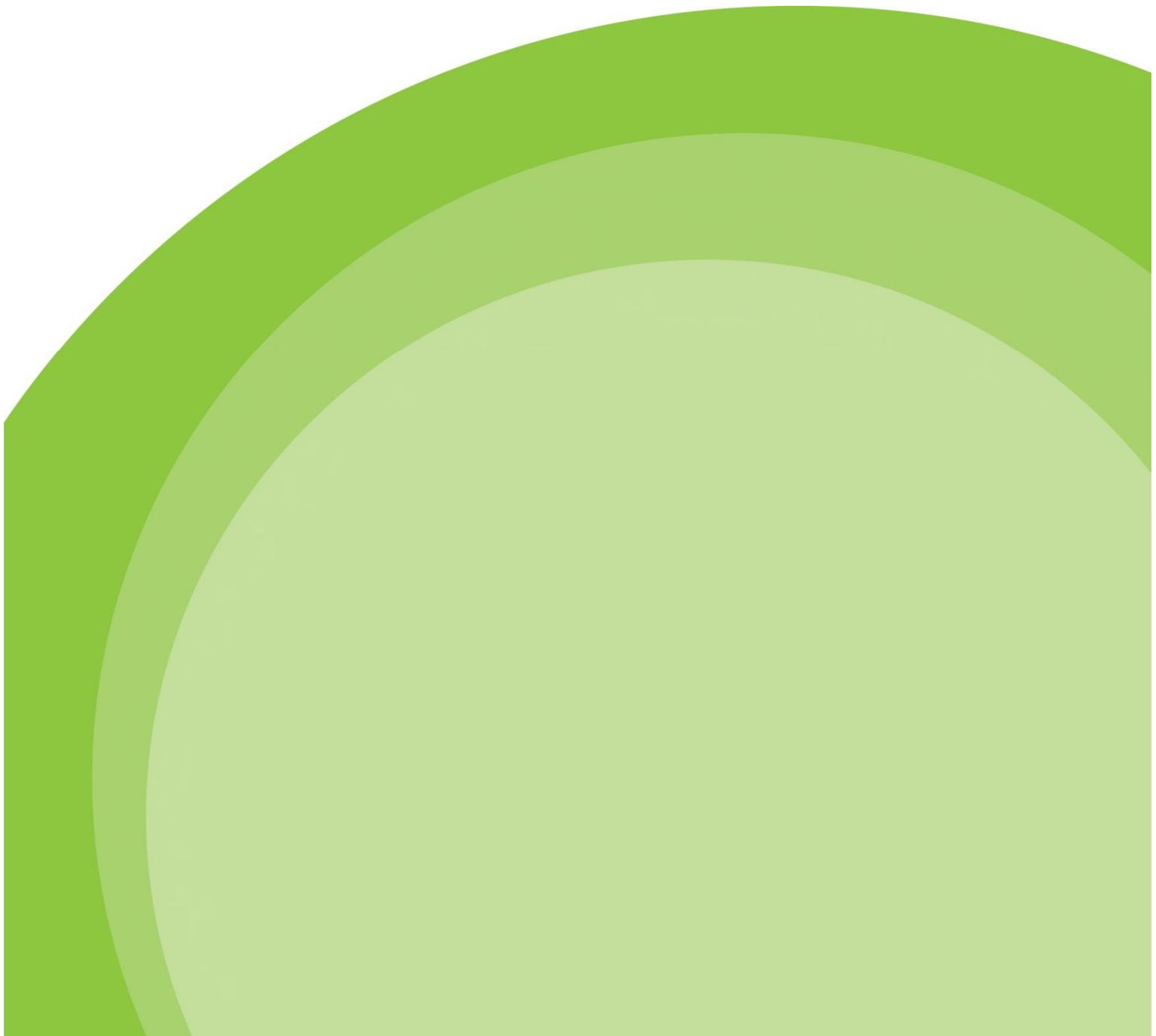




Central Bedfordshire Homelessness Strategy 2015- 2020

Adopted by Executive 31 March 2015



Central Bedfordshire Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020

Draft

Contents

	Page
Foreword	3
What do we mean by 'homelessness'?	4
Introduction	5
Our Vision	6
Building on Success	7
Summary of the Homelessness Review Findings	8
National and local policy context	11
Strategic Priorities	17
Priority one: Improve the provision of a range of housing options and services to effectively prevent and reduce homelessness	17
Priority two: Meet the accommodation and support needs of homeless people	20
Priority three: Reduce the use of temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast	23
Priority four: Minimise the impact of welfare reform, whilst assisting homeless people to access opportunities for employment, education and training, and support them to raise and meet their aspirations	24
Priority five: Develop an integrated partnership approach to tackling homelessness	25
Implementing the Strategy	26

Foreword

As the Council's Executive Member for Social Care, Health & Housing, I am pleased to present our new Homelessness Strategy. Its purpose is to set out our strategic approach and commitment to preventing homelessness. The strategy identifies current issues and sets out how we plan to address the housing needs and aspirations of those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.



Central Bedfordshire is a great place to live, visit and invest in. A place where all our residents are able to contribute to and benefit from sustained prosperity. The vision articulated within this strategy requires all to take responsibility for supporting our vulnerable communities and this includes striving to reduce and prevent homelessness.

Despite a small reduction in both homeless applications and acceptances in the last year, the demand and pressure on the Housing Solutions service remains high. Each year over 2,000 households approach the service seeking advice and assistance with regard to housing and homelessness issues. The use of both temporary accommodation and bed & breakfast accommodation reached a three-year high during 2014.

There is a limited supply of affordable housing in the social and private rented sectors. The pressure is mainly for 1 and 2 bedroom properties, as well as supported and specialist accommodation. Need is most pressing in the market towns – Sandy, Biggleswade, Flitwick, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, and Leighton Buzzard/Linslade.

It is essential that we make best use of our existing stock and seize every opportunity to enable the development of affordable provision to meet local housing needs. The Council's Landlord Business is delivering an ambitious programme of new build development, whilst we also support Housing Associations to increase the supply of affordable housing.

This strategy reflects our strong commitment to early intervention and prevention, by continuing to invest in and improve the effectiveness of the Housing Solutions Service. We seek to enable people to make their own informed choices for housing they can afford and sustain. Our approach is to develop person-centered solutions, minimising the impact of homelessness on people's lives, whilst developing local solutions to create opportunities to enable people to help themselves – with support when and where needed.

Alongside our actions to prevent homelessness, we have a clear social purpose. We strive to raise the aspirations of our customers, supporting them to access sustainable and affordable housing whilst also assisting them to access education, training and employment. Our offer of accommodation is tied to our social purpose and through our Homelessness Strategy we will change lives and raise aspirations.

