

# Cambridge City Council

## Interim Housing Strategy Statement 2017

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## OUR VISION

### **Our vision is for Cambridge to be a City where:**

- The housing market functions effectively, providing homes which are as affordable as possible; to meet the needs of residents and support the local economy.
- There is a wide and varied choice of good quality, sustainable homes of different sizes, types and tenures, to meet the needs of a wide range of different households.
- Homes are located in high quality sustainable environments, served by jobs and neighbourhood facilities, appropriate green space, effective transport links and other necessary infrastructure.
- Everyone has access to a suitable home, and residents are able to live as healthily, safely, independently as possible.
- People from all walks of life live in harmony, within mixed and balanced communities; and homes and communities continue to meet the needs of residents into the future.
- We have strong relationships with residents, developers and partners that enable us to deliver housing and services effectively, and to innovate where appropriate.

*We recognise that this is an aspirational vision. We will do all we can to work towards achieving it together with our partners, within the national policy framework and the resources available.*

## OUR STRATEGIC AIMS

### **Increasing housing supply & tackling affordability**

- Work with stakeholders to accelerate the delivery of housing and infrastructure in and around Cambridge as set out in the Greater Cambridge City Deal and Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Devolution Deal.
- Provide, and promote provision of, good quality, energy and water efficient homes, in high quality, sustainable environments, alongside appropriate infrastructure.

- Ensure that new homes: are as affordable as possible; are available in a range of sizes, types and tenures, to meet a range of needs; and can support mixed, balanced and sustainable communities.
- Make the best use of council land to maximise the supply of housing for those who cannot afford to access the private market.

### **Existing homes & communities**

- Make and promote the best use of existing homes.
- Enable people to live settled lives, within safe and healthy homes and communities.
- Manage and maintain the council's homes and estates in a cost-effective way, protecting core services, balancing the budget, and operating within our means.
- Promote a well-regulated, fair, good quality private rented sector, and support the provision of longer and more settled tenancies.
- Recognise links between health, social care & housing, and work positively with partner organisations to promote and improve quality of life and health and well-being for those most in need.

### **Homelessness, housing advice & rough sleeping**

- Prevent homelessness and rough sleeping.
- Minimise use of temporary accommodation and maximise access to longer term housing solutions.
- Enable people to make informed choices about their housing.
- Promote sustained and settled lifestyles and minimise social exclusion.

### **OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES**

*In working towards achieving our vision and strategic aims we will:*

- Work in partnership to maximise resources and achieve required outcomes.
- Deliver efficient and effective services, and operate within our means.
- Target scarce resources to those who are most in need.
- Prioritise the protection of essential services.
- Seek out opportunities to influence government policy to meet Cambridge's needs.

## **Statement from Councillor Kevin Price, Executive Councillor for Housing**

Good quality, affordable housing, whatever the tenure, is the key to delivering the opportunity for all our city's residents to thrive and live in mixed communities of their own choice. This Interim Housing Strategy Statement lays out our vision for Cambridge alongside the challenging national and local context in which it is set.

It is a strategy which is being delivered in a rapidly changing landscape and we will need to be flexible and responsive in our approach. The new and ongoing policy and legislative changes from national government will present significant challenges to the delivery of services and to Cambridge's residents over the period up to 2019. There will almost certainly continue to be a shortage of affordable housing for low and median income residents, although the promise of significant funding for new council and housing association homes through the proposed Devolution Deal is one we must build on to prioritise the delivery of new truly affordable social housing.

The rise in homelessness of all forms since 2010 presents a major challenge for all local authorities and is driven by housing affordability pressures and national welfare changes. Our work in homelessness prevention will continue to grow in importance along with the need to work with all partners to support and encourage entrenched rough sleepers into sustainable tenancies.

Improving housing and management standards in Cambridge's private rented stock is another key element along with ensuring that people are given good information, advice and support on their housing options, whether that is in the social or private rented sector or low cost home ownership such as shared ownership.

This Interim Housing Strategy Statement is a framework setting the direction for everyone involved in housing in Cambridge - our local authorities, residents, housing associations, developers, investors, private landlords, the voluntary sector - to work together to provide the homes we need and ensure that housing in and around Cambridge delivers a clear social dividend, supporting everyone to reach their potential by creating successful communities in which to live and work.

## Introduction

Cambridge is a world-renowned historic city with a strong economy and a growing population. However, housing pressure is significant, and for Cambridge to continue to thrive, we need to build new homes and communities to satisfy demand, whilst at the same time enabling the needs of existing residents and communities to be met.

We have close strategic links with South Cambridgeshire District Council, and many common issues to deal with. Although there will be some differences in priorities and how we approach certain issues, both districts consider there would be real benefits from having a joint strategic approach. We are planning to work with South Cambridgeshire on a joint Housing Strategy, to link with our long-standing commitment for delivery of a joint Local Plan once our emerging Local Plans have been adopted. There have also been discussions around the potential for a Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Housing Strategy in the context of devolution. This Interim Housing Strategy Statement outlines Cambridge City Council's strategic vision for housing, and demonstrates how we are working in partnership to deal with housing issues in the City, prior to a joint City & South Cambridgeshire Strategy being developed.

We made significant progress against our previous Housing Strategy 2012-2015.<sup>i</sup> We consulted on an ambitious revised Strategy in summer 2015, but a number of major national policy changes emerged at around the same time, which meant we needed to rethink some of our proposals. This Interim Housing Strategy Statement draws on our 2015 draft, the results of the consultation, and new opportunities which have since emerged.

