

Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 (Front Cover)

'Ensuring Prevention & Early Upstream Intervention are at the centre of our service'

Introduction (New Page)

Under the Homelessness Act 2002 all Housing Authorities are required to carry out a review of homelessness in their Districts and formulate a homelessness strategy based on the results of that review. The current Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 - 2024 has been reviewed and the findings of that review have fed into the development of this new Strategy. (The Babergh and Mid Suffolk Homelessness Review 2023 can be found at Appendix TBC).

For many people the term 'homelessness' evokes images of the 'rough sleeper', however, homelessness and the services provided by the Local Authority are far more complex and widespread than this. This can include people living in insecure, unsuitable or unaffordable housing as well as those required to leave their existing housing, often through no fault of their own.

This strategy seeks to destigmatize homelessness and empower residents to seek help and act on advice at the earliest opportunity. It also seeks to ensure that all our policies and procedures have 'early and upstream' intervention at their heart to maximise opportunities to prevent households becoming homeless in the first place.

This Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy will ensure we have a clear focus on how we can work with our partners to effectively prevent and relieve homelessness. It will also provide a plan on how to ensure that access to accommodation, support and advice is available for residents of the districts who are at risk of becoming homeless or may already be homeless.

Our Vision and Priorities (New Page)

Our vision is that rough sleeping is rare, brief and non-recurring and homelessness is routinely prevented through early and upstream intervention.

To achieve this, we will:

- FOCUS on embedding an early prevention and intervention approach with support systems to achieve this.
- WORK with those who have lived experience through co-production; to influence services, options, process and policies.
- DEVELOP a county wide, multi-agency approach to support people to rebuild their lives in settled and sustainable tenancies.

Our priorities are:

- Early upstream prevention & intervention
- Making rough sleeping rare, brief and non-recurring.
- Ensuring the health and wellbeing needs of households are met whilst in temporary accommodation.
- Expanding and future-proofing the role and remit of Central Suffolk Lettings to continue to improve access to the private rented sector
- Mitigating against the impacts of the cost of living

The Strategic Context: (New Page)

The Legal Context

There is a raft of legislation that shapes and defines how homelessness and rough sleeping are dealt with in the UK. We must work within this legal framework to meet our statutory obligations to those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless:

Housing Act 1996 (Part 7): The Housing Act 1996 came into effect 20 January 1997. Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 is the overarching piece of legislation that relates to homelessness. The Act has been amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, the Localism Act 2011 and more recently by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Homelessness Act 2002 & Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002:

The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced amendments to Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 and introduced powers for a Local Authority to end the main housing duty, owed to applicants where a homeless duty had been accepted, by arrangement of a suitable offer of accommodation through the private rented sector.

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017: The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 amended the period from which a person can be at risk of homelessness from 28 days to 56 days. This meant that housing authorities must work with people to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage. This is known as the extended prevention duty. The Act aimed to reduce homelessness by improving the quality of the advice available and refocusing local authorities on prevention work and increasing support for single people. The Act was also amended to allow Local Authorities to discharge their housing duty with an offer of private rented accommodation.

Further legislation that shapes how our homelessness services are provided are:

- Mental Health Act 1983
- Localism Act 2011
- Welfare Reform Act 2012
- Care Act 2014
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021

The National Context (New Page)

The following sets out the **national** situation and policy landscape that shapes and affects housing within Babergh and Mid Suffolk:

Covid-19 Pandemic and Recovery: On 11th March 2020, a Coronavirus pandemic, referred to as Covid-19, was declared by the World Health Organisation. On 26 March 2020, the UK Government announced a wave of measures to try and reduce the spread of the virus and asked local authorities in England to “help make sure we get everyone in”, including those who would not normally be entitled to assistance under homelessness legislation and included an eviction ban for those households in rent arrears during the summer of 2020. During the Covid 19 recovery period and following the lifting of the ban in October 2021 BMSDC saw an increase in households presenting as homeless and subsequently our temporary accommodation provision has been at full capacity with the use of bed and breakfast provision increasing.

Ending Rough Sleeping for Good: This is a cross-government strategy published in September 2022, setting out how the government and its partners plan to work together to deliver on the government’s manifesto commitment to end rough sleeping in this Parliament. It also lays the foundations for long-term system change to end rough sleeping sustainably and for good. The ‘end goal’ of the Strategy is for ‘rough sleeping to be prevented wherever possible but when it does occur it should be rare, brief and non-recurring.’ The Strategy focuses on better prevention, swift and effective intervention, extra help to aid recovery and a more transparent and joined up system

Deprivation: The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is produced by the Government to rank nearly 33,000 neighbourhoods across England in terms of their relative deprivation. Deprivation is measured based on 39 separate indicators, organised across seven domains: Income, Employment, Health & Disability, Education, Skills & Training, Crime and Living Environment. Although deprivation levels are low in Suffolk compared with national levels, across Suffolk 28% of those identified as income deprived live in rural areas. Both Babergh and Mid Suffolk are classified as predominantly rural areas Living in a very rural area is widely considered to cost households on average about 20% more than a similar household living in an urban area. Existing pockets of deprivation within the districts will be exacerbated by the current Cost of Living Crisis.

