, we will ensure people receive timely support, access to suitable accommodation and the assistance needed to build a stable and sustainable future.

Working together with our partners and communities, we will continue striving towards a Huntingdonshire where everyone has the opportunity to live safely, independently and securely.

1. Introduction

Homelessness remains one of the most significant social challenges facing communities across the country. While the causes of homelessness are often complex and varied, the consequences are consistently damaging for individuals, families and communities.

Homelessness describes a situation where an individual or household does not have access to accommodation that is available, suitable, secure, and reasonable for them to occupy as their home. It includes both visible homelessness, such as rough sleeping, and hidden forms of homelessness, such as staying temporarily with friends or family, or being at risk of losing their home.

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities to assess homelessness needs and publish a strategy setting out how homelessness will be prevented and addressed. This Strategy fulfils that requirement and provides Huntingdonshire District Council's strategic framework for tackling homelessness and rough sleeping between 2026 and 2031.

The Strategy has been informed by:

- A review of homelessness and rough sleeping within Huntingdonshire.
- Engagement with statutory, voluntary and community sector partners.
- Local housing and demographic evidence.
- National policy and legislative developments.

This document establishes the Council's vision, priorities and strategic direction. Delivery will be supported through a detailed Action Plan, which will be reviewed annually to ensure services remain responsive to changing needs and emerging challenges.

2. Policy, Legislative and Strategic Context

2.1 National Policy Context

The national approach to homelessness has increasingly focused on prevention, early intervention and housing-led solutions. There is growing recognition that homelessness cannot be addressed solely through crisis responses and emergency accommodation. Sustainable outcomes require coordinated action across housing, welfare, health, employment and support services.

Government is increasingly involving Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSA's) within the area of homelessness and rough sleeping. An example is the recent allocation of Rough Sleeping Programme funding to MSA's to coordinate strategic regional

responses, pool resources across local council boundaries, and integrate housing, health, criminal justice, and support services.

In December 2025, the Government published *A National Plan to End Homelessness*, establishing a vision that homelessness should be rare, brief and non-recurring. The Plan is based on five interrelated pillars:

Universal Prevention

Addressing the root causes of homelessness through housing supply, affordability, poverty reduction and improved tenancy security.

Targeted Prevention

Providing enhanced support to groups known to face an increased risk of homelessness, including care leavers, prison leavers, survivors of domestic abuse and people leaving health institutions.

Preventing Crisis

Identifying housing issues at the earliest opportunity and helping households maintain accommodation wherever possible.

Improving Emergency Responses

Ensuring people who experience homelessness have access to safe, suitable accommodation and effective support.

Recovery and Preventing Repeat Homelessness

Supporting residents to maintain stable housing and avoid future experiences of homelessness.

These principles underpin this Strategy and reinforce the importance of prevention, partnership and sustainable housing outcomes.

Supporting Veterans and Ending Veteran Homelessness

Under the Armed Forces Covenant, the Council is committed to ensuring that former service personnel, current reservists, and their families are treated with fairness and respect, and are never disadvantaged in accessing housing and homelessness services due to their service. We pledge to actively identify veteran status at the earliest point of contact, apply statutory exemptions and local connection flexibilities, and work in close partnership with veteran-specific housing and support providers to prevent crisis and eliminate veteran rough sleeping.

2.2 Legislative Framework

The Council delivers its homelessness functions within a comprehensive legislative framework that defines local authority duties and responsibilities.

Key legislation includes:

- Housing Act 1996 (as amended)
- Homelessness Act 2002
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Localism Act 2011
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Care Act 2014
- Children Act 1989 and 2004
- Equality Act 2010
- Mental Health Act 1983 (as amended)

Together, this framework places a strong emphasis on early intervention, prevention, partnership working and protecting vulnerable households.

The Rough Sleeping Programme

The Government's Rough Sleeping Programme represents a significant national commitment to reducing and ultimately ending rough sleeping. The programme promotes rapid access to accommodation, intensive wraparound support and long-term housing solutions for people experiencing the most severe and prolonged forms of homelessness.

The programme supports local authorities and partners to strengthen outreach services, improve accommodation pathways and create sustainable routes away from rough sleeping.

