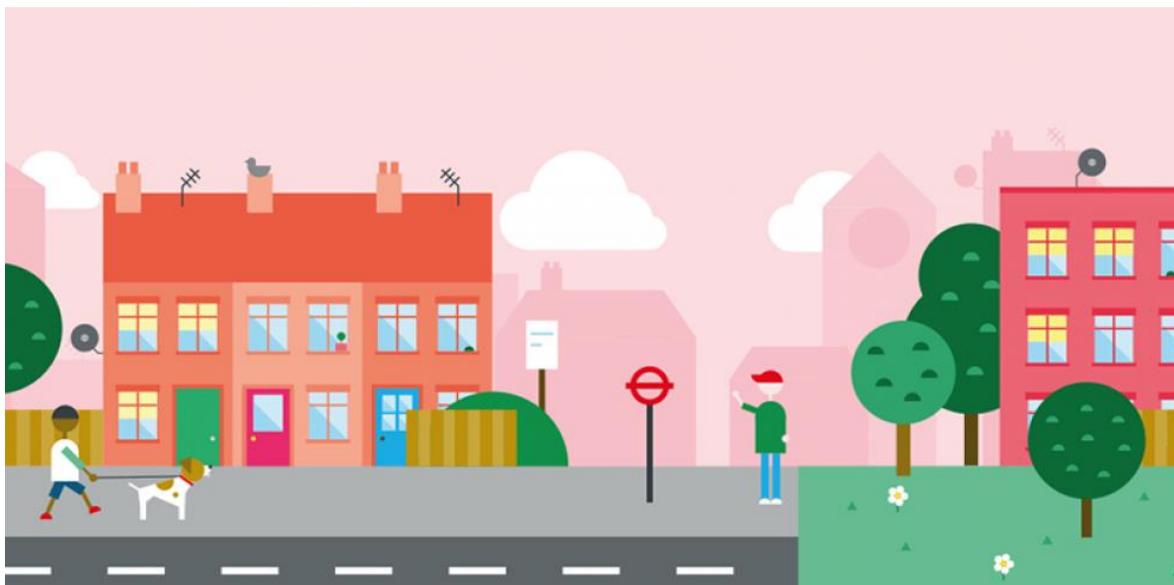




Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025



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Foreword



I am pleased to introduce Torrridge District Councils Homelessness Strategy for the period 2020 to 2025.

Torrridge District Council is located within the north west of Devon. The district is divided into 16 wards, comprising of 62 parishes and is predominantly rural covering 380 sq. miles. The main towns are Bideford, Holsworthy & Great Torrington with almost half of the population living in or close to Bideford/Northam.

Reflecting its peripheral location and rural nature, Torrridge is relatively poorly connected to major urban economies. There are no rail services within Torrridge and some major services such as further education and hospitals also lie outside of the district.

In rural areas such as Torrridge homelessness can sometimes go unnoticed. However, it remains a very real problem with many of our residents not having anywhere to call home.

The average (gross) weekly pay in Torrridge is £385 (2018). This is £64 (17%) lower than the average for Devon and £170 (43%) lower than the UK average. Local house prices and rents continue to rise faster than local incomes meaning many families are finding it increasingly difficult to find somewhere affordable to live.

Homelessness is not just about a lack of accommodation, it can impact physical and mental health, well being, education, employment and places pressure on personal and family relationships.

No single organisation can prevent homelessness, so rather than dealing with households at a point of a homelessness crisis, this strategy reinforces our commitment to work collaboratively with our partners and stakeholders in preventing homelessness wherever possible.

Councillor Michael Clarke

Lead Member (Housing)

A Strategy to Prevent Homelessness in Torridge

This strategy has been designed to be a high level overarching document that sets out Torridge District Council's priorities for both tackling the root causes of homelessness and achieving better outcomes for those people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The strategy has been developed using evidential data and through consultation with key stakeholders and partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors.



Homelessness in Torridge

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which came in to force on 3 April 2018 introduced a number of changes, including:

- An extension of the period threatened with homelessness from 28 to **56 days**.
- A new duty to **prevent** homelessness for all eligible homeless applicants threatened with homelessness, regardless of priority need or local connection.
- A new duty to **relieve** homelessness for all eligible homeless applicants, regardless of priority need.
- A new `Duty to refer` - effective from 1 October 2018, a duty on specified public authorities to refer service users who they think may be homeless or threatened with homelessness to a local authority



During the financial year 2018/19 we received **888** approaches for help with housing. **456** of these approaches triggered a homeless application, and **432** did not trigger a homeless application and were resolved through housing advice.

