

Lancaster Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Review 2026-2031

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Executive Summary

This review has been undertaken to inform the development of Lancaster City Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026-2031.

The review draws on homelessness data, service performance information, stakeholder engagement, partner feedback and lived experience insight to understand how homelessness has changed across Lancaster District, assess the effectiveness of current arrangements and identify priorities for the next five years.

A detailed Evidence and Analysis document accompanies this review and provides the full evidence base, methodology, data analysis, stakeholder engagement findings and lived experience insight that informed the conclusions presented within this report.

The evidence shows that Lancaster has made significant progress during the life of the current strategy.

More households are receiving support before reaching crisis point, reliance on temporary accommodation has reduced, the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families beyond statutory limits has been eliminated and maintained, and positive

progress has been made in reducing repeat and long-term rough sleeping. Lancaster also benefits from a broad range of accommodation, prevention and support services, supported by strong operational partnerships across housing, health, social care, support providers and the voluntary sector.

However, the review also found that homelessness is becoming increasingly complex. Housing affordability pressures and limited accommodation supply continue to create challenges, whilst homelessness is increasingly concentrated amongst people experiencing multiple and overlapping support needs. Evidence demonstrates strong links between multiple disadvantage, repeat homelessness and rough sleeping, highlighting the importance of coordinated support and long-term housing stability.

The review found that many of the key building blocks of an effective homelessness system are already in place. Future progress will depend less on creating entirely new services and more on strengthening prevention, improving accessibility, supporting people with complex needs, improving access to accommodation and ensuring organisations work together more effectively to improve outcomes.

Six priorities have been identified for the next strategy period:

- Strengthen prevention and early intervention.
- Improve outcomes for people with multiple and complex needs.
- Improve access to accommodation and housing pathways.
- Strengthen partnership accountability and system leadership.
- Improve accessibility, inclusion and customer experience.
- Use data, insight and lived experience to drive improvement.

Introduction

Under the Homelessness Act 2002, local housing authorities are required to review homelessness within their district and publish a strategy based on the findings of that review.

This review has been undertaken to understand how homelessness is changing across Lancaster District, assess the effectiveness of current services and arrangements, and provide the evidence base for Lancaster's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026-2031.

The review draws on statutory homelessness data, service performance information, housing and support service data, stakeholder engagement and lived experience activity. Together, these sources provide a comprehensive picture of homelessness, housing insecurity and support needs across Lancaster District.

What Has Changed Since the Last Strategy?

The evidence shows that Lancaster's homelessness system has continued to develop during the life of the current strategy.

One of the most significant changes has been a stronger focus on prevention and earlier intervention. More households are receiving support before homelessness occurs and fewer are progressing into more intensive forms of homelessness assistance. This reflects a continued shift away from crisis response towards earlier help and prevention.

The review also found a significant reduction in reliance on temporary accommodation for households with children. The use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families beyond statutory limits has been eliminated and maintained, representing a significant achievement for the district. Numbers in temporary accommodation have reduced and fewer households are progressing to the main housing duty.

Positive progress has also been achieved in relation to rough sleeping. Levels remain comparatively low and improvements have been made in reducing repeat and long-term rough sleeping through targeted support and effective partnership working.

Alongside these improvements, the homelessness system has strengthened its understanding of local need through improved use of data, stakeholder engagement and service insight. There is also clear evidence of strong operational relationships between organisations involved in preventing homelessness and supporting residents experiencing housing insecurity.

The review also identified the value of targeted prevention pathways, including support for people leaving prison or hospital, young people in transition, and people referred through Duty to Refer arrangements. These pathways help identify housing need earlier and reduce the likelihood of housing difficulties escalating into homelessness.

Whilst challenges remain, the evidence suggests that Lancaster enters the next strategy period with a stronger foundation than existed at the beginning of the current strategy.

What We Know About Homelessness in Lancaster Today

Homelessness in Lancaster continues to be shaped by a combination of housing market pressures, affordability challenges and wider social and economic factors.

Demand for affordable housing continues to exceed supply, access to social housing remains limited and affordability pressures within the private rented sector create challenges for many households seeking to access or sustain accommodation. These pressures influence both demand for homelessness services and the options available to households at risk of homelessness.

The private rented sector remains a critical part of Lancaster's homelessness system. It is both the most common recorded cause of homelessness and the most significant route through which homelessness is successfully prevented, highlighting the importance of maintaining access to affordable and sustainable private rented accommodation

The review found that homelessness is increasingly characterised by complexity. Almost half of homelessness approaches involved households with three or more recorded support needs, demonstrating the growing significance of multiple disadvantage within local homelessness demand. Mental health difficulties, physical ill health, substance misuse, domestic abuse, offending histories, repeat homelessness and rough sleeping frequently occur alongside housing problems rather than in isolation.

The evidence shows strong links between multiple disadvantage, repeat homelessness and rough sleeping. For many households, housing difficulties are closely connected to wider challenges relating to health, wellbeing, finances, relationships and social circumstances. Improving outcomes therefore requires more than the provision of accommodation alone.

The evidence also demonstrates that positive outcomes are being achieved for households experiencing multiple disadvantage, reinforcing the importance of coordinated and person-centred approaches that address both housing needs and wider support needs

The review also found that securing accommodation is often only the first step in achieving a positive outcome. Long-term housing stability increasingly depends on tenancy sustainment, wellbeing, recovery and access to ongoing support, particularly for people experiencing multiple and complex needs.

