



29<sup>th</sup> November 2018

Briefing Paper

# It Takes A City

Cambridge Summit for Homelessness  
29<sup>th</sup> November 2018



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## Context

### *Introduction*

It does not take a rocket scientist to see that something is wrong on the streets of Cambridge. In the recent Varsity video on inequality in Cambridge<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Rowan Williams, reflecting on different public attitudes to rough sleepers observed during a Street Pastor patrol, noted that we have a “choice to look” – we can look, and do something, or turn aside. The video was entitled “*A Choice to Look*”.

Your interest in this Summit, along with many others who are not able to join us, shows that you have chosen to “take a look”, to see what we as a community can do together – authorities, agencies, charities, commerce, academia, and friends with lived experience – to help people off the streets, to regain their lives, and to ensure that no-one has to sleep rough again in our city.

### *Becoming homeless*

The root causes of homelessness are both simple – nowhere to live – and complex – the myriad personal and wider reasons for losing a home and being unable to find another one. There is also a complex interaction with street presence. Not all homeless people have a street presence. And while it can be safely assumed that all rough sleepers are homeless, not all those on the street seeking money are homeless.

The main reason that single people or households lose their home is eviction from rented property by their landlord. For others it will be some form of relationship breakdown or domestic violence leading to part of a household having to leave somewhere they had called home – or simply due to growing up and having to leave home. Those leaving any kind of institution – care, prison etc. – too often have nowhere to go, or nowhere permanent.

But this is often just the tipping point into homelessness: a complex web of personal and wider issues may have built up over time, and if so it is these that, in addition to the difficulty in even accessing the housing market in any event, become obstacles to finding a new home.

It is widely accepted that homelessness has increased markedly across the country in recent years. The increases (according to a very useful House of Commons Library briefing paper – “*Briefing Paper Number 02007, 23 February 2018 Rough sleeping (England)*”<sup>2</sup> – are due to welfare reforms, particularly reductions in entitlement to Housing Benefit/Local Housing Allowance; reduced

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/varsityuk/videos/2090916730918757/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN02007>

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investment by local authorities in homeless services; and flows of non-UK nationals who are unable to access benefits.

## ***Street sleeping***

The end result of becoming homeless, whether short term or long, is usually street sleeping, once all the options of squats, sofas, sheds and car sleeping have been exhausted. Those that are sleeping rough on the streets have spent all their social capital, with one rejection too many along the way.

## ***The cost of being homeless***

The cost to someone's life from having nowhere to live, at risk of street sleeping – health, dignity, social exclusion, life expectancy – cannot be reduced to figures. It is a miserable existence.

The cost to the rest of us of a single person being homeless in the UK for 12 months was estimated in 2015 as £20,128 (source: Crisis, *At what cost?*<sup>1</sup>).

## ***Ending homelessness***

Crisis has just issued a major report *Everybody In: How to end homelessness in Great Britain*<sup>2</sup>, an evidence-based analysis of the causes and costs of homelessness, which puts forward a series of changes and investments that are needed at all levels to end the growing tragedy of rough sleeping and homelessness.

A full response to our local concerns might begin by asking Crisis to help us prepare a version of this long report for Cambridge – but in the meantime we can make a start, by working together as a community to turn the local tide.

## ***Single homelessness***

An introduction to the support offered to rough sleepers and the homeless, statutory and non-statutory, by the Council, and the local systems of housing and support, are outlined in the Annex below. Very considerable effort and money is expended by Cambridge City Council, of its own and from central government grants, to prevent households becoming homeless in the first place, and to relieve the situation when they do. As explained in the Annex, where this involves children or those with disabilities (and some other groups with special needs), such households are usually provided with immediate relief by way of temporary

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/cost-of-homelessness/at-what-cost-2015/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/international-plans-to-end-homelessness/everybody-in-how-to-end-homelessness-in-great-britain-2018/>

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accommodation while a more permanent solution is found. They never need to sleep rough and are generally not visible to the wider public.