Our vision is simple – a **new start with our help – helping you to help yourself**

Councillor Ms Carole Hegley
Executive member responsible for Social Care, Health and Housing.

What do we mean by 'homelessness'?

Homelessness is a term that is often misunderstood, with many people believing that the definition is restricted to those who sleep on the streets. However the legal definition is far wider, and there are many instances in which a person would be considered legally homeless or at risk of homelessness. Our strategy has regard to this wider legal definition.

In Autumn 2013 it was estimated that there were 13 rough sleepers in Central Bedfordshire, compared to the regional average of 6 and in December 2014, the estimate increased to 18. Nationally an increase in rough sleeping has been witnessed since 2010, and is thought to be due to a range of factors including the current economic climate and limited housing options available to young single people. Rough sleeping is the most extreme form of homelessness, and one where we need to focus our efforts on immediate intervention and support.

Central Bedfordshire Council is committed to meeting the Government's 'No Second Night Out' vision. In partnership with our neighbouring authorities we have developed a local 'No Second Night Out' offer, which ensures that anyone who sleeps rough is contacted immediately through outreach services and an offer of emergency accommodation and support is made to ensure that they do not need to spend a second night on the streets. We are committed to ending rough sleeping and will work with our partners and communities to ensure this commitment is met.

The majority of people who are homeless in Central Bedfordshire do not sleep rough. It is much more likely that homeless people are the 'hidden homeless', and may be living in insecure or unsuitable accommodation, temporarily staying with family or friends or at risk of homelessness as they cannot afford to meet their housing costs. Homelessness can happen to anyone for a multitude of reasons.

A wide number of factors play a part in someone becoming homeless. Individuals can arrive at the point of homelessness after a long chain of other life events. Some factors and experiences can make people more vulnerable to homelessness: these include poor physical health, mental health problems, bereavement, experience of care, alcohol and drugs issues, and experience of the criminal justice system.

Central Bedfordshire Council has a clear legal responsibility in relation to homelessness. Our primary role and legal duty can be described as –

- To prevent homelessness and in a broader sense to promote health and wellbeing
- To fulfil our statutory responsibility to secure accommodation where there is a clear legal duty to do so. The Council will typically discharge its legal duty by securing suitable accommodation, which may be in the private rented sector.

In line with the Government's Code of Guidance, Central Bedfordshire Council does not encourage or incentivise homelessness, rather the Council will work with its partners to prevent homelessness. The Council does not see homelessness as being a route to access social housing, though in some cases it will be appropriate to offer a homeless person a council or Housing Association home. The Council has two main policies which determine access to accommodation –

- Allocations Policy – adopted in May 2014 and implemented during October 2014
- Policy to Discharge Homelessness Duty to a Suitable Home – adopted and implemented September 14

Introduction

Reducing homelessness is a key priority for Central Bedfordshire. The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities to carry out a Strategic Review of Homelessness in their area and then formulate and publish a Homelessness Strategy based on the findings from the review.

The outcome of the recent homelessness review highlights high levels of demand on the Housing Solutions service. Whilst preventative services have had success in preventing homelessness over the past 5 years, the ongoing high demand for services coupled with the impacts of welfare reform indicate that new approaches are required to meet the needs of those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

A copy of the full review can be found at <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/home-and-housing/housing/housing-policies-strategies/housing-policies-strategies.aspx>

Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) published its previous Homelessness Strategy in 2010. Since this time, significant socio-economic change has continued to take place both nationally and regionally as a result of the economic downturn and Government Spending Review decisions, particularly in relation to welfare reform. The combined effect of this change has in turn placed greater pressure on vulnerable households to maintain secure accommodation whilst also dealing with an increased cost of living, lack of security of tenure in the private sector, rising private rents and ongoing growth in house prices.

The Council is ambitious to deliver new housing in Central Bedfordshire through the Local Development Framework, and is determined to work with partners and businesses to create new jobs; 2,000 jobs have already been achieved as part of an ambitious target to achieve 27,000 new jobs through our strategy for growth. The Council's aim is to focus on local people contributing to, and benefiting from, economic success. Our plans for reform across the whole spectrum of public services, are based on supporting people into work and improving quality of life for all, young and old.

Central Bedfordshire is committed to delivering efficient and effective services; by working in new and innovative ways the Council has demonstrated that it can do more for less, and in doing so save money for our local residents. Given the high demand on the Housing Solutions service and the pressures on the housing market, we need to radically rethink the way we tackle these challenges including the way people who are homeless are supported to regain their independence, access sustainable and affordable accommodation and make a contribution to the community.

This strategy sets out a response to homelessness to the above challenges. The involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, including Registered Providers of social housing (RP's), health services, voluntary and community groups, and customers has been invaluable in developing the strategy.

The Strategy is based firmly on the findings of a comprehensive review of homelessness undertaken during 2014. This included both primary research and an in-depth desk-top analysis of data from the Council and other agencies to identify key issues and trends. This analysis has been supplemented by wider data on the population of Central Bedfordshire, economic factors, health inequalities, and the housing market.

The Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020 builds on the success of Central Bedfordshire's first strategy, which has encouraged more people to resolve their housing situation through preventative measures and housing options interventions. However social and economic factors have led to an increase in demand for housing options and advice services, housing register applications, homelessness declarations and a substantial increase in the use of temporary accommodation.

The strategy's priorities are therefore focused on continuing to improve preventative services, supporting homeless people and ensuring an adequate supply of appropriate, affordable accommodation. The Council recognises that a range of public bodies and third sector providers have an essential and invaluable contribution to make towards preventing homelessness. This strategy can only be successfully delivered through effective partnership working.

Our vision

Our Homelessness Strategy is forward looking; all of our interventions lead, through a range of different options, to our offer of accommodation being a springboard into work and financial stability.

Our vision is simple – a **new start with our help – helping you to help yourself**

The challenge we continue to face is that of housing supply, against a difficult economic backdrop. With a limited supply of affordable housing provision in both the social and private rented sectors and a lack of appropriate supported housing, it is essential to make the best use of the existing supply, whilst at the same time enabling the development of affordable provision to meet the housing needs of the area.

Our approach is to develop person-centered solutions, minimising the impact of homelessness on people's lives, whilst developing local solutions to create opportunities to enable people to help themselves – with support when and where needed.

