

Review of Reading's previous homelessness and rough sleeping strategies

Section 1: Review of Reading's Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2020 – 2025

Overview

Reading's Homelessness Strategy 2020 – 2025 focused on three priorities: intervening early to prevent and reduce homelessness, supporting people who are vulnerable to recurring homelessness and increasing access to decent, suitable accommodation. This review summarises progress and key learning to inform future strategic direction.

Intervening early to prevent and reduce homelessness: Summary of key achievements

- Launched a fully revised Allocations Scheme, providing a more transparent and accurate reflection of verified housing need, including the introduction of a split housing register to better match adapted properties to applicants.
- Strengthened early intervention and prevention activity by delivering a six-month pilot focusing on upstream prevention and facilitating move-on from temporary accommodation. Improved data collection to better understand the reasons for homelessness presentations and identified households for outreach activity via LIFT dashboard campaigns.
- Delivered targeted outreach by establishing Young Person's and Mental Health Homelessness Specialisms, strengthening partnerships, improving referral pathways, and promoting use of the Duty to Refer.
- Improved online resources and engagement for customers and partners by redeveloping the Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS) and Homelessness sections of the Council website, adding multilingual functionality, self-service tools, and informative videos for customers and agencies. Launched the "Click Before You Evict" website, offering practical resources for landlords and tenants to prevent evictions.
- Began the digital transformation of Housing Needs services, to improve customer accessibility, by launching the Housing Online platform.
- Introduced a Power BI platform to allow better manager and team oversight of key metrics, improving responsiveness, enabling more efficient case working and offering opportunity to identify and target trends in demand as they arise.

Supporting people who are vulnerable to recurring homelessness: Summary of key achievements

- Sustained private sector tenancies by delivering tenancy support via in-house and commissioned grant-funded interventions, enhanced the RGS incentive programme to address the gap between Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and market rents, enabling tenancies to be re-signed for a further fixed term, and strengthened collaboration with the teams who administer Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to maximise grant utilisation.

- Transferred emergency accommodation procurement to the RGS team, improving quality and value for money, introduced compliance tracking and streamlined spot-purchase processes to support homelessness prevention and SWEP responses.
- Enhanced homelessness intervention and support for vulnerable groups by launching the Accommodation for Ex-Offenders (AfEO) initiative, creating a Refugee and Asylum Team to respond to rising demand and expanding housing priority, forward planning, and multi-service collaboration for Care Leavers.
- Strengthened collaboration across services by establishing homelessness participation in multi-agency panels including MARAC, MAPPA, Safeguarding Adults Board, and the Complex Adults Panel.

Increasing access to decent, suitable accommodation: Summary of key achievements

- Improved access to suitable, affordable housing by introducing the Adapted Housing Register, integrating the Disabled Facilities Grants Team into Housing Needs, supporting under occupying households to downsize, delivering new housing developments, and securing Build-to-Rent units for homeless households.
- Enhanced the provision of safe, cost-effective temporary accommodation by exploring block-booking arrangements to reduce costs and improve standards and acquiring LAHF properties to expand temporary accommodation options.
- Engaged the private rented sector and improved landlord relations by refining the RGS offer and incentives in response to market trends and upcoming legislation (Renter's Rights Bill) and delivering landlord engagement activities including the annual Landlord Evening and the Click Before You Evict website.
- Improved access to accommodation for young people via a homelessness prevention specialist role and joint working with partner agencies, focussing on transition planning.

Full review of objectives, achievements, and actions to take forward to 2025 – 30

Priority 1: Intervening Early to Prevent and Reduce Homelessness in Reading

We must develop an approach that provides universal awareness of homelessness within the wider community and ensure that this reaches a breadth of households.

Our objective was to...

... enable residents and communities to identify their own risks of homelessness. We want trigger points on the pathway to homelessness to be within the consciousness of people and professionals in Reading and aim to embed a systemic corporate approach underpinned by Team Reading within the Council.

Universal approaches
Aims:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create and adopt a full Communications Plan to promote a Homelessness Prevention Service that is visible and instils confidence.• Maximise customer access to Homelessness Prevention services.• Deliver general and bespoke training to upskill and educate statutory sector, faith, voluntary and community partners around homelessness.• Support primary healthcare partners to identify homelessness risk and refer into the Service.• Improve existing partnerships and joint working with admittance and discharge teams at the Royal Berkshire Hospital and Prospect Park Hospitals.

Achievements and how:

- Completed a comprehensive audit of allocations, leading to the successful launch of a fully revised Allocations Scheme which is both more transparent for customers and also a more accurate reflection and appropriate prioritisation of verified housing need. Introduced a split housing register, distinguishing between General Needs and Adapted Housing, to optimise the use of adapted properties and better match applicants with verified needs.
- Transitioned the Choice-Based Lettings process to the Housing Online platform, enhancing digital access to services.
- Reviewed Reading's Allocations Plan to keep it responsive to local demand, resulting in increased lets to homeless households. Continued to utilise and annually review the quota queues, liaising with wider services to identify need and establish referral processes.
- Supported Adult Social Care to move customers from supported housing placements to general needs stock via a panel and quota queue approach.
- Introduced the Power BI platform to allow better manager and team oversight of key metrics such as caseloads and deadlines, rolled out to the Homelessness Prevention Team.
- Redeveloped the RGS and Homelessness sections of the Council website, as part of the customer journey optimisation project, to improve accessibility and engagement, including the creation of informative videos illustrating common homelessness scenarios and explaining how the RGS process operates, and also a dedicated section for partner agencies to access training materials and request support. These website enhancements support both customer and agency self-service, with multilingual functionality enabling instant translation into dozens of languages.
- Developed the "Click Before You Evict" website, offering downloadable fact sheets and translatable videos for landlords and tenants, providing guidance on managing tenancy risks and preventing eviction.
- Reviewed and updated customer-facing literature, including the creation of A Guide to Homelessness Prevention booklet.
- Actively promoted the Duty to Refer across all partner organisations to strengthen early intervention pathways.
- Established a Mental Health Homelessness Prevention specialist role, carrying out weekly outreach visits to Prospect Park Hospital and strengthening partnerships with mental health services.
- Conducted landlord and tenant surveys within the Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS) to gather feedback on service delivery, processes, and overall customer experience.

Suggested actions to take forward to 2025 – 30:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive Communications Plan to promote the Homelessness Prevention Service, building on existing digital platforms and outreach materials to ensure visibility and trust.
- Continue to expand digital access and self-service functionality for homelessness services, consolidating the Housing Online platform and going live with the digital Personalised Housing Plan.
- Strengthen collaboration with primary healthcare providers, building on the success of the Mental Health Homelessness Prevention specialist role to fully embed Duty to Refer use.
- Enhance joint working with hospital discharge teams at Royal Berkshire and Prospect Park Hospitals, to ensure timely and coordinated support for patients at risk of homelessness.