Social Housing White Paper: This was published by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government in November 2020. It set out seven commitments that social housing residents should be able to expect from their landlord and collates a range of different initiatives and legislative changes from across the housing landscape, building on proposals set out in the Social Housing Green Paper and the Review of Social Housing Regulation: Call for Evidence. The overarching themes are building and resident safety, and resident voice.

The Local Context (New Page)

The following sets out the **local** situation and policy landscape that shapes and affects housing within Babergh and Mid Suffolk:

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council Corporate Plan 2019-2023: The Corporate Plan is designed to address the challenges and seize the opportunities facing the districts, and partner organisations. Housing (along with Environment, Economy, Wellbeing, Customers and Community) is a Strategic Priority of the Corporate Plan. The Vision of the Corporate Plan is to build "Great communities with bright and healthy futures that everyone is proud to call home". The Corporate Plan is due to be refreshed in the coming year. (To be updated once new Corporate Plan is published).

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council Joint Homes and Housing Strategy: In March 2019, both Councils adopted the Homes and Housing Strategy 2019 -2024. In October 2022, the Homes and Housing Strategy was refreshed to ensure it remained up to date. The Homes and Housing Strategy Delivery Plan continues to be refocused annually to ensure it is reflective of the new priorities that have emerged since the original strategy and delivery plan was written in 2019. The strategy has nine strategic aims and is monitored on a quarterly basis with an in-depth review every year.

Gateway to Home Choice Allocation Policy: Gateway to Homechoice is a choice-based lettings system, where social housing properties are advertised in the Local Authority areas of Babergh, Braintree, Colchester, East Suffolk, Ipswich, Maldon, and Mid Suffolk. The scheme allows one point of access for customers to apply to a Local Authority housing register and be considered for available properties in any of the areas. The scheme aims to provide a consistent approach to accessing housing across the diverse area of operation and where possible, to ensure that applicants have choice over where they live.

Strategic Housing Market Assessment: Ipswich Borough Council, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils and Suffolk Coastal District Council and Waveney District Council (Now East Suffolk Council) jointly commissioned Peter Brett Associates to undertake a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). The objective was to test and confirm the housing market geography and to produce conclusions on objectively assessed housing need. The Ipswich and Waveney Area Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2017 (with a partial update in 2019) indicated a need for at least 110 affordable homes per year in Babergh 127 affordable homes per year for Mid Suffolk.

PRIORITIES

Priority 1: Early upstream prevention & intervention. (New Page)

Preventing homelessness is of benefit to both the Council and applicants. Extended periods of homelessness and time spent in temporary accommodation can result in isolation from family support, employment and schooling and have a negative impact on both adults and children.

Early intervention strategies are designed to work quickly to support individuals and families to either retain their housing, or if that is not possible, to use rapid rehousing strategies to ensure people move into safe and appropriate accommodation with the support that they need. The Housing Solutions Team has a frontline service comprising of early Intervention officers and a triage team who identify households contacting the service at an early stage before they become homeless and ideally before a significant risk of homelessness arises. The use of the private rented sector plays a crucial role in this work and the utilisation of Central Suffolk Lettings remains key to increased success in the early intervention work we do.

Early upstream and early intervention work significantly reduces relief duty and main duty decisions which in turn allows Housing Solutions Officers to focus on relieving homelessness for those households who are already homeless, allowing for less negative decisions on homelessness applications.

The focus of BMSDC's early intervention work is to ensure a smooth journey for each client group through bespoke pathways, with wraparound support which results in sustained tenancies.

Key Facts (To be displayed as Infographics in finished strategy document)

Successful homelessness preventions have increased significantly since the establishment of the Early Intervention Team:

- Babergh – 53%
- Mid Suffolk – 49%

Intentional Decisions* have decreased significantly since the establishment of the Early Intervention Team

- 2019 - 2020 – 7 Intentional Decisions in Babergh and 1 in Mid Suffolk
- 2020 – 2021 – 6 Intentional Decisions in Babergh and 2 in Mid Suffolk
- 2021 – 2022 – 4 Intentional decisions in Babergh and 5 in Mid Suffolk
- 2022 – 2023 – 3 Intentional Decisions in Babergh and 4 in Mid Suffolk
- So far in 2023-2024 - 1 intentional decision in Babergh and 0 in Mid Suffolk

*Intentionally homeless means that you are homeless because you left accommodation that you could have stayed in, or you lost your home as a result of your actions.