Of the **456** homeless applications triggered, **254** of the approaches were from single people of whom **153** were male. 45% of the single people who approached



were aged between 18 and 34. **156** of the approaches that triggered a homeless application were from households with a family commitment (including where there was a pregnancy) and **46** were from couples.

The main reasons for homelessness were loss of private rented sector tenancy (35%), family or friends no longer able or willing to accommodate (19%) and relationship breakdown (11%).

Over half of the households whose approach triggered a homeless application had wider support needs identified within the household; 31% of households had one support need identified and 25% had more than one support need identified. There was a history of mental health problems within 25% of households whose approach triggered a homeless application.

During the period April 2016 to March 2019 we experienced a significant increase in the use of temporary accommodation. Analysis of the data has identified an overall increase in demand of 122%; of which demand from singles increased by 231% and families/couples by 48%.

Key Issues

- High levels of low paid part time work.
- A private rented sector that is not accessible or affordable to those on low incomes.
- A need for more affordable housing, particularly to rent.
- Impact of welfare reform, particularly Universal Credit.
- Impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the challenge of reviewing and adapting the service to meet our responsibilities and achieve the best possible outcomes for those owed a duty.



Rough Sleeping

Central government published the National Rough Sleeping Strategy in August 2018 with the aim of halving rough sleeping by 2022 and to end it completely by 2027.

Historically, Torridge has experienced very low numbers of Rough Sleepers typically 2 or 3 at any one time. It is possible that the genuine number of rough sleepers has been consistently underestimated due to the predominantly rural nature of the district and lack of resource for outreach, which makes it difficult for us to locate and engage with rough sleepers. Additionally, it is recognised that rough sleepers sometimes migrate from Torridge to North Devon to access services.

In 2019/20 the Council successfully secured 12 months funding from MHCLG for 14 hours rough sleeper outreach per week and a part time social worker (shared with North Devon) to work with rough sleepers with complex needs. This additional resource has enabled Torridge to make an improved offer to those rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping in the district and between April and September 2019 outreach worked with 30 people.

Improved engagement has allowed the Council to carry out more thorough assessments and has enabled rough sleepers to better access and utilise pathways to support and specialist accommodation, local supported accommodation and in the private rented sector.



Torridge is committed to building upon the work already undertaken and recognises that partnership working is centric to securing those rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping in the district better access to housing, support and wider services.

Our Priorities are to:

- Regularly monitor and review homelessness locally to ensure that we understand local needs.
- Be responsive to change and target resource to ensure that we are effective in meeting local needs.
- Place greater emphasis on helping service users to resolve their housing needs themselves where they are able; providing easy access to tailored help and advice, improving and promoting online services and signposting.
- Identify and help people at risk of homelessness at the earliest possible opportunity; recognising that it is more efficient and cost effective to the household, the Council and other agencies to provide early advice support and intervention.
- Continue to develop a Customer Centric Approach where persons are treated with empathy, dignity and respect irrespective of background. Recognising that housing crisis can often stem from wider social and economic issues, and that by embedding a holistic approach to assessment and personalised housing plans people can be supported to address wider needs for skills and support and therefore be able to better meet their housing needs.



Our Priorities continued:

- Place an increasing emphasis on collaborative working with partners and stakeholders, including other local authorities to better access funding opportunities and deliver better outcomes for service users.
- Improve our offer to rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping through continued outreach and improved partnership working.
- Continue with investment in property to reduce the Council's reliance on 3rd party temporary accommodation providers.
- Establish a multi agency homelessness forum that meets regularly.



Strategy Links

This strategy links with cross cutting pieces of legislation and other strategies and policies, which have an interface with the prevention and relief of homelessness.

Related Strategies and Policies:

- North Devon & Torridge Local Plan 2011 - 2031
- Devon Health & Well Being Strategy
- National Rough Sleeping Strategy
- Torridge Tenancy Strategy
- Devon Home Choice Policy
- Discretionary Housing Payment Policy



Related Legislation:

- Housing Act 1996 (as amended)
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Welfare Reform Act 2012
- Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016
- Housing and Planning Act 2016
- Health and Social Care Act 2012
- Children and Social Care Act 2017
- Care Act 2004

Action Plan

We will deliver this strategy via an action plan that will set out SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound) objectives that will be regularly reviewed to ensure they continue to address any evidential or forecast change in demand.

