

Draft

Huntingdonshire District Council

HOMELESSNESS & ROUGH SLEEPING - REVIEW & STRATEGY

January 2020



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1. Introduction

The Council is required to review homelessness within the district and update its Homelessness Strategy every five years. The previous review and strategy took place in 2017 just prior to the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which came into effect in April 2018. The Act implemented the most significant changes to the homelessness legislation in 40 years, by amending certain parts of Homelessness Act 2002, and this review and revised strategy is timely given that we are almost two years into a transformed way of working. It also allows us to reflect on more recent changes within the national policy context as well as reflecting on emerging local issues and pressures.

The legal framework that we must consider when preparing this strategy is contained within the Homelessness Act 2002, as amended. The Act requires all Councils to formulate a Homelessness Strategy and in preparing this they must carry out a review of homelessness in their area. The strategy must then:

- address the causes of homelessness in the area;
- introduce initiatives to prevent homelessness wherever possible;
- provide sufficient temporary accommodation for those households that are or may become homeless; and
- ensure that appropriate support is available for people who have previously experienced homelessness in order to prevent it happening again.

The Council recognises the devastating effect that homelessness can have on households and that good quality housing providing a stable and secure home environment contributes to the health and wellbeing of our residents. It was one of five key improvement areas that were highlighted within the Council's 2018/19 Annual Governance Statement (AGS). This identified the link between housing affordability leading to homelessness and constraining growth.

Each theme within the AGS is wide ranging and will be delivered only if a strategic and collaborative approach is taken. The fact that homelessness and the associated area of affordable housing delivery is registered as a key risk places this on the highest possible footing in terms of the priorities that the Council must tackle.

The Council has included within its strategic priorities, contained within the Corporate Plan 2018-22, objectives and key actions that support the work that will flow from this strategy to help address homelessness:

Corporate Plan 2018-22:

Vision:	People – Support people to improve their health and well-being.	
Objective:	Meeting the housing & support needs of our population	Develop stronger and more resilient communities to enable people to help themselves
Key Action:	Continue to develop and support early homelessness prevention initiatives in line with the new duties contained within the Homelessness Reduction Act, to help residents remain in their current homes or find alternative housing Ensure that the principles of earlier interventions aimed at preventing homelessness are embedded within public sector organisations and other stakeholder partners	Working with communities to build resilience. Supporting community development and enabling the voluntary and community sector to develop

2. National Policy Context

Homelessness Reduction Act

The Homeless Reduction Act was introduced in April 2018, making some of the most significant change in terms of how local authorities should work towards preventing homeless in their area. The Act's main thrust is to refocus local authorities' efforts to prevent homeless and to do this in co-operation with other local partners. The Act has amended Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 and its measures include:

- An extension of the period during which an authority should treat someone as threatened with homelessness from 28 to 56 days.
- A new duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible applicants threatened with homelessness irrespective of priority need.
- A new duty to relieve homelessness for all eligible homeless applicants irrespective of priority need.
- A new duty on public services to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- Clarification of the action an authority should take when someone applies for assistance having been served with a section 21 notice of intention to seek possession from an assured shorthold tenancy.

Rough Sleeping Strategy

The Government launched its Rough Sleeping Strategy in August 2018. It is based around three core pillars:

- Prevention - providing timely support before someone becomes homeless;
- Intervention – helping people who are already in crisis get swift, targeted support to get them off the streets;
- Recovery - supporting people to find a new home quickly and rebuild their lives via a new rapid rehousing approach.

The principles of this strategy are very much in line with those introduced through the Homelessness Reduction Act and the Government's commitment is to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027.

The Government has introduced several funding bid rounds since the launch of its strategy to help local authorities devise innovative solutions to help deliver on the three core pillars explained above.

The Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy highlights that those who sleep rough are more likely to have experience of institutions such as prisons, the care system or the armed forces. Local authorities should be mindful of the impact of these types of institutional backgrounds that may lead to rough sleeping and put in place assistance and timely interventions. This should include putting in place effective pathways for those prior to leaving these types of institutions so as to minimise the chances of homelessness and rough sleeping.

Welfare reform policy

In 2015 the Government announced a package of welfare reforms which would have an impact on household incomes in general, with some having a direct impact on the ability of households to meet their housing costs. These included:

- Lowering the household benefit cap threshold from £26,000 for a family and £18,200 for a single person, to £23,000 in London (£15,410 for a single person) and £20,000 (£13,400 for a single person) elsewhere in the UK.
- A four-year benefits freeze.
- Limiting support through Child Tax Credits/Universal Credit
- Replacing Support for Mortgage Interest with Loans for Mortgage Interest
- Reducing social housing rent levels by 1% in each year for four years from 2016-17

The National Audit Office's report 'Homelessness' in 2017 examined the impact of certain welfare reforms. It found that a substantial amount of variation in levels of homelessness between different local authorities is associated both with the

broad character of different areas and with the proportion of households in an area receiving housing benefit to help pay their rent. The risk of homelessness is greatest for households in areas of high economic activity on the margins of being able to pay market rents for their homes.

The impact of welfare reforms that change the balance between welfare benefits received and the affordability of local housing is therefore likely to have a wider impact on homelessness.

Troubled Families Programme

This programme has been running from 2015 to 2020, being run and delivered by all 150 upper tier Local Authorities and their partners. Although this programme is not specifically aimed as homeless prevention it aims to address many of the issues that are the main risk factors associated with homelessness, for example worklessness and problem debt, poor school attendance and attainment, mental and physical health problems, crime and anti-social behaviour, domestic violence and abuse and children who are deemed as in need of help.

The programme is driving service transformation in local authorities; changing structures and processes, strengthening partnership working and promoting 'whole-family' working. These are the same objectives that local housing authorities are aiming to achieve in order to deliver effective homelessness prevention. Innovative local authorities are therefore building on the foundations of the Troubled Families Programme in order to help achieve transformation in the delivery of homelessness prevention services.

3. Local context – policies, projects and transformative programmes.

The Council has a clear commitment to address and resolve the housing difficulties faced by our communities, and in particular those that lead to homelessness. There are a number of local policies, projects and transformative programmes that will shape how public services as a whole respond to homelessness. These are summarised below:

The Grand Challenges

The Cambridgeshire Public Services Board (the Chief Executives' group representing the public sector agencies across the area) has defined a vision for Cambridgeshire. This vision is split into four Grand Challenges that each public sector service should aim to contribute to and there are clear links as to how successful homelessness prevention may contribute to these challenges. The Grand Challenges are:

- Giving people a good start in life
- Ensuring that people have good work
- Creating a place where people want to live

- Ensuring that people are healthy throughout their lives

Housing Advice & Options preventative services

The Council invested in a restructured and increased homelessness prevention service at the time of the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act. Initially the immediate response was for Council to ensure it fulfilled the new duties contained within the Act but recognised that the change in the law was only the beginning. A significant cultural shift was needed to change ways of working; to accelerate the better use of data, use new methods and improve collaboration between different institutions and services early on.

