



UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Homelessness Strategy and Review

2016-2021

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Foreword by the Housing Portfolio Holder

The development of our new Homelessness Strategy comes at a time of great change within housing, welfare and social policy. There are continual pressures on housing within Uttlesford particularly with regard to the affordability of housing for many local people.

Since the publication of the 2011 Homelessness Strategy, which at that time was amalgamated with the Housing Strategy, significant achievements have been made in the prevention of homelessness in Uttlesford and the reduction in use of emergency bed and breakfast accommodation for all client groups.

We have greatly improved the accommodation that we offer to homeless households whilst they wait for a permanent home to become available. This includes the building of four purpose built units on our new development at Mead Court in Stansted, however one of our priorities remains the further provision of good quality temporary accommodation.

The new Homelessness Strategy has been developed against fresh and bigger challenges that threaten to increase homelessness and make it more difficult for people to meet their housing need. The reasons that people become homeless are many and varied but being without a settled home is usually only one of the issues that people present with. This is why we rely on our partner organisations to help us manage the more complex cases of homelessness that we are now seeing and why we have improving the health and wellbeing of homeless people as one of our priorities.

As an Authority we have increased the supply of available accommodation for people in housing need and continue to work closely with Landlords in the private rented sector to improve access to affordable private rented accommodation. This is not easy in a high value area but another of our priorities will be to increase the availability to homeless people of affordable private rented sector properties.

Through the work of the Uttlesford Homelessness Partnership we will continue to work with partners to meet our first priority which is to prevent homelessness by providing a first class housing advice service to help people sustain their tenancies in whichever tenure they currently reside.

Uttlesford is fortunate not to have the degree of homelessness as seen in other parts Essex but this means we also do not have the access to resources of others, however by working with our partners on the Essex Homelessness Officers Group, we can take ideas of best practice and innovation to help Uttlesford develop services to match the increasing demand and improve the offer that we are able to make to those who find themselves without a home.

Cllr Julie Redfern – Housing Portfolio Holder Uttlesford District Council

Introduction

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a statutory obligation on all local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness and then publish a strategy on how they will try to prevent and tackle homelessness in their area. Uttlesford has published three homelessness strategies, the last being integrated into the 2012 - 2015 Housing Strategy.

This Strategy looks at the context of homelessness both nationally and locally, it reviews the levels of homelessness within the district and looks back at the achievements since the last document. The emphasis has been on preventing homelessness and offering advice and support to people to be able to remain in their homes, where this is not possible, the aim has been to provide good quality temporary accommodation and then to help people into stable affordable long term accommodation.

The document and has been developed in consultation with partners and by looking across the country at of the work that others are doing within this area, it sets out the council's strategic priorities for tackling homelessness within Uttlesford for the next five years.

Achievements since the Last Homelessness Strategy

There have been many developments in the council's Housing Options/ Homelessness service since the previous strategy was published within the Housing Strategy in 2012. Despite the huge challenges faced due to the economic climate that has prevailed during this time, the council is able to report on a number of important successes that have been achieved these include:-

- Development of the council's Housing Options Team – the council has invested in staff to develop the Housing Options Team who are now able to offer a high quality housing advice service to all clients on a no appointment needed basis and then where appropriate follow this with detailed case working for those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- Development of an appropriate portfolio of temporary accommodation, providing good quality ready to occupy accommodation. This has enabled Uttlesford to have only minimal use of bed and breakfast for families unless in an absolute emergency and greatly reduced use for all other client groups.
- Development of an in-house rent deposit scheme to help clients into private sector accommodation and the employing of a dedicated Empty Homes Officer to bring empty private sector properties back into use. The council also holds an annual Landlords Forum to engage with private sector

landlords as they are an important key to solving the problems of homelessness within the district.

- Working with the West Essex Mental Health Joint Referral Panel to engage with the providers of specialist supported housing to ensure clients with mental health issues are helped into appropriate housing
- Comprehensive review of Allocations Policy to take advantages of freedoms offered by the Localism Act. This has enabled us to rethink the way homeless households can engage with the council's choice based lettings system.
- Developed a comprehensive arrears policy including the appointment of a dedicated officer to work with council tenants who have debt issues or subject to the spare room subsidy to try to prevent the need to take eviction action to recover rent arrears within the councils own stock.
- Development of procedures for housing and the council's housing benefit department to work together on the use of Discretionary Housing Payments to be used to prevent homelessness.
- Worked with Essex County Council on the development of services for victims of Domestic Violence. Uttlesford has signed up to TUTIS a countywide reciprocal agreement to increase the options for tenants in social housing who need to move because of domestic abuse.
- Achieving recognition of the good quality of the homelessness services provided by Uttlesford Council by taking part in the National Practitioner Support Service Diagnostic Peer Review with 4 other neighboring authorities.

Context

This chapter puts the homelessness strategy in perspective by looking at the legal context, the national policy changes since the last strategy and the local context

Homelessness is expensive, not just to the individual or household experiencing it but also to the community and the taxpayer - it has been estimated that on average each homeless person costs the public purse £26,000 per year and the overall costs of homelessness in the UK exceed £1billion per annum (Homeless Link 2013).

