



To: Executive Councillor for Housing: Councillor Kevin Price
Report by: Tom Bremner, Head of Housing
Relevant scrutiny committee: Housing 21/6/2016 Scrutiny Committee
Wards affected: Abbey Arbury Castle Cherry Hinton Coleridge East Chesterton King's Hedges Market Newnham Petersfield Queen Edith's Romsey Trumpington West Chesterton

HOMELESSNESS AND STRATEGIC APPROACH TO HOMELESSNESS IN CAMBRIDGE CITY

Key Decision

1. Executive summary

This report outlines the extent of homelessness pressure in Cambridge, set within a national context of rising numbers of homeless households. The report distinguishes between households where the council has a statutory duty under part 7 of the 1996 Housing Act (as amended) and those households to whom the council has no duty. Despite the distinction, the Council commits considerable resources into tackling and preventing homelessness for all of those unfortunate enough to be affected by it.

The report also reflects on the Council's recent performance in attempting to address homelessness in Cambridge and will provide Members with a summary of strategic measures that have been employed or have been identified to tackle the issue.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended:

- 1) To note the information on homelessness pressure and service performance as outlined in this report
- 2) To approve the homelessness strategy action plan as detailed at appendix 1

3. Background

- 3.1 Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) outlines local authority duties to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The Act requires authorities to conduct inquiries to determine an applicant's eligibility for assistance, homelessness, 'priority need', whether the homelessness is intentional or unintentional and local connection to the district. The authority must notify the applicant of the decision following inquiries and provide accommodation where applicable
- 3.2 While the Council does not have a statutory duty to single homeless people, where they are not in 'priority need' as defined in the Act, it has a strong tradition of collaborative working with partner agencies in the City to tackle single homelessness and rough sleeping and has increased resource in this area through the inception of the single homelessness service, supported by the Council's social lettings agency, *Town Hall Lettings*. Previous reports have been brought to committee on the single homelessness service at <http://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/documents/g2823/Public%20reports%20pack%2013th-Jan-2016%2017.30%20Housing%20Scrutiny%20Committee.pdf?T=10> (p203) and *Town Hall Lettings* at <http://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/documents/g2823/Public%20reports%20pack%2013th-Jan-2016%2017.30%20Housing%20Scrutiny%20Committee.pdf?T=10> (p163)
- 3.3 Both statutory and non-statutory homelessness pressure has risen significantly in recent times. Rough sleeping figures have been revealing sharp rises in the city since November 2015 and these high figures have remained ever since. A briefing on rough sleeping and measures identified to address the issue was provided for the Full Council meeting in April and is attached at appendix 2.
- 3.4 The number of homeless applications (whereby the Council formally assesses whether a household is owed a homelessness duty) has increased significantly over a two year period as the statistics below demonstrate – further detail on the profile of these applicants can be found at appendix 3:

Year	Number of applications	Number of acceptances
2012-13	169	124
2013-14	186	121
2014-15	268	146
2015-16	419	172

- 3.5 However, as the table above demonstrates, the rise in the number of homelessness acceptances has risen less dramatically. This reflects a change in working practices following a number of Local Government Ombudsman decisions against local authorities for not taking homeless applications. It is also reasonable to conclude that homelessness is rising amongst households to whom the Council does not owe a statutory duty – this assertion is also supported by the recent sharp rises in the number of rough sleepers in Cambridge City from 135 individuals in 2014-15 to 152 in 2015-16 – see appendix 2.
- 3.6 The acceptance figures for Cambridge still show an increase of 21% between 2013/14 and 2014/15 and 18% between 2014/15 and 2015/16. By comparison, national figures show an average increase of 5% over the first three quarters of 2015-16. Quarter 4 figures have not yet been published by the Government. National homelessness acceptances have been rising steadily since 2009/10. Further detail can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics#statutory-homelessness>
- 3.7 The Council also has a duty to ensure that advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness are available free of charge to any person in its district
- 3.8. The Council is in the process of reviewing its Housing Strategy but the principles outlined in the homelessness, housing advice and housing options chapter with the 2012-15 Housing Strategy are to:
- Prevent homelessness and rough sleeping
 - Minimise use of temporary accommodation and maximise use of longer term housing solutions
 - Enable people to make informed choices about their housing
 - Promote sustained and settled lifestyles and minimise social exclusion