Targeted upstream interventions

Aim:

- Continue to commission *Policy in Practice* Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) dashboard.
- Reframe analysis away from the most recent homelessness reason to consider wider factors.
- Continue to provide homelessness advice and information within community and homelessness sector settings.
- Continue to support vulnerable households with moving to Universal Credit.
- Pilot awareness sessions in schools, colleges, universities, and youth services.

Achievements and how:

- Utilised the LIFT dashboard to strategically allocate Winter Pressures funding, targeting low-income households identified as being in rent arrears.
- Tested the effectiveness of an Early Intervention Team as part of the Homelessness Prevention Team six month Pilot, carrying out upstream prevention activities including outreach campaigns determined using LIFT dashboard data and focussing officer time on achieving move on from temporary accommodation.
- Embedded Personalised Housing Plans (PHP) as a core practice following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act, ensuring tailored support for individuals at risk.
- Established a young person's homelessness specialism role, delivering targeted outreach at YMCA facilities and attending drop-in sessions at the Salvation Army.
- Promoted community cohesion by using a revised sensitive lets process to make offers of social housing, in response to social concerns raised in specific neighbourhoods.
- Enhanced the management transfer process for residents who had gained succession rights to unsuitable social housing, ensuring access to an alternative and suitable offer of accommodation.
- Successfully supported the transition of RGS tenants and Housing Needs clients from Housing Benefit to Universal Credit, with dedicated assistance provided by the Money Advisor to ensure financial stability and continuity of housing.

Suggested actions to take forward to 2025 – 30:

- Continue commissioning and expanding use of the LIFT dashboard to identify households at risk and inform targeted prevention and early intervention strategies, aiming to identify the origin of homelessness presentations and expanding homelessness advice provision in community settings, including supporting the Launchpad Drop In, to access individuals at an earlier stage.
- Broaden homelessness analysis beyond identification of the presenting reason, reviewing the whole customer journey and identifying where earlier intervention might have been possible, embedding a holistic understanding of all the factors contributing to or triggering homelessness into assessments and service planning.
- Pilot targeted homelessness awareness sessions in educational settings, including schools, colleges, universities, and youth services, to promote understanding and knowledge of homelessness triggers and available support, and enable early identification and prevention. Build on the Young Person's Homelessness Specialism to explore further engagement opportunities with education and youth networks.

Priority 2: Supporting people who are vulnerable to recurring homelessness in Reading

We must develop an approach that provides universal awareness of homelessness within the wider community and ensure that this reaches a breadth of households.

Our objective was to...

... provide exceptional housing-related support for independent living that can effectively identify additional needs and signpost to services that can support with relationship breakdown, domestic abuse, mental ill-health problems, drug and alcohol dependency, poverty, debt, and unemployment.

Supported sustainment
Aim:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that housing-related support continues to play a key part in assisting with finding and maintaining suitable accommodation.• Review most effective way to deliver housing related support – in house versus commissioned.• Develop and roll-out a holistic modular/accredited pre-tenancy training programme with partners.• Review how people access supported accommodation and ensure that it meets needs now and, in the future.• Work alongside Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) in preparing care leavers for independent living.• Prevent the cycle of mental health discharge, readmittance and risk of homelessness.• Continue to maximise our grant revenue funding opportunities from Government.
Achievements and how:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tenancy Sustainment support continues to be available for council tenants, helping to prevent tenancy breakdown and homelessness, plus a Tenancy Preparation Programme for council tenants was developed and implemented to improve readiness and long-term housing outcomes.• Out-of-Hours Tenancy Sustainment Support introduced through grant funding, specifically targeting individuals with a history of rough sleeping from 2021 – 2023, and continued to deliver short term cross-tenure tenancy sustainment support via Launchpad.• Delivered RGS workshops offering practical guidance on accessing private rented sector accommodation.• Utilised grant-funded Environmental Health videos to educate tenants and landlords on property condition standards and responsibilities.• Faced reductions in funding across contracted supported accommodation services, increasing reliance on short-term grants and limited Council-funded provision. This has caused challenges in aligning service review and renewal cycles due to uncertainty around future funding streams.

- Improved homelessness prevention for those leaving care by introducing a dedicated care leavers quota queue on the Housing Register to prioritise access to housing and establishing a Joint Working Protocol for care leavers, enhancing multi-agency collaboration. Initiated regular care leavers meetings attended by homelessness services, enabling proactive planning before individuals turn 18 and improving transition outcomes. Conducted regular outcome reviews with BFfC to identify learning and improve service delivery for care leavers. Established homelessness services' representation on the Preparation for Adulthood Panel to identify housing needs early and plan appropriate interventions and streamlined referral processes into Launchpad for care leavers through a simplified form. RGS Money Advisor provided tailored financial advice sessions to care leavers preparing for independent living.
- Reactively responded to and supported arrivals of unaccompanied minors via refugee and asylum seeker routes.
- Established a Mental Health Homelessness Prevention specialist role, with assessments conducted at Prospect Park Hospital to support individuals with complex needs.
- Successfully launched the grant-funded Accommodation for Ex-Offenders initiative, securing sustained private rented sector accommodation for former offenders, including the creation of two dedicated Transitions Officer posts to support individuals from prison release through to stable accommodation, providing six months of tenancy sustainment support.
- Acquired properties through the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) to be used as temporary accommodation for refugee households, including larger family-sized homes.

Suggested actions to take forward to 2025 – 30:

- Review before recommissioning housing-related support services, ensuring they are accessible, effective, and tailored to help individuals find and sustain accommodation, achieving a balance between efficiency and person-centred approach.
- Review the delivery model for tenancy sustainment, evaluating the benefits of in-house provision versus commissioned services to ensure continuity and quality.
- Develop and roll out a programme to upskill clients threatened with homelessness to find property in the private sector, building on the RGS workshop.
- Strengthen partnership working with Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) to support care leavers, particularly those aged 16-17, including early planning and financial advice, via the Young Person's specialism role. Continue to work collaboratively to end intentionally homeless decisions for care leavers.
- Continue to develop mental health homelessness prevention pathways via the Mental Health specialism role, reducing the risk of discharge-readmittance cycles through hospital-based assessments and coordinated support.
- Continue to develop health-homelessness prevention pathways, rolling out a joint working protocol for hospital discharge.
- Maximise opportunities to secure and utilise grant funding, including for specialist projects, temporary accommodation, and tenancy sustainment initiatives, including the NAPpads, a review of the AfEO scheme and the Test and Learn initiative, responding to the challenge of grants being increasingly homogenised, seeking to improve information sharing and contact across different teams and services to facilitate creative opportunities for collaboration.

