The question is not whether homelessness can end. It is what action we can take to make it happen.
Making the difference: the strategic plan to end homelessness 2015-2020

Homeless Link

Summary & introduction

"All the strategic objectives are underpinned by our combination of influencing work at a national and local policy level and improving local practice to achieve positive change for people who find themselves homeless."
At Homeless Link we do not ask whether homelessness can be ended but what action we can take to make it happen.

The next five years will be a critical time for the homelessness sector. There will be constraints on public spending alongside a broader debate about the role of the state. We will also continue to experience population growth and demographic change that will place different demands on homelessness services and public services as a whole.

It remains our vision that there is no place for homelessness in the 21st century. With this as a backdrop we are seeking to be ambitious for people who find themselves homeless. Our goals, therefore, relate to preventing homelessness before it starts and providing both responsive and long term, sustainable solutions should it occur.

This strategy covers a five year period from 2015-2020. It brings together our vision and beliefs; our mission, values and behaviours; and it describes the actions that we will take.

Our approach is to strengthen, sustain, grow and innovate with our partners.

There are six priorities in this strategy, designed to achieve an end to homelessness.

- Objectives one and four seek to challenge and expand the scope of the homelessness sector.
- Objectives two and three seek to solidify and improve existing service provision.
- Objectives five and six seek to create structures for the sector and Homeless Link to be sustainable.

All the strategic objectives are underpinned by our combination of influencing work at a national and local policy level and improving local practice to achieve positive change for people who find themselves homeless.
"The challenge for our leaders is to prepare organisations today to be sustainable in this new tomorrow ... Our sector’s unique role as a trusted partner for the community will provide many opportunities if we know how to take them."
Our Vision is of a country free of homelessness. At Homeless Link we think that it is a scandal that anyone in the 21st century should be denied a place to call home. What’s more we believe that together, we have the power to confine homelessness to the history books.

It is based on a definition of home as:

- Affordable and good quality accommodation,
- That you have an adequate income to maintain,
- Where you have support networks that are appropriate and available for as long as you need, and, most importantly,
- A place from where you can realise your potential.

People do and will continue to become homeless for a variety of personal and structural reasons. Our vision is based on a wide consultation and contains a clear road map of what will need to be done and maintained into the foreseeable future. The challenge is to create a service and policy environment where:

- We act faster to prevent people losing their home
- Ensure if people do become homeless that it is for the shortest time possible
- We provide long term accommodation and appropriate support solutions for people with complex problems
- People are supported to achieve their potential and avoid becoming homeless in the future.

Between 2008 – 2015 we experienced one of the biggest economic upheavals in a generation. Its effect has been dramatic, with fewer resources and major changes in the way public and publicly funded community services are delivered. During this time, we have taken the initiative to rethink how services are designed and delivered.

Our emphasis has been on the speed of response for people new to sleeping rough, encouraging the adoption of No Second Night Out nationwide and on better use of resources for people with multiple and complex needs through the Making Every Adult Matter coalition.

The new Government in 2015 will, regardless of political complexion, continue to oversee significant change in the way that public and community services operate, within ever tighter resources. At the same time we expect the population to grow by over two million, to age, become more diverse and to become more aspirational.

We foresee that these changes will have an impact on public and community services as they seek to respond to this environment. We believe that we are at a defining moment within the broader political paradigm, embarking on a shift in the role of public services and specifically the state. A central theme will be communities, public services and the private sector working together on local solutions, with an expectation that the community will do more for itself, reducing demand on statutory public services.

The challenge for our leaders is to prepare organisations today to be sustainable in this new tomorrow. The voluntary sector has a key role to play and as part of that, the voluntary homelessness sector will by necessity work with the most extreme exclusions and inequalities. Our sector’s unique role as a trusted partner for the community will provide many opportunities if we know how to take them.
We are Effective, Efficient, Independent and Trustworthy ... we advocate for solutions that are Local and Personal. Our approach is to listen and learn, act and then speak.”
Our mission

Homeless Link is the membership body for the homelessness sector in England. We exist to change the way that we, as a society, think and act towards single people who become homeless.

We do this by influencing policy and strategy at a national and local level. We also work, in partnership with our members, to develop services that practically improve our response to homelessness and its causes.

How we act on our mission

As a membership body, a voice for the homelessness sector and a trusted member of civil society it is vital that we have integrity. That means we are Effective, Efficient, Independent and Trustworthy and that we advocate for solutions that are Local and Personal. Our approach is to listen and learn, act and then speak:

Listen & Learn

To be effective we must first understand evidence, perspectives and motivations. As a first principle, therefore, we seek to understand before seeking to be understood. We do this to:

- Get the information that we need
- Develop trust with our partners and members
- Maintain our reputation as an expert in homelessness
- Reduce conflict
- Create shared vision and motivation.

We are particularly concerned to learn from experience (that of people with experience of homelessness and those that work directly with them) and hard evidence.

Act

Our actions are our most powerful tool in making change happen. We are therefore focussed on ensuring that all our actions are based on known solutions that support our long term goals. It is based on positive change by:

- Establishing a sense of urgency where there is a need for a change or response. Helping others to understand the problem, identifying solutions and creating a desire to act
- Creating and building partnerships and alliances that have the power, expertise, credibility and leadership to make change happen.
- Developing vision and getting buy-in while taking into account the current realities. We will agree goals that are truly ambitious for the sector and people experiencing homelessness.
- Empowering action through long and short term wins that identify barriers, challenge how things are done, and determine new ways of approaching things.
- Being persistent, ensuring that changing / reflecting and responding becomes a part of the culture of service delivery, with new approaches, involving more people (especially those with experience of homelessness) and creating continuous improvement.

