



## Homelessness Strategy 2018 – 2023

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The Homelessness Review 2018 / 2023

# South Cambridgeshire District Council

## Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023

### 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 2013 and is now due for renewal. During the life of the 2013 – 2018 strategy, the emphasis was on the provision of temporary accommodation and on-going homelessness prevention. The 2018 Homelessness review for South Cambridgeshire District Council has shown:

Profile of Homelessness
Levels of homelessness are increasing with a 62% increase in homeless approaches between 2012 / 2013 and 2017 / 2018 and a 55% increase in acceptances between 2012 / 2013 and 2017 / 2018.
The highest priority group for homeless acceptances is households that include dependent children, followed by first pregnancy and those who are vulnerable due to mental health.
The highest age category of homeless acceptances are those aged between 25 – 44 who make up around 50% of all homeless applications.
The main cause of homelessness is now termination of assured shorthold tenancy (AST) which accounts for a third of all homeless acceptances.
South Cambridgeshire does not have a specific problem with rough sleeping and levels remain low. It is unlikely that this will become a problem in the future since rough sleepers tend to migrate to Cambridge City where there are support services / facilities. Advice and assistance is provided to rough sleepers in South Cambridgeshire, but due to the low numbers this does not form a key issue for the strategy.
7.8% of homeless applicants accepted were from black and minority ethnic (BME) households in 2016 / 2017, compared to 6.7% of the population as a whole.
14% of homeless acceptances have been from foreign nationals on average over the past five years with the highest nationality represented being Polish.
Future homelessness – based on current trends, homeless acceptances are expected to rise significantly with a potential worse-case scenario of a 7-fold increase in case load.

The Homeless Reduction Act came into force from 3 April 2018 and increases the duties owed by the Council.
<b>Existing Housing &amp; Support</b>
The number of households in temporary accommodation has increased by 9% over the last 6 years.
Use of bed & breakfast however has reduced considerably with only £22,606 spent on this type of temporary accommodation in 2017 / 2018 compared with £99,767 in 2012 / 2013.
Redevelopment of the existing hostel site in Waterbeach has resulted in a better quality of living standards and an increase in units from 16 to 30 overall.
Private rented accommodation in the district is expensive and unaffordable to many households when comparing the local housing allowance (LHA) with median rents.
Home ownership is also unaffordable for many households with lower quartile figure comparisons showing house prices to be 11.1 times higher than income.
<b>Prevention Activities</b>
Homeless prevention has reduced since 2014 / 2015 largely due to the difficulties of accessing affordable private rent, although figures have increased in 2017 / 2018.
Most homeless prevention is achieved through securing alternative accommodation rather than maintaining current homes, reflecting the unaffordability of current accommodation.
However, private rent assistance (which includes some form of financial assistance from the Council) remains the highest successful intervention to prevent homelessness.
Following a review of the Private Sector Leasing (PSL) scheme, an in-house scheme via a new council owned company has been set up.
The County-wide Trailblazer project is working to increase homeless prevention further through building stronger links between agencies and making homelessness the unacceptable outcome.

This document will replace the 2013 / 2018 Homelessness Strategy and is based on the Homelessness Review 2018, which is at Appendix 1, and should be read in conjunction with this strategy. An action plan will accompany the strategy. The Strategy sits within the context of the wider draft Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy due to be published in 2018.

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

In developing the Homelessness Strategy, key stakeholders were consulted and the actions identified complement the County-wide Trailblazer project that South Cambridgeshire District Council are a part of. The continued support of partnerships and involvement will be crucial to the success of this Strategy's implementation.

## 2. National and Local Policy

### 2.1 National:

#### Welfare reforms

The implementation of a major national programme of welfare reforms is well under way. Key aims are to cut the overall welfare bill and encourage people into work.

A key driver of the welfare changes is to make it financially worthwhile for people to take on paid employment rather than claim benefits. This combined with advice and support around seeking employment, education and / or training, should lead to improved opportunities for some people who would previously have been caught in the benefit trap.

However, with severe cuts to the national welfare budget happening at the same time, many claimants are finding their benefits reduced, and struggling to make ends meet, including those who are already in work. In South Cambridgeshire there are approximately 65 households subject to the benefit cap with an average weekly restriction of £49.86 (the highest being £155 per week).

