



Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Homelessness Trailblazer Year 1 review

Briefing note #1 published August 2018

What is the homelessness trailblazer project?

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough's homelessness prevention trailblazer project is funded by the government for two years to look at new and creative ways to reduce homelessness in our area.

This note sets out the ways the trailblazer project is working at the end of its first year, along with some case studies to give some "real life" examples and quotes from partners.

The Trailblazer is a team of seven people, who work with council housing options teams, helping them connect with other public sector professionals and with housing landlords.

The districts covered are

- Cambridge
- East Cambridgeshire
- Huntingdonshire
- South Cambridgeshire
- Peterborough; and
- Fenland who leads the project.

You can find out about all the many partners involved, on page 4 - and how you can get involved on page 8.



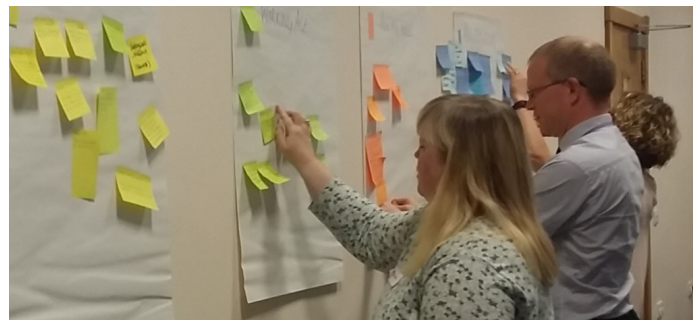
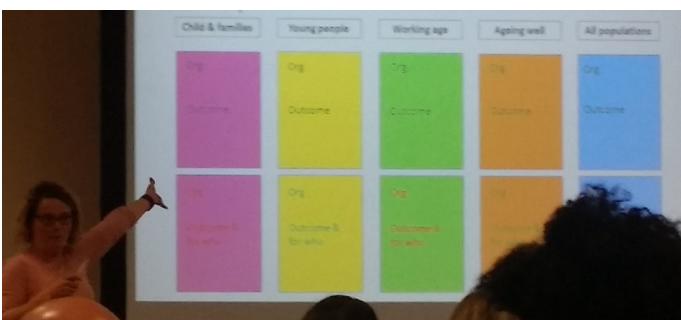
In the beginning...

Having secured £736,000 of funding and started to recruit the team, we ran an event in May 2017 to gather ideas, thoughts and suggestions on how to turn the bid into reality, and how we could work better together on it. Around 35 partners got together and were led through sessions and workshops to share concerns and generate ideas to make the Trailblazer project as relevant and useful as possible, locally. Questions included

- Why does homelessness matter?
- What needs to be in place to achieve our ambition?
- How can we gain further commitment from senior leaders?

Delegates agreed homelessness is rising and that although the Homelessness Reduction Act would enable more households to have their homelessness prevented, but this alone would not end homelessness entirely. Also homelessness teams and housing alone could not solve the problem alone. To prevent homelessness we need leadership and commitment to change our systems, organisations, professions and communities. The workshop identified the commitments needed from local leaders, starting with the Public Service Board to achieve this, which are set out in our [memorandum of cooperation](#). Other partners can sign up to a new [statement of intent](#). The website where you can find both is on page 8.

The Trailblazer project aims to make homelessness the unacceptable outcome across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.