The establishment of the Early Intervention Team has significantly decreased the amount of time a Prevention Case is open for:

- 2019 – 2020 - 90 days in Babergh and 76 days in Mid Suffolk
- 2020 – 2021 – 105 days in Babergh and 101 days in Mid Suffolk
- 2021 – 2022 – 113 days in Babergh and 102 days in Mid Suffolk
- 2022 – 2023 – 72 days in Babergh and 72 days in Mid Suffolk
- So far in 2023-2024 – 22 days in Babergh and 34 days in Mid Suffolk

What we have already achieved:

- Developed and implemented a comprehensive online advice service for clients to access housing options advice: Housing Aid <https://baberghmidsuffolk.adviceaid.uk/>
- Created and established the Early Intervention Team to focus on targeted, early and upstream intervention – 1 Team Manager and 4 Housing Solutions Officers focusing on early intervention work.
- Sustained tenancies and prevented homelessness by ensuring they remained financially viable via a team of Financial Inclusion Officers
- Established the Household Support Fund to work with households prior to the 56 days when they are threatened with homelessness under legislation.
- Delivered Domestic Abuse (DA) Champion Training, led by Housing Solutions DA Link Worker. DA Champions are located across Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils and have received DA awareness training to develop knowledge on asking, responding, supporting and signposting people affected by domestic abuse.
- Enabled those households working with the Domestic Abuse Link Worker to feedback via exit surveys online.
- Ensuring upstream work with domestic abuse cases to support those households to remain in their own homes if appropriate through safety and security measures called 'Target Hardening'.
- Focused early intervention work to significantly reduce the time officers are spending making decisions on homelessness applications: as a result, there has only been one 'Intentional' decision made since April 2023.

Case Study:

A single parent with three children was facing eviction from her Housing Association home due to rent arrears. We only became aware of the situation four days before the scheduled Eviction date. Initially, the Housing Association demanded full payment of the substantial arrears.

When talking to the tenant, it became evident that her mental health struggles had prevented her from addressing the issue. She expressed a willingness to pay her full rent along with some arrears and accepted support from the Financial Inclusion Team to help manage her budget.

Efforts were made to negotiate with the Housing Association, offering to pay half of the arrears and provide a support package. The deal was finalized at the last minute, allowing her to keep her home, thus preventing homelessness for her and her children. This outcome also saved the local authority the expense of emergency accommodation and spared the family from the trauma associated with it.

What we will be doing next:

- Establishing the team processes and the links to other in-house teams, especially the Financial Inclusion Team and Central Suffolk Lettings to complement service delivery.
- Setting up Protocols with other agencies to formalise early-intervention multi agency arrangements with Probation, Prisons, Hospitals, Adult Care Services and Childrens and Young Peoples services to work collaboratively and prevent homelessness for our most vulnerable residents.

- Establishing Early Intervention Hubs in our districts for face-to-face meetings facilitating more effective communication, helping to build strong relationships and increase engagement.
- Considering how we can best serve the needs of our rural communities and consider the viability of a mobile customer access point for housing services.
- Working towards obtaining Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation; to raise awareness of Domestic Abuse to enable a proactive not reactive service, focussing on households remaining in accommodation or working towards more managed moves.
- Participating in Shelter's 'Systems Change in Homelessness Services' project
- Creating a 'fast-track' referral system to Central Suffolk Lettings to ensure cases where homelessness can be prevented quickly through the use of the Rent Guarantee Scheme are prioritised and dealt with effectively.

Case Study:

An elderly lady had a fall at home and was stuck in her bath unable to get out. She had a Social Housing tenancy. It was a couple of days before she was found and eventually had to be rescued by the fire brigade before being admitted to hospital.

We were only notified by the hospital of the situation when she was due to be discharged. They advised she was unable to access stairs and she would not be able to return to her home and would be homeless.

This coincided with a hard to let property becoming available in an area where she wanted to live. The Early Intervention Team sourced all the necessary documentation, applied to the Gateway and within two days her application was active, and a bid was placed on her behalf for the property. She was able to move to the new property direct from hospital as we were able to negotiate with the hospital for a delay to discharge to prevent her becoming homeless.

Priority 2: Making rough sleeping rare, brief and non-recurring. (New Page)

Rough sleeping in our districts has been reduced significantly by rapid intervention for those individuals who are new to rough sleeping and by prevention methods for those that are at risk of rough sleeping. However, many long-term rough sleepers have high levels of complex needs including mental health problems, drug and alcohol dependencies, and institutional experiences which needs a more tailored approach alongside supporting agencies.

There are relatively low numbers of rough sleepers across our districts and the Rough Sleeper Team will verify and act upon information received as soon as possible, working with partner organisations, and using resources to provide an immediate place of safety for rough sleepers to stay, an assessment of their needs and access to other services such as healthcare and support.

