

DRAFT



HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2013-2018

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The Homelessness Strategy Action Plan

The Homelessness Review 20013/18

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2013-2018

1. 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. The Strategy must be renewed at least every 5 years. In addition, Section 153 of the Localism Act 2011 requires that Local Authorities must have regard to their Allocation Scheme and their Tenancy Strategy when developing or modifying their Homelessness strategy.

South Cambridgeshire District Council's Homelessness Strategy was last published in 2008 and is now due for renewal. During the life of the 2008-13 strategy, the emphasis was on reducing homelessness and the Council's use of temporary accommodation through increased prevention and partnership working. Since its publication, the Council has seen:

- An initial decrease in numbers living in temporary accommodation, followed by a recent and continued increase. (57 households at the end of 07/08, falling to 26 households at its lowest in June 2011 compared to 42 households at the end of 2012/13).
- Fewer households accepted as homeless at the start of the 5 year period (82 in 2008/09 falling to 64 in 2009/10). A subsequent and steady increase in homeless acceptances during the latter part of the 5 year period (102 in 2012/13).

The initial reduction in homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation was primarily the result of the greater emphasis on preventative work undertaken by the Housing Advice and Options Team and the continued use of initiatives such as the Settled Homes Scheme. However, since 2010/11 homeless prevention options have become harder to achieve which is illustrated by the rise in homeless acceptances and the increase in demand for temporary accommodation. This is mainly due to changes in the way that Local Housing Allowance is calculated which has meant that the majority of private rented sector properties in the district are no longer affordable to households on low incomes or who are reliant on welfare benefits. In addition, the impact of recent welfare reforms will mean that it becomes more difficult for residents to meet their housing needs with their own resources.

In 2010 the Audit Commission inspected the Council's Strategic Housing Service, including the provision of its statutory Homelessness Functions and Housing Advice. Overall the service was considered to be 'Good' and recognition was given to the fact that the Council had a range of successful initiatives to prevent homelessness as well as good management of the sub-regional choice based lettings process.

Although prevention work will continue to play an important role in the Council's service, it is recognised that the current economic climate, the shortage of affordable private rented housing and the impact of the welfare reforms will make it harder to

achieve the success rates previously attained. The new strategy will also seek to minimise the use of Bed and Breakfast and improve the quality of temporary accommodation available.

This document will therefore replace the 2008 Homelessness Strategy and is split into three parts: the Strategy, the Action Plan and Review. The Strategy will focus on the two key elements of continued homeless prevention and increasing the supply of temporary accommodation. Partnership working will be central to the success of the strategy.

New actions and priorities resulting from the Review will help to shape the strategic approach for the next five years, taking into account National, Regional and Local Priorities.

In developing the Homelessness Strategy, key stakeholders within all sectors, including voluntary organisations, service providers, housing associations, private landlords and other statutory organisations have been involved, primarily through participation on-line but also through attendance at a consultation event. Their continued support and involvement will be crucial to the success of this Strategy's implementation. Full acknowledgement of all those who have assisted is published at the end of this Strategy.

2. NATIONAL AND LOCAL POLICY

2.1 National:

Since publication of the last Homelessness Strategy there have been fundamental changes to housing policy, as well as an overhaul of the welfare system. Alongside this, the economic downturn has meant a rise in unemployment, fewer new homes being built and an increase in the number of homeless applications being made.

In brief, the table below identifies some of the key changes to policy that have a direct impact on the way in which local housing authorities deliver allocations, lettings and homelessness services.

Changes to the Local Housing Allowance Arrangements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates capped and set at the 30th percentile of local rents (April 2011) • Increased non-dependant deductions (April 2011) • £15 weekly excess removed where the tenant's rent is less than their LHA (April 2011) • Increasing the shared accommodation room rate age threshold to 35 from 25 (January 2012)
Localism Act 2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability for local authorities to discharge the homelessness duty in the private rented sector in accordance with the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 • Greater freedom for local authorities to set their own policies about who should qualify to go on the waiting list for social housing in their area.

