



# HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2008-2013

## DRAFT

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## **The Homelessness Strategy Action Plan**

## **The Homelessness Review 2007/08**

# **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2008-2013**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires councils to compile a Homelessness Strategy and to renew this at least every five years. South Cambridgeshire District Council's Homelessness Strategy was last published in 2003 and is now due for renewal. Since its publication, the Council has seen-

- A reduction in the numbers living in temporary accommodation (152 households in 2004/05, compared to 57 as at the end of 07/08)
- Fewer households making a homeless application (170 in 2005/06; 128 in 2006/07)
- A significant reduction by almost 54% in the homelessness services expenditure.

This is as a result of a greater emphasis on preventative work undertaken by the Housing Advice & Options Team and the introduction of new initiatives, such as The Settled Homes Scheme. Detailed outcomes from the 2003 Homelessness Strategy are set out in the 2007/08 Review document.

In September 2007, the Council was selected as regional champions for homelessness by the Government following its successes in preventing and reducing homelessness. As a regional champion, the Housing Advice & Options Team will work with other authorities and RSLs within the region to relay good practice and share experience. This is seen as an endorsement of the achievements made since the last Strategy, but it is also recognised that there is still a lot more to do which has been identified through the 2007/08 Review and will be prioritised within this Strategy.

This document will therefore replace the 2003 Homelessness Strategy and is split into three parts: the Strategy, the Action Plan and Review. The Strategy will focus on the three key elements of prevention, securing accommodation and providing support through continued partnership working and building on the successes already achieved.

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 either through attendance of the Homelessness Review Steering Group or participation of the landlords, housing associations and service provider surveys. 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, REGIONAL AND LOCAL PRIORITIES**

### **2.1 National**

In January 2005, the ODPM (now Department for Communities and Local Government – DCLG) published its five year plan titled “Sustainable Communities: Homes for All.” Within the plan it focused on 3 main themes with regard to homelessness:

- Temporary accommodation- a target to halve the number of households in ‘insecure’ temporary accommodation by 2010.
- Increased emphasis on councils being pro-active in the prevention of homelessness, including options for making greater use of the private rented sector.
- The improvement of the quality of hostel accommodation

The Government have also published various policies and guidance since the last Homelessness Strategy, which have been taken into consideration:

- Statutory Homelessness in England: The experiences of families and 16-17 year olds, Homelessness Research Summary No. 7, DCLG March 2008
- Evaluating Homelessness Prevention, DCLG December 2007
- Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable, DCLG July 2007
- Tackling Homelessness – The Housing Corporation Strategy, November 2006
- Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, DCLG July 2006
- Homelessness Prevention, a guide to good practice, DCLG 2006
- Preventing Homelessness: A Strategic Health Check, DCLG 2006
- Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives, DCLG 2005
- Hostels Review Toolkit 2005
- Local Authorities’ Homelessness Strategies: Evaluation & Good Practice, DCLG 2004
- Effective Co-operation in Tackling Homelessness: Nomination Agreements and Exclusions, DCLG November 2004

### **2.2 Regional**

Key Stakeholders in the East of England have developed a Regional Homelessness Action Plan for 2006-07 that identified the following priority areas for the region in tackling homelessness:

- Effective communication and co-ordination between agencies
- Homelessness prevention and support for people at risk of homelessness
- Access to permanent housing for homeless people
- Maximise resources to provide accommodation and support

The delivery of the Action Plan will be taken forward by the newly formed Regional Homelessness Advisory Panel.

## 2.3 Sub Regional/Countywide

Following on from the Regional Homelessness Action Plan, work is currently underway via the Sub Regional Homelessness Group to agree priorities for the Sub-Region, which is due to be published in the Spring 2008. The main themes identified are generally objectives that all the local authorities in the sub region are working towards already, i.e. reductions in the number of households in temporary accommodation and homelessness prevention. Any further actions arising from this will be incorporated into the new Homelessness Strategy Action Plan.

The Cambridgeshire Local Area Agreement 06-09 (LAA) recognises housing as an important area and has included two new performance indicators that relate directly to the prevention of homelessness for 16-18 year olds and the length of stay in temporary accommodation by homeless households. Partners in the LAA who allocate the Supporting People resources have agreed funding for the new Young Persons Floating Support Scheme provided through Cambridge Housing Society in the latest commissioning bid round, in addition to supporting the existing floating support service.

