

Housing Board Update for CPSB: Homelessness Trailblazer and Next Steps

Background / Situation

Councils and agencies within the Combined Authority (CA) area worked with relevant partners to submit a bid to the Homelessness Trailblazer fund in November 2016.

The fund was launched by MHCLG to help capture learning and innovation for changes to Homelessness legislation which has now been implemented through the Homelessness Reduction Act from April 2018

The Housing Board worked collaboratively with wider partners to develop the bid. Fenland District Council submitted the bid on behalf of the Housing Board.

The bid totalling £736,400 for a 2 year period was successful.

There were 4 key work elements to the bid.

- Homelessness Prevention Hub – Developing systems and processes to help staff across the public sector identify early warning signs of homelessness and ways to prevent it. In a time of resource constraint making every interaction count.
- Private rent solution service – Creating a service for landlords to help maintain tenancies, resolve tenancy problems and reduce evictions which is by far the main reason for homelessness across the CA area.
- Trailblazer delivery vehicle – Along with increasing the number of new affordable homes securing additional private rented accommodation is the main way to prevent homelessness locally. Therefore the bid outlined the creation of a lettings delivery vehicle (new business development) working with private landlords to offer more options for households at risk of homelessness,
- Expanded web resource through the Making Money Count website embedding the homeless preventative services within that site.

A strand throughout the areas of work is developing the workforce across the broader public sector in their awareness of housing options work in order to nip issues in the bud early enough at the first sign of a housing problem.

To help create a “one team” working culture across the sector (building on successful projects like “Think Family”) a Memorandum of Cooperation was approved by this board on the 22nd September 2017 with a mission statement that homelessness becomes the “unacceptable outcome”.

This report:

- Updates the CPSB on progress with regard to the project,
- Explains the changing dynamic both operationally and financially since September 2017
- Gives consideration as to how the project and wider factors can deliver a positive legacy into meeting future service challenges relating to homelessness across all agencies on CPSB.

This includes thoughts around what CPSB agreed as actions in September 2017 including:

- Consideration will need to be given to future funding when grant runs out and therefore we should consider whether the project is a candidate for the public service reform workstream.
- At end of year 1 evidence to be collated / analysed and used as a catalyst for lobbying for policy change and future devolution as appropriate.

The proposed way forward is in keeping with 2 other agendas that have been considered recently by CPSB:

- the emerging “Think Communities” document that has been developed in partnership with first and second tier authorities across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough “Creating a shared vision, approach and priorities for building Community Resilience across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough partner organisations”
- “Leading the Approach to Reducing, Preventing and Delaying Demand” which is currently undergoing consultation with the second tier districts

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Homelessness Trailblazer Year 1 Review

Appendix A is a summary briefing note to highlight the impact of the project. This includes:

- 697 referrals
- 1057 interventions including:
 - Mediation with 164 referrals
 - 105 households enabled to secure alternative accommodation.
- Universal positive feedback across particularly County-wide based organisations and Private Sector Landlords
- 400 contacted the team earlier than the new 56 day period before homelessness.
- The programme was one of only 6 chosen nationally to be inspected as an area that has been meeting the expectations of the bid to help inform learning at national government to support roll out of the new Homelessness Reduction Act.
- In terms of current forecast there is expected to be an underspend from the Trailblazer project of circa £100,000 at the original forecast end of project (April 2019)

Legacy considerations

Since implementing the Homelessness Trailblazer project the operational and financial arena in tackling homelessness and associated issues has changed. This includes:

- Commencement of a transformed approach to preventing and mitigating homelessness impacts through the new Homelessness Reduction Act from April 2018
- Time limited funding (Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and New Burdens Grant) has been received to help second tier and unitary Councils adjust to the new duties
- Many Councils' have increased their teams with this funding to ensure they can meet the new demands which includes the statutory responsibility to investigate Homelessness from 56 days rather than 28 days and a requirement to performance manage individually tailored personal housing plans for households receiving the housing options service under the Act.
- With no funding guaranteed from 2021/22, status quo will impact on general fund budgets from that year. In Fenland District Council's case a status quo scenario would lead to an estimated increase of circa £130,000 per annum on the general fund budget from that year.
- The County Council are currently consulting with providers and partners on reducing the Housing Related Support grant by £1 million from 2019/20.
- Feedback received to the Housing Board from the Trailblazer project board shows:
 - The Trailblazer funding has seen a significant positive impact through homelessness resource supporting non housing related services which is delivered on County-wide or Combined Area basis.
 - This includes commencing the formation of new partnerships and new ways of working through new multi agency pathways / protocols.
 - Examples of closer working includes:
 - Criminal Justice
 - Health and Mental Health
 - Hospital discharge
 - Hoarding
 - Registered Providers
 - Care leavers
 - Education
 - Safeguarding and Early Help teams (Adults and Children's')
 - This is over and above core work of the trailblazer team responding to households who are threatened with homelessness above the statutory 56 days on the basis of the earlier the prevention the better.
 - The emphasis of maintaining the profile of homelessness prevention amongst all statutory partners and third sector organisations is critical as it prevents unnecessary crisis led management and increase resource cost of all agencies.
 - The new business development project element has not been a success. Access to additional private rented sector accommodation for homelessness services has not increased significantly with Officers ability to incentivise landlords constrained especially at the same time as Universal Credit roll out. It again places the importance of increasing affordable housing supply and recognises that increasing private rented sector supply for homelessness needs intervention and resource from the public sector e.g Shire Homes in South Cambs. However despite this the outputs and outcomes from the project remain significant.

Therefore how can the trailblazer projects impetus be sustained when the project and staffing resource ends?

A Public Service Reform Workstream?

As CPSB considered in September 2017 and in light of the pressures facing the service operationally and financially, the Housing Board has considered whether there is opportunity to transform the service across the Combined Authority area to meet our legislative requirements within the new reducing cost envelope. In other words understanding all resources currently and forecast to be tackling homelessness across all tiers of Government in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and remodelling as a public service reform workstream.

If so Housing Board would coordinate an approach to the Local Government Association and the Trailblazer national team within the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to help provide expertise to work with the Housing Board to understand the potential and whether it could deliver more than status quo.

Alongside this the Housing Board would agree a pitch to the MHCLG Trailblazer funding team for them to consider how the underspend could be best utilised for both the public service reform workstream and continuation of the work identified by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Trailblazer project team for 2019/20. As part of this the Housing Board would understand if there is additional funding from CPSB bodies to help support continuation of this work.

Outcome & Decisions

CPSB are asked to:

- Consider the impact from the Trailblazer project to date and the learning evidenced in Appendix A
- Task the Housing Board to seek advice and support from both the LGA and MHCLG National Trailblazer team to:
 - Ascertain if there is additional funding centrally, regionally or locally to bring in the external expertise required for the Public Service Workstream feasibility and subject to that feedback:
 - Agree the best use of Trailblazer underspend with MHCLG to support both that and the ongoing collaborative homelessness work across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough identified above.