

Canterbury City Council
Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy
2026 - 2030

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Foreword

We know the importance and difference that secure and safe accommodation can make to the life chances of all those who live in our district.

We know the impact not having a place to call home can have on health and, of course, the adverse effects on the development and achievements of children affected by homelessness.

Homelessness remains a key priority for Canterbury City Council, and we aim to build on the achievements of the last strategy to improve our response to homelessness and provide positive outcomes for those approaching our services for assistance.

Our overarching priority must be to prevent people becoming homeless in the first place. To tackle this, we will need to work with our partners and support services to identify those at risk at the earliest possible opportunity. We must also make sure our services are as accessible as possible to ensure we are getting advice and support to people at the time they need it most. To do this, we will use the data we hold to review and shape our services.

If people do become homeless, we will offer temporary accommodation and remain committed to helping people to move on into longer term accommodation as quickly as possible. Since the last Strategy we have reduced our reliance on expensive, unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation and invested in purchasing our own temporary accommodation.

We do not underestimate the challenges we face, both economically and in practise, including the forthcoming changes as part of the Local Government Reorganisation. But our commitment to preventing homelessness and rough sleeping, providing safe and secure options in the private rented sector along with increasing our provision of affordable and social housing remain at the heart of our commitment to our residents.

1 Introduction

The Homelessness Act (2002) details housing authorities must create and implement a homelessness strategy at least every five years that sets out their key priorities for preventing and reducing homelessness and rough sleeping in their district. This is our Strategy for the four-year period (2026-2030).

The Council remains committed to our statutory obligations to prevent and relieve those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping. We have all faced many challenges over the last few years, including the Covid 19 Pandemic and the ongoing cost of living crisis, and we are aware of the impact this has had on our residents. Homelessness has increased, not only in the Canterbury District but also nationally. These wider issues present a longer-term challenge and along with the pressures on council budgets, we must prioritise our plans and resources whilst being as ambitious and creative as we can.

Our Strategy focusses on the below four strategic priorities:

- 1. Increase prevention of homelessness through early intervention**
- 2. Reduce and prevent rough sleeping**
- 3. To improve access and information available for our services**
- 4. Raise the standards of temporary accommodation and make best use of housing stock**

A Child-Centred Approach

This Strategy adopts a child-centred approach, recognising that homelessness has a profound and long-lasting impact on children's health, emotional wellbeing, education and life chances. Where children are part of a household affected by homelessness, their best interests will be a primary consideration in all decision making, in line with the Children Act 1989 and the Council's wider safeguarding responsibilities.

We recognise that homelessness can disrupt schooling, access to early years provision, stability of relationships, and access to health and support services. Even short periods in temporary or unsuitable accommodation such as bed and breakfast accommodation, can have lasting consequences for children. Preventing homelessness for families, minimising disruption when homelessness cannot be avoided and supporting swift and stable move-on are therefore key priorities of this Strategy.

A child-centred approach means that:

- Children are seen, heard and considered in homelessness assessments and housing decisions;
- Families with children are prevented from becoming homeless wherever possible;
- Where temporary accommodation is required, it is safe, suitable and as close as possible to schools, support networks and health services;
- Length of stay in temporary accommodation is minimised, with a strong focus on rapid move-on to settled housing;
- Services work in partnership with children's services, education, health and the voluntary sector to address needs early and holistically.

This approach applies across all priorities in this Strategy and will inform how our services are designed, delivered and reviewed.

2. Context

Understanding Homelessness

Homelessness is a complex issue with wide-ranging causes and impacts. A person is considered homeless if they have no accommodation available to them which they have a legal right to occupy, or if it is not reasonable for them to continue to occupy their current accommodation. Homelessness can also include people who are unable to secure entry to their accommodation, those living in temporary or insecure arrangements, or those fleeing domestic abuse or other forms of harm.

Homelessness is not limited to those sleeping rough. Many people experience homelessness in less visible ways, including staying in temporary accommodation, sofa-surfing with friends or family, or living in accommodation that is overcrowded, unsafe or unsuitable. For families, homelessness can be particularly destabilising, often disrupting children's education, health, wellbeing and access to support networks.

