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**HOUSING UPDATE**

To: Regulatory Services Committee  
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Author: Housing & Community Safety Manager

[T13]

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1.0 **ISSUE**

1.1 To receive an update on the Housing Service.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 Members are requested to note the update in this report.

3.0 **UPDATE**

3.1 **Homeless Reduction Act 2017**

3.1.1 The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) came into force on 3 April 2018. In order to prepare for this major change in legislation the Council received funding from two different sources to deal with the additional burden of implementation and operation.

**New Burdens Funding**

- £24,078 for 2017/18
- £22,055 for 2018/19
- £25,347 for 2019/20

**Flexible Homeless Support Grant**

- £168,000 for 2017/18
- £191,000 for 2018/19

The Council has ringfenced this money for the prevention of homelessness.

3.1.2 In preparation for the introduction of the HRA the Housing Team was restructured. The new structure can be found at Appendix 1. The purpose of the restructure was to provide a more holistic service with a focus on supporting people to sustain and maintain tenancies, particularly those with higher support needs e.g. mental health, drugs and alcohol.

3.1.3 The restructure introduced three new fixed term posts comprising a Community Safety and Housing Strategy Team Leader, a Tenancy Support Officer and a Housing Options Administration Officer. We have also outsourced a contract for specific mental health support. The latter is being delivered by

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RED2GREEN; a charity already established in the area for providing such support.

3.1.4 The Council was in a good position prior to the introduction of the HRA as it already had a focus on prevention.

What are the main implications of the new legislation?

### DUTY TO PROVIDE ADVISORY SERVICES

Requires free homelessness advice and information services to be provided to all residents and to provide advice designed with certain vulnerable groups in mind, including care leavers, former armed forces, people leaving custody, victims of domestic abuse, people leaving hospital and people with mental health issues.

Advice must include:

Prevention of homelessness

Securing accommodation when homeless

The rights of applicants and LA duties

Help available to people threatened with or homeless

How to access the available help

### MEANING OF 'THREATENED WITH HOMELESSNESS'

Extends the period during which someone might be threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days and; An applicant is threatened with homelessness if they have been served with a valid section 21 notice to end the Assured Shorthold Tenancy of their only available accommodation, that has expired or will expire within 56 days.

### PREVENTION DUTY

Local housing authorities (LHAs) must take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for any at risk eligible applicant, regardless of priority need. This can involve assisting them to stay in their current accommodation, or helping them to find a new place to live

### RELIEF DUTY

LHAs must take reasonable steps to help the applicant to secure suitable accommodation

Help could be, for example, funding a rent deposit or working with a private landlord to make properties available, working with supported accommodation providers to secure accommodation and working with social housing providers.

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### ASSESSMENTS AND PERSONALISED HOUSING PLANS (PHP's)

LAs must carry out an assessment of the circumstances and needs of all eligible applicants who are homeless, or threatened with becoming homeless within 56 days. The assessment has to be shared with the applicant. A Personalised Housing Plan will be drawn up which sets out the 'reasonable steps' the authority and the applicant will take (and other agencies/people as appropriate). 'Reasonable steps' should be tailored to the individual and the plan should be realistic

The introduction of the HRA highlighted the good work already being done by the Council as we already were highly focused on prevention working with families and individuals at the earliest stages.

3.1.5 In anticipation for the new HRA we now have a qualified HHSSRS trained Officer who can assess suitability and standards of properties. This means we are expanding the knowledge within in the team and becoming more responsive broadening the skills and ability of the service.

### **3.2 Community Hubs**

#### **3.2.1 Ely**

In its first year of operation the Ely Hub has seen in excess of 1,650 people. The hub has proven to be a very successful collaboration of partners. Through negotiation food is provided by Tesco's Fair Share and the coffee is provided by Starbucks.

#### **3.2.2 Littleport**

Littleport hub has been rolled out in partnership with Littleport Parish Council who are providing the village hall free of charge. The Hub is open to anyone on the 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of every month. So far the roll out has been successful.

3.2.3 We have worked to complete an Information sharing agreement with partner agencies across Ely and Littleport and can now work in partnership with agencies including Cambridge Housing Society (CHS) , Inclusion, Christians against Poverty (CAP) , Centre 33 , Cambridgeshire County Council, Medical practices, Sanctuary Housing & The Rosmini Centre to name a few in order to be able to get to work quickly with the vulnerable families and individuals in the area to prevent homelessness and crisis situations early.

#### **3.2.4 Youth hubs**

The Council is rolling out two hubs, with statutory partner agencies, designed for young people aged 11 plus Littleport Leisure Centre will host one of the youth hubs and Officers are currently searching for a venue in Ely.

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The first youth community hub will be rolled out on 21 June 2018 at Littleport Leisure Centre.

The aim of the Hub is to be able to engage young people aged 11 upwards with agencies including Centre 33, MIND , mental health and wellbeing service for young people and a carer's support group. There will be classes including cooking, health and wellbeing. Littleport was identified as an area with a need as the first PSPO order was placed there. We have worked closely with the business at the leisure park and they will be awarding young people with vouchers for activities and food.