Key messages coming through from responses to the 2015 consultation included: the need for more housing of all types and tenures which is affordable to local people; the importance of associated infrastructure; the need for a good quality, well-managed, affordable private rented sector; and the importance of working in partnership.

This interim Statement is set within the context of national policy, the council's wider vision,<sup>ii</sup> and a number of other established strategies and plans.

## Housing – The Challenge for Cambridge

Cambridge and the surrounding area has undergone significant growth over recent years, and is a major net contributor to the national economy. The business sector is growing, and more people are wanting to live here and benefit from what Cambridge has to offer.

However, with this growth has come a significant worsening in housing affordability, making it difficult for local people to remain living locally, and pushing many workers out of the City and further afield. There are also major concerns amongst business leaders about the impact of house prices and rental costs on their ability to continue to operate effectively in the local market.

For example:

- The average price of a home in Cambridge is now over £500,000, with median prices standing at over 13 times median local incomes. The cheapest 25% (ie lower quartile) of homes are more than 19 times higher than lower quartile incomes.<sup>iii</sup> In South Cambridgeshire also, median prices are nearly 9 times median incomes, with lower quartile rents more than 12 times more than lower quartile incomes.
- Private rents in the City are also some of the highest in the country. For example the rent on an average two bedroom home in Cambridge is £265 per week, which is over 40% of the median weekly income for a full time worker in Cambridge earning £31,778k per year.<sup>iv</sup>
- For those claiming benefits, Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Rates are set well below local rents. Eg the LHA rate of £126 per week for a one bedroom home falls well short of the lower quartile rent of around £196 per week.<sup>v vi</sup>
- Although Cambridge is a thriving and prosperous area, a significant proportion of residents are on low incomes, are struggling to make ends meet, and are at risk of being left behind. Links between poverty and ill health, poorer educational outcomes and social isolation are well documented. A good supply of decent affordable housing is essential, as well as supporting people who need it, to reduce their living costs, maximise incomes, and improve life chances.<sup>vii</sup>

- High housing costs are not only affecting those on low incomes. Even those on median incomes are finding it increasingly difficult to afford to live in Cambridge or the surrounding area.
- Homelessness and rough sleeping are increasing, both nationally and locally, and major cuts in welfare benefits are making it extremely difficult for people on low incomes to maintain tenancies.

There are inevitably a number of barriers and challenges which make it more difficult to tackle Cambridge's housing issues. For example:

- Housing delivery being largely a market-led activity, over which the council may only have limited influence. For example, rates of build, timing of delivery of infrastructure, affordability of housing, who buys new homes, etc are areas where developers tend to have more control. Construction costs are also rising, stemming from shortage of skills and materials.
- Delays in getting our emerging Local Plan adopted, some of which are linked to changes in national planning policy which have been either proposed or implemented since the process began.
- A national 1% annual reduction in social rents for four years from April 2016; combined with a proposed requirement for local authorities to pay a levy to government, based on the value of higher value council homes which become empty. These two measures alone are likely to have a severe impact on the money available for council housing services funded through our Housing Revenue Account, and the building of new homes.
- Other elements of national social housing policy, including: a cap on the amount councils can borrow against their Housing Revenue Account; regulations governing council housing management responsibilities and how rental income can be spent; Right to Buy policy and proposals to extend the right to housing association tenants; proposals to end the provision of lifetime tenancies; etc.
- Cuts in welfare, including: a four year freeze on working age benefits; social housing tenants receiving lower benefits if they are deemed to have 'spare bedrooms' (aka the 'bedroom tax'); reducing the overall amount of certain benefits that a household can receive; limiting housing benefit for tenants in



social housing to Local Housing Allowance Rates; limiting Local Housing Allowance for single people under 35 to the shared accommodation rate; the rolling out of Universal Credit as a single benefit payment made direct to tenants; etc. One of the aims of such reforms is to encourage more people into work, but with increasing numbers of claimants already working, many are likely to find it more difficult to make ends meet, leading to higher risk of rent arrears, evictions, and a further increase in homelessness.

- Major cuts in public funding, and changes in how wider public services are funded. Major reforms are needed, (some already under way), to ensure that essential services are available, including services for those who need care or support to help them live their daily lives.
- Changes in the national economy, including some uncertainty arising from the UK's decision to leave the European Union, which some developers are saying is starting to impact on their appetite for building.

However, despite these challenges, some major new opportunities are emerging for tackling the local housing crisis. For example:

- The new devolution deal for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough which promises to give a significant boost in terms of infrastructure and affordable housing delivery. <sup>viii</sup>
- The Greater Cambridge City Deal is enabling us to work in partnership to accelerate housing growth and provision of transport infrastructure, as well as promoting jobs growth, training opportunities and innovation. <sup>ix</sup>
- The council, together with key partners, have set up a Greater Cambridge Housing Development Agency. Working in partnership the aim is to be involved in schemes that deliver around 250 new homes a year, primarily affordable housing. The aspiration is to be involved directly in contributing approximately 4,000 new homes up to 2031.
- The recently published national housing white paper sets out plans to increase the number of new homes built, through a range of measures aimed at: planning for homes in the right places; building homes faster; diversifying the housing market; and 'helping people now' <sup>x</sup> The council is keen to work with

partners to make the most of opportunities arising from the government's proposals.

- We will continue to identify and promote solutions to challenges, and to proactively lobby government where national policy is likely to be detrimental to meeting local housing needs.