But those who are single and homeless, who do not have a disability or severe health problems, are not guaranteed temporary accommodation while searching for somewhere to live and are not guaranteed to be found permanent accommodation. They will either stay or end up sleeping rough. Nevertheless, some do make a formal homelessness application to the Council and under the new Homelessness Reduction Act which came into force on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2018, are provided with dedicated help for a time period to secure accommodation through all the possible housing pathways – again see the Annex for details.

At any one time there will also be many other single homeless, some already rough sleepers, who for whatever reason have not made a formal application to the Council and therefore are not included in any published homelessness prevention and relief figures. They will also be, in one way or another, more or less, trying to access the same range of routes into housing as are those who are being assisted by the Council.

As noted earlier, such single homeless people are often, but not always, struggling with other issues that become barriers to finding (and sustaining) accommodation.

There will be other single homeless people who are not yet trying to find accommodation due to struggles with mental and physical health, addictions, loss of confidence due to too many past rejections, and many other reasons.

This then is the root of homelessness and rough sleeping, leading to the visible evidence on our streets.

## ***Rough sleeping numbers***

Rough sleeping and homelessness mean real people in challenging, complex and ever-changing situations.

The very tip of the iceberg of numbers is the number of people found rough sleeping in known places in each local authority area very early in the morning of a national count organised by MHCLG each November. These are often reported as “rough sleeping numbers”: this is highly misleading in absolute terms but is a useful relative indicator.

Regular street counts are also carried out in Cambridge at other times in the year, and the Cambridge Mental Health and Street Outreach Team records all rough sleepers found during their early morning patrols every weekday.

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Those found rough sleeping in the city in known places or areas patrolled form part of a much larger population of rough sleepers that spread out across neighbouring areas – green spaces, private property, cars, sheds, sofas, etc – often moving from one location to another, e.g. from street to sofa and back again.

Some in this larger population will seek help from the local authority, agencies and charities and may also be identified as rough sleeping.

The Council operates a single contact database of homeless and vulnerably housed people shared by all authorised local agencies – Inform. All those seeking help are asked for permission for their information to be shared among the agencies using Inform in order for the best help to be given.

Combining Inform and other data from all these touch points can give a better idea of the total people who have slept rough during the year as opposed to just on one night, or on any one night. It would also tell us who is new to rough sleeping, who is no longer rough sleeping, and who is still rough sleeping between periods of time. London agencies have been collecting this data for some time<sup>1</sup>. For Greater London the number of people verified as sleeping rough during the year is about eight times the number reported on the night of the annual count.

Others in this larger population, especially those that are sofa surfing or living in tents, may be seeking help from various agencies – health, employment, housing – but are not included in any rough sleeping statistics: the “hidden homeless”.

It can be seen that the annual street count, and those we see rough sleeping on our streets, are the visible representatives of a very much larger number who are sleeping rough – whether for short period or long, and in various places – during the year.

Some of this new analysis has been done and will be available at the Summit. More work is needed.

## ***Homelessness agencies***

The key front-line agencies working to help people who are rough sleeping are:

- **Cambridge Mental Health and Street Outreach Team<sup>2</sup>** – as mentioned above, the team carries out street patrols each weekday morning, to check on the welfare of street sleepers and offer support towards accommodation, mental health, practical needs, etc. Follow-up surgeries and meetings are

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<sup>1</sup> <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.changegrowlive.org/content/cambridge-street-mental-health-outreach-team-csmhot>

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held in Wintercomfort and at their offices co-located with the Cambridge Access Surgery.