Welfare Reform Act 2012

- Social sector size criteria for working age tenants (April 2013) – those considered to have a ‘spare’ bedroom will face a reduction in housing benefit
- Benefit cap for working age people (from April 2013) – a cap on the total amount of benefit that working age people receive so it does not exceed the average wage for working families
- Personal Independence Payment (from April 2013) – replacing Disability Living Allowance based on how a person’s condition affects them, not the condition they have
- Universal Credit (from October 2013) – bringing together a range of working age benefits into a single payment, including housing support
- Direct Payments in the Social Sector (from October 2013) – housing costs within Universal Credit will be paid directly to individuals in the social sector, rather than the current system of payments direct to landlords
- Localising Council Tax Support (April 2013) – replacing Council Tax Benefit, councils are required to design and adopt a scheme based on a national framework that protects vulnerable pensioners

NHS and Social Care Act 2012

- Includes a new and important role for local authorities from April 2013 in helping to shape services and deliver public health outcomes, as well as the establishment of local clinical commissioning groups that will oversee the bulk of NHS investment in a local area

The Government have introduced a number of measures to deal with increased homelessness, with priority given to help rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness to stay off the streets. **‘No Second Night Out’** published in 2011 sets out clear expectations for local authorities about developing joint approaches to ending rough sleeping.

Additional funding has been made available between 2011 and 2015 to help protect the most vulnerable and support them to adapt to changing welfare reforms.

- £400 million available to local councils and voluntary sector partners to spend on homeless prevention, such as rent deposit schemes and mediation services.
- £18.5 million funding for local councils to prevent homelessness, ensuring nobody is turned away without clear and useful advice when they are most in need.
- A further £12.5 million provided to Crisis to help find stable private rented accommodation for single homeless people, including priority groups such as recovering drug users and ex-offenders.
- £20 million to Homeless Link for a homelessness transition fund to help voluntary sector frontline services.
- £200 million over 5 years from 2013 for specialist housing for older and disabled people .

‘Making Every Contact Count’ published by the Government in 2012 supports local authorities to deliver a Gold Standard homeless prevention service. It sets out 10 challenges for local authorities which are designed to ensure that homelessness prevention and support to vulnerable households is as effective as possible. Funding

of £1.7 million will be available from May 2013 to help support local authorities to meet the Gold Standard.

The national context of policy change is unprecedented, with local authorities facing both huge challenges to the housing sector as well as opportunities to shape services providing support and advice to the most vulnerable.

We will continue to seek additional funding from central government wherever possible to ensure we can provide the support needed to help residents through these changing times.

2.2 Sub regional:

The sub regional Homelessness Group agreed a sub-regional action plan in 2008, which has largely been completed and included:

- The implementation of a housing advice and homelessness database across the sub region – this is a module that links to the Home-Link scheme through the Locata IT system.
- Floating support – participated in the Supporting People review of floating support services.
- Identified initiatives to develop training and employment opportunities for applicants – links established with Job Centre Plus and information can be accessed via the sub regional Home-Link scheme.
- Court desk provision – all areas in the sub region are covered by a court desk service.
- Review of the Home-Link CBL scheme – reviewed after one year of implementation to ensure the scheme met the needs of the sub region. This was reported to management board in March 2009.
- Cambridgeshire-wide Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- Cambridgeshire-wide protocol with social care for homeless young people. Has been successfully implemented and recently reviewed.

The Sub Regional Homelessness group will be working on a new sub regional action plan to help address the current priorities for all the Local Authorities including the impact of the welfare reforms and government funding that has been granted to the sub region to prevent rough sleeping and assist single homelessness. The new action plan should be available later in 2013.

2.3 Local:

The Homelessness Strategy sits within the Council's Housing Strategy which was published in March 2012. This sets out the overall vision and key aims for the housing service over the next 5 years. Putting the HEART into Housing encapsulates the key themes of the Housing Strategy:

HHealth and Wellbeing

Economic Growth and Development

Affordable Housing

Reducing Fuel Poverty and promoting energy efficiency

Tackling Homelessness

Overall Housing Vision

To be the best housing service by providing good quality housing across all tenures that is accessible to all – that enhances residents' quality of life, their health and wellbeing, that supports economic growth and social opportunities, alongside improved energy security and reduced carbon footprints.

Key Aims:

- To deliver a range of homes that are affordable to all and where people want to live that will support economic growth and economic activity
- To improve the living conditions across all tenures, to help make homes more energy efficient and to reduce fuel poverty
- To promote safe and sustainable communities, ensuring people are living in the right homes at a time that is right for them
- To promote fully inclusive communities and to work with partners to provide support and assistance to enable independent living
- To reduce homelessness through being proactive in preventative measures and ensuring there is sufficient suitable accommodation available to people who are, or who may become homeless
- To work in partnership to provide housing advice so that people understand their housing options, help them to sustain their current home or access alternative suitable accommodation
- To provide an Affordable Homes Service that is transparent and accountable, that is developed in consultation with our tenants, partner agencies and the wider public and demonstrates value for money

The Council remains a stock holding authority following the 'No' vote to transfer to a housing association in 2009. Since that time there has been a change in direction regarding Council housing finances, with the Council's landlord functions becoming self-financing from April 2012. This has meant that the Council took on a debt of £205M but is able to keep its full rental income, which has enabled the Council to reinvest into existing stock and begin to build new affordable homes. The Council's New Build Strategy identifies up to 200 new homes to be built in the next 10 years, helping to provide long term solutions for homeless families rather than temporary accommodation options.