Pre-Crisis Intervention

Aim:

- Continue existing, well established preventative practices under our Homelessness Reduction Act prevention duties.
- Promote planned move-on options for those vulnerable to friend and family evictions.
- Better understand the reasons behind relationship breakdown.
- Continue to respond to homelessness from the private rented sector.
- Improve communication when enforcement action is planned or imminent.
- Embed universal trauma informed approaches for assessing and supporting complex and higher need households that may be experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Achievements and how:

- Undertook significant preparation for the rollout of the Digital Personalised Housing Plan, enhancing accessibility and efficiency of support planning.
- Introduced stricter procedures for conducting homelessness home visits, improving consistency and safeguarding.
- Gained deeper insight into homelessness presentations linked to relationship breakdown, which is no longer a top five reason for presentations due to improved data categorisation. Enhanced data collection practices now distinguish between family breakdown and domestic abuse, allowing for more accurate analysis and targeted interventions.
- Strategically deployed the Prevention Fund to rescue and secure private rented tenancies at risk.
- Expanded the ability of the RGS to procure private sector accommodation with an incentive programme – initially funded through Winter Pressures, now embedded in the annual budget – to create and sustain tenancies, addressing the gap between Local Housing Allowance and market rents.
- Strengthened collaboration with the Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) team to maximise grant utilisation and respond to shared pressures.
- Used the LIFT dashboard to identify households for upstream prevention work.
- Maintained a three-day-a-week Launchpad drop-in service to support individuals at risk of homelessness.
- Hosted an annual RGS Landlord Evening to engage the private rented sector, promote Council services, and share homelessness prevention messages.
- Introduced a streamlined process for spot-purchased emergency accommodation, reducing pressure on frontline teams and supporting Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) responses.
- Employed grant-funded Private Rented Tenancy Sustainment Officers for a fixed term to support tenancy retention.
- Formed a dedicated Asylum and Refugee Team in response to rising homelessness demand among displaced populations.
- Established the active participation of Homelessness Prevention Officers and RGS staff in the Complex Adults Panel to support individuals facing enforcement action.
- Strengthened cross-team collaboration between RGS, Rents, Housing Advice, and Environmental Health.

- Contributed to multi-agency panels including MARAC, MAPPA, Safeguarding Adults Board, and the Preparing for Adulthood Board.
- Developed processes to challenge negative decisions and support individuals on the rough sleeping list during appeals.
- All RGS procurement team members are trained in the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), using it to identify Category 1 and 2 hazards during property inspections.
- Fostered links between RGS and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to support employment pathways.
- Supported Launchpad's Work & Life Skills Centre to promote independence and resilience.
- Established an Early Intervention Team through a pilot programme to identify and address risks earlier.
- Leveraged the LIFT dashboard to identify and respond to worklessness as a contributing factor to homelessness.

Suggested actions to take forward to 2025 – 30:

- Continue to digitalise Homelessness Reduction Act prevention duties, including the use of Digital Personalised Housing Plans and HOOPS forms, streamlined through the adoption of Magic Notes. Roll out Magic Notes functionality to additional areas, including the Common Assessment Form, to support consistency and reduce administrative burden.
- Promote planned move-on options for individuals vulnerable to friend and family evictions, using upstream prevention models and targeted support.
- Use improved data collection and analysis to better understand presentation reasons, including the nuanced causes of relationship breakdown, now separated from domestic abuse and family breakdown.
- Review the effectiveness of the Homelessness Prevention Pilot, incorporating learning into future service design and delivery.
- Continue to engage with the private rented sector, monitoring and responding to upcoming Renter's Rights Bill changes, temperature testing landlord motivations and using market insights to shape future interventions and incentives, particularly considering the revision of the RGS offer to maintain the scheme's attractiveness.
- Explore the use of the welfare band on the Housing Register to support households at risk of homelessness, preventing temporary accommodation placements while ensuring this remains a short-term, strategic tool.
- Review access to supported accommodation to ensure it meets current and future needs, in light of the Supported Housing Regulatory Oversight Act and feedback from the Rough Sleeping Deep Dive.
- Monitor and respond to the impact of new Selective and Additional Licensing requirements to promote housing quality and compliance across the private rented sector, while maximising property procurement.
- Continue to develop trauma-informed approaches to homelessness prevention activities, including a full roll out of reflective supervision for internal teams and commissioned services, embedding person-centred practice into interview skills training and onboarding programmes. Offer training on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and their impact on homelessness cycles.

- Improve connections with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to identify support pathways and employment opportunities for homeless households. Utilise the RGS Money Advisor to provide targeted intervention to maximise household income and financial resilience.
- Explore and strengthen existing links between the Money Advice Team and employment services to promote financial resilience and tenancy sustainment.
- Promote a One Directorate approach, sharing training, resources, and expertise across teams to improve service integration and outcomes.
- Improve use of Multi-Agency Risk Management frameworks to support individuals with complex needs and reduce repeat homelessness.
- Establish better relationships with the Home Office, using decision lists and our understanding of shortened decision-making timescales to plan housing responses for asylum seekers and refugees.
- Develop the housing needs workforce by fully delivering reflective supervision training and embedding trauma-informed approaches across services, promoting a person-centred approach. Ensure commissioned services adopted reflective supervision as standard practice. Develop training programmes and induction plans to include shadowing external teams and service providers.

Priority 3: Increasing access to decent, suitable accommodation.

We will relieve and prevent homelessness by enabling residents to access secure and suitable accommodation that they can call home.

Our objective was to...

... increase housing supply to avoid use of emergency temporary accommodation and improve the standards of accommodation for new and existing tenants that approach our Homelessness Prevention Service. Given what we know about Reading's housing market, our focus will primarily be within the private rented sector.

Provision of accommodation and crisis intervention

Aim:

- Advocate that homelessness is not just about provision of 'bricks and mortar.'
- Continue existing practices under Homelessness Reduction Act relief duties.
- Ensure that the provision of temporary accommodation is adequate in meeting the needs of any growing pressures.
- Regularly review how we procure enough private sector housing for homeless households.
- Continue to provide information, advice, and support for landlords.
- Continue developing more affordable housing as a priority for the Council.
- Implement revised Allocations Scheme by 2021/22.
- Review and develop accommodation and support for those aged 16 – 24.
- Scope and implement a permanent site/pitch for the gypsy and traveller community.
- Maximise opportunities to support and signpost homeless households without recourse to public funds.

Achievements and how:

- Emphasised a person-centred approach to homelessness prevention, focusing not only on accommodation but on understanding the root causes of previous tenancy failure and putting measures in place to prevent recurrence.
- Delivered a six-month pilot of the Homelessness Prevention Team, focusing on upstream prevention and facilitating move-on pathways by clearing systemic blockages.
- Established Housing Needs representation within the Safeguarding Adults Board to strengthen multi-agency collaboration.
- Integrated the Disabled Facilities Grants Team into the Housing Needs Service, enabling more cohesive support for individuals with accessibility needs, with Occupational Therapists available to assess the needs of homeless households, ensuring appropriate adaptations and placements. This enables optimised use of grant funding to adapt both private rented and social housing stock to meet evolving accessibility requirements.
- Implemented a revised Allocations Scheme to better reflect local housing priorities and needs, and finalised Allocations quota queues and move-on processes to improve flow through supported and temporary accommodation.

