

# **Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping:**

**A strategy for Reading 2026 – 2031**

**Shared responsibility • Shared voice • Shared solutions**

# What is in our strategy...

<b><u>Summary of our strategy</u></b>	<b>3</b>
<b><u>A message from your Lead Councillor for Housing</u></b>	<b>3</b>
<b><u>Introduction</u></b> <i>Why this strategy was written and what it aims to do.</i>	<b>4</b>
<b><u>What we know about Reading</u></b> <i>Explains the local situation in Reading and why people may become homeless.</i>	<b>4</b>
<b><u>Our Core Values</u></b> <i>What we believe in and how we treat people.</i>	<b>5</b>
<b><u>How your feedback shaped our strategy</u></b> <i>What people told us and how it changed the strategy.</i>	<b>7</b>
<b><u>Building on success</u></b> <i>What has worked, is working and the challenges we still face.</i>	<b>9</b>
<b><u>What Reading does to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping</u></b> <i>Services that support homelessness prevention and relieve rough sleeping.</i>	<b>11</b>
<b><u>Understanding homelessness locally: Our challenges</u></b> <i>What homelessness looks like in Reading, who is affected right now and our future need.</i>	<b>12</b>
<b><u>Triggers and risk factors</u></b> <i>The main reasons people lose their homes.</i>	<b>17</b>
<b><u>Our Priorities</u></b> <i>The main things we are focusing on to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.</i>	<b>18</b>
<b><u>Our Principles</u></b> <i>The values that guide how we work and make decisions.</i>	<b>19</b>
<b><u>Strategic influences, alignment and commitments</u></b> <i>The national and local factors shaping our approach, and commitments guiding our Action Plan.</i>	<b>22</b>
<b><u>How we will monitor and oversee progress</u></b> <i>How we will track what is working and make improvements.</i>	<b>24</b>
<b><u>Keeping our strategy up to date</u></b> <i>How we will review and update the strategy each year.</i>	<b>24</b>

## Summary of our strategy

This strategy sets out Reading's plan to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping between 2026 and 2031. It aims to make homelessness rare, brief, and not something people experience again. We know that homelessness is not just about housing - it's also linked to health, money worries, trauma, and other life challenges.

The strategy builds on what we've already achieved and is shaped by local data, national policies, and feedback from people in Reading. It focuses on three main priorities: preventing homelessness early, breaking the cycle of repeat homelessness, and ensuring access to safe, settled, and affordable housing.

To make this happen, we need to work together – across council services, with local organisations, and with the people who use our services. We are committed to treating everyone with dignity, listening to lived experience, and making sure support is fair, joined up, and easy to access. This strategy is our shared plan to help people in Reading build safer, more stable futures.

## A message from your Lead Councillor for Housing

I am pleased to introduce *Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping: A Strategy for Reading 2026 – 31* and Action Plan which sets out the Council's priorities to prevent homelessness and explains how we will invest in services to protect Reading's residents who are most vulnerable and in need of support.

Homelessness and rough sleeping are among the most urgent and complex challenges we face as a community. They are not just about bricks and mortar – they are about people's lives, their health, their dignity, and their futures. In Reading, we believe that everyone deserves a safe, stable place to call home, and that preventing homelessness is a shared responsibility across all sectors of our town.

This strategy sets out a bold and compassionate vision for Reading between 2026 and 2031. It builds on the progress we've made, listens to the voices of those with lived experience, and responds to the growing pressures facing our residents – from rising housing costs and health inequalities to the impact of national reforms and local demand.

We know that the causes of homelessness are complex, and the solutions must be equally so. That's why this strategy focuses on early intervention, breaking the cycle of repeat homelessness, and ensuring access to safe, settled, and affordable housing. It is rooted in dignity, inclusion, and partnership – values that reflect the very best of Reading.

I am proud of the work already being done by our Council teams, voluntary and faith organisations, and community partners. But we must go further. This strategy is our commitment to do just that – to work together, to innovate, and to make homelessness and rough sleeping rare, brief, and non-recurring. Thank you to everyone who contributed to shaping this strategy. Your insights, experiences, and dedication have made it stronger, fairer, and more focused on what matters most.

Together, we can build a Reading where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

**[PICTURE]**

**CIlr Yeo**

**Lead Councillor for Housing**

# Introduction

Homelessness and rough sleeping reach far beyond not having a home. They affect every part of a person's life — including their physical health, mental wellbeing, and chances for a better future. These are not just housing problems; they are human problems, shaped by complex personal experiences and wider challenges in society.

Preventing homelessness is a key part of our strategy. People can become homeless for many different reasons. This is why our solutions must involve the whole council, working together across services, and in partnership with other sectors. Everyone deserves to be seen, listened to, and supported. Everyone deserves a voice in shaping their journey toward a safe, stable home.

**“There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in.”**

— *Desmond Tutu*

## What we know about Reading

**Reading is a growing and changing town.** Over the last 10 years our population increased by nearly 12%, reaching over 174,000 residents. We are growing faster than regional and national averages, and our population is changing. Reading's average age is younger than the South East and England, even though more residents are now living into older age. Family sizes and household types are changing, and demand for housing and support services is increasing.

**Reading is becoming more diverse.** A growing number of our residents are identifying with a range of ethnic backgrounds and are born outside the UK. We are an inclusive town and there is a need for accessible and responsive services for all our communities.