Although we are committed to seizing new opportunities to increase housing delivery, we are also very mindful of the need to balance housing growth with other issues such as: protecting the unique character of Cambridge; promoting environmental protection and sustainability; the quality and sustainability of new homes; protecting and enhancing existing communities; and the need for transport links and other infrastructure. These key elements are being addressed through policies in our emerging Local Plan.<sup>xi</sup>

This Interim Housing Strategy Statement outlines our vision and our proposed approach within the context of both the opportunities and constraints which we face.

We cannot achieve anything alone. We have a strong track record of partnership working, and engaging and working closely with partners is becoming ever more critical in working towards our vision.

## Increasing housing supply & tackling affordability

### Key issues

- Housing has a critical part to play in enabling people to live settled lives, and in supporting both the national and local economy. Need has been identified for 14,000 new homes in Cambridge by 2031. A further 19,500 have been assessed as required in South Cambridgeshire. <sup>xii xiii</sup>
- Local house prices and rent levels are at all-time record levels and are continuing to rise. Homelessness is on the rise, and there are around 2,000 households on the council's social housing register (Home-Link) <sup>xiv</sup>
- There is a strong need for homes of a wide range of types and tenures, and some employers are telling us that shortage of housing is making it increasingly difficult for them to recruit and retain staff. Social housing is imperative for those on lower incomes, but there is also a growing need for lower cost housing for sale and rent for the growing number of people who can neither access social housing for rent, nor afford open market rents or house prices. There are around 500 households on the Help to Buy intermediate housing register either living or working in Cambridge, and Registered Providers also report strong local demand.
- The short-term nature of most private rented tenancies means that households who cannot afford to buy but who want to settle are finding it difficult to put down roots. This is disruptive for the households concerned and can also affect stability of communities.
- Nationally imposed financial restrictions on our Housing Revenue Account have limited the council's ability to contribute significantly towards delivering the homes needed. However, new opportunities for partnership delivery are emerging, including the funding allocated through devolution.
- Much of the government's agenda has been focused on working households, but the population as a whole is ageing. We need to plan carefully to meet the current and future housing needs of older people, as well as those with other specialist needs. The emerging Local Plan addresses the provision of specialist housing, where need arises. Needs assessment is being undertaken at a county-wide level.

- Development needs to be carried out in a sustainable way. The challenge is to provide the number of homes that are needed whilst ensuring that Cambridge remains a compact city, located within the landscape setting of the Cambridge Green Belt. Mitigation of climate change and bio-diversity need to be planned into new developments from the outset.
- It is also important that new homes are well designed, and served by high quality and sustainable transport links. Communities need to be well-served by services and infrastructure, and sustainable in the long term.

### **Ongoing approach to achieving vision and aims**

- We remain committed to using the powers and resources we have to work in partnership to meet the City's housing needs.
- We are in the process of supporting our emerging Local Plan through the planning examination process towards adoption. This aims to achieve development of a balanced mix of dwelling sizes, types and tenures; and a minimum 40% affordable housing on larger sites of fifteen or more units. It also outlines the council's approach towards: the location of new homes; provision of transport links and other infrastructure; quality of housing; sustainability and environmental protection; and balancing the need for growth with the importance of Cambridge remaining a compact city and promoting quality of life and place. We remain committed to proactively identifying and bringing appropriate sites forward.<sup>xv</sup>
- Major housing development is already well under-way, with a number of new communities completed or under construction. Much of this is taking place jointly with South Cambridgeshire District Council on the urban fringes of the City.<sup>xvi</sup> A five year supply of land has been identified through our Local Plan process.<sup>xvii</sup>
- We are working with partners as part of a new Housing Development Agency to pool land and resources, and seek further opportunities to deliver the housing agreed as part of the Greater Cambridge City Deal.<sup>xviii</sup>
- We work closely with Registered Providers to try to maximise the amount of good quality affordable housing provided on new developments through

section 106 agreements. We also work to maintain a mix of tenures overall to meet a range of needs and to support mixed and sustainable communities. We have a particular focus on providing new social housing for rent, although we also recognise the need for all types and tenures, including intermediate tenures and specialist forms of housing. Our proposed requirements for new affordable housing are set out in our emerging Local Plan and Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document. These will be reviewed in the context of the outcome of the Local Plan examination and any further changes in national planning policy.<sup>xix</sup>

- We are working with South Cambridgeshire District Council to develop a joint approach to viability challenges from developers, particularly in relation to affordable housing contributions.
- In terms of the council's own development, we will continue to prioritise provision of new council homes for those on low incomes, aiming for rents to be at or below Local Housing Allowance rates. However, we are also seeking opportunities to provide homes for low cost purchase and intermediate rent – particularly where these can be used to subsidise the provision of more social housing for rent. We have set up a Housing Company to purchase the market sale properties on our own developments, to enable them to be let as intermediate housing at sub-market rents.
- We recognise that the market for private rent and intermediate tenures has been growing, and are working with partners in Cambridge and the surrounding area to identify in more detail the need for intermediate tenure housing, so that we can understand, and support delivery of, the sorts of tenure models that would best serve the needs of the area. However, it remains important that as far as possible, increasing provision for these groups is not at the expense of providing a supply of social housing for rent for those most in need.
- Recognising that the local housing market extends beyond the Cambridge area we have carried out a number of projects jointly with councils in the wider housing sub-region. For example, we have a shared Strategic Housing Market Assessment, and a shared memorandum of co-operation, and work closely with them on local research, promoting housing delivery and sharing best practice.<sup>xx</sup>

- We seek to promote high quality design across all tenures through: our emerging Local Plan, in the context of the new optional national housing standards for accessible housing and internal space; through the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth,<sup>xxi</sup> and through use of Design Codes on the fringe developments.
- We are working on county-wide projects to identify the need for homes for older people and people with a range of disabilities; and the Council's emerging Local Plan seeks to secure accessible homes for the future, including wheelchair accessible housing. We have also been working with partners on the development of an Older People's Accommodation Strategy and an Extra Care Market Position Statement for Cambridgeshire.
- Although our Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment has identified no need for pitches within the City itself, we will, with regional partners, keep this under review.
- We have also recently assessed the need for and supply of student housing, and the extent to which provision of purpose built student accommodation is likely to free up existing housing. The research indicates that students form a significant part of the city's population, and that the delivery of purpose built student accommodation, alongside the delivery of other forms of residential accommodation, could help meet the identified needs of higher education institutions, which are important to the city's economy.
- Although our powers are limited, we work proactively with developers to promote early provision of facilities and infrastructure on new developments. We also support existing, as well as newly emerging communities, to ensure that as many people as possible can benefit from the opportunities arising from new development. For example, initiatives introduced as part of the southern fringe development have included: use of local volunteers to welcome new residents; close working with the existing Residents' Association; and use of Community Forums to give residents the opportunity to raise concerns about the new development and influence developers' thinking.

## **Emerging actions**

In addition to our current approach we will:

- Work with partners to deliver the landmark devolution deal agreed for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This will help unlock barriers to construction and includes unprecedented provision for affordable housing together with significant funding for transport infrastructure. £70m will be available to deliver up to 500 council homes in Cambridge City over the next five years; plus a further £100m for other affordable housing across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. There will be another £20m a year over the next 30 years to support economic growth, development of local infrastructure, and jobs. We will work to deliver the new council homes through the Housing Development Agency, and support partners in delivering the other affordable homes and infrastructure.
- Review our approach to planning and meeting the needs of those ineligible for social housing but unable to buy on the open market, using the results of some research on local housing affordability which has been commissioned for the Greater Cambridge area.
- Implement our new Sustainable Housing Design Guide, setting out quality standards for homes to be built through the Housing Development Agency. This covers factors such as: addressing fuel and water poverty issues and adaptability to climate change; and building homes which have a positive impact on health and wellbeing, and which can be easily adapted where necessary.
- Work proactively with potential developers and investors to try to increase the amount of well-managed, high quality privately rented housing available in Cambridge, promoting longer tenancies and homes at a range of prices.
- Promote and support delivery of specialist forms of housing, including homes for older people and those with disabilities; and continue to support provision of other forms of specialist housing where needs can be evidenced.
- Implement a revised River Moorings Policy following recent public consultation; and programme in, with sub-regional partners, an assessment of housing need in relation to houseboats and moorings.
- Seek out and respond to any future opportunities which may arise to increase housing supply, improve affordability, promote longer term tenancies, and meet identified housing needs.

- Ensure that, through the implementation of the Local Plan, new developments in Cambridge are of the highest quality in terms of design excellence and innovation, embracing the principles of sustainable design and construction.
- Work proactively with Anglia Ruskin University, the University of Cambridge and its Colleges, and other educational institutions to maintain an up-to-date understanding of needs and to ensure that student accommodation that is delivered is affordable and suitable for the students it seeks to serve.
- Work with the city's large institutions and companies to understand the needs of key workers.
- Start work on a new joint Local Plan with South Cambridgeshire District Council, once the emerging Local Plans have been adopted.
- Work on a new joint Housing Strategy with South Cambridgeshire District Council.
- Respond to the government's consultation on the housing white paper, and work with partners to take advantage of opportunities which arise from it to increase housing supply and tackle housing affordability.<sup>xxii</sup>



## Existing homes & communities

### Key issues

The council has a central role to play in ensuring that the residents of Cambridge can live settled lives in homes that are well managed and maintained.

### Council housing

- The council currently owns around 8,000 homes, including around 7,000 for rent 1,000 leasehold, and 80 shared ownership. Management and maintenance of the rented homes is funded through the council's Housing Revenue Account, based on a 30-year business plan.
- Council housing numbers have been falling since the early 1980s due to Right to Buy sales (over which the council has no control), and are likely to be further affected by the proposed government levy on councils which is expected to be paid for through the sale of higher value homes. There is some light at the end of the tunnel though – the council already has a healthy new-build programme, and around 500 additional new council homes are now planned for the City through the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Devolution Deal. <sup>xxiii</sup>
- The council has some big decisions to make around the future of the council housing service. National policies such as the annual 1% rent cut and the 'higher value homes levy' mean that the council will have to made significant savings to keep the business afloat. The role of council housing is also changing. With the proposed phasing out of lifetime tenancies, and the growing gap between the 'offer' that the council is able to provide compared with options available to housing associations, council housing could move increasingly towards becoming a shorter term housing solution for those in greatest need. This is likely to have significant implications for tenants, and will present new challenges in terms of ensuring that communities can remain sustainable in the long-term. We need to adapt to the changing landscape in order to continue: to manage and maintain the council's homes for the benefit of residents; to meet our statutory responsibilities; to mitigate, as far as possible, the negative impact of national policy changes; and to retain the value of the council's asset. <sup>xxiv</sup>

