

# Homelessness Strategy 2016



*Oadby and Wigston  
Borough Council*

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Foreward by Councillor Boulter

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## **Foreward**

Welcome to Oadby & Wigston Borough Council's third homelessness strategy.

The world has changed and continues to change yet the challenge of homelessness remains.

Oadby & Wigston Borough Council has continued to develop it's offer to those facing homelessness, particularly over the past 2 years.

The challenges going forward are enormous.

Substantial cuts to welfare budgets has seen temporary accommodation across Leicestershire reduced from 10 schemes providing over 200 bedspaces to 2 schemes providing just 60 spaces. Proposed welfare cuts particularly to the under 35 year old age range will make dealing with homelessness much harder.

### **The future**

I recognise that many of the causes for increasing homelessness in the Borough are outside the control of both residents and the Council. In developing this strategy I am confident that we will continue to strive to provide a responsive and appropriate service for those facing homelessness locally.

Cllr Boulter, Chair Service Delivery Committee  
June 2016

## **1. Introduction**

The Homelessness Act 2002 placed a legal obligation on all Local Housing Authorities to carry out a review of homelessness in their areas and to develop a strategy for tackling and preventing it at least every 5 years.

This is Oadby & Wigston Borough Council's third Homelessness Strategy and it builds on the progress made since 2003. At the same time it recognises the changing national and local context which has brought increased levels of demand and a challenging financial environment.

Homelessness administration is a statutory function. In Oadby & Wigston homelessness and housing advice services are carried out by the Council through the Housing Options team.

In 2016 Oadby & Wigston Borough Council will commence work towards the Gold Standard in Homelessness. The Gold Standard is a cross-government supported service improvement challenge aiming to encourage Local Authorities to develop and improve their homelessness and housing advice services.

The first stage of the challenge is a peer review with 2 other Councils in which we must get 60% or above on in order to progress to the second stage which involves demonstrating good practice in service delivery across 10 gold standard challenge areas (ranging from partnership working and corporate commitment to youth homelessness and temporary accommodation).

The peer review of Oadby & Wigston Borough Council will take place by the end of 2017. We will aim to achieve more than 60%. The detailed criteria for each of the challenge areas will be closely linked to the objectives and actions of this Strategy and action plan.

## 2. Homelessness Review

During 2015 the Council carried out a brief internal review of homelessness.