There will be places for young people to be able to complete homework if they need a quiet space.

### **3.2.5 Work in progress**

Venues have been identified in Soham and Bottisham for future community hubs and work is ongoing to launch these in the coming months. The next area of focus will be in Sutton.

3.2.6 Early intervention is invaluable; reaching out to communities before crisis not only saves the Council money in the long run but delivers a service that the community deserves. None of this could be achieved without the excellent relationship that the Council has with partner agencies. Other authorities in the sub-region are looking to implement similar models.

3.2.7 In July The Housing Team will attend the National Practitioners Service conference. The team attended last year and were awarded the bronze award we are to attend this year and are aiming to achieve Gold Standard in Housing Advice and Prevention Services. We are working through several challenges to achieve this.

### **3.3 Life Skills**

3.3.1 The Housing Team are in the process of organising a 'life skills' program which will be rolled out to all secondary schools in East Cambridgeshire. This programme aims to educate young people on the harsh realities of homelessness using visual interactive activities and guest speakers including young people from the Ely Young Peoples project (EYPP). We will be giving workshops on how to be a good neighbour and what constitutes ASB both in and outside the home. This work is being done in collaboration with Cambridgeshire County Council Youth Services. The first Personal Social Health and Economic Education (PSHE) day will be at Ely College on 20 June 2018.

**3.4 Migrant workers**

- 3.4.1 The Council recognises the high level of migrant workers in the district and as a consequence has welcomed the Rosmini Centre who now operate from an office base within the Council at an annual rent of £2000. Whilst they support primarily Eastern European clients they offer assistance to all minority ethnic communities. The Council contributes £7000 to the running costs through its Community Safety fund with a further £7000 of financial support from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- 3.4.2 The Rosmini Centre service has proven to be of great value to the Council and many of its residents. They provide translators and support services to foreign nationals free of charge. Their outreach service includes assisting clients in obtaining National Insurance numbers, access to schools and medical services, signposting to mental health and learning difficulties support, job seeking and in limited circumstances, repatriation. They are involved in outreach work at local factories and other areas of employment and “recruit” volunteers to provide English speaking lessons
- 3.4.3 Leaflets promoting the service are distributed to all statutory and voluntary bodies as well as posters placed at locations including those known to be frequented by migrant communities. The Centre assists the police and other agencies in the identification of cases of exploitation and abuse among children and adults, this aspect being a fundamental plank of the successful bid for the OPCC funding (refer 3.4.1 above).
- 3.4.4 The Centre has recently (May 30<sup>th</sup>) delivered a Heritage Event in Ely which has celebrated cultural diversity through various activities, enabling their work to be advertised to a wider audience.
- 3.4.5 The Centre also assists with the co-ordination of our community hubs and in partnership with the Council are helping to apply for additional funding to sustain and develop them.
- 3.4.6 As a consequence their work provides an important addition to the Council's services aimed at the prevention of homelessness.

**3.5 Prevention**

- 3.5.1 As a result of all of the measures that have been put in place the Council is able to boast that it has still not used bed and breakfast accommodation. The changes introduced through the HRA and Universal Credit (due for implementation in September 2018), means that the Housing Team will need to continue to focus on the prevention work.
- 3.5.2 Officers are currently working in partnership with Ely Job Centre to identify client's now so early intervention and budgeting work can be completed.

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- 3.5.3 A referral process is already in place with Sanctuary Housing. Sanctuary Housing now issue the Council with a notice as soon as a tenant falls into rent arrears rather than waiting until court action is taken. This enables the Council to intervene at the earliest opportunity to work with tenants to prevent homelessness.
- 3.5.4 We have a well-established rent deposit scheme that has been running and which we have a collection rate of 85.38%. This enables us to lend money for rent deposit meaning we have a constant recycle fund so we can continue to lend homeless households and those threatened with homelessness money to secure private rented accommodation in the local area. In the last 12 months we have assisted 56 households into affordable private rented accommodation.
- 3.5.5 From the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2017 until the 31.03.2018 we had:
- 361 Households approach the Housing Advice service as threatened with homelessness or homeless. We were able to work with 97 households to enable them to remain in their own home using mediation, Discretionary housing payments (DHP) and resolving housing benefit or income issues. 108 households were assisted into alternative accommodation including supported housing & private rented. Of the 156 homeless applications that were taken 94 were accepted as having a Full Housing Duty, which equates to 26% of the footfall to Housing advice being homeless acceptances. Taking the burden off Social Housing providers and opening up the Housing register to everybody is something we are very proud of.
- 3.5.6 The lighthouse centre in Ely provide our severe weather provision (SWEP) for street homeless individuals and we are looking to evolve this to include no second night out. The winter of 2017 the SWEP was accessed by 3 individuals who have now been housed.
- 3.5.7 A sharing agreement is currently being set up between East Cambridgeshire Housing, CHS, Inclusion Drug and Alcohol service, Red to Green mental health and wellbeing service and Police. It will mean that if an individual has been identified as street homeless then we will make contact by going out to see the person and try and engage individuals with support services to resolve the reasons the person is street homeless or begging.
- 3.5.8 Our Tenancy Support Officers have worked with 146 families across the district to prevent homelessness as well as the Housing and Community safety team they are contacted by partner agencies to work with vulnerable families and adults to help with income, maximise benefits help with health, debt and sign post to various support agencies. They also work closely with our temporary accommodation providers to ensure that households are ready to move into long term accommodation. They will work with families to set up tenancies, utility's, housing benefits, doctors and schools to give people the best possible start in accommodation.

