

Homelessness [DRAFT]

Homelessness and rough sleeping – the scale of the problem

In the five years between 2013/14 and 2017/18.

- *The number of homeless applications where a decision was made has risen considerably in both Councils with over 600 applications in 2017/18.*
- *The number of households accepted as homeless and in priority need has increased slightly with 270 households being accepted in 2017/18.*
- *The number of households in temporary accommodation at any one time has been reduced considerably, particularly over the last year. The number in Bed & Breakfast has fluctuated from year to year.*
- *The number of rough sleepers has tripled with 30 recorded street sleepers in 2017/18.*
- The number of households preventing from becoming homeless has risen three-fold from around 550 to almost 1500 in 2017/18.
- The number of social housing lettings available has remained constant over that period.
- The main causes of homelessness in both districts is the loss of private tenancy, eviction by friends / family and relationship breakdown.

Preventing Homelessness in Greater Cambridge

The councils have numerous approaches to help prevent homelessness including the following:

- Cambridge City's financial advice and support, and home visiting services- providing conciliation and advocacy to prevent evictions from the homes of family and friends.
- South Cambridgeshire District Council's work with Cambridge Citizens Advice Bureau to provide a money advice outreach service from the Council's offices. A Spend to Save scheme gives officers discretion to provide one-off loan solutions up to a maximum of £2,000 per applicant to prevent homelessness.
- Improved approaches to tackling domestic abuse. It is estimated that 1 in 4 women experience domestic abuse, with the number one barrier to women leaving abusive situations being access to appropriate housing. To improve the support and advice available the councils are working towards formal accreditation through the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance.¹ And CIH 'Make a Stand' pledge².

¹ Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance: <https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/>

- A successful bid for Government funding as a 'Homelessness Trailblazer' resulting in a wider partnership across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Multi-agency working to make homelessness 'the unacceptable outcome' is a key objective of the project.
- Social housing lettings policies which include priority given to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.^{3 4} However, with limited supply of social housing, improving access to the private rented sector for those at risk of homelessness, will continue to be a major priority for both councils, through a variety of initiatives.
- Supporting access to the private rented sector including payment of rent deposits.
- Cambridge City's social lettings agency - Town Hall Lettings, and South Cambridgeshire's new Shire Homes Ltd private sector leasing scheme. Both are aimed at enabling homeowners to let out their homes at an affordable rate with guaranteed rental payments.^{5 6}
- Cambridge City's Housing Benefit Plus and Housing Benefit Family Plus schemes which provide top-up payments for those whose housing benefit is insufficient to cover the rent, and offers employment advice and financial support to help people to improve their financial circumstances.
- The City's tenancy sustainment service, which provides support to residents whose tenancies may be at risk due to such issues as mental ill health, anti-social behaviour, and/or history of homelessness
- Encouraging the use of empty homes for use by homeless households including via Town Hall Lettings.⁷ South Cambridgeshire District have invested around £2million since 2012 on purchasing 15 empty homes to utilise as temporary accommodation.
- Both councils provide grant aid to a number of organisations that offer housing advice and other support to homeless and potentially homeless households.

Temporary and emergency accommodation

- Both Councils use temporary and emergency accommodation, which sometimes includes bed and breakfast. The City Council in particular is increasingly having to look for housing outside the district to be able to meet its statutory requirements around rehousing homeless households. This is far from ideal for those wanting to remain close to family, schools, existing social and support networks, but the shortage of housing available locally which is affordable to those on low incomes often leaves the Council with little choice. For South Cambridgeshire, whilst it has managed to accommodate homeless households mostly

² <http://www.cih.org/makeastand>

³ SCDC Lettings policy: <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Lettings%20Policy.pdf>

⁴ CCC Lettings policy: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/default/files/lettings-policy.pdf>

⁵ SCDC Shire Homes web page: <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/ShireHomes>

⁶ CCC Town Hall Lettings web page: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/town-hall-lettings>

⁷ CCC Empty homes web page: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/empty-homes>

within the District, given its rurality it is often difficult to find accommodation close to support networks, etc.