**Health outcomes in Reading vary across communities.** 50% of residents report being in very good health, but compared to other areas in England, our overall health score is in the bottom 30%. People who are homeless are more than twice as likely to say they have poor health or a disability. Issues like drug and alcohol use, and smoking, are still common and a cause for concern.

**The cost-of-living crisis has deepened financial pressures across Reading.** Five small neighbourhoods in our town are among the 10% most disadvantaged in England. 1 in 6 children live in low-income families, and over 1 in 10 homes are overcrowded. These figures are higher than both the regional and national averages. Rising housing costs, energy bills, and inflation have increased the risk of homelessness for our residents.

**Reading has strong economic growth and job opportunities.** Many of our residents have jobs and earn more than the national average, but not everyone is benefiting from this. More people are claiming benefits. Those in low-paid or unstable jobs are feeling the pressure most. 1 in 3 people who are homeless have no qualifications, which makes it harder for them to get jobs and improve their situation.

**Housing in Reading is increasingly unaffordable.** Owning a home is becoming harder. House prices are ten times the average yearly income, making homeownership impossible for

most. Renting privately has increased – it is expensive, and rents keep rising. The average rent is £1,552 per month, while the average full-time salary is £40,988 a year. After tax, this means people are spending over half (57%) of their take-home pay just on rent. 70% of rent for private tenants is not covered by housing benefit support (Local Housing Allowance), leaving low-income renters unable to pay their bills and at risk of arrears or losing their home. Only 1 in 6 homes in Reading are social or affordable housing, and demand far exceeds availability.

**Reading's private rented sector is under growing pressure.** National programmes which rely upon a supply of properties from the private rented sector have increased competition for affordable homes. The Renters' Rights Act 2025 could result in some landlords deciding to stop renting out their properties. This would mean fewer homes available to rent.

## **Our Core Values**

### **Putting dignity at the centre of our strategy**

This strategy is built on a strong commitment to dignity. Reading's Dignity Charter is more than a set of words - it's a promise to treat every person with respect, compassion, and fairness. The Charter includes 12 clear pledges that guide how we work. These pledges support a person-centred approach that values each person's individuality, protects privacy, encourages clear and inclusive communication and takes a zero-tolerance approach to abuse. These are not just ideals – they shape how we design and deliver services every day. The Charter inspires us to empower people with real choice and control over their lives. It reminds us that every interaction should be based on empathy and accountability. Our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026-31 will put the Dignity Charter at its core. It has shaped our priorities, guided our principles, and drives our Action Plan – making sure dignity is not just something we talk about, but something we live by in every service we provide.

### **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in homelessness services**

Reading Borough Council is committed to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). This means making sure our homelessness services are not only effective, but also fair and inclusive for everyone. We want every resident – especially those from protected or marginalised groups – to get support that meets their individual needs. This includes people of different races, genders, ages, and abilities. We use Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) to help us understand how our housing policies affect different people. This helps us identify and remove barriers – whether they come from complex needs, language differences, or lack of access to digital services – so that no one is excluded from receiving the service they need.

We are committed to using inclusive language that respects people's identities. This means avoiding labels or assumptions, challenging stereotypes and recognising the diversity of people who experience homelessness. We know it takes courage to ask for help and this strategy is not about ticking boxes or making assumptions – it is about seeing people as individuals first, not defining them by their housing situation.

EDI is at the heart of our work – from how we design services to how we communicate. We aim to create services that are accessible, compassionate, equitable and empowering. We understand that preventing homelessness means more than providing shelter. It means

understanding the inequalities that lead to housing insecurity. That's why we design our services to reflect our diverse community, and make sure we work in ways which are sensitive to different cultures. This helps build long-term resilience to prevent the cycle of homelessness.

## **Putting our customers at the heart of service and processes**

We will create services that are easy to access, inclusive, and shaped by people with lived experience of homelessness. We are committed to making things simpler – reducing unnecessary processes and avoiding people being passed between teams. By tailoring services to individual needs, we make sure that everyone has fair access to the support they need. We will actively involve customers in shaping services and policies. Feedback will be built into everything we do, so we can keep learning and improving. We will use data in smart ways to help us deliver better services and outcomes — making sure our support is effective, efficient, and focused on what matters most to people who use our services.

## **Adopting a whole-system approach**

Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping is about more than providing 'bricks and mortar'. It involves a coordinated response that supports people with a wide range of needs, helping them move towards long-term recovery and stability in all aspects of their life. Strong collaboration and strategic integration are important to make sure that homelessness awareness is part of every policy and service area – not just housing. By improving how we communicate, increasing visibility, and sharing responsibility across teams and other organisations, we can build a culture where everyone works together and delivers support in a consistent and coordinated way – making homelessness everyone's business, and lasting change everyone's goal.

## How your feedback shaped our strategy

To make sure our consultation was inclusive, we spoke with a wide range of people over six weeks – from 2 July to 10 August 2025. We heard from residents across Reading, people using Housing Needs services, Council teams and other public services, Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector organisations (VCFS), local businesses and commissioned homelessness service providers. We used different ways to gather feedback, including a self-completion survey on the Go Vocal platform, several key stakeholder workshops, drop-in sessions and outreach from VCFS partners to make sure customer voices were heard. This approach helped us hear from a diverse range of voices, making sure the strategy reflects real experiences and local needs.

### What we heard from the consultation

During the consultation, several clear themes came through. People told us that preventing and responding to homelessness and rough sleeping has many challenges, including pressures in the housing market, health and wellbeing inequalities, gaps in how services work together and limited resources. These issues are all connected – and together, they shape people's real-life experiences of homelessness.

#### Housing affordability, availability and standards

You told us that:

- Affordability of housing remains one of the most significant barriers to preventing homelessness.
- Rising rents and limited access to genuinely affordable housing, especially social housing, have created a situation where many households struggle to find or keep a home.
- In the private rented sector, some landlords do not follow the legislation that protects tenants from being evicted illegally.

#### Health inequalities and trauma

You told us that:

- Health inequalities are a major contributing factor to homelessness and rough sleeping.
- Individuals experiencing homelessness often face several serious health challenges, including untreated mental health conditions, problems with alcohol or drugs and long-term physical conditions.
- Experiences like abuse, neglect, or family breakdown can cause deep trauma – and this can make people more vulnerable to housing problems later in life.
- Using trauma-informed approaches helps services respond with care and understanding – and makes it easier to identify early signs, offer support sooner, and help people begin their recovery.

## **Support services and move-on pathways**

You told us that:

- Supported accommodation plays an important role in helping people feel more stable and secure. However, moving on from support into independent living can be a difficult and uncertain step for many.
- When there aren't enough suitable housing options for people to move on from supported accommodation – and when ongoing support is missing – it can lead to people becoming homeless again or cause delays for others waiting for these services.
- For people at risk of, or sleeping rough, long-term recovery depends on different services – like housing, health, and social care – working closely together in a joined-up way.

## **Funding and resources**

You told us that:

- A lack of funding and resources continues to be a challenge for both statutory services and voluntary organisations working to support people facing homelessness.
- Funding for services is often short-term and not enough to meet increasing demand. This makes it harder for services to try new approaches, adapt to changing needs and build long-term, sustainable support solutions for people.
- Cuts to funding and ongoing uncertainty put extra strain on frontline workers. Low wages in the support sector and short-term contracts make it harder to attract and keep skilled staff.

## **Safeguarding and complex needs**

You told us that:

- Safeguarding needs to change to better support people who are homeless. It should reflect the complex realities people face and offer the right kind of help. This means understanding how mental health, neurodiversity, trauma and unstable housing all can be connected.
- Many people who are homeless have complex needs but are not assessed as qualifying for formal safeguarding or social care support. Even though they do not meet the usual thresholds, their situations clearly show they are at risk, and they need help and protection.
- A more joined up and thoughtful approach to safeguarding is needed. This includes better sharing of information between organisations and building trust across different sectors. It means using safeguarding to offer early support and to help people stay in their homes – not letting it be a barrier that stops people from getting help.

# Building on success

## Our achievements

We have made strong progress in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping. Two key plans – the *Preventing Homelessness Strategy (2020-25)* and the *Rough Sleeping Strategy (2019-24)* – have helped us improve services and support. These strategies have led to better partnerships between organisations, smarter use of data to understand local needs, and more effective help for people in need. Challenges still exist, but these strategies have put us in a good place to keep making progress and to continue improving the lives of Reading’s residents, especially those most at risk.

## Progress from Reading’s Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2020 – 2025

### Priority to intervene early to prevent and reduce homelessness

- Ran a six-month pilot to focus on preventing homelessness and helping people earlier and supporting them to move on from temporary accommodation.
- Used better data tools (like the LIFT dashboard from Policy in Practice) to identify households at risk of homelessness sooner and offer help.
- Created a main contact person in the homelessness advice service for young people and those with mental health needs – this makes it easier to refer and provide tailored support.
- Improved online access with tools in different languages, self-service options, and helpful videos.
- Launched the “Click Before You Evict” website to help landlords and tenants avoid evictions.
- Started improving digital services by introducing the Housing Online platform.
- Introduced Power BI to track key data and look at trends more easily.

### Priority to supporting people who are vulnerable to recurring homelessness

- Helped people stay in their homes by improving rent support and offering further incentives through the Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS).
- Transferred emergency accommodation procurement to the RGS team, improving quality and value for money.
- Set up expert advice teams to support ex-offenders, refugees and asylum seekers.
- Improved access to housing for care leavers and improved planning with Children’s Social Care and other services for housing and life after care.
- Made sure homelessness services are part of key meetings with other agencies to support access to the right services, especially people with complex needs – including meetings like MARAC (for domestic abuse), MAPPA (for people who may pose a risk), Safeguarding Adults Board, and the Complex Adults Panel.

### **Priority to increase access to decent, suitable accommodation**

- Updated our application and assessment process for social housing – called an Allocations Scheme – with a specific housing register to better match adapted homes with people who need them.
- The team that assesses and approves Disabled Facilities Grants is now part of Housing Needs.
- Built new homes and secured rental properties - under the Build-to-Rent scheme – to increase options for homeless households.
- Trialled procuring several units of emergency accommodation (block-booking) through 12 months contracts to lower costs and improve quality.
- Increased temporary accommodation by buying properties through the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) – a government fund – which has helped support Afghan families who are resettling in Reading.
- Improved support for landlords by holding events to help them understand new laws and offering better incentives to take our homeless households as tenants.