- **Cambridge Access Surgery**<sup>1</sup> – a specialist NHS GP service for those who are homeless, living in sheltered accommodation or at risk of homelessness.
- **Jimmy's Assessment Centre**<sup>2</sup> – provides 28-day assessment beds for 22 rough sleepers, plus additional beds targeted at hard-to-reach rough sleepers. A number of people apply for a bed every day of the week but have to wait until a space is available.
- **Wintercomfort**<sup>3</sup> – provides day care from 8.30am to 2pm 7 days a week, including showers, breakfast, lunch, computer access, classes, employment opportunities, accommodation referrals, clothes and many other things. Wintercomfort logs all service users daily, usually 60-70 people: about half state that they are rough sleeping, with the rest recent rough sleepers and / or still vulnerably housed.
- **Single Homeless Service**<sup>4</sup> – a Council scheme for finding accommodation for low-need rough sleepers and the homeless, or those threatened with homelessness, other than by making a formal homelessness application.
- **Cambridge Churches Homeless Project**<sup>5</sup> – a volunteer organisation that provides 17 emergency supported beds for four months of the winter using local churches and a local synagogue. All are (or would be but for this support) rough sleepers.
- **SWEP** – during winter but only during severe weather, still more people present who seek a bed in the severe weather emergency provision funded by the Council and operated by Jimmy's in addition to their core service above. Last winter this peaked at around 30 people and provision was made on 53 nights across the 5 months it operated.

## **Begging**

Cambridge is a wealthy and generous city. In addition to the generosity of local residents, 5m tourists visit each year spending £600m and 30,000 students at the two universities are all touched by the plight of rough sleepers.

Anecdotal data suggests up to £100 a day is the going rate for street begging.

Some of the more recent increases in street presence may be due to begging by those with homes to go to, whether in Cambridge or elsewhere, with attendant issues of anti-social behaviour, drug use, drug supply, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mhcambridgeaccess.co.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.jimmyscambridge.org.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://wintercomfort.org.uk/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/the-single-homelessness-service>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cchp.org.uk/>

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This is a sensitive subject and local authorities and agencies are acutely aware of, and are addressing, the problem.

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## Six thoughts

The previous pages have set out a rough picture in general terms of the reasons for homelessness, the size of the problem in Cambridge and the services working hard to make a difference. An outline of the current systems of housing and support follow this section.

We take six thoughts from all this – there may be others. So, the following is not meant to close down debate, but to open up some lines of enquiry and possible action for discussion.

## **Connecting**

### Issues

- Although there are many services and support organisations for homeless people they are hard to find, complex to navigate and difficult to access. This applies equally to those offering support as to those needing support.
- The wider community does not have a good picture of the services and support available, leading to a narrative emerging that “nothing is being done”
- The current “rough sleeping numbers” published soon after November each year are just a one-night snapshot of those sleeping in known places and are not a realistic account of the numbers homeless and rough sleeping.

### Actions under way

- A small group of County and City Council staff is starting to build a better picture of rough sleeping in Cambridge using existing but so far unpublished data.
- A number of cities around the UK have populated local versions of the Street Support app and web site developed in Manchester<sup>1</sup>. This provides a straightforward means to find and access local services, offer help and develop new approaches – bringing together and articulating a community-wide response to homelessness. The developers, Street Support Network, have offered to help us do the same in Cambridge and work is under way to “pre-populate” a Cambridge version which we hope to demonstrate. But it will cost some money up-front and on-going.

### Discussion points

- Where can we find the funds and resources to bring the Street Support app and website to Cambridge?
- If we do, how can we best encourage its use by the wider community?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://streetsupport.net/>

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- What other ways are there to get these messages out to the wider community?
- How can local authority and agency partners work together to produce and publish more realistic and more frequent numbers on rough sleepers?

## **Housing**

### Issues

- The housing problem facing rough sleepers is part of a much wider problem of housing supply and cost in Cambridge. Those on low incomes who have experienced rough sleeping are at a significant disadvantage competing in a housing market with high demand and limited supply. Fundamental barriers include:
  - o Private sector tenancies are too expensive – even “affordable” rents are far too high
  - o It is very hard to find a room, let alone a flat or house, in Cambridge and South Cambs where the rent can be covered by housing benefit, if needed
  - o Far too many private sector landlords are unwilling to rent to benefits claimants – indicated by the disclaimer “no DSS” on very many property advertisements.
- The hostel system can provide 1-2 years of support and help, but it is difficult to transition from there into permanent accommodation, for much the same reasons as above. Many fall through the net by being evicted back onto the street: this does of course mean another person can move up the chain, but can lead to a revolving door.
- Social housing is inaccessible to most single homeless
- Temporary accommodation during the search for a home is not normally provided to the single homeless
- Rough sleepers are especially at risk during the winter, more so during severe weather.
- Women tend to come to rough sleeping very much as a last resort and can present with particularly complex problems. Housing solutions need to recognise that some are escaping from abuse, and that many have complex needs.
- Young people can fall into homelessness simply through growing up – leaving care or being forced out of a dysfunctional family home. They are especially vulnerable and adult institutions may not be right. Organisations such as the YMCA do an amazing job, but demand is very high and many young people remain hidden homeless.

