

Harlow Homelessness & Rough Sleeping (Strategy) Service Users Survey Analysis Report July 2019



Introduction

The Council and its Partners are developing the Strategy for Homelessness and Rough Sleeping for the next five years (2019-2024). The Strategy is designed to address homelessness issues specific to Harlow and sets out how the Council and its Partners will tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.

To shape the future delivery of the homelessness service, the Council sought Service Users experiences, to enable the Strategy to meet the needs of the people that find themselves homeless or threatened with homelessness.

The Survey covered the following areas:

- Age groups
- Key Principles
- Housing Situation
- Housing Support
- Any other comments

This analysis provides a transparent account of Users views on the above areas.

Methodology

The Survey was hosted using Smart Survey. Smart Survey was commissioned following a benchmarking exercise to find a new system that was GDPR compliant.

In accordance with GDPR and Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018, a privacy statement was included in the Survey with information of where to find the Council policy on GDPR/DPA 2018.

A promotion campaign was undertaken to encourage Service Users to complete the Survey, including social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Your Harlow.

The Survey was issued on 25 March 2019 and closed at Midnight on the 16 June 2019.

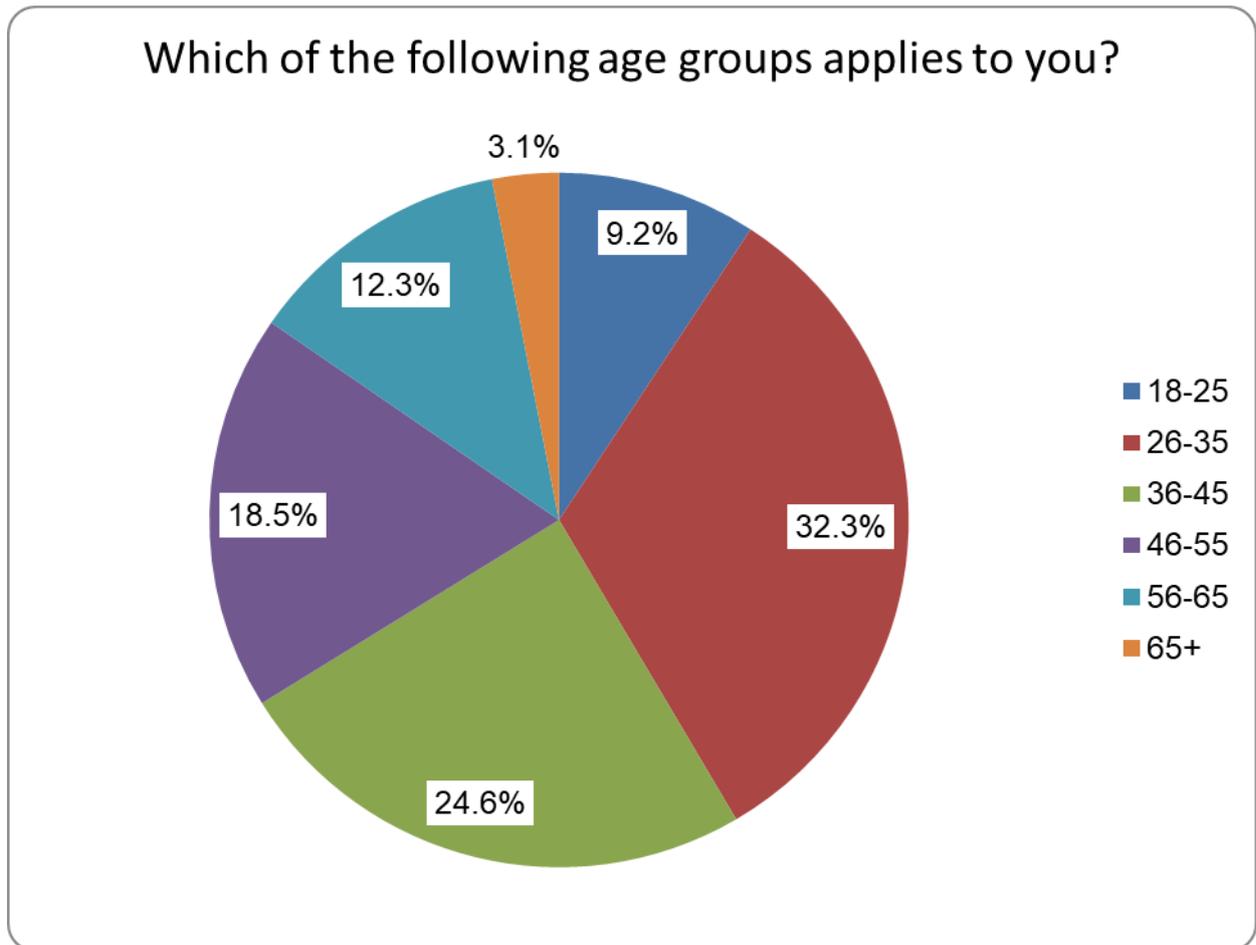
Findings

A total of 65 responses were received. Analysis of the responses are shown in the following charts and tables.

Age groups

A summary of the responses by age groups is shown in the chart below. The highest responses were from the age groups 26-35 (32.3%) and 36-45 (24.6%). There were also high responses from the age groups 46-55 (18.5%) and 56-65 (12.3%).

It was also noted that the lowest responses were for 18-25 (9.2%) and 65+ (3.1%)



Key Principles

Service Users were asked to indicate their agreement to the Council's 4 key principles, which will be used to inform the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The results are shown in the table below.

Key Principles	Yes	No	Response Total
Prevention - to stop homelessness and rough sleeping	63	2	65
Intervention - helping those in crisis with swift targeted support	60	5	65
Recovery - helping to rebuild lives	62	3	65
Partnerships - collective working to tackle homelessness in Harlow	60	5	65

This table below shows an example of the comments from the Service Users who responded 'No' to the Key Principles above.