Establishing these new ways of working has been the focus of this team over the last 18 months and continues to be so. The following transformative programmes link directly to this different way of working and so must be considered in the whole to ensure that efforts and resources are aligned with partners to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.

Homelessness Trailblazer Programme

The Council together with partners from Cambridgeshire and Peterborough successfully bid for funding through the Government's Trailblazer scheme in September 2016. This was in preparation for the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act, identifying distinct areas of work that could contribute to homelessness prevention through earlier interventions. The funding was available for 2 years, going live in the second half of 2017.

Over the last 2 years the Trailblazer team has led on reviewing pathways between partners that contribute to the homelessness prevention agenda and establishing new pathways where they previously did not exist. Through these pathways they have received 1365 referrals from other agencies and achieved 482 successful homelessness preventions across the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area. Although the funding from Government has now lapsed the partnership has committed to continue with the Trailblazer programme through to September 2020. This will allow the completion of certain priority areas of work as well as an evaluation of the programme and how it links into the wider homelessness transformation agenda (see below).

Housing related support commissioning and the potential for wider homelessness system transformation

In counties with two tier local government, the County Council has historically received the funding for and commissioned housing related support services.

These services help people to live independently or move on to independent living, supporting a wide range of client groups such as: older people or frail elderly people with mental health problems; homeless people; women at risk of domestic violence; people with substance misuse problems; offenders; young

people and teenage parents; people with physical or sensory disabilities; and people with learning disabilities.

A key part of these services is to support the individuals or families to be able to sustain their accommodation, or help set up their home for the first time, so that they are able to live independently successfully. They play an important part in both preventing homelessness across all the client groups listed above as well as helping households move through a homelessness crisis back into settled accommodation.

Cambridgeshire County Council is reviewing the services it commissions, specifically looking at those that support homeless households. To support this the County Council has consulted with the District and City Councils on the steps it intends to take to re-commission certain services as well as investigating whether there are opportunities at the same time to re-design services. This work is being supported by a commissioned piece of research to ensure that the Housing Related Support review and service redesign work is underpinned by the best possible understanding of the needs of our vulnerable homeless population.

The research will report in April 2020 informing the drafting of the County Council's Housing Related Support Strategy and the possible opportunities to redesign or reconfigure models of delivery, taking account of relevant recommendations and any identified good practice.

Think Communities Approach

The Think Communities Approach is being developed with partners from across the public sector in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This approach focuses on developing an innovative set of principles and ways of working that the public sector across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will implement to ensure our citizens are at the heart of our decision making.

8 workstreams have been identified as part of this approach with many of these intrinsically linked to the delivery of 'joined up' services that will help facilitate homelessness prevention within our communities. Examples of how these principles will be linked to transforming homelessness prevention services include:

Strategic Coherence & System Facilitation – that will provide the system with the strategic leadership to ensure Think Communities is delivered, and to ensure the public sector works as a single system, with communities at the heart of place-based delivery.

Communications - developing new communication platforms that engage our communities and workforce, making it easier to find the right information, and that enable new behaviours that help residents and staff identify and access alternative services.

Workforce Reform - transforming and engaging our workforce to deliver Think Communities outcomes. This will be achieved by:

- Developing new skills and core behaviours
- ‘Unlearning’ traditional ways of working
- Listening to and understanding our communities
- Enabling our staff to work in a ‘less permission, more innovation’ environment
- Blurring organisational boundaries where appropriate, lawful and safe to do so.

As the Think Communities approach is developed and refined this will help inform any transformative opportunities for the delivery of homelessness prevention activities across the range of public sector organisations.

The following two projects have strong synergies with the ‘Think Communities’ approach and we will ensure that the commonalities between these are brought together to avoid duplication and to maximise efficiency and scale in terms of transforming multi agency prevention working.

Project Pathways

The Council has initiated a project to generate proposals for how we structure and deliver services to our most vulnerable customers, preventing a revolving door of presentations. This takes into scope all frontline customer contact and the interplay between Citizens Advice, Job Centre Plus, CGL (substance misuse services) and Everyone Health (health & well-being services) who all offer services at the same location in Huntingdon.

We recognised that despite ever greater collaboration between our teams, services remain silo based and this project aims to create a seamless service for customers. Evidence shows that to meet growing demand the most cost-effective response is to prevent it and so working in partnership with others to proactively predict and solve problems, building self-reliance and social capital on the way, we aim to deliver services to customers that better resolve the range of difficulties they face.

A particular strand of this project will include workforce development and reform, with the aim of achieving the same outcomes as highlighted under the Think Communities approach above.

Huntingdon North Initiative

The Oxmoor is within Huntingdon North ward making up the majority of its residential areas. It is characterised by social housing built between 1965 and 1975 as ‘London Overspill’ to accommodate the additional housing needs of the capital. Individuals with their families moved to the area with their employers and as a result enjoyed a life as one big community.

More recently things have changed and Huntingdon North Ward is now one of the most deprived wards in Cambridgeshire. This deprivation assessment takes

account of factors such as income, employment, education, health, crime and access to housing.

The Council held two 'Developing Oxmoor' events involving a wide range of partners and stakeholders to identify the local issues. The priorities identified at those events all linked to the Grand Challenges that have been set by the Cambridgeshire Public Service Board and operational boards under each of these headings have now been established to deliver against the identified priorities for the ward.

These boards are sponsored by representatives from the wider public sector services and there are clear synergies between this work and the transformative work of the Think Communities approach. We will ensure that opportunities to trial different ways of working under the Huntingdon North project also inform the wider homelessness transformation agenda.

Delivery of affordable housing

The Council's Local Plan to 2036 was adopted in May 2019 and it sets out the approach to securing sustainable development in the district to meet identified needs. This includes ensuring that housing development in Huntingdonshire contributes to the delivery of affordable housing. As is looked at in later sections of this strategy, affordable rented housing is one of the main ways in which homelessness can be prevented and relieved and so making sure that sufficient numbers of affordable homes in order to meet identified needs, is essential.

The Council's Lettings Policy

This policy determines who will be considered for the social rented housing that becomes available in the district and how these households should be prioritised. The policy ensures that those households that legislation states must be prioritised, including those that are owed certain homelessness duties, are offered sufficient priority. This helps with the prevention of homelessness as well as assisting those households placed in temporary accommodation to move into a settled home so as to minimise the impact of becoming homeless. The Letting's Policy was amended to take account of the changes introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act and we are reviewing whether these changes have been successful in contributing to homelessness prevention. This review is due to be completed later in 2020.

Health & Well-Being Strategy

Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council are developing a new joint Health and Well-Being Strategy that aims to address many of the important factors which affect residents' health and social, economic and environmental well-being. The upper tier local authorities recognise that the lower tier authorities, including Huntingdonshire, provide many services which are key to health and wellbeing, and so are being engaged in the development of this strategy.