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## Actions under way

- During severe weather, the Council provides further winter capacity, managed by Jimmy's Assessment Centre, ideally enough for all who want to come inside, but the opportunities to provide help and support during these short stays is very limited.
- The Cambridge Churches Homeless Project has shown that bringing people off the streets into a supportive pastoral environment (warm welcome, hot supper, safe place to sleep, help and support) helps people to accept help and find accommodation, even when all hope has previously been lost.
- A joint County Council and City Council programme has just been launched to increase the number of "Housing First" units to 10 over the next year. Housing First provides immediate access to accommodation with wrap-around support.

## Discussion points

- The cost to the rest of us of leaving someone homeless for a year is over £20,000, with a cost to the person that cannot be calculated. Many property and land owners, large and small, have benefitted enormously from the excessive rise in Cambridge property and land values over the last 10 years or more. What solutions are available that can offer this value increase to help the homeless?
- Can we bring together a group of housing, land, charities and investment organisations to develop innovative solutions to homes for the homeless in Cambridge?
- How can we find investors, landlords and land owners willing to help extend:
  - o The County Council's embryonic Housing First scheme, providing immediate access to housing and support for entrenched rough sleepers?
  - o Social investment programmes that have pioneered a number of housing solutions in and around Cambridge, for example Hope into Action's church-linked supported houses?
  - o The Council's social lettings agency, Town Hall Lettings<sup>1</sup> which depends on a supply of landlords willing to release their property at an affordable rent for a shared housing?
- The Council provides help with deposits and sometimes rents for those seeking accommodation in the private rented sector. But other barriers are often bigger – finding, viewing, negotiating and signing up for rentals in a predominantly "no DSS" market. What can we do to help?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://townhalllettings.com/>

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- How can we work with local landlords and agents to remove the “no DSS” barrier?
- How can we get everybody off the street into a place where they can have help and support, at least during the winter?

## ***Employing***

### Issues

- Finding a job is not easy at the best of times. With a ready supply of other labour, there are not enough employers willing to offer supported work opportunities for formerly homeless people, on the same basis as those with formally recognised disabilities. Getting back to work after a long absence may seem a very good idea, but very often the pressures build and the job cannot be maintained. This leads to yet further disappointment.
- Although this is a general problem, even the Living Wage is not sufficient to afford a place to live in Cambridge. And many employers are not offering even that.
- There is evidence that some homeless people take opportunities, for the want of anything else, that bear a strong resemblance to modern slavery: low income, poor working conditions and no security.

### Actions under way

- Wintercomfort has set up several employment schemes – in-house social enterprises such as Overstream Clean and schemes with partners such as Nanna Mexico and Cambscuisine, giving opportunity for rough sleepers and the recently homeless to find a way back into secure work.

### Discussion points

- How can we scale up the Wintercomfort schemes in scale and scope?
- How can the Colleges and local businesses help in providing supported working opportunities that do not put rough sleepers or the recently homeless at immediate risk of failure?
- What can we do to encourage the Living Wage amongst local employers – can we all sign up to that? And a Cambridge Living Wage?
- There are some schemes<sup>1</sup> that provide training and job access schemes for those that have struggled in the past – what can we do to build on and expand these schemes?

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<sup>1</sup> For an example, see <https://www.newmeaning.co.uk/cambridge-pace>

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## ***Supporting***

### Issues

- Many of those stuck in rough sleeping have mental health problems, unresolved traumas, chaotic behaviour and poor life skills. There is no general service focused on their needs, which includes long-term and flexible support with sustaining tenancies, maintaining work placements, building social and spiritual capital and encouraging civic engagement
- As mentioned in the Annex below, the current street-hostel-housing journey entails multiple changes of support worker, which can be disruptive and lead to backward steps.