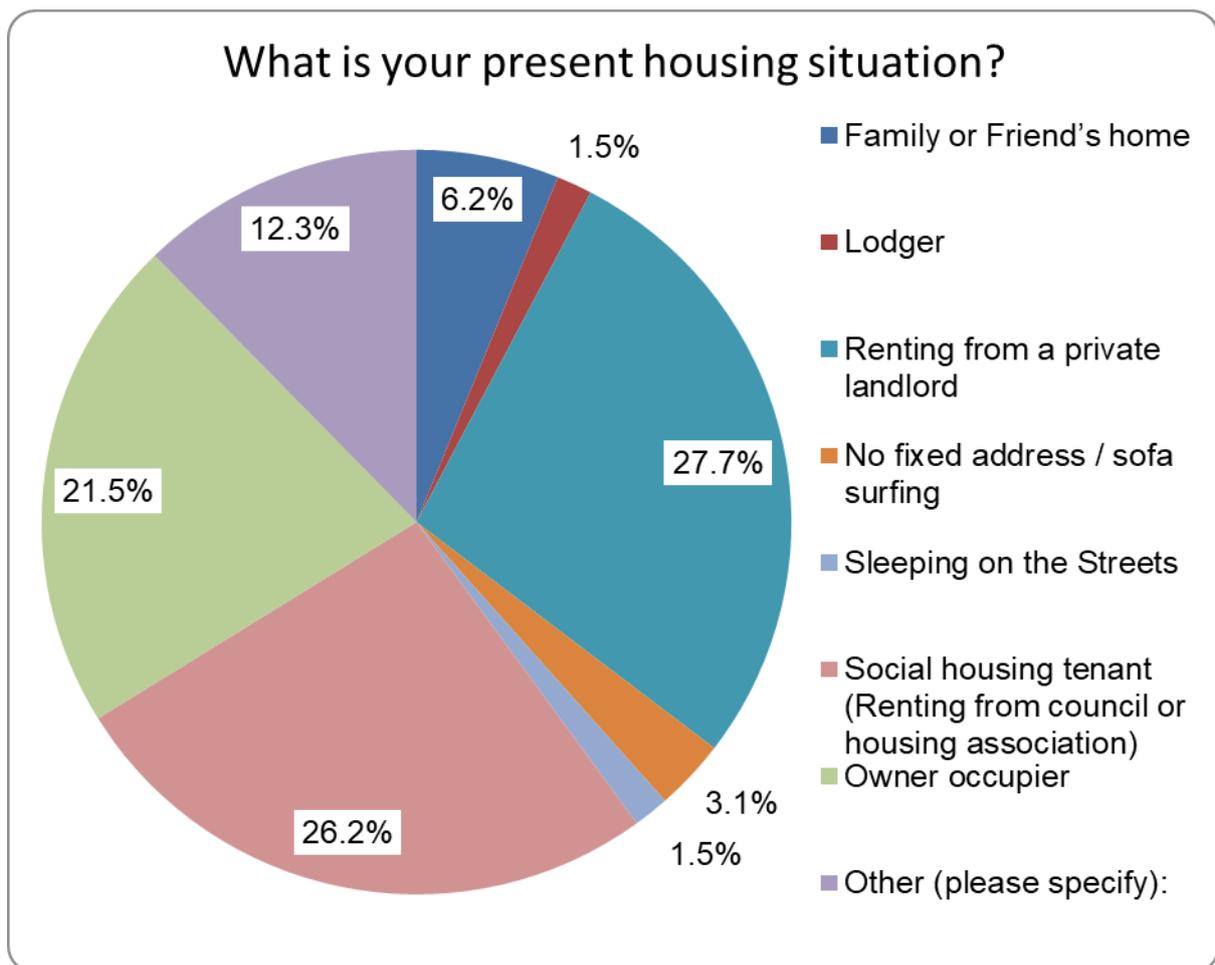
If you have responded No to any of the 4 key principles, please state why:
<i>"You don't give priority enough to band 3 home seekers which I find unfair why should others get first choice it's as if we are second class people wanting our own home through no fault of our own you just don't do enough for single people it's all families first which is unfair."</i>
<i>"I would like to add though that once in self-contained temp accommodation under no further threat of eviction why can't they go in band 3 to help. Create movement and help more 2 beds become available."</i>
<i>"I am a single person."</i>
<i>"I do not know if this section is saying this is what the council does or should Do, either way I know they don't do any of these."</i>
<i>"If the answer is what going on at terminus house then the town is going to hell in a hand cart."</i>

Housing Situation

Using a list of the options, Service Users were asked about their present housing situation. The top three responses were:

1. Renting from a private landlord (27.7%)
2. Social housing tenant (renting from Council or Housing Association) (26.2%)
3. Owner occupier (21.5%)

Further details are shown in the chart below:



The fourth highest response was 'Other (please specify)' (12.3%). These Service Users provided more detail and their responses are shown in the table below.

Other Please Specify
<i>"Temporary accommodation"</i>
<i>"Temporary accommodation due to being 'homeless full duty' while waiting permanent housing by Harlow Council"</i>
<i>"Harlow Council"</i>

"Homeless staying in a Licenced Temporary Accommodation."

"Sleeping in a van. keeps the rain off me head. But it's bad for my back injury arm injury and my knee injury."

"Living with parent"

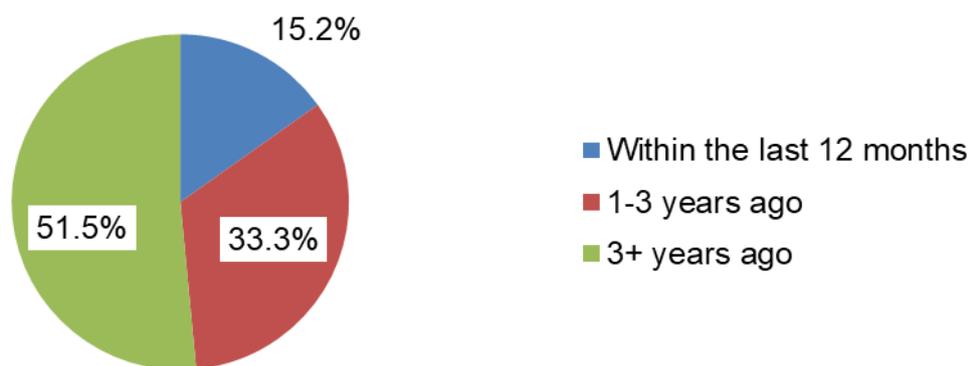
"In temporary accommodation through Harlow council"

