

Fenland District Council

Homelessness Review 2018

CONTENTS

Summary

Chapter 1 – Introduction 1.1 Outcomes of 2013-18 Homeless Strategy

Chapter 2 – Profile of Homelessness in Fenland.

1 The Fenland area.

2.2 Links with other strategies

2.3 Current levels of homelessness

2.4 Levels of rough sleeping

2.5 Breakdown of homeless applicants by age group and household type

2.6 Reasons for priority need

2.7 Reasons for homelessness

2.8 Ethnicity

2.9 Foreign Nationals

2.10 Asylum Seekers

2.11 Gypsy and Travellers

2.12 Future levels of homelessness

2.13 Welfare reforms

2.14 Funding of supported housing

2.15 Devolution

2.16 The Homeless Reduction Act

Chapter 3 – Existing Housing and Support

3.1 Temporary accommodation

3.2 Other accommodation/ specialist support

3.3 Permanent accommodation

Chapter 4 – Homeless Prevention Activities

4.1 The Housing Options Team

4.2 Floating support

4.3 Rent Deposit scheme

4.4 Discretionary housing payments

4.5 CAB – Money advice service

4.6 Homeless prevention via Home-Link

Chapter 5 – Partnership working and consultation

5.1 Joint working groups

5.2 Homelessness Trailblazer project

5.3 Protocols

5.4 Consultation

Chapter 6 – Performance Monitoring

6.1 Homeless strategy action plan

6.2 KPI's

Chapter 7 – Resources

7.1 Expenditure and income

7.2 Government grants

7.3 Grants to external organisations

Chapter 8 - Conclusions

Summary

The following points below summarise the main findings and challenges identified in the Homelessness Review:

Profile of Homelessness Levels, there isn't much variation in the number of approached between 2014/15 & 2017/18 however there was an increase in acceptances in 2015/16 (see table below).

The highest priority group for homeless acceptances is households that include dependent children, followed by those who vulnerable due to mental health. The highest age category of homeless acceptances are those aged between 25-44 who make up around third of all homeless applications. The main cause of homelessness is now termination of assured shorthold tenancy which accounts for two-thirds of all homeless acceptances.

Fenland has a specific problem with rough sleeping particularly in Wisbech and levels are growing. This is linked to the rural nature and opportunities for work within the agricultural sector and supply of cheap accommodation within the private rented sector. Some migrant workers are subject to exploitation and other methods of Modern Slavery, through rogue landlord and gangmaster activity, partnership working via Operation Pheasant is helping to tackle this issue in partnership with Cambs Police, the council, HMRC , Cambs Fire & Rescue and the Gangmasters licence & Abuse Authority.

Advice and assistance is provided to rough sleepers in Fenland via our Migrant Outreach Worker (funded through the Controlling Migration Fund 201-2019) working in partnership with our Housing Options team, drug and alcohol services, migrant advisory services and accommodation providers. We are seeing an increase in rough sleepers with multiple addiction (e.g. drug and alcohol dependence) Currently a quarter of those rough sleeping know to us have this.

The Homeless Reduction Act is due to commence from 3rd April 2018 and will increase the duties owed by the Council.

Existing Housing & Support - The number of households in temporary accommodation has always remained at a constant level but reduced slightly in 2017/18

Number of Household placed in	B&B	Temp Accommodation
2014/15	25	53
2015/16	40	53
2016/17	38	71

Use of bed & breakfast however has reduced considerably with only £5,820.86 spent on this type of temporary accommodation in 2016/17 compared with £16,838.58 in 2015/16.

The council has a hostel with 7 units, 9 properties leased from Clarion Housing and a further 5 flats from Luminus Group.

Private rented accommodation in the district is largely affordable to most households when comparing the local housing allowance (LHA) with the median rents. Home ownership is less likely for many households with lower quartile figure comparisons.

Prevention Activities

Homeless prevention has increased since 2014/15 largely due to more landlords and agents willing to work with our deposit scheme. Most homeless prevention is achieved through securing alternative accommodation rather than maintaining current homes.

The Council is leading on the Combined Authority Area Trailblazer project encompassing Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The 5 districts and two city councils are working with the Trailblazer Team to reduce homelessness by early prevention techniques with partner organisations to help make homelessness the unacceptable outcome. The two year project has been very successful and used as a good practice model by central government. The Trailblazer team and councils are engaged in training registered providers in homelessness prevention and establishing protocols e.g. criminal justice system and housing.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires councils to compile a Homelessness Strategy and to renew this at least every five years. Fenland District Council (FDC) published its previous Homelessness Strategy in 2014/17 and subsequent strategies have been implemented with the last one covering 2018/22. The actions within the Strategy have been monitored closely to ensure that the key objectives have been achieved.

1.1 Outcomes of the 2014/17 Homelessness Strategy

The 2014/17 Strategy focussed on two main areas:-

- The prevention of homelessness and housing options
- Temporary accommodation

Homeless prevention outcomes from 2014 – 17 were

2014/15 = 72

2015/16 = 73

2016/17 = 106

2017/18 = 203 which included 71 Trailblazer preventions

Floating support

There is a county wide floating support service available to all. The service is under review with a new provider expected in the autumn.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

The DHP policy was revised to take account of the impact of the changes to the LHA. Close collaboration between the Council's Housing Options Team and housing benefit services (ARP) have enabled these funds to be targeted at homeless prevention to assist with deposits and where individuals circumstances have changed e.g. loss of employment to help bridge the gap with accommodation costs. .

Mental Health

The council continue to see an increase in complex cases from clients requiring mental health support, particularly young single people . Access to support services or specialised accommodation can be challenging, placing additional strain on the housing service.

Money advice

We continue to work closely with the Citizens Advice Bureau (Cambs Rural CAB) to provide a money advice service and this is a key tool used by housing advisors to prevent homelessness. Further improvements have been made including drop-in sessions and introductory telephone calls to increase take-up from those at risk of homelessness.

Single Homelessness

FDC work in partnership with the Ferry Project who run a hostel for single homeless people. They also run a night shelter for rough sleepers and provide Serve Weather Emergency Provision (SWEPP) during the winter months.

Reconnection policy

Through or work with CGL, our Outreach worker helps to re connect clients where there is a local connection and support where required. There is also a voluntary repatriation service in place.

Information

Leaflets and information to residents and applicants are regularly updated. However this continues to be a key area of work in view of new legislation, changing responsibilities, new Council website and Trailblazer initiatives.

Temporary accommodation

FDC lease 9 properties from Clarion Housing and 5 from Luminus Housing to use as temporary accommodation, the council owns and manages a 7 unit hostel. We are currently exploring opportunities to look at alternatives to bed and breakfast.

Foyer

A Foyer scheme, providing accommodation and training opportunities for young people was built in Wisbech in 2008, this provides a valuable support to you people between the ages of 16-25 and provides 17 flats and 6 move on flats.

Chapter 2

Profile of Homelessness in Fenland

2.1 The Fenland Area

Fenland is located in the East of England region with rail access to London and to Stansted Airport. It is a largely rural district, which surrounds the city of Peterborough and comprises of villages and four market towns which are generally 10–20 miles from Peterborough. The current population is 60,000 persons

Affordability remains a growing problem for Fenland District Council with the cost of buying or renting on the open market consistently high. The average house price in September 2018 March was £203k an increase of 10.8% in just 12 months.

There is an active private rental market with high demand. Rents in the district are expensive, making some private rentals unaffordable for those on benefits or a low income. Private rentals at the lower end of the market are few and far between and for those relying on housing benefit to pay their rent, the difference between the LHA rate and the rent payable represents an average shortfall of £100 - 150 per month.

2.2 Links with other strategies

Homelessness is the Council's highest risk and therefore actions to mitigate against this remains a priority. Homelessness is a key theme in the Cambridgeshire Housing Strategy Statement, and has strong links to governments policies around welfare reform and, of course, the major change to homeless legislation through the Homeless Reduction Act.

2.3 Current levels of homelessness

Demand for the service continues to be high. The figure has remained relatively steady with a increase from 2016/17

2014/15 = 835 2015/16 = 828 2016/17 = 1580 2017/18 = 2515

Homeless applications and acceptances however have risen over the course of the four years albeit with a dip during 2015/16 on acceptances. P1E data (quarterly statistics on homelessness) shows the following:

Applications

2014/15 = 151 2015/16 = 146 2016/17 = 163 2017/18 = 159

Accepted

2014/15 = 87 2015/16 = 122 2016/17 = 102 2017/18 = 102

2.4 Levels of Rough Sleeping

The Council are required to complete a rough sleeping count or provide an estimate each year by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Because of the rural nature of the District and the relative high numbers of rough sleepers it is not feasible to undertake rough sleeping count across the whole District on a particular night. Therefore the council carry out a count in the town with the most rough sleepers, which is normally Wisbech. Agencies are written to asking whether there are any known rough sleepers in their area. In addition staff, local agencies - such as the Police, Fire Service and Inclusion are contacted and asked to respond with any rough sleepers they are aware of.