Key Facts (To be displayed as Infographics in finished strategy document)

Since the 1st of April 2020 of the referrals received only:
11% of Rough Sleeper referrals in Babergh have been verified as rough sleeping
9% of Rough Sleeper referrals in Mid Suffolk have been verified as rough sleeping
Following enquiries, the remainder of the referrals had accommodation that was available to them.

Since the 1st of April 2020:
38 rough sleepers in Babergh have secured long-term accommodation
34 rough sleepers in Mid Suffolk have secured long-term accommodation

As of 31st August 2023, there are 23 clients supported in tenancies in Babergh and 9 clients supported in tenancies in Mid Suffolk. These individuals have all either been through the Rough Sleeper Pathway or have been identified as being at risk of Rough Sleeping.

What we have already achieved:

- Ensured contact is made with all rough sleepers within 24 hours of receiving a referral.
- Accessed funding streams, when available, for additional support to tackle rough sleeping following the initial Successful Rough Sleeper Initiative bid in 2019.
- Provided suitable accommodation for rough sleepers in extreme weather conditions under the Severe Weather Emergency Provision.
- Provided regular outreach work to those individuals who have disengaged from services, to facilitate on-going support.
- Participated in multi-agency panels to manage, monitor and find housing solutions for the hardest to house clients.
- Procured 19 specialist bed spaces where rough sleepers are accommodated, including street to step beds, transitional beds and move on units.
- Supported service users in settled and move on accommodation to sustain their tenancies.
- Procured the services of BEAM to work with service users who have been marginalised from work, training and education to provide opportunities to get back into employment.

Case Study:

In March 2021, a referral was received for an applicant in his 60s, he had been diagnosed with cancer and other severe medical conditions and he was living with his dog in dire conditions,

including an unheated industrial unit and a hot/cold portacabin without basic amenities. The applicant had difficulties with official documentation and procedures which hindered interactions with the Council's Housing Department. However, through face-to-face meetings and clear explanations, a rapport was built.

By May 2021, the applicant completed a Gateway to Homechoice application, securing a Band B award on the Housing Register. In August 2021, he accepted temporary accommodation in Elmswell, and in February 2022 he accepted permanent accommodation.

Throughout his journey, the applicant was supported with grants for household items, benefit transfers, utility setup, and a gradual transition to self-sufficiency. The applicant now has access to support, should he need it, from a nearby Sheltered Housing Unit's warden. The applicant is very grateful to BMSDC for the support, accommodation, and a garden for his aging dog.

What we will be doing next:

- Training for staff to identify root causes of recurring rough sleeping and unstable housing histories, for rough sleepers with complex needs, using person-centred trauma informed interview techniques.
- Engaging multiple agencies through co-production and joint protocols to provide intensive support, including Mental Health, NHS outreach teams, and drug and alcohol services.
- Contributing to cross- county co-production work with Campbell Tickell Consultants to establish a multi-district approach to service delivery, commissioned by the Suffolk Housing Board.
- Vision and forward planning for the ending of Rough Sleeper Initiative funding in 2025 including team structure and continuation of service delivery.
- Considering utilising the Make Every Adult Matter (MEAM) model. This model helps local areas design and deliver better coordinated services for people experiencing multiple disadvantages.

Case Study

In the summer of 2023, a single woman, in her 40s, was found living in an unsecured caravan in a lorry park, prompting concerns about her safety and well-being. In early 2020 she had been evicted from a tenancy due to drug use and criminal activity and had struggled with homelessness for several years. Her housing instability stemmed from a history of failing to engage with support services despite disclosing domestic abuse and mental health issues, including bipolar disorder, PTSD, depression, and social anxiety, for which she was medicated. She also admitted a drug addiction but has not consistently engaged with drug and alcohol services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she was temporarily accommodated but was later considered to be intentionally homeless due to her previous eviction. Complaints from other residents about drug use led to her accommodation being changed multiple times.

In 2023 a multi-agency approach involving the police, health outreach, and the local council was initiated. Daily welfare visits were scheduled to engage with her, and she was fast-tracked for a prescription for methadone. She was eventually offered temporary accommodation with modifications to address her specific needs and risks, and as of September 2023, she remains in temporary accommodation with ongoing support from services.

Priority 3: Ensuring the health and wellbeing needs of households are met whilst in temporary accommodation. (New Page)

This strategy is committed to preventing homelessness and minimising the use of Temporary Accommodation (TA). However, if a household needs to go into TA, we are also committed to ensuring that the journey through TA is used to facilitate positive health and well-being outcomes and does not become part of the 'homelessness trauma.' The amount of time spent in TA can be dramatically reduced by continuing to work with households under a relief duty.

We are striving to improve the whole journey through TA for all households by increasing opportunities for sign posting and multi-agency engagement. We are aiming to introduce a 'Homelessness Plus Service' which uses a person-centred approach and signposts each household according to their specific needs.

Official figures show that nationally almost 104,510 households were in TA at the end of March 2023. This is a 25-year high and includes more than 131,000 children, the highest level since records for that measure began in 2004. We will be focusing on children in temporary accommodation and implementing measures to limit the impact on their education, health and socialisation.

Impact of Homelessness on Children:

National research from a survey of homeless families funded by Trust for London and Joseph Rowntree Foundation and reported by Shelter in December 2022, shows:

- **Sharing beds:** more than a third (35%) of homeless parents say their child(ren) do not have a bed of their own and are forced to share a bed with another family member.
- **Education:** almost half (45%) of school age children have arrived at school tired, late or hungry because of living in temporary accommodation. B&Bs and hostels are often not equipped with suitable or any facilities for parents to cook meals for their children, and noise from other residents and bed-sharing means children often struggle to sleep.
- **Play:** 6 in 10 (61%) children lack space to play in their temporary accommodation.
- **Mental Health:** 1 in 4 parents (26%) report their child or children being often unhappy or depressed because of living in temporary accommodation.
- **Social isolation:** more than 1 in 4 parents (28%) say their children are finding it hard to make or keep friends because of living in temporary accommodation. This can be the result of feeling embarrassed or ashamed of where they live, or because they are unable to have friends to play due to a lack of space or rules that forbid visitors.

Key Facts (To be displayed as Infographics in finished strategy document)

Average number of days spent in Temporary Accommodation:

- 2019-2020 – 127 days in Babergh and 111 days in Mid Suffolk
- 2020 – 2021 – 152 days in Babergh and 119 days in Mid Suffolk
- 2021 – 2022 – 182 days in Babergh and 139 days in Mid Suffolk
- 2022 – 2023 – 134 days in Babergh and 101 days in Mid Suffolk

- **Babergh has 74 units of Temporary Accommodation:**
5 bedsits, 33 rooms, 20 One beds, 8 Two beds, 7 Three beds and 1 Four bed
- **Mid Suffolk has 43 units of Temporary Accommodation:**
3 bedsits, 15 rooms, 9 One beds, 10 Two beds and 6 Three beds)

Children in Temporary Accommodation:

As of 31st August 2023:

- 39% of individuals accommodated in TA in Babergh are children.
- 37 % of individuals accommodated in TA in Mid Suffolk are children.

What we have already achieved:

- Established 4 Temporary Accommodation refuge sites, where we provide 'ready to move in' furnished properties with food parcels, children's toys and books, household items, kitchen utensils and new bedding.
- Appointed a second Resettlement Officer to focus on enabling households in TA to be actively looking for housing opportunities, maximising incomes and ensuring households are tenancy ready.
- Enabled exit surveys to be completed online for all households who are accommodated in TA.
- Secured 12 units of temporary accommodation with Sanctuary Housing which also provide a higher level of support for single people.
- Procured the services of BEAM - [Beam Homeless Social Enterprise - Sponsor a Homeless Person in the UK Into a Job](#) to assist marginalised service users into employment, education and training.

Case Study:

In May 2023 a woman and her two children presented to BMSDC following a relationship breakdown, the family were initially placed in emergency hotel accommodation. The Resettlement Officer (RO) made initial contact via email preparing the woman with an introduction to her role, arranging a convenient time to meet and advising her of what information would be helpful for her to bring to the appointment to make benefit applications and assist to get her active / fast tracked on Gateway To Homechoice (GTHC).

The RO met the family the next day, at the hotel in person to assist with applications, sending a fast-track request to Choice Based Lettings (CBL) to activate her online application. The application was made active the following day, as all necessary information was received. RO called her that same day and advised her she was now active and able to bid.

The following week, applicant was moved to alternative Temporary Accommodation (TA) within our own stock, RO again assisted with Housing Benefit Change of Circumstances form for the move, thus avoiding any rent arrears in TA from accruing. Whilst in TA, RO monitored bidding cycles, encouraging app to bid on suitable available properties in the required areas for children's school/ work commitment and family support.

In early July 2023 she was successful in her bid for permanent accommodation, RO then began to assist her with making applications to charitable organisations for furniture that she didn't have, including beds and securing a grant for all white goods and arranging delivery to new property for her to be able to move on as quickly as possible from TA.

At the end of July 2023, RO visited the lady at her new home. Assisting her with going through her welcome pack from her housing provider. She showed her where all the meters were and how to read them, assisted with completing a further Housing Benefit Change of Circumstances form and how to notify Universal Credit of her new address, adding housing cost information. RO also assisted with calls to utility suppliers and ordering waste bins to be delivered to her new address.

The face-to-face and regular engagement allowed the RO to develop a positive and effective working relationship with her, achieving a positive outcome for her by enabling her to become active on GTHC, maximise her income with benefit applications, preventing any arrears and helping her to move on from TA quickly.

What we will be doing next:

- Introducing a minimum standard of temporary accommodation for children; including provision of sterilising equipment, child and baby equipment such as stairgates and age-appropriate books and toys.
- Providing continuous resettlement work which is person-centred and lasting.
- Completing a Rent and Service Charge review for all temporary accommodation.
- Refurbishing and creating extra rooms in a current unit of temporary accommodation (The Lees).
- Implementing a project of planned work and upgrades on all temporary accommodation alongside Building Services.
- Making adaptations to a new temporary accommodation unit to create adapted rooms which are wheelchair accessible for households with mobility issues (Eve Balfour House).
- Ensuring Wi-Fi and internet access is available at each site with accompanying digital skills training from the Cost-of-Living Team.
- Establishing an accommodation-based approach to temporary accommodation based on a variation of the Housing First model.
- Providing Pre tenancy training for all households in temporary accommodation (A pilot started on 26/09/2023).
- Exploring setting up a notification system which ensures that, at the point a household registers as homeless, relevant existing services are informed such as education, health and social care.
- Destigmatising temporary accommodation and homelessness by sharing experiences in a realistic and respectful way ensuring that we are not reinforcing unhelpful attitudes and stereotypes.
- Adding testimonials from households and virtual tours and reviews of TA filmed with tenants onto our website.
- Improving our TA green spaces, encouraging gardening interaction from residents to assist with improving general health and wellbeing:

Case Study:

The applicant was in an abusive relationship and fled when her second son was only a few weeks old. English was not her first language, and she was seeking assistance with securing leave to remain in the UK. When she left, she had no funds for necessities, but a Domestic Abuse Link Worker (DALW) helped secure items like nappies and baby milk and The Housing Solutions Team arranged temporary accommodation for her.

She left during the winter and lacked suitable clothing for the cold weather and had no social circle outside her home due to restrictions imposed on her by her abusive partner. With assistance from an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) and The Phoebe Centre, she moved into the temporary accommodation with her children. The DALW guided her through social housing registration, taught her household skills, and even facilitated a Winter Warmer clothing package, toy donations, and funding for a playgroup.

She received help with the transition from temporary accommodation to her new home, including appliances, curtains, bedding, and utility registrations. Ongoing support and connections to support networks have made a significant and positive impact on her life. The applicant's journey from escaping an abusive relationship to finding safety and support involved various agencies working together to provide crucial assistance, helping her rebuild her life and regain her peace of mind. The collaborative efforts of these teams ensured her well-being and a brighter future.

DRAFT

Priority 4: Expanding and future proofing the role and remit of Central Suffolk Lettings to continue to improve access to the private rented sector

Increasing our residents access to the Private Rented Sector minimises the use of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation and reduces the demands on Temporary Accommodation. Discharging more housing duties into the private sector can often be a quicker solution to finding a new home, offers more choice in positive housing outcomes and allows social housing to be retained for those households that most need it.

Launched in Spring 2020 the Central Suffolk Lettings service is committed to building long term, sustainable relationships with landlords and letting agents to offer a wide range of good quality, affordable and secure tenancies in the private rented sector.

Key Facts (To be displayed as Infographics in finished strategy document)

Homelessness Duties discharged via Central Suffolk Lettings:

Since the establishment of CSL Homelessness has been discharged via CSL:

- 110 times in Babergh and 99 times in Mid Suffolk

Current Central Suffolk Lettings tenancies:

As of 31st August 2023:

- There were 51 CSL tenancies in Babergh and 35 in Mid Suffolk

Percentage increase over the years to now:

- In Babergh there has been an 81% increase in the number of ongoing tenancies as of 31st March 2023, compared to same period the prior year.
- In Mid Suffolk there has been an 150% increase in the number of ongoing tenancies as of 31st March 2023, compared to same period the prior year.

Central Suffolk Lettings: Benefits of letting a property with us: Current offer to Landlords:

- Guaranteed rent payment for the term of the tenancy:
- No loss of rent. Rent paid on time in full every month (by us). Rent, set at the LHA rate + 10%
- Cash incentive: For each property you place with us through the Rent Guarantee Scheme we will give you a one-off cash incentive
- No fees. No commission: We provide a free service, so there is no commission to pay and no hidden charges
- Assessment of potential tenants: We carry out full affordability assessments on any potential tenants we put forward to you
- Accompanied viewings: All property viewings will be arranged by us and will be fully accompanied with timely feedback to you
- Deposit Bond: We will provide one month's deposit bond to cover the required deposit (Because we are a local authority providing a bond, there is no requirement for you to register the deposit).
- Inventory and regular inspections: We will compile an inventory on your behalf before the tenant moves into the property and will conduct a routine inspection six-monthly. We will also carry out a check-out inspection.

What we have already achieved:

- Cemented Central Suffolk Lettings as a well-established brand with an online presence and a growing portfolio of properties.
- Carried out a survey of Landlords to inform direction for the service: 99.5% of landlords surveyed in our 2023 survey rated our service 'highly' or 'very highly'.
- Negotiated Houses of Multiple occupation (HMOs) through work with landlords to meet the needs of under 35s limited in the private sector by local housing allowance rates: a 3 bed HMO in Stowmarket is in the CSL portfolio.
- Collaboration with the Empty Homes Team and landlords to bring properties back into use through the CSL schemes.
- CSL attended the Suffolk Show and Business Fayres and are actively looking for other opportunities to promote the scheme

Case Study:

In the Spring of 2021, a man in his late 60s faced sudden homelessness when his 22-year-long relationship ended unexpectedly, forcing him to leave the family home. He was struggling with high blood pressure and emotional distress from the breakup and from having to part ways with his youngest son and seek new accommodation. His eldest son in Suffolk was able to offer him accommodation on a temporary basis. He was well aware of the long wait for social housing and the scarcity of affordable private rented accommodation. His Housing Solutions Officer referred his case to Central Suffolk Lettings, who successfully found him a one-bedroom house in Chelmondiston.

Testimonials from Landlords:

"I chose to let via BMSDC because I feel slightly uncomfortable about being a landlord. I believe that 'commercial' rents are too high. The rent I receive through this arrangement is lower than I might receive on the open market but, in return, BMSDC find me a fully vetted tenant and take responsibility for collecting rent (while paying me direct). This saves me much anxiety and makes for an easier landlord-tenant relationship."

"I would have no problem in recommending Central Suffolk Lettings to other agents and tenants alike. A really effective way of helping tenants that do not quite fit agents' criteria who have nowhere else to turn."

What we will be doing next:

- Providing Pre-tenancy training, in conjunction with the Stone Foundation to contribute to maintaining tenancies, returning tenancies in a better condition, decreasing Anti-Social Behaviour and preventing homelessness,
- Further promoting CSL to extend its reach, including 'to let' boards and targeted advertising.
- Creating a new website and increasing our online presence
- Acting on the results of the recent survey of Landlords, including considering extending the current Landlord's package or delivering an extended service.
- Expanding CSL's HMO Portfolio with the addition of 2 five bed HMOs in Needham Market
- Raising our profile within the organisation by linking in with Economic Development and Planning Teams to provide an offer at the start of housing development.
- Building on the Empty Homes project including more publicity, communication and an offer to landlords to work with us.
- Being an active part of the Landlords Forum, in partnership with Safe Suffolk Renters
- Procuring a new Tenancy Management system to support the growing business.

- Considering a charge to landlords who come onto the scheme. This could generate an income for Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council
- Quantifying the cost saving value of CSL to BMSDC

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Priority 5: Mitigating against the impacts of the cost-of-living. (New Page)

The rising costs of fuel, food and other essentials are combining with existing disadvantage and vulnerability within our communities to put many households at greater risk of both immediate hardship and reduced opportunity and wellbeing. This impacts on some people and communities more than others and many households face stark financial challenges with increasing food and energy bills.

In May 2022 Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils (BMSDC) launched a five-point action plan to support residents through the cost-of-living crisis. The Cost-of-Living Crisis Action Plan brings together a suite of measures that focus on maximising income, accessing advice, food insecurity and poverty, fuel poverty and Health and Wellbeing. The Action Plan is reviewed regularly as there are many unknowns and potential challenges ahead that cannot be fully predicted, such as global challenges, market volatility, rising inflation and the everyday changing landscape regarding people's household budgets.

Housing costs continue to add to the financial strain for households. There has been no increase to the Local Housing Allowance for those who rely on benefits to pay their rent. Mortgage interest rates continue to rise sharply as a result of increases to the Bank of England base rate, leaving lower income homeowners concerned about the prospect of managing drastically increasing mortgage costs. All of this converges to increase the risk of households becoming homeless.

BMSDC Cost of Living Support:

In May 2022 Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils launched a five-point action plan to support residents through the cost-of-living crisis, focusing on:

1. Co-ordinating Government Support to ensure it reaches those people who need it.
2. Exercising discretion when providing welfare support and advice to support those people who could potentially fall on hard times.
3. Maximising partnership working and established systems to provide targeted support in localities where there is a particular trend and need, implementing a targeted family-first approach.
4. Maintaining Good Health – whether that be referrals for mental health support, discounts at our gyms and swimming pools, engaging in community-led “wellbeing” initiatives, volunteering, and socialising via local initiatives.
5. Access to food and nutrition – whether that be participating in healthy eating exercises/initiatives, organising a community garden to grow produce, setting up of a Community Larder or providing extra support to local food banks to meet any unmet need

As the crisis has evolved the Cost-of-Living Plan has been updated and a refreshed plan sets out additional areas of focus, which are:

- responding to the changing needs of our residents
- identifying steps to support people through the current crisis
- building longer term resilience across our communities

Further details can be found: <https://www.babergh.gov.uk/benefits/cost-of-living-support/>

Key Facts (To be displayed as Infographics in finished strategy document)

Amount of £ secured by Financial Inclusion Officers:

From 1st April 2019 to 31st August 2023

- Babergh - £242,552.54
- Mid Suffolk - £211,700.04

Number of households assisted via the Household Support Grant since March 2022:

- Babergh – 85
- Mid Suffolk – 110

Case Study:

A visually impaired single man residing in a two-bedroom council property faced financial challenges due to the bedroom tax, resulting in rent arrears of approximately £1400. Efforts were made by a Financial Inclusion Officer (FIO) to secure Housing Benefit coverage for the second bedroom due to disability-related sensory equipment storage, but this request was denied. An application for Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) to bridge the gap was also declined.

Given these challenges, the tenant was presented with options: downsizing to a smaller property or re-evaluating income and expenditures to make the second bedroom affordable. Collaborating with the FIO, adjustments were made to outgoing expenses to make the rent more sustainable. With no extra income available for setting up a payment plan for the arrears, which were considered static (not increasing), an application was then submitted to the Household Support Fund (HSF) to clear the outstanding arrear, ultimately securing an award of £1400 from HSF to prevent the risk of eviction.

What we have already achieved:

- Continued to work closely with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Citizens' Advice (CA) to tackle the impacts of welfare reforms and the roll out of Universal Credit
- Monitored repayment agreements and the number of evictions for rent arrears to consider the success of our budgeting advice and affordability checks, so we can help clients to manage their income effectively.
- Introduced an Internal referral form between BMSDC and Mid Suffolk CA to speed up the referral process and to get help quickly to those who need it
- Launched a Fuel Poverty Toolkit for frontline members of staff to use
- Updated our webpages to ensure that residents can be signposted effectively to other agencies for advice and support
- Established the Household Support Grant (funded by Central Government) for households to apply to if they are struggling to pay rent or service charges.
- Sent targeted communications to Temporary Accommodation tenants and BMSDC tenants to highlight advice and help available and to encourage accessing support earlier
- Worked holistically with other teams to maximise opportunities to help households struggling with rising costs
- Administered Winter Warmth Grants for Community Spaces
- Mapped all the food banks operating in the districts and shared this information

What we will be doing next:

- Ensuring Wi-Fi and internet access is available at every Temporary Accommodation site with accompanying digital skills training from the Cost-of-Living Team.

- Using Data Mapping to look at deprivation in the districts and using this intelligence to pinpoint areas for further targeted communications and early intervention work
- Building stronger links with the Communities and Rents Teams to target areas where collaborative working would bring benefits for residents; including using Rent Sense data to target where help is needed
- Introducing an Internal referral form between BMSDC and Babergh Citizens Advice (CA) to speed up the referral process and to get help quickly to those who need it (similar to the process set up between BMSDC and Mid Suffolk CA)
- Taking part in a pilot with Anglian Water to ensure Social Tariffs are more easily accessible (Including automatically applying the Social Tariff when Council Tax Reduction is awarded).
- Continuing with targeted communications campaigns as and when required to ensure residents are kept well informed
- Signposting to appropriate low-income tariffs when households move from temporary to permanent accommodation
- Taking part in the development of a Food security plan for Suffolk alongside Community Action Suffolk

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Consultation (New Page)

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Monitoring and Governance (New Page)

This Strategy will be monitored and governed through a Delivery Plan, which is part of the wider Delivery Plan for Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils' Joint Homes and Housing Strategy. The Delivery Plan is designed to underpin the whole Strategy and will be under constant review through regular updates from Action Owners which will inform Quarterly Updates to the Housing Programme Board.

The Housing Programme Board oversees all projects that are in progress within the Housing Service. The Board meets monthly to look at any projects that are 'At Risk' or 'Off-track' and to help steer projects back or support projects with ideas and guidance. The Housing Programme Board also works with the other corporate boards to better plan projects and resources, for example forward planning where IT resource is required. The Strategy will also be reviewed annually by the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

This robust process will ensure that the Delivery Plan remains current and relevant, both a measure of work to be completed in order to meet the aims of the Strategy and a measure of what has been achieved. The Delivery Plan will be available on our website, alongside the Strategy.