"Temporary accommodation through rent guarantee company"

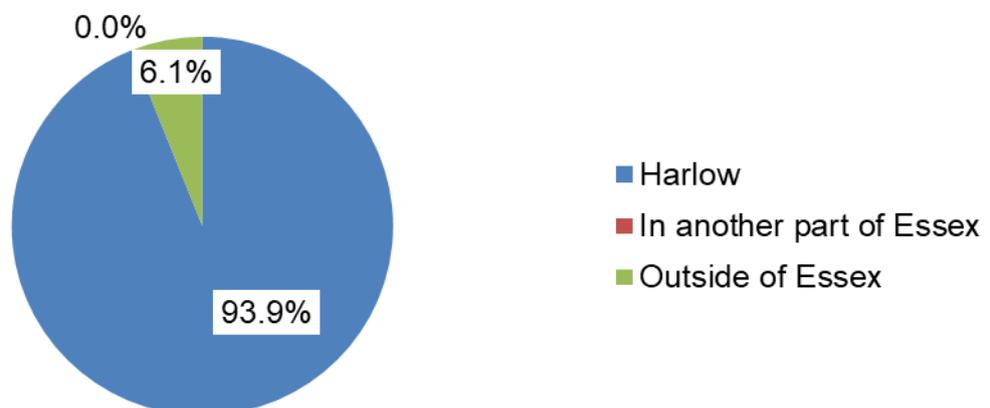
Service Users were asked "if they had ever experienced difficulties finding a settled home to live". Thirty three out of the 65 respondent said, 'yes', they had experienced difficulties finding a settled home to live. The remaining respondents (32) said 'no'.

The 33 respondents that answered 'yes' were asked to give more information about a) when, and b) where they experienced these difficulties. The results are shown in the following charts.

When did you experience these difficulties?



Where did you experience these difficulties?



Service Users were asked “*what was the main reason they found themselves in difficulty*”. The top responses were ‘*other*’ (30.3%); ‘*family/friends not able to provide accommodation*’ (27.3%) and ‘*loss of privately rented property*’ (18.2%)

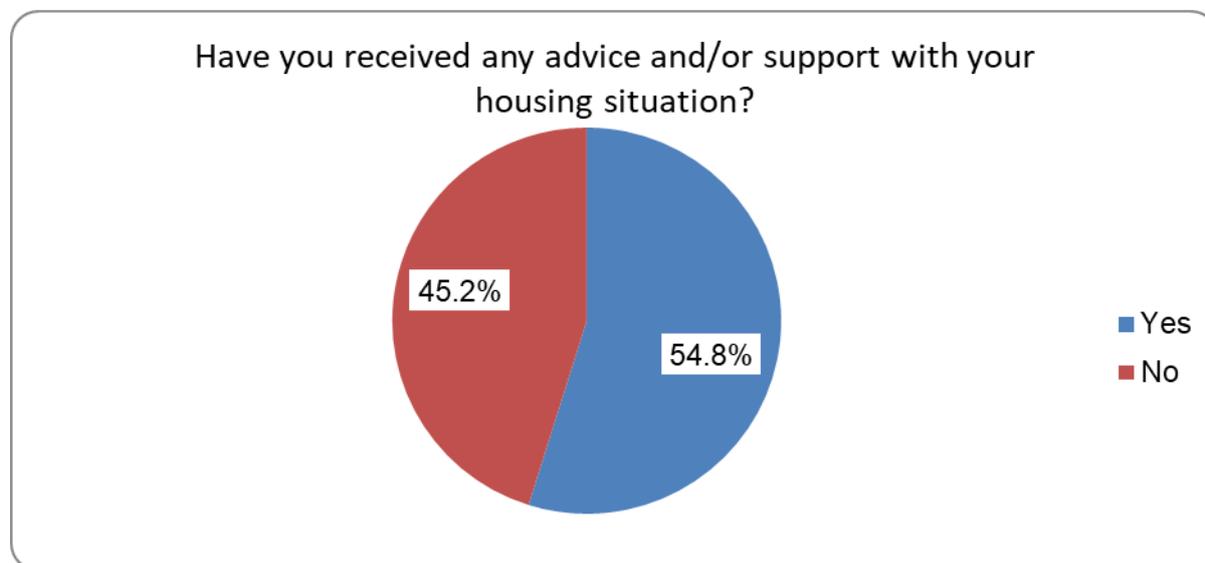
What was the main reason you found yourself in difficulty?	Count	Response %
Family / friends not able to provide accommodation	9	27.3%
Non-violent relationship breakdown	4	12.1%
Violence / harassment	3	9.1%
Loss of privately rented property	6	18.2%
Loss of social housing	1	3.0%
Other (please specify):	10	30.3%