Many of the factors affecting health and well-being are recognised as contributory factors leading to homelessness or are experienced as a consequence of someone suffering homelessness. The Health & Well-Being Board's draft strategy includes an objective directly relating to the prevention of homelessness and improving pathways into housing for vulnerable people and the Council will be actively involved in the contributing to the workstreams that develop from this.

4. Homelessness in Context - The National Picture

The introduction of new duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) from April 2018 has led to changes in how homelessness is recorded by local authorities and reported nationally. This has led to some issues with direct comparison with earlier years as well as the monitoring of some on-going trends. It is therefore best to consider what has happened before the introduction of the HRA and early indicators of what has changed post-April 2018.

Prior to April 2018 local authorities recorded the number of households that they owed a duty to secure accommodation because of their homelessness (called the main housing duty and acceptance rates are shown in the table below). Over the last 9 years the general trend has been an increase in homelessness, measured by the number of households that local authorities in England accepted as 'statutorily' homeless.

The financial year 2010/11 saw a 10% increase in homelessness acceptances by local authorities over the previous year, representing the first financial year increase since 2003/4. Homelessness acceptances continued to rise over the next three years but fell by 3% between 2012/13 and 2013/14. The 2014/15 financial year recorded a further increase, with acceptances 36% higher than in 2009/10. Acceptances increased again in 2015/16 and 2016/17 but fell by 4% in 2017/18 compared to the previous year.

The figures covering the period after April 2018 (see table below) are not fully comparable with figures from before that date, because of the additional statutory duties created by the HRA. Households are now initially assessed as being owed either a prevention or a relief duty – the relief duty applies for 56 days and is replaced with a main duty (the same main duty as recorded in the graph above) if the household meets the criteria and homelessness has not been relieved within 56 days.

The number of households recorded as being owed this main duty after April 2018 is therefore considerably lower than the number in the same quarter in previous years. For example, in January - March 2019 there were 7,570 households accepted as owed a main duty, 43% fewer than in the same quarter in 2018.

This does not mean that homeless has reduced, it just means that local authorities are attempting to resolve homelessness through earlier interventions at the prevention and relief duty stages, as intended through the introduction of

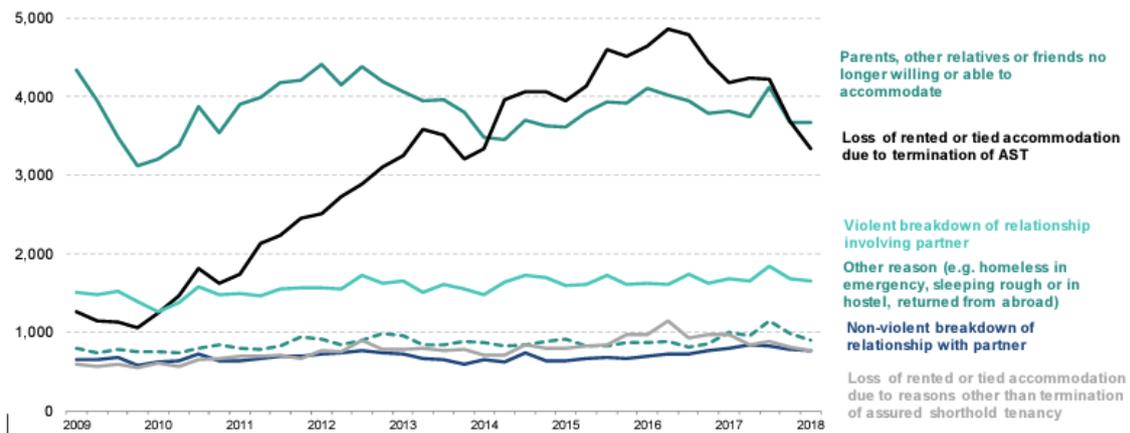
the HRA. The graph below illustrates the reduction in households being considered by local authorities at the main duty stage.

Causes of homelessness

The most significant factor contributing to the increase in homelessness since 2010/11 has been the growth in the number of households being evicted from private sector tenancies through no fault of their own. This growth correlates to the introduction of the welfare reform programme, in particular changes to the Housing Benefit system. The indication is that this has led to affordability becoming an increasingly significant issue, as more households facing the end of a private tenancy are unable to find an alternative that they are able to afford through their own income or with the assistance offered through the Housing Benefit system. This affordability issue has led to some households having only one option, to approach local housing authorities for help with housing.

This trend continued, leading to it becoming the leading cause of homelessness in 2014. There was a downturn in the number of households accepted as homeless caused by loss of a private sector tenancy in 2017/18, although it still accounted for 1 in four of all homelessness acceptances by local authorities. This slight downturn led to evictions of households by family or friends becoming the highest cause of homelessness nationally at the end of 2017/18, being slightly above evictions from private sector tenancies.

Households accepted as statutorily homeless by reason for loss of last home - for England between 2008/09 - 2017/18



Source: MHCLG Housing Statistical Release December 2018

Impact on numbers of households placed into temporary accommodation

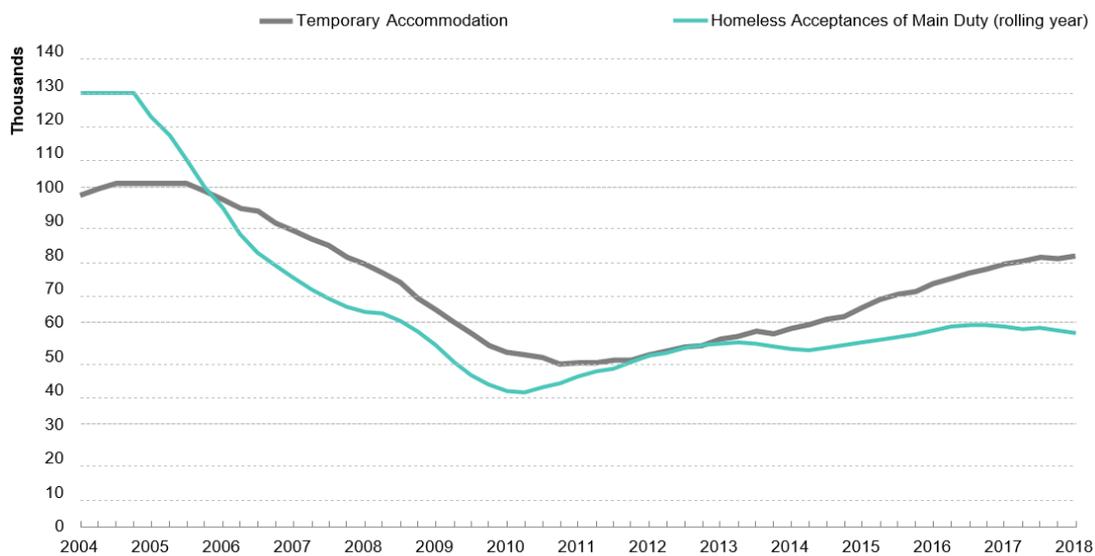
As homelessness rates have increased local authorities have been required to find temporary accommodation and ultimately settled housing solutions for those households in need. The ability to find permanent housing solutions is challenging and influenced by the same issues affecting affordability as explained

earlier. These are the same issues that have often led to homelessness in the first place and so homelessness cannot be resolved by finding a settled home in the private sector if this is not a realistically affordable solution. In areas of high private rental prices this means that the opportunity to find a home in the private sector is unlikely for those on lower incomes, meaning that social rented housing is likely to be the only realistic solution.