4. Service Performance

- 4.1 **Homelessness prevention and relief** – according to government guidelines for the submission of quarterly local authority homelessness data returns, a homelessness prevention counts as an intervention by the local authority or funded partner agency, which can reasonably be expected to last for at least 6 months. Homelessness relief occurs when an authority has been unable to prevent homelessness, but helps someone to secure accommodation, even though the authority is under no statutory obligation to do so.
- 4.2 In 2015-16 the Council and its Cambridge City based partner agencies (Jimmy's Cambridge, Centre 33, the street outreach team and the Citizen's Advice Bureau), prevented or relieved homelessness in 787 cases. This compares to 470 cases prevented or relieved in 2014-15. This is a further reflection of the increased pressure on services but also highlights the intensity of effort that is expended by the Council and its partners to ensure that homelessness has not increased by an even greater degree. These measures also avert the potential need to provide temporary accommodation and the considerable concomitant costs involved.
- 4.3 **Rough sleeping** - increases in recent months have raised weekly snapshot figures to levels of rough sleeping to the highest point in over a decade in Cambridge City. There is evidence that these numbers include a number of longer term, entrenched rough sleepers because the total number of individuals sleeping rough across 2015-16, while a matter for concern (a 12.6% increase), reflects a less acute rise than numbers found on the weekly counts. More detail about the methodology for counting the number of rough sleepers and performance against targets can be found at appendix 2. The table below shows the cities of Oxford and Brighton as comparators to Cambridge. They are all outside London but are characterised by high property prices and have traditionally experienced high rough sleeping pressure. Data for all local authority districts can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics#rough-sleeping>

City	Average house prices in 2015*	Number of households in 2015 ('000s)	Autumn 2014 rough sleeping count	Autumn 2015 count	2015 rough sleeping rate per 1000 households
Oxford	£473,854	56.2	26	39	0.69
Brighton	£438,628	126	41	78	0.62
Cambridge	£481,527	47.5	10	18	0.38

* source: Right Move

4.4 **Minimising the use of temporary accommodation** – although this objective applies to both statutory and non-statutory homelessness, the costs to the Council of temporary accommodation for homeless households to whom the Council owes an interim or full housing duty is significant. If all of the Council's temporary accommodation is full the Council is compelled to rely on bed and breakfast accommodation to discharge its duties. Department of Work and Pensions regulations mean that, for households reliant on housing benefit, the Council can only recover about one third of the gross costs of bed and breakfast provision. Therefore, the Council has been pursuing measures to reduce stays in temporary accommodation and reduce the reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation as a form of emergency provision.

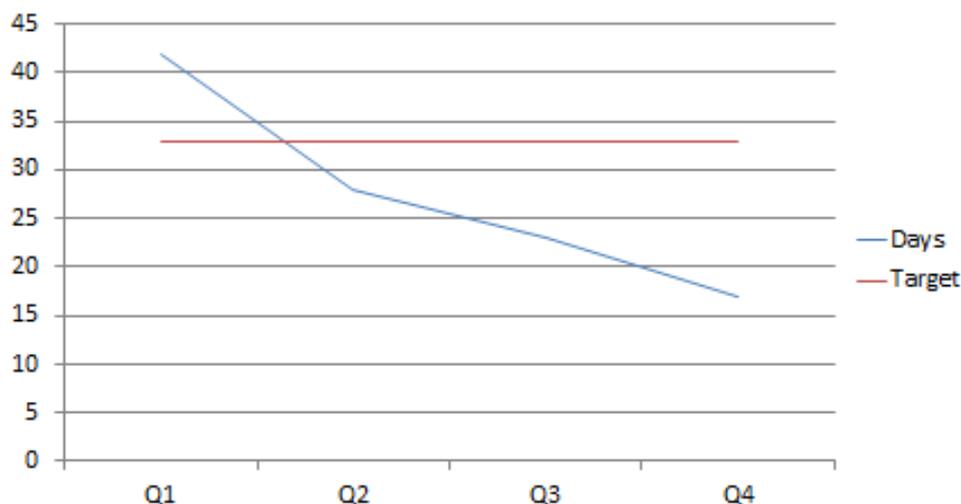
4.5 The initiatives employed to achieve Council objectives in this area are:

1) Improving homelessness decision times

This has been the subject of considerable focus within the Housing Advice Service and significant progress has been made in 2015-16. The recommended target for completing homelessness investigations and issuing a decision is 33 working days (as cited in the Homelessness Code of Guidance). Average decision times in 2013-14 were 42 working days, in 2014-15 they stood at 45 working days, but in 2015-16 average decision times were reduced to an average of 26 working days across the year. The percentage of homelessness cases completed within 33 working days went up from 56% in 2014-15 to 74% in 2015-16. The reduction in the time it

takes to make homeless decisions has a direct impact on lengths of stay in temporary accommodation.

Homeless Decision Times



2) Direct lets to homeless households

The Council has recently revised its Lettings Policy and the changes came into force from 1st April 2016. One of the changes, which is relevant to minimising stays in temporary accommodation, is that when the Council accepts a full homelessness duty to an applicant, a direct let is made at this point. The previous policy allowed for a three month period of bidding before a direct let was made. Although the policy only came into effect last month the Council has been working to put this in to practice with customers on a consensual basis since last Autumn when the policy was first approved by this committee.