We will be clear about our offer and celebrate the contributions that others can bring. To this end our actions will be owned and understood by our members and delivered, as a default, in partnership with the best people to achieve the best results.

Speak

We will speak with and on behalf of people experiencing homelessness and those that work with them to ensure that homelessness remains on the agenda. We base what we say on what we have heard, learned and done.

Our voice, like our actions, is a powerful tool and a great responsibility. We will, therefore, speak in a ‘tone of voice’ that highlights the qualities and strengths people bring rather than the problems they are perceived to have. We will offer a tangible way forward that is agreement-based and identifies what people can do. We do this by:

- Being authoritative about the subject
- Saying when we do and don’t know the answer
- Understanding what our audience needs to hear, making them rather than us the focus
- Using anecdotes and stories alongside evidence and information to ensure that the issues can be understood by all.
Our priorities for the next five years

“Advocate ... Ensure ... Champion ... Promote ... Enable ... Create ...”
1) Advocate an early intervention approach to preventing and ending homelessness

Preventing a crisis before it occurs may sound obvious but is fraught with problems.

From a resources point of view the contract culture, with its emphasis on achieving specific outcomes, favours managing rather than preventing crisis and as such this is how services are structured.

From 2015 we will:
Create and maintain an evidence base that enables us to understand the opportunities to intervene earlier to prevent and reduce homelessness.

Engage our members and local stakeholders in early intervention and prevention activities.

Work with other sectors and government departments to accept their responsibility in preventing homelessness.

2) Ensure that every local area has a personalised, rapid response for people who find themselves sleeping rough

People do and will become homeless for many reasons and can end up on the streets.

Central to our strategy from 2010 was rapidly responding to rough sleeping. This largely took the form of No Second Night Out, with the majority of projects being funded through the Homelessness Transition Fund, which was administered by Homeless Link. No Second Night Out is not a specific service design but a set of principles, developed by the Inter Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness, which Local Authorities were encouraged to adopt.

We have developed guidance to help services deliver them. We operate StreetLink to enable members of the public to alert services to people sleeping rough.

However, since 2010, we have seen increasing numbers of people coming onto the streets, a population that is becoming more diverse and more complex.

From 2015 we will:
Work with local authorities, Homeless Link members and other key stakeholders in all local areas to continue to promote and develop the principles of No Second Night Out as the core way of working.

Develop, with our members, local practical responses that specifically reduce migrant rough sleeping.

Promote to central government departments a range of policies and solutions that decrease, or mitigate against, rough sleeping and homelessness.
3) Champion flexible, good quality services that support people to end their homelessness

While it is vital to move people away from homelessness as quickly as possible, we also need to ensure that people are able to stay at home and avoid coming onto the streets in the first place.

And once people have left the streets they need the support, whether it be for health, mental health, substance misuse, offending behaviour or other issues, to move away from homelessness for good.

We estimate that currently 60,000 adults in England face a combination of these problems.

Like prevention, this may sound obvious, but for many of the same reasons it is difficult to achieve. Current funding structures mean that services often work in silos that do not recognise and/or work with all of an individual’s support needs.

Unless services work more closely these people will not get the support they need.

From 2015 we will:

Support our members to ensure that the services they provide are the best that they can be.

Identify, test, evaluate and promote new ways of working with our members and other stakeholders.

Strengthen partnerships with other sectors, through our Making Every Adult Matter coalition, in order to change the way that systems work for people with multiple and complex needs.

4) Promote sustainable housing and employment as the most effective route out of homelessness

A key theme of public service reform is that communities and citizens do more for themselves, reducing the demand on public services.

For those with lower support needs, part of our agenda needs to be to ensure that there is a sufficient and accessible affordable housing supply and the work opportunities for people to maintain that housing.

Mainstream housing policy and / or managing the economy require national mainstream policy and significant local imagination and action.

These agendas are far wider than Homeless Link’s scope. Rather, our role is to ensure that there are routes into these opportunities for the people we represent.

From 2015 we will:

Ensure that the needs of people who have experienced homelessness are fully addressed in the development and delivery of housing policy and provision.

Bring homelessness services together to achieve the ambition that everyone who can work is able to gain and sustain a job.

Develop models of flexible, ongoing, sustainment support that prevent people from returning to rough sleeping or homelessness.
5) Enable services to thrive and be sustainable in the new public service environment

For much of the voluntary sector, the financial crisis has triggered serious structural change.

For those parts of the homelessness sector that are highly dependent on statutory funding, it has been particularly challenging. If homelessness organisations are to thrive, they need to be able to see different ways of operating in the future.

Key to this is to understand that while voluntary sector contracts are shrinking (NCVO predict a fall in total voluntary sector spend by Government of £1.7 billion), we have also seen public giving and fundraising stabilise, and other forms of investment become available.

In addition, changes within the health, social care and criminal justice sectors present other potential opportunities and challenges.

6) Create structures and operating processes that ensure we have the right people in the right place to deliver our vision, mission and strategy

Just like our members we also face funding and operating environment challenges.

If we are to thrive, and have the credibility to enable our members to do the same, we must look at our own business, structures and operating processes.

From 2015 we will:

Continue to develop a sustainable business that gives us the resources that we need.

Continually improve our processes to ensure that they are efficient and effective in supporting our business.

Attract, retain and develop the best people for the job that we require.

From 2015 we will:

Support our members to maximise and sustain their income from public sector commissioning.

Support our members to understand and develop business models that generate income from a diverse range of funding sources.

Create and engage in a national debate about how services for people who become homeless should be funded in the long term.
What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless in England. We work to make services better and campaign for policy change that will help end homelessness.

Let's end homelessness together

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