The availability of social, or affordable rented properties in appropriate numbers therefore affects the ability of local authorities to move households from temporary accommodation into settled homes. During a period where lower numbers of new affordable homes have been delivered, at a time of rising demand, the impact has been for increasing numbers of households being accommodated in temporary accommodation awaiting moves into settled homes.

The chart below illustrates the national impact of increases in homelessness and households being accommodated in temporary accommodation during a period of limited affordable housing solutions.

Households accepted by local authorities as owed a homelessness main duty, and the number of households in temporary accommodation, quarterly 2004 to 2018, England



Source: MHCLG Housing Statistical Release December 2018

Types of households owed a homelessness duty

Considering the makeup of households being assisted by local authorities under the new homelessness duties we can see that nearly two-thirds of these were single households (households without children) – see table below. An emerging trend under the HRA appears to be that local authorities are assisting a higher proportion of households that do not have dependent children but may have support needs or medical conditions.

The knock on effect of this is that if homelessness cannot be prevented where households then reach crisis point, and local authorities have a duty to provide temporary accommodation, a higher proportion of households being accommodated are single people that may have associated support or medical needs.

Rough Sleeping

Local authorities are required to carry out street counts or evidence-based estimates of the number of people sleeping rough in their local areas. These are single night snapshots of the number of people sleeping rough that allow authorities to understand the extent and impact of rough sleeping so that they are able to provide or commission appropriate services to assist rough sleepers off the streets.

The most recent published figures from counts and estimates show that 4,677 people were found sleeping rough in England on a single night in autumn 2018. This is a 2% reduction from the autumn 2017 total of 4,751, and up by 2,909 (165%) from the autumn of 2010.

As may be expected rough sleeping is more apparent in the larger cities, with London accounting for 27% of the total figure for England, up from 23% in 2016. From the published statistics one thing is apparent, that the rate of rough sleeping in the rest of England has increased since 2014 at a quicker rate than in London.

The national statistics break down instances of rough sleeping by region and certain regions have seen significant increases (the West Midlands a 42% increase from 2017 to 2018 and the North East a 29% increase over the same period) Others, have seen reductions with the East of England recording the joint largest reduction of 21% from 2017 to 2018.

Although rough sleeping is not solely problem faced by men, of the 4,677 people found sleeping rough in the autumn 2018, 84% of these were male.

5. The Local Picture – a review of homelessness and rough sleeping in Huntingdonshire

Pre-Homelessness Reduction Act

The trend in homelessness in the district has been similar to national trends, showing an increase in the number of statutory acceptances by the Council up until the introduction of the HRA in April 2018. The number of households accepted as homelessness increased from 169 in 2010/11 to 254 in 2017/18, a 50% increase, although the number of homelessness acceptances plateaued and remained constant between 2015 and 2018.

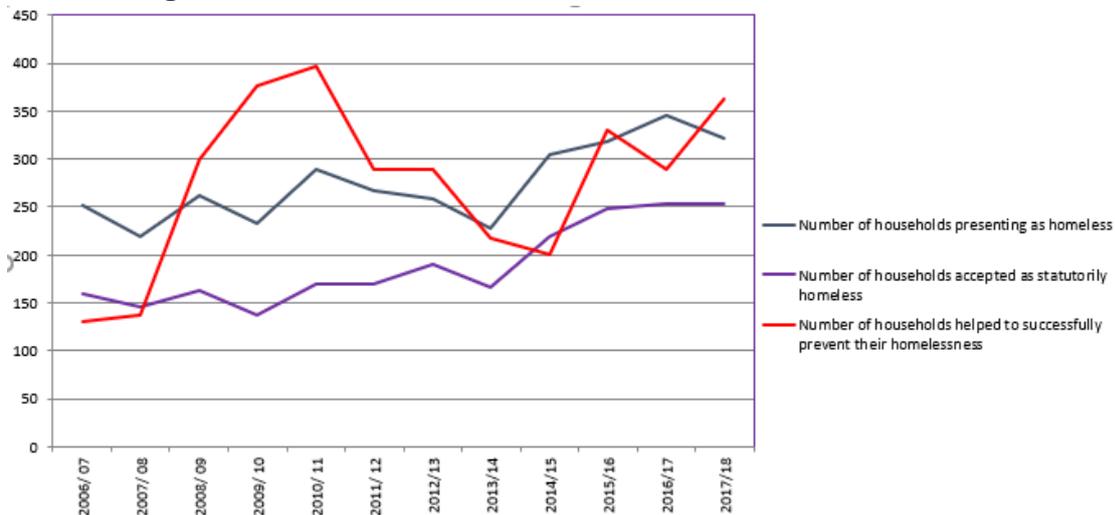
The welfare reform programme and continued increases in the cost of privately renting in the district has meant that more households see social/affordable rented housing as their only realistic option. This has undoubtedly contributed to

the number of households approaching the Council for assistance when faced with homelessness.

The lack of properties available within Local Housing Allowance rates in the private rented sector meant that opportunities to help households into this sector as a successful homelessness prevention reduced, resulting in fewer successful preventions from 2010 to 2014.

However, refocusing prevention efforts in areas where earlier interventions have been able to have an impact has led to an increase in overall preventions since 2014. (see graph below). This has undoubtedly contributed to keeping statutory homelessness acceptances constant from 2015 to 2018 and it is likely that acceptances would have been at a higher level without these successes.

Total homelessness decisions, those that were accepted as statutorily homeless and successful homelessness preventions – no. of households for Huntingdonshire between 2006/07 & 2017/18