Universal Credit was introduced across the district in October 2018. This replaces six other benefits, including housing benefit, and is provided in a single monthly payment. Nationally the risk of Universal Credit claimants falling into rent arrears has been found to be high, increasing the risk of homelessness as well as increasing the financial risk to the Council in respect of its role as a landlord.

#### Social Housing Policy reforms

A range of housing policy reforms were announced in 2015 – 2016. These included: the annual high value asset levy payable by stock holding local authorities; the phasing out of lifetime tenancies for council tenants and extension of the Right to Buy to Housing Association tenants. However, other than a 1% annual rent cut for social housing tenants, and a review of social housing rent policy, it is now unclear the extent to which the range of social housing policy reforms announced during 2015 – 2016 will be implemented. In the meantime, more positive proposals for a green paper on a national review of social housing have been announced, although timescales are unclear.

Rent cuts have had a significant impact on the council's Housing Revenue Account; and the higher value asset levy – if implemented - would have significant financial implications for the council, reducing the amount available for providing services to tenants and for investing in new homes.

## Funding of supported housing

The Government recently consulted on the future funding for supported housing and the decision, in response to this, to continue payment of housing costs through housing benefit for supported housing is welcome. This includes all forms of supported housing including short term accommodation for those faced with homelessness.

Cambridgeshire County Council are currently undertaking a review of Housing Related Support. Whilst it is recognised that floating support type services provide valuable support to many residents in independent accommodation, there is also a need to ensure adequate provision of supported accommodation for the most vulnerable clients.

## Homeless Reduction Act

The main national policy change relating to homelessness has been around the passing of the Homeless Reduction Act. The Homeless Reduction Act brings major changes to the homeless legislation and with it, significant resource implications for the Council. The Act, which emanated from a Private Members Bill and received Royal Assent in April 2017 came into effect from April 2018.

The Homeless Reduction Act places new responsibilities on local authorities to provide advice and assistance to prevent and relieve homelessness, regardless of priority need. It is expected that the impact of the act will be to increase the number of customers approaching the Council for assistance. In addition, the Act will place significant additional administrative burdens on local authorities, particularly in relation to the level of detail required in producing and monitoring Personal Housing Plans. Furthermore, there are potentially 10 – 15 stages in the new process where the local authority is required to issue a written decision and where these decisions are all subject to review.

The main changes that the act will bring are:

- Applicants will be treated as being threatened with homelessness within 56 days (previously 28).
- Duty to prevent homelessness.
- Duty to relieve homelessness.
- Duty to complete a needs assessment and personal housing plan and keep these under review.
- Increase in decisions that can be reviewed, including decisions to end the prevention and relief duties and actions specified in the personal housing plan.
- A requirement on the applicant to co-operate with the actions to prevent and relieve homelessness.
- A duty on other public sector bodies to refer cases of potential homelessness to the housing authority (delayed until October 2018).

Duty to refer:

The following public authorities are under the duty to refer:

- Prisons
- Youth offending institutions
- Secure training centres
- Secure colleges
- Youth offending teams
- Probation services
- Job centre plus
- Social services authorities
- Emergency departments
- Urgent treatment centres
- Hospitals in their function of providing in patient care

To refer the referring agency must have the client's consent. Local procedures are available on the Council's website.

## 2.2 Local:

### Trailblazer project

In 2016, a range of partners across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough came together to bid for "homeless trailblazer" funding. The purpose of the funding was to enable local authorities and partner agencies to develop and test new ways of working in order to prepare for the new duties contained in the Homeless Reduction Act. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough bid was able to secure nearly £750,000 of funding as a result. Our vision is that "by empowering all public facing staff to identify the risk of homelessness and work together to prevent it, we make homelessness the 'unacceptable outcome'".

The project includes:

#### **Homeless prevention**

The homelessness prevention team is working with a wide range of local teams across a range of services to work better together, to reduce homelessness. They have been helping staff in partner agencies to identify the early warning signs of homelessness and ways to prevent it. The team has built up good working relationships to deliver a better service by linking agencies up. In addition, pieces of focused multi agency work are also underway to develop and improve pathways for particularly vulnerable groups, such as high risk offenders.