A figure of 9 rough sleepers was recorded at the last count in 2017 and historically our figures have been low. Fenland however does have an emerging problem with rough sleeping, we tend to see rough sleepers stay within the town of Wisbech.

2.5 Break down of Homeless Applications by Age group and household type

The following shows the age groups of those making a homeless application during the past four years. In each year the highest represented age group amongst homeless applicants is 25-44 accounting for around 30% of all applications. This is

followed by the 16-24 year age group and continues the trends seen in previous years.

2014/15	16-24 = 17	25-44 = 36	45-59 = 10	60-64 = 3	65-75+ = 4
2015/16	16-24 = 13	25-44 = 30	45-59 = 3	60-64 = 1	65-75+ = 4
2016/17	16-24 = 34	25-44 = 50	45-59 = 10	60-64 = 1	65-75+ = 8
2017/18	16-24 = 34	25-44 = 58	45-59 = 6	60-64 = 3	65-75+ = 1

*Note 2015/16 not all figures were available due to change in ICT

The following shows the breakdown of household type across the four years for those accepted as homeless. Female lone parents is consistently the highest household type followed by 'couple with children'. One person households have increased during the four year period. This potentially reflects the complex needs and vulnerability of many single applicants and the difficulties finding suitable single person accommodation.

Female Lone parents	2014/15 = 33	2015/16 = 21	2016/17 = 54	2017/18 = 56
Male Lone parents	2014/15 = 3	2015/16 = 0	2016/17 = 1	2017/18 = 2
Couples with children	2014/15 = 14	2015/16 = 15	2016/17 = 22	2017/18 = 18
Single person	2014/15 = 16	2015/16 = 13	2016/17 = 23	2017/18 = 13
Couples	2014/15 = 4	2015/16 = 2	2016/17 = 3	2017/18 = 3

*Note 2015/16 not all figures were available due to change in ICT

2.6 Reasons for Priority need

The homeless legislation defines the priority need categories that determine who we have a duty to accommodate. During the four years all those homeless applications that were accepted meaning they were found to be eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless (i.e. they did not bring on their homelessness themselves) and in priority need.

During the last four year period, those with dependent children are the largest group of priority need applicants, counting for around 80% throughout this period. The second highest priority need category is mental health, followed by first pregnancy.

2014/15	Dependent children = 49	Pregnant = 3	Mental illness or disability = 6
2015/16 *	Dependent children = 32	Pregnant = 4	Mental illness or disability = 5
2016/17	Dependent children = 65	Pregnant = 14	Mental illness or disability = 5
2017/18	Dependent children = 80	Pregnant = 6	Mental illness or disability = 5

* note all figures available due to change in ICT

2.7 Reasons for homelessness

During the previous review period trends changed in terms of the main cause of homelessness when 'being asked to leave by parents' was overtaken by 'termination of assured shorthold'.

Overall this trend has continued with 'termination of assured shorthold' accounting for two-thirds of all homeless applications over the past four years. Whilst in 2014/15 and 2015/16 'parents asking their children to leave home' was very slightly the highest cause for these years, 'termination of assured shorthold' is the highest cause (and has accounted for more than double the reason of 'parents asking their children to leave') over the most recent two years.

The third highest cause of homelessness has varied each year between 'being asked to leave by friends', 'non-violent relationship breakdown' and 'violent relationship breakdown', but overall across the five year period 'violent relationship breakdown' is the third highest cause of homelessness.