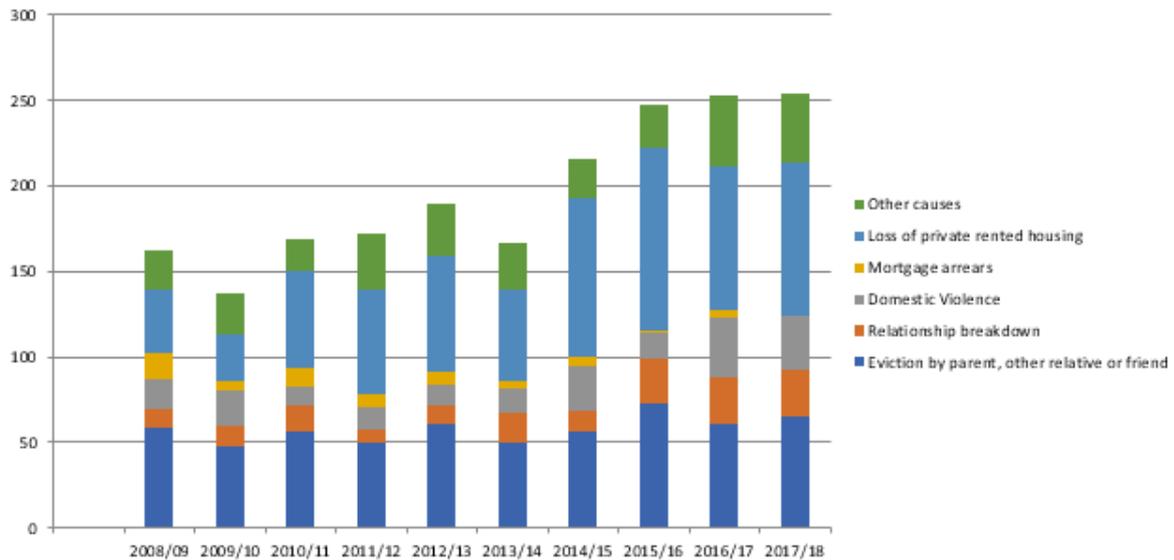
Source: MHCLG Statutory Homelessness Live Tables

Local main causes of homelessness

The causes of homelessness within the district are consistent with the national picture: eviction by parents, other relatives and friends and relationship breakdown (violent and non-violent) continues to be significant causes but as at the national level the end of private sector tenancies has grown considerably and since 2010/11 has been the single largest cause of homelessness in the district.

Although national trends saw a downturn in the number of households becoming homeless from the private sector in 2017/18 this was not experienced locally (although the previous year had seen a slight downturn). It remained the largest cause of homelessness accounting for a third of all homelessness acceptances.

Households accepted as statutorily homeless (main duty) by reason for loss of last home - for Huntingdonshire between 2009/10 - 2017/18

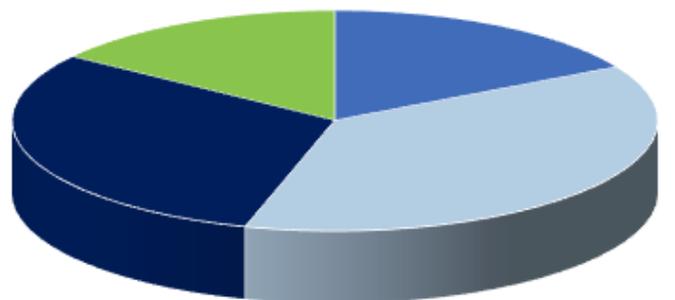


Source: MHCLG Statutory Homelessness Live Tables

Post Homelessness Reduction Act

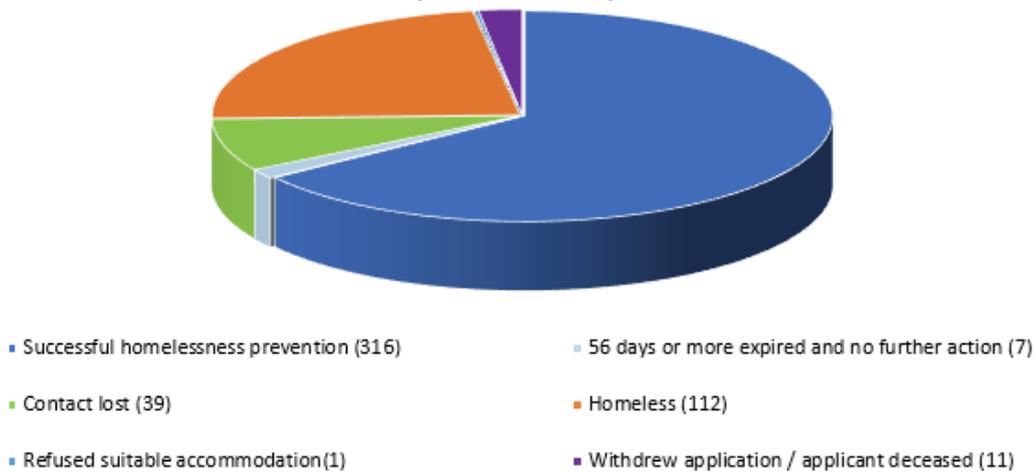
2018/19 saw the first year of recording homelessness under the terms of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA). The Council assisted 1500 applicants that year under the various duties within the Act, although it is important to remember that some households that did not have their homelessness prevented at the initial stage will have been considered under later duties (leading to some double counting). The breakdown of the differing stages of assistance are shown in the chart below.

Number of Homeless Applications Opened At the Various Duty Stages, Huntingdonshire 2018/19



- Advice Only Cases (276)
- Relief Duty Cases (480)
- Prevention Duty Cases (593)
- Main Duty Cases (239)

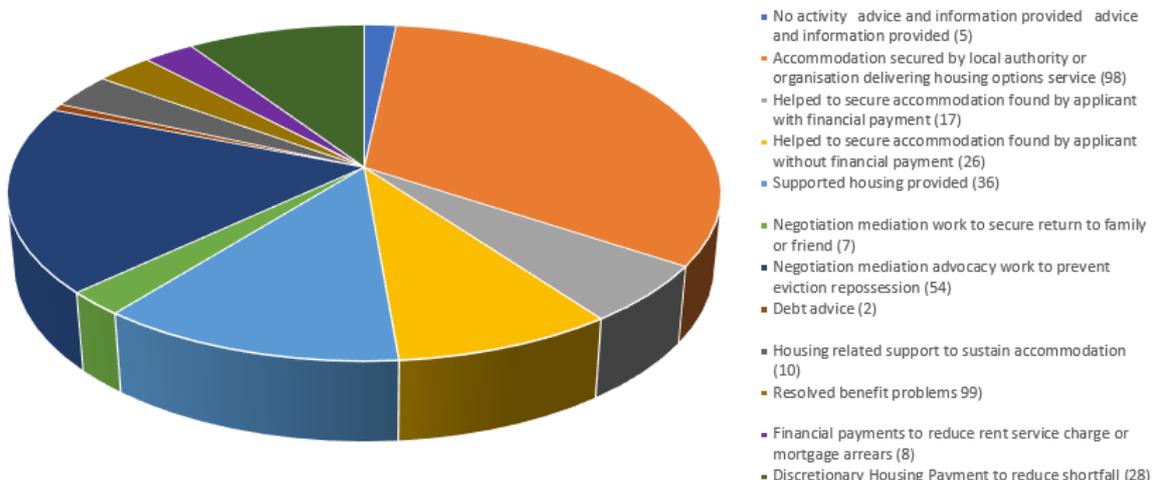
Outcomes At The Prevention Duty Stage, Huntingdonshire 2018/19



The chart above shows the outcomes that were achieved from preventatively working with households prior to their actual homelessness (the Prevention Duty stage). Almost two out of every three instances of homelessness at this stage resulted in a positive outcome, by either securing the household's current home or helping to find alternative accommodation.

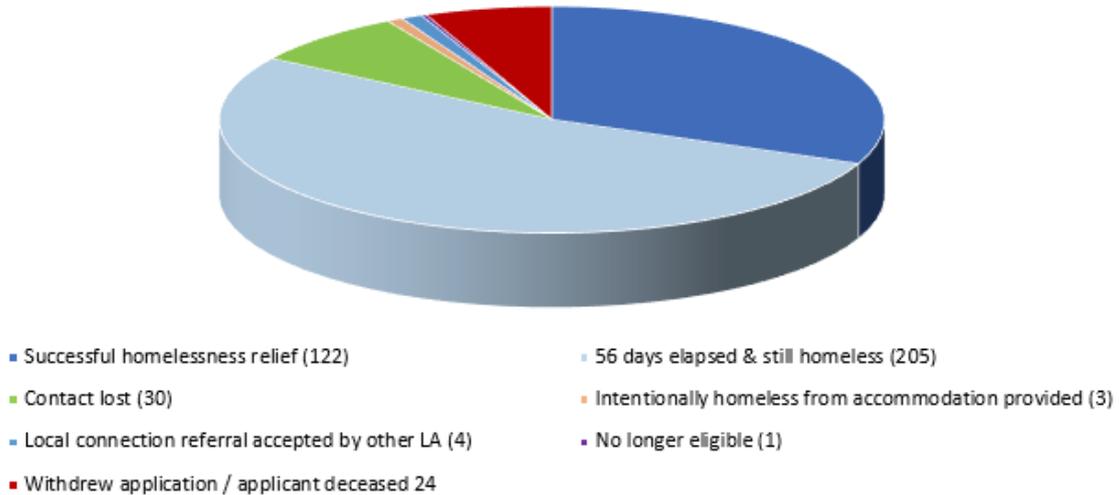
The 'prevention toolkit' offers a range of options that may be used to try and prevent a household lose their existing home or where this is not possible, find an alternative home before homelessness actually occurs. The options investigated at this stage will be informed by the particular cause of homelessness and what actions and solutions may help prevent this. In 2018/19, 60% of situations were successfully resolved by dealing with financial issues and arrears that were threatening homelessness. These actions included negotiating with landlords; resolving benefit problems; helping access Discretionary Housing Payments or homeless prevention payments. Almost one-third of cases were resolved by helping households into alternative accommodation through the Home-Link scheme, ensuring that they were appropriately prioritised when under a threat of homelessness (see chart below).

Actions to achieve successful homelessness preventions, Huntingdonshire 2018/19



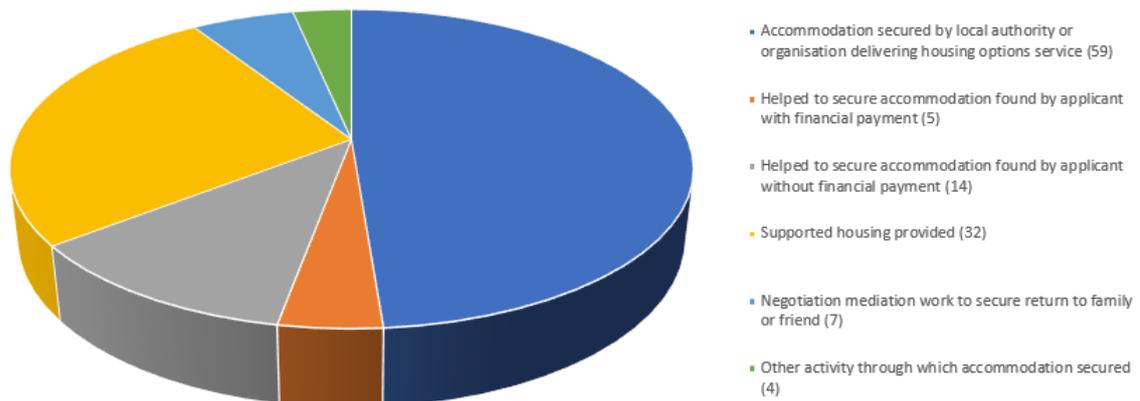
For those households where prevention work was unsuccessful the Council would then go on to see what assistance could be offered to help relieve their homelessness (the Relief Duty stage) – see the following chart.

Outcomes At The Relief Duty Stage, Huntingdonshire 2018/19



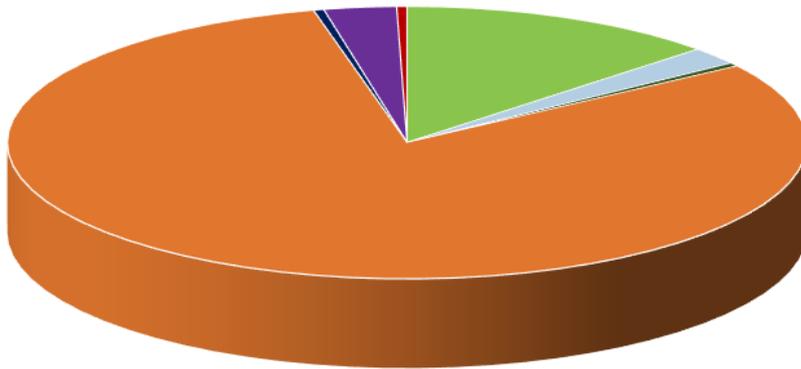
In situations where households reached the crisis point of homelessness the Council managed to help to successfully resolve their homelessness in almost one-third of cases. This stage of assistance lasts for a period of 56 days after actual homelessness and where this is not successfully resolved the Council must consider whether it owes the household the main housing duty. If the Council does not owe a main housing duty it can continue to assist the household at the relief stage in order to try and achieve a positive outcome.

Actions to achieve successful homelessness relief, Huntingdonshire 2018/19



The chart above shows the actions that were successful in relieving homelessness, with 75% of successes being as a result of helping the household access social rented housing through Home-Link scheme or sourcing appropriate supported accommodation.

Outcomes At The Main Duty Stage, Huntingdonshire 2018/19



- Homeless & no priority need (31)
- Homeless, priority need & intentionally homeless (5)
- Homeless, priority need & unintentional duty owed but referred to another Local Authority (1)
- Homeless, priority need and unintentional – s193(2) duty (193)
- Lost contact prior to assessment (1)
- Not homeless (7)
- Withdrew prior to assessment (1)

The Council accepted over 80% of households as ‘statutorily’ homeless at the main duty stage – see chart above. By reaching this stage it means that their homelessness was not successfully prevented by earlier interventions, the 56 day relief period did not give further opportunity to come up with solutions and so, subject to final assessment, the main homelessness duty is owed to those households. The solution for households that are accepted at the main duty stage is not limited to, but most likely to be, an offer of social rented housing through the Council’s housing register.

Temporary Accommodation

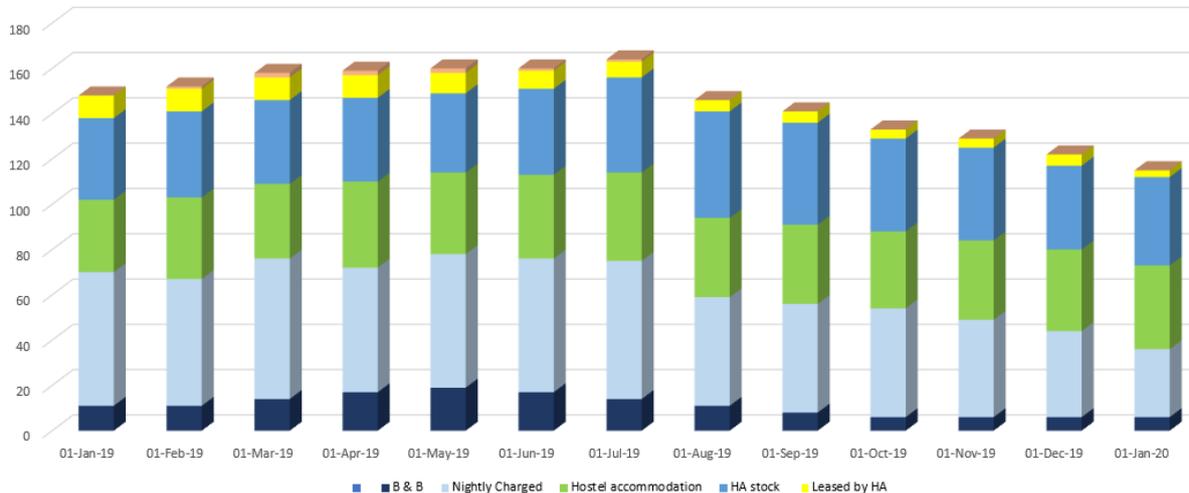
The HRA did not amend the Council’s duty to provide temporary accommodation to certain households that become homeless. Under the new legislative framework Councils must consider whether to provide temporary accommodation at the relief duty stage, when homelessness actually occurs. As with the national picture, we have seen an increasing number of households placed in temporary accommodation, whilst relief activities are carried out.

There is a significant cost to the Council associated with the provision of temporary accommodation placing an increased emphasis on achieving positive outcomes at the prevention stage, so that households do not have the need to be placed into temporary accommodation. It is similarly important that there is a steady supply of suitable properties through the housing register as this allows households to quickly move into settled homes, resolving their homelessness and limiting their time in temporary accommodation.

The number of new build affordable rented homes completed in 2019/20 has contributed to a reduction in the number of households in temporary accommodation in latter stages of 2019. We saw a peak of 164 households in temporary accommodation in July and this reduced to 110 households at the end

of December. This has allowed us to reduce our use of bed & breakfast and nightly paid accommodation, the most costly forms of temporary accommodation – see chart below.

Number of households in temporary accommodation, Huntingdonshire 2019.



The Council has one scheme in the pipeline with a partner housing association that will deliver additional units of temporary accommodation, further contributing to our reduced use of bed & breakfast and nightly paid accommodation.

Rough Sleeping

The Council is required to carry out either an annual count or an intelligence based estimate of the number of people sleeping rough in the district on an average night. As in previous years the Cambridgeshire local authorities agreed to complete this on the same night in November 2019 so as to avoid the potential for double counting of rough sleepers who may move between districts.

Given the large geographic area of the district we completed an intelligence based estimate collating information from a wide range of partners from the public sector, voluntary organisations and faith groups that work with or come into contact with rough sleepers. This information and the processes used were then independently verified.

From the intelligence gathered it is estimated that there were 4 people sleeping rough on the chosen night in November 2019, a slight reduction from the estimate of 5 people the previous year. The 4 people were all men aged over the age of 25 years, with three of these known to be EU nationals.

The Council was successful in securing funding from Government in 2019 through the Rough Sleeper Initiative which has allowed us to pilot a homeless street outreach service. This is a service covering the combined areas of Huntingdonshire, South & East Cambridgeshire Councils and was launched in

December 2019. It provides rough sleepers with a level of support to help them address a wide range of issues, such as accessing health services, but with the ultimate aim of trying to assist rough sleepers off the streets.

Evidence on the level of rough sleeping identified together with the successes achieved by the pilot will be used to evaluate the on-going need for this type of service.

The Cost of Homelessness

Homelessness has a huge impact on the households affected in both social and economic terms. Homelessness also has a huge financial impact on local authorities particularly in relation to the provision of temporary accommodation, with many authorities having to make significant provision within their budgets to meet these costs. The net cost of providing temporary accommodation in Huntingdonshire in 2018/19 was £840,000. Further investment in enhanced ways of working preventatively, achieving higher rates of success and limiting the number of households that require help with temporary accommodation, will help reduce this cost to the Council as well as minimising the devastating effect of homelessness on those households affected.

The range of measures in place to try to prevent and relieve homelessness, together with the links that we will continue to make as highlighted earlier in this strategy, show a commitment to combat homelessness wherever possible. The annual action plans associated with this strategy will also focus on the financial impact of homelessness and how this may be addressed.

6. Our Strategic Priorities.

This five-year strategy covers the period 2020-25 and from the review of homelessness in the area we have highlighted 4 broad priorities that will be the focus of our efforts over the life of this strategy.

There are a range of objectives linked to each of these priorities and we will develop annual action plans around these objectives to help us, working with our partners and the wider community, achieve those objectives. By developing an annual action plan this will allow us to respond to the evidence base as this develops throughout the lifetime of the strategy as well as any emerging national and local policies.

Priority 1: Preventing homelessness.

Given the challenges we face around increasing homelessness it is critical that we continue to put homeless prevention at the heart of everything we do. We will find new ways of both understanding and addressing the factors that can lead to homelessness - such as the ending of private sector tenancies, family/relationship breakdown and discharge from institutions. We will also develop a greater understanding of the impact of wider social issues such as poverty and disadvantage, unemployment, poor health and wellbeing and lack of

access to affordable, decent homes. We believe this will greatly increase the chances of positive outcomes for people at risk of becoming homeless.

Key Objectives

- Develop further preventative actions based on the evidence of what has previously been successful in preventing homelessness both at a local and national level.
- Embed the early intervention principles and systems that were seen to be successful through the Homelessness Trailblazer pilot.
- Develop greater understanding of the ‘triggers’ that are causing tenancies to end, especially in the private rented sector; and why relationships and/or families are breaking down – to allow new opportunities for prevention to be identified and implemented.
- Monitor and act on the impact of the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act within the Council’s Housing Advice & Options service and with partner agencies.
- Review and analyse the information that we gather in relation to homelessness and we will adapt future services and interventions in response to what we learn.
- Continue to effectively communicate with people about how to avoid the risk of homelessness, ensuring that advice and appropriate support is readily available.

Priority 2: Providing appropriate temporary accommodation and aiming to reduce its overall use by securing accommodation for people who are homeless.

Key Objectives

- To link this strategy with the targets to increase affordable housing supply including an increase in the supply of move on accommodation for all supported housing pathways.
- Reduce the use of bed and breakfast and nightly paid temporary accommodation, instead providing appropriate temporary accommodation options in partnership with Registered Provider partners.
- Provide support to households placed in temporary accommodation to help them address issues that may be barriers to moving into settled housing.
- Develop a greater understanding of what may encourage private landlords to increase the supply of affordable rented accommodation and how we may assist with making this a realistic housing solution.

Priority 3: Establishing effective partnerships, working arrangements and support to those who are threatened with homelessness, to improve their resilience and reduce the risk homelessness occurring.

The previous homelessness strategy emphasised partnership working to co-ordinate activity and focus combined energies on preventing homelessness and improving services for homeless people. With this new strategy we wish to develop this approach further. Over the life of this strategy, we will forge new relationships with our partners and ensure that our collective efforts to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping are effectively aligned.

Key Objectives

- Continue to establish appropriate pathways for customers between agencies which reinforce the early identification of factors that may be likely to lead to a risk of homelessness.
- Align efforts and resources with partners to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.
- Establish a shared workspace for agencies working across the North Huntingdon ward to help facilitate joint discussions and problem solving for professionals with shared customers and clients.
- Build on and improve existing processes to ensure an effective 'duty to refer' from all relevant public sector bodies as set out in the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- Work with Cambridgeshire County Council to embed the 'Think Communities' approach across the district.
- Ensure that the Council's workforce have the appropriate skills to apply 'Making every contact counts' principles when assisting customers
- Challenge and resolve barriers to effective service delivery as part of business as usual.

Priority 4: Supporting rough sleepers to address their housing and other needs.

Although the intelligence-based estimates show low numbers of rough sleepers in the district our priority remains to prevent all forms of rough sleeping. We recognise that these figures represent just the 'tip of the iceberg', for example with many more people having to 'sofa surfing' and at risk of rough sleeping.

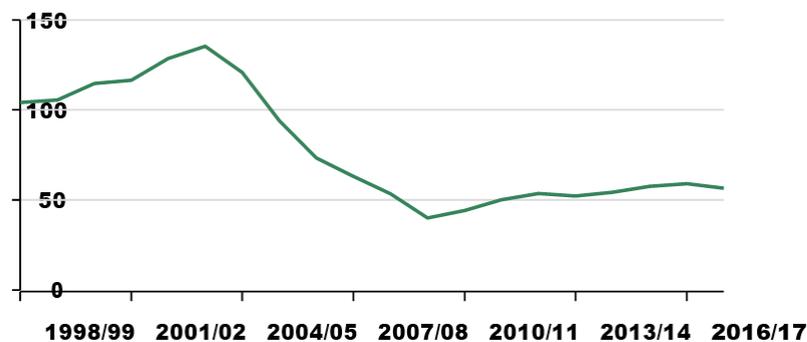
Key Objectives

- Support and evaluate the pilot Street Outreach service, in particular to better understand the causes of local rough sleeping as well as the pattern and locations of rough sleepers.
- Support rough sleepers who are ready for independent living to move into longer-term accommodation and to sustain their tenancy.

- Evaluate and adapt housing pathways, and develop new ones where they do not exist, to ensure they meet the needs of those living with complex needs as well as new/emergent client groups.
- Build on existing work with partner organisations to develop appropriate supported housing solutions, such as a 'Housing First' model, for homeless people with the highest level of need.

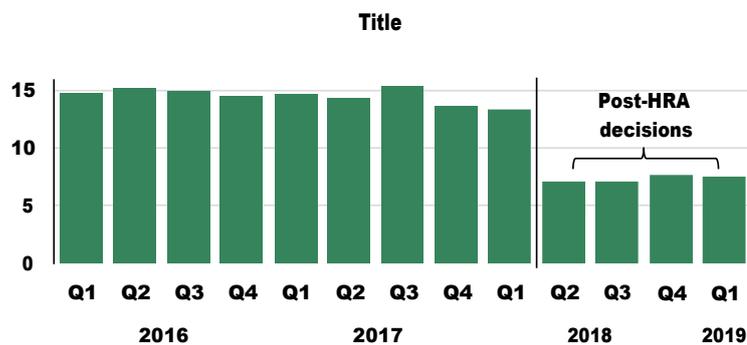
Appendix A - Homelessness in Context – charts showing the national picture.

HOMELESS MAIN DUTY ACCEPTANCES Thousands, 1998/99 to 2017/18, England



Source: MHCLG, [Main duty tables: Table MD1](#) (13 December 2018)

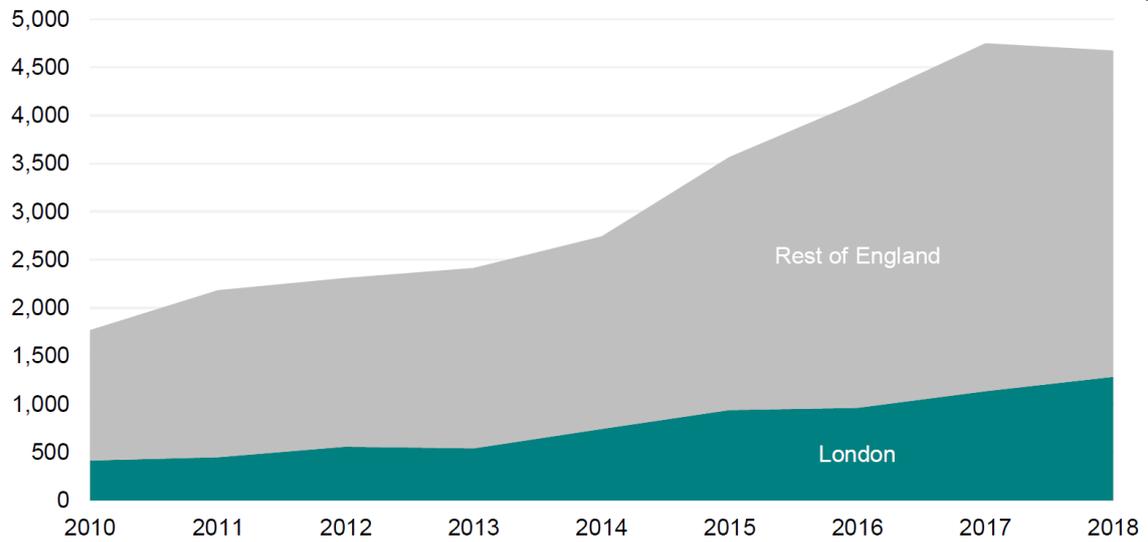
QUARTERLY MAIN DUTY ACCEPTANCES Thousands, 2016-2019, England



Notes: Figures are rounded to the nearest 10. These figures are an underestimate because they exclude five local authorities that didn't provide data (another four have had data imputed). Other data quality issues are explained above.

Source: MHCLG, [Main duty tables: Table MD1](#) (12 September 2019)

Number of people sleeping rough, England, London and Rest of England, autumn 2010 to autumn 2018



MHCLG - Housing Statistical Release 25 February 2019