The Homelessness Strategy cannot be developed in isolation but has important links and reliance to other policy documents and strategies:

Allocations Policy (amended April 2013)

- Local connection required to be eligible to register with Home-Link
- Greater priority to Armed Forces Personnel
- Increase priority for households in social housing who are under-occupying
- New assessments of overcrowding based on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) regulations; but with higher priority awarded
- Size of property applicants are eligible to bid for in line with LHA criteria
- Homeless applicants – removal of 3 month 'bidding' period, can offer direct let automatically to discharge duty
- Housing Options Assessment – online registration notifying applicants if eligible to register or alternative housing options available to them

It is too early to say what impact the changes to the Allocations Policy may have. We will monitor this over the coming year to ensure homeless households are not adversely affected.

Tenancy Strategy (published October 2012)

The key elements to the Tenancy Strategy include:

- **Affordable Rents** – as part of the Council's enabling role we would wish to have early discussions around the level and mix of Affordable Rent and recommend that Affordable Rents should not be set higher than the Local Housing Allowance rates for this area.
- **Conversion to Affordable Rents** – Registered Providers are asked to take a strategic approach to conversions and consider areas where it would provide for a more balanced community, especially in areas where there are high levels of social rent.
- **Stock Disposals** – generally we would support stock rationalisation where the housing stock is offered to another Registered Provider as affordable housing or where a property has insurmountable management or maintenance problems.
- **Use of Fixed Term/Flexible Tenancies** – the Council supports the use of fixed term/flexible tenancies for the primary purpose of making best use of existing stock. As a minimum 5 year tenancies should be offered to ensure tenants have a degree of stability in their home and are able to feel part of and contribute to their community.
- **Expiry of a Fixed Term/Flexible Tenancy** – the Council is committed to ensuring that the use of fixed term/flexible tenancies and their termination does not lead to an increase in homelessness and therefore expect registered providers to generally offer tenancy renewal or alternative accommodation.

Affordable rents and fixed term tenancies have been in existence since April 2012. Close monitoring of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme would indicate that the changes have not altered the bidding pattern of applicants. The Council's enabling team work closely with registered providers to ensure 'Affordable Rent' properties remain affordable within the District.

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment – People who are homeless or at the risk of homeless (February 2010)

JSNA's are undertaken by the County Council and PCT and involve local authorities and other key partner organisations providing services. Recommendations from the Homelessness JSNA include:

- Development of a multi-agency steering group to strengthen joint commissioning to address the needs of chronically excluded adults, single homeless and rough sleepers
- Develop methods to encourage service user engagement in the commissioning process. Service users' experience and perceived needs should be embedded in the care planning process
- Develop integrated information systems, data collection tools and ways of unifying individual client records so they can be used and accessed across services
- Develop services enabling prevention of homelessness and early intervention for the newly homeless to improve individual lives and to reduce overall homelessness
- Develop a strategy to address the health needs of the homeless population in Cambridgeshire as part of a joint commissioning strategy

Supporting People

The Supporting People programme has now ended. Housing related support services for vulnerable adults are now commissioned, funded and monitored by the Adult Social Care Directorate within Cambridgeshire County Council. The housing related support services are aimed at helping people live independently in their homes. The change from Supporting People is still in a transitional phase and it is uncertain what impact this will have on future funding available to support those

facing homelessness.

Cambridgeshire Association to Commission Health Ltd (CATCH)

Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) are groups of GPs that from April 2013 are the statutory bodies responsible for designing local health services in England. Every GP practice will have to be a member of a CCG.

Local Commissioning Groups (LCGs) are smaller groups of GP practices with a focus on more local issues than the CCG. CATCH is one of the main 8 LCGs within the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough CCG that operates within South Cambridgeshire.

CATCH have a crucial role to play in setting the shape of health care delivery in the District. The Council will work closely with them to ensure that the health needs of homeless households and vulnerable adults are taken into consideration when commissioning services.