We are working to increase housing supply through the following initiatives:

- Council's new build homes programme
- Targeted approach to the allocation of social housing to those in housing need
- Enabling chains of moves to free up social housing
- Lets Rent scheme to increase supply in the private rented sector
- Shared houses to meet the housing needs of single under 35 year olds

This approach to increasing supply will be coupled with a range of solutions to resolve a crisis and at the same time, we will expect people to use our 'Hand Up' to move on and to leave troubled times behind.

Our objectives are to:

- Effectively prevent homelessness by offering good realistic advice and support together with practical help.
- Understand and tackle the root causes of homelessness at a local level.
- Where people do become homeless, help them to find and sustain suitable homes as

soon as possible.

- Involve people affected by homelessness in planning services to meet their individual needs.
- Improve how we work together so services are easier to use and make the best use of available resources.
- Work in partnership with Children's Services to develop bespoke and sustainable housing solutions for young people and care leavers, including the provision of supported housing.
- Ensure our responses to homelessness promote customer choice, equality of opportunity, reduce social exclusion and contribute to community cohesion.
- Delivery of high quality front line services, which consistently achieves great results, whilst making the best use of resources.

Central Bedfordshire Council will continue to plan ahead and work in partnership with others who can assist in delivering solutions, as we strive to meet our housing ambitions.

Building on Success

Housing has a central role to play in everything we are seeking to achieve in Central Bedfordshire. During 2013, a Councilor led Task and Finish Group worked closely with stakeholders and local residents to develop our local Housing Green Paper, which sets out the Council's thinking to date on housing issues and challenges and our priorities for action in driving forward with a new agenda. Our Green Paper sets out an innovative and ambitious approach to meeting the housing needs of our residents.

- In 2012 we developed our first Tenancy Strategy, which ensures the most effective use of our housing stock through the introduction of flexible tenancies.
- In 2014 we launched our new Allocations policy, which takes advantage of the opportunities provided by the Localism Act in creating a truly local Allocations Scheme, based upon research into our local housing needs. The new policy seeks to make the best use of housing stock, focusing resources on those households in housing need and supporting our residents into employment, education and training.
- In 2014 we approved a policy to discharge the homeless duty into the private rented sector, and have renewed and strengthened our 'Let's Rent' scheme, which increases affordable housing supply in the private rented sector.
- In 2014 the Council launched its new Tenancy Sustainment approach, which includes one to one support provided by Tenancy Support Officers, improved risk assessments before the tenant moves in to ensure the best start to the tenancy and incentives for tenants struggling financially to downsize. The Council has received national recognition for this innovative approach.
- In 2014, we created a locality model of service – Housing Solutions – amalgamating Housing Needs and Private Sector housing teams, creating generic roles and closer operational collaboration across specialist areas to more effectively deal with issues and problems (and create solutions) mainly in the private rented sector.

There have been many successes since the development of the last Homelessness

Strategy, in spite of the high housing demand in Central Bedfordshire. These successes have been achieved through the high priority placed on homelessness prevention in the area and the continuing work in delivering practical homelessness solutions. As a consequence, a strong network of partnerships and services has been developed to support those who are either threatened with or experiencing homelessness.

Since the previous strategy there have been significant changes in legislation such as the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the Localism Act 2011. This has provided the opportunity to develop new ways of delivering services and has led to radical revisions in the way in which we deliver our housing services, including closer integration with employment and education.

We are proud of what we have achieved since the publication of our last Homelessness Strategy, including:

1. The successful harmonisation of the north and south housing needs services following the north service being brought back in house. This has ensured there is a consistent approach across Central Bedfordshire.
2. Development of a new local allocations scheme which meets our local needs.
3. The Let's Rent scheme, which facilitates private sector tenancies, has been developed to increase the housing supply available.
4. Troubled families now have additional support through the implementation of the Supporting Families programme.
5. A Homelessness and Mediation Service for young people has been introduced.
6. Debt and budgeting information and advice provision has been improved.
7. A new policy has been implemented to enable the use of the power to discharge the homelessness duty to the private sector.
8. Emergency night shelter facilities have been provided through the No Second Night Out Initiative.

Summary of the Homelessness Review findings

In developing this Strategy, a comprehensive review of homelessness across Central Bedfordshire was undertaken over a period of ten months and involved active engagement with service providers and partner agencies.

The Review provides a sound evidence base for preventing and addressing homelessness across Central Bedfordshire and reflects on the factors known to affect future homelessness. Its findings and recommendations are the basis for the development of this new Homelessness Strategy.

- Since Central Bedfordshire Council's last Homelessness Strategy was published in 2010 there have been many changes affecting local residents such as the welfare reforms and continuing economic challenges. This and other factors have led to an increase in demand for housing options and advice services, housing register applications, homelessness declarations and a substantial increase in the use of temporary accommodation.

- In 2013/14 2,158 households approached the Housing Solutions service for assistance, whilst this is a 9% reduction on the previous year, there continue to be high numbers of customers accessing the service.
- In 2013/14 183 homeless decisions were made, compared with 219 in 2010/11, representing a 16% decrease. This is due to pro-active prevention work and an increased use of private rented accommodation through the Council's Let's Rent scheme. There were 124 acceptances in 2013/14 compared with 159 the previous year. However, in the first half of 2014/15 there have already been 72 acceptances, suggesting an annual increase on the previous year.
- Young people are significantly over-represented in the homeless population in Central Bedfordshire, 57% of acceptances were young people. There are a number of factors that make young people vulnerable to homelessness and restrict their housing options; including high numbers of young people not in employment, education or training. Young people face challenges in finding accommodation through a combination of Local Housing Allowance restrictions and shared accommodation rates, a lack of resources for a deposit, and competition in the private rented sector from all people aged under 34 years.
- The number of households placed in temporary accommodation under a homeless duty has increased by 55% since 2010/11, which is at odds with the reduction in homeless decisions over the same time period. Hostel accommodation makes up the largest proportion of placements, however the use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation increased significantly over the three year period to 2012-13 with a reduction in 2013-14. The cost of placing homeless households in temporary B&B accommodation has increased from £31,000 in 2011/12, to £71,000 in 2013/14. Both the increase in the use of B&B and the length of stay in B&B are of considerable concern. The majority of households placed in temporary accommodation were households with dependent children (71%).
- However data from the first two quarters of 2014/15 indicates that the rate of statutory homeless applications is likely to increase from the previous year, whilst the number of homelessness preventions is lower in comparison. At the same time, the number of placements in TA has roughly doubled in comparison to previous years. This demonstrates very clearly that there is extra pressure on the Housing Solutions service, and specifically on temporary accommodation. A considerably higher proportion of the homelessness caseload for 2014-15 has led to a placement in Temporary Accommodation, than in the previous two years.
- The majority of households accepted as homeless were lone females with dependent children, accounting for 40% of acceptances.
- The main reason for homelessness in Central Bedfordshire is family or friends not willing to accommodate, accounting for nearly a third (31%) of homeless acceptances in 2013-14.
- This second biggest reason for homelessness locally is due to the termination of an assured shorthold tenancy. Nationally the termination of an assured shorthold tenancy is the main cause of homelessness. In order to effectively prevent homelessness arising from the private rented sector a range of prevention tools are required including

early intervention and immediate responses to problems as they arise.