### **Progress from Reading's Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 – 2024**

- Secured £2 million a year since 2021 to help fund new housing and support services. This money comes from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the Centre for Homelessness Impact (CHI).
- Added 87 new bed spaces for people with complex needs by developing the Caversham Road Pods, the Nova Project, and expanding the Housing First programme.
- The Accommodation for Ex-Offenders project received over 200 referrals and created more than 50 private rental tenancies for those leaving prison.
- Expanded our outreach and tenancy support teams to include help outside normal working hours and staff who specialise in complex cases.
- Willow House continued to offer some emergency bed spaces with 24 hours support. An emergency bed – a crash pad – is now available at the Reading YMCA for young people. New options like NAPpads are being considered to give more people a safe place to stay off the streets.
- A pilot project and support worker helped non-UK nationals and people with limited access to public funds get support with their immigration status and then housing.
- Improved data collection and a dedicated Data and Evaluation Lead helped inform service development and identify unknown people sleeping rough.
- Better data collection and a dedicated data lead helped shape how support is delivered.
- Tap for Reading was launched as a safe way to donate to help people who are homeless. It is supported by stronger public messaging, promotion of StreetLink, and better coordination between services as part of Reading's overall Homelessness Partnership (HoP).

## **What Reading does to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping**

All the Council's homelessness services work together as one joined-up system. They provide the right support for people with a wide range of needs when they are homeless or at risk of losing their home. These services not only meet legal duties, but try to prevent homelessness early, support people in crisis, and help them move on to a home.

The Council provides support under the Homelessness Reduction Act, which means helping people stay in their homes or find somewhere else to live. Everyone who asks for help from the Homelessness Prevention team gets a Personalised Housing Plan, and those in urgent need, who meet priority need criteria, can access emergency accommodation. The Council works closely with other services – like health, probation, children's services and adult social care – to identify people at risk before they reach crisis point. When temporary housing is needed, the Council uses a mix of purpose-built accommodation, which are supported by staff and used flexibly to meet demand. A pilot launched in 2025 has created specialist teams focused on early intervention, prevention, and helping people move out of temporary accommodation more quickly.

The Council funds over 290 bed spaces of supported housing. This includes services for women, young people, couples, people with a history of offending and those with complex needs. Outreach teams work on the streets to connect people with support, and emergency beds are available during cold weather or heatwaves - to save lives, even if someone is from out of area. Tenancy sustainment and employment support are provided through the Council commissioned Floating Support Service.

Reading helps people access the private rented sector through its long-running Rent Guarantee Scheme. This offers landlords guaranteed rent and support, while tenants get help with deposits, budgeting, and finding homes. The scheme has been successful in preventing homelessness and reducing the need for emergency accommodation.

For those waiting for social housing, the Council runs the Homechoice at Reading scheme. To help free up bigger homes for families, the Council offers incentives for tenants to downsize, and it also sets aside homes for vulnerable groups under a quota queue policy. People with disabilities can apply for Disabled Facilities Grants to make their homes safer and more accessible.

# Understanding homelessness locally: Our challenges

Our main challenges to preventing and relieving homelessness and delivering high quality services are:

## A lack of genuinely affordable housing

Many people cannot find or keep a home because rents are high, social housing is limited, and private renting is becoming harder to access.

### In Reading:

- **40% of households are larger than the national average**, showing a growing need for bigger homes.
- **50% of households owned their home in 2021** – lower than the national average of 61% and the South East average of 66%. Rising house prices mean homes now **cost more than 10 times the average income**, making it harder for many people to afford to buy.
- **1 in 3 households rented privately in 2021** – up from 1 in 4 in 2011. By June 2025, average rents had risen to £1,543 per month, making renting unaffordable for many people.
- **Fewer than 1 in 10 households on our Housing Register were offered a home in 2024/25**, and only **16% of all homes are social or affordable housing**, showing a big gap between need and what is available.
- **Only 1 in 5 new properties built in 2023/24 were affordable homes.**

## The gap between benefit support and rising housing costs

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) has not kept up with rising rents, making it harder for low-income households to find or keep affordable private rented homes, even with Council support. This gap between housing costs and income puts more people at risk of eviction or homelessness.

### In Reading:

- **Average private rents are much higher than LHA rates** – by £316 per month for shared rooms and £618 for 3-bed homes – making it hard for low-income households to afford a place to live.
- **673 households are affected by the benefit cap**, which limits support unless someone earns over £722 a month. This makes having a job key to keeping a home.
- **£1.6m in rent arrears was owed by tenants at the end of 2023/24** – with **19 mortgage possession claims by mid-2025**, showing the financial pressure many households are facing.
- **79 landlord possession claims** were recorded in mid-2025 – **twice as many as the South East average** – showing growing pressure on renters and high levels of private rented evictions.

### **Social and financial pressures are increasing homelessness risk**

Health issues, low pay, lack of qualifications, and rising living costs – like food, energy and transport – are making it harder for people to keep their home. These pressures increase the risk of homelessness and make it harder for us to prevent.

3

#### **In Reading:**

- **30% of people who were homeless had no qualifications**, compared to 19% of the general population – showing how lack of education can increase the risk of homelessness.
- **44% of homeless households said they had a disability** – more than twice the national average.
- **Five small neighbourhoods are among the most deprived 10% in England**. Overall, Reading ranks 141st out of 317 councils for deprivation.

### **Rising demand from increasingly diverse and vulnerable households**

More people with different or complex needs require homelessness support in Reading. This includes larger families, single people, and those with poor physical or mental health – highlighting the need for our services to respond to a wide range of situations.

