

Homelessness Strategy

2023 to 2028

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Introduction

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory duty on all Local Authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their area and, based on the findings of this review, to develop and publish a strategy to tackle and prevent homelessness. This new Homelessness Strategy will cover 2023 to 2028 and the strategy is reviewed and renewed every five years. Since the last review and strategy were written there have been significant external factors affecting the homeless services, including the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the ongoing economic situation continues to place increased pressure on household budgets.

The strategy should be read in conjunction with the Homelessness Review of the district.

The homelessness review document shows the impact on our homeless applications.

New aims and priorities resulting from the Review will help to shape the strategic approach for the next five. The priorities for the next Strategy are grouped into two main aims, which are detailed further later in the strategy:



To provide homeless prevention, early intervention, and support.



To provide suitable housing options.



Local Policy Context

South Cambridgeshire District Council's Business plan

The business plan aims to put the heart into South Cambridgeshire by:

- Growing local businesses and economies
- Housing that is truly affordable for everyone to live in
- Being green to our core
- A modern and caring Council

Housing that is truly affordable for everyone to live in is an important element of homeless prevention and addressing housing need in the district. Likewise, being a modern and caring Council supports the support and assistance many residents need that bricks and mortar alone cannot provide. Being green to our core links in with energy efficiency and making homes more affordable.

Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy

This strategy outlines the strategic direction for housing activity in Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire. Its purpose is to set the context as to how both councils aim to meet the housing challenges facing the area for both new and existing homes and residents.

The strategy is currently under review but will support a strong emphasis on preventing homelessness.





Homelessness in South Cambridgeshire – what we achieved in the previous strategy.

Working closer with partner agencies to prevent homelessness

- Procedures in place for public services to refer those at risk of homelessness to the local housing authority, under their 'duty to refer'.
- Criminal Justice protocol
- Care Leavers protocol
- Increased casework with all homeless applicants (including non-priority homeless applicants), including personal housing plans.
- Mental Health, Substance Misuse and Housing toolkit
- Emmaus – increased referrals and supported the completion of pods to provide move on accommodation.
- DAHA accreditation due to work on domestic abuse including joint panels such as Marac and Perpetrator panel.

New private rent initiatives

- Increased supply of private rented properties through the Shire Homes Lettings private sector leasing scheme.
- Completion of pilot scheme for HMO's (houses of multiple occupation) within the Shire Homes Lettings scheme – this proved to be successful and has continued as business as usual.
- Evaluated the outcomes of the new business development officers, through the Trailblazer scheme, and methods to increase access to private rented sector, however, concluded that specific schemes were best achieved at a local level based on needs and supply.
- The Greater Cambridge Build to Rent Policy was published in July 2021 as an Annex to the Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy. This sets out the



Council's expectations in terms of the delivery of Build to Rent and the provision of Affordable Private Rent. Early discussions with developers on some of the strategic sites within South Cambridgeshire are ongoing regarding the delivery of Build to Rent as part of the overall housing delivery.

- Reviewed rent deposit guarantee scheme and agreed to bring this in-house and manage alongside other spend to save initiatives.
- Continued use of discretionary housing payments (DHP) specifically for homeless prevention.
- Continued close working relations with Ermine Street Housing in their capacity as a Council owned company and private landlord.

Access to information

- Updated written and website information covering advice on rights and responsibilities to help residents prevent homelessness from their current accommodation.
- Updated information covering advice on housing options available.
- Improved working to ensure better advice and information for partner agencies. This includes joint working on protocols and pathways.

Access to accommodation and support

- Increased the supply of affordable accommodation through new build programme, private sector leasing and access via other private rent incentives.
- Regular monitoring of temporary accommodation including hostel vacancies and the use of B&B.
- Increased the number of properties under management by Shire Homes Lettings private sector leasing scheme.
- Continued to work with the City and contributed to the Single Homeless Service.
- Commenced the use of HMO's within the Shire Homes Lettings scheme.



- Worked with Emmaus to improve referrals from the Housing Advice Team to Emmaus and supported the completion of six Pods on site.
- Enabled existing and potential tenants to access appropriate support to enable them to maintain their accommodation – this included floating support, visiting support, Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB), money advice service and discretionary housing payments.
- Worked with our Housing Benefit colleagues to support clients through the Universal Credit roll out in South Cambs.
- Reviewed the lettings policy in light of the impact of the Homeless Reduction Act responsibilities and duties.
- Awarded Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation.
- Created money advice and income maximisation roles within the team.
- Accommodated four Syrian families, 10 Afghan families and worked with over 350 Ukrainian households totalling 769 guests to offer support and assistance as required.

Key findings from the homelessness review

Homelessness in the district remains high, with more people approaching us once they are already homeless in recent years.

The main causes of homelessness at prevention stage are end of an assured shorthold tenancy, family or friends no longer being able to accommodate and domestic abuse.

The main causes of homelessness at relief stage are family and friends no longer being able to accommodate and domestic abuse, followed by non-violent relationship.

Overall, the main causes of homelessness are:

- family and friends no longer being able to accommodate,
- the end of an assured shorthold tenancy,
- with domestic abuse being the third highest cause of homelessness.

This is the same nationally.