The Supporting People Commissioning Body has recently reviewed its priorities in the light of financial constraints. Listed below are the countywide agreed priorities. Whilst not all of them relate specifically to homelessness many do have a relevance to its prevention-

- generic floating support
- floating support for offenders
- specialist floating support for people with physical and sensory impairment
- resettlement support
- services for substance misusers
- remodeling mental health schemes
- women at risk of domestic violence
- new accommodation for people with mental health problems
- services for young people with complex needs
- implementing the findings of the review of sheltered housing

A Choice Based Lettings Scheme has been developed in the Cambridge Sub Region. The scheme went live in February 2008 and aims to provide a fair and transparent scheme for the letting of social housing which will offer applicants greater choice and ease of movement between local authorities across the region. Its impact on the discharge of statutory homelessness duties of the Authority will need to be carefully monitored and reviewed once the scheme is in operation. Households who are owed a main housing duty by one of the local authority partners in the scheme are given top priority in the allocation of properties.

## 2.4 Local

Housing Futures - At the end of January 2008, the Council took the decision to develop a proposal for the transfer of the ownership and management of its homes to a new housing association landlord. A detailed proposal will be developed over the coming year, with tenants being balloted in late 2008/early 2009. The Housing Advice/Options Manager is a member of the Housing Futures Project Team that will feed into the overall decision-making process in developing the proposal. The implications for the Homelessness/Housing Advice Service will be dependent on whether the service is included in the services potentially being out-sourced to the new landlord and ultimately the outcome of the ballot. Further restructuring for the team may be necessary once a decision has been reached.

Under the Supporting People Programme, specific deficits that have been identified for services in South Cambridgeshire include-

- more move-on accommodation from specialist schemes. This has been addressed as part of the review of allocations carried out for the introduction of Choice Based lettings, where priority will be awarded in band A.
- more extra care sheltered housing. Funding has been approved for the scheme at Moorlands, Melbourn and a further scheme at Flaxfields, Linton.
- more support for young people at risk. A pilot programme run by Cambridge Housing Society is underway, funded by previous underspends in the Supporting People pipeline programme - current funding through to March 2009.
- Remodeling older mental health provision. New homes with higher levels of independence are being planned for the re-development of the Windmill estate at Fulbourn
- increasing the supply of wheelchair accessible housing. Apart from the activities of the Home Aid Agency using disabled facilities grants, a scheme for wheelchair users in the new development at Arbury Park has been proposed and the Housing Corporation have approved two Lifetime Homes via Papworth Housing Trust as additions to the 2006/8 housing programme (Feb 2008)
- The development of housing options for people with mental health problems will be guided by the Adult Mental Health Services Strategy for Housing and Related Support Services.
- The Council will work with a range of stakeholders to develop the new countywide Housing Strategy for Disabled People

South Cambridgeshire District Council's Housing Strategy was published in July 2007 and brings together all aspects of the Council's comprehensive housing role. Actions relating specifically to housing options/homelessness include:

- Implement the Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme.
- Incorporate appropriate "move on" arrangements for residents of supported housing within the new Sub Regional Choice Based Lettings System.
- Review Hostel Provision and produce a re-provision strategy.
- Review Homelessness in the District and produce a new Homelessness Strategy.

Within the emerging Sustainable Community Strategy 2007-10 there is reference to services for victims of domestic violence and support via floating support schemes, etc as priorities for achieving it's aim for Safe and Clean Villages.

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

### 3. PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES

#### Relevant Corporate Objective:

- *Deliver high quality services that represent best value and are accessible to all our community.*

#### Relevant Service Priorities:

- *Ensuring the best value for money provision of services.*
- *Strong management and prioritisation of resources, resulting in improved audit assessments.*
- *Working with local people to promote community cohesion addressing the needs of the most vulnerable in the community*

#### Service Objective:

- *To provide housing advice and services in partnership to enable people to understand their housing options, to sustain and improve their current home or access alternative suitable housing.*

The overall aim of the homelessness strategy is:

- **the prevention of homelessness**
- **ensuring that there is sufficient accommodation available to people who are, or who may become homeless**
- **ensuring there is adequate support for people who are, or who may become homeless, or who need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again**

#### 3.1 The Prevention of Homelessness

The number of enquiries that the Housing Options & Advice Team receive is continuing to increase and it is anticipated that contributory factors such as the current economic climate, the introduction of the Local Housing Allowance and the increase in the number of Eastern Europeans coming to work in South Cambridgeshire will only add to the continuing upward trend for those approaching the Council.