4

#### **In Reading:**

- **397 households needed homelessness support between January and the end of March 2025 – 142 were already homeless and 195 were at risk**. These numbers are higher than the regional average, showing ongoing pressure on housing.
- **729 single men, 524 single women and 178 female lone parents were owed a housing duty in 2023/24**. Demand from single people and single-parent families is increasing.
- **Nearly half (49%) of people we helped with homelessness in 2024/25 were White, while 17% were Black and 16% were Asian**. Ethnically diverse communities are increasingly affected by homelessness in Reading.
- **17% of people who needed homelessness support had mental health needs** in 2022/23 – the most common type of support needed – and **14% had physical health issues**. Many also faced challenges like substance misuse, domestic abuse, repeat homelessness, or difficulty finding work.

## More people are sleeping rough for longer or returning to the streets after being housed

There has been an increase in numbers of people sleeping rough in Reading. Many are struggling to move off the streets. Some face serious challenges like poor mental health, substance use, and neurodivergent conditions that are often undiagnosed. Others have no local connection or unresolved immigration status, which limits their access to support and accommodation. Many have lost previous housing due to rent arrears or difficulty managing a tenancy, and some have recently left prison, hospital, or asylum accommodation without a clear plan. Often, people face several of these issues at once, increasing their risk of long-term or repeat homelessness.

### In Reading:

- **81 people were sleeping rough each month, with 43 people on a typical night** (October 2024 - March 2025).
- **More people sleep rough, per 100,000 people, than in similar areas** – although other places have higher overall numbers.
- **Over 50% of people in 2024 rough sleeping snapshot were either ineligible for support due to immigration issue or not engaging with reconnection efforts** – leaving a large number of people without options to come off the streets.
- **50% of people sleeping rough in early 2025 were on the streets for over 10 nights, often across multiple months** – showing persistent and harder to resolve rough sleeping.
- **326 new referrals in 2024/25 were made for supported accommodation** that meets the needs of people at risk of, or rough sleeping. Greatest demand was for high needs support and from single males, aged 30 – 49 with UK National status.

## Services, partners and the public not knowing when, how or where to get homelessness support

Everyone needs to notice early signs that someone might become homeless – even when those signs aren't obvious. They should know when and how to refer people for help and how they can support the Council's prevention efforts.

### In Reading:

- It's still a challenge to make sure the public and partner organisations understand what causes homelessness, what support is available, and how to refer people for help. Without clear and consistent communication, it's harder to act early and work together to prevent homelessness.
- Referrals from prisons, rehabilitation services, and hospitals are lower than in other areas of the South East. This shows a need for better joint working to make sure people get help *before* becoming homeless.
- Local data doesn't fully reflect the needs of some groups at higher risk of homelessness – like care leavers, veterans, people leaving hospital or prison, survivors of domestic abuse, refugees, people fleeing conflict, those experiencing hidden homelessness, LGBTQ+ individuals, and neurodiverse young people. National evidence and local feedback show these groups are often missed in referrals, do not approach services at all, or when they do, this is not recorded properly.

7

## No shared obligation to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping

Homelessness is often caused by a combination of issues like poor mental health, domestic abuse, poverty, and challenges linked to migration. Tackling these root causes requires joined up working across different services and departments.

### In Reading:

- There is no clear, shared responsibility across Council teams, local services, or community partners to spot the signs of homelessness early, take action, or work together. This makes it harder to prevent people from losing their homes.
- Different departments and services have their own legal responsibilities, priorities and day-to-day pressure which can make it harder to work together. When support is not joined up, people with multiple vulnerabilities can miss out on the help they need to avoid homelessness.
- People who are homeless or rough sleeping often face serious risks. Self-neglect, being excluded from services and failures in joined up working may mean they do not get the help they need. Missed opportunities to act, especially for people with multiple vulnerabilities who have care and support needs, can lead to serious harm.

8

## Growing pressure on homelessness services and Council budgets

More people are turning to the Council for homelessness support, but funding is reducing. Staff are managing bigger caseloads and more complex needs, while the use of temporary accommodation continues to grow. At the same time, rising costs – for housing, inflation, and basic living – are making it harder to prevent homelessness. New laws, like changes to private renting and duties under the Renters' Rights and Domestic Abuse Acts, will require more staff to meet demand.

### In Reading:

- **186 households were living in emergency accommodation at the end of 2024/25** – up from just 11 in April 2020 and 71 in April 2022. This shows a sharp rise in people needing urgent housing support.
- **447 households were living in temporary accommodation in April 2025** – including emergency housing - nearly double the number from April 2022.
- **4,675 households were on the housing register in August 2025.** Nearly two-thirds needed to move because they were homeless, living in unsuitable housing, had health or welfare needs, or were facing hardship.
- **The Council overspent by £1.2 million on homelessness services in 2024/25** – mainly due to more people needing emergency housing for longer. In response, an extra £884,000 has been added to the 2025/26 budget to help prevent homelessness.

## Uncertain funding for homelessness, supported housing and rough sleeping services

Most funding for homelessness and housing support in Reading is short-term and announced year-to-year. This makes it difficult to invest in long-term contracts and sustainable solutions. It is hard for commissioned providers to plan ahead, recruit and keep staff. It disrupts commissioning cycles, leads to repeated contract extensions, increases legal risks, and reduces time for proper planning – all while demand for services continues to grow.

### In Reading:

9

- **£3.13 million in Homelessness Prevention Grant was received in 2025/26.** The amount of funding received is decided by central Government each year based on demand, which makes long-term planning difficult.
- **£1.18 million was received in Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant in 2025/26.** This one-year grant covers support for rough sleeping, Housing First, and ex-offenders – but unlike the previous three years, future funding is not guaranteed, creating uncertainty for existing services.
- **£881,919 was received from the Rough Sleeping Accommodation programme in 2025/26.** Unlike the multi-year funding given from 2021 to 2024, this was a one-year grant – creating uncertainty while the Council waits for further government announcements.