The table below shows an example of the comments from the respondents who selected other.

Other Please Specify
<i>“Death of parents so have to rely on family who are overcrowded”</i>
<i>“Left home when I was 15/16 years of age & went to City of London.”</i>
<i>“Repossession of owned property”</i>
<i>“Loss of family home due to repossession/divorce”</i>
<i>“Drink and drug addict lost everything”</i>
<i>“I have been depressed. It’s so bad I can’t get my life together. People say there’s help but in the real world people don’t want to know. The depression has led to me being homeless.”</i>
<i>“Occasio house”</i>
<i>“Mainly due to Private rent costs. 1 bed flat with a 1 year old baby and a drug dealer who lives opposite.”</i>
<i>“And also the loss of private rented accommodation, meaning I had to stay with my then partner, then that relationship ended, leaving me homeless.”</i>

Housing Support

Fifty-five per cent of the respondents said 'yes' "they had received advice and/or support with their housing situation".



The 45.2% of the respondents that responded 'no' were asked to provide further details. The comments are shown in the table below.

Comments
<i>"As I'm single and not priority all I get from housing is keep bidding"</i>
<i>"Advised to go through the eviction route when private landlords sold property and since being confirmed 'homeless full duty' with the council, we've been in temporary accommodation since September 2017. Council have not been forthcoming in keeping in contact regarding our situation or advising how long we could wait for permanent housing."</i>
<i>"Too far back in time."</i>
<i>"I am currently encountering difficulty to which Harlow Council will not help as I am apparently suitably housed."</i>
<i>"No advice/support offered."</i>
<i>"The council didn't want to help but I eventually got a room with Nacro."</i>
<i>"I am a middle aged man with a crap job and no kids. There is no help for me."</i>
<i>"Just we had to live in Harlow for 5 years before going on the list and told go and rent somewhere council will not help."</i>
<i>"We were given a deposit, but had to move up north, four to five hours away."</i>
<i>"Still no help from the council was turned away every time I asked for help. I was homeless for 9 months before I found a room I could afford."</i>

“Harlow council told me to rent private and now I am struggling financially. Streets2homes helped me with a deposit scheme. Nacro took me in for a while as the refuge was closed down due to funding cuts.”

“Resolved by courts.”

Service Users were asked to indicate which of the organisations (if any) in the table, helped them with their housing situation. The top organisation was Harlow Council with 48.4% of responses. However, there were 8 respondents (26%) that were not helped by an agency.

Answer choice	Count	Response %
Harlow Council	15	48.4%
Streets2Homes	5	16.1%
Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)	6	19.4%
Social Services	2	6.5%
NACRO (National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders)	2	6.5%
Peabody (providers of support)	1	3.2%
I was not helped by an agency	8	25.8%
Other	6	19.4%

Just over 19% of the respondents stated ‘other’. Their comments are in the table below.