### Actions under way

- Cambridgeshire County Council's Counting Every Adult (CEA) team provides a person-centred and client-led service for vulnerable adults with complex needs who, more often than not, are homeless (95% of their current case load) and who need someone to stay with them throughout the journey: they never close a case unless the client has asked them to. The same very small team manages an embryonic Housing First programme, in which this model of support is inherent.
- The newly established Dual Diagnosis Street Team is a two-year pilot which has recently been extended by a further year from April 2019. It fills a long-felt gap in provision, with poor mental health and substance abuse being among the biggest barriers to finding and sustaining accommodation, and, left untreated, can condemn some to many years as entrenched rough sleepers.

### Discussion points

- Can we bring together statutory authorities, agencies, charities and others, to advocate for and develop deeper and wider support services that recognise the complex and enduring support needed to prevent repeat homelessness, whether as hidden homelessness or sustained street presence?
- The above CEA model is limited to a subset of rough sleepers with especially complex needs. Can the model above be expanded to cover those with less support needs?
- Is it possible to conceive a general system where support is provided "*for the journey*"?

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## **Giving**

### Issues

- There are many small organisations and groups trying to “do good” for the homeless, but some is counter-productive and risky and can help to mitigate the difficulty of rough sleeping without helping to end it.
- Experience from the key workers within the Cambridge Churches Homeless Project shows that a commitment to regular mentoring / befriending meetings with a homeless or formerly homeless person can be a great help. The group believes there is a big desire from many volunteers to do likewise, to get to know and help someone informally. But this is of course fraught with safeguarding concerns.
- A lot of money goes to the begging community, not all wisely spent. Street begging is now very visible in Cambridge – there is a correlation with homelessness but the information available is limited.

### Actions under way

- The Council launched Cambridge Street Aid, a charitable fund managed by Cambridgeshire Community Foundation, with local homelessness charities able to apply for grants benefiting specific rough sleepers. The Council is currently extending this by rolling out “giving terminals” across the city.
- A pilot project has begun, targeting street begging, offering specific help alongside enforcement action.

### Discussion points

- How can we help roll out Cambridge Street Aid even further?
- Are there ways in which rough sleepers can be involved in raising money that they can benefit from as individuals, for example Oxford’s Greater Change initiative<sup>1</sup>?
- Is there a way of the wider public being able to help homeless and formerly homeless people directly, for example through a Cambridge-wide mentoring and befriending scheme such as the one developed by the NCVO<sup>2</sup>? Where do we find the funds and resources for this?
- Could the Street Support app, mentioned above, be a good way for volunteer groups to advertise their need for volunteers and other help, again as a whole community response?
- Are there other gaps that could be filled by community groups, in ways that help the wider efforts?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.greaterchange.co.uk/homepage>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/2-content/1945-ncvo-mentoring-and-befriending>

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- The first resort in tackling any problem is to measure it. Can we treat street begging as social problem requiring targeted outreach and support, in the same way that we now treat rough sleeping?
- Is there a way of accepting the underlying reasons for street begging but providing a better way of doing it?

## **Networking**

### Issues

- Civic organisations, businesses, academia and others are intensely interested in the problem of homelessness but are unsure how to contribute. Many have rich skills and resources that can be deployed but are not engaged strategically to make use of these effectively.
- All relevant statutory bodies have recently signed up to a Memorandum of Understanding headed “Homelessness is unacceptable: tackling homelessness is everyone’s business<sup>1</sup>” developed as part of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Homelessness Trailblazer project<sup>2</sup>.
- A small number of non-statutory bodies, including the Cambridge Churches Homeless Project, Wintercomfort and CHS Group, have signed up to a Statement of Intent adapted from the Memorandum of Understanding and with the same title<sup>3</sup>.
- The purpose of both documents, for those with statutory responsibilities and those without, is to communicate that each signatory
  - o *Believes that homelessness is unacceptable;*
  - o *Understands the impacts of homelessness on individuals and on communities;*
  - o *Commits to action to prevent homelessness and to enable people to move on from homelessness.*
- These documents commit signatories to engaging the wider community, but they are not at all widely known. This Summit, although not inspired by these commitments, does seem to respond to them.