### **The landlord rent solution service**

The rent solution service offers free specialist help and advice to agents, landlords and tenants to help maintain tenancies and try to help resolve tenancy problems that may otherwise lead to evictions.

### **New business development**

Two new business development officers will develop schemes that facilitate access into good quality, affordable and suitable private rented homes. The aim is to increase supply of affordable housing options for households in need, co-operating with existing offers and exploring new opportunities.

### **Expanded Web Resources**

Debt advice and resolving arrears are key to homelessness prevention. We will support the Making Money Count (MMC) web resource and we will expand our web resource to help residents and partner agencies with more information around homelessness and build better inter-agency knowledge.

## Housing Strategy

Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District Councils are working together to produce a joint Housing Strategy (the Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy) promoting healthy, sustainable, affordable homes for all. It was agreed to undertake a joint strategy given the affordability challenges facing both Councils and the interdependencies of the two areas in terms of supporting sustainable economic growth. They are also the only authorities in the Cambridge housing sub-region to have retained their own housing stock.

Both councils have a central role to play in ensuring that the residents of Greater Cambridge can live settled lives, in strong and stable communities, and in homes that are well managed and maintained.

Although there are clearly differences between the two authorities demographically, and in terms of tenures and types of housing, urban and rural communities, etc. both districts face many of the same issues, including high housing costs, management and maintenance of Council rented homes, ensuring safe and well managed homes in the private rented sector and promoting health and wellbeing, particularly for vulnerable and elderly residents in the district.

The strategy also has a focus on tackling poverty and social exclusion including the impact of welfare reforms and ensuring appropriate forms of help and assistance are available to help tackle poverty and isolation.

As well as considering the needs of existing residents, the joint Housing Strategy addresses growth planned for Greater Cambridge. To accommodate future growth several areas have been identified for development within and on the edge of Cambridge, as well as key strategic



sites for new towns. South Cambridgeshire district will aim to achieve 40% affordable homes on all sites of 10 or more dwellings.

#### Lettings policy

The lettings policy was amended in April 2013 to take account of the welfare reforms and in particular the changes to LHA including new assessments of overcrowding based on the LHA regulations but with higher priority awarded. The LHA guidelines also form the basis of the property size allocations.

Further minor amendments were made in February 2018 to ensure compatibility with the Homeless Reduction Act. This will be monitored and reviewed again to ensure the policy continues to assist those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness appropriately.

The lettings policy provides priority for homeless households including the following housing need reasons:

Accepted as statutorily homeless – Band A

Homeless prevention or relief – Band B

Rough sleeping – Band B

Other homelessness (including non-priority and intentionally homeless households) – Band C

#### Tenancy Strategy

The Localism Act 2011 placed a duty on the local housing authority to prepare and publish a Tenancy Strategy. South Cambridgeshire's Tenancy Strategy was published in October 2012. This sets out the broad objectives to which registered providers should have due regard in formulating their Tenancy Policy, which must include –

- a) the kinds of tenancies they grant,
- b) the circumstances in which they will grant a tenancy of a particular kind
- c) where they grant tenancies for a certain term, the length of the terms, and
- d) the circumstances in which they will grant a further tenancy on the coming to an end of an existing tenancy

#### **Use of Fixed Term / Flexible Tenancies (Social Rents and Affordable Rents)**

The Council supports the use of fixed term / flexible tenancies for the primary purpose of making best use of existing stock, especially in tackling under-occupation in the longer term or making best use of adapted properties, or in some cases where households are able to secure alternative appropriate housing at the end of their initial tenancy.

However, this flexibility needs to be balanced against the need to ensure households have stability and security so that they feel part of and contribute to the community. The Council would also expect that the use of fixed term / flexible tenancies would not see an increase to the risk of homelessness.

## **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. We would therefore encourage there to be a presumption for renewal of tenancy in most circumstances. Where this is not the case, for example where a household's circumstances have changed to the extent that they can access the private market, it is expected that appropriate advice and support will be given to enable the household to move to suitable and appropriate accommodation that is both affordable (i.e. housing costs amount to no more than a third of gross household income) and available (i.e. within the household's locality for employment, school, family support, etc.).