2014/2015	Parents	Oth rels/fr	Relationship brkdwn		Mortg	Rent arrs	Private rented		Institution	Other
	FCNLA		Violent	Non-viol			Term.ast	Other loss		
Q/E 30.6	2	1	5	2	0	1	6	0	0	0
Q/E 30.9	2	1	3	2	1	1	9	3	1	0
Q/E 31.12	5	3	2	0	0	0	5	2	0	0
Q/E 31.3	5	2	5	3	1	1	11	1	1	0
Total	14	7	15	7	2	3	31	6	2	0
2015/16	Parents	Oth rels/fr	Relationship brkdwn		Mortg	Rent arrs	Private rented		Institution	Other
	FCNLA		Violent	Non-viol			Term.ast	Other loss		
Q/E 30.6	6	3	10	2	0	1	8	7	1	0
Q/E 30.9	6	1	4	1	1	3	9	5	0	2
Q/E 31.12	9	1	5	2	0	0	6	4	1	1
Q/E 31.3	3	3	3	1	0	0	7	2	0	3
Total	24	8	22	6	1	4	30	18	2	6
2016/17	Parents	Oth rels/fr	Relationship brkdwn		Mortg	Rent arrs	Private rented		Institution	Other
	FCNLA		Violent	Non-viol			Term.ast	Other loss		
Q/E 30.6	4	2	4	5	0	2	10	0	1	0
Q/E 30.9	5	6	3	3	1	1	8	1	1	2
Q/E 31.12	4	0	3	4	0	4	10	1	0	0
Q/E 31.3	7	2	1	1	0	0	6	1	0	0
Total	20	10	11	13	1	7	34	3	2	2
2017/18	Parents	Oth rels/fr	Relationship brkdwn		Mortg	Rent arrs	Private rented		Institution	Other
	FCNLA		Violent	Non-viol			Term.ast	Other loss		
Q/E 30.6	3	4	2	4	0	1	12	0	0	1
Q/E 30.9	4	2	1	1	0	0	5	0	0	2
Q/E 31.12	3	9	4	1	0	0	13	0	2	1
Q/E 31.3	7	3	2	1	0	1	12	0	1	0
Total	17	18	9	7	0	2	42	0	3	4

These figures match the national trends for reason for loss of last settled home, with 'Termination of Assured Shorthold' accounting for 29% of all cases in the last quarter of 2016/17 and 'parents no longer being able to accommodate' being the second biggest cause.

Ethnicity

2.8 BME households

The BME population is significant throughout the district, particularly within the town of Wisbech, a hub for migrant employment.

2.9 Foreign nationals

The proportion of accepted applicants who are Foreign Nationals has remained fairly consistent over the past 5 years (15% of the current housing register are non white british). Of the European Economic Area (EEA) Nationals Lithuanian is the highest nationality.

2.10 Asylum Seekers

Information from the P1E's show that during the past 5 years no one was accepted as homeless due to being a former Asylum Seeker.

2.11 Gypsies and Travellers

The 2011 census identified 0.3% of the population as a white Gypsy/Irish Traveller in South Cambridgeshire, equating to an overall figure of just under 500 Gypsy & Travellers recorded as residing in the District.

In 2016 a sub-regional Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment was undertaken. The study was carried out on the basis of the changes to the planning definition of a Gypsy, Traveller or Travelling Showperson which meant that persons who ceased to travel permanently would no longer be considered under the definition of a Gypsy & Traveller. The findings of the survey identified that there was no requirement to provide additional Gypsy & Traveller pitches in the District. For Travelling Showpeople, 12 additional pitches were identified to be provided over the Local Plan period up to 2036. The survey also identified that 61 Gypsy & Traveller households no longer meet the definition but have a housing need. This need, in planning terms, will be addressed as any other part of the settled community through current housing planning policies.

2.12 Future Levels of Homelessness

Homelessness both nationally and within Fenland has increased over recent years, with increases in homeless acceptances seen in Fenland in 15/16. There are a number of external factors that this can be attributed to, including welfare reforms and increasing costs in the private housing market.

2014/2015		Accepted	Intentional	Non PN	Not hmss	Ineligible	TOTAL
	Q/E 30.6	17	0	1	12	0	30
	Q/E 30.9	23	5	1	20	1	50
	Q/E 31.12	17	7	2	9	1	36
	Q/E 31.3	30	2	1	2	1	36
	Total	87	14	5	43	3	152
2015/16		Accepted	Intentional	Non PN	Not hmss	Ineligible	TOTAL
	Q/E 30.6	38	1	1	3	0	43
	Q/E 30.9	32	1	1	3	0	37
	Q/E 31.12	29	2	0	3	0	34
	Q/E 31.3	22	1	0	7	1	31
	Total	121	5	2	16	1	145
2016/17		Accepted	Intentional	Non PN	Not hmss	Ineligible	TOTAL
	Q/E 30.6	28	2	0	7	0	37
	Q/E 30.9	31	6	2	15	0	54
	Q/E 31.12	26	4	0	8	0	40
	Q/E 31.3	18	4	3	7	1	33
	Total	103	16	5	37	1	164
2017/18		Accepted	Intentional	Non PN	Not hmss	Ineligible	TOTAL
	Q/E 30.6	27	3	4	13	0	47
	Q/E 30.9	15	5	1	6	0	27
	Q/E 31.12	33	4	2	9	0	48
	Q/E 31.3	27	2	4	4	0	37
	Total	102	14	11	32	0	159

Based on recent levels we can expect homeless acceptances to increase, however, predictions are difficult due to changes to the homeless legislation, continued welfare reforms and difficulty accessing affordable accommodation in the private sector.