- Transferred emergency accommodation procurement responsibilities to the RGS team, reducing pressure on the homelessness prevention team and improving quality of accommodation and value for money. The team established a six-monthly inspection programme for emergency accommodation to ensure standards are maintained, introducing compliance tracking covering gas and electrical safety, Energy Performance Certificates, and HMO licences where applicable. Delivered value-for-money moves within nightly paid accommodation by transitioning from higher-cost placements to more affordable options.
- Completed a tender process for block-booking 1- and 2-bedroom emergency accommodation units at favourable rates.
- Improved forecasting of homelessness 'upcoming demand' to reduce reliance on emergency placements and maximise use of RGS and temporary accommodation, and improved tracking of homelessness themes and trends to inform service planning.
- Monitored upcoming private rented sector legislation and engaged landlords in preparation for the Renter's Rights Bill, carrying out rent snapshots and surveys to understand market trends, set RGS incentive payments and review and refine the RGS offer to ensure relevance and appeal.
- Created a Refugee and Asylum Team to respond to Home Office changes and increasing demand.
- Acquired properties through the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) to expand temporary accommodation options.
- Established a Suitability Inspections process for Prevention Fund payments, ensuring safe and compliant accommodation.
- Appointed a dedicated officer to support under occupying households to downsize, supported by a revised incentive package.
- Delivered an annual Landlord Evening to promote Council services and homelessness prevention initiatives.
- Employed a fixed-term, grant-funded Tenancy Relations Officer to support landlord-tenant relationships.
- Launched the Click Before You Evict website and associated publicity campaign to raise awareness of support resources for landlords and tenants.
- Refreshed the Council website to focus on landlord and tenant resources, improving accessibility and self-service.
- Delivered new housing developments at Arthur Hill, Green Park, and Wensley Road.
- Successfully negotiated making Build-to-Rent schemes available to homeless households via the RGS.
- Reviewed provision for 18-24 year olds by establishing a Young Persons Homelessness Specialism role, including monthly outreach visits to YMCA, extending YMCA nomination rights to increase access for young people, and increasing the Leaving Care Queue in response to rising demand.
- Strengthened partnership working with the Leaving Care Team to support transitions.
- Responded to the COVID-19 Everybody In initiative by accommodating rough sleepers and continuing support post-pandemic.

Suggested actions to take forward to 2025 – 30:

- Continue to advocate that homelessness is not solely about housing, embedding trauma-informed, person-centred approaches across all services.
- Explore how we might better identify and respond at an earlier stage to hidden homelessness, including people sofa surfing and people experiencing housing instability due to domestic abuse.
- Continue to monitor and respond to demand for emergency accommodation, using forecasting tools and LAHF acquisitions to reduce reliance on nightly paid options, scoping private sector leasing models as alternatives, including cost modelling and value-for-money analysis. Maintain compliance tracking and inspection regimes for emergency accommodation.
- Continue to respond to the Renter's Rights Bill, establishing a new Tenancy Relations Officer role to undertake prevention activity and monitor compliance.
- Continue to act as a source of advice and support for private sector landlords, re-launching and promoting the updated Click Before you Evict website and focussing landlord events on topics of primary concern, contributing to forging better links between landlords and Council teams whose services they utilise, promoting the RGS and delivering homelessness prevention messaging.
- Continue to review and refine the Allocations Scheme, including making necessary adjustments to accommodate the Domestic Abuse Act and Armed Forces Covenant.
- Continue to review the adapted housing register, identifying properties suitable for adaptation in partnership with Registered Providers and target properties within Reading housing stock where tenants no longer require the adaptations in their home.
- Maximise the supply of affordable housing by continuing to support under occupiers to downsize, with revised incentive packages and media campaigns, signing contracts with Registered Providers to establish nominations agreements and exploring further private sector Build-to-Rent opportunities for homeless households.
- Expand support for 16–24 year olds, by developing a Young Person's Hub as a focus of early intervention activity. Create a toolkit for this cohort to include tenancy training and CV writing skills. Collaborate with secondary schools and youth services in delivering tenancy and money management training. Review 16–17 year old protocol and improve joint assessments with BFFC. Strengthen transitions between services for 18-year-olds. Investigate the connection between sexuality, gender and neurodivergence and homelessness, especially in young people, and evaluate how we best enable access to services for neurodivergent individuals. Use the LIFT dashboard to identify young people at risk of homelessness – such as those qualifying for non-dependent deductions or becoming ineligible for Child Benefit.
- Continue to support refugee and asylum households, using Home Office decision lists to plan responses, ensuring that both staff and services are culturally sensitive, and access is inclusive.
- Strengthen multi-agency risk management and safeguarding links.
- Promote a One Directorate approach, sharing training and resources across teams.

Section 2: Review of Reading's Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 – 2024

Overview

Reading's Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 – 2024 focused on five priorities: early intervention and prevention, recovery and community integration, rapid intervention, united support and enforcement, and provision of information and alternative ways to give. This review summarises progress and key learning to inform future strategic direction.

Early intervention and preventions: Summary of key achievements

- Improved data collection and a dedicated Data and Evaluation Lead have helped improve what we know about people verified sleeping rough and informed service development.
- The Accommodation for Ex-Offenders project supported over 200 referrals and created 50+ tenancies in the private rented sector.
- Strong joint working with NHS Health Outreach Liaison Team (HOLT) prevented hospital discharges to rough sleeping, while Duty to Refer was embedded in non-statutory services.
- Proportional reduction in new and repeat rough sleepers, despite overall increase in numbers.

Recovery and community integration: Summary of key achievements

- Secured significant capital and revenue grant funding from the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the Centre for Homelessness Impact (CHI) to deliver new accommodation and support initiatives.
- Developed the Caversham Road Pods and Nova Project and expanded Housing First to deliver 87 additional bed spaces for people with complex needs.
- Outreach and tenancy sustainment teams expanded to include out-of-hours support and complex case workers.

Rapid intervention: Summary of key achievements

- Willow House continued to offer 24/7 emergency bed spaces, supported by the introduction of a YMCA crash pad for young people and the scoping of NAPpad provision to further expand off-the-streets options.
- A new pilot project and navigator role supported individuals with Limited Access to Public Funds and Non-UK Nationals who were rough sleeping with acquiring immigration status outcomes and subsequent housing options.
- Monthly progression meetings helped create vacancies in supported housing and strengthened move-on pathways into long-term accommodation.
- Learning Framework commissioning and Power BI dashboards improved service agility and performance monitoring.

United support and enforcement: Summary of key achievements

- Rough Sleeping Initiatives team supported enforcement in hotspot areas and supported the work of the Safer Public Realm team to ensure action was paired with outreach support and housing offers.
- Weekly encampment updates and Power BI alerts improved transparency and enabled faster responses.
- Multi-agency panel involvement helped address begging and anti-social behaviour linked to rough sleeping.
- Public messaging and reporting channels were strengthened and made clearer to reduce stigma and promote appropriate, compassionate reporting and responses.