2.3 Regional and Sub-Regional Context

Many drivers of homelessness extend beyond district boundaries. Huntingdonshire therefore works closely with partners across Cambridgeshire and the wider region to develop coordinated responses to housing need and rough sleeping.

The Council works alongside:

- Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Cambridgeshire's district and city councils
- Parish Councils
- Housing associations and registered providers

- Health and social care partners
- The Integrated Care System
- Police, Probation and criminal justice agencies
- Voluntary, community and faith sector organisations

Strong partnership working helps deliver effective pathways for residents leaving institutions, supports rough sleeping initiatives and promotes coordinated responses to housing pressures.

3. Huntingdonshire: Local Context

Huntingdonshire is the largest district in Cambridgeshire by geographical area and is home to a diverse mix of market towns, villages and rural communities.

The district's principal settlements include:

- Huntingdon
- St Neots
- St Ives
- Ramsey
- Godmanchester

Huntingdonshire continues to experience population growth and economic development, making it an attractive place to live and work. However, these strengths are accompanied by increasing pressure on housing affordability and housing supply.

Recent data from the Office for National Statistics show that Huntingdonshire residents continue to face a range of housing challenges including:

- Rising private sector rents – with the average monthly rent in September 2026 being £1,065, 4% higher than the same month in the previous year.
- High barriers to home ownership – average house prices being £307,000 in August 2026, a 1% rise over the previous year.
- Ongoing demand for affordable housing – over 3000 households on the housing register as at the end of September 2026.
- Increased pressure on temporary accommodation – 135 households in temporary accommodation at the end of September 2026 compared to 129 a year earlier.
- Reduced housing options for lower-income households

The rural nature of the district also presents additional challenges. Hidden homelessness can be more difficult to identify, while transport limitations and reduced access to services can make it harder for vulnerable residents to obtain support.

These local circumstances require a homelessness response that is flexible, preventative and tailored to the needs of both urban and rural communities.

This Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy links closely to several other key council strategies because homelessness is driven by multi-faceted social, health, economic, and housing supply issues.

The diagram below illustrates which strategies homelessness is closely linked to and it is recognised how the strategic direction and work in these other areas may influence our ability to help resolve homelessness through areas such as the supply of affordable housing.



4. Homelessness in Huntingdonshire: Needs, Trends and Challenges

The Council's Homelessness Review identified a number of key trends influencing local demand and shaping future service requirements.

Housing Affordability

Increasing housing costs continue to place pressure on households across all tenures. Access to both social housing and the private rented sector remains challenging for many residents.

Increasing Demand

The number of households seeking homelessness assistance has continued to increase, reflecting wider economic pressures and worsening affordability.

Temporary Accommodation Pressures

Demand for temporary accommodation remains significant, creating both operational and financial pressures and highlighting the need for preventative approaches.

Rough Sleeping

While rough sleeping levels remain relatively low compared with some urban areas, rough sleeping continues to occur within the district. Hidden homelessness and sofa surfing remain areas of concern.

Multiple Disadvantage

Many residents experiencing homelessness face several interconnected challenges, including:

- Poor mental health
- Substance misuse
- Domestic abuse
- Family breakdown
- Financial hardship
- Physical health problems
- Social isolation

These factors demonstrate that homelessness is rarely caused by a single issue and that sustainable solutions require both suitable housing and personalised support.

5. Strategic Challenges

While Huntingdonshire remains a prosperous and desirable place to live, a number of structural and emerging challenges continue to influence levels of homelessness and housing insecurity.

Key challenges include:

- Rising housing costs and affordability pressures.

- Demand for affordable rented housing exceeding supply.
- Increasing use and cost of temporary accommodation.
- Growing complexity of support needs.
- Access to accommodation for single people and younger households.
- Rural isolation and hidden homelessness.
- Economic uncertainty and cost of living pressures.
- Workforce recruitment and capacity challenges across housing and support services.

The Council and its partners must respond proactively through prevention, innovation, partnership working and effective use of resources.

6. Our Vision

Our Vision for 2031

Our vision is that homelessness in Huntingdonshire should be rare, brief and non-recurring. We will work with residents, communities and partners to ensure everyone has access to safe, suitable and sustainable accommodation, together with the support required to maintain independence, improve wellbeing and achieve positive life outcomes.