# Triggers and risk factors

This table sets out the main factors that can lead to homelessness or housing instability at different stages of a person or family's life.

It groups these risks into five areas: contact with services, social experiences, economic pressures, welfare issues, and housing challenges. The risks vary by age, showing that people face different pressures at different points in their lives. Preventing homelessness requires senior leaders and frontline teams across public services – such as health, education, social care, criminal justice, and the Home Office – and community organisations, to work together in coordinating efforts, sharing information, and raising awareness among colleagues and the public. In doing so we can all identify risks earlier and offer the right support at the right time.

Triggers, causes, risk factors (by age in years)						
Contributing theme	0 – 10	11 – 15	16 – 24	25 – 44	45 – 59	60+
<b>Contact with services (statutory, institutions and Home Office)</b>	Adverse childhood experiences		Family conflict and relationship breakdown			
	Child in Need / Looked After Child*		Care leaver			Vulnerable adult
	Youth offending		Released from prison			
			Discharged from Armed Forces			
			Discharged from hospital without appropriate accommodation			
			Refugees required to leave Home Office accommodation			
<b>Social conditions and experiences (environment, community safety, health and education)</b>	Domestic abuse					
	Involved in, or affected by crime, anti-social behaviour harassment or discrimination					
	Poor educational attainment		Lack of qualifications and skills			
			Young parent with children at risk of*			
	Insecure or unsuitable housing conditions, disrepair, overcrowding and/or sofa surfing					
	Poor physical and/or mental health, disability, substance misuse, and/or history of abuse					
Social isolation						
<b>Economic deprivation</b>	Shortage of affordable, suitable housing					
			Low income, debt, pay day loans and/or rent arrears			
			Lack of employment			
			Lack of affordable childcare			
<b>Welfare related</b>			Benefit delays, sanctions, conditionality			
			Benefit caps			
			Limited access to Public Funds			
<b>Housing related</b>			Local Housing Allowance vs. market rents			
			Affordable housing – demand exceeding supply			
			Supported housing – demand exceeding supply			

# Our Priorities

Having clear priorities helps make the best use of resources. They ensure support is well coordinated, outcomes can be measured, and efforts are focused on long-term recovery. Clear priorities help services stay inclusive, responsive, and aligned with wider policy goals – ultimately, they drive real progress in reducing homelessness.

## ***Priority 1:***

### **Intervene early to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping**

Identify housing problems early, before they turn into a crisis.

**Why:** By acting quickly to help people before they lose their home, we can reduce crisis, avoid long stays in emergency accommodation, with better outcomes for individuals and families.

**How:** We will work closely with public services and community partners to help people at the first sign of housing instability, and we will find ways for those experiencing hidden homelessness to access services and support.

## ***Priority 2:***

### **Break the cycle of homelessness and rough sleeping**

Help people move on from homelessness for good by recognising that housing alone is not the solution.

**Why:** Breaking the cycle helps people, especially children, stay healthy and builds safer, more welcoming communities. Listening and learning all the time helps us support people better and make sure everyone feels respected and understood. Helping with connected problems gives people a better chance to recover and stay stable long term.

**How:** We will work with public sector and community groups to tackle root causes and reasons for repeat homelessness. We will provide advice and support in ways that our customers can access. We will ask for customer feedback and use this to improve all our services – including supported housing.

## ***Priority 3:***

### **Make sure everyone can access safe, settled, and affordable housing**

Continue to facilitate access to homes that meet both legal standards and personal needs – places where people can live well.

**Why:** A home gives people the foundation they need to rebuild their lives, avoid crisis, and recover in the long term. By working creatively and in partnership we can help people access homes that meet our required standards and suit individual need.

**How:** We will use new and existing social housing to meet homelessness needs in the best way. We will build stronger partnerships with landlords to increase housing supply. We will make sure everyone can get the right support to find, move into and keep a stable home. We will be creative, but open about the limits on housing choices – like costs, legislation, and what the market can offer – so people understand what is possible and avoid unnecessary frustration.

# Our Principles

Principles give us a clear and practical foundation for making decisions. They help align services with people's needs, promote consistency and accountability and guide our Action Plan with integrity and purpose. Our principles show our commitment to delivering services that truly make a difference.

## **Work together across services to give people better support**

*Strong partnerships between the Council, health services, probation, community groups, and national agencies like hospitals, prisons, and the Home Office help prevent homelessness and support recovery. By sharing information, coordinating referrals, and offering joined-up services we can make sure advice and support is tailored to each person's needs.*

## **Work closely with charities, community groups, and faith organisations to support people facing homelessness**

*Local organisations play a vital role in preventing homelessness and helping people recover. We will agree shared values to align service objectives and activities – this will make sure everyone understands what each sector can and can't do. By improving coordination, facilitating access to funding, and learning from community-led models, we can make sure support is joined-up, inclusive, and reaches those who need it most.*

## **Listen to people and use their experiences to shape services**

*People who've experienced homelessness know what works. By involving them from the start, improving communication and feedback, and making services easier to understand and access, we can build trust, reflect real customer journeys, and design services and support that truly meets people's needs*