Early intervention for the prevention of homelessness is seen as vital to ensure that the number of homelessness applications continues to decrease. Therefore the Council intends to meet the aim of preventing homelessness through building on the successes of the various initiatives already in place, such as the Settled Homes Scheme and the Young Persons Floating Support Scheme, as well as working in partnership with other statutory agencies.

The outcome of the Homelessness Review, which has taken into account the views from service providers, RSLs and the private sector, has helped to identify where further work needs to be progressed. This will include:

- Ensuring information is accessible to all in a format that is easily understood. In particular information targeted at specific individual client groups such as young people and Travellers need to be further developed.
- Work with King Street Housing Society to raise awareness with the private sector and promote the Settled Homes Scheme. Also work with the City

Council towards a landlord's forum/newsletter and arrange visits with housing benefit to local letting agents to promote services

- Establish joint protocols with partner agencies aimed to prevent homelessness. In particular develop a joint protocol with RSLs regarding tenants who are threatened with homelessness, with the aim of working towards a sub regional RSL Homelessness Strategy. Work with the OCYPS and other service providers, which will cover joint working on homeless prevention, young people, ineligible households and intentionally homeless families.
- Robust monitoring across the homelessness service to ensure the Actions within the Strategy remain relevant to the needs of the District, i.e. impact of the Local Housing Allowance, improved ethnic monitoring, etc.
- Maximise the opportunity presented by Regional Champion status to disseminate and gain best practices and share experiences.
- Meet the Audit Commission's KLOE (Key Lines of Enquiry) assessment to provide an excellent service.

### **3.2 Ensuring that there is sufficient accommodation available to people who are, or who may become homeless**

In January 2005, the Government set all local authorities a target to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010. The numbers in temporary accommodation have consistently reduced each quarter during the last year and have exceeded the milestones set locally. However, the average length of stay in hostel accommodation is still too long and it is recognised that the current hostel provision does not give good value for money taking into account the quality of the accommodation.

The Council aims to address this issue by:

#### Temporary Accommodation

- Develop a Hostel Re-provision Strategy to improve standards and reduce use of shared units – this will include redeployment of support services to Robson Court following the closure of The Poplars hostel in March 2008, further investigation into the remodelling of Robson Court, as well as identifying new purpose built provision.
- Increase the move-on rate for those accommodated in the YMCA through liaison and identification of properties under the Settled Homes Scheme.
- Implement recommendations by the HQN value for money assessment across the sub region.

#### Permanent Housing

- Increase the provision of affordable housing through the Affordable Housing Programme over the next 5 years as the strategic growth sites come forward.
- The introduction of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme and amended Lettings Policy should help to address the time spent in hostel accommodation and those that no longer require residential support, by way of priority banding. This will need to be monitored closely as part of the actions identified under CBL to ensure that homeless applicants understand and participate successfully in the scheme.



### 3.3 Ensuring there is adequate support for people who are, or who may become homeless, or who need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again

One of the main findings of the Review highlighted the need to ensure key agencies that work with homeless or potentially homeless applicants were aware of the services/support provided by the Housing Advice & Options Team.

To ensure that adequate support is available and utilised, the Council will:

- Increase the awareness of the prevention services, such as the Floating Support Scheme, with key agencies.
- Support potential bids for continued funding and increase referrals to the Young Peoples Floating Support scheme
- Investigate new procedures for referrals to the CAB for debt advice under the Spend to Save policy – to be evaluated once established.
- Review the housing needs of young people in more detail and investigate with sub regional partners the possibility of a Supported Lodgings Scheme.
- Review the role of the Travellers Liaison Officer to ensure appropriate support is available.
- Work with the Disability Housing Strategic Network to support a countywide strategy and implement arising actions from the action plan.
- Review the services provided within the Housing Advice & Options Team following the outcome of the Tenant Ballot in late 2008/early 2009 on the future of the Council's housing stock.