The highest household type to approach us at prevention stage are female, single parents, closely followed by single males.

At relief stage the largest household type is by far single males.

Applicants tend to be of working age, with very few applications from those under 18 or over 65.

More applicants are employed than in receipt of benefits.

The ethnicity of our applicants matches the proportions within the 2021 census.

The sexual identification categories of our applicants are also similar to the census, however, a greater proportion 'prefer not to say'.

The highest support need for our applicants is mental health, followed by physical health and disability.

65% of those who approach us at prevention stage are successfully prevented from becoming homeless.

In most cases this is due to securing alternative accommodation, which is similar to the national picture.

An offer of social housing is the main means of preventing homelessness, followed by the private rented sector.

At relief stage, whilst a high proportion secure alternative accommodation, the highest proportion end relief due to 56 days having elapsed and therefore moving onto the main duty stage.

Like at the prevention stage, an offer of social housing is the main means of relieving homelessness, followed by private rented.

Where a main duty decision is made, in the vast majority of cases this is to accept the main duty.

Where a main duty is accepted, the reason for priority need is largely due to the household including dependent children, followed by mental health and physical health.



The main means of discharging a main duty is through an offer of social rented accommodation.

Rough Sleeping

Levels of rough sleeping within the district are low, but have increased recently, which is the same nationally. Since December 2019 to August 2022, 55 referrals had been made to P3, a charity who provide an outreach service for rough sleepers in South Cambridgeshire.

Due to vague or unclear information about the location of a rough sleeper, only 33% of referrals were located. However, the service has a high success rate with regards to engaging with people with 89% of those found, engaging in a needs assessment and support plan with the Outreach Service.

Affordability

The lower quartile house price to income ratio is 11.4 for South Cambridgeshire (October 2022) – generally house prices of 3 to 3.5 times income are considered affordable.

The difference between the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate for private rent and the median rent payable represents an average shortfall of £65 per week (October 2022).



As at March 2023, there were a total of

1,738

applicants on the housing register.

The highest proportion of these were single people.

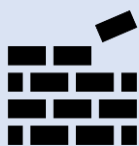
Over the last 3 years (up to March 2023) on average

318

allocations have been made each year from the housing register into Council stock,



24% of which are generally for sheltered accommodation.



Since the last strategy, there have been on average

371

new affordable homes completions each year through housing associations.

Between 2018 / 2019 and 2022 / 2023,

309

council owned properties have been built, including rented and shared ownership.



Shire Homes Lettings has housed over

150

households.

As of March 2023 they have

67 self-contained properties and

5 houses of multiple occupation providing **21** rooms.

Aims and priorities moving forward

As the review of homelessness in the district has shown, demand for homeless services have continued to be high over the past five years. In addition, there have been some unprecedented impacts over these previous five years, including the Covid pandemic, cost of living crisis and support for refugees. This combination has exacerbated some of the main challenges facing South Cambridgeshire District Council and its homeless service, including:



Aim 1: To provide homeless prevention, early intervention and support.

- The need to promote early intervention to increase the opportunities to prevent homelessness, including family breakdown and other forms of insecure housing.
- Ensuring we prevent and intervene to resolve rough sleeping.
- Early intervention through protocols and pathways including the criminal justice system and care leavers.
- Access to private rented accommodation including a rent deposit scheme and our private sector leasing scheme, Shire Homes Lettings.
- Street outreach service provided by P3.
- Early and targeted money advice for those on a low income, including those in employment, to help with affordability.
- Include training package for tenancy responsibilities.
- Include review of energy efficiency to increase affordability (through links with our Net Zero Carbon Strategy).
- Ongoing support and assistance for tenants and landlords in the private rented sector.
- Ensuring we provide an inclusive service, taking account of all protected characteristics, particularly due to the increase in domestic abuse and high levels of homeless applications from those with mental and physical health needs.
- Rectify the high number of 'not known' recordings.
- Further work to build on the improvements to the Council's response to domestic abuse.
- Joint working with health services to improve early intervention for those with mental and physical health needs.

Aim 2: To provide suitable housing options

- Improve the housing options available for single people including those who are unsuitable for shared accommodation.



- Project with Ermine Street to provide additional single person self-contained accommodation.
- Reducing the use of B&B, which is unsuitable as a form of temporary accommodation.
- Monitor effectiveness of the change of working practice within the service.
- Increase provision of access to privately rented accommodation including through Shire Homes Lettings.
- Council and Housing Association new build programmes.
- Joint work through the Home-Link partnership to reduce affordability concerns preventing offers of social housing.
- Ongoing work to support government refugee schemes including guests from Ukraine.

Action plan and monitoring

An action plan will accompany the strategy covering the actions identified above. This will be monitored annually and updated to reflect progress, emerging challenges and achievements.

Several performance indicators are also monitored on a quarterly basis through the Housing Management Service and the Council's corporate Performance reports.

This includes:

- Total number of presentations, including advice only cases
- Number of homeless applications
- Number of successful homeless prevention
- Number of homeless acceptances
- Numbers of households in temporary accommodation
- Number of households with family commitments who have been accommodated in B&B for longer than six weeks. *
- Successful homeless prevention as a proportion of all homelessness cases closed. *

(* included in corporate performance reports)