Information and alternative giving: Summary of key achievements

- The Homelessness Partnership (HoP) strengthened cross-sector coordination and shared learning.
- A dedicated Media and Communications Manager for housing improved visibility of homelessness services, as did Members briefings in raising awareness among Councillors.
- StreetLink campaign actively promoted as single point of referral into the rough sleeping outreach service.
- Tap for Reading pilot launched in January 2025, offering alternative donation options and raising public awareness around rough sleeping and begging.

Full review of objectives, achievements, and actions to take forward to 2025 – 30

Priority 1: Early intervention and prevention

Where possible, intervene early to prevent rough sleeping in the first place and prevent people from returning to the streets once housed.

Our objective was to...

...prevent those who are vulnerable to sleeping rough from moving towards entrenched and harmful behaviours and lifestyles by intervening as early as possible.

Aims / commitments:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce the number of people sleeping rough on the streets of Reading to 15 or fewer, by our rough sleeping count in the autumn of 2022.
Achievements and how:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reading’s annual snapshot rough sleeping figure has increased year-on-year since 2020.• There has been a proportional decrease in those new to the streets and repeatedly sleeping rough, but an increase in those sleeping rough long-term. An increase in the number of people sleeping rough who were unknown has been reversed by better data collation methods.• Improved data collation to ensure unknown individuals sleeping rough are identified, engaged with, and captured – understanding people sleeping rough better: numbers, status, off-the-streets needs, and options.
Suggested actions to take forward to 2025 – 30:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pursue a reduction of rough sleeping numbers in Reading, in accordance with the national ambition to prevent rough sleeping wherever possible and, where it cannot be prevented, making it a rare, brief, and non-recurrent experience.

Aims / commitments:

- Work in partnership to prevent those discharged from hospital, prison or other institutional settings ending up on the streets of Reading.
- Develop a response that works with our neighbouring boroughs and local authorities further afield so that joint working benefits individuals, including identifying and maximising cross-boundary funding bids and opportunities.

Achievements and how:

- Appointment of a fixed-term Berkshire-wide strategic lead to improve coordination of the homelessness and rough sleeping response across the region.
- Well-established Accommodation for Ex-Offenders (AfEO) project since 2022, supporting access to private rented sector housing for people leaving custody. Over 50 tenancies created, 200+ referrals received, and individuals supported to sustain or transition into appropriate accommodation.
- Strong partnership with HMPS Homelessness Prevention Taskforce has improved Duty to Refer rates prior to release, supported by regular meetings, shared release information, and Taskforce attendance at Access Panel.
- Pilot with HMP Bullingdon to identify individuals at risk of homelessness well ahead of release, enabling timely referrals to the correct local authority.
- Introduction of CAS3 accommodation offer in Reading has strengthened referral and prevention pathways for prison leavers.
- Close joint working between the Rough Sleeping Initiatives team, rough sleeping outreach service and NHS-commissioned Health Outreach Liaison Team (HOLT) to deliver co-ordinated support to prevent hospital discharges to rough sleeping.

Suggested actions to take forward to 2025 – 30:

- Work with HMPS to expand early identification pilots to more prisons, enabling earlier homelessness prevention planning.
- Improve Duty to Refer compliance across CAS3, Probation, and Prisons to ensure timely referrals and coordinated support.
- Engage with individuals placed in CAS3 accommodation at the earliest opportunity to maximise positive housing outcomes and prevent rough sleeping.
- Use data to better identify early risk of homelessness, monitor the success of the AfEO project, and track tenancy sustainment outcomes.
- Inform service commissioning and delivery through the voices of people with lived experience leaving prison and hospital, ensuring services are responsive and person-centred.

Aims / Commitments:

Ensure that access to, and sustainment of, income benefits are not barriers to obtaining accommodation for people who are rough sleeping or vulnerable to rough sleeping, through joint working with statutory partners such as the Department for Work and Pensions and our voluntary sector advice providers

Achievements and how:

- Outreach focused on setting up benefits and bank accounts in advance of entering accommodation.

Actions to take forward to 2025 – 30:

- Arrears and overcharges remain a significant barrier for our most complex people and affects affordability for move on too.
- Focus support services upon acquiring identification to set up bank accounts and income benefits; check at Access Panel and Progression Meeting if Universal Credit is in place, and a bank account sustained to prevent this being someone's future barrier to moving on.
- Utilise data and Power BI dashboards to identify individuals with current or former rent arrears that may hinder their transition into private rented or social housing, even after gaining the skills to live independently.

Aims / commitments:

- Provide tools and knowledge to the public, professionals, and partners to enable them to identify specific triggers, risk factors and causes of rough sleeping at different points in a person's journey to ensure that the right services are targeting individuals at the right time.
- Improve strategic communications by raising awareness, coordinating services, and building trust with partners and vulnerable individuals.
- Co-produce services by ensuring that they are shaped with, not just for, people with lived experience – making support more relevant, accessible, and effective.
- Strengthen partnerships with the voluntary and community sector to extend its reach, harness trusted frontline support, and deliver more co-ordinated, person-centred interventions that prevent and reduce rough sleeping.
- Embed No First Night Out principles internally, throughout commissioned services and into places where the wider community may have contact with people who are sleeping or may sleep rough.
- Continue the development of the Hub offer at Willow House to include more statutory services and the 'one-stop shop' concept. This will include developing a robust response for people with No Recourse to Public Funds.

Achievements and how:

- Introduction of Street Support Network from 2021–2024, and re-establishment of Reading’s Homelessness Forum, in the guise of the Homelessness Partnership (HoP), to support networking and shared learning.
- VCFS partners played a vital role during the ‘Everyone In’ initiative, strengthening relationships and reinforcing their importance in supporting those sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough.
- Strong partnerships at operational level contributed to upskilling professionals and developing a holistic view of situations that lead to rough sleeping.
- Refocus and renaming of the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) Coordinator role, commissioned to Launchpad, to lead targeted training and coordinate co-production, embedding lived experience into service design.
- Duty to Refer is now embedded in commissioned supported housing services, ensuring clients at risk of eviction are proactively identified and referred by non-statutory providers to the homelessness prevention team.
- Use of the Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) from Policy in Practice to run targeted campaigns – drawing on housing benefit and income data – has effectively identified households at risk and enabled early, proactive officer contact.
- Expansion of Launchpad Reading drop-in service to offer housing advice across more days and to key services such as Approved Premises.
- Outreach services across homelessness, substance misuse, and health utilise Willow House as a hub in delivering joined-up support for residents and those sleeping rough.
- VCFS responses have adapted to fill gaps and diversify early intervention, including community fridges, food pantries, foodbank expansion, refugee support, and homework clubs for families.
- Ad-hoc training has been delivered to VCFS partners and volunteers throughout the strategy period to support early signposting, covering Safeguarding Level 1, boundaries, homelessness services, and Duty to Refer.
- Employment of a Data and Evaluation Lead in the Rough Sleeping Initiatives team to improve how data is collated, monitored, and used to inform service development.
- An improved effort from the Council to raise public awareness of rough sleeping, how residents can help, and what support is available.
- Supporting World Homeless Day with VCFS partners to promote messaging around rough sleeping, begging, and available services.
- Better communications about funding use, SWEP, year-round and winter-specific interventions via a dedicated Media and Communications Manager – using social media, press releases, and resident newsletters.
- Launch of Tap for Reading – more info under Priority 5.

Suggested actions to take forward to 2025 – 30:

- Co-develop an early identification toolkit to help the homelessness prevention team and partners identify risk indicators, enabling timely referrals and access to support such as No First Night Out accommodation.
- Explore No First and No Second Night Out models for Reading, drawing on best practice to strengthen early interventions.
- Use lived experience to identify risk factors for rough sleeping and inform the design of targeted, person-centred intervention services.
- Enhance Reading's Homelessness Partnership (HoP) to evolve beyond a networking forum into a strategic delivery body shaped by lived experience and co-production.
- Develop structured opportunities for people with lived experience to shape early intervention and prevention responses through a dedicated forum and co-production framework.
- Accelerate development of peer mentorship and lived experience roles, embedding them into service design, delivery, and governance.
- Continue improving data collation and usage, particularly around hidden homelessness, and early triggers, to inform proactive service development.
- Strengthen the rolling training programme for VCFS partners, building on previous ad-hoc sessions and aligning with co-production to embed shared learning and frontline capacity.
- Use Target Priority Group monitoring to evaluate what works, report findings to the Safeguarding Adults Board, and ensure rough sleeping is represented at each quarterly meeting.
- Expand statutory service presence at Willow House, progressing toward a robust 'one-stop shop' model, including pathways for individuals with No Recourse to Public Funds.
- Formalise hospital discharge protocols to ensure early identification, notification, and referral to the local housing authority for patients sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough.
- Explore opportunities with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to improve access to dental, ophthalmic, GP, and pharmacy services for socially excluded individuals.
- Review and improve information about rough sleeping on the Council's website to ensure clarity and accessibility.
- Address public misconceptions that rough sleeping may lead to quicker access to social housing, promoting accurate messaging around pathways and support.
- Review the Tap for Reading pilot and its impact on public understanding of rough sleeping and perceptions of begging.
- Develop a strategic communications plan to unify messaging across partners, improve service visibility, and build trust with vulnerable individuals and the wider community.

Aim / commitments:

Improve access to social care, mental and physical health and drug/alcohol services including:

- In-reach support and targeted surgeries for those sleeping rough and those at risk of rough sleeping at the Hub and across other Homelessness Support Services
- Where possible, having flexible and innovative responses to how those sleeping rough obtain and access primary healthcare services, including dental health services.
- Break down barriers for people who feel that their substance dependency prevents them from receiving support with their mental health – utilising peer support groups for those experiencing substance dependency.
- Early identification, notification, and referral to the local housing authority, prior to hospital discharge, for those sleeping rough and those at risk of homelessness

Achievements and how:

- Funding from MHCLG grants has enabled the creation of a specialist social worker role to support individuals sleeping rough or living in commissioned supported accommodation.
- Continued partnership working with the OHID-funded/Public Health commissioned Multiple Disadvantage Outreach Team (MDOT) has provided substance misuse and health support to those sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough.
- Ongoing collaboration with the Health Outreach Liaison Team (HOLT) to deliver targeted support to the rough sleeping cohort.
- Early development of a Lived Experience Forum and co-production initiatives, including exploration of peer mentorship opportunities to strengthen frontline practice and service design.

Suggested actions to take forward to 2025 – 30:

- Recruitment and retention of a specialist Social Worker to support individuals sleeping rough.
- Explore opportunities with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to improve access to dental, ophthalmic, GP, and pharmacy services for socially excluded individuals and those sleeping rough to strengthen low-barrier clinical pathways.
- Formalise hospital discharge protocols to ensure early identification, notification, and referral to the local housing authority for patients who are rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping – this remains an underdeveloped area requiring stronger cross-sector coordination.
- Improved and sustained transitions from specialist services into mainstream provision, helping to free up capacity for future complex needs.
- Accelerate development of peer mentorship and lived experience involvement, moving beyond early-stage co-production to embedded, structured roles that influence service design and delivery.
- Use Target Priority Group monitoring to evaluate what works and identify areas for improvement, ensuring findings are reported to the Safeguarding Adults Board and that rough sleeping is represented at each quarterly meeting.

Priority 2: Recovery and community integration

Ensuring that recovery underpins tenancy sustainment as part of a holistic approach to homelessness prevention.

Our objective was to...

...ensure that recovery underpins tenancy sustainment as part of a holistic approach to homelessness prevention.

Aims / commitments:

- Provide a holistic approach to recovery that does not solely focus upon clinical, structured, and prescriptive interventions, but upon wellbeing, and purposeful and meaningful occupation of time for those affected by drug/alcohol dependency; mental ill-health; criminal behaviours and/or homelessness.
- Work with partners across sectors to introduce peer-to-peer and mutually beneficial relationships including befriending and mentoring to reduce feelings of loneliness and social isolation.
- Focus efforts on recovery at the earliest stage possible to sustain existing life and employment skills and avoid the development of entrenched behaviours.
- Work with partners to create offers of support and accommodation that can engage individuals with a history of not engaging with services and offers.
- Promote social integration as a key factor in sustaining tenancies and preventing repeat homelessness.

Achievements and how:

- Successfully secured a range of national and regional funding streams – including the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP), Accommodation for Ex-Offenders (AfEO), Rough Sleeping Initiatives (RSI)/Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant (RSPARG), Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP), Transformation Fund, and Centre for Homelessness Impact (CHI) – to expand and diversify Reading’s rough sleeping response. This enabled the development of key projects such as the Caversham Road Pods (established in 2021), the Nova Project (launched in 2022), and the expansion of Housing First from five people in 2018 to 32 in 2022, and 37 in 2024, including tailored support for couples. Outreach and tenancy sustainment teams grew to include rough sleeping navigators, an out-of-hours offer, and complex case workers. These initiatives, delivered in partnership with the VCFS, offer low-barrier accommodation and wraparound support for individuals who have historically not engaged with traditional services.
- Supported and evidenced the commission and launch of the Multiple Disadvantage Outreach Team (MDOT) in 2022, by drug and alcohol commissioners using OHID funding, to deliver flexible, cross-sector support for individuals sleeping rough or at risk – focusing on substance misuse, health needs, and engagement with those facing multiple and complex disadvantages.
- With support from the Council, partners have independently funded and introduced offers to improve wellbeing, learning, and employment for people sleeping rough, vulnerably housed, or in supported accommodation: St Mungo’s Recovery

College, now operating remotely with a focus on employment pathways, and Launchpad Reading's 135 Cardiff Road Work and Life Skills Centre, providing permanent premises for holistic wellbeing, education, and meaningful occupation.