3) Standardisation of legal agreements for temporary accommodation

Until recently the Council has used both tenancy and licence agreements for applicants occupying temporary accommodation. The type of accommodation would determine the type of agreement offered. This meant that, where the Council had made an adverse homeless decision and a tenancy agreement existed, it was necessary, in some cases, to take action through the courts to evict applicants who failed to leave the accommodation once the council had discharged its interim homelessness duty. This can also apply to cases where the Council has accepted the full homelessness duty but the applicant has rejected a

'reasonable' offer of accommodation. However, in the light of a Supreme Court decision on *R v Newham LBC & Lewisham LBC 2014*, which ruled that applicants are not entitled to a court order when in temporary accommodation provided by the Council to discharge a homelessness duty, this has allowed the Council to offer licences to all those occupying temporary accommodation. In doing so, this provides a consistent approach to all and reduces cost to the Council.

4) Increasing temporary accommodation stock

Although this measure does not reduce stays in temporary accommodation, it does mean that bed and breakfast usage is minimised and, therefore, the overall cost to the Council is reduced. At the start of 2015-16 the Council had 86 units of temporary accommodation. This increased to 97 by September 2015 and now stands at 94. In quarter 1 of 2015-16 emergency accommodation, including bed and breakfast provision, had a net cost to the Council of £81,408. In the following three quarters the total net costs for emergency provision dropped to £41,139. Further work will be done throughout 2016-17 to assess the net financial benefit of holding a surfeit of temporary accommodation to keep bed and breakfast usage to minimal levels. The average number of households in bed and breakfast accommodation, based on a snapshot taken at the end of each quarter in 2015-16, is 3. This is set in the context of 419 homeless applications across 2015-16.

4.6 Enabling people to make informed choices about their housing

The Council coordinates a sub-regional single homelessness service, which is supported by the Council's social lettings agency *Town Hall Lettings*. Originally, this involved 7 other local authority partners throughout Cambridgeshire and West Suffolk. From 1st April 2016 the partners are confined to South Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire District Councils. Since its inception in October 2013 the single homelessness service has provided housing for 191 Cambridge City referrals (83 of these were made in 2015-16). This service has greatly improved the range of housing options for single homeless people, covering private rented shared housing, an employment and training-focused adult foyer, a supported lodgings scheme, direct placements with Registered Providers and support to enter self-contained private rented accommodation with rental deposits and guarantees.

5. Homelessness Strategy

- 5.1 The Council no longer produces a separate Homelessness Strategy but, instead, devotes a chapter to homelessness, housing advice and housing options within its Housing Strategy.

- 5.2 The Housing Strategy is currently being reviewed but has been delayed to give the Council the opportunity to evaluate a series of key policy changes and announcements made by the Government; in particular, those contained within the Housing and Planning Bill, which was published last month.
- 5.3 Despite this, the Council has begun work on the delivery of a Homelessness Strategy action plan, which is attached to this report at appendix 1
- 5.4 The Homelessness Strategy action plan has identified 8 key themes. These are:
- Domestic abuse
 - Access to the private rented sector
 - Rough Sleeping
 - Mental health
 - Homelessness prevention
 - Minimising the use of temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast provision
 - Mitigating the impact of welfare reform
 - Bringing empty homes back into use
- 5.5 As highlighted in this report, current rises in rough sleeping numbers have meant that this area of work needs to be afforded uppermost priority for action within the plan.

6. Implications

(a) Financial Implications

Despite significant challenges in this area of work, there are no additional resources required at present. The Council's success or otherwise at balancing the requirements for temporary accommodation against the need to minimise the use of bed and breakfast accommodation will determine any positive or negative implications across 2016-17.

The objective within the homelessness strategy action plan to explore the possibility of commissioning Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP)

may have financial implications but these are not known at this point. SWEP is currently coordinated by the Council between November and March each year. It involves the mobilisation of a number of partner agencies and arrangements are re-established each year. It may be that providing a single grant-funded service may prove more efficient from an operational point of view, but may also be more costly. Whether or not this requires additional resource from the General Fund will depend whether a change is approved and whether it is funded from the Council's existing homelessness prevention grant funding programme.

(b) **Staffing Implications** (if not covered in Consultations Section)

There are no City Council staffing implications

(c) **Equality and Poverty Implications**

An Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out on the Housing Strategy once published, of which the Homelessness Strategy action plan will form a part.

(d) **Environmental Implications**

None

(e) **Procurement**

There are no immediate procurement implications. Homelessness prevention activity is supported by a grants programme, which is due to be reviewed by this committee in Autumn cycle later this year.

(f) **Consultation and communication**

The Homelessness Strategy action plan has been subject to extensive consultation with the Homelessness Strategy Implementation Partnership (HSIP), which consists of statutory and voluntary sector delivery and commissioning partners, along with service user representation.

(g) **Community Safety**

There are community safety implications from the Council's approach to tackling street based anti- social behaviour, of which rough sleeping and begging forms a part. Objectives on these two areas of work are contained within the Homelessness Strategy action plan.

6. Background papers

None

7. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Homelessness Strategy Action Plan

Appendix 2 – Rough Sleeping in Cambridge – briefing for Full Council, April 2016

Appendix 3 - Profile of homelessness applications and acceptances 2012-2016

7. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact:

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