Rough sleeping represents the most acute and visible form of homelessness. Rough sleepers are people who are bedded down or about to bed down in the open air or in places not designed for habitation, such as doorways, parks, stairwells, vehicles or derelict buildings. While numbers in Canterbury remain relatively low compared with national figures, rough sleeping continues to present significant risks to health, safety and wellbeing and remains a priority within this Strategy.

Legislative and Policy Framework

This Strategy is developed within the statutory framework set out in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The legislation places duties on local housing authorities to prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible households, regardless of priority need, local connection or intentionality.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 marked a significant shift towards earlier intervention, extending the period during which a household is considered threatened with homelessness from 28 to 56 days and placing new requirements on councils to work proactively with households to prevent homelessness wherever possible.

Local authorities also have responsibilities under wider legislation, including the Children Act 1989, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and safeguarding duties, which require that the welfare and safety of children are central to decision making where families are affected by homelessness.

National Context

Homelessness has increased nationally in recent years, driven by a combination of factors including:

- Rising housing costs and affordability pressures
- A shortage of social and genuinely affordable housing
- Growing demand within the private rented sector
- Wider economic pressures, including the cost-of-living crisis
- Increasing complexity of need among households seeking assistance

National data also shows an increase in the number of households living in temporary accommodation and an increase in families with children affected by homelessness. The use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation has risen in many areas, despite recognition that it is often unsuitable for families and can have detrimental impacts on children's wellbeing and development.

Local Context: Homelessness in the Canterbury District

Homelessness remains a significant and growing challenge within the Canterbury district. Demand for homelessness advice and assistance has increased sharply in recent years. In 2024/25 there were 939 approaches for homelessness advice, rising to 1,270 in 2025/26—an increase of 35%.

In September 2025, there were 160 households living in temporary accommodation, including 50 households with children, comprising 123 children. This reflects the increasing pressure on temporary accommodation and the growing number of families requiring support.

The most common reasons for households approaching the Council as homeless include:

- The ending of an assured shorthold tenancy
- Being asked to leave by family or friends
- Domestic abuse

There has also been a notable increase in households presenting with support needs, rising from 71 at the end of March 2024 to 116 by March 2025. This reflects the increasing complexity of homelessness and the need for joined up, multi-agency responses.

Children, Families and Young People

Children and young people are disproportionately affected by homelessness. Alongside the growing number of families in temporary accommodation, the Council has seen a significant increase in young people aged 18–24 assessed as being owed a homelessness duty, rising from 37 at the end of March 2024 to 55 by March 2025.

For children, homelessness can result in:

- Disruption to education and early years provision
- Increased emotional and mental health needs
- Reduced access to healthcare and support services
- Social isolation and instability

Recognising these impacts, this Strategy places a strong emphasis on prevention for families, minimising time spent in temporary accommodation, and ensuring that housing solutions support children's safety, stability and development.

Housing Supply and Affordability

The shortage of affordable housing remains one of the most significant structural drivers of homelessness locally. At the end of March 2025, there were 1,356 households on the social housing register, rising to 1,377 in 2026, reflecting ongoing pressure on available housing stock.

Limited turnover of social housing, combined with affordability pressures in the private rented sector, means that many households face prolonged stays in temporary accommodation or difficulty securing settled housing. Addressing these pressures requires not only increasing supply but also making the best use of existing housing stock and strengthening partnerships with registered providers and private landlords.

Why This Strategy Matters

This Strategy sets out Canterbury City Council's response to these challenges over the next four years. It recognises that homelessness is preventable in many cases, that early intervention delivers better outcomes for residents and better value for public services, and that children's welfare must be central to local responses.

By focusing on prevention, partnership working, a child centred approach and effective use of housing resources, the Council aims to reduce homelessness, prevent rough sleeping, and improve outcomes for individuals, families and communities across the district.

3. Our priorities

Priority 1: Increase our prevention of homelessness through early intervention

Preventing homelessness at the earliest possible stage delivers the best outcomes for residents and represents the most effective use of public resources. For individuals and families, remaining in their existing home avoids the disruption that homelessness can cause to employment, education, health and support networks. For children, prevention is particularly critical, as homelessness can have lasting impacts on wellbeing, development and educational attainment.