- 537 households were prevented from becoming homeless either by providing support to remain in the existing home (275) or assistance to find alternative secure accommodation (262). This equates to 4.88 preventions per 1,000 households, which is below the national average of 9.28. This is an 18% reduction compared with the previous year.
- The most successful prevention measure used to enable households to remain in their existing home was through mediation, and the most successful measure to enable households to secure alternative accommodation was through assistance to access the private rented sector. The Lets Rent scheme is a significant success story locally.
- In 2013/14 there were 1,337 new Housing Register applications. The number of households joining the Housing Register has decreased by 10% over the last three years. It is anticipated that a further reduction will be witnessed following the implementation of the new Allocations Policy, which introduces a range of new eligibility criteria, however this may impact upon a higher demand on the Housing Solutions service. Currently the highest proportion of applications is made up of lone female parents, followed by couples with dependent children.
- There was estimated to be 13 rough sleepers in Central Bedfordshire in Autumn 2013, compared to the regional average of six.
- The Homelessness Review highlighted the link between homelessness and health, and illustrated the significant health inequalities experienced by homeless people, especially those sleeping rough. Whilst some aspects of poor health are attributable to being homeless, some health problems such as substance misuse and mental health problems can lead to homelessness, and be a barrier in moving from the streets or temporary housing into more stable accommodation. Access to appropriate and timely drug and alcohol and mental health treatments can therefore play an important role in moving people out of homelessness and into long term recovery.
- In undertaking the review a number of engagement events were held with staff and external stakeholders to gather views on the effectiveness of homelessness service provision within Central Bedfordshire. The key messages that arose through the consultation event were:
 - Effective support and key worker provision, however the demand for the service is very high.
 - Lack of supported accommodation for young people.
 - Lack of emergency accommodation.
 - Lack of one and two bedroom properties across the area.

National and local policy context

Central Bedfordshire's Homelessness Strategy has been developed in the context of a wide range of national, regional and local policies, strategies and plans.

Homelessness Duty

Legal provisions covering statutory homelessness prevention and relief are set by the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002. The legislation places a general duty on housing authorities to deliver advice and information on preventing homelessness along with providing assistance to priority need households that are threatened with or become homeless.

National Social Policy Change

Since the last Homelessness Strategy was published in 2010 there has been a period of rapid social policy change, including major welfare and social housing reform.

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 is a key part of the Government's approach to social and economic reform and includes the introduction of Universal Credit and Benefit Cap, the replacement of Disability Living Allowance with Personal Independence Payments and the introduction of the under occupancy penalty for Housing Benefit claimants in social housing.

In addition to this, in 2011 Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates in the private sector were decreased and national caps were introduced. Further changes were made to the LHA in 2012 where there was an increase in the proportion of single people with no dependents restricted to the same rate as those renting a single room in a shared house due to a change in the age limit to 35.

The Localism Act 2011 introduced a raft of local government reforms across finance, planning, governance and housing. The changes relevant to homelessness include:

- a) The right for housing authorities to grant fixed-term tenancies
- b) A requirement for local authorities to produce a Tenancy Strategy
- c) Greater flexibility in the allocation of social housing
- d) Discharging homelessness duties using private rented accommodation.

The Government's Policy on Homelessness

The Government has established a cross- Government working group made up of Ministers from eight government departments. This group set out its strategy in its Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out nationwide published in July 2011.

NSNO has five standards:

1. New rough sleepers can be identified and helped off the streets immediately.
2. The public can alert services if they see anyone sleeping rough so they get help.
3. Rough sleepers can go to a place of safety, where their needs can be assessed and they can get help.
4. Rough sleepers are able to get emergency accommodation and other services they need.
5. Rough sleepers from outside their area can be reconnected with their community.

Making Every Contact Count: a joint approach towards homelessness prevention

In August 2012, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published the Making Every Contact Count report. The report sets out the Government's approach to homelessness prevention by focusing on the contribution that a commitment around troubled families, health, crime prevention and employment and skills can make. The report calls for central Government, local authorities, government agencies and the voluntary sector to work together to support those at risk of homelessness.

It also gives an indication of the Government's direction and expectations for homelessness prevention. This emphasises a number of important factors, including; greater integration of local authority services (Housing, Adult Social Care and Children's Services, etc.); increased focus on a payment by results approach to funding; increased reliance on the private rented sector; and a focus on wrap-around services to tackle youth homelessness.

The report also set ten local challenges, which the Government has recommended local authorities should take forward. This strategy recognises the importance of these challenges and acknowledges existing work already undertaken or underway in response to them. CBC will ensure that the ten 'Gold Standard Pledges' remain key to its targeted approach in addressing homelessness prevention and homelessness.

Care Act 2014 requirements

The Care Act introduced the wellbeing principle where local authorities must promote the wellbeing of adults in a number of its functions. Promoting well-being means actively seeking improvements in the aspects of wellbeing. A number of these aspects are relevant to homeless people such as physical and mental health and emotional well-being, participation in work, education, training or recreation, social and economic well-being and suitability of living accommodation. Suitable living accommodation includes adaptations, assistive technology and advice and assistance on housing options.

This Care Act also requires local authorities to be pro-active to prevent, delay or reduce the need for social care support and this applies to the whole population, whether or not they currently use services. Local authorities will need to work with other organisations to identify people who might have support needs that are not being met and to make available services that will enable a person to stay independent.

Access to information and advice in the right format at the right time is also a key requirement of the Care Act. The guidance contains key principles for local authorities on information and advice, which should be considered in the context of this strategy in helping meet Care Act requirements:

- Be accessible for whole population
- Gives choice and control
- Supports the integration agenda
- Prevents or delays need for care and support
- Independent living – core part of well being principle

Local authorities have a duty under the Care Act to carry out their care and support responsibilities with the aim of joining-up services with those provided by the NHS and other health-related services (which includes housing and leisure services). Partnership working and integration is therefore important to implement the Care Act requirements.

Children and Families Act

The Children and Families Act 2014 seeks to improve services for vulnerable children and support strong families. It underpins wider reforms to ensure that all children and young people can succeed, no matter what their background.