## 4. RESOURCING THE STRATEGY

The resources available to deliver the homelessness strategy are summarised below:

### 4.1 Staffing

Following the restructure of the service, to create a fuller housing advice and options service, the following staffing resources are in place:

Housing advice and Options Manager

Housing advice and homelessness:

Housing advice and homelessness team leader

Homelessness officer

Housing advice officer x 2

Housing advice and homelessness assistant

Housing allocations and options:

Housing allocations and options team leader

Choice based lettings project officer

Housing options assistant x 2

Housing and Traveller support:

Housing and traveller support team leader

Traveller site wardens x 2

## Housing Support Workers x 2

As part of the Housing Futures project, all services provided by the housing advice and options team will be considered for either retention by the Council or potential contracting out alongside the landlord functions and therefore the team's structure may change again.

### 4.2 Finance

#### Housing advice and Homelessness budget

The homelessness review looked at the change in expenditure between 2003/04 and 2006/07. In summary this includes:

- A significant overall reduction in net expenditure from £338,425 in 2002/03 to £181,535 in 2006/07.
- This is largely as a result of a huge reduction in spending on temporary accommodation (£245,160 in 2002/03 to £47,479 in 2006/07 – excluding hostel accommodation). This has been achieved through new management arrangements for the private sector leasing scheme (and King Street Housing Society) and minimal use of bed and breakfast accommodation.
- Staffing levels to address housing advice have increased and expenditure has increased. However, this has been off set by the reduction in expenditure on temporary accommodation.
- The government grant provided to SCDC has increased, in part, to help fund an additional Housing Advice Officer.

#### Hostels

Total expenditure for the provision of hostel accommodation has continued to increase, from £78,382 in 2002/03 to £85,147 in 2006/07. The revised budget for 2007/08 shows a significant increase to approximately £125,340, however this is largely due to increased void costs throughout the year as a result of the reducing numbers requiring temporary accommodation. With the termination of the Poplars hostel at the end of March 2008, it is anticipated that expenditure on hostels in 2008/09 will reduce to £94,790. Staffing levels are being maintained to help provide additional support to hostel residents to participate in the choice based lettings scheme.

#### Floating support service

This is mainly although not fully funded through the Supporting People programme. In 2006/07 the total expenditure on this service was £89,531, of which £80,465 was received from SP. The grant has reduced further in 2007/08 to £75,000.

#### Lettings and choice based lettings:

These functions now form part of the housing advice and options service, and have had a positive impact on expenditure on homelessness over the last few years. The revised budget for 2007/08 is expected to be approximately £181,600 with an anticipated increase to £219,240 in 2008/09.

The choice based lettings scheme was launched in February 2008, and advertising and associated costs to provide this service will account for approximately £50,000 of the above figure.

#### Grants to external agencies

The grants provided to external agencies have had to reduce over the previous years due to the Governments decision to impose a capping limit on the district council's budgets – for 2007/08 this amounts to a total of £7,640. Details of the housing grants provided are covered in the Homelessness Review.

#### Supply of temporary and settled accommodation

##### Temporary

- Hostel accommodation – 20 units (from 2008/09 onwards)
- Leased accommodation through the Private sector leasing scheme – varying number of units let as temporary, as the scheme now also provides a settled homes option for people in need of housing.
- Non-secure tenancies within the council's own stock. These are only provided when there is no alternative temporary accommodation available or due to the specific needs of the household needing temporary accommodation.
- Referrals to accommodation providing specialist support, although no direct nomination rights.

##### Settled Accommodation to prevent homelessness

- Settled homes provided through the private sector leasing scheme.
- Accommodation secured within the private sector with the help of the rent deposit guarantee scheme.
- Nomination rights for 10 bed spaces at the YMCA in Cambridge.
- Permanent social rented accommodation (Council and Housing Association) let through the housing register and home-link scheme. It is expected that this will increase over future years as the strategic growth sites identified start to develop.
- Permanent low-cost home ownership accommodation allocated through Key Homes East.