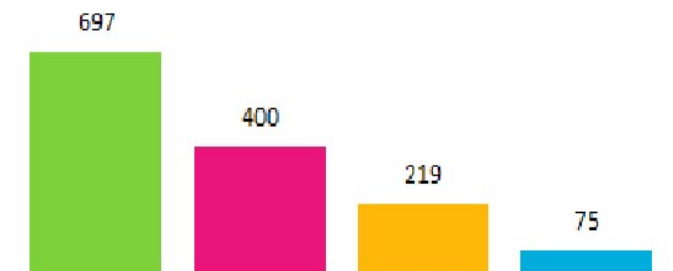
Spotting the early signs

- Trailblazer prevention officers work on cases where they get news of the threat of homelessness, more than 56 days before that threat comes into force.
- If the threat of homelessness is less than 56 days, the case is passed to the relevant local authority—usually to the housing options team—where people can get advice.
- Trailblazer officers give advice to public sector professionals on legislation and other housing matters, giving staff in other professions the skills needed so they can deal with homelessness queries themselves.
- The Trailblazer has helped to create new pathways so there is “no wrong front door” meaning if people need help, they will find it.
- Trailblazer officers signpost and refer people to other agencies where appropriate.
- They also collect data on the cases they help with, so we have evidence on what works, and how homelessness is being prevented.
- The Trailblazers draw on past experience and give real examples of where homelessness could be avoided to public sector professionals, so by working together to make homelessness the unacceptable outcome.

Year 1: how much warning ?

From June 2017 to July 2018 the Trailblazer team had 697 referrals in total. The chart shows how much warning each case had, prior to the households becoming homeless...

- 697 total referrals.
- 400 had more than 56 days warning of homelessness (these are the Trailblazer team’s key target).
- 219 had less than 56 days’ warning.
- 75 were already homeless (i.e. no time to prevent homelessness at point of referral).



(3 cases were referred but fell out of contact with any team)

Early Help... making a difference

This review came in from James Burgess, the Early Help Hub manager at Cambridgeshire County Council. It shows how much difference the Trailblazer project is making already, working with teams like the Early Help Hub...

An Early Help Assessment was received from the children’s school. The family consisted of mother and three children. The assessment raised concerns with children’s behaviour at home and school as well as a potential eviction from home due to children’s anti-social behaviour and significant debt issues.

The assessment was triaged by an Early Help Hub coordinator and the family and school were spoken to. The school raised concerns that children had already had several school moves due to housing issues in the past; and that one of the children had learning needs which would make a change of school difficult. Support was offered through one of the Early Help’s district teams to support mother with routines and boundaries and managing finances.

The case was also raised with the duty Housing Trailblazer who helped liaise with the housing provider and agree a suitable payment plan for the debts. They arranged for the housing provider to form part of the Team Around the Family going forward, this would ensure that the support in place would be coordinated to best meet the family’s needs.

All of this was completed in a short space of time.

Without the support of the Housing Trailblazers, there could well have been a situation where the family were forced to move home, meaning another change in school for the children - or a need to put alternative education plans in place.

James Burgess, the Early Help Hub manager at Cambridgeshire County Council

Do you know someone at risk of homelessness?

- Rent arrears
- Benefit concerns
- Landlord and tenant relationship breakdown
- Debt problems
- Anti-Social Behaviour concerns
- Poor condition of property
- Threatened eviction notice
- Warning letters from landlord

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION TRAILBLAZER

Covering Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

Please email
trailblazer@fenland.gov.uk

MAKING HOMELESSNESS THE UNACCEPTABLE OUTCOME

Landlord rents and solutions service

- This team offers a service to private landlords, called the Landlord Rents and Solutions service. It is free of charge. Trailblazers promote and market the service to encourage private landlords to work with the local authority to help house the clients in housing need.
- The service includes mediation, debt advice and money advice to tenants, benefit applications, referrals to support agencies and much more.
- The team also promotes the existing schemes that Local Authorities run which private landlords can work with, such as Town Hall Lettings, Ermine Street and Shire Homes in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire.
- The Trailblazer team has been holding landlord information events to promote these services, starting with an event in Fenland in June 2018. The event was well attended, and gave an opportunity for landlords to get together and share their thoughts with the Trailblazer and other teams.
- A further event is planned for East Cambridgeshire.
- If you want to share the poster you can download it from [here](#).
- If you want to find out more on this, please email trailblazer@fenland.gov.uk

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Trailblazer Project

Landlord Rents and Solutions Service covering Cambridgeshire and Peterborough



We provide a free help and advice service to private sector landlords. Our aim is to give fast and efficient housing management support, to landlords with properties in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. We will:

- Assist with debt issues, including rent arrears
- Coach tenants on tenancy obligations, including rent payments
- Help you to avoid the expense and inconvenience of evictions
- Help steer you through the requirements of new legislation and regulations
- We can even help find tenants, provide rent deposits and rent in advance

Contact Trailblazers team at trailblazer@fenland.gov.uk or on 01354 654321

This is a service being provided through a partnership of Cambridge and Peterborough City Councils, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire District Councils.



trailblazer@fenland.gov.uk
01354 654321

'Making homelessness the unacceptable outcome'

Case study #1: helping find a place to rent

Referred by Local Authority Housing Options team

Household type and any vulnerability
One adult on probation who has a lung condition (COPD)

Tenure Private rented within sister's tenancy

Risk of homelessness
High, was released from prison in Summer 2017, now sleeping on sister's sofa and struggling to find private rented accommodation. Landlord has served notice.

Action required and completed
The Trailblazer Business Development team found a suitable private rented

house and negotiated a rent close to the local housing allowance rate with the landlord.

Tenant viewed and accepted the property straight away. Team mediated between tenant and landlord while a Universal Credit claim was being set up. Also assisted tenant further by applying for a £500 grant to help purchase white goods and furniture for the property.

Outcome
Tenant happily living in the accommodation located close to her support network. Landlord and tenant can contact the Trailblazer team if there are any problems with the tenancy.

Town & Country fully supports the important work being done by Trailblazers, helping the most vulnerable, that the "system" would have previously let down. In our experience it is the first time we have seen an concerted, realistic and most importantly an effective initiative from local government to address homelessness. We at Town & Country are proud to be involved and find Trailblazers are open and effective in the way that they work with us. This initiative fully deserves to be funded to expand, and hopefully to become the normal experience for those in need.

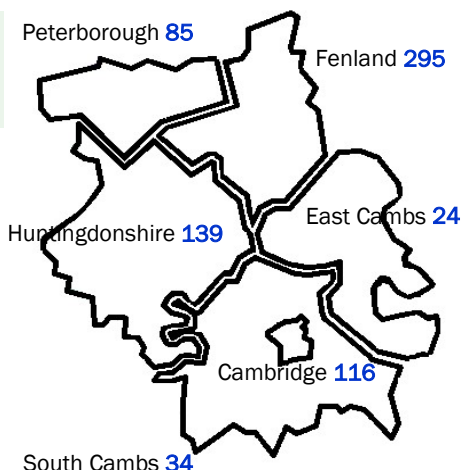
Timothy Clark, Director, Town & Country Letting Agents Ltd, Downham Market

Year 1: where?

The spread of 697 referrals was quite uneven over the six districts covered for a variety of reasons, but all benefitted.

The number of people referred to the trailblazer team are shown on the map...

Again, a couple of referrals were not covered or lost contact



It is a pleasure to work with Melissa from Trailblazer. She is pleasant, communicative and on the ball. I have already housed a Trailblazer tenant with Melissa, and look forward to working with her on-going.

Carole Cooney, Director, Opal Lettings Ltd



Joining up work-streams

Trailblazer prevention officers have formed a hub, based in a number of public sector organisations, including...

- Children's services
- Adult Social Care
- District council teams
- Housing options teams
- Council housing teams in Cambridge & South Cambridgeshire
- Housing Associations
- Voluntary organisations.

By acting as housing navigators in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub and the Early Help Hub, Trailblazer prevention officers help make the links with other teams such as education, health and the police.

"I have to say the Trailblazer service is brilliant. Colleagues within the service... are all very knowledgeable and helpful when I have any queries about housing issues facing our families in the Early Help Hub.

Great work is taking place to help our most vulnerable families in Cambridgeshire."

*Jane McPherson, Early Help Hub Coordinator, Children's Services
Cambridgeshire County Council*

Building the network: Think Family

- The Trailblazers promote Cambridgeshire County Council's **'think family'** approach and way of working, which encourages joined up working to problem solve and improve outcomes for people, in all areas - not just housing.
- Training is provided to staff on 'think family' approach – to registered social landlords (also known as housing associations) in particular. The think family approach promotes support for families, rather than enforcement, where possible.
- The Trailblazer ensures all other public sector agencies are committed to preventing homelessness and are aware of their role in it. It enforces the message that *'homelessness is the unacceptable outcome'* and empowers partners to be involved and be confident.
- Trailblazer staff need to be aware of all services available locally which provide support, debt advice and other help; and this knowledge is growing with the support of other public sector agencies.