### Actions under way

- Manchester has pioneered the use of a Homelessness Charter<sup>4</sup>, a simple but powerful statement intended to be adopted by each organisation in the statutory sector and the wider community towards the same ends.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://cambridgeshire.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Trailblazer-MoU-with-jargonbuster.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/housing/priority-themes/housing-need/homelessness-trailblazer/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/statement-of-intent.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://charter.streetsupport.net/>

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Southampton has just adopted a more comprehensive Charter to the same ends which has been given wide publicity there<sup>1</sup>.

## Discussion points

- This Summit brings together representatives of businesses, academia, statutory bodies, front-line agencies and others. How best can we work together to ensure everyone who needs a home has access to one, and everyone who needs help to access and sustain that home, has access to that help, whether by working together on the above areas or on different or additional areas that address the issues listed?
- Are we able to put our names collectively to a Cambridge Homelessness Charter, agreeing a set of principles that we all agree to work to, following the examples of Manchester and Southampton, building on or adapting the Cambridge and Peterborough Trailblazer Statement of Intent and Memorandum of Understanding?
- How can this Summit become an effective body for identifying and monitoring collective actions that meet the challenges and address the opportunities above?
- Can we learn from the Crisis report, perhaps by commissioning a local version, and commit to ending rough sleeping in Cambridge?
- Are we willing to meet again early next year to see what progress has been made?

Ends

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<sup>1</sup> <https://spark.adobe.com/page/9w36MxwzN5pvN/>

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## Cambridge Homelessness Charter – Outline

### Vision

- To end homelessness in Cambridge

### Signatories

- Local authorities, healthcare and other public sector service providers, academic institutions, charities, faith groups, businesses and community groups

### Commitment

- Work together and with those who have lived experience of homelessness to find timely and appropriate solutions to end homelessness

### Outcomes

- An end to homelessness and rough sleeping
- Rapid pathways to decent and safe accommodation with appropriate support
- Protection from discrimination and abuse
- Equality of access to information, services, employment and life opportunities

### Actions

- Pledge support
- Join a working group
- Make commitments

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## Annex – an outline of the current system

### *Statutory homelessness*

Local authorities have various statutory duties towards those at risk of or threatened with homelessness. The Homelessness Reduction Act,<sup>1</sup> which commenced on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2018, gave significantly increased duties towards those seeking help, the biggest change since the 1970s. This is a very complex area of law and practice and in so far as the new Act is concerned it is early days.

Households (comprising 1 or more people) that are about to be or have become homeless can apply to the Council for assistance. By law the Council must in the first instance assess whether or not they are:

- Homeless
- Eligible for help (due to citizenship for example)
- In priority need (in simple terms, families, expectant mothers, those with disabilities, young people)

All those that pass the first two tests are provided with active support for 56 days by the Council, in liaison with local agencies, either towards preventing the homelessness or towards relieving it. The Council has the discretionary power, but not the duty, to provide immediate temporary accommodation if needed: often, rough sleeping continues.

Those that satisfy all three tests must be provided with immediate temporary accommodation during this 56-day period, if needed.

During the 56-day period, while efforts at prevention and/or relief continue, the above tests are examined more closely, and a further test is applied – whether or not the household became homeless due to their own action or inaction.

If prevention or relief is achieved during the 56-day period, all well and good! If not, then one of three things will happen:

- The household has passed all four tests and the Council will provide on-going temporary and then permanent accommodation, or
- The period may be extended, and this may or may not include extending any temporary accommodation provision, or
- The assistance ceases and any temporary accommodation must be vacated.

This is all very new. We hope to have data on how this is starting to work out in time for the Summit.