The changes to the law to give greater protection to vulnerable children, better support for children whose parents are separating, a new system to help children with special educational needs and disabilities, and help for parents to balance work and family life.

It also ensures vital changes to the adoption system can be put into practice, meaning more children who need loving homes are placed faster. Reforms for children in care can be implemented including giving them the choice to stay with their foster families until their 21st birthday.

The Children and Families Act 2014 places a duty on local authorities for joint commissioning and assessment of Education, Health and Care needs, to support Young People that have Special Educational Needs or disabilities, from birth to the age of 25.

Central Bedfordshire Council's medium term plan

'Delivering Your Priorities 2012-16' sets out the priority of 'enhancing your local community – creating jobs, managing growth, protecting our countryside and enabling businesses to grow'. One of the targets is to ensure the availability of high quality, appropriate housing including affordable housing, supported by suitable infrastructure.

Affordable housing supply is an essential element of a strategy to prevent homelessness. Our customers mainly ask for a property to rent. Providing a home is an important element of the overall – personal – solution we are working towards, though it is always true that a sustainable solution typically requires much more besides, than just "bricks and mortar".

The Council's Landlord Business is delivering an ambitious programme of new build development, whilst we also support Housing Associations to increase the supply of affordable housing. Below, we set out summary information for completions within our affordable housing programme during 2013/14 and the first two quarters of 2014/15. Our programme is weighted towards low cost home ownership and within the rented provision, we typically see provision of mainly general needs 2 and 3 bed properties.

2013/2014 (12 month period)

Tenure	Number of completions
Social Rent	22
Affordable Rent	55
Shared Ownership	63
First Buy	13
Help to Buy	284

2014/2015 (Q1&Q2, 6 month period)

Tenure	Number of completions
Social Rent	6

Affordable Rent	82
Shared Ownership	84
Help to Buy	212

Looking to the future and in particular to the supply of rented housing, it is imperative that the Council and our partner Housing Associations seek to deliver new provision of rented accommodation as follows –

- **Accommodation based supported housing** in line with our Market Position Statement for Vulnerable People. In particular, provision for young people and care leavers. This is particularly true in the Ivel Valley and West Mid Beds localities. However, new provision of accommodation based services is required across Central Bedfordshire and is the main priority related to Housing Supply. For example, a Foyer scheme for young people.
- **Accessible housing, provided to full mobility standards** to address a shortfall of accommodation for those households where a member is disabled.
- **Suitable housing for older people**, on the basis that the Council and our partners are proactive to enable older people living in general needs accommodation to downsize, so freeing up general needs properties, enabling the council to meet multiple needs through 'chains of moves'. This can include specialist provision of Independent Living accommodation, as well as ordinary housing that is attractive and accessible to older people.
- **1 and 2 bedroom properties, in the market towns** – Sandy, Biggleswade, Flitwick, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, and Leighton Buzzard/Linslade.
- Approximately **six large 5 bedroom, mobility standard homes**, which typically are required on the basis of 1 property per year for a period of 7 years across Central Bedfordshire, in each of the market towns.
- The Council's Landlord Business is committed to directly provide **new provision of temporary accommodation (TA)** in either Biggleswade or Sandy, and Flitwick, in suitable locations. This additional provision will compliment the existing provision in Leighton Buzzard and Houghton Regis, providing suitable and reasonably accessible coverage of TA across Central Bedfordshire.

Central Bedfordshire Sustainable Community Strategy

The Council's priority to 'enhance your local community' is mirrored by the Sustainable Community Strategy 2010-2031 which has the priority of 'maximising employment opportunities and delivering housing growth to meet the needs of our communities' with a commitment to:

- Helping people to access good quality, suitable housing by ensuring that at least 35% of our new homes are affordable,
- Ensure that all new homes meet new sustainable home standards and
- Ensure that all accommodation is safe, healthy, accessible and affordably warm.

Housing Strategy 2011-16

The existing Housing Strategy 2011-16 set out the Council's priorities for providing a comprehensive housing service, which aims to improve quality of life for all residents through effective housing need solutions and the development of stable communities across Central Bedfordshire.

The key priorities identified in the Housing Strategy included meeting the accommodation and support needs of older persons and vulnerable people and providing housing options for the whole community. The Housing Strategy is due for review during 2015/16

Looked After Children Placement Strategy 2013

Section 22G of The Children Act 1989 requires a council to take steps, as far as reasonably practicable, that secures accommodation for looked after children within the authority's area and which meets the needs of those children. Councils should consider the number of accommodation providers in their area that is sufficient in the Council's opinion, and take account of the range of accommodation in their area capable of meeting different needs.

The Looked After Children Placement Strategy sets out the position in relation to placements for looked after children in Central Bedfordshire, including actions needed to ensure sufficient placements to meet future need.

Tenancy Strategy 2013-18

In response to new tenancy arrangements introduced by the Localism Act 2011 the Council developed the Tenancy Strategy 2013-18 to outline its approach to flexible tenancies and delivering a new housing offer for local people. The Tenancy Strategy focusses on using tenancy arrangements to maximise the use of social housing stock for those in most need and incentivise employment, social responsibility and social mobility. The strategy introduced:

- Five year fixed term tenancies across the CBC social housing stock for all new tenants from 1 April 2013;
- Guidance for Registered Providers to use fixed term tenancies and provide options advice as tenancies finish; and
- Criteria for assessing the renewal of tenancies based on changing circumstances (priority need and financial) and conduct.

Housing Support Services Market Position Statement

As of October 2014, the Market Position Statement (MPS) is being developed and it identifies the level and type of housing-support services that CBC currently wishes to see being made available to vulnerable residents. These services are required in order to promote access to suitable homes and help people to remain in them.

The evidence available to the Council suggests that there is unmet need for housing support services across Central Bedfordshire. The MPS is due to be published in 2014/15 at which point Commissioning colleagues will develop a commissioning plan to shape the supported housing market based on the findings of the MPS.

Allocations Policy

In 2014 the Council revised its existing housing allocations scheme to help applicants in housing need to find suitable housing, provide an incentive for applicants to seek employment and make efficient and best use of social housing stock in the area.

The new allocations scheme has been developed on the principles of fairness and transparency when allocating social or affordable lets and has simplified the banding system to make eligibility clearer for local people to understand. The new allocations scheme seeks to meet the following objectives:

- a) Encourage applicants who are out of work to seek employment,
- b) Balance reasonable preference with local priorities,
- c) Provide support for low paid workers in the private sector,
- d) Deliver practical help for those threatened with homelessness,
- e) Support households who work locally, and
- f) Offer choice.