The Trailblazer service relies on commitment from all agencies to play their part in preventing homelessness, and understand that in turn this will improve outcomes in all areas of people's lives, and will have a great economic benefit.

In one year we have seen a huge commitment and willingness to work together. The Trailblazer project has enabled this to happen and build on relationships that already existed with the Local Authorities.

There is still a long way to go and hopefully lots will be achieved in the coming year, and beyond.

The Trailblazer project also works to build good relationships with other sectors on behalf of Local Authority Housing Options teams, for example Criminal Justice services, Hospital discharge teams, Children's and adult social services, and Fire and Rescue services.

This enhances good working practices and partnership working. It encourages early identification of risk of homelessness and pathways to be developed to help separate organisations work together better.

It also helps to develop a consistent approach across all Local Authorities so partner agencies do not get confused.

The Trailblazer builds information and knowledge of what other public sector services are, and what they do.

This has been identified as vitally important for partnership working. The knowledge and information is then shared with the Local Authority Housing Options Teams.

The Housing Options and Trailblazer teams work very closely together to try and assist those that could be threatened with homelessness with payments to cover either rent arrears or rent deposits.

With this assistance Trailblazer prevented 71 households from becoming homeless in 2017/18.

Tracey Martin, Housing Options Team Leader, Fenland District Council

The trailblazers help the team with solutions as well as raising awareness... It's a great example of joined up and partnership working and how effective it can be. They have also helped us gain an understanding of the new Homelessness Reduction Act."

Stuart Brown, Head of Adult Early Help, Cambridgeshire County Council

Do you want to get more involved?

Please contact trailblazer@fenland.gov.uk



Putting a foot in the revolving door...

Developing clearer pathways for people with experience of the criminal justice system.

The Homelessness Trailblazer project, in partnership with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, is enabling a much-needed piece of work looking at existing Offender pathways and the processes that do work and don't work effectively.

The project is improving working partnerships between housing teams including Local Authority Housing Options, housing providers and criminal justice services.

It will improve access to housing for offenders, as well as overall outcomes for them.

Given the shortage of housing this workstream also aims to identify national gaps and challenges that prevent access to good accommodation.

To start the conversation, a whole room full of professionals got together in May 2018 to look at the issue and find better ways of working together.



"We've got to change the way we approach homelessness and it is imperative we recognise vulnerability in our policies and processes"

@PCCCambs

"Working together we can ensure all agencies play their part in preventing homelessness to allow people to live fulfilling lives. There is still a long way to go but I am optimistic that together we can make homelessness an unacceptable outcome."

"It is clear we need to address the long term causes of criminality and put a foot in the revolving door and ensuring people have stability going forward"

@PCCCambs



A [press release](#) following the event summarized nicely...

A central government funded project to look at new and creative ways to reduce homelessness in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is being supported by Police and Crime Commissioner, Jason Ablewhite.

Councils in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough were awarded £736,000 to work together to prevent homelessness in January 2017. The scheme, now in place for over a year, is working with a range of partners who can all play their part in preventing homelessness.

Police Commissioner, Jason Ablewhite met with members of the Trailblazer service, housing officers and representatives from criminal justice services at an event in Huntingdon earlier this month (May 9th) to discuss developing clearer pathways for people with experience of the criminal justice system.

Police and Crime Commissioner, Jason Ablewhite said:

"The Trailblazer project gives us a great opportunity to look at what prevents vulnerable people from finding suitable housing. People can find themselves homeless for a whole variety of reasons: they may be in debt, struggling with complex needs, coming out of prison or having issues with landlords.

The Trailblazer team is building good relationships with other sectors on behalf of local authority housing teams, for example with criminal justice services, hospital discharge teams, and children's and adult social services.