- Major welfare reforms taking place mean that council tenants who are unable to work, or to earn enough to keep themselves out of the benefit system, are already finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. As well as the impact on the tenants themselves, any increase in rent arrears as a result will put increasing pressure on local authorities as landlords and could impact further on the level and quality of services we are able to provide.
- Tackling climate change is a key policy priority for the council, with an aspiration to achieve zero carbon status for Cambridge by 2050.<sup>xxv</sup> During 2014/15, the council's sheltered and temporary accommodation accounted for 12.5% of carbon emissions from the council's buildings and operations.
- Residents from low income households in the north of the city who attended a survey workshop in 2016, whilst generally supportive of council services, raised concerns about levels of antisocial behaviour in their neighbourhoods, the cleaning of council housing communal areas and the collection of waste and recycling from communal areas. (Although it is not clear the extent to which this reflected the views of residents actually living in council owned neighbourhoods).<sup>xxvi</sup>
- We are committed to supporting people to remain living independently at home as long as possible. However, we need to be mindful of the need to operate cost-effectively and make best use of existing homes, and that for some people – eg those who need home adaptations or adversely affected by welfare reforms - remaining in their existing home may not always be the best solution.
- The move towards reliance on the internet for a whole range of products and services, including the need to claim Universal Credit electronically, means that many tenants without access to the internet, or without the skills to use it effectively, are at risk of being left behind.

## **Private sector housing**

- Census figures suggest around 26% of households in the City lived in private rented housing in 2011. It is the second largest tenure in the City, accounting for more than 85% of the growth in households between the two censuses. Since then the sector is thought to have grown even further.

- Welfare issues and reforms are also having an impact on private tenants on low incomes. For example, Local Housing Allowance rates are nowhere near sufficient to cover rents in the City for even the cheapest rental properties in the City, and fewer and fewer households on benefits can afford to remain living in Cambridge. Over the last three years the number of LHA claimants in the City has fallen by a fifth, at least some of which is thought to be due to people no longer able to afford to rent privately in the City.
- A relatively high proportion of private rented homes in Cambridge are Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). These are an important part of the Cambridge housing market, and most landlords provide a good service. However, a minority do not, and we need to ensure that private rented homes – and HMOs in particular - are well managed and maintained, for the benefit of occupants and those in the wider community.

### **Support to live safely and independently – all tenures**

- With an ageing population, the number of older people is rising, and with it the numbers of people with chronic health conditions and disabilities, including dementia. National data and local experience suggest also a steady increase in recent years in the numbers of people with mental health problems, many of whom are in need of support. At the same time, funding for services for vulnerable people is being squeezed, making it more and more difficult to ensure that people receive the help and support they need.
- As a result, significant changes are taking place, both nationally and locally, in how health and social care services are commissioned and delivered. It is important that we continue to work closely with, and support partners in, developing and delivering current and future plans and in provision of more integrated services.

### **Ongoing approach to achieving vision and aims**

- Owing to recently announced reductions in funding available we are having to fundamentally review our council housing spending and activity, with the aim of transforming services and saving at least £1m per year. A set of principles

have been agreed, which include protecting core services and focusing resources on the most vulnerable. This will shape our approach to council housing issues going forward<sup>xxvii</sup>

- We take a proactive approach to maintaining the condition of the council's housing stock, investing in planned maintenance to help minimise the cost of ongoing repairs and maintenance; with restricted budgets this will become increasingly challenging.
- Our Carbon Management Plan includes an ongoing programme to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions in our sheltered and temporary housing schemes, including improvements to heating and lighting systems and insulation.<sup>xxviii</sup>
- Our Anti-Poverty Strategy<sup>xxix</sup> contains a significant number of actions around tackling poverty and social exclusion. Areas include: supporting debt advice services; supporting people into work and training; offering apprenticeships across a range of services; promoting energy efficiency measures to residents in lower income areas of the City; increasing internet access points in community buildings; etc. We have created a financial inclusion officer post to work with financially disadvantaged people in priority wards. We also have a Fuel and Water Poverty Action Plan,<sup>xxx</sup> targeting residents in lower income areas, supporting them to take up energy and/or water saving measures.
- We have a strong track record in involving council tenants and leaseholders in decision making and improving services. For example we have resident representation on the council's Housing Scrutiny Committee; volunteer residents carry out inspections of work carried out on estates; and resident Digital Champions support others to get on-line. The wider tenant and leaseholder community also participate via surveys, social media channels, tenant newsletters/magazines and local residents' groups/associations.<sup>xxxi</sup>
- We have been reviewing instances where council neighbourhoods have experienced problems with communal recycling areas, and working with residents to find solutions to prevent further problems and flytipping. In some cases this may involve closing the area and providing individual recycling bins instead.

- We periodically review our choice based lettings (Home-Link) policy to ensure that the limited supply of social housing is available to those most in need.
- We have carried out a comprehensive Private Sector House Condition Survey which other Cambridgeshire districts are now considering using as a model for their own areas. We are in the process of analysing the results to assess where our priorities for investment should lie.
- We will continue to support private landlords to deliver good standard, energy efficient housing, and to use enforcement to tackle those who do not. We have a property accreditation scheme, and welcome, in principle, the government's proposals to extend the scope of mandatory licensing of HMOs and introduce minimum room sizes.<sup>xxxii</sup>
- We recognise that affordability of the private rented sector is a major issue for residents. We have no powers to control rents generally, but are expanding the role of our sub-regional social lettings agency, Town Hall Lettings, to make more good quality private rented homes available at below market rents.<sup>xxxiii</sup>
- Residents are able to report empty homes through our website. We actively support owners of long-term empty homes to bring them back into use, and have set up a loan fund to enable such homes to be improved for use as affordable housing. Again, we will use formal enforcement where necessary.  
<sup>xxxiv</sup>
- We treat anti-social behaviour and hate crime seriously, engaging proactively with the community in terms of prevention, as well as dealing with complaints and issues as they arise.<sup>xxxv</sup> We are also an active member of the Cambridgeshire Community Safety Partnership.<sup>xxxvi</sup>
- We work closely with partners to provide support to those who need it, through: joint prevention initiatives; supporting implementation of the Care Act and Cambridgeshire County Council's Transforming Lives programme; addressing health inequalities; and supporting hospital discharge. For example: by providing, on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council, a visiting support service for older people across all tenures; a tenancy sustainment service to support residents whose tenancies may be at risk; working with partners to support the transformation of mental health commissioning and services, through implementation of the Cambridgeshire Mental Health Crisis