### **Sub Regional Homeless Group**

The Sub Regional Homeless Group consists of housing advice and homelessness leads from Cambridgeshire, Peterborough and West Suffolk, who work together on shared priorities and actions to help maximise good practice, prevent homelessness and address housing need across the sub region. From this joint initiatives are developed, which are not only cost effective, but provide consistency across the area to aid closer working with partner agencies. The main focus of the Sub-Regional Homeless group work is currently supporting the Trailblazer project, however, other joint initiatives include joint working around homeless issues affecting the Home-Link choice based lettings scheme, a single homeless service and joint protocols.

### **Cambridge Sub Regional Housing Board (CRHB)**

CRHB is a senior officer group of local authorities and partner agencies which meets regularly to work collaboratively on strategic housing issues. CRHB works to share learning and experiences across our housing market area on four priority areas:

- New homes
- Homes for wellbeing
- Existing homes
- Housing need & homelessness

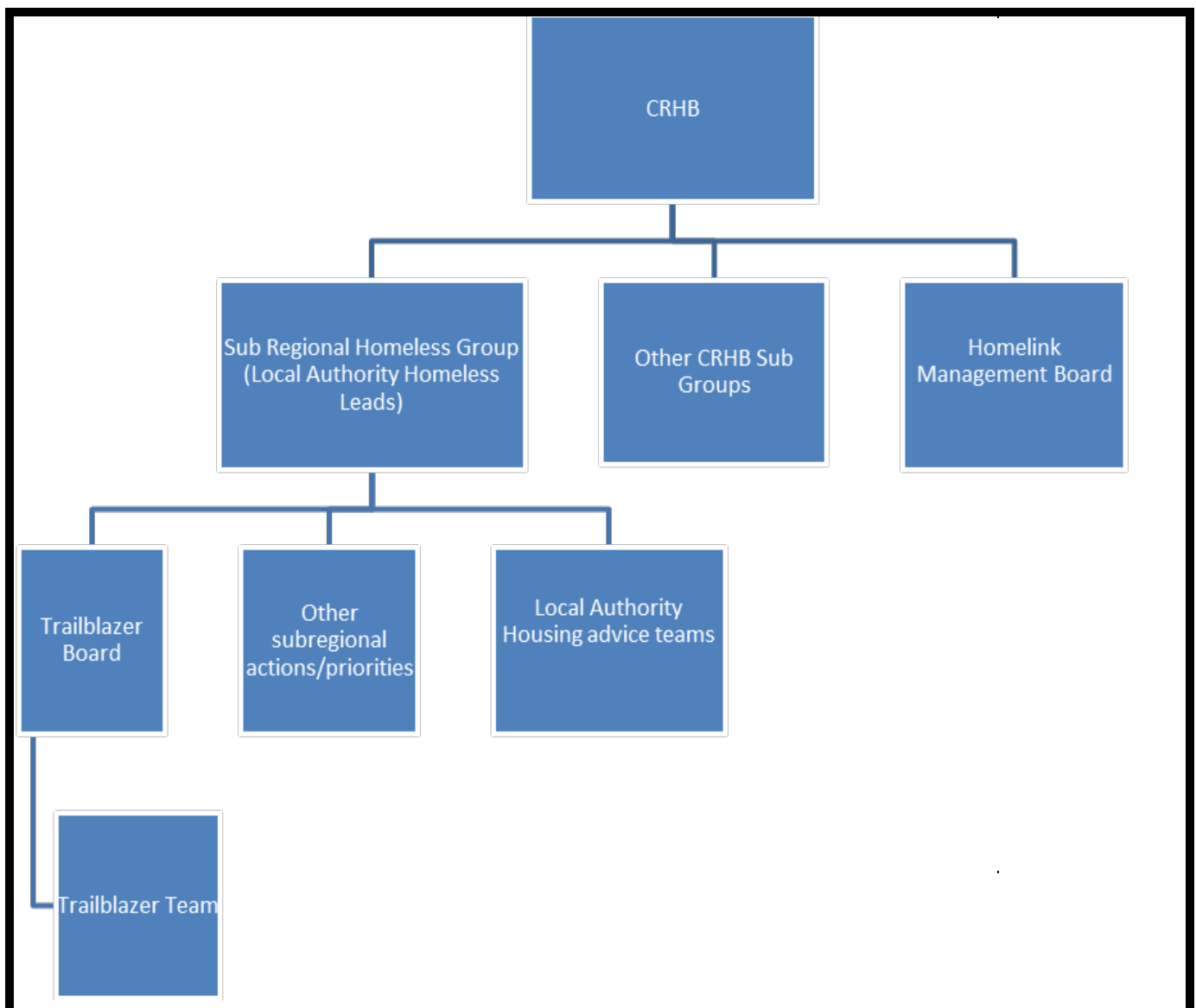
Overall, CRHB aims to help

- support the most vulnerable in our society.
- build and promote partnerships which help tackle the area's most pressing housing needs.
- make best use of the resources at our disposal and reduce inefficiencies.

Through its meetings and work plan, the Board will

- Respond to key consultation documents on housing and related issues.
- Develop and deliver an annual work programme, based on agreed priorities.
- Identify opportunities for joint working and exchange of good practice between agencies including joint working and joint commissioning of projects.
- Set up and support groups which address priority areas, enabling links back to CRHB, and review the impact and relevance of such groups periodically.

A number of related sub-groups report to CRHB, including the Home-link Management Board and the Sub Regional Homeless Group which consists of the Homelessness / Housing Advice Lead Officers for Cambridgeshire, Peterborough and West Suffolk. All sub boards report back to CRHB throughout the year. Structure of local groups reporting into CRHB:



### 3. Outcome of the Homelessness Review

The Homelessness Review that supplements the Homelessness Strategy, and can be found at Appendix 1, 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 trends similar to the national homelessness picture. Homelessness is increasing, with loss of AST being the main cause of homelessness. 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 including the introduction of Universal Credit in the district along with new responsibilities under the Homeless Reduction Act are likely to have a significant impact on the demand for the housing advice and homelessness services.