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[https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional\\_resources/policy\\_and\\_research/policy\\_library/policy\\_library\\_folder/briefing\\_homelessness\\_reduction\\_act\\_2017](https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/policy_library_folder/briefing_homelessness_reduction_act_2017)

# It Takes A City

## Cambridge Summit for Homelessness

29<sup>th</sup> November 2018



During Q1 2018, the last quarter before the new Act became law, for comparison<sup>1</sup>:

- 52 homeless households (1 or more people) applied for help from the Council. Of these:
  - o 17 households were owed a full housing duty including immediate temporary accommodation if needed. They did not end up on the street.
  - o 16 households were not owed a full housing duty but were eligible for a reasonable period in temporary accommodation if needed while they looked for housing. They may well have ended up on the street after a time.
  - o 19 households were only eligible for advice and assistance. If rough sleeping, it continued.
- At the end of Q1 2018:
  - o 52 households were in temporary accommodation, including B&B
  - o 15 households were owed a full housing duty and no accommodation had yet been found (they would be still in temporary accommodation)

### ***Housing options and routes for single homeless***

As mentioned above, single homeless people are, under the statutory provisions, generally not eligible for temporary accommodation or assured of a certain route to social housing.

The Council uses money granted from central government to help provide other accommodation options for single homeless people, and also provides funds to partner agencies, who in turn draw on government grants and charitable sources to offer accommodation and support to the single homeless. And there are other charities, housing associations, etc that provide accommodation for the single homeless, in addition of course to the private rented sector.

These taken together form a range of housing options for the single homeless. There are numerous routes to access these options but it can take some time for a space to be found and navigating the routes and the options is not easy.

The main routes to housing are:

- Application to the **Council** for assistance – as described above

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<sup>1</sup> Data taken from the national dataset

<https://data.cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/dataset/homelessness-england/resource/d16a8225-4942-4cbe-84a5-6ccb8bcb3ce>

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- Self-referral to **Jimmy's Assessment Centre** – once accepted, Jimmy's provides short-stay accommodation and makes onward referrals to next-step accommodation providers
- Self-referral to the other two key agencies: **Cambridge Mental Health and Street Outreach Team; Wintercomfort.**
- Accepting an offer of help from **other front-line street teams** that can include assistance with accommodation
- If accommodated during the winter shelter project, via the **Cambridge Churches Homeless Project**
- Self-referral to direct access accommodation providers: **Hope into Action; Emmaus; Cyrenians** (some projects); other charities depending on eligibility
- Looking for private sector rented rooms or flats via **estate agents, Gumtree** and the like

The main options for housing include:

- **Social housing and Housing Associations** – on making a homeless application to the Council and being accepted as owed a full housing duty. This includes temporary accommodation as a stop-gap.
- **The hostel system**<sup>1</sup> – short- and medium-term accommodation with support, normally accessed via Jimmy's as above, but exemptions can apply
- **Town Hall Lettings** – the Council's social lettings programme that gives affordable opportunities in shared accommodation
- Other housing charities with various eligibility and referral routes – **Hope into Action, Emmaus, Orbit** and others
- **Private sector rented accommodation** – the supply is limited and although the Council and others can offer help with such things as deposits and high rents there are many other financial and non-financial barriers in the way.
- **Cambridge Churches Homeless Project (CCHP)** – emergency shelter during the winter, which can lead to referrals to onward accommodation run by CCHP and others

There are other smaller options, including an embryonic Housing First project managed by a County Council team. And in addition to the various routes into the hostel system, there are further routes out of it into permanent accommodation – social housing and the private rented sector – that are too complex to describe here.

It is important to understand that for many rough sleepers, there is no one easy route to follow, routes and options can fail for various reasons and multiple

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<sup>1</sup> 222 Victoria Road, The Springs, Willow Walk, 451 Newmarket Road, Cyrenians, Railway House, Whitworth House, Corona House – all with various eligibility criteria and referral routes

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attempts might be made: it is really a game of snakes and ladders – a slow climb from the street and far too often a rapid fall back down. For some longer-term rough sleepers these disappointments can lead to a loss of hope.

For far too many, rough sleeping frequently becomes the only option.