Concordat; and supporting a number of partnership initiatives around falls prevention.

- We have worked with partners on a county-wide review around the use of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) aimed at providing a more joined up approach, and better use of resources, to improve health care and housing outcomes. Our existing policy of providing grants and loans to private sector residents includes topping up Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs); helping people to move if their property is unsuitable for adaptation; and repairs and improvements to make homes safer. These all help to contribute towards Cambridgeshire's Better Care Fund vision, which includes: diverting resources away from acute health services and ongoing social care; focusing rather on helping people to help themselves; and returning people to independence wherever possible.
- We are also reviewing how our shared Home Improvement Agency operates, with a view to improving efficiency.
- The council is working with partners to provide housing and support for refugees under the government's Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

## Emerging actions

In addition to the above we plan to:

- Implement the agreed proposals arising from our major 'Housing Transformation Programme', to transform the way we provide services to council tenants.
- Plan for and implement the required phasing out of lifetime tenancies for council tenants, once government guidelines are in place.
- Implement our recently agreed revised disabled adaptation policy for council tenants, bringing it more in line with Disabled Facilities Grant policy used for private sector residents, and supporting people to move to more suitable accommodation where that is more appropriate to meet their long term housing needs.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

- Review the building cleaning contract, in relation to council housing communal areas.
- Plan for and implement the government's proposals around widening the scope of mandatory licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation once more details are available; and review the impact of changes once implemented.
- Review our private rented sector standard, establishing an agreed set of advisory standards between the council and landlords, to help ensure the health and safety of occupiers and minimise the need for council intervention.
- Promote use of longer term private rented tenancies, and support the sector in doing so.
- Review the range of home improvement grants and loans offered to private sector residents on low incomes; and work with partners to agree how DFG funding can be used more effectively to meet Better Care Fund objectives, through development of a county-wide DFG policy.

## Homelessness, housing advice & rough sleeping

### Key issues

- Homelessness has always been an issue in Cambridge but, as is the case nationally, it has become more acute over the last couple of years. A combination of rising rent levels fuelled by high demand, together with welfare reforms, have contributed towards increased pressure in relation to both statutory and non-statutory homelessness.
- The number of decisions based on applications from households presenting as homeless has more than doubled in the last two years, from 189 in 2013/14 to 418 in 2015/16. 294 decisions were made in the first three quarters of 2016/17.<sup>xxxix</sup>
- The number of households accepted as homeless and in priority need of accommodation also increased, albeit less dramatically, by 35% between 2013/14 and 2015/16 (from 127 to 172). So far there have been 94 acceptances in the first three quarters of 2016/17.
- Homelessness is also rising amongst households whom the council has no statutory duty to rehouse. In 2015/16, 787 cases of homelessness were prevented or relieved, with 630 in the first three quarters up to December 2016. This compares with 470 cases during 2014/15.
- Anyone can become homeless, but some groups are more at risk than others. For example, more than 60% of homeless applicants over the last nine months or so have been aged 35 and under, and over half those are under 25. The main reasons for people losing their settled home include: family or friends no longer willing to accommodate; loss of private tenancy; and violence, including domestic violence. Instances of homelessness involving all of these are on the rise.
- Use of temporary and Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation for households to whom the council owes a statutory interim or permanent duty, is expensive - and for households it is far from ideal. Where households are reliant on housing benefit, the council can only recover about one third of the cost of B&B provision. Also, because of the difficulty in securing B&B from hoteliers, it is often located outside of the City.



- There has been a sharp rise in the number of rough sleepers recorded in the City, from 135 individuals in 2014/15, to 152 in 2015/16. There has been a long-standing target of keeping rough sleeping numbers at or below 10 on any single night, which has been broadly met for a number of years. However, this rose sharply to 18 in autumn 2015, and annual figures also rose from 135 in 2014/15 to 152 in 2015/16.<sup>xi</sup> The number of rough sleepers with no resource to public finance have also increased over the last year. During the last six months of 2015-16, numbers in each month were more or less double those for the first six months.
- Partners have reported a significant increase over the last few years in the number of rough sleepers with mental health problems, many of whom also have alcohol or substance misuse issues. Some engage in street-based anti-social behaviour and begging. Not all rough sleepers are homeless, but have tenancies, and such behaviours can put tenancies at risk.
- A Homelessness Reduction Bill is on its way through parliament.<sup>xii</sup> We welcome the focus that this gives on the importance of homelessness prevention. However, turning much of what we already do into a statutory duty means we will need to review some of our processes once more detail is known. There will be costs involved, and all local authorities will need to be awarded additional resources to implement the changes.
- Of those on the housing register, around 63% are single people or couples, and around one third are households with children or with a pregnant primary applicant.

### **Ongoing approach to achieving vision and aims**

- The council works closely with a range of partner agencies, including providing funding where appropriate, to provide a number of prevention initiatives and accommodation & support services.
- We have, over recent years, focused closely on preventing homelessness, shifting resources more towards enabling and supporting people threatened with homelessness to remain where they are or access appropriate alternative

housing. Financial advice and support; and a home visiting service, providing conciliation and advocacy to prevent evictions from the homes of family and friends; are just two examples of interventions which have proved particularly effective in terms of helping households to stay put.

- Our focus has been moving away from short term hostel accommodation for single homeless people, towards supporting partner agencies in the provision of one-to one support and re-ablement services, including development of skills and employment. We also operate a re-connections policy to reconnect rough sleepers to where they came from.
- We have been working to improve access to the private rented sector. For example, we have an access scheme, providing rent guarantees and rent deposits for those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- We have set up, with partners: a single homelessness service to provide accommodation for people who are homeless, and either rough sleeping or at risk of doing so;<sup>xliii</sup> and a social lettings agency – Town Hall Lettings – aimed initially at securing private rented accommodation for single people, but which is now expanding the range of rented homes available.<sup>xliiii</sup> We have also developed, in partnership with a registered provider, a small number of training flats in the City.
- We have been working to reduce our reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation, and length of stay in temporary accommodation. Measures include: speeding up the time taken to complete investigations and making homelessness decisions; making direct lets to those for whom the council owes a full homelessness duty, rather than requiring them to bid for housing through our Home-Link choice based lettings scheme; and increasing the amount of alternative temporary and emergency accommodation available as an alternative to B&B. For example, average homelessness decision times have been reduced from 45 working days in 2014-15, to 30 working days to date during 2016-17. In the current financial year to January 2017, 60 households have been in B&B or temporary accommodation, compared with 184 during 2015-16, with the average stay reduced from 17 nights to 5.
- As already outlined, we are committed to maximising the supply of genuinely affordable housing for those who need it, aiming for a mix of property sizes to meet a range of needs. This is both through our own development programme

and through supporting appropriate development by other registered providers.

- Access to social housing is dealt with through our sub-regional choice based lettings scheme, Home-Link.<sup>xliv</sup> We keep our lettings policy under review to ensure that priority continues to be given to those most in need, and take a robust approach to housing related fraud.
- For those not immediately threatened with homelessness, we continue to provide general advice on housing options, supporting people to apply for social housing where appropriate, and sign-posting to other agencies.
- We have, over recent years, been improving our approach to capturing and monitoring client data. We need to continue with this, to ensure that we have a good sense of the profile of our customers and how this might be changing over time, and whether particular equalities groups might be being disadvantaged.

## **Emerging actions**

We have worked closely with partners to identify the key issues and develop a three-year action plan to deal with these issues.<sup>xlv, xlvi</sup>

Examples of areas for action, working with partners, include:

- Improving our approach to domestic abuse, including better information for victims and survivors; and reviewing policies, procedures and practices, with the aim of working with housing providers to develop a joint framework to tackle domestic abuse issues.
- Improving access to the private rented sector, including strengthening the effectiveness of the single homelessness service and Town Hall Lettings
- Preventing and tackling rough sleeping, including: developing more targeted work with young people to prevent homelessness – especially those not in employment, education or training (NEET) or those in Pupil Referral Units; and exploring options for a more effective joined up approach towards supporting single homeless people and rough sleepers into independent living.

- Improving support services for those with mental health issues or a dual diagnosis with mental health as a primary issue.
- Exploring new homelessness prevention measures, including: investigating the reasons for repeat homelessness, and seeking appropriate solutions; and continuing to pursue shared housing models with Registered Providers.
- Minimising use of temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast; eg through further improving the speed at which homelessness decisions are made, and regularly reviewing temporary accommodation requirements.
- Developing a multi-agency approach to mitigating the impact of welfare reforms, to reduce the risk of homelessness amongst those affected.
- Bringing empty homes back into use.

In addition, we will:

- With funding recently secured through the government's Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer fund, work with sub-regional partners to develop a co-ordinated multi-agency approach to preventing homelessness. This will include: training for professionals; setting up a landlord resolution service to help maintain tenancies and reduce evictions; improving access to private rented housing; and improving web-based information on the range of services available. <sup>xlvi</sup>
- Implement the changes required by the proposed Homelessness Reduction Act. <sup>xlviii</sup>

## **Monitoring of delivery**

This Interim Housing Strategy Statement will be publicly available on the housing strategy page of the council's website.<sup>xlix</sup>

Ongoing and emerging actions are being delivered and monitored through a range of other agreed projects and action plans.