- Where households require rehousing on a temporary basis, use of temporary, Bed and Breakfast (B&B) and other emergency accommodation for households to whom the councils owe a statutory interim or permanent duty, is expensive - and for households it is far from ideal. Where households are reliant on housing benefit, the councils can only recover about one third of the cost of B&B provision. In addition, because of the difficulty in securing B&B from hoteliers, homeless households in Cambridge often have to be placed in B&B outside of Cambridge. This is also the case occasionally for South Cambridgeshire, although less so here because of the lower number of placements.
- Both councils' use of Bed & Breakfast has been reduced over recent years, with the councils maintaining a supply of hostel and other temporary accommodation for households awaiting a homelessness decision or waiting for permanent accommodation. This is kept under regular review to ensure that it continues to meet local needs.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2018

Duties under the new Act include:

- an enhanced prevention duty extending the period during which a household is threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days, meaning that housing authorities are required to work with people to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage; and
- a new duty for housing authorities in relation to those who are already homeless, requiring them to support households for 56 days to relieve their homelessness by helping them to secure accommodation.

With a good track record around homelessness prevention, both councils welcome the principles of the Act. However, together with housing authorities nationally, we have concerns about the increase in capacity and resources likely to be required to successfully implement the Act's requirements.

A workshop held with housing advice & homelessness officers from both local authorities, in developing this Strategy in the context of the new Act, identified three key areas of concern:

- The need to increase the supply of accommodation that is genuinely affordable and the growing gap in provision of sub market and other affordable private rented sector accommodation.
- The challenges presented by both councils needing to implement the requirements of the new Act and ensure compliance with the new duties and responsibilities, at a time of local government spending pressures and the need to make significant financial savings.
- Potential impact on lettings through Home-Link following the implementation of the Act. A further review of the lettings policy is likely to be required once the implications become clearer.

Single homelessness & rough sleeping

Single homelessness is on the rise across Greater Cambridge, with rough sleeping an increasing problem in Cambridge. Both councils are involved in a number of initiatives to help prevent single people from becoming homeless:

- Cambridge City Council's Single Homelessness service helps single people with low support needs who are threatened with homelessness to find somewhere to live and to settle into their new home, with access to private sector housing available through the council's social lettings agency, Town Hall Lettings.
- Initiatives to support those with mental health problems – including an Accommodation Forum for specialist mental health accommodation. We also work with the Riverside Floating Support service and the Chronically Excluded Adults service to find suitable support for those who need it.
- In Cambridge a 'training flats' model is used to provide housing for rough sleepers with complex needs who have a history of repeat homelessness and failure to progress through the hostel and established supported housing pathways. This offers accommodation together with training on how to manage a tenancy; a type of 'Housing First' approach.
- A dual diagnosis street outreach service is also being piloted in Cambridge, to support rough sleepers with mental health problems who also have drug or alcohol dependency issues.

The City Council has, over recent years, been shifting focus from provision of short term accommodation for single people towards supporting partner agencies in providing one to one support and reablement services, including development of skills and employment.

Ex-offenders being discharged from prison are one of the groups particularly at risk of becoming homeless. They may end up 'sofa-surfing' (staying with friends/ relatives), therefore not showing up in official homelessness figures, and end up sleeping rough further down the line. We need to improve our understanding of this issue and work with partners to improve our approach to preventing homelessness amongst ex-offenders.

We know that some rough sleepers engage in street based anti-social behaviour and begging. In addition we know that not all rough sleepers are homeless but already have tenancies, and such behaviours can put individuals' tenancies at risk. The Cambridge Street Aid initiative aims to discourage the direct giving of financial donations to people on the streets, instead enabling them to donate through the scheme. Donations are used to provide grants to individuals to help them to get back on their feet.

See South Cambridgeshire District Council's Homelessness Strategy 2018 and Cambridge City Council's Homelessness and Single Homelessness & Rough Sleeping action plans for more detail and for further actions being taken forward.⁸

⁸ Cambridge City Council Homelessness Strategy Action Plan:
<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/6092/homelessness-strategy-action-plan.pdf>