Cambridgeshire Health and Wellbeing Board and Network

The Cambridgeshire Health and Wellbeing Board and Network brings together leaders from local organisations which have a strong influence on health and wellbeing, including the commissioning of health, social care and public health services.

Its focus is on planning the right services for Cambridgeshire and securing the best possible health and wellbeing outcomes for all residents.

The work of the Board is guided by the Cambridgeshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2012-17. The Strategy sets out the priorities the Health and Wellbeing Board and Network feel are the most important for local people:

- Ensure a positive start to life for children, young people and their families
- Support older people to be independent, safe and well
- Encourage healthy lifestyles and behaviours in all actions and activities while respecting people's personal choices
- Create a safe environment and help to build strong communities , wellbeing and mental health
- Create a sustainable environment in which communities can flourish
- Work together effectively

The above list of National and Local Policies is not intended to be comprehensive but identifies those that are most relevant to the formulation of the new Homelessness Strategy and Review.

3. OUTCOME OF THE HOMELESSNESS REVIEW

The Homelessness Review that supplements the Homelessness Strategy gives a detailed analysis of homelessness in the District over the last 5 years and the types of support available.

South Cambridgeshire District has experienced similar trends to the national homelessness picture. In the last two years, homeless applications have increased and the Council is now in the unfortunate position of having to use bed & breakfast again as temporary accommodation. Affordability is an acute issue for residents in South Cambridgeshire, with property prices continuing to increase and a general lack of affordable private rented accommodation. It is anticipated that the changes to the welfare reforms are likely to have significant impacts on vulnerable households across the District and we have already introduced new ways of working to try to help mitigate the impact, such as money advice and the provision of single person accommodation.

The outcome of the Review identified six key themes to be taken forward over the next 5 year Homelessness Strategy:

Homeless Prevention

- Increased provision of advice and support in relation to finances and budgetary assistance.
- Access to affordable private rented sector housing in the district.
- Access to accommodation in the District to cater for single people, especially those with additional support needs.
- Increased focus on prevention of homelessness for those suffering with a mental health problem.
- Review and improve accessibility of information through the use of social media and other formats.

Increase provision of Temporary Accommodation

- Additional provision for good quality temporary accommodation

4. PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES

4.1 Corporate Priorities

Relevant Corporate Aims:

- *We will make sure that South Cambridgeshire continues to offer an outstanding quality of life for our residents.*
- *We will listen to and engage with residents, parishes and businesses to ensure we deliver first class services and value for money*

Relevant Council Actions:

- *Ensure best use of Council assets and benefit from opportunities to achieve efficiencies from working together*
- *Increase the supply of temporary accommodation, prioritising council owned properties whilst not restricting options in other sectors*
- *Ensure benefits reform is implemented as smoothly and effectively as possible.*

Service Objective:

'To provide housing advice to enable people to understand their housing options, to sustain and improve their current home or access alternative good quality and suitable housing'.

At a corporate level, the Council recognises the need to increase the supply of temporary accommodation, to ensure the smooth implementation of welfare reform and the benefits of working together. It is important that the Corporate Aims and actions for the Council support the themes and priorities identified in the Homelessness Review to ensure best use of resources and it is clear that these links exist.

Each of the key themes identified in the Homelessness Review has strands of work, or actions, associated with it and these are contained in the Homeless Strategy Action Plan. The themes and associated actions can be broadly categorised under the two main aims of:

- Continued homeless prevention
- Increasing temporary accommodation

In addition, two other important elements run through the Review, Strategy and Action Plan and cut across both of the key aims above. These cross cutting themes are:

- importance of continued partnership working and
- the need to continually assess and improve service provision

Partnership working is recognised as central to achieving both the prevention and temporary accommodation actions whilst the Council will seek to achieve continuous improvement by completing and learning from Peer Reviews in relation to the Gold Standard for Homeless Services. A corporate commitment to the prevention of homelessness is an important element in achieving the Gold Standard and this can be evidenced through the Corporate Aims and Council Actions relating to Homeless services and provision.

4.2 The Prevention of Homelessness:

The housing advice and options team continue to receive high levels of contact from residents needing housing advice. The Council continue to offer and pursue various homeless prevention schemes and initiatives; however, we recognise with the changes to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and the welfare reforms, our continued success in this area will be even more challenging. Early intervention is therefore seen as vital to ensure we minimise the expected increase in homelessness.

We will aim to continue to build on successful initiatives already implemented such as our settled homes scheme and provision of money advice through the CAB and we will continue to work in partnership with other agencies to achieve this.