Chart 1

### Homeless Applications and Acceptances

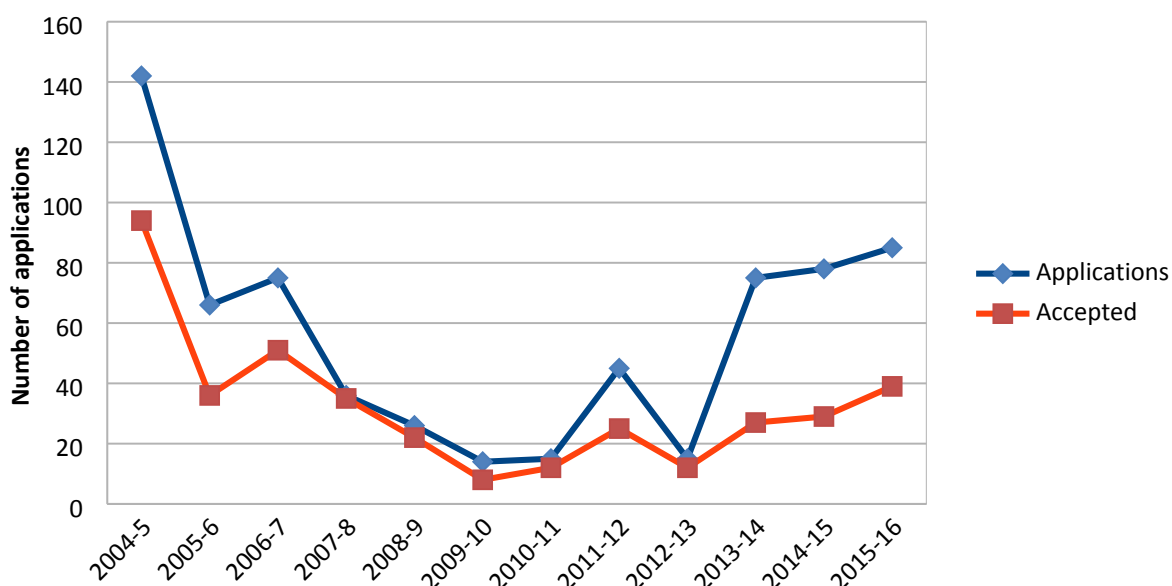


Chart 1 shows a substantial increase in homelessness over the past 3 years with applications up by 25%. This is not reflected nationally<sup>1</sup> where from 2012-13 to 2014-15 homeless applications and acceptances remained static at around 112 000 applications. Oadby & Wigston Borough Council's acceptance rate has been below both the national figure of which 47%-48% and that for the East Midlands region.

	East Midlands Q3 <sup>2</sup>	OWBC to date 2015/16
Accepted	57%	45%
Rejected as intentional	5%	6%
Rejected as no priority	8%	34%
Rejected as not homeless	12%	12%

Table 2. Homeless application outcomes

Table 2 highlights that around one third of homeless applicants in the borough are deemed 'not to be in priority need', these are typically single people without children. Being 'not in priority need' means the Council does not have to provide immediate emergency accommodation and can lead to people sleeping rough on the streets.

Of the 29 'no priority' borough residents presenting in 2015/16 all received advice and assistance and many were offered emergency accommodation via the No Second Night Out (NSNO)<sup>3</sup> project and similar.

The No Second Night Out project aims to provide emergency bedspaces for new rough sleepers to help reduce the likelihood of them becoming long term street homeless.

It is clear that these residents will be at great risk of rough sleeping were the NSNO project to end as planned later in 2016.

The 'no priority' figures confirm that Oadby & Wigston Borough Council are routinely undertaking homelessness assessments and are not actively engaged with gatekeeping<sup>4</sup> practices.

In the past year the main reason for homelessness in those accepted cases was the termination of an existing tenancy by their private landlord accounting as it did for 56% of cases or 22 households. Nationally this cause of homelessness has nearly doubled in the past 4 years from 15% to 29%<sup>5</sup>

Of those households accepted in 2015/16 90% have or are expecting children with between 5 and 13 families being accommodated in temporary accommodation at any given time in the borough.

The final review finding is that 46% of homeless applications were from people aged under 35 years of age of which 70% (27 in number) did not receive a positive outcome. It is likely that given current and planned welfare reforms targeting out of work childless under 35 year olds that this statistic will only worsen.

### Review references

1. DCLG live tables on homelessness. NB Chart 1 should be read with an element of caution as it was only with the introduction of the new Housing Options structure in 2013 that reliable record keeping can be demonstrated. In particular only partial data was collected and reported to DCLG in 2007/8, 2010/11 and 2012/13.
2. Compiled from DCLG statutory returns by Homeless Link
3. The No Second Night Out project runs for 18 months from 2015 until 2016 across all 7 county district and borough authorities funded via £150 000 of DCLG grant funding.
4. Gatekeeping is defined by Shelter as a refusal to accept a homelessness application where there is a duty to do so.
5. Homelessness in numbers #1 Homeless Link June 2015

### 3. Current initiatives

In the last strategy we said that we had plans to undertake a number of actions, the following section outlines where we are with these (1-6) with descriptions of further initiatives:

From the 2008 strategy

#### 1. **Develop new arrangements for providing housing advice through the Customer Service Centre**

As of October 2015 Housing Options is primarily delivered at the Council's Customer Services Centre on Bell Street. 15 pre-bookable appointments are made available every week and emergencies are seen on an ad-hoc basis. The Council also funds the Citizen's Advice Bureau and Helping Hands advice agencies.

#### 2. **16/17 year olds**

The plans outlined in the previous strategy were overtaken by the House of Lords decision in *G v Southwark* (2009) which refocused the primary duty for homeless 16 and 17 year olds back onto Children's Services at Leicestershire County Council. Oadby & Wigston was home to a specialist 16/17 year old 'Single Access Point' funded through Leicestershire County Council for a period in 2012 – 2014 which produced some promising results but was in turn cancelled by the funding body. Since 2015 staff have been working with colleagues at Leicestershire County Council on the implementation of the Empowering Futures accommodation scheme for homeless 16/17 year olds provided through Adullam Homes Housing Association. This scheme provides 20 bedspaces in three hubs located in Oadby, Loughborough and Hinckley with 24/7 staffing.