Helen Brown, Trailblazer Project Homeless Prevention Manager said:

"Many offenders face difficulties securing and maintaining a home which can contribute to a chaotic lifestyle. It was good to have representatives from so many different housing and criminal justice services working in partnership to help address these difficulties. The agencies have agreed to build on the ideas that came out of the event.

"The Trailblazer project can only be successful with the commitment and support of our partner agencies. We are extremely grateful that The Police and Crime Commissioner has pledged his support in helping to make homelessness the unacceptable outcome."

Link to press release here

<http://www.cambridgeshire-pcc.gov.uk/scheme-reduce-homelessness-cambridgeshire-peterborough-supported-police-commissioner/>

Case study #2: eviction prevented

Referred by: Clarion Housing's Income Team

Household type and any vulnerability: 2 adults and 1 child

Tenure: Social rented

Risk of homelessness:

High, having significant rent arrears and court costs, a suspended possession order and tenant had stopped engaging.

Action required and completed:

- Regular mediation with Clarion's income team.
- Assisted discretionary housing payment application

Outcome and tenancy sustainment options used:

Tenant covered £390 court costs herself by borrowing from family, and was awarded a discretionary housing payment to clear the arrears. Clarion cancelled the potential eviction.

The Trailblazer team supported the tenant, giving guidance on applying to Home-Link to try to move to a smaller, more affordable property.

This would also return a larger home to Clarion, which can be rented to a family who need that larger property.

Trailblazer provides a much needed service to persons facing eviction. Joined up service with other organisations like councils and Job Centre Plus has produced significant results to reduce homelessness

Caroline Pollyn, Benefits Officer, Anglia Revenues Partnership

The Trailblazer team is providing a welcome and much needed resource to support tenants and housing applicants at risk of homelessness. In particular, applicants applying to join the housing register can now be referred at an earlier stage to proactively prevent homelessness where possible.

Nina Burton, Housing Services Manager, Eastern region, Clarion Housing
www.myclarionhousing.com

Working with Making Money Count

- The Trailblazer team is very happy to be working with [Making Money Count](#) to get its messages out, on-line.
- Making Money Count offers everyday help with money, being online, finding work and renting. All the Making Money Count information is reliable, practical and easy to follow and is brought to you by organisations working across Cambridgeshire, West Norfolk and Peterborough who want to help make life fairer for everyone.
- The Trailblazer team also is working on a Housing 'health check' for professionals to help spot the warning signs of homelessness; and has added housing and homelessness advice on the Making Money Count website at <http://makingmoneycount.org.uk/about-us/homelessness-trailblazer-project/>
- You can find the Trailblazer team on-line, see page 8 for more detail.

Since Trailblazer has been in up and running the partnership working has operated brilliantly, referring clients to and from each other which has been a great success. Trailblazer are able to deal with members whether landlords or tenants and negotiate a way forward which is often sorted before the homeless team intervention would have previously stepped in, which has saved tenancies.

We have developed good partnership working relationship, helping each other to do the best for our clients which are often vulnerable people within the district and without their help eviction and loss of tenancies would have been imminent. This has saved both time and money to the Council as matters are being addressed at the earliest point.

Referrals to our department often leads in the submission of Discretionary Housing Payment applications where the Trailblazer team often negotiate with both landlord and tenant on our behalf gathering information in order to make the most appropriate decision in each case.

I do hope that this partnership working can continue to grow and assist as many residents in need as possible.

Anna Plitsch, Benefits Officer, Anglia Revenues Partnership

Case study #3: clearing arrears

Referred by: Axiom housing

Household type and any vulnerability: One adult

Tenure: Social rented

Risk of homelessness: High risk, significant rent arrears due to benefits stopping while tenant was away. Served a "section 21" notice.

Action required and completed: Applied for discretionary housing payment and homelessness prevention fund.

Worked with Axiom, communicating about funding and arrears.

Outcome and tenancy sustainment options used:

- Discretionary Housing Payment application was rejected, but the local authority encouraged an application to its Homelessness Prevention Fund.
- Successfully secured £730 of funding, the arrear was paid off and the section 21 notice was not pursued any further.