It should be noted that whilst the Homeless Reduction Act aims to reduce homeless acceptances, Local Authorities will have increased responsibilities to provide housing plans and prevention options to all those who approach, resulting in most approaches involving active case work. If we compare existing levels of homeless acceptances to future levels of approaches, we are seeing a potential seven-fold increase in case load.

2.13 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.

Universal Credit will be introduced across the district in May 2019. This will replace six other benefits, including housing benefit, and be 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.

2.14 Funding of supported housing

The government is proposing changes to the way that the housing related costs of supported housing are funded, to make up the funding shortfall to providers which is likely to arise from the introduction of Universal Credit and other welfare reforms.

Proposals to give local authorities more of a commissioning role, deciding what provision is required where, rather than leaving it to the market, are to be welcomed in principle, as this strategic role was lost when the Supporting People regime was disbanded. However, any commissioning role is more likely to be a county council responsibility in two tier authorities, and the district councils will need to develop a meaningful role in terms of engaging with Cambridgeshire County Council and other partners to ensure that local needs are adequately met. This will be particularly important for temporary accommodation as being able to respond to the increasing need for this is essential to minimise costs and use of unsuitable temporary accommodation such as B&B.

2.15 Devolution

Powers and funding devolved to the new Cambridge & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) are to be used to facilitate delivery of new homes, economic growth, local infrastructure, and jobs across the area. As part of this, £100m is available for new affordable housing.

The CPCA have been granted the powers to receive the £100m fund from the Government to be spent on funding the start on site of at least 2000 additional affordable homes by 31 March 2022. This provides a unique opportunity to speed up housing delivery generally, and boost the delivery of affordable housing.

2.16 Homeless Reduction Act

The main national policy change relating to homelessness has been around the passing of the Homelessness 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.

Based on the expected increase in customers and the additional time needed to manage each case, additional staffing resources are essential.

Additional resources were also required to properly prepare for and implement the legislation. This includes changes and modifications to IT systems and equipment, specialist training and a review of policies and procedures.

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 housing (from 1 Oct 2018). Advice and information will need to be

available to support specific groups, which include: People released from prison or youth detention accommodation, Care leavers, Former members of the regular armed forces, Victims of domestic abuse, People leaving hospital, People suffering from a mental illness or impairment and Any other group that we identify as being at particular risk of homelessness in the district.

Chapter 3

Existing Housing and Support

3.1 Temporary accommodation

The demand for temporary accommodation has also increased over the last 4 years. Figures from the end of 2014/15 and 2016/17 show a 43% increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation.

Number of Household placed in	B&B	Temp Accommodation
2014/15	25	53
2015/16	40	53
2016/17	38	71
2017/18	26	49

The Council use it's own 7 bedroom hostel, along with 14 other units. Bed and breakfast is largely only used for out of hours placements until the next working day to transfer in to temporary accommodation. However, this is not always possible.

The team's success in managing homeless applicants and their temporary accommodation is reflected in the low usage of B&B despite an overall increase in temporary accommodation.

Year Annual B&B spend

2012/13 £632.76

2013/14 £8,091.41

2014/15 £9,207.61

2015/16 £16,838.85

2016/17 £5,820.86

2017/18 £8,755.97

3.2 Other accommodation/ specialist support

Supported specialist accommodation is largely located within Wisbech.

The council has nomination rights in to the following accommodation:

The Ferry Project (age criteria adults 18-65 years)

The Foyer – 16-25 years

The Staithe 16 – 25 years

Princes Walk & 18 – 65 years Kirkgate St Wisbech 18 – 65 years criteria

Residents ready to move on, can be assessed under the Home-Link Sub-Regional choice based lettings scheme and, where appropriate, will be awarded Band A.

3.3 Permanent accommodation

Social housing

SCDC is a non stock holding authority , transferring it's stock to Clarion housing (then Roddons Housing Association) in 2006 with 4164 social rented homes.

3534 – General needs

419 – Retirement living / older person housing

211 – lease, shared ownership etc.

Choice Based Lettings (CBL)

The Cambridgeshire sub region introduced their CBL scheme in 2008, called HomeLink. The lettings policy was reviewed in 2018 to take account of some of the welfare reforms and readiness for the Homelessness Reduction Act.

There are currently 2619 applicants on the housing register for Fenland, split into the following housing needs bands:

Fenland housing register data - 16/10/2018

	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Emergency	Total
1 bed	92	228	251	584	2	1157
2 beds	65	239	185	408	1	898
3 beds	53	182	65	143	2	445
4 beds	16	40	8	25	1	90
5+ beds	15	12	0	2	0	29
					Total	2619

Private rent

Private rent in the district is expensive. Housing Benefit entitlement is restricted to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) for the area. The following table shows the LHA for Peterborough for each size of property along with the weekly median rent. The difference each week makes access to the private rent sector difficult for many households in receipt of benefit or on a low income.

Rent April 18

1 bed £ 129

2 bed £140

3 bed £167

4 bed £187

LHA rate April 18

1 bed per week Peterborough	£92.05	Kings Lynn	£90.64
2 bed per week Peterborough	£115.07	Kings Lynn	£112.21
3 bed per week Peterborough	£132.32	Kings Lynn	£129.47
4 bed Peterborough	£168.41	Kings Lynn	£163.16

Home Ownership

The average house price for Fenland in April 2018 was approximately £203K, with the lower quartile averaging £147k (an £11,500 increase in the last 12 months) . Figures from the Cambridgeshire Sub regional housing market bulletin show average median house prices are 6.8 times the average income, whilst comparisons between the lower quartile figures show house prices to be 9.5 times higher than income (April 2018). As a general rule, house prices of 3 – 3.5 times income are considered affordable.

For many households therefore living in the district home ownership continues to be unaffordable.

Chapter 4

Homeless Prevention Activities

4.1 The Housing Options Team

The Housing Options team is responsible for providing free and confidential advice to the residents of Fenland , including homeless prevention. The service is also responsible for the Council's statutory duties under the homeless legislation contained within the 1996 Housing Act and introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act, along with responsibility for letting social rented properties under Home-Link, the sub-regional choice based lettings service.

The Housing Options team have continued to focus on prevention since the last strategy, however, during this time, decent and affordable homes within the private renting have become more difficult to access. This has had a knock on affect with the number of homeless approaches and acceptances increasing 2015/16.

The following table shows the number of potentially homeless cases prevented through officer intervention. The chart also illustrates the difficulties in trying to help households remain in their current homes. Far more prevention is achieved by assistance to secure alternative accommodation. This is a reflection of the changes to welfare reform, where many household find their current accommodation unaffordable.

Mediation or Home Visits	23
Debt Advice	15
Supported Accommodation	32
Part 6 offer	11
Private rented without payment	5
Reconnections	7
Other	13
Failed	11

The table above shows the activities undertaken to help prevent homelessness during 2016/17. The main areas where homelessness can be successfully prevented is through assistance to access supported accommodation and accommodation allocated via Home-Link.

Additional staffing resources have been required to meet the demands of the Homelessness Reduction Act. This includes an additional 2 Housing Options Officers and 2 Housing Options Support Case Workers to help with the triage stage, when applicants initially contact the service.

4.2 Floating support

A county wide floating support service is in place to support a range of clients aged 16 – 64 who may need housing related support to help them to maintain their accommodation.

4.3 Rent deposit scheme

The rent deposit scheme has been in operation for a number of years. The scheme enables individuals to have assistance with accessing the private rented market.

The scheme is offered to both priority need and non priority need applicants at risk of homelessness and enables them to find and choose their own accommodation.

During the last financial year since April 2017, 10 households had been assisted to secure private rented accommodation with the deposit scheme.

4.4 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs)

DHP's are extra payments to assist with housing payments for those in receipt of housing benefit. The policy prioritises homeless prevention and additional payment towards housing costs such as rent can be made to help prevent homelessness.

This has been incredibly helpful in preventing homelessness for both the council and the Trailblazer team.

Funds for DHP's are allocated from Central Government and is administered by Anglian Revenues partnership (ARP) on the council's behalf.

4.5 CAB – Money Advice service

The Council works in partnership with Cambridgeshire Rural CAB to provide a money advice outreach service from the Council's offices. Many applicants approach the Council with debt issues, which the CAB can assess and assist with. We also have a 5 day fast track concession via the Trailblazer funding.