Single adult households account for most homelessness approaches and represent the defining homelessness cohort within Lancaster District. Many of the most significant challenges identified through this review are concentrated within this group, particularly amongst those experiencing multiple and overlapping needs.

The review also found that successful outcomes are often influenced by the quality of relationships, coordinated support and the ability of organisations to work together around the individual. Stakeholders and people with lived experience consistently highlighted the importance of trust, communication and accessible services.

What Is Working Well?

The review identified several strengths which provide a strong foundation for future delivery.

Prevention and Early Intervention

More households are receiving support before homelessness occurs and prevention activity has become increasingly embedded across the local homelessness system. Evidence suggests that earlier intervention is contributing to improved outcomes and reducing reliance on crisis responses.

Temporary Accommodation and Rough Sleeping

The elimination of bed and breakfast accommodation for families beyond statutory limits, reductions in temporary accommodation use and positive outcomes in relation to rough sleeping all represent significant achievements during the current strategy period.

Services and Support Pathways

Lancaster benefits from a broad range of homelessness prevention, accommodation and support services. These services provide support across the homelessness pathway and many of the key building blocks of an effective homelessness system are already in place.

Partnership Working

The review identified strong operational relationships and a clear commitment across organisations to preventing homelessness and improving outcomes. Partners consistently demonstrated willingness to collaborate, share expertise and work together to address complex challenges.

Evidence and Insight

Improved use of data, cohort analysis, stakeholder engagement and service intelligence has strengthened understanding of homelessness within Lancaster District and provided a stronger evidence base for future decision-making.

What Are the Remaining Challenges?

Despite the progress achieved, the review identified several significant challenges that will influence homelessness outcomes over the next five years.

Housing Supply and Affordability

Access to suitable and affordable accommodation remains one of the most significant challenges affecting homelessness outcomes. Demand continues to exceed supply and wider housing market pressures limit opportunities for prevention and move-on.

Increasing Complexity of Need

The growing concentration of homelessness amongst people experiencing multiple and overlapping support needs is one of the most significant findings of the review.

Improving outcomes for this group will require coordinated responses that address both housing need and wider factors contributing to homelessness and housing instability.

Housing Pathways and Move-On

Pressures within housing pathways can affect movement through supported housing and temporary accommodation, reducing capacity and limiting opportunities for long-term housing solutions.

Accessibility and Early Engagement

Some residents continue to experience barriers relating to communication, digital inclusion, language and confidence in navigating services. Improving accessibility remains important if opportunities for early intervention are to be maximised.

Partnership Accountability

Whilst relationships between organisations are strong, opportunities exist to strengthen governance, coordination and collective ownership of outcomes across the wider homelessness system.

Data, Learning and Workforce Development

The review identified opportunities to strengthen the use of data, service insight and lived experience in supporting learning and improvement. It also highlighted the importance of continued investment in workforce development, trauma-informed practice, partnership learning and reflective practice as homelessness presentations become increasingly complex.

What Does This Mean for the Next Strategy?

The review shows that Lancaster has made significant progress during the life of the current strategy. Stronger prevention activity, reduced reliance on temporary accommodation, positive outcomes in relation to rough sleeping and a stronger evidence base provide a solid foundation for future delivery.

However, homelessness is becoming increasingly complex and is increasingly concentrated amongst people experiencing multiple and overlapping support needs. Housing affordability pressures and limited accommodation supply remain significant barriers, whilst long-term success often depends on coordinated support extending beyond housing services alone.

The evidence suggests that future progress is likely to depend less on creating entirely new services and more on strengthening prevention, improving accessibility, supporting people with multiple disadvantage, improving access to accommodation and ensuring organisations work together more effectively to achieve positive long-term outcomes. Stakeholders and people with lived experience consistently highlighted the importance of trusted relationships, clear communication, coordinated support and trauma-informed approaches.

Future success will depend not only on helping people access accommodation, but also on supporting them to sustain it. This will require effective housing pathways, appropriate move-on opportunities, tenancy sustainment support and coordinated responses that help people maintain long-term housing stability.

The review also identified opportunities to strengthen workforce development, partnership accountability and the use of data, insight and lived experience to support continuous improvement. As homelessness becomes increasingly complex, the knowledge, skills and culture of the wider homelessness system will play an important role in supporting positive outcomes.

Taken together, these findings have informed six priorities for Lancaster's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026-2031.

Strategic Priorities

Priority 1: Strengthen Prevention and Early Intervention

Improve opportunities to identify housing risks earlier and support more households before they reach crisis point.

Priority 2: Improve Outcomes for People with Multiple and Complex Needs

Strengthen coordinated, person-centred responses for people experiencing multiple disadvantage, repeat homelessness and rough sleeping.

Priority 3: Improve Access to Accommodation and Housing Pathways

Improve access to suitable accommodation, strengthen housing pathways and reduce barriers to long-term housing stability.

Priority 4: Strengthen Partnership Accountability and System Leadership

Strengthen governance, coordination and shared accountability across the local homelessness system.

Priority 5: Improve Accessibility, Inclusion and Customer Experience

Ensure services are accessible, responsive and designed around the needs and experiences of local people.

Priority 6: Use Data, Insight and Lived Experience to Drive Improvement

Improve the use of evidence, performance information and lived experience to support learning, accountability and continuous improvement.

A Clear Direction for the Future

Together, these priorities provide a clear response to the evidence presented throughout this review. They build on the progress achieved during the current strategy period, respond to the most significant challenges identified through the evidence and provide a clear direction for improving outcomes for residents experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity across Lancaster District.

The findings from this review have informed the development of Lancaster's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026-2031.