It is anticipated that the implementation of this policy will have an impact on the number of clients approaching the Housing Options Service as clients that are unable to join the Housing Register because they do not meet the criteria may seek alternative options for housing. The Council is monitoring the impact of this policy on demand for Housing Options services and the length of time households accepted as homeless spend in temporary accommodation.

Joint Commissioning Strategy for Mental Health Services for Adults and Older People in Central Bedfordshire

The Joint Commissioning Strategy recognises that meeting the mental health needs of key groups at the greatest risk of homelessness is a priority across Central Bedfordshire. Key points highlighted in the strategy were:

- Access to mental health services if not registered with a GP.
- Support for hostels/temporary accommodation providers when dealing with mental illness.
- Discharge processes, particularly late on a Friday.

Strategic priorities

The magnitude and complexity of the issues that face us in the next 5 years must not be under-estimated. However, Central Bedfordshire Council will strive to meet its housing ambitions and will continue to plan ahead and will work in partnership with others who can assist in delivering solutions. We have prioritised issues and proposed actions to build on our past success, mitigate the impacts of changing housing markets, social and welfare

reform but, above all, prevent homelessness.

This 5 year strategy covers the period 2015 – 2020, and seeks to further strengthen partnership across Central Bedfordshire and to continue to make significant improvements across homelessness services. We need to challenge the conventional approach to public sector intervention – intensifying and accelerating our action. This will be achieved through adoption of the following priorities. Key actions across each of the priorities are detailed in the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan.

The following strategic priorities have been adopted and are based upon the Homelessness Review findings.

Priority 1: Improve the provision of a range of housing options and services to effectively prevent and reduce homelessness

Priority 2: Increase Housing Supply to meet the accommodation and support needs of homeless people

Priority 3: Reduce the use of temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast

Priority 4: Minimise the impact of welfare reform, while assisting homeless people to access opportunities for employment, education and training, and support them to raise and meet their aspirations.

Priority 5: Develop an integrated partnership approach to tackling homelessness

Priority one: Improve the provision of a range of housing options and services to effectively prevent and reduce homelessness

In order to strengthen our approach to tackling homelessness we will seek corporate endorsement to preventing homelessness across the Council. We will seek commitment from both Members and Senior Managers across all service areas to work together to deliver a joined up and holistic approach to preventing and ending homelessness.

We will continue to prevent homelessness, and we will strategically commission and work with our partners to deliver effective, pro-active homelessness prevention services. These services will be targeted, accessible and be able to respond to the diverse needs of all customers, providing innovative and flexible solutions.

The Homelessness Review showed that homeless prevention services within Central Bedfordshire have been more effective in recent years. Since the last review of homelessness in 2009 Central Bedfordshire has seen increasing demand for housing options support to assist local people to maintain their existing accommodation, overcome difficulties and prevent people becoming homeless.

Whilst the increased housing options activity has had a positive impact on reducing homelessness, there is still much more that can be done to help customers sustain their current accommodation. Through our locality model we will ensure that our Housing Solutions service provides a holistic approach to preventing homelessness and tackling its root causes; whilst at the same time providing a range of affordable housing options in both the social and private rented sector e.g. our work around illegal evictions.

In 2014, we created a locality model of service – Housing Solutions – amalgamating Housing Needs and Private Sector housing teams, creating generic roles and closer operational collaboration across specialist areas to more effectively deal with issues and problems (and create solutions) mainly in the private rented sector.

Welfare reforms, economic uncertainty, a buoyant private rented sector and lack of security in the private sector is squeezing the housing options available for working age, low income households in Central Bedfordshire. Finally the economic crisis has led to uncertainty in the employment market, stagnant wages and an increased cost of living, putting pressure especially on low income families.

It is anticipated that these factors will continue to place increased demand on the Housing Solutions service, and as such service delivery models need to be reviewed to ensure effective and strategic approaches to customer demand management.

A high number of individuals were estimated to be sleeping rough in 2013, it is essential to ensure effective provision for this vulnerable group to ensure that no rough sleeper spends a second night sleeping rough.

The Review found that in 2013/14 31% of homelessness acceptances were due to family or friends no longer able to accommodate and 18% were due to the termination of an assured shorthold tenancy. The service needs to respond to these main causes.

In order to effectively prevent homelessness arising in the private rented sector a targeted approach is required. Early intervention is essential to prevent the landlord and tenant relationship breaking down irrevocably. As such support to both tenant and landlord is essential in the early stages of a new tenancy, as too is mediation when a tenancy is at risk. A toolkit will be developed to prevent homelessness from arising from the private rented sector, and where homelessness cannot be prevented, notice periods will be used to source alternative sustainable accommodation to ensure that households do not have to go into temporary accommodation. We will not wait until the household is in crisis to assist.

Young people are significantly over-represented in the homeless population in Central Bedfordshire, 57% of acceptances were from people aged under 34 years. The service needs to develop effective solutions to prevent young people from becoming homeless, alongside affordable housing options for those that do become homeless.

In particular a coordinated approach with Children's services is required to prevent Care Leavers from becoming homeless. Currently advice is often sought at a point of crisis e.g. breakdown of a supported housing arrangements, or failure of planned arrangement. The established protocol is not well known or understood.

A Care Leavers Accommodation Working Group has recently been established, recognising that Housing and Corporate Parenting colleagues need to collaborate more

effectively on the operational response to Care Leavers with housing needs; and on the strategic response to vulnerable Young People.

A Shared Homes accommodation pilot is currently being explored. The intention is to lease a council property to a specialist provider. Three vulnerable people with a pre-existing friendship, able to provide mutual support and a preference to share would live in the property, receiving intensive support from the provider. This model has the potential to work well for the right group of people, and will be rolled out if successful.

It is not always possible to keep people in their homes, and sometimes a move can be the only realistic option. As far as possible we will ensure that people are supported to move home in a planned way, either into supported accommodation or into alternative permanent accommodation.

We aim to ensure all homeless people are able to access meaningful advice and assistance, regardless of whether or not there is a statutory duty. This means being realistic about what we can do, and creative in finding solutions, which should be tailored to meet individual need and circumstances.

Homelessness prevention measures will also be embedded within local communities as many people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless are likely to seek advice from local services first. This strategy therefore supports the need for local agencies to develop and maintain the necessary skills and resources to be able to identify those at risk of homelessness and to give them appropriate advice, or to refer them to a more appropriate service for support.

We are committed to ongoing service improvement and pledge to meet the Government's national Gold Standard.