Demand for homelessness services in the Canterbury district has increased significantly, reflecting wider pressures within the housing market and rising living costs. Early intervention allows the Council and its partners to identify risks sooner, provide timely advice and support, and reduce the number of households entering crisis. By strengthening prevention activity, the Council can reduce reliance on temporary accommodation, limit avoidable trauma for households, and create more sustainable housing outcomes.

How we will achieve this:

- By building stronger relationships with our partners and support services to identify those at risk at the earliest possible opportunity. This includes our public service and voluntary sector colleagues. We will review how effective this has been by analysing our Duty to Refer approaches and data gathered from internal systems.
- By widening our approach to how our homeless services can be accessed, taking our services into the district to make sure harder to reach communities are encouraged to seek assistance as soon as they need it. We will consider how we can reach those in rural areas and also how we can work with community and voluntary organisations to ensure our approach is inclusive.
- By effectively engaging and building relationships with landlords in the private sector to ensure we are offering advice and support to prevent homelessness at an early stage.
- Develop family focused prevention pathways, including, early budgeting and debt advice for families and interventions through schools.

- By maximising our funding opportunities from Central Government to target the prevention of homelessness. This may be by providing rent in advance or deposits for properties in the private sector or adaptations to properties that will allow people to stay in their homes.

Priority 2: To reduce and prevent rough sleeping

Rough sleeping represents the most visible and severe form of homelessness and poses serious risks to health, safety and wellbeing. While the number of people sleeping rough in Canterbury is relatively low compared to national figures, the district experiences persistent challenges related to long-term and repeat rough sleeping, often involving individuals with complex needs.

Preventing rough sleeping and supporting rapid routes off the street improves outcomes for individuals and communities and reduces pressure on emergency services. Effective responses require early identification of risk, coordinated multi-agency support, and access to suitable accommodation options. This priority reflects the Council's commitment to preventing people from entering street homelessness and ensuring that those who do are supported to move quickly into stable accommodation with the right level of ongoing support.

How we will achieve this:

- By increasing early intervention, using data and risk assessments to identify vulnerability 3-6 months before crisis
- Develop personalised recovery plans for entrenched rough sleepers
- Increase the number of individuals who are able to remain in their accommodation through earlier interventions.
- Expand our private sector links as part of the Rapid Rehousing model
- Develop ways to work with our partners to offer early advice and support to single people at risk of homelessness or rough sleeping
- Support wider inclusion health strategies to ensure no-one is discharged onto the streets, using our Hospital Pathways Homeless worker to assist and advise on in-patients with complex needs
- Increase accommodation offers for those rough sleeping to provide a personalised and immediate offer

- Strengthen pathways for 16–25-year-olds, particularly care leavers and young parents, working jointly with Children’s Services and commissioned youth homelessness services.

Priority 3: To improve how we communicate and provide advice

Accessible, timely and high-quality advice is fundamental to preventing homelessness and ensuring residents receive the right support at the right time. Barriers to accessing services such as lack of awareness, digital exclusion, language needs or fear of engagement can result in households seeking help only when they are already in crisis.

Improving how services are communicated and accessed supports earlier intervention, promotes fairness, and ensures that vulnerable residents, including families with children, young people and those with additional support needs, are not disadvantaged. Clear communication and consistent advice also help residents to understand their rights and responsibilities, support meaningful engagement with personalised housing plans, and contribute to better housing outcomes.

How we will achieve this:

- We will review the information on our website to highlight access points to vulnerable residents and those with support needs and consider a range of options for how contact can be made.
- We will produce clear Personalised Housing Plans for each household, which are reviewed regularly and where expectations on both sides are understood and committed to.
- We will consider running regular satellite advice sessions offering homeless advice in rural areas to ensure we are reaching everyone in our District
- We will continue working towards the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation and ensure our staff have the relevant training and understanding to communicate with, and advise domestic abuse victims, continuing our face-to-face presence at our local One-Stop Shops
- We will regularly review our data to identify those who may experience barriers in accessing our services and use that data to shape the provision of our services.
- We will use the results of our data to establish work with partners to ensure we have links to relevant agencies or third sector organisations to provide targeted support.