Comments
<i>“Can't remember the name but a charity for homeless gave some advice about 2 years ago.”</i>
<i>“Shelter”</i>
<i>“Nacro mental health, I was not an offender”</i>
<i>“Housing association”</i>
<i>“The council, streets2homes, CAB and social services were who I went to, the only ones to actually try and help were social services.”</i>
<i>“The MP contacted the council and asked them to put me in suitable accommodation and when I got made homeless from temp the MP asked for them to give me more than 24 hours' notice.”</i>

Sixteen out of 32 respondents that answered question 11, said ‘yes’ the difficulty was resolved; and a further 16 respondents said ‘no’ NB: The response rate is based on the 32 respondents.

Answer choice	Count	Response %
Yes	16	50.0%
No	16	50.0%

The respondents that said 'no' the difficulty was not resolved were asked to provide further details. Their comments are in the table below.

If the difficulty was not resolved please provide details:
<i>"But moved around a lot of which costs money and no significant time frame still waiting 24 months in..."</i>
<i>"I'm still awaiting on being given even a viewing of a potential home within Harlow"</i>
<i>"Still on the waiting list awaiting permanent housing"</i>
<i>"I went back home."</i>
<i>"This is still ongoing"</i>
<i>"We were moved into council accommodation not suitable for our needs on the basis we wouldn't wait long to transfer"</i>
<i>"Still under investigation."</i>
<i>"Still paying bills on credit cards and still getting into more debt because of it."</i>
<i>"Because of my injuries arm, back and knee I need a support with a crutch to walk with and climb so a shared house is out of the question."</i>
<i>"Had to borrow a large sum of money from family and place them as guarantors to rent a property privately, it took 3 years to repay and it broke down the relationship due to the financial stress and strain placed on my family as well as causing me anxiety and depression."</i>
<i>"It was resolved without the help from the council, they just turned me away."</i>
<i>"It took 4 months to sort out"</i>
<i>"Not enough housing available"</i>
<i>"Council refused to help, seems like if you're not a single parent or young single parent you are not helped."</i>
<i>"I was left homeless for 10 months with a child."</i>
<i>"I am still homeless, and the council are still not willing to offer me something suitable for me."</i>
<i>"I struggle every day financially. I make sure rent is paid as a priority, but it is so high I currently have £0.00 in my account until the 25th."</i>
<i>"No I'm still in temp five months behind on the register I have had to make complaints to get anything done I have to fight my case with the council this has caused me severe depression and I'm having counselling for it two years this has been going on I got told I would be housed in roughly 18 months."</i>

Any Other Comments

Service Users were asked “is there anything specific you would like to see in the Strategy about tackling rough sleeping that has not already been identified or about homelessness in general”. An example of their comments are listed in the table below.

Any Other Comments
<p><i>“If people are known to the housing register before their homeless status then maybe that would be something to take into consideration to be in temp a shorter time than those that are new to it through their homeless band. And rough sleepers should be given a care of address so they can receive a benefit maybe a post-box at council? And then they could use food bank easier ??”</i></p>
<p><i>“Having worked with people that are homeless, I have found the council's attitude very poor. The council needs to employ people that have empathy with those that are homeless, not act a bullies. Having been called a liar by a member of your staff, when recalling a visit with someone that is homeless, has DV, illness and family with mental health issues, I am not surprised that people are left in very bad situations by this council. Get your staff in order then this will give better support to those in this situation.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Yes more priority to single men and less to families as this is an unfair situation so single men do not get a look in when it comes to prioritising who get a home and who doesn't.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Some sort of priority given to those in an unfortunate situation, especially when not their fault, have family (dependants) and are working. More communication from Harlow Council, rather than people just feeling unknown on what is happening and where they are on the waiting list. More reasonably priced temporary accommodation rent, as for me it feels we are paying 'market price' as if we were privately renting.”</i></p>
<p><i>“You need to find homes for these people & maybe jobs as well - to help them back on the right road.”</i></p>
<p><i>“People whom are from Harlow should not be sleeping rough. Instead of housing people from outside of Harlow and different countries, Harlow people should always be a priority.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Please refer to previous statements plus I feel with new government funding for deposits these applicants should be placed in band 3 as they are not then under any threat of homelessness and not be given a priory band to join the list like previous schemes ...”</i></p>
<p><i>“Studios and one beds should be offered to childless people only and not allowed for people with children.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Get all Empty properties available for rent very very quickly. Refurbish & make available the Homes in the Former Occasio House, easily 40 homes could be utilised there.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Partnership working continues. Young single people homelessness.”</i></p>
<p><i>“If you look after us British people that have paid taxes and fought for this COUNTRY!! FIRST. And send the isis and other people like the POLISH & OTHERS LIKE THEM AWAY. Send them packing you wouldn't have this PROBLEM!!”</i></p>