7. Our Strategic Ambitions

Make Homelessness Rare

By addressing the root causes of homelessness and strengthening prevention, resilience and early intervention services.

Make Homelessness Brief

By ensuring rapid access to advice, support and suitable accommodation whenever homelessness cannot be prevented.

Make Homelessness Non-Recurring

By helping residents sustain accommodation, build resilience and access the support required for long-term housing stability.

8. Our Principles

We will:

- Put prevention first.
- Intervene early.
- Place residents at the centre of service delivery.
- Work collaboratively.
- Promote housing-led solutions.
- Champion equality and inclusion.
- Value lived experience.
- Pursue continuous improvement through evidence and learning.

9. Our Strategic Priorities

Priority 1

Prevent Homelessness Through Earlier Intervention and Targeted Support

Prevention remains the most effective way of reducing homelessness and improving outcomes for residents.

We will strengthen early intervention, tenancy sustainment and targeted support to identify housing issues before they escalate into crisis.

Strategic Outcomes

- Earlier identification of risk.
- Increased tenancy sustainment.
- Fewer homelessness presentations.
- Improved access to preventative support.
- Ensure residents in rural communities can access prevention, advice and support services regardless of location.

Priority 2

Provide High-Quality, Person-Centred Homelessness Services

Where homelessness cannot be prevented, residents should receive a timely, coordinated and compassionate response.

We will continue improving customer experience, assessment processes and accommodation pathways.

Strategic Outcomes

- Faster access to support.
- Reduced time spent in temporary accommodation.
- Improved housing outcomes.

Priority 3

Reduce Rough Sleeping and Support Recovery

No one should be forced to sleep rough.

We recognise that rough sleeping is often the most visible form of homelessness but represents only a small proportion of those experiencing housing insecurity. We will continue to strengthen local outreach arrangements, improve partnership responses and ensure people sleeping rough are supported into accommodation as quickly as possible.

Particular focus will be given to preventing repeat rough sleeping and supporting people with complex needs.

Strategic Outcomes

- Reduced rough sleeping.
- Improved access to support services and supported housing options.
- More sustainable move-on into settled housing.
- Reduced repeat rough sleeping.

Priority 4

Increase Access to Safe, Suitable and Sustainable Housing

Access to appropriate housing is fundamental to preventing and relieving homelessness.

We will work closely with housing providers, developers, landlords and support agencies to increase housing opportunities and improve accommodation pathways.

Strategic Outcomes

- Increased housing options.
- Improved access to affordable housing.
- Better move-on opportunities.

- Expanded housing-led interventions.

Priority 5

Develop Strong Partnerships and Place Lived Experience at the Heart of Service Delivery

Homelessness cannot be resolved by a single organisation acting alone.

We will strengthen relationships across housing, health, social care, criminal justice and voluntary sector services while ensuring that the voices of residents inform future service development.

Strategic Outcomes

- Stronger partnership working.
- Better coordinated services.
- Improved data and performance management.
- Greater involvement of people with lived experience.

10. Delivering the Strategy

Successful delivery will depend upon strong leadership, effective partnership working and clear accountability.

The Strategy will be supported through:

- A detailed annual Action Plan.
- Multi-agency partnership working.
- Regular performance monitoring.
- Resident engagement and feedback.
- Ongoing review of emerging needs and priorities.

11. Governance and Accountability

Delivery of this Strategy will be overseen by Huntingdonshire District Council through regular performance monitoring and partnership governance arrangements.

Progress will be reviewed through:

- Annual Action Plan updates.
- Quarterly performance reporting.

- Partnership review meetings.
- Service user feedback.

This will ensure the Strategy remains responsive to emerging needs, policy developments and changing housing pressures.

12. Measuring Success

Progress will be measured through a framework of quantitative and qualitative indicators, including:

- Increased positive outcomes at the prevention duty stage.
- Reduced use of temporary accommodation.
- Reduced levels of rough sleeping.
- Improved tenancy sustainment rates.
- Increased access to suitable accommodation.
- Enhanced partnership effectiveness.
- Improved long-term housing outcomes.

Annual reporting will provide transparency, accountability and opportunities for continuous improvement.