Milestones

October 2017: Cross-sector team agrees to bid for homelessness trailblazer funding for Cambridgeshire & Peterborough

December 2017: Bid successful, started recruiting the team

May 2017: Multi agency project board established including seven district councils and other public sector partners, e.g. County, Police and Housing Association

April 2017: [Trailblazer](#) pages added on [Cambridgeshire Insight](#) website

May 2017: National homelessness expert recruited to help run a workshop to develop an agreement for senior partners to sign; and to involve partners in devising the Trailblazer project action plan.

MILE
STONE
1

May 2017: Working on housing aspects of the Making Money Count website

June 2017: Data systems amended within Home-Link for individual cases. Team data collected separately.

July 2017:
Memorandum agreed
at the Public Service
Board

MILE
STONE
2

July 2017
Referrals start

July 2017: Referral form set up, more referrals start coming through from partners

July 2017: Small interventions fund and marketing materials developed

Oct 2017
117 referrals

Oct 2017: Project building blocks are now in place and referrals flowing through to the team.

Oct 2017: Team have duty rota presence at Multi agency Safeguarding Hub, Early Help Hub and Adult Early Help

Oct 2017: Training provided to Registered Provider officers on the *Think Family* approach and homelessness prevention, aiming to help them reduce the number of evictions. Since then, training has been spread to include other public sector agencies

Oct 2017: Widespread promotion of the Landlord Rents and Solutions service including social media.

March 2018
467 referrals

March 18: Promoting the service and getting referrals from landlords and letting agents, successfully preventing notices being served. Developing lettings and deposits schemes that are more flexible to boost preventions and building relationships with local landlords to increase supply. Landlords impressed with the service and offer other properties

March 2018: Developing new, flexible lettings and deposits schemes to boost homelessness prevention, with local authorities agreeing the level of incentive to offer

May 2018: Helping develop new our [trailblazer](#) web pages at [Making Money Count](#)

MILE
STONE
3

June 2018: Workshop with Police Crime Commissioner to look at homelessness and offending, and strengthen working relationships between housing and criminal justice

June 2018: First Landlord event held in Wisbech... *more news to follow...*

What's coming next?

The Trailblazer project is to continue to work across the local housing market area for another year, completing all the tasks set out in our bid. Tasks still to come include...

- Continuing to deliver training to public sector partners on the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- Training for officers on dealing with difficult interactions, to help individuals and families deal with their more complex issues - and to enable staff to build up their skills to know how to help people tackle such issues if they threaten again in future.
- Investigating the need for, and approach to, people who hoard.

- Developing new protocols where teams need to work together, for example helping overcome barriers to discharging people from hospital where there are housing issues.
- Debt advice for individuals and families across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough who are in financial difficulties.
- Encouraging more partners to sign up to the Memorandum of Understanding and the Statement of Intent, to make homelessness the unacceptable outcome.
- Reporting to senior officers on progress in Year 1, and on future possibilities for the project.

Year 1: what kind of help?

This list shows the kind of help the Trailblazer team gave, from June 2017 to July 2018... this adds up to more than the 697 total number of referrals because households may well get more than one kind of help.

Type of help	Number of cases
Advice & information	534
Mediation	164
Private or social housing for minimum 6 months	105
Financial payment	109
Other activity	69
Identifying at-risk groups	32
Temporary housing for up to 6 months	17
Supported accommodation	12
Client training	11
Domestic abuse: refuge or support	4
Fell out of contact	3
Total	1,057

Want to get in touch?

- Want to get more involved?
- Want to find out more?
- Need the Trailblazer team's help?
- Know someone else who needs the Trailblazer's help?

Please get in touch...



trailblazer@fenland.gov.uk



01354 654321



www.cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/trailblazer

Thank you!



The Constabulary is a countywide agency and the Trailblazer team is assisting with reviewing all the different housing department processes in the county.

This will assist all countywide agencies and establishments.

Shelley Ward, Cambridgeshire Constabulary Partnership and Operational Support