- All commissioned services have delivered added social value by using personal budgets and recovery-focused programmes to promote meaningful and enjoyable activities – such as an 8-week life skills, learning and development course (Salvation Army), football tournaments, gardening, tending allotments (Launchpad), cooking skills, and wellbeing walks—supporting both personal development and improved physical health.
- Although the planned multi-agency 'Pop-Up Hub' was not trialled due to changes in funding, a flexible hub-based model has evolved across Reading. Outreach services now operate from Willow House, with MDOT and HOLT holding regular surgeries, and health/substance misuse outreach services offer appointment and drop-ins at Nova, Pods, Alana House, and Launchpad Reading drop-ins. Additional initiatives include collaborative work with FAITH Christian Group, who offer cool spaces during hot weather and a day hub during Cold SWEPP periods.

Suggested actions to take forward to 2025 – 30:

- Strengthen peer-led and mentoring pathways, including formal befriending schemes, to reduce loneliness and social isolation among people with lived experience of homelessness, substance misuse, and mental ill-health.
- Embed early-stage recovery interventions that proactively sustain life and employment skills before entrenched behaviours develop – moving beyond crisis response to preventative engagement.
- Continue with personalised, non-clinical recovery pathways that prioritise wellbeing and meaningful occupation of time, especially for those affected by multiple disadvantage, criminal behaviours, or long-term substance dependency.
- Enhance engagement strategies for individuals who historically avoid services, including co-designed accommodation and support offers that reflect lived experience and trauma-informed practice.
- Promote and measure social integration outcomes as part of tenancy sustainment efforts, ensuring that community connection and purposeful activity are central to preventing repeat homelessness.

Priority 3: Rapid intervention

When people do end up sleeping rough, provide rapid intervention and reconnection support to ensure that they are offered an appropriate and sustainable housing solution.

Our objective was to...

...intervene rapidly when prevention has been ineffective and homelessness is unavoidable.

Aims / commitments:

- Identify and verify individuals quickly and assess their needs accurately and efficiently.
- Offer a personalised and sustainable route away from the streets for every person sleeping rough, where that offer must be based on their individual circumstances and must be regardless of their local connection or immigration status.
- Work with partners to explore, establish, and enable support and accommodation options for people sleeping rough who have No Recourse to Public Funds
- Ensure clear off-the-streets and long-term accommodation planning for each individual.
- Commission effective supported accommodation services.

Achievements and how:

- Continued operation of Willow House as Reading's primary 24/7 sit-up hub, offering three bed spaces for immediate off-the-streets provision for people sleeping rough.
- Introduction of a crash pad at the YMCA for those aged 18 – 24 who are rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping, to provide an immediate off the streets offer, with a pathway into supported housing or the private rented sector – aiming to prevent entrenched behaviours and lifestyles.
- Expansion of Housing First provision for single people and couples, supported by Rough Sleeping Initiative and SHAP funding, offering long-term, wraparound support tailored to complex needs.
- Development of a couples move-on pathway to provide Housing First accommodation and support for those with complex needs which has supported a reduction in female rough sleeping numbers.
- Flexible use of Rough Sleeping Initiative funding to bridge the gap between street homelessness and access to supported housing via short-term paid nightly accommodation.
- Maximised use of the Council's quota queue to enable direct moves from the streets into social housing, including secure tenancies for Housing First and couples pathway clients.
- Funding and coordination support to FAITH Christian Group's Bed for the Night Winter Shelter which operates January – March every year which provides a safe space and platform for people to access longer-term housing options.
- Funding and coordination of Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) to ensure that lives are protected during extremes of cold and hot weather.
- Monthly supported housing progression meetings to coordinate and support transitions into long-term accommodation.

- Navigator role introduced to support individuals with No Recourse to Public Funds to access specialist support and achieve immigration outcomes to enable access to income and housing benefits, opening up accommodation options away from rough sleeping.
- Successful bid to the Centre for Homelessness Impact for a 12-month Non-UK Nationals Test and Learn Project (starting March 2025), offering time-limited accommodation, support, and legal/immigration advice.
- Scoping of NAPpad provision to expand emergency off-the-streets accommodation options with implementation expected 2025/26.
- Adoption of a Learning Framework approach to commissioning, enabling agile service delivery and accountability through feedback from commissioned services.
- Quarterly monitoring meetings with commissioned services to review KPIs, case studies, and barriers, with specifications reviewed at each contract extension.
- Introduction of Power BI dashboards for transparent KPI data submission and performance analysis.
- Employment of a dedicated Data and Performance Lead to enhance monitoring and interpretation of supported accommodation performance.
- Promotion of Streetlink as the primary reporting tool for rough sleeping, ensuring fast outreach response and consistent messaging to the public.
- Well-funded core homelessness support services, enhanced by MHCLG grants, increasing staffing capacity across Housing First and outreach teams, including specialisms for women, people with limited access to public funds, and those without a local connection.

Suggested actions to take forward to 2025 – 30:

- Progress the development and implementation of NAPpads to diversify emergency accommodation options.
- Act on the MHCLG Deep Dive recommendation to expand off-the-streets provision for people new to rough sleeping, regardless of immigration status or local connection – recognising that planning sustainable accommodation pathways is more effective from a place of safety.
- Continue to deliver and explore opportunities to expand Housing First provision for both single people and couples, ensuring long-term, wraparound support tailored to complex needs.
- Use the voice of lived experience to shape how services are commissioned, delivered, and improved – embedding insight into decision-making and frontline practice.
- Develop a formal co-production approach and framework to ensure meaningful involvement of people with lived experience in service design and review.
- Increase in-person visits to commissioned services to strengthen relationships, improve oversight, and support collaborative problem-solving.
- Explore practical solutions to improve dignity and engagement for those sleeping rough, including access to storage for belongings and mobile phone charging points while awaiting accommodation.

Priority 4: United support and enforcement action in Reading

Protecting communities by tackling street activities associated with rough sleeping and intervening to stop dangerous behaviours.

Our objective was to...

...approach rough sleeping in a way that supports individuals, but that also protects Reading's resident and business community from the effects of any associated anti-social behaviours.

Aims / commitments:

- Identify individual offending behaviour and associated risk, to enable multi-agency intervention to protect the individual, public and business community.
- Provide a jointly agreed coordinated and measured response to offending behaviour.
- Ensure that all intervention includes elements of supporting individuals to access services and/or an assessment of the current support they are receiving.