## ***Support options and routes***

As seen above, finding accommodation is not easy, despite the numerous routes and options. Few do it unaided. Few sustain their accommodation unaided. Hence, and as in housing, there is also a complex network of support services that help rough sleepers, the homeless, formerly homeless and vulnerably housed to:

- Find and sustain accommodation
- Find and sustain employment
- Manage bills, benefits and money
- Manage a house, flat or room
- Build social and spiritual capital
- Obtain personal and household items
- Provide grants to help with particular purchases
- Address mental and physical needs
- Deal with substance abuse
- General welfare, etc

Support divides roughly into front line and specialist support.

For those in social or private housing a national organisation new to Cambridge, P3, has just won a “floating support” front-line Cambridgeshire-wide contract, taking over from four previous providers.

Other housing options include front-line support as part of the package. Some include built-in long-term intensive support, some provide just moving-in support, others offer something in between.

All such support is intended to help people set up and maintain their accommodation, practically and financially, leading to as much independence and security as possible. The support is of the same nature as being a GP in healthcare: specialist support is introduced as needed by the individual – mental and physical health, employment, money, community engagement, etc.

Similar support is offered to rough sleepers by the front-line organisations mentioned earlier, albeit of course the focus is on getting into accommodation: Cambridge Mental Health and Street Outreach Team; Wintercomfort; Cambridgeshire County Council’s Counting Every Adult (CEA) team; other front-

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line street teams. Some of this support, especially for example at Wintercomfort, continues as the homeless person steps onto the accommodation pathways, complementing any housing related support. The Cambridge Churches Homeless Project continues to offer complementary pastoral and practical help to its winter guests following the end of the winter.

It can be seen that a rough sleeper could have multiple sources of front-line help at any one time – active coordination is often needed to avoid requests for help falling through the gaps.

Support that is provided as part of accommodation, for example in the hostel system, requires a detailed assessment of a person's needs and ambitions. Other support also requires an assessment, albeit perhaps less detailed.

Unfortunately, this can mean a rough sleeper needs to tell their story time after time, either as key workers change or as they move along the housing pathways from the street through to emergency or temporary accommodation, if provided, to the hostel system and eventually into permanent accommodation: this can be hard to do. There is no system currently in place for support “for the journey”, with two exceptions:

- The embryonic Housing First model developing via a County Council's CEA team offers immediate access to housing and wrap-around support whether in that home or after moving to another one in the same scheme
- Cambridge Churches Homeless Project, and its predecessor Hope Cambridge, has provided on-going long-term pastoral and practical support for a small number of its winter guests, all of whom arrived direct from the street, who are able to access housing pathways during or following the winter. This support is complementary to any other support offered.

In addition to this front-line support there is of course a very wide range of other organisations that provide the specialist support mentioned above, some exclusively to homeless people, some less so, some not so. Health issues are a major factor in rough sleeping, so special mention must be made of the critical support provided by:

- The Cambridge Access Surgery<sup>1</sup> – a specialist NHS GP service for rough sleepers and the vulnerably housed.
- The Dual Diagnosis Street Team<sup>2</sup> – a specialist team of NHS mental health and substance abuse nurses established late last year to work with rough sleepers.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mhcambridgeaccess.co.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cpft.nhs.uk/services/dual-diagnostic-street-outreach-team.htm>

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Finally, there are a number, and the number is growing, of community-led groups offering support in various ways to rough sleepers, often independently of any other service provider. Often a valuable life-line, they can in some instances lead to rough sleepers gaining dependence and not taking steps to independence.

This support eco-system, as with housing – once again the routes and the options – is impossibly hard to describe in detail.

Support is expensive. Cuts in local authority adult services budgets have meant reductions in budgets and personnel, and constant re-organising to spread the load more efficiently. The wider problems affecting publicly funded social work generally have their parallel in homelessness services.

But support – meaning people – is essential. Housing by comparison is easy: the number of extra units of housing needed is very small compared to the number of units being built each year in Cambridge. But support in terms of people time is expensive and enduringly so. Yet support is what will ensure rough sleepers get the help needed and find and sustain accommodation. Whether professional, social or community-led, paid or by volunteers – effective, personal, non-judgemental, pastoral and practical people that can walk alongside our homeless friends “for the journey” are the key to ending homelessness.

**Ends**