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

- Working closer with partner agencies to prevent homelessness.
- New private rent initiatives.
- Access to information.
- Access to accommodation and support.

## 4. Priorities and Objectives

### 4.1 Corporate Priorities

- We will support our communities to remain in good health whilst continuing to protect the natural and built environment

#### Relevant Council Actions:

- Adopt a new Local Plan that will guide where and how new jobs, homes and facilities will be delivered in the area
- Put more resource into preventing people becoming homeless
- Manage the introduction of Universal Credit across the district
- Secure the delivery of a wide range of housing to meet the needs of existing and future communities

#### Relevant Council Actions:

- Work with the Combined Authority as they begin to build affordable homes as part of the £100 million housing programme
- Finish building and rent out more affordable Council homes
- Work closely with developers so they can get on site more quickly to deliver high quality new homes where they are needed
- Assess and determine planning applications for new houses and facilities at major growth sites, such as Northstowe
- Make sure local communities are actively involved in how major housing sites are being developed
- Continue marketing of council owned land made available for self-build.
- Fund and help set up community groups to develop local affordable housing schemes
- Provide more help and advice for parish councils so they can shape and influence the design of new **homes** in their villages

At a corporate level, the Council recognises the need to invest in homelessness prevention services. Increasing homelessness is high on the Council's risk register and additional resources have been supported corporately, to both increase the staffing levels to meet the demands of the Homeless Reduction Act, as well as direct homeless prevention solutions such as the Shire Homes Lettings private sector leasing scheme.

## 4.2 Homeless strategy priorities

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. Partnership working is recognised as central to achieving the prevention, accommodation and support actions. It is also recognised that new ideas and ways of working will play an important role in delivery of the actions. The joint bid for Trailblazer funding is just one example of partnership working in which costs and expertise have been shared and new ways of working introduced. Similarly, throughout the life of the strategy, developing partnerships and exploring opportunities to maximise resources and expertise will continue to be considered and assessed as opportunities arise.