- Develop child aware assessments, ensuring officers consider:
 - Children’s educational needs
 - Health, disability or SEND needs
 - Impact of accommodation location and suitability

Priority 4: Raise the standards of temporary accommodation and make best use of housing stock

Safe, suitable and good-quality temporary accommodation is essential to supporting households experiencing homelessness, particularly families with children and those with additional vulnerabilities. Although temporary accommodation is intended to be a short-term measure, housing supply pressures mean some households experience longer stays, making standards of safety, suitability and location increasingly important.

Alongside this, a shortage of affordable housing remains a key driver of homelessness locally and nationally. High demand for social housing, limited turnover and affordability pressures in the private rented sector increase reliance on temporary accommodation.

By improving the quality and suitability of temporary accommodation and making better use of existing housing stock, the Council can reduce reliance on unsuitable placements such as bed and breakfast, improve move-on rates, and ensure housing resources are targeted effectively to those in greatest need.

How we will achieve this:

- By continuing to undertake robust suitability assessments when placing households into temporary accommodation and we will look at how we can ensure standards of Temporary Accommodation are met and maintained
- Reduce reliance on private sector accommodation through purchasing of own temporary accommodation
- Limit the usage of bed and breakfast accommodation
- Reduce levels of out of area placements for temporary accommodation
- Work with our social housing landlords to build relationships to further help us in housing our statutory homeless households, including:

- Having input into decisions on planning arrangements for any new build properties and making sure they are agreed and informed by the make-up of our district
- Where we are able, we will seek agreement to a small percentage of new build properties being allocated to homeless households
- We will review our Allocations Policy to ensure it still reflects the need of our District and that properties continue to be allocated to those in the highest priority need
- We will consider schemes to assist those under occupying social housing to move to a smaller property, which will free up larger family accommodation.
- We will continue to build our links across council services to make sure we are doing all we can to help people stay in their own homes where possible, making the best use of our Disabled Facilities Grant for adaptations to properties.
- We will engage in the requirement to produce a Supported Housing Strategy to understand current availability currently and establish our future needs for this type of accommodation.

4. How we will deliver our strategy

Delivery of this Strategy will be underpinned by partnership working, strong governance, a child-centred approach, and continuous review of outcomes.

Partnership Working

We recognise that homelessness cannot be addressed by the Council alone. Effective delivery will rely on strong collaboration with partners, including:

- Kent County Council, including Children’s Services and Public Health
- Education providers and early years services
- Health services
- Housing providers and private landlords

- Voluntary and community sector organisations

We will strengthen referral pathways, information sharing (where appropriate), and joint planning to ensure families and individuals receive timely, coordinated support.

Child-Centred and Trauma-Informed Practice

All homelessness services will work in a way that:

- Considers the needs and wellbeing of children in homeless households
- Is trauma-informed, recognising the impact of homelessness, domestic abuse and instability
- Ensures safeguarding responsibilities are understood and acted upon at all stages

Governance and Accountability

- The Strategy will be overseen through existing Council governance arrangements.
- A delivery action plan will sit alongside this Strategy, setting out:
 - Clear actions
 - Lead officers
 - Timescales
 - Performance measures

Monitoring, Review and Data

We will use data to:

- Track homelessness trends, including the number of households with children in temporary accommodation
- Monitor length of stay in temporary accommodation for families

- Identify inequalities or barriers to access

The Strategy will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains responsive to:

- Changes in demand
- Legislative changes
- Economic pressures
- The needs of children and families in the district

Listening and Learning

We will seek feedback from:

- Residents who have experienced homelessness
- Families and young people using our services
- Partner organisations

This learning will be used to improve service design and outcomes over the lifetime of the Strategy.

5. Links to other strategies

[Housing, homelessness and rough sleeping strategy 2018 - 2023](#)

[Canterbury City Council Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028](#)

[Canterbury City Council Local Plan](#)

[Kent & Medway Housing Strategy](#)

Housing Allocations Policy