## **Make sure everyone knows their role in preventing homelessness, so people get the help they need to stay housed**

*Homelessness isn't just a housing issue – it's linked to health, care, safety, and support. We will help other services and sectors understand, and act on, their role in preventing homelessness. A strategic approach will be adopted to ensure consistent outcomes for customers, reducing reliance on informal operational relationships. By joining up services like housing, social care, mental health, community safety, and education, and making everyone responsible for outcomes, we can offer better, more consistent support and stop people falling through gaps in provisions*

## **Find new and better ways to support people facing homelessness**

*We need to be creative and flexible in how we design services, using proven approaches and learning from what works elsewhere. We'll be ready to act quickly when funding or opportunities come up – always focusing on what's best for our customers. By working together across sectors, improving how we fund and commission services, and offering tailored housing and support options, we can make sure services and support meet people's needs in ways that make the best use of our funding.*

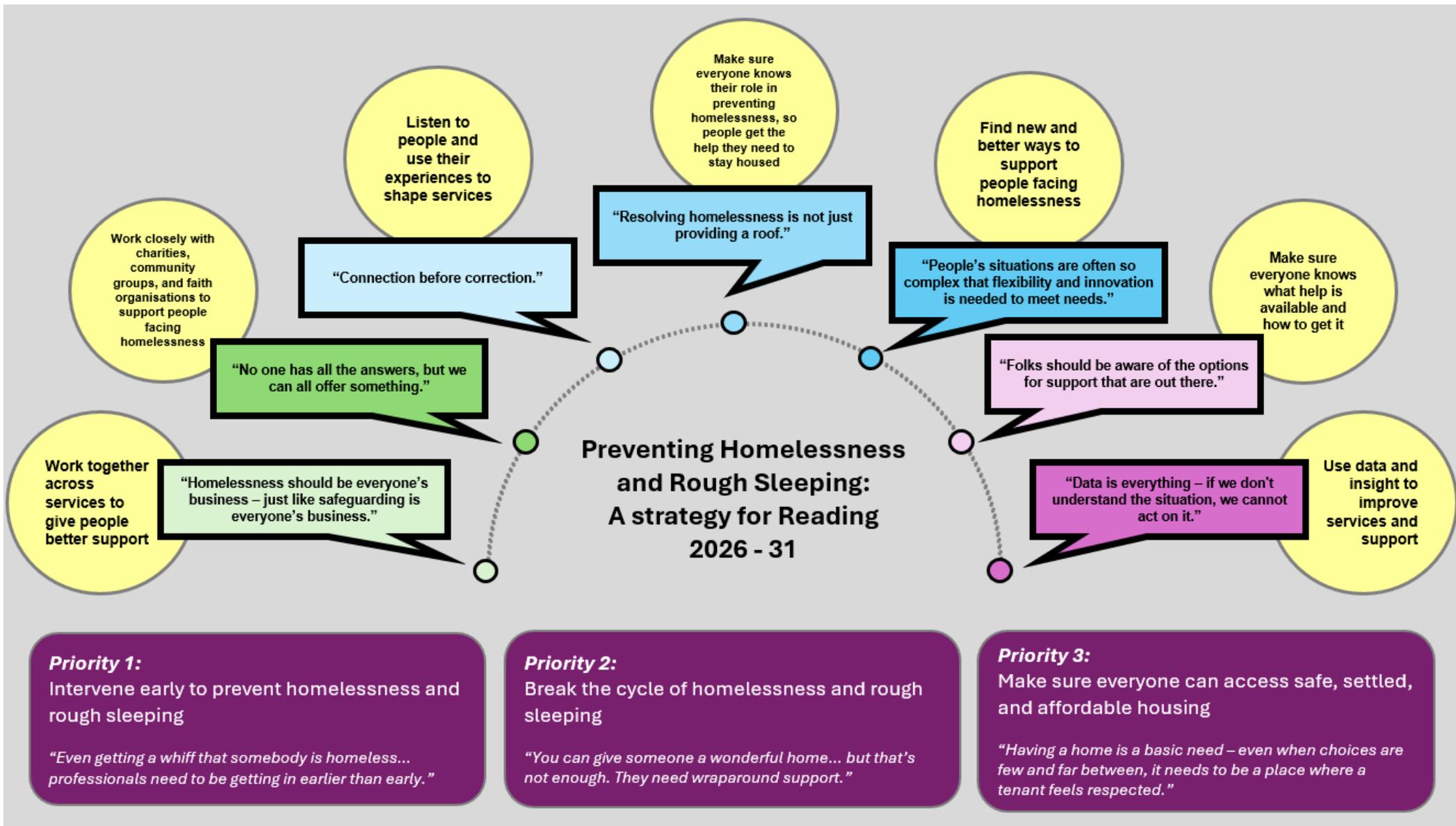
### **Make sure everyone knows what help is available and how to get it**

*Services should be easy to find and understand – online, in person, and in the community. Clear, inclusive communication helps people access support, reduces stigma, and builds trust. By improving public awareness, tailoring services to different needs, and sharing success stories, we can make sure everyone can access the services they need.*

### **Use data and insight to improve services and support**

*By understanding patterns and sharing information, we can better focus our efforts, target support, plan ahead, and make sure services work well for everyone. We'll use data and information responsibly and transparently – always being clear about how and why we are using it. We will use what we learn from people and services to focus on improving outcomes and make sure resources are used effectively where they'll make the biggest difference.*

DRAFT



## **Strategic influences, alignment and commitments**

Our strategy reflects local realities, the ambitions of national policy and sits alongside several other strategies. How these all connect is crucial. The strategy will not be successful without effective cross-Council, cross-sector and partnership working.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic and other major global events, the way homelessness is understood and addressed has changed. These shifts have brought new difficulties, but also some unexpected chances to improve support, especially for people sleeping rough. These changes mean we need to reflect, adapt, and evolve.