4.6 Homeless prevention via Home-Link

As part of the Home-Link lettings policy, Band B can be awarded to applicants, likely to be in priority need, who are working with us to prevent their homelessness. As demand and housing need for housing increases there can be no guarantee of rehousing prior to homelessness, however, where households are willing to be as flexible as possible there is some chance of rehousing.

Chapter 5

Partnership Working and Consultation

5.1 Joint working groups

The team work in partnership with a number of other agencies to support those who are homeless, address their associated needs and improve joint working. The services include:

Home-Link Management Board

Home-Link Operations group

MAPPA

MARAC

Sub regional homelessness group

Trailblazer steering group

Fenland Young Parents Project

Integrated Offender management group

Joint Allocations Panel

This is not an exhaustive list and one-off or ad-hoc meetings are also attended with other agencies as the need arises.

5.2 Homelessness Trailblazer project

In 2016, a range of partners across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough came together to bid for “homeless trailblazer” funding. Happily we secured nearly £750,000 as a result. Lead by the Fenland, 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 is well underway, with the funding expected to last up to mid 2019. Partners to the project will therefore be undertaking an evaluation of the project and establishing which activities have proved successful and how these may be able to continue either collectively or within each local authority area.

The project includes:

Homeless prevention

The homelessness prevention team are working with a wide range of local teams to work better together, to reduce homelessness. They have been helping staff identify the early warning signs of homelessness and ways to prevent it. The team have built up good working relationships to deliver a better service by linking agencies up. The team provide support and direct help to achieve the following: □ Educating agencies to recognise the early warning signs of homelessness and ways to prevent it.

Helping people as early as possible when threatened with homelessness, regardless of “priority need”.

Promoting a new housing health-check and new budgeting tools.

Supporting agencies to make action plans for those at risk of homelessness.

Ensuring customers are engaging with help given, to ensure a positive outcome.

Working closely with housing options teams to see what has been successful and what has not, using the feedback to further develop the project.

Helping to develop all aspects of the homelessness prevention hub and the rent solution service.

The landlord rent solution service

Loss of rented or tied accommodation is our biggest reason for homelessness acceptances, and this is mirrored across the County. As part of the Trailblazer project: We will create a new 'rent solution' service to help landlords maintain tenancies, resolve tenancy problems and reduce evictions which are leading to homeless acceptances. We will aim to attract landlords to use our trailblazer delivery vehicle through these interactions.

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. We plan to promote this service via our Landlord Events of which we will be holding 3 in 18/19.

New business development

It is evident that social housing cannot meet the levels of housing need across the County. Access to private rent accommodation is vital and enabling people on low incomes to secure private rented accommodation is now the most significant housing route to prevent homelessness.

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.

This will be achieved by:

Working with existing private rental schemes.

Setting up new private rent schemes, for example; guaranteed rent schemes for private landlords.

Facilitating new supplies of accessible rental accommodation.

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.

5.3 Protocols

The housing advice and homelessness service have a number of protocols in place with other agencies. This is likely to increase with the requirements of the duty to refer under the Homeless Reduction Act. Most protocols are, and will need to be, County wide to ensure a consistent approach for County-wide agencies.

Some key existing protocols include:

Homeless 16/17 year olds:

A vital area of work between Housing and Children's Services to ensure vulnerable 16/17 year olds receive the help and support they need to either resolve the issues at home that have led to the threat of homelessness or those who are living away from their families for the first time, whilst still legally being a minor.

The protocol has recently been under review and further government guidance is due in light of the Homeless Reduction Act requirements.

MAPPA

This is a protocol between housing and key agencies who are part of Multi Agency Public Protection.

This protocol was recently updated in April 2017 promoting a housing options approach. The protocol mainly applies to level 2 and 3 offenders and covers comprehensive planning six months in advance of release.

5.4 Consultation

As part of the work the council has lead on, we have engaged with a number of partners around the Trailblazer project. The review of how we have historically worked and how we now operate has become embedded across registered providers, Adults Early Help and Early Help Hub, MASH, probation Service, Police & Crime commissioner, Cambridge Housing Society, and the third sector to name but a few. We recognise that this work is ongoing and a review of next steps is currently underway.

Chapter 6

Performance monitoring

6.1 Homeless strategy action plan

The action plan will illustrate key actions needed to address the priorities identified in the homeless strategy. This will be regularly monitored by the Council to ensure actions remain on track.

6.2 KPI's

The Council monitors KPI's for the homeless service:

Monthly	Number of households accepted as homeless (eligible, unintentional and in priority need)
Monthly	Number of homeless decisions (including intentional, no local connection & not homeless)
Monthly	Number of homeless households placed in Bed and Breakfast
Monthly	Number of families in Bed and Breakfast for more than 6 weeks
Monthly	Total number of homeless households placed in Hostel
Monthly	The average length of stay in: a) bed & breakfast accommodation b) hostel accommodation of households which include dependent children or a pregnant woman and which are unintentionally homeless and in priority need
Annual	The number of people sleeping rough on a single night within the area of the authority
Monthly	Number of households who considered themselves as homeless, who approached the local housing authority's housing advice services(s) and for whom housing advice casework intervention resolved their situation.
Monthly	Cases Closed as Advice only
Monthly	Locata - Total Approaches
Monthly	Locata – current prevention cases started
Monthly	Locata – current relief cases started
Monthly	Homeless application
Monthly	Personal Housing Plans
Monthly	Leased Temporary Accommodation Void

Chapter 7

Resources

7.1 Expenditure and income

Housing Options service

Payments for accommodation have increased in the most recent year. This is largely due to improved working relationships with agents and private sector landlords. Spending on homeless prevention has increased as this area of work has been prioritised. This includes a money advice service to aid homeless prevention.

7.2 Government Grants

In October 2017 the Government announced that it would be allocating £72.7 million 'New Burdens' funding to all housing authorities in England in acknowledgement of the transitional support required by local authorities implementing new processes and systems to prepare for commencement of the new act. The funding covers the remainder of 17/18 and the following two financial years through to March 2020. It is not expected to be extended beyond this date, although a thorough review of the funding and underlying financial assumptions have been promised after the second year.

The amount of grant awarded for 2016/17 to 2018/19 is expected to be as follows:

	£
Flexible Homelessness Support grant	86,428.69
New burdens Fund	<u>66,732.00</u>
Total	153,160.69

From this fund we pay for our homeless prevention activity, including temporary accommodation:

Temporary accommodation:

	£
Annual charges	
Hostel	19,449
Clarion Housing leased properties	36,565

In addition, the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (FHSG) was introduced this year. This grant is not directly designed to cover the costs of implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act but can be used in this manner if a council chooses to do so.

FHSG is a direct replacement for the 'Temporary Accommodation Management Fee' (TAMF) which was distributed to local authorities by the Department of Work and Pensions until the end of March 2017. This funding stream is primarily to cover the costs of temporary accommodation, although the regulations allow it to be spent on wider homeless prevention activities if a council chooses.

7.3 Grants to external organisation

The Council provides grant aid to Cambs Rural CAB to offer housing advice and other support to homeless and potentially homeless households.

3 year SLA £73k per year

Chapter 8

Conclusion

There is no doubt that homelessness remains an increasing challenge for Fenland and across the UK with all councils. A number of external factors have contributed to this including welfare reforms and an unaffordable housing market. Homelessness has risen significantly over recent years and demands on local authorities will increase further due to the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act.

Fenland are part of a County-wide partnership who were successful in obtaining Trailblazer funding to increase homeless prevention opportunities as early as possible. It is therefore essential that these resources as well as existing resources are put to the best use possible and focus will need to remain on the new initiatives being supported including the Trailblazer project and the private sector leasing scheme.

The Council's statutory responsibilities in relation to homelessness are subject to the largest change since the homeless legislation was introduced and time and resources are required to meet these challenges.

Like many local authorities the main cause of homelessness is termination of assured shorthold tenancies and we can see that affordability of housing is a key concern within the district. Specific prevention options including debt advice and affordable housing options therefore need to remain a priority. Early intervention is essential and given the expected increase in homelessness it is important that we make information available that the public can access directly and where possible address their own housing needs. Early work undertaken by all agencies signed up

to the ethos adopted by the Trailblazer project of 'homelessness being the unacceptable outcome' will also aid early resolution of housing difficulties.

Key themes that are therefore emerging as priorities for the next 5 years include:

Working closer with partner agencies to prevent homelessness through the Trailblazer project to establishing pathways

Work closely with ARP to assist with rent deposits and rent solutions

Train our staff to work differently and make homelessness the unacceptable outcome.

OCTOBER 2018