“Homeless public drinking in the streets and begging for money in large groups. it needs to be stopped as it is getting impossible to walk through the town centre without someone coming up and asking for money claiming they need it for a bus home or to get to another town to see a sick family member.”

“I'd love to see our streets and towns without people sleeping in doorways and shop front doors. How can we help our own town when we're bringing people in from London, we barely have anything for people already and now there's people coming from other areas out of Harlow that are getting placed straight into housing when there's people who have lived here for many years and going without any support. Especially if there's children involved! Many single men and women are overlooked as not a priority.”

“Provide accurate information and support to everyone and to look into the councils housing policies so that those who have the financial means to purchase or rent luxury products like cars etc are not placed in band 2 housing needs when those who don't have the means to do so are having to privately rent at a premium because social housing is going to those who should be able to provide for themselves instead.”

“Stop discriminating against single men, just because I'm a man I should never have been told that I was capable of rough sleeping. A life is a life and there's a reason why middle aged men so often try to end their own life. I was approaching 50 years of age and for the first time in my life I didn't have a roof over my head, how the hell was I capable?”

“The analysis of the statistics is superficial. It focuses on applications and makes no attempt to determine if there is a deeper underlying need, such as those vulnerably housed. The rough sleeping statistics are 2 years old, despite there being far more recent data available. The analysis of applications seems to be attempting to interpret data to fit a narrative. It says that the application has been relatively constant, with a short term reserve recent month, and uses that to justify a 9 fold increase in processing time for applications over many years. It makes no mention of the resourcing applied to deal with applications. The analysis of reasons for applications its loss of private tenancy but makes no attempt to get to the cause of those loses. Other data is available for example on reasons such as benefits loss, reduction or delay, on the role of mental health, of substance misuse which would be required if there was a serious attempt at prevention. Comparisons with other areas in the East of England are misleading, and further comparative analysis against benchmark local authority areas, and socio-demographic and deprivation data would be more illuminating. In short, there needs to be a far greater level of understanding of the current picture, of trends, and of causes. The strategy needs to address how the 4 principles - which while laudable are at such a high level as to be 'motherhood and apple pie' (no one could disagree with them) - are to be addressed in practice, by working with others (other statutory agencies, health services, the voluntary sector, law enforcement, faith groups, etc), to prevent, deal with the consequences and reinforce, and how the council intends to allocate and prioritise resources.”

“Stop selling land/buildings to companies who are out just to make money. Use them to help the homeless in Harlow, not London's overflow!”

“In general terms, evidence and experience from other areas (London, Cambridge, Manchester etc.) shows that the street sleepers will gravitate towards areas where hostel provision is available. This inevitably leads to a higher than average incidence of street sleeping, which in turn results in a greater provision of support and ancillary services in the area. Whilst all areas should ensure prevention and provision services are in place, to a degree signposting and referral to those areas with existing service and support infrastructures may prove more productive in assisting the individual to stabilise their housing situation and associated physical and/or mental health/dependency issues in the longer term.”

“I believe Harlow council is doing a fantastic job in tackling rough sleeping and homelessness.”

When my husband and I were experiencing homelessness the council placed us into temporary accommodation, through a private flat, very quickly and we were over the moon. We did struggle to support the accommodation financially as it was private and very expensive but appreciated the support more than Harlow Council could know."