Objectives

	What we will do to Improve the provision of a range of housing options and services to effectively prevent and reduce homelessness
1	Undertake a comprehensive review of service delivery arrangements to ensure effective demand management and customer satisfaction.
2	Ensure homelessness is prevented through an effective homelessness prevention toolkit.
3	Ensure a targeted approach to meeting the housing needs of young people and Care Leavers.
4	Undertaken a review of rough sleeping services to ensure that the 'No Second Night Out' vision is met.
5	Achieve the Government's Gold Standard

Priority Two: Increase housing supply to meet the accommodation and support needs of homeless people

We are committed to housing growth in the area, especially the growth of affordable housing to increase the housing options available, together with economic growth; maximising employment opportunities.

Alongside our strategic commitment to the development of affordable housing, which is outlined at pages 13 and 14 above, related to the main areas of supply where there is a shortfall or deficit, Central Bedfordshire Council recognises the increasingly important role that the private rented sector plays in meeting the housing needs of the community, including those households who are homeless.

The Council has successfully developed the Let's Rent scheme, which increases the provision of private sector housing available to Housing Solutions clients. The scheme has provided good quality, well managed, private sector accommodation in the local area. Client demand for the Let's Rent scheme is growing and work is underway to develop relationships with letting agents in the north of the area to expand the need to meet this growing demand. In order to ensure the sustainability of this tenancy model effective and timely support to both tenants and landlords is critical.

In 2014/15 the Council adopted a policy that allows its homelessness duty to be discharged by offering to house an applicant in a suitable private rented sector property. It is anticipated that this approach will underpin and strengthen existing housing advice and homelessness prevention activities and ensure homeless households are able to access suitable and secure accommodation within improved timescales. The ability to make a PSO has introduced more flexibility in preventing homelessness but the Council needs to increase the availability of these private sector properties to maximise the benefits.

The increased use of the private rented sector will need a coordinated approach to ensure that all private rented sector schemes work effectively together and maximise resources.

We are also committed to the best use of our own housing stock in meeting the needs of our communities as signaled through our Tenancy Strategy and new Allocations Policy. Through the development of specialist accommodation for our older residents, we hope to free up general needs accommodation, facilitating chains of lets and meeting housing needs. Alongside this we will make the best use of our two bed units and facilitate house shares to meet the needs of single people.

The role that supported housing plays in preventing homelessness is critical. The Council is committed to investing in a supported housing model that acts as a place of change, not only meeting the housing needs of homeless people; but supporting them to tackle the underlying causes of homelessness, raising their aspiration and assisting them to access training, education and employment.

The Council commissions a range of supported housing accommodation and floating support services for those that are homeless or at risk of homelessness. We are developing our first Supported Housing Services Market Position Statement (MPS) to signal to the provider market the services we want to meet the housing needs of vulnerable people. The MPS, which is due to be published in 2015, sets out our

aspirations for the type of housing support services we want to be available to local people. These aspirations are:

- A mixed market of providers of different sizes offering different types of service, in order to promote choice to local people in the way they access housing and support.
- Accommodation Based Services available in a range of locations across Central Bedfordshire.
- Providers of all kinds offering bespoke services as far as possible, designed in conjunction with the customer.

The evidence gathered in the development of the MPS suggests that there is significant unmet need for housing support services across Central Bedfordshire for several client groups, and no apparent areas of 'over-supply'. The MPS, Homelessness Review and stakeholder engagement activity indicates that provision of accommodation and support for the following groups in particular should be reviewed to better meet individual needs:

1. Single homeless people (including rough sleepers)
2. Young people (16 and 17 year olds and care leavers aged 18-24)
3. People with mental health problems
4. People that have difficulties with substance misuse
5. Ex-offenders

The MPS, once finalised, will provide the evidence base and commissioning priorities for the future of accommodation and non-accommodation based housing support in Central Bedfordshire. The Council's Commissioning Service in the Social Care, Health and Housing directorate will then develop a commissioning plan to shape the supported housing market based on the evidence presented in the MPS.

Demand for supported accommodation in Central Bedfordshire is high and we need to ensure that it is used appropriately. It is therefore essential to ensure that an effective eligibility criteria is in place to ensure that supported accommodation is available to those who need it most, and we can prioritise places when demand is high. Alongside this it is essential that there is effective move on from supported accommodation.

Nationally, health outcomes for homeless people were much poorer than the general population. In 2012 a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) report on Homeless People in Central Bedfordshire identified unmet health needs and service gaps with recommendations for improvement.

Key issues identified were:

1. Access to GP services where the client does not have a fixed address and cannot register for services.
2. Over-use of Accident and Emergency services for conditions that could have been treated earlier if the patient had accessed primary care services.
3. Homeless people can drop out of services that do not have case management.
4. No health input is available to support hostel staff in complex health and homeless cases to reduce rough sleeping, prevent mental health crisis and reduce hospital admissions.
5. Lack of training on homelessness and health for provider health staff.
6. Lack of a multi-agency approach to health and homelessness.

To improve the health outcomes of homeless people there is a requirement for a multi agency partnership between health, housing and third sector professionals to enable a collaborative approach to meet the complex needs of homeless people, especially rough sleepers.

Objectives

	What we will do to increase housing supply to meet the accommodation and support needs of homeless people.
1	Develop a coordinated approach to increase the supply of affordable private rented accommodation.
2	Ensure the best use of the Council's Housing Stock to meet customer need, through the Allocations Policy, the Annual Lettings Plan, tenancy sustainment approaches and shared tenancies.
3	Increase the provision of affordable housing, including both market and rented.
4	Develop a coordinated approach to increase the provision and through put of supported accommodation services to meet identified needs.
5	Improve the health and wellbeing of homeless people.

Priority three: Reduce the use of temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast

We will undertake a full scale review of our approach to temporary accommodation to ensure that it meets the current needs, eliminates the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation and supports our approach to use private sector offers to discharge the homeless duty. This review will respond to the immediate need, but will take a longer term approach to ensuring a model that is flexible and responsive to the changes that Universal Credit will bring in relation to both demand and funding subsidies.

The Council uses a range of short to medium term stay accommodation from a variety of providers for clients that are homeless or where enquiries are pending. This includes:

- Temporary accommodation schemes owned and managed by the Council, mainly hostel based accommodation,
- Dispersed, self-contained temporary accommodation owned by a Registered Provider in an area where the Council does not have any stock,
- Referral to Domestic Abuse refuges,
- Bed and Breakfast accommodation for emergency, short-term use only.

The Review highlighted that there has been a 55% increase in the use of temporary accommodation since 2010-11. The majority of households stay in temporary accommodation for less than three months, and almost all less than six months.