Through the Homelessness Review and the changing housing environment we have identified the following areas to address to maintain and increase levels of homeless prevention:

- Floating support – monitor the impact of demand from our clients for floating support and work with the floating support provider to address how this is best met.
- Discretionary Housing payments – review the policy to take into account the changes to the LHA and ensure we can help the short terms needs that will help to prevent homelessness.
- Under Occupation – through the changes to the LHA affecting social rented tenants SCDC has recruited an Under-Occupation officer to work with tenants affected and help to provide solutions for any shortfall in rent.
- Mental Health – due to an increase in clients with mental health support needs, work with partner agencies to help address this.
- Provision of money advice and support in relation to finance and budgetary assistance – continue to work with the CAB to provide dedicated money advice to prevent homelessness and investigate credit unions and the options available that may help people on low incomes to help manage their money more effectively and meet their housing costs.
- Single homelessness – work with our partners in the sub region to implement a single homeless service scheme, with the aim of providing an offer of accommodation, through either emergency placement or an offer in the private rented sector.

- Reconnections policy – adopt a reconnections policy, in line with our sub regional partners, to prevent rough sleeping and to enable assistance to be directed to those with a connection to the sub region.
- King Street Home-finder scheme – establish the success of this scheme and future funding opportunities.
- Information – review information available to residents including through social media, on the web site and through leaflets and letters.

4.3 Temporary accommodation:

Since the previous Homeless Strategy we are in a very different position in relation to temporary accommodation. Through effective homeless prevention initiatives temporary accommodation had reduced significantly. However, with the introduction of the welfare reforms, homelessness is now on the increase and there is an urgent need for more temporary accommodation.

Following the Homelessness Review we have identified a number of actions to take forward.

- Redevelopment of Robson Court – working with Sanctuary to redevelop the Robson Court hostel site. The current hostel provided shared accommodation for 16 households. Maintaining the building is not cost effective compared to other forms of temporary accommodation, in addition to the negative impact living in shared accommodation can have on families and children. The new development will provide 30 units of self-contained temporary accommodation, replacing both the 16 units at Robson Court, 4 units at the Bungalow (to enable Sanctuary to manage the temporary accommodation on one site) and a further 10 additional units to help alleviate the need to use B&B.
- Options for the Bungalow hostel – Once the Robson Court development has been completed we will need to consider the on-going use of the Bungalow which is owned by the Council. At that stage we will consider the need for additional temporary accommodation, specific provision for a particular group or converting the property back into general needs accommodation.
- Empty Homes scheme – continuation of the empty homes scheme, with the aim of purchasing 5-8 properties during 2013/14.
- Foyer – work with partners to investigate the potential for a Foyer scheme located in South Cambridgeshire for young people to live and gain valuable training or work experience.
- Impact of the welfare reforms on the Private Sector Leasing scheme – work with King Street Housing to monitor the impact of the welfare reforms. This will include proposed changes to the payment of management fees for this form of accommodation and impact of direct payments under the Universal Credit scheme.
- Discharge of duty policy – policy to collate the various options for discharging our homeless duties, including into the private rented sector.

5. MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE STRATEGY

The Homelessness Strategy Review Group will review the strategy on an annual basis and will share the review findings with the Council's wider Housing Services Management Team. It is expected that some actions may evolve over the lifetime of the Strategy and any such changes will be agreed by the Review Group and reported to the Management Team before being incorporated into the Action Plan. The Housing Portfolio Holder will monitor progress against the Action Plan annually.

Key objectives within the Strategy are also monitored on a quarterly basis through the Council's corporate Performance Indicator System (CorVu). The two areas of performance monitored via CorVu are:

- Preventing Homelessness
- Numbers in temporary accommodation

In addition, the Council has committed to reducing its expenditure on B&B placements. In 2013/14 a transitory target has been set to ensure B&B expenditure does not exceed £4,000 per calendar month (which represents roughly a 50% reduction on the 2012/13 levels of expenditure). It is anticipated that the target will be reduced further throughout the life of the strategy and will be set every 12 months as part of the annual review of the Homelessness Strategy.

6. CONTACT DETAILS

If you have any comments about this Strategy or would like more information about ways in which homelessness can be tackled in South Cambridgeshire please contact:

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7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

South Cambridgeshire District Council would like to acknowledge and thank all organisations that have contributed to the Homelessness Review and development of the Homelessness Strategy by assisting in the completion of questionnaires as well as providing valuable input throughout the consultation process. Full acknowledgements will be included once the Consultation process is completed.