## **5. MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE STRATEGY**

The Homelessness Strategy Review Group will meet on a 6-monthly basis and have overall responsibility for the monitoring and review of the Strategy. It is expected that some actions may evolve over the lifetime of the Strategy and any such changes will be agreed by this Group and incorporated into the Action Plan. The Action Plan will be reported to the Homelessness Strategy Review Group and to the Housing Portfolio Holder to monitor progress, and will be made available on the Council's website.

Key objectives within the Strategy are also monitored through the corporate service improvement and operational plans. The following performance indicators (national and local) are also reported through the Council's corporate Performance Indicator

Management and Monitoring System (PIMMS). The corporate monitoring system is currently being updated to the CorVu system, which will provide a more accurate and up to date picture of the council's performance.

BV 183a*	Average length of stay in Bed & Breakfast
BV 183b	Length of stay in hostel accommodation
BV 202	Rough Sleepers
BV 203*	% Change families in temporary accommodation
BV 213	Preventing homelessness
BV 214*	Repeat homelessness
SH 329	Households in temporary accommodation
SH 335	Homeless 16 to 18 yr olds where intervention worked
*This PI has been deleted for external 07/08 reporting purposes. However it has been retained as a value local PI for 07/08	

## 6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

### National

Statutory Homelessness in England: The experiences of families and 16-17 year olds, Homelessness Research Summary No. 7, DCLG March 2008  
 Sustainable Communities: Homes for All, DCLG January 2005  
 Evaluating Homelessness Prevention, DCLG December 2007  
 Key Line of Enquiry, Audit Commission October 2007  
 Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable, DCLG July 2007  
 Tackling Homelessness – The Housing Corporation Strategy, November 2006  
 Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, DCLG July 2006  
 Homelessness Prevention, a guide to good practice, DCLG 2006  
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 Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives, DCLG 2005  
 Hostels Review Toolkit 2005  
 Local Authorities' Homelessness Strategies: Evaluation & Good Practice, DCLG 2004  
 Effective Co-operation in Tackling Homelessness: Nomination Agreements and Exclusions, DCLG November 2004

### Regional

The East of England Regional Homelessness Action Plan 2006-07

### Sub Regional/Countywide

Regional Homelessness Action Plan  
 The Cambridgeshire Local Area Agreement 06-09 (LAA)  
 The Supporting People Programme  
 Cambridgeshire Disability Housing Strategy 2008-2011

### Local

Affordable Housing Programme 2008  
 Adult Mental Health Services Strategy for Housing and Related Support Services.  
 South Cambridgeshire District Council's Housing Strategy July 2007

## 7. 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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## 8. 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. Special thanks is given to all those that have participated in the Homelessness Strategy Review Group and for their continued support and to King Street Housing Society for their assistance in engaging with the private sector.

### **Attendance at Strategy Review Group meetings**

OCYPS 16+ Adviser Service

OCYPS – Cambridge & South Cambs Children’s Team

Cambridge Mediation Service

Ormiston Children & Families Trust

Circle Anglia

Sanctuary Hereward Housing

Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association

Stonham Housing Association

**Housing Association Questionnaire - Respondents**

The Papworth Trust	King Street Housing Society
Kelsey Housing Association	Sanctuary Hereward
Orbit Housing Association	Cambridge Housing Society
Circle Anglia	Suffolk Housing Society
Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association	Hundred Houses Society

**Service Providers Questionnaire - Respondents**

Cambridge Citizens Advice Bureau	Centre 33 – Advocacy & Support
Cambridge Cyrenians	John Huntingdon's Charity
Cambridge Housing Society	Office of Children & Young People's Service
Cambridge Women & Homelessness Group	Sanctuary Hereward (Hostels)
Cambridge Women's Aid	Stonham Housing Group
Cambs Psychiatric Rehabilitation Service	The Bridge
Cambs & Peterborough Mental Health Partnership Trust	King Street Housing Society Ltd.
Cambs Youth Offending Service	Whitworth House
Castle Project Housing	YMCA

**Landlord/Letting Agent Questionnaire - Respondents**

Appiedaize Property Manager	Lilicroft Lettings
Cambridge Property Practice Ltd.	St Andrews Bureau Ltd.
Cambs Property Bureau Ltd.	Stag Property Management Ltd.
Crofton Property Management Ltd.	

**Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire** - Respondents taken from a random selection of housing advice & homeless applicants

**Rough Sleeper Survey** – Parish Councils within the District