2. Introduction

Legal requirements

2.1. Local authorities are required to publish a homelessness strategy under the Homelessness Act 2002. A new strategy should be published every five years. Local authorities are required to engage with public and local authorities, voluntary organisations and other people and organisations considered appropriate when adopting or modifying their homelessness strategy.

2.2. When developing a new homelessness strategy, the local authority should carry out a review of homelessness in its district. The purpose of the review is to establish the extent of homelessness in the area, identify future trends and any gaps in the services currently being provided. To do this the review should examine:

- The current and likely future levels of homelessness in the district
- The services provided to prevent homelessness, secure accommodation and provide support for homeless households
- The resources available to the local authority, other statutory organisations and voluntary organisations for providing these services.

2.3. This review looks at definitions of homelessness, the current legislation and guidance and the policy context. It then examines the impact of demographic change, the wider economy, and the housing market. It goes on to examine figures for rough sleeping and statutory homelessness including homelessness decisions, acceptances and the use of temporary accommodation. It then sets out a profile of homeless demand including detail concerning household characteristics and vulnerability.

2.4. It goes on to look at the current provision of services, accommodation and support. The engagement carried out with residents, stakeholders and partners will identify gaps in the current service provision, and suggest potential strategic objectives and priority actions to be included in the forthcoming homelessness strategy.

Definition of homelessness

2.5. In drafting this review, a number of reports have been particularly informative and helpful. The first is The Homelessness Monitor commissioned and funded by Crisis and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and produced by the Institute for Housing, Urban and Real Estate Research at Heriot-Watt University; the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York;

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and City Futures Research Centre at the University of New South Wales\(^2\). The other is the UK Housing Review published by the Chartered Institute of Housing\(^3\). Both reports have helped shape the review and suggest areas of investigation as well providing a wealth of information on homelessness and the wider factors that influence it.

2.6. It is helpful to start by setting out what we mean by homeless and who we include in the definition. This review uses a wide definition of homelessness which includes:

- People sleeping rough
- Single homeless people living in shelters, hostels, and supported accommodation
- Statutory homeless households

It also includes people that can be described as "hidden homelessness" i.e. people who are squatting, living in severely overcrowded accommodation and concealed households.

2.7. Crisis have also produced a definition of what it means by “ending homelessness” in its plan “Everybody in – How to end Homelessness in Great Britain”\(^4\) which will also help shape the priorities to be set out in our new strategy. The definition of ending homelessness is:

- No on sleeping rough
- No on forced to live in transient or dangerous accommodation, such as tents, squats and non-residential buildings
- No one living in emergency accommodation such as shelters and hostels without a plan for rapid rehousing into affordable, secure and decent accommodation
- No on homeless as a result of leaving a state institution such as a prison or the care system
- Everyone at immediate risk of homelessness gets the help that prevents it happening

2.8. The Daily Mirror recently reported that homeless charities are increasingly reporting working homelessness, with workers (including Chefs, engineers, construction workers and security staff) living in doorways, tents, cars and vans. This type of homelessness, exacerbated by zero-hours contracts and informal work arrangements is largely hidden from sight, and is not reported as homelessness or rough sleeping in official statistics\(^5\). Shelter reported that more than half of homeless families living in temporary accommodation are in employment and are “working every hour they can”. Shelter’s analysis suggests 55% of families (33,000) living in temporary digs were also working in 2017 - up 73% on 2013. They highlight the impact of expensive private rents, a housing benefit freeze and a lack of social housing as contributory factors.

\(^3\) [https://www.ukhousingreview.org.uk/](https://www.ukhousingreview.org.uk/)
\(^5\) [https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/growing-number-working-homeless-bedding-12964438#ICID=Android_TMNewsApp_AppShare](https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/growing-number-working-homeless-bedding-12964438#ICID=Android_TMNewsApp_AppShare)
2.9. A key issue for many public sector services is the availability of suitable emergency accommodation, or settled accommodation for residents to move into or return to once they have completed a period of treatment, care, or a residential stay in supported accommodation or an institution (such as a prison or hospital). Either residents without suitable accommodation remain in the services too long ‘blocking’ places for others that need the service, or more worryingly are discharged into the community without accommodation to go to.

Review question 1 - definition of homelessness

Do you agree with this definition of homelessness? Or should it include any other groups or people facing homelessness?

Do you agree we should also look at how to support residents without suitable accommodation to move into or return home to?

What causes homelessness?

2.10. It is also helpful to set out our understanding of the factors that contribute towards homelessness. This is not a straightforward task, as research suggests the causation of homelessness is complex and that there is no one factor that triggers it or is necessary for it to occur. Factors relating to an individual, their relationships, housing and employment all play a part. Housing market trends and policies have a more direct impact on homelessness, whereas economic and labour market factors have a less direct impact, are subject to delay, and can be mitigated by welfare policies. All governments have tried to tackle the housing crisis, with the current government seeking to address this by doubling the house building to hit a target of 300,000 homes a year by the middle of the next decade. Individual factors including vulnerability, mental and physical ill health, support needs, addiction and substance misuse play a part in homelessness, and can also be exacerbated by poverty and disadvantage. Family and other relationships, which help support people and prevent homelessness, can also be strained by economic circumstances and result in relationship breakdown and loss of accommodation. There is also the issue of domestic violence, families being hostile to LGBT members of the family as well as the additional vulnerability of people who are care leavers.

2.11. Among the most common reasons people give for losing their accommodation is that a friend or relatives are no longer able to provide support or because of relationship breakdown. However, these reasons are only the catalysts that trigger people into seeking assistance, and not the underlying issues that have caused the crisis to build up in the first place. For many people, there is no single event that results in sudden homelessness.
Instead, homelessness is due to a number of unresolved problems building up over time and individuals can arrive at the point of homelessness after a long chain of other life events.

- **Individual circumstances** Some factors and experiences can make people more vulnerable to homelessness: including lack of qualifications, lack of social support, debts - especially mortgage or rent arrears, poor physical and mental health, relationship breakdown, and getting involved in crime at an early age, alcohol and drugs issues, bereavement, experience of care, and experience of the criminal justice system.

- **Family background** including family breakdown and disputes e.g. around sexuality, sexual and physical abuse in childhood or adolescence, having parents with drug or alcohol problems, and previous experience of family homelessness.

- **Wider forces** Structural factors can include poverty, inequality, housing supply and affordability, unemployment, welfare and income policies.

- **Complex interplay** Structural and individual factors are often interrelated; individual issues can arise from structural disadvantages such as poverty or lack of education. While personal factors, such as family and social relationships, can also be put under pressure by structural forces such as poverty.

**Review question 2 – Causes of homelessness**

*Do you agree with this analysis of the causes of homelessness? Is there anything else that needs to be taken into account?*

Contact details for feedback/comments on this section

Input and feedback can be provided in writing, by email, by telephone or via the survey on our [Get Involved](http://england.shelter.org.uk/campaigns_/why_we_campaign/tackling_homelessness/What-causes-homelessness) web site. The information provided as part of this review will feed into Croydon’s third Homelessness Strategy since the Homelessness Act 2002 was introduced.

To provide feedback or comments please write to: David Morris, Gateway Transformation Programme Lead (Interim), Croydon Council, Bernard Weatherill House, 8 Mint Walk, Croydon CR0 1EA, or email david.2.morris@croydon.gov.uk.

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6 [https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/understanding-homelessness/causes-of-homelessness](https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/understanding-homelessness/causes-of-homelessness)