Achievements and how:

- Focus on supporting hotspot areas in the town centre and areas of business to ensure the Rough Sleeping Initiatives team supports enforcement action when it is actioned by the Safer Public Realm Team.
- Joint working with the Safer Public Realm Team has led to more robust internal procedures for enforcement and consistent updates on encampments.
- Weekly encampment updates are shared with Lead Councillors and internal stakeholders to ensure transparency and coordinated action.
- The Rough Sleeping Initiatives team is actively involved in meetings the Safer Public Realm team holds with private landowners to ensure enforcement actions are paired with appropriate housing and support offers, maintaining a balanced approach.
- A fixed-term Street Warden, jointly commissioned by the Business Improvement District, was deployed to disrupt begging activity in the town centre.
- The Rough Sleeping Initiatives team regularly attends the Sex Workers Action Group and Borough Problem Solving Group to expedite housing options for individuals whose homelessness is linked to anti-social behaviour, supporting recovery-focused interventions.
- Data monitoring has improved using Power BI dashboards and trigger alerts, enabling the RSI team to respond quickly when encampments grow based on outreach data.
- Messaging consistently distinguishes between rough sleeping and anti-social behaviour, making clear that rough sleeping itself is not inherently anti-social.

- Promotion of how to report anti-social behaviour associated with rough sleeping is included in all communications from the Rough Sleeping Initiatives team to Councillors, MPs, and members of the public.
- Reporting channels – such as Streetlink for rough sleeping and local authority systems for anti-social behaviour – are clearly signposted to ensure appropriate and timely responses.
- Public-facing materials use consistent language to reduce stigma, build understanding, and encourage compassionate engagement with individuals experiencing homelessness.

Suggested actions to take forward to 2025 – 30:

- Link operational activity to relevant priorities within Reading's Community Safety Partnership, ensuring joint working across services. These priorities include reducing crime in high-impact neighbourhoods; improving responses to anti-social behaviour and hate crime; tackling community-based drug activity; and supporting multi-agency approaches to individuals whose offending or vulnerability is linked to rough sleeping. This alignment will strengthen coordinated interventions and ensure enforcement and support are delivered in tandem.
- Enhance cross-sector training and protocols to ensure that all partners – including private landowners, BID teams, and enforcement officers - understand the balance between public protection and individual support.
- Continue the role of the Rough Sleeping Initiatives team in multi-agency panels, ensuring that individuals with complex needs linked to offending behaviour are proactively supported via outreach and supported housing.
- Ensure integration between enforcement and support planning, so that housing and recovery options are not only offered but actively coordinated alongside enforcement actions.
- Ensure that every enforcement-related intervention includes a structured assessment of current support and a clear pathway to accessing services – this needs to be embedded more consistently across all cases.
- Expand the scope of data monitoring to include behavioural risk indicators and service engagement levels, enabling more targeted interventions and better tracking of outcomes.
- Identify and pursue additional funding opportunities to strengthen coordinated legal responses in cases where support-based interventions for individuals sleeping rough or in encampments have proven insufficient, and where targeted disruption is necessary to encourage engagement with services and reduce anti-social behaviour.

Priority 5: Provision of information and alternative ways to give

Providing information and guidance to the community, residents, and visitors regarding alternative ways to support those who are sleeping rough.

Our objective was to...

...provide steer to our local communities in how they respond to people who are sleeping rough by providing sufficient and accessible information, support, and guidance around how we collectively and individually support vulnerable people.

Aims / commitments:

- Keep the public, our community groups, professionals, and businesses up to date and well-informed about the vast amount of support that already exists in Reading. We need to have a strong, consistently messaged, and shared strategy of communication.
- Educate the public and groups outside of the homelessness sector regarding how giving to people that are begging can fuel and exacerbate entrenched lifestyles, which may or may not include rough sleeping, by funding drug and alcohol dependency.
- Channel our cross-sector energies and resources in the same direction to develop and implement a co-produced alternative means for people to direct their good will and donations that does not perpetuate rough sleeping, anti-social or begging behaviours in Reading

Achievements and how:

- Tap for Reading alternative giving scheme successfully launched in January 2025, offering the public a safe and impactful way to donate to local charities supporting people who are rough sleeping or at risk. The scheme is part of a 12-month pilot led by Community Safety partners and supported by the Rough Sleeping Initiatives Team, aimed at educating the public about rough sleeping, begging, and existing support services in Reading. It also helps divert funds away from potentially harmful uses and toward recovery-focused interventions.
- Street Support Reading played a key role in establishing the Homelessness Partnership (HoP) and was later superseded by Tap for Reading and the use of existing platforms such as Homeless Link and the RBC Service Guide – streamlining resources and improving cross-sector communications.
- Reading's HoP continues to provide a cross-sector platform for sharing information and coordinating responses across services and organisations. Continued efforts are being made to create a truly multi-agency, cross-sector homelessness, and social inclusion forum, building on the foundations of the HoP and strengthening collaborative working across Reading.
- A dedicated Media and Communications Manager within Housing Needs has significantly enhanced the promotion of homelessness and rough sleeping efforts, increased social media presence and press engagement. This resource has been instrumental in launching and sustaining Tap for Reading.
- Work is ongoing to improve the Council's rough sleeping section of the website to centralise information and improve access to support.
- The national StreetLink campaign is actively promoted across Reading via Councillors, outreach teams, the Council website, and the Tap for Reading initiative – ensuring the public, businesses, and partners know how to report rough sleeping.
- A stronger communications campaign has been developed around begging, with clear messaging that not all individuals who beg are homeless, and that alternative giving supports long-term solutions.
- Members briefings have been used to promote rough sleeping services and Tap for Reading and raise awareness among constituents about homelessness, begging, and how to report concerns.

Suggested actions to take forward to 2025 – 30:

- Contribute to the 12-month pilot review and determine success and future of the Tap for Reading campaign.
- Strengthen the strategic coordination of cross-sector communications, ensuring all partners consistently promote the same messages about support services, alternative giving, and the realities of rough sleeping and begging.
- Expand public education efforts beyond the homelessness sector to include schools, faith groups, and community organisations – clarifying the risks of giving directly to people who beg and promoting informed compassion.
- Ensure the Council’s rough sleeping website section is fully developed into a comprehensive, user-friendly platform that centralises information, signposts services, and supports public understanding.
- Build on Homelessness Partnership foundations to include broader representation and shared governance that links to developing co-production forums and frameworks.
- Develop and implement a communications and training plan to equip internal teams and external frontline partners – such as parks and street cleansing staff – with clear, accessible information they can share with individuals sleeping rough, ensuring consistent messaging, and signposting to support services.

Conclusion

Reading’s Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategies from 2020–25 and 2019–24 have delivered considerable progress across early intervention, targeted support, and access to accommodation. Through strengthened partnerships, innovative pilots, digital transformation, and person-centred approaches, the Council has enhanced service delivery and outcomes for vulnerable residents. The strategies have laid a solid foundation for future work, with clear learning and actionable insights to inform the next phase. Continued focus on prevention, recovery, co-production, and cross-sector collaboration will be essential to achieving Reading’s ambition of making homelessness and rough sleeping rare, brief, and non-recurrent in Reading.