#### 3. **Private Sector Accommodation**

For the past 10 years the Homeless Prevention Grant has been made available to help households with children to access privately rented accommodation. Since January 2016 this same assistance has been made available to all homeless households living in the borough including single people under the age of 35 years. However with financial assistance with rent for those on a low income or out of work being squeezed by central government policy it is likely that this aspiration will become progressively harder to deliver.

In providing this assistance the Council has recognised the need for such accommodation to be sustainable hence the poorest energy efficient properties (those with an Energy Performance rated F or G) have been excluded and all potential lettings must be deemed as affordable.

#### 4. **Reducing the use of temporary accommodation**

The achieving of arbitrary targets in relation to temporary accommodation as outlined in the previous strategy was shown to be unrealistic given that demand is almost entirely outside of the Council's control. In the past 2 years the Council has strived to improve the quality of accommodation used to accommodate households with children. This led to the closure of the Council's homeless families hostel in 2014 where households had to share facilities and the establishment of a modest portfolio of self contained accommodation. Future demand may be better met through the provision of another hostel with more improved facilities than were available on the former site.

## **5. Seek a 'quality mark'**

The Council are seeking to gain Gold Standard accreditation over the next 2 years.

## **6. Provision of grants to bring empty properties back into use**

The Council has recently commenced a programme to offer 100% grant funding to bring long term empty properties back into use. A dedicated staff resource was provided for 3 months.

### Other initiatives

## **7. Hospital discharge**

The Better Care Fund and the local Health Services have invested in dedicated Housing Options staffing based in 2 of the main hospital sites to assist with people who are homeless upon discharge. The Housing Options team at OWBC have liaised closely with colleagues based at the hospital with 3 cases successfully dealt with in 2015.

## **8. No Second Night Out**

Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) made grant funding available via Leicester City Council to provide a 'No Second Night Out' scheme in Leicestershire in partnership with all 7 district and borough Councils. This has been in operation for just over a year at the time of this strategy and provides 3 nights of emergency accommodation for first time rough sleepers with a Leicestershire county connection. It is delivered through Action Homeless and is due to end in 2016. At the time of writing no provision is in place for either continuation of the scheme nor for a replacement. In the first 12 months Oadby & Wigston made 24 referrals to the scheme accounting for over 25% of all referrals. The majority of successful referrals were moved onwards into other supported accommodation or hostels. Unfortunately a number returned to the streets for a short period of which nearly all subsequently secured other accommodation in the end.

## **9. Accommodation and Floating Support for single homeless**

In September 2015 the Leicestershire County Council's New Accommodation and Support contract commenced based out of the Falcon Support Services Hostel in Loughborough as part of the Housing Matters consortium. OWBC regularly refer into both the accommodation and the support schemes and are seeking a move on agreement for those cases with a borough connection.

## **10. Homeless Prevention Funds**

The policy of using grant funding to pay for rental deposits was widened to involve payments for nearly anything to prevent homelessness since 2014 for families with children (further extended to help all homeless households since January 2016). To date rental deposit and rent in advance payments continue to account for the majority expenditure. A small number of households have been prevented from becoming homeless through funds being granted to secure homes – extra locks, improved security (in the case of anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse), lump sum payments to reduce rent arrears to help persuade landlords to keep tenants they might otherwise have evicted (this is not available to OWBC tenants)

## **11. Domestic Violence**

The Council has recognised the need for additional resource and specialism around Domestic Violence and from March 2016 it has contracted a specialist domestic violence support role from Womens Aid Leicestershire. This allows Housing Options staff and the wider Community Team to bring specialist support in when dealing with complex abuse cases.

## **12. Improved case management**

In 2014 The Council introduced it's first case management system for homelessness and housing advice. This has immediately improved the quality of service provided for customers and has meant that no statistical returns to government have been missed or delayed.

## **13. Severe Weather Provision**

The Council operates a non-statutory provision which offers emergency accommodation to verified rough sleepers where the forecast is for below freezing temperatures for 3 consecutive nights.

## **14. When it's gone**

An educational theatre presentation tackling multiple themes but primarily homelessness, offered to every High School in the Borough and delivered through the Zest Theatre Company

## **4. Our priorities**

### **1. Prevent Homelessness and where possible minimise demand**

We will work to minimise demand for homelessness by continuing a strong multi agency approach. We will continue to liaise with appropriate agencies to recommend and facilitate interventions that will ensure households know where to access advice and support that assists them to avoid or deal with issues that could lead to homelessness. Particularly important will be targeting young people in schools and other youth provision, providing a consistent message about the difficulties of leaving home at a young age, the realities of housing choice, including affordability and the likelihood of needing to share accommodation.

#### **To get there we will:**

- We will work in partnership with Supporting Leicestershire Families, Early Years, Strengthening Families and other statutory agencies including Probation and Youth Offending Services. We will seek to work closely with local advice and advocacy agencies including Citizens Advice Bureau, Helping Hands, Shelter Housing Aid and Research Project and Christians Against Poverty. In doing this we will seek to prevent homelessness wherever possible.
- We will work in partnership with local High Schools to deliver a message specifically tailored to young people, currently via the offer of the 'When It's Gone' theatre production.
- We will closely monitor the impact of Welfare Reform to both households and the housing sector and seek to minimise negative consequences.
- We will ensure good quality information and advice is available to prevent homelessness

- We will seek to support schemes which promote independent living skills and prevents relationship breakdown such as the 'learning to cook' course run by the Oadby & Wigston Lions Club.
- We will recognise that there are groups of people with specific needs and ensure there is equality of access to advice whether a main homelessness duty is owed or not

## **2. Reduce crisis presentations**

Agencies across the borough have opportunities to reduce housing crisis amongst their core client groups. This can be achieved by working in a more joined up way to identify those households at high risk of homelessness by making sure agencies can recognise the indicators of housing stress and be able to act appropriately to prevent homelessness. Every opportunity should be taken as early as possible to prevent homelessness.

### **To get there we will:**

- We will endeavour to offer consistent advice and assist at the earliest opportunity
- We will ensure Homelessness Services are approachable and easy to access
- We will advise and enable mediation within families to facilitate a return home to allow for a planned move rather than one in crisis (where appropriate)
- We will use Housing and partner evidence to predict potential future housing issues

## **3. Deliver effective services at the point of contact**

This priority is about ensuring that households who approach services will be able to access effective advice and assistance to prevent homelessness, either by enabling them to remain where they are or by facilitating a move into appropriate accommodation. Homeless people and households will be able to access pro-active homelessness prevention services, a full assessment of need and a range of advice and options that will enable access to short stay or longer stay accommodation. In time this service will also seek to link into other services promoting education, training and employment opportunities, health services, life-skills and benefits advice. These in turn will strengthen people's chances of resolving their housing problems.

### **To get there we will:**

- We will ensure services are approachable and easy to access
- We will take a proactive preventative approach to make every contact matter
- We will undertake a comprehensive assessment of need
- We will provide housing advice, facilitating access to short and longer stay accommodation and support
- We will provide clear and meaningful housing and support pathways
- We will provide easier access to other services that promote health and wellbeing, employment, education and training opportunities.

## **4. Provide appropriate accommodation options**

Facilitating access to appropriate accommodation is crucial in preventing and resolving homelessness in the short, medium and long term. This includes:



- The Private rented sector; by facilitating access to tenancies for all groups where landlords can feel confident that these tenancies will be sustainable
- Social housing: the allocation of which will be needs led where the existing Choice Based Lettings scheme can be a useful tool to prevent homelessness.
- Supported housing: ensuring not only access to this type of housing where it is appropriate, but to ensure meaningful pathways into independent tenancies when people are ready to move on.

**To get there we will:**

- We will ensure people have access to appropriate accommodation
- We will ensure people have a range of housing options
- We will support people to develop their independent living skills, where appropriate

**5. Move people away from homelessness**

Crucial to the Homelessness Strategy is ensuring that people do not become homeless again by enabling access to the range of schemes that will help them achieve their aspirations in terms of education, training and employment. This will strengthen current tenancies and assist people as they progress away from homelessness

**To get there we will:**

- We will ensure people have access to housing
- We will ensure there sufficient move on options from supported accommodation
- We will link people into timely support when tenancies start to fail
- Ensuring there are clear links to health promotion, education, training and employment opportunities
- We will seek to develop sustainable Tenancy Support resources

**5. Action Plan**

TBA once priorities are agreed after consultation

Priority	Action	Who	When