Bed and Breakfast is only provided as a last resort when other accommodation is not available, usually as interim accommodation whilst investigations are being carried out on a homeless application. However the use of B&B accommodation has increased significantly with spend on B&B increasing from £31,000 in 2011-12 to £71,000 in 2013-14.

Both the increase in the use of B&B and the length of stay in B&B are of considerable concern. As a result, the Council is carrying out a review of Temporary Accommodation to find solutions to reduce its use.

Any review of temporary accommodation needs to be undertaken in the context of the ability to discharge the Council's homeless duty into the private rented sector, and the impact that Universal Credit will have on the funding arrangements for temporary accommodation.

Objectives

	What we will do reduce the use of temporary accommodation and bed & breakfast
1	Carry out a comprehensive review of the use of Temporary Accommodation.
2	Minimise the use of unsuitable and expensive B&B accommodation.
3	Review temporary accommodation in light of the ongoing and forthcoming reforms made by the DWP and establish which properties will be affected.

Priority four: Minimise the impact of welfare reform, while assisting homeless people to access opportunities for employment, education and training, and support them to raise and meet their aspirations

We will work with our key partners to reduce the impact that welfare reform has on homeless levels.

Welfare reforms have reduced income for a number of households and placed restrictions on the housing they can access through a reduction in Local Housing Allowance rates and the under-occupancy penalty for social housing tenants. This has led to increased pressure on the availability of affordable one and two bedroom properties. Due to increased competition in the private sector market, some landlords are becoming more selective of their tenants with a preference for those not claiming benefits.

The Council is also monitoring and responding to the impact of welfare reform by providing additional support targeted at those affected. The Welfare Reform Working Group has commissioned research on how residents are responding to the reforms and is seeking ways to improve financial resilience through increasing funding for Citizens Advice Bureau services and providing funding to encourage the use of Credit Unions.

The next significant challenge for benefit claimants that the Council is preparing for is the introduction of Universal Credit, which will increase financial pressure on households and may result in increased evictions due to failure to pay housing costs.

We will help homeless people to access opportunities for employment, education and training, and support them to raise and meet their aspirations.

Losing or being without a job can be a cause and consequence of homelessness. The majority of people who approach the Housing Solutions Service in Central Bedfordshire are economically inactive, yet many homeless people want to work. Homeless people can face multiple and complex barriers to finding and staying in employment. These challenges can include poor qualifications, long term unemployment, unspent convictions, drug and alcohol misuse, poor physical and mental health, and low levels of self-confidence and self-esteem.

Central Bedfordshire has an ambition to create 27,000 new jobs through our strategy for growth. Increased prosperity and economic growth will have a positive impact on reducing the factors that lead to homelessness.

The link between aspiration, life outcomes and dependency on public services is well established. Homeless people must be enabled to make their own lives better, and raising aspiration is an important driver of change. This will often involve changing culture, attitudes and behaviour over the long term to ensure that they play a full and active part in the growth and prosperity of our communities.

Helping homeless people back into the labour market or into the labour market for the first time needs increased focus. This is essential if we are to reduce the number of people trapped in dependency.

The Review highlighted the importance of providing opportunities for homeless people to learn life skills and access education and training so that they can maintain their independence. Young people that have experienced homelessness often do not have the

skills to manage a tenancy such as managing income, adjusting to the behaviour expected of a tenant and managing a property.

Objectives

	What we will do to minimise the impact of welfare reform.
1	Develop an approach to manage the impact of Universal Credit on social housing tenants.
2	Deliver Housing Landlord's Tenants Incentive Scheme to free up under-occupied homes and create shared houses.
3	Work with DWP to raise awareness of the impact of Universal Credit with partners and customers and develop a range of mitigations.
4	Ensure that the Housing Solutions service actively works with customers to raise their aspirations and help them to access employment, education and training.
5	In partnership explore the feasibility of developing a social enterprise to create employment opportunities for homeless customers.

Priority five: Develop an integrated partnership approach to tackling homelessness

We recognise that to effectively prevent homelessness a partnership approach is critical. Many people have multiple needs that extend beyond the basic need for a home; the Council working in isolation cannot meet these needs. Working in partnership is fundamental if homelessness is to be effectively prevented. Therefore a partnership needs to be developed alongside effective governance arrangements for ensuring the delivery of the Strategy and its ongoing review.

Central Bedfordshire does not have a forum solely dedicated to homelessness. Instead there are a number of forums that CBC colleagues, partners and service providers attend with links to the agenda.

A Homelessness Multi-Agency Assurance Group (MAAG) will be established with membership made up of managers with decision-making powers, commissioning responsibilities and statutory responsibilities for tackling homelessness from a range of key agencies. This group will oversee the delivery of the strategy.

A further integrated partnership approach will be established through the development of a homelessness forum, which will meet quarterly to discuss with a wide variety of partners key homeless issues including current trends, information sharing, establishing best practice and improving working practices.

The Review also highlighted an issue with referrals between agencies, leading to poor customer outcomes and an un-coordinated response.

The availability of information about current service provision was seen by several stakeholders as limited or out of date. Better information sharing would allow service providers to make more accurate referrals to a wider variety of services allowing more choice for clients and reducing pressure on over-subscribed services.

Objectives

	What we will do to develop an integrated partnership approach to tackling homelessness
1	Through this strategy, develop a clear vision for Homelessness across Central Bedfordshire.
2	Establish a Multi-Agency Assurance Group (MAAG) to govern and lead the delivery of the vision and the Homelessness Strategy implementation.
3	Establish a homelessness forum.
4	Improve access to information and review referral arrangements.

Implementing the Strategy

In order to meet our commitment to deliver the strategic priorities we need to ensure that together with partners, we have the skills, structures and infrastructure for the delivery of the Strategy's objectives, and to deliver the radical and innovative agenda that will be essential to successfully tackling homelessness over the next five years.

To achieve the strategic priorities and objectives an action plan has been developed in partnership with partners and stakeholders to outline key objectives and tasks to be delivered over the 2015 - 2020 period. This is a separate document that will be published together with this strategy.

The Homelessness Multi Agency Assurance Group will be responsible for the delivery and monitoring of this Homelessness Strategy and action plan. The action plan will be monitored and reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs, policy and legislative changes and achieves the priorities contained within it. Actions will be further developed each year and included in the Housing Service Plan annually.

By adopting the Homelessness Strategy Central Bedfordshire Council is making a commitment to achieve the ambitions made by the Government to end rough sleeping and prevent homelessness.

The Council recognises that only through partnership working can we develop sustainable housing solutions that will provide a hand up into employment and financial sustainability.



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