### **Affordable housing delivery**

Demand for housing in Reading continues to significantly outstrip supply, with over half of new homes needing to be affordable for people on low incomes, including social rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing provided at below market rates. This demand places sustained pressure on homelessness services and housing pathways and a reliance on the private rented sector to meet housing needs.

The Council's Housing Strategy 2020–2025 and the Development and Regeneration Programme 2025–2040 set out ambitious plans to increase the delivery of affordable homes, replace outdated stock, and improve sustainability across the Council's housing portfolio. Strategic site reviews have identified key areas for development, with a focus on creating thriving, inclusive communities and ensuring access to employment, education, and services.

### **Government policy related to the private rented sector**

The private rented housing market is under growing pressure both nationally and locally. A mix of market changes, government policies, and upcoming legal reforms is making it harder to find affordable rental homes. This puts more people at risk of homelessness and increases the Council's reliance on temporary and emergency accommodation.

Many landlords are leaving the sector because they're finding it harder to keep their businesses going due to rising costs, increased taxation and regulatory burdens. The Renter's Rights Act 2025 aims to prevent homelessness by abolishing Section 21 'no fault' evictions and strengthening enforcement and statutory requirements. While these reforms are designed to promote housing stability, they may lead to fewer affordable private rental options, higher rents, and increased demand for enforcement resources.

Housing benefit rates (Local Housing Allowance) have stayed the same, while rents continue to rise due to high demand and fewer available properties. The gap between income and housing costs has existed for many years. It continues to grow and hits low-income households hardest making it more difficult for the Council to secure and retain suitable homes to prevent homelessness in the private rented sector.

## Funding and resourcing

Local authorities are financially stretched due to years of reduced central government funding and rising demand for essential services. Pressures from adult and children's social care, homelessness, and special educational needs have grown, while councils face short-term funding cycles that hinder long-term planning. All councils are relying on reserves or asset sales to stay afloat. These challenges have led to widespread cuts in discretionary services and increased strain on core functions.

In Reading, as with most local authorities, our most significant budget pressure in the delivery of homelessness services is the cost of providing emergency and temporary accommodation. Some homelessness and rough sleeping funding streams now have a three-year settlement for 2026/27 – 2028/29, with further announcements expected, but not guaranteed. We must continue to advocate for sustainable long-term funding that supports effective strategic development. Consistent delivery means we can focus on homelessness prevention at the earliest opportunity. Investing in AI and new technology to maximise officer capacity, increase staff skills and find different ways of working will improve our homelessness and rough sleeping services.

## A National Plan to End Homelessness

To ensure our work is aligned with the national homelessness and rough sleeping strategy published December 2025, we commit to:

- **Deliver measurable outcomes** by setting clear goals aligned with national ambitions, including reducing long-term rough sleeping and enhancing the quality and experience of temporary accommodation.
- **Embed legal duties and shared responsibility** by preparing for and implementing new statutory requirements, such as the Duty to Collaborate, and wherever possible, actively promoting homelessness prevention as a shared priority across public services and partnerships.
- **Champion affordable housing delivery** by working alongside the Council's Housing Strategy to increase access to social and affordable homes and make best use of existing housing stock, recognising that supply is critical to prevention.
- **Ensure safe discharge from institutions** by strengthening partnerships with health, justice, and care services to make sure no one leaves hospital, prison, or care without a housing plan.
- **Invest in workforce resilience** by supporting the development of skilled, confident teams equipped to deliver high-quality services.
- **Focus on those most at risk** by shaping prevention and support around the needs of people facing the greatest vulnerability, including veterans, prison leavers, care leavers, young people, refugees and migrants, survivors of domestic abuse, individuals affected by exploitation or human trafficking, people leaving hospital, and those experiencing multiple disadvantage such as substance use and those requiring adult social care support.
- **Use data, technology and lived experience** by strengthening our evidence base and involving people who have experienced homelessness in improving services and outcomes.

- **Promote dignity in temporary accommodation** by maintaining high standards that minimise disruption and protect stability and wellbeing.
- **Maximise funding and partnerships** by actively seeking national funding opportunities and working with government and local partners to deliver sustainable solutions in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping.
- **Align with national frameworks** by monitoring progress against the MHCLG Outcomes Framework to ensure transparency and consistency with national reporting.

These commitments guide our detailed Action Plan and demonstrate Reading's ambition to make homelessness and rough sleeping rare, brief, and non-recurring.

## How we will monitor and oversee progress

To make sure the strategy is working and moving in the right direction, we will regularly check progress and share updates. The Council's Housing Needs team will lead this work, but because the strategy involves many different services, we will also meet every six months with other teams to make sure everything is joined up.

We will work with partners – including community groups, and other public services – to keep track of what is working and where we need to improve. Updates will be shared every six months with senior leaders, strategic boards for housing and other service areas, and the Lead Councillor for Housing.

## Keeping the strategy up to date

Each year, we will review and refresh the Action Plan to make sure it reflects what is happening locally and nationally. We will use data on homelessness, housing supply, and service performance to guide this review. We will also look at feedback from partners and people using services.

A full report will be shared with Strategic Housing Board who will check the progress and suggest any changes. Once approved, the updated Action Plan will be published at the start of each financial year. An annual update on delivery progression against the Action Plan will be provided to Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee.