**5 November 2021 – Report to Housing Board On:**

**Overview of Homelessness Across Cambridgeshire & West Suffolk in 2020-21**

On 23 March 2020, England entered a national lockdown in response to the rapidly rising rates of COVID-19 infections. As a result, wider initiatives to support people to retain or access accommodation through this period were introduced by government.

This included requiring landlords to give tenants longer notice periods before starting possession proceedings from 26 March 2020 (initially at 3 months and then later increasing to 6 months, in most cases, from 29 August 2020), a 6 month suspension on housing possession action in the courts between 27 March and 20 September 2020, and a restriction on bailiff enforcement activity from 17 November 2020 until 31 May 2021. These measures contributed to a reduction in the number of households approaching local authorities for help from self-contained private or social rented sector accommodation.

Mortgage payment holidays introduced in March 2020 also contributed to a reduction in approaches for support from owner occupiers.

On 26 March 2020 the Everyone In campaign was also launched, whereby local authorities were asked to provide emergency accommodation to rough sleepers, people who were living in shelters with shared sleeping arrangements, and those at risk of rough sleeping.

Overall across the Cambridgeshire & West Suffolk sub region:

* 1,550 households were threatened with homelessness and owed a prevention duty in 2020-21, down 27% from the 2,132 households in 2019-20 (compared to a 20% reduction nationally).
* Of these 301 were due to an assured shorthold tenancy in the private rented sector being brought to an end, down 39% from 2019-20.
* 2,051 households were homeless and owed a relief duty in 2020-21, up 14% from the 1,805 households in 2019-20 (compared to a 6% national increase).

As shown in Figure 1, April to June (Q1) 2020/21 saw the peak of the impact of COVID-19 on statutory homelessness data. The number of households owed a prevention duty fell 37% compared to the same quarter in the previous year (30% nationally), which can be linked to lengthened notice periods for landlords, and the restrictions on private rented sector evictions.

In contrast, the number of households owed a relief duty increased 18% from the same quarter in the previous year (17% nationally), linked to the Everyone In campaign and driven by the increase in single households (households without children) owed a relief duty over the same period as a result of the Everyone In campaign.

**Causes of Homelessness.**

The reason for loss of last settled home is a good indication of the cause of homelessness for households assessed as being owed a duty.

For those owed a prevention duty, we unsurprisingly saw the largest falls in homelessness with those households facing eviction from their privately rented ASTs and those from social rented tenancies. As explained above this can be attributed to the restriction placed on evictions and lengthened notice periods for landlords.

Those facing eviction from their privately rented AST fell by 39% between 2019/20 and 2020/21 (301 households facing eviction compared to 493 in the previous year) whilst with those facing eviction from their social rented tenancies the drop was 52% when compared year on year 315 households reducing to 152).

At the prevention duty stage in 2020/21, family or friends being no longer willing to accommodate became the single largest cause of homelessness at 27% of all cases.

The most common reason for loss of last settled home under a relief duty was due to family or friends being no longer willing to accommodate, at 584 or 28% of all households owed a relief duty. This is a 33% increase from 2019-20.

Other notable trends include an increase in instances homelessness as a result of domestic abuse and non-violent relationship breakdown at the relief duty stage.

Domestic abuse increased by 34% for those owed a relief duty in 2020/21 and homelessness as a result of a non-violent relationship breakdown increased by 24%.

**Outcomes at the Prevention Duty Stage**

The homelessness legislation requires local authorities to take reasonable steps to try to prevent or relieve a household’s homelessness by helping them to secure accommodation for at least 6 months. These duties usually last 56 days each. The reasons for duties ending indicate the likely outcomes for these applicants.

The graph above shows the outcomes for the prevention duties that ended in 2019/20 & 2020-21.

The number of prevention duties that ended decreased 25% from the 2137 households in 2019-20, reflecting the decrease in prevention duties owed in 2020-21. The majority of households whose prevention duty ended was as a result of a successful prevention where accommodation was secured for 6 months or more (for 917 households or 57% of the total).

Of those who secured accommodation 18% secured their existing accommodation, whilst 40% secured alternative accommodation.

For 331 or 21% of households, the prevention duty ended because the household became homeless, and were therefore owed a relief duty. This remained comparable to the previous year where in 22% of cases the prevention duty was ended because the household became homeless.

**Outcomes at the Relief Duty Stage**

The graph above shows the outcomes for the relief duties that ended in 2019/20 & 2020/21.

Where the relief duty was brought to an end in 2020/21, in 43% of cases this was due to a successful outcome where accommodation had been secured for 6 months or more. However in 36% of cases homelessness had not been resolved and at this point the local authority would need to assess whether a main duty is owed to the household.

**Local Authority Responses Under Everyone In Campaign.**

On 26 March 2020, the Government asked local authorities in England to help make sure that those people sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough were assisted with emergency housing, including those who would not normally be entitled to assistance under homelessness legislation.

In response, local authorities across the country sought to ensure that people sleeping rough and in accommodation where it was difficult to self-isolate (such as shelters and assessment centres) were safely accommodated to protect them, and the wider public, from the risks of Covid-19. This was an enormous challenge for local authorities, who block-booked hotel rooms, secured other en-suite accommodation (eg B&Bs, student accommodation, holiday rentals etc) and worked with partners to ensure that those accommodated had the food, medical care and support they required.

Between 26 March 2020 and June 2021, a total of 701 people were assisted with emergency accommodation by the Cambridgeshire and West Suffolk housing authorities.

Of these, 383 or 55% were successfully moved on into settled accommodation (such as social housing or the private rental sector) or supported housing – meaning that they did not return to the streets to sleep rough.

The breakdown of individuals assisted across the sub region are shown below: