

APPENDIX 1

Social Care, Health and Housing

Homelessness Review

2010 - 2015



1 The Homelessness Review

1.1 Purpose of the review

Under the Homelessness Act 2002, local authorities are required to carry out a review of homelessness in the area in order to publish a new homelessness strategy. The review should seek the views of both service users and stakeholders so that the council can identify and map any gaps in the existing service, and to listen to suggestions as to how the service could improve its customer focus and support to the community.

1.2 Reviewing existing homelessness strategies

The homelessness review, carried out in 2009, was particularly important as it needed to combine information and intelligence about homelessness across the former Mid Bedfordshire and South Bedfordshire districts. There were two existing homelessness strategies for these former council areas, so it was necessary to examine and bring together all the past achievements and ensure that any remaining actions were examined and if appropriate carried over to the new Central Bedfordshire strategy.

1.3 Achievements from the last homelessness strategies

Significant progress has already been made by the council in relation to the reduction of homelessness, expansion of housing options and offering choice.

The table below demonstrates some of these achievements.

- Launch of Choice Based Lettings scheme
- New Housing Options literature and leaflets to crystal-mark standard
- New procedures implemented to identify vulnerability and risk with all homeless applicants
- Court duty desk manned by CAB-funded officer, working closely with mortgage arrears and homelessness prevention officer
- Six monthly articles on homelessness in News Central
- Domestic violence training given to all housing staff
- Two domestic violence refuges currently under construction
- Home visits for family exclusion cases
- Rent deposit/rent in advance scheme
- Dedicated post to tackle Mortgage Rescue, worklessness and financial inclusion
- Learning from teenage parent pilot project
- Bromford floating support available across all tenancy types
- Provision of hostel in Leighton Buzzard
- Mental Health and Housing Forum established
- Review of Transfer Incentive Scheme with increased funding and support

- Additional funding for money advice to young people and tenants
- Launch of Credit Union
- Satisfaction surveys for homeless service users

1.4 Homelessness strategy health check

As part of the work of the review, service managers utilised the Communities and Local Government's Strategy Health check document as a tool in identifying areas of concern and improvement. The following table shows the council's perceived strengths and weaknesses; all areas of perceived weakness have been incorporated into the new homelessness strategy.

Areas of Strength	Areas of Weakness
Member and corporate commitment to tackling homelessness	Need further protocols with agencies to reduce homelessness in areas relating to health, offenders, drug and alcohol
Sub-regional working including a homelessness forum	Having named contacts with other agencies for a seamless referral approach
Good consultation with service users and stakeholders for the new strategy	Homelessness prevention training and awareness to frontline staff in other agencies
Meeting the Government's 2010 TA reduction target	Improved ethnic monitoring
Strong prevention and options work	Improved working with Housing Association partners
Good levels of mediation offered, including home visits	Tackling wider causes of homelessness such as worklessness
Care Leavers protocol in place	Performance monitoring
16/17 year old protocol drafted with Children's Services	Pathways and options for homeless young people.
Action to improve liaison with Housing Benefits department	Weak formal partnership structure for the Central Bedfordshire locality, as distinct from the Bedfordshire and Luton sub-region.
Rent deposit and rent in advance scheme	
Provision of floating tenancy support	
Domestic violence awareness and action	
Robust procedures and processes for administering a homelessness service	

1.5 Homelessness demand

In order to establish the past, present and projected future of homelessness demand, the review looked at statistics from a variety of internal and external sources. The findings are outlined below.

2 Homelessness Demand

2.1 Homeless acceptances and applications

Data on approaches to the service from customers in housing need shows a high volume of work coming into the service. In 2009, 1550 households presented to the council's service in housing need and 814 presented to the service run by Aragon Housing Association.

However, data on the number of homeless applications taken, and the number of households accepted as being in priority need homelessness, show the success the service has had in responding to this challenge, with a 70% reduction in acceptances between 2005 and 2009.

The available evidence shows that homelessness in Central Bedfordshire is a challenge, rather than a 'problem', as it was described in our Comprehensive Area Assessment.

The following table shows in more detail how housing need services across Central Bedfordshire responded to households presenting in housing need in 2009. This data suggests that the scale of homelessness is larger in the south of the district, echoing the broader housing need picture presented in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2010. At the same time, the data suggests a similar approach being taken by the council and Aragon Housing Association in responding to households in housing need.

Housing need approaches Jan-Dec 09	Total	All priority need acceptances	All homeless applications	All preventions	All advice cases
'North' Central Bedfordshire	814	44	86	66	618
'South' Central Bedfordshire	1550	67	109	112	1262

Of the total approaches, the table shows the number of households who received housing advice; the number of households who were the subject of a successful homelessness prevention; the number of households from whom a full homeless application was taken, and of these the number which were accepted as being in priority need with a full duty owed under homelessness legislation.

2.2 Homelessness prevention

The timing of this change co-incides with the introduction of the housing options and homelessness prevention approach adopted in 2007. During 2008 and 2009, there were 330 homelessness preventions, including some early successes on mortgage rescue. More detail on the preventions achieved is published in Appendix 1, and shows strong performance on this across both housing options service providers in Central Bedfordshire.

Further analysis of prevention activity shows a difference in the type of preventions most frequently achieved by the Aragon Housing Association service and the council's service. 'North' area services make most use of access to the private rented sector via landlord incentive schemes, and of homelessness prevention fund payments. Most 'south' area homelessness preventions are via entry to the private rented sector without use of a landlord incentive, and by provision of debt advice.

This analysis does not take account of homelessness preventions which are recorded as 'other'.

This approach has allowed a marked reduction in the use of temporary accommodation across Central Bedfordshire. There were 414 households in temporary accommodation at March 2004 across Central Bedfordshire. This had reduced to 47 households in March 2009.

The prevention and options approach is also demonstrated in the proportion of new lettings which are to statutory homeless households. The Homelessness Review carried out by South Bedfordshire District Council in 2003 showed that 60% of allocations during 2002-03 were to homeless households. In 2008-09, this had reduced to 25% of allocations to Central Bedfordshire Council tenancies.

During 2009-10, there has been a trend for preventions to decrease relative to the number of priority need homeless acceptances. This is indicative of increasing pressure on the system as the recession has progressed, to the point where the ability to prevent homelessness has plateaued.

2.3 Profile of homeless households by reason for homelessness

Data from statutory homelessness returns to the Government provides detailed information about the profile of those households who have been accepted as being in priority need homelessness between 2005 and 2009. Analysis of the reasons for homelessness in these households shows the volume of homelessness decreasing across all recorded reasons over the period. During the period, the most common reasons for homelessness were the loss of accommodation with family and friends (including non-violent relationship breakdowns), followed by the end of an assured-shorthold tenancy, violence and harassment (including violent relationship breakdown), and mortgage arrears.

The only reason for homelessness which has increased proportionately during this period is mortgage arrears, which is to be expected in the context of the recession. In 2005, this type of homelessness accounted for 5% of all priority need cases. In 2009, the proportion had increased to 11% of all priority need cases.

These 10 cases of homelessness due to mortgage arrears in 2009 are only one part of the effect of the recession on homelessness. For instance, we know that in 2008-09, 43 households were evicted from council and Aragon Housing Association tenancies in Central Bedfordshire due to rent arrears. These evictions are not reflected in homeless acceptance figures for the same time period, either because the household was not in priority need, or was in priority need but found to be intentionally homeless.

We would expect to see further increases in local unemployment reflected in increased demand on the service. The cold winter may also increase demand, as fuel poverty leaves people struggling to meet household expenses.

There has been a slight increase in the proportion of people becoming homeless due to harassment or violence, which raises questions about the role of community safety in preventing this type of homelessness, particularly given service developments around domestic violence and broader community safety issues during this time. More in-depth research would help to understand the nature of this problem and identify the correct response.

There has been service development in recent years around provision for people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, due to domestic violence. The 'Sanctuary' scheme exists to prevent homelessness, where appropriate, by installing security measures and panic buttons in the victims home so that they can safely remain in their existing home.

Two hostels catering to people fleeing domestic violence are currently in the pipeline. One, in the south of the area, will complete in March 2010, and the other, in the north, is scheduled to complete later in 2010. These refuges will provide a dedicated resource for survivors of domestic violence and will be run in partnership with Supporting People and Stonham.

However, we will need to examine with partners how these services will be funded in the longer term. To date, funding is mainly from Supporting People grant, which is increasingly under pressure.

2.4 Profile of homeless households by type of priority need

Data is also available on the reasons for priority need in these homeless households. It shows that the great majority of priority need homeless households are single parent households, followed by couples with children. This reflects that children or a pregnant woman in the household automatically places the household in priority need.

The number of homeless households with children, whilst far lower than in previous years, nonetheless highlights the importance of the Think Family Agenda in the way that the service responds to homeless families. Preventing homelessness in a family, or

responding to their homelessness in a way which recognises the wider needs of the children for stability and support, has an important role to play in preventing long-term detriment to the family's prospects.

Analysis of priority need shows that after families with children, the next largest group (10% of all acceptances in 2009), are people who have mental ill health or a mental disability, followed by people with a physical disability, people with 'other special need', and people who are vulnerable because they are fleeing violence.

The number of people having a priority need because they are care-leavers is low – just 8 people in 5 years. This could be because alternative housing pathways are effectively preventing homelessness in this group. However, better intelligence is needed to clarify housing outcomes for this group.

At present Central Bedfordshire is working in with Children's Services to set up a protocol for all care leavers so that a supported housing pathway is created for them to meet each individual's housing need and ensure ongoing support for that care leaver, so as to minimize the risk of tenancy breakdown or individuals living a chaotic life.

2.5 Ex-offenders and people with drug or alcohol dependency

Numbers accepted as having a priority need because of alcohol or drug dependency, or because of having been in custody, are particularly low and have been throughout the period 2005-09 – just seven people from these categories in 5 years.

The low number of people in priority need because of alcohol or drug dependency relates to case-law directing that life-style choice is not a relevant factor in establishing priority need.

At the same time, Supporting People needs analysis suggests that there is unmet need for housing and support in both of these groups. We need to collect more reportable data about people in contact with housing options and homelessness services in these circumstances, in order to better understand outcomes for the individuals concerned, and implications for families and the wider community.

2.6 Ethnicity of priority need homeless households

Data collected on the ethnicity of priority need homeless households suggests that the proportion of households found to be in priority need who are recorded as BME is proportionate to the percentage of BME households in the population according to the 2001 census. This does not mean that there is not ongoing work to be done in ensuring that the service meets needs across ethnic groups. For example, we have no data about the number of Gypsy and Traveller households applying as homeless because the statutory returns do not ask for them to be recorded as an ethnic group.

We do know that there is unmet accommodation need amongst local Gypsies and Travellers. Responding to homeless demand from Gypsies and Travellers means developing better monitoring so that we know more about homeless demand from this group; developing our ability to respond to customers from this group with culturally appropriate housing advice; and working with colleagues across housing and planning to develop more sites and improve living conditions on existing sites.

We also believe there to be unmet need for adapted accommodation on sites for older disabled Gypsies and Travellers, which we hope to address by designating an existing council-owned site for this use.

2.7 Disability

We do not have reportable data about the volume of homeless demand which comes from people needing housing adapted for a disability, and this needs to be addressed in monitoring systems. However, analysis of acceptances by reason for priority need shows that there is homeless demand from disabled people.

However, the bigger need around disability is for adapted property rather than as a homeless demand.

2.8 Sexuality

We do not collect information about the sexuality of customers approaching the service in housing need and cannot evidence our response to people who are homeless in situations where the sexuality is a factor in their situation. B Proud, a Third Sector organization representing and advocating for the views of LGBT people, were consulted in developing the Homelessness Strategy, and suggested areas for service development around responding to homelessness in this group.

2.9 Non-priority need homelessness

Conducting the homelessness review has revealed a general difficulty in obtaining reportable information about non-priority need homelessness. Collecting more reportable information about these households would make it easier to evidence our response to this type of housing need, and would support anecdotal intelligence about the need for further service development.

2.10 Young people

Homelessness in young people (those aged 24 and under) is an area where frontline services perceive unmet need. This links back to earlier discussion, under 'Housing needs', about the difficulties for this group in accessing the private rented sector, and the lack of alternative pathways and options – including support – for this group.

Statutory returns show that in 2009, there were 37 cases of priority need homelessness where the household was headed by someone aged 24 or under. However, this ignores non-priority need homelessness in this age group. Analysis of people approaching the council service for housing advice in this age group shows that a further 459 young people came to the council for housing advice in 2009, amongst which will be people who were homeless but not in priority need. The information referenced earlier on young people accessing the Signpost service provides further evidence of unmet homeless need in this group.

2.11 Repeat homelessness

Available data on repeat homelessness from statutory returns shows just 10 cases of this in 5 years. However, this represents only a narrowly defined group of households falling into priority need homelessness twice within 3 years. Households who are repeatedly homeless without being in priority need, or who fall into priority need repeatedly over a longer timescale, are ignored in this data. There is a need to establish recording which allows a fuller understanding of this issue locally.

However, anecdotally, we are aware that there are a significant number of vulnerable families living on our estates who may be vulnerable to repeat homelessness, and so work around 'Think Family', and wider service development around floating tenancy support, are in place as part of the response to this type of homelessness.

2.12 Rough sleeping

Rough sleeping is perceived not to be a significant problem locally and Central Bedfordshire is not defined as a rough sleeping zone by the CLG. However, intelligence gathering with partners in 2009 showed evidence of an issue with rough sleepers, with a total of 9 rough sleepers identified and a further 4-5 known to have slept rough in Sandy in the previous 12 months. Central Bedfordshire is working with partners to provide a dedicated winter hostel for 2011.

2.13 Safeguarding vulnerable adults and children

Central Bedfordshire Council has statutory responsibilities to safeguard vulnerable adults and children from harm and abuse, by ensuring the safety of vulnerable adults and children in their contact with the service, and with services provided to them on the council's behalf. There is also an obligation to train employees to recognize the signs that they might come to be aware of in their contact with customers which could indicate that someone is being abused; and to ensure that staff know what to do if they have cause for concern about the welfare of a vulnerable adult or child they come into contact with.

Further, the housing service has obligations to make promotion of the welfare of children and vulnerable adults a material consideration in strategic decision making. Developing

and improving practice around these areas of work is therefore an ongoing strategic priority for homelessness and housing options services.

Crucial to our response to vulnerable young people is agreeing a robust protocol with Children's Services for responding to homeless 16 and 17 year olds, establishing the roles and responsibilities of housing and social care services, embedding good practice on safeguarding, and establishing funding for crash-pad accommodation and supported lodgings.

2.14 Homelessness and health

A study of the health impacts of local homelessness was carried out in 2009 by a partnership of local agencies, including the council and Aragon's housing options and homelessness services. The study was informed by work with focus groups of single homeless people and homeless families.

A multi-agency conference was held in January 2010, hosted by NHS Bedfordshire, to further explore the issues raised in the study.

The focus groups with homeless families raised issues around the impact on the health and wellbeing of parents and children of the stress and uncertainty of homelessness, disruption to their ability to access primary care services (although the study found that generally local GP services are more responsive to homeless families than they have been in the past), and health and hygiene issues associated with shared temporary accommodation.

The council's homeless hostel at Bedford Court is in the process of refurbishment and will consist entirely of self-contained accommodation by the end of 2010, with the final phase of this work to begin in March 2010.

The health issues raised by families in these focus groups echo the findings of various academic studies into health outcomes for homeless parents and children.

The study drew attention to the fact that the area's rurality makes any rough-sleeping low-visibility and difficult to quantify. Despite this, there is some rough sleeping, as discussed above, which is associated with particular impact on mental and physical health.

The lack of a direct access hostel in Central Bedfordshire, of hostels catering to over 30's and to medium and high level support needs, was identified as a contributing factor to rough sleeping locally.

Focus group participants reported a fear of accessing hostel services based in Bedford and Luton.

The role of health professionals in assessing priority need and vulnerability was identified as crucial in ensuring that priority need in homeless people was correctly identified, and in ensuring that considerations of intentionality took mental ill health and disability properly into account.

Various recommendations were made in the study, which are reflected in the Homelessness Strategy priorities and action plan. These are as follows:-

- Complete work on a notification system between health and housing for homeless families with children moving in and out of temporary accommodation.
- Joint protocols and working practices agreed between housing and health, housing and education, and housing and social care services, for the support of families who have been placed into temporary accommodation during this period and whilst they are settling into permanent accommodation.
- Jointly explore how homeless families with school age children are identified and supported.
- Provide mother and baby homeless units in Central Bedfordshire.
- Engage the benefits agency in local homelessness forums.
- Explore the development of an independent Housing Advice Centre in Central Bedfordshire.
- Partnership work between health professionals and Medical Officer's employed by housing services to assess medical priority, priority need and related issues.
- Setting up focus groups with rough sleepers, and multi-agency partnership work to better understand local rough-sleeping and related housing and health needs.
- Co-ordinated health support to minimize eviction from hostels.
- Hospital discharge protocols.
- Consider joint commissioning of additional drug and alcohol treatment services in Central Bedfordshire, depending on the outcome of needs analysis around this issue.

2.15 Benchmarking against other authorities

A benchmarking exercise has been done to find out how Central Bedfordshire compares to 'near neighbour' authorities in its volume of homeless acceptances per thousand households; its use of temporary accommodation; and the percentage of homelessness applications which result in a full duty acceptance of priority need homelessness.

The 'near neighbours' have been identified using the CIPFA near neighbour model, which aims to find like authorities based on socio-economic characteristics. Luton Borough has been included due to its geographic proximity and as a partner to sub-regional Choice Based Lettings.

Authority	Full duty homeless acceptances per thousand households, Oct 08 – Sep 09	Percentage of homeless applications resulting in an acceptance of full duty Oct 08 – Sep 09	Number of households in temporary accommodation per thousand households, at September 09
Central Bedfordshire	1.3	55 %	0.4
West Cheshire	0.2	46 %	0.2

Bedford	3.1	64 %	0.6
East Cheshire	0.4	17 %	0.1
Warrington	2.3	74 %	0.5
Stockport	0.9	36 %	0.2
Wiltshire	1.7	74 %	0.8
South Gloucestershire	1.6	60 %	0.8
Solihull	3.1	70 %	0.2
Bury	1.3	52 %	0.2
Swindon	1.5	47 %	4.4
Bath and NE Somerset	1.1	54 %	0.4
Medway	1.3	41 %	1.3
West Berkshire	0.02	10 %	0.4
Milton Keynes	0.8	48 %	0.9
Calderdale	0.8	73 %	0.2
Luton	3.1	61 %	8.5

The above data illustrates considerable variance, between socio-economic 'near neighbours', in volumes of homeless acceptances per thousand households, and in numbers in temporary accommodation.

Central Bedfordshire has a rate of homeless acceptances slightly below average for the near neighbour group, and compares well to other authorities in its use of temporary accommodation. It seems reasonable to take this as indicative of robust work by the council and Aragon Housing Association's housing need service to meet the local housing need and homelessness challenge, given the housing need and unemployment context which are outlined in section 2 of the Homelessness Strategy 2010-2015. Further analysis of unemployment levels and housing supply in the near neighbour authorities would help to clarify our position in relation to them.

The percentage of homeless applications which result in an acceptance of full duty shows considerable variance between different authorities. This suggests different approaches to homelessness assessment between authorities. However, the figures don't tell us what the reason for the difference is. For example, a high percentage of applications assessed as full duty could mean that the service is applying a less strict test of vulnerability or intentionality than its near neighbours. Alternatively, it could mean that strict gate-keeping is screening out most non-priority need homelessness before an application is taken. Or it could mean that the authority is carrying out effective housing options and homelessness prevention work so that lots of households who would fall outside priority need don't reach application stage before their housing need is resolved.

The difficulty of drawing any obvious conclusions based on this type of data points to the need for ongoing service review, monitoring and customer feedback, in order to maintain a good understanding of the wider outcomes generated by the approach taken to homeless assessment within Central Bedfordshire.