In terms of issues relating to council housing, tenant and leasehold representatives scrutinise both services and key decisions: as service inspectors; through a Housing Regulation Panel; and as members of the council's Housing Management Board.<sup>l</sup>

## Annex 1

### Web links

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- <sup>i</sup> Progress against Housing Strategy 2012-2015: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/content/housing-and-related-strategies>
- <sup>ii</sup> Cambridge City Council vision statement: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/vision-statement>
- <sup>iii</sup> Cambridge sub-regional Housing Market Bulletin. Ed 31: <http://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/Housingmarketbulletin>
- <sup>iv</sup> Cambridge sub-regional Housing Market Bulletin, Ed 31: <http://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/Housingmarketbulletin>
- <sup>v</sup> Cambridge sub-regional Housing Market Bulletins, Ed 31: <http://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/Housingmarketbulletin>
- <sup>vi</sup> Strategic Housing Key Facts, December 2016, private rent data, pp 13-16: [https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/default/files/15\\_key\\_facts\\_december\\_2016\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/default/files/15_key_facts_december_2016_-_final.pdf)
- <sup>vii</sup> Anti-Poverty Strategy 2014-17 : <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/antipoverty-strategy>
- <sup>viii</sup> Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Devolution: <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/devolution>
- <sup>ix</sup> Greater Cambridge City Deal: <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/citydeal/>
- <sup>x</sup> Housing white paper, Fixing our Broken Housing Market, DCLG, February 2017: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fixing-our-broken-housing-market>
- <sup>xi</sup> Local Plan review: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/local-plan-review>
- <sup>xii</sup> Local Plan review: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/local-plan-review>
- <sup>xiii</sup> Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire Local Plan Examination – Objectively Assessed Housing Need: Further Evidence (November 2015) see RD/MC/140: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/local-plan-core-documents-library>
- <sup>xiv</sup> Strategic Housing Key Facts, December 2016, Home-Link applicant data, page 24: [https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/default/files/15\\_key\\_facts\\_december\\_2016\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/default/files/15_key_facts_december_2016_-_final.pdf)
- <sup>xv</sup> Local Plan review: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/local-plan-review>
- <sup>xvi</sup> Cambridge City Council growth web pages: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/urban-growth>
- <sup>xvii</sup> Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/content/strategic-housing-land-availability-assessment>
- <sup>xviii</sup> Greater Cambridge City Deal: <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/citydeal/>
- <sup>xix</sup> Local Plan review: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/local-plan-review>
- <sup>xx</sup> Cambridgeshire Insight Housing pages: <http://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/housing>
- <sup>xxi</sup> Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth: [https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/cambridgeshire\\_quality\\_charter\\_2010.pdf](https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/cambridgeshire_quality_charter_2010.pdf)
- <sup>xxii</sup> Housing white paper, Fixing our Broken Housing Market, DCLG, February 2017: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fixing-our-broken-housing-market>
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Devolution: <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/devolution>
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Report to Executive Councillor & Housing Scrutiny January 2018, see item 7 - Housing Transformation Programme 2017/18: <http://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=414&MId=3065&Ver=4>
- <sup>xxv</sup> Climate Change Strategy 2016-2021: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/climate-change-strategy>
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Citizens' Survey 2016 press release: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/news/2016/11/16/more-residents-satisfied-with-council-services>

- <sup>xxvii</sup> Report to Executive Councillor & Housing Scrutiny January 2018, see item 7 - Housing Transformation Programme 2017/18:  
<http://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=414&MId=3065&Ver=4>
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Carbon Management Plan 2016-2021:  
[https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/default/files/carbon\\_management\\_plan\\_2016-21\\_1.pdf](https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/default/files/carbon_management_plan_2016-21_1.pdf)
- <sup>xxix</sup> Anti-Poverty Strategy 2014-17 : <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/antipoverty-strategy>
- <sup>xxx</sup> Fuel & Water Poverty Action Plan 2015-2017:  
<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Fuel%20%20Water%20Poverty%20Action%20Plan%202015-2017.pdf>
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Resident involvement web page: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/resident-involvement>
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Property Accreditation Scheme: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/property-accreditation>
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Town Hall Lettings web page: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/town-hall-lettings>
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Empty Homes web page: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/empty-homes>
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Community Safety Communication Strategy: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/community-safety-communication-strategy>
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Anti-social behaviour web page: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/what-is-antisocial-behaviour>
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Syrian Refugees web page: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/syrian-refugees>
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Adaptations Policy for HRA Property, Housing Scrutiny Committee January 2017, agenda item 6: <http://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=414&MId=3065&Ver=4>
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Strategic Housing Key Facts, December 2016, homelessness data, page 38:  
[https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/default/files/15\\_key\\_facts\\_december\\_2016\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/default/files/15_key_facts_december_2016_-_final.pdf)
- <sup>xl</sup> Strategic Housing Key Facts, December 2016, rough sleeping data, pages 43-45:  
[https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/default/files/15\\_key\\_facts\\_december\\_2016\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/default/files/15_key_facts_december_2016_-_final.pdf)
- <sup>xli</sup> Homelessness Reduction Bill 2016: <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/homelessnessreduction.html>
- <sup>xlii</sup> Single Homelessness Service web page: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/the-single-homelessness-service>
- <sup>xliii</sup> Town Hall Lettings web page: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/town-hall-lettings>
- <sup>xliv</sup> Looking for a council or housing association home web page:  
<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/council-and-housing-association-properties>
- <sup>xlv</sup> Homelessness action plan 2016-19:  
[https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/default/files/homelessness\\_strategy\\_action\\_plan\\_-\\_names\\_redacted\\_0.pdf](https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/sites/default/files/homelessness_strategy_action_plan_-_names_redacted_0.pdf)
- <sup>xlvi</sup> Homelessness review 2015: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/content/housing-and-related-strategies>
- <sup>xlvii</sup> Cambridgeshire Insight web page on Homelessness Trailblazer bid:  
<http://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/housing/trailblazer>
- <sup>xlviii</sup> Homelessness Reduction Bill 2016/17: <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/homelessnessreduction.html>
- <sup>xlix</sup> Housing strategy web pages: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/content/housing-and-related-strategies>
- <sup>l</sup> Resident involvement web page: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/resident-involvement>