Conclusion

The causes of homelessness are complex, but homelessness itself is not inevitable. Through strong partnerships, earlier intervention, effective prevention and a commitment to continuous improvement, Huntingdonshire District Council and its partners will work together to ensure that fewer people experience homelessness and that those who do receive the support needed to recover quickly and sustainably.

This Strategy provides a clear framework for achieving that ambition and for creating a district where everyone has the opportunity to live in a safe, secure and suitable home. By working together, we will strive to ensure that homelessness in Huntingdonshire becomes increasingly rare, increasingly brief and increasingly non-recurring.

Case Studies – examples of the types of homelessness and assistance offered to residents

Case Study 1

Ms L lived in a Private Rented Tenancy with her two children, one of whom was dependant and one an adult, but with additional needs for whom she was a carer. She approached the Housing Advice & Options Team for advice about her options following a relationship breakdown.

Ms L had a joint tenancy with her ex-partner and they were still living together in the property that had been their home for the last five years. Following the relationship breakdown she was no longer able to afford the rent on her own, as she was only able to work part time due to her caring responsibilities.

A prevention duty was accepted towards her on the basis of a valid notice seeking possession being served by the landlord. Prevention work was undertaken, including exploring the possibility of supporting Ms L with any rent shortfall to remain in her home so she could be helped to move in a more planned way. This was not successful as the landlord would not agree to this arrangement and wanted to regain possession of the property. Ms L had to move out of the property to avoid Court action being taken against her where she would also have been liable for costs.

She initially made her own arrangements for temporary accommodation but was allocated temporary accommodation by the Council once these arrangements broke down. A Main Housing Duty was then accepted towards Ms L and her Home-Link application was awarded the highest priority band.

Given that social housing was the only realistic and affordable housing solution, Ms L was assisted with bidding for properties through the Home-Link scheme and was allocated a 3-bed tenancy in the area of her choice. She and her children were then offered additional support via the Residents' Advice Team to help them settle into their new home.

Case Study 2

Ms Q was a high-risk victim of domestic abuse being supported by a number of agencies. Ms Q's circumstances were discussed at a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference, a local, confidential meeting where statutory and voluntary agencies share information on high-risk domestic abuse cases to create coordinated safety plans.

Although the perpetrator was serving a custodial sentence and subject to a restraining order, there remained concerns regarding her ongoing safety and the impact of further incidents on her wellbeing upon his release.

The Housing Needs Team worked closely with Ms Q's Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) and other partner agencies, to support Ms Q to remain safely in her home, recognising that maintaining her accommodation and support networks was important to her recovery and reducing the risk of homelessness. While alternative housing options were discussed, Ms Q wished to remain in her current property close to family and friends who were part of her support network.

Following a further incident at the property following the perpetrators release, a safety plan was reviewed, and additional security measures were considered. Working collaboratively with the IDVA, the Housing Needs team assisted with funding for 18 months of internet costs, enabling the installation of a video doorbell system. This provided Ms Q with an additional layer of security, helping her to remain safely in her home and preventing the need to move that would have created a homelessness situation.

As a result, Ms Q was able to remain in settled accommodation, continue engaging with support services, and maintain her recovery within her local community.

Case Study 3

Mr M experienced a life-changing brain injury which resulted in significant mobility difficulties, leaving him unable to walk unaided and requiring ongoing care and support. As his previous accommodation was unsuitable for his changed circumstances, he was at risk of homelessness upon discharge from hospital.

Prior to his hospital admission, Mr M had experienced periods of homelessness and alcohol misuse and was already receiving support from the Counting Every Adult service (CEA) at the County Council. Recognising the risk of homelessness upon discharge from hospital the CEA team made a referral to the Housing Needs Team to secure appropriate accommodation and support.

Working closely with CEA and the hospital discharge team, the Housing Needs team coordinated a planned transition from hospital into accessible temporary accommodation in Huntingdon. The accommodation was suitable for Mr M's mobility needs and enabled care providers to visit four times a day to deliver essential care and support, ensuring his safety and wellbeing in the community.

The Housing Needs team assisted Mr M to register on the Home-Link scheme and provided ongoing support to help him bid for suitable properties. Through this process, Mr M successfully secured an offer of a suitable ground-floor flat in Huntingdon. He accepted the offer and moved into settled accommodation, providing him with a stable and accessible home from which to continue his recovery.