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3.5.9 We work closely with local letting agents and private landlords to secure private rented accommodation for our clients. We invite local letting agents and landlords to attend our Landlord forums where we give advice to landlords regarding setting houses of multiple occupancy ( HMO'S) changes to any current legalisation, our tenancy support officers and our free landlord resolution service.

We currently have 8 HMO's in the District that we have helped set up with the assistance from the environmental health team who will liaise with landlords to make sure that the property is up to health and safety standards. Having access to these properties means that we have direct access into shared housing within East Cambs to house clients who could struggle to find housing due to being non priority. We work with several landlords outside the District including Cambridge, Newmarket & Haverhill meaning that we have options to clients that work or have families outside the District To date since setting up the shared house we have housed 80 non priority single clients into HMO's.

### **3.6 Supported properties**

3.6.1 The Housing Team have recently met with The Pringle Group whose main activity is to develop properties for adults with mental health and learning disability.

3.6.2 The Pringle Group have numerous properties in Ely which are set up as fully supported HMO's for people with learning disability and mental health issues. A property has become vacant and The Pringle Group has approached the Council to work together to provide accommodation for people with specific mental health, drug and alcohol related issues.

3.6.3 These properties are housing benefit sustainable. The Pringle Group provide support and are happy to work with the Council on a direct referral basis. If this property is successful there will be a potential for direct referrals to all of their other properties in this area. This opportunity has arisen from the positive reputation the Council has for the work carried out with landlords and the ongoing support provided by the Housing Team.

3.6.4 Our Soham Young Parents Project is going from strength due to the work that is done by our tenancy support officer and partner agencies. We have a well-established project and we are working to give young families the skills needed to maintain long term accommodation and become a good neighbour. Projects currently running:

- Carers and training opportunities ( alongside County Council)
- Young parents group
- Budgeting/ income benefits
- Emotional wellbeing
- Healthy relationships
- Sexual health
- Healthy eating

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- Baby first aid
- Nutrition
- Computer skills
- Healthy cooking to a budget
- Paying rent and keeping up to date with rent payments
- Setting up utility bills

We are looking into various funding groups to explore the option of offering driving lessons so that they can gain more independence meaning more opportunities for work, education and training.

### **3.7 Community Safety**

3.7.1 The Council is a lead organisation in the district's Community Safety Partnership (CSP). This partnership is responsible for working to reduce threat, risk and harm to victims of crime and anti-social behaviour. Whilst some elements of the work do not directly impact on homelessness prevention, many of the projects do.

3.7.2 We are currently re launching the White Ribbon campaign which looks to not only highlight the problem of domestic violence but to change people's mind-set and hopefully reduce the levels of abuse suffered, predominantly by women. It links to the County wide work which is constantly looking to develop and improve the provision of advice and support to victims. A number of our clients seeking housing advice are suffering from domestic abuse.

3.7.3 The Community Eyes and Ears initiative is also being overhauled and this will help identify vulnerable people in our communities who are struggling with various aspects of their lives and enable them to be given advice and support. Historically this has embraced households struggling with their accommodation and has enabled us to share with them alternatives or ways in which the current situation can be improved. This has included referrals to Care and Repair whereby adaptations have been provided to enable residents to remain in their own home safely.

3.7.4 Challenging Hate Crime and helping people to avoid Rogue Scams are two other projects supported by the Partnership and are aimed at keeping people safe and secure in their homes and communities. Other projects aimed at reducing the level and impact of anti- social behaviour have a very real impact on people's desire/need to look for alternative accommodation.

3.7.5 In association with our Waste Team and the Community Payback Team (Probation) we have worked hard to eradicate an increasing incidence of graffiti that a number of people have found unnerving to the point that they do not feel safe. Whilst not appearing on the surface to be associated with homelessness prevention such work does help people feel more satisfied with their surroundings and be less likely to want to move for reasons of fear. In a similar

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way our Community Partnership projects that have targeted domestic burglaries help residents to be less likely to pursue a move elsewhere.

3.7.6 What is quite clear is that the work of the Community Safety Partnership is an intrinsic part of the of the Housing Service and provides a number of benefits that, if they were not available, would doubtless see an increase in the number of members of the public seeking alternative accommodation.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS/EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4.2 Equality Impact Assessment (INRA) is not required.

5.0 APPENDICES

5.1 Appendix 1- Department Structure

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<u>Background Documents</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Contact Officer</u>
None	Room FF102 1 <sup>st</sup> Floor, Annexe The Grange Ely	Angela Parmenter Housing & Community Safety Manager 01353 616374 <a href="mailto:Angela.parmenter@eastcambs.gov.uk">Angela.parmenter@eastcambs.gov.uk</a>