### **Working closer with partner agencies to prevent homelessness:**

This is a priority of the Trailblazer project, with many agencies signing up to the commitment to make homelessness the unacceptable outcome. During the course of this next homelessness strategy we will need to learn from this project to ensure we can take this ethos forward. In addition, the Homeless Reduction Act places duties on a number of public services to refer those at risk of homelessness to the local housing authority. The Homelessness Review shows that we are continuing to see many people with complex needs, where additional support to manage their home will be essential.

Key actions include:

- Responsibility on all agencies to help prevent homelessness, including homeless prevention awareness, referral systems, housing pathways and protocols.
- Increase prevention upstream which enable people to remain in their current homes.
- Increased casework with all homeless applicants (including non-priority homeless applicants), identifying key actions through housing plans.
- Help staff within partner agencies to identify early warning signs of homelessness and find new ways to prevent it including staff training, evaluation of Trailblazer project and identifying ways of continuing joint working, including a think family approach.
- Work with public bodies under their duties to refer clients at risk of homelessness.

### **New private rent initiatives:**

Ending of an assured shorthold tenancy is the Council's main cause of homelessness and there is a severe lack of affordable accommodation in the private sector. Social rented accommodation is unable to keep pace with demand and therefore it is imperative that we look at solutions within the private sector that enable families and vulnerable people to find decent, affordable homes where they feel safe and secure.

Key actions include:

- Increase supply of private rented properties through the Shire Homes Lettings private sector leasing scheme.
- Evaluate the success of the landlord and rent solution service (Trailblazer project) and how the service or learning from the service can be taken forward following the Trailblazer project.
- Evaluate the success of the new business development officers and methods to increase access to private rented sector (Trailblazer project), including access through existing schemes and one-off solutions using a spend to save approach.
- Exploring opportunities for Build to Rent Schemes on the larger strategic sites in South Cambridgeshire as part of the Council's affordable housing enabling role.
- Review of rent deposit guarantee scheme.
- Utilising discretionary housing payments (DHP) specifically for homeless prevention.
- Explore opportunities for further work with Ermine Street Housing in their capacity as a Council owned company and landlord.

### **Access to information**

This has been a priority of the Trailblazer project. South Cambridgeshire District Council will both benefit from and expand on this work in order to provide residents of the district with information and advice that can help them to resolve their housing difficulties and / or that they can access at any time via the internet.

Key actions include:

- Update and review written and website information covering advice on rights and responsibilities to help residents prevent homelessness from their current accommodation.
- Update and review written and website information covering advice on other housing options available.
- Better advice and information for partner agencies including through the evaluation of the Trailblazer project.
- Targeting advice for specific groups, such as single people or those renting privately.

### **Access to accommodation and support**

Affordability is a severe problem in South Cambridgeshire and access to affordable and decent accommodation is crucial to meeting housing need. Homelessness has been increasing over recent years, and this is expected to continue. Solutions will therefore be required that prevent homelessness, provide temporary accommodation for households where prevention has not been possible or provide longer term social rented homes.

Key actions include:

- Increase supply of affordable accommodation (including private rent and appropriate levels of social rent), through new build programme, private sector leasing and access via other private rent incentives.
- Review levels of temporary accommodation and the need for additional units, by monitoring hostel vacancies and the use of B&B and exploring opportunities for new temporary accommodation provision.
- Continue to work with the City and contribute to the Single Homeless Service and identify other ways to meet the housing needs of single people.
- Monitor impact of the Homeless Reduction Act.
- Enable existing and potential tenants to access appropriate support to enable them to maintain their accommodation, including floating support, visiting support, Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) money advice service and discretionary housing payments.
- Increasing the number of properties under management by Shire Homes Lettings private sector leasing scheme.
- Managing Universal Credit roll out in South Cambs, including working with the housing benefit team to support applicants.
- Work with Housing Services and monitor impact of fixed term tenancies coming to an end.
- Ensure vulnerable applicants are referred to appropriate supported accommodation that meets their need, monitoring access to this supported housing as well as unmet need to identify ongoing gaps in provision and continue to engage with the County on their review of Housing Related Support.
- Review lettings policy in light of impact of Homeless Reduction Act responsibilities and duties.

## 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 lead member for Housing 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. The three areas of performance monitored are:

- Preventing Homelessness
- Numbers in temporary accommodation
- B&B spend



## 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.