The following data tables are all drawn from statutory P1E homelessness returns between January 2005 and December 2009.

Homeless applications January 2005 – December 2009

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
TOTAL	589	418	415	335	195

Homeless acceptances January 2005 – December 2009

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
TOTAL	373	228	278	206	111

These first two tables clearly show a marked reduction in homelessness applications and acceptances during 2007, when the new housing options programmes were launched.

Reasons for homelessness January 2005 – December 2009

	Family /friend eviction	End of AST	Leaving Care	Harassment or Violence	Mortgage arrears	Left prison	Left hospital	Tied Accom	Other
2005	207	49	10	35	18	0	0	12	43
2006	123	36	3	19	15	0	0	4	28
2007	124	65	3	24	14	0	0	6	10
2008	116	46	0	16	16	1	2	0	9
2009	52	17	2	12	10	2	4	3	9
TOTAL	622	213	18	106	73	3	6	25	99

Reason for homelessness is unavailable for SBDC area between Jan-Mar 2007

Acceptances by ethnicity January 2005 – December 2009

	White	Black	Asian	Mixed	Chinese	Other	Not stated
2005	325	7	3	5	0	2	31
2006	207	4	1	2	0	1	13
2007	236	6	3	3	0	0	30
2008	165	3	1	0	0	2	35
2009	93	1	0	2	0	1	14
TOTAL	1026	21	8	12	0	6	123

Household type January 2005 – December 2009

	Couple with children	Lone parent	Single person	Other
2005	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2006	38	72	43	22
2007	73	162	22	21
2008	65	124	13	4
2009	28	54	26	3
TOTAL	204	412	104	50

Acceptances by priority need January 2005 – December 2009

	Child /preg	Age 16/17	Old age	Alcohol/ drugs	Physical disability	Mental ill health disability	Other special need	Leave care	Custody Remand	Violence
2005	300	11	6	0	9	21	18	1	1	6
2006	191	2	0	1	4	16	9	2	0	3
2007	217	0	2	1	10	8	0	1	0	7
2008	189	3	1	0	3	8	0	0	1	1
2009	83	1	1	1	3	11	2	4	2	3
TOTAL	980	17	10	3	29	64	29	8	4	20

Reason for priority need is unavailable for SBDC area between Jan-Mar 07

Age of main applicant January 2005 – December 2009

	16-24	25-44	45-59	60-64	65-74	75+
2005	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2006	105	88	11	0	0	0
2007	110	114	21	0	0	1
2008	104	91	9	0	1	1
2009	37	58	13	2	1	0
TOTAL	356	351	54	2	2	2

Main applicant age is unavailable for MBDC area between Jan-Mar 06 and for SBDC area between Jan-Mar 07

Homeless preventions January 2005 – December 2009

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
TOTAL	n/a	n/a	n/a	153	177

Reasons for prevention (by maintaining existing accommodation) January 2005 – December 2009

	Media tion	Concili ation	Preve ntion fund	Debt advic e	Hb resolv ed	Arrears Resolved	Sanc tuary	Crisis interv ention	Neg AST	Other assis	Mort gage	oth er
2005	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2006	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2007	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2008	1	1	1	1	3	0	3	0	3	0	2	3
2009	2	3	8	11	2	1	6	1	4	2	3	17
TOT AL	3	4	9	12	5	1	9	1	7	2	5	20

**Reasons for prevention (by obtaining alternative accommodation)
January 2005 – December 2009**

	Hostel / HMO	AST with incentive	AST without incent	Friends / family	Supported accom	Social housing	Low cost owner	other
2005	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2006	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2007	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2008	3	31	3	0	0	27	0	10
2009	14	13	36	16	4	11	0	23
TOTAL	17	44	39	16	4	38	0	33

Youth homeless acceptances January 2005 – December 2009

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
TOTAL	88	105	110	104	37

Ex-offender homeless acceptances January 2005 – December 2009

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
TOTAL	1	0	0	1	3

Repeat homeless acceptances January 2005 – December 2009

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
TOTAL	4	2	0	3	1