"Need more places for single males to have access to their kids as shared accommodation is of no use also need to concentrate on complex needs and have the council more easy to access and be more sympathetic towards homeless individuals go to a quiet room not tell the reception your whole life choices."

"Winter night shelters open for more months during the autumn and spring. There are always volunteers to run these and the temperature is not always as seasonal as we think."

"Just because I'm middle aged with not a lot of money please don't ignore my situation. I know people with kids need putting in front of me but that don't help me. I am not living I am just existing. There are lot like me out there. There's nothing for us."

"I think it's very upsetting to see homeless this day and age, but I do also know that some people are not truly homeless who are begging in the streets which must be hard to manage."

"Looking into Housing First options and support around domestic abuse, improving links between health and housing and building more council housing to house people in need of secure affordable rented housing."

"Treat the homeless as people not numbers, put yourself in their position, offers educations, rehabilitations, jobs and personnel development growth alongside housing, this is the best way to enable stability."

"I was homeless in 2012 with my partner living in a tent for 7 months, Harlow council did nothing to help us."

"You need to start actually trying to help homeless people instead of pretending to."

"Stop bringing in or allowing in more people to Harlow and make it a policy that people who grew up in Harlow have a higher right to council properties than those who didn't. If they don't have a previous tie to Harlow they could move anywhere, whereas our families want to stay close to us. If the council moved faster turning around properties that would also help a lot. I heard yesterday of 2 properties that have been empty months and months waiting for the house to be declared ok to use again and being held up because workmen have not been on yet. Surely that is a number one priority."

"Rough sleepers in Harlow appear more and more, especially recently. They need to be removed from the doorways etc. Homeless should not be moved out of other regions into Harlow, they should be looked after in their own towns."

"Adults who find themselves homeless , and are working full time, and have grown up children like myself, will always find it difficult to resolve their situation... to come up with the deposit for private renting when you are on minimum wage and already have outgoings, is near on impossible, so the solution is sofa surfing, staying with friends & family... I was one of the lucky ones, I had family to support me and house me, and my 19 year old daughter, whilst I got myself back on my feet.. it's the adults that have no one to turn to, that end up on the streets. The council should be in a position to help these adults... private renting is a massive obstacle to overcome , even if you are working full time & find yourself without a permanent home . There should be more help in this area maybe, overcoming the deposit that is needed upfront."

"Making sure vulnerable and disabled people actually get the help they need and deserve instead of treating them like vermin. I often thought of taking my own life because the council FAILED ME EVERY SINGLE DAMN TIME!"

"Stop housing people from out of the area into places like terminus house.. other councils love re housing their gang nominals and problem families into Harlow."

"Better practices should be in place. Less prejudice and more affordable homes should be available. Maybe work with private landlords who will accept lower rent for some kind of incentive?"

"They need to make sure that the temporary accommodations that they are offered each person has a bed especially if they have health problems especially i.e. and someone who might have cancer, also make sure they can get to the properties, also if they have 20 year old children with learning difficulties, they should be housed with them and not left on the streets to defend for themselves."

"Anecdotally, I have observed that the reason, "unable to continue living with friends or relatives" is sometimes contrived and used for the sole purpose of obtaining housing. Many of these people are not truly homeless.

Although I can understand and sympathise with the reasons people do this - it's partly a legacy from Harlow's original '2G' promise of housing for locally-born future generations and can be the only way a young family can get housed - it distorts the homeless figures."

"Why does a person leaving prison get more help than a mother with two kids living in a refuge I think prioritise need looking at."

"I would like the staff of Harlow council to have training on how to be compassionate towards people who have become homeless. We was shown no compassion and was constantly lied to by a housing officer. We was told about things that would happen when our baby was born. Then when he was born, and we asked about these things all we got was I don't know. We was put into Templefields house and when I raised issues with the council with Templefields all I got was that we were there tenants and we had to take it up with them. So more training on how to be compassionate also training to improve staffs communication skills as there was a real lack of it."

"Streets to homes needs to have more funding. Also open up the empty buildings to get people off the streets."