Below are some of the individual costs associated with some of the public services used by homeless people:-

- £387– average cost of each homelessness assessment (Homeless Link 2013)
- £1,668 – average cost of an arrest (research shows homeless people are at significantly greater risk of offending) (Ministry of Justice 2010)
-
- £147 – average cost of a visit to A&E leading to admission (it is estimated that homeless people use A&E five times more than the general population) (Lesley Curtis – ‘Unit Costs of Health and Social Care’ (2011) and Inclusion Health (March 2010))
-
- £1,005 average weekly cost of residential care for older people (Lesley Curtis – ‘Unit Costs of Health and Social Care’ (2011))

The Legal Context

Definition of homelessness for the purpose of this strategy

Statutory homeless households as defined by the 1996 Housing Act and Homelessness Act 2002. These are more likely to be families with dependent children, pregnant women and adults who are assessed as vulnerable. (This definition of homelessness is relatively narrow and does not constitute the majority of homelessness cases).

Those households who do not fall into the above categories (sometimes called ‘non-statutory’ homeless) and are more likely to be single or couples (with no dependents) who are either sleeping rough, living in supported accommodation or are deemed as “hidden homeless” and are typically sleeping on friends or family member’s sofas as a temporary stop gap measure.

The Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002

Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 continues to be the overarching piece of legislation that relates to homelessness and informs the way in which local authorities respond to homelessness.

The Act has since been amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Localism Act 2011. These subsequent pieces of legislation have placed a requirement on Local Authorities to adopt a strategic approach to managing and preventing homelessness.

The Localism Act 2011

Section 153 of the Localism Act 2011 prescribes the relationship between schemes and strategies that local authorities must have regard to in developing or modifying their local preventing homelessness strategies:

'In formulating or modifying a homelessness strategy, a local housing authority in England shall have regard to—

- (a) its current allocation scheme under section 166A of the Housing Act 1996,*
- (b) its current tenancy strategy under section 150 of the Localism Act 2011*

The National Context

Policy changes since the last strategy

A number of key national policy changes have been introduced since the last strategy in 2012. The following section attempts to draw some of the main policy changes that have had a direct or indirect effect on homelessness in Uttlesford

Localism Act 2011

The purpose of the act was to shift power from the state to local communities by:

- Lifting the burden of bureaucracy
- Empowering communities to do things their way
- Increase local control of public finances
- Diversifying the supply of public services
- Opening up government to public scrutiny
- Strengthening accountability to local people.

Welfare reform Act 2012

Against a background of financial constraints the coalition government introduced a number of changes through the Welfare Reform Act 2012. Some of these changes were the biggest seen since the introduction of the Welfare state in the 1940s, these include:

- Measures to simplify the system
- More stringent rules and eligibility criteria
- Stricter sanctions
- Making work pay
- More frequent benefit entitlement assessments
- Benefit rate freezes
- Caps to some benefits
- Loss of benefit uprating linked to actual costs
- Increase in a range of deductions made to benefits
- New payment methods
- Localisation of the social fund

Reduction in the value of working-age benefits

A significant number of the changes brought about by the Welfare Reform Act 2012 were made to reduce the value of working-age benefits for people who are on low incomes. These measures include:

- Restricting the annual uprating of working age benefits to 1%
- Lowering the rates for Local Housing allowance (LHA)
- The Benefits Cap
- Means testing Child Benefit
- Limiting contribution-based Employment Support Allowance
- The Social Sector Size Criteria (SSSC)
- Replacing Council Tax Benefit (CTB) with Council Tax Support (CTS)
- Restrictions on Working Tax Credits
- Raising the deduction rate for non-dependents

Some of the above reductions have placed people in Uttlesford at further risk of homelessness.

Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment Act 2012 - Legal aid changes

In April 2013, the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment Act 2012 was introduced. The main aim of the act was to reduce the legal aid bill by £350m a year in England and Wales. The Act removed funding for a number of areas of civil law including some debt, housing and benefit issues. Legal aid is still available for debt and housing matters where someone's home is at immediate risk but for some people intervention at an earlier stage may have prevented them reaching this stage of threatened homelessness.

The Health and Social Care Act 2012

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 introduced some of the biggest changes to the NHS since its introduction in 1948. The main focuses of the changes were around:

- Structure
- Accountabilities
- Funding arrangements
- Working arrangements

This has led to Local Authorities (Councils) taking a larger role in public health promotion requiring each local authority to undertake a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and creating Health and Wellbeing Boards. Uttlesford's Health and Wellbeing Group feeds directly into the Essex Board.

The Care Act 2014

The wellbeing of people is at the centre of the new Care Act. Councils now have a duty to think about the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of people who need care. Councils also have a new duty to provide preventative services to keep people healthy in the first place.

Domestic Abuse

There have been considerable legislative changes between 2010 and 2014 which address the issue of domestic abuse and its negative impacts. This increases awareness of the issue. It is a continual challenge to understand the true level of those affected by domestic abuse, and the impact that this has on homelessness. The introduction of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferencing and the DASH assessment form means that our approach to dealing with customers is more consistent and offers an opportunity for us to do effective action planning with the individual. This also helps the customer to measure their own risk levels, and minimise them.

The introduction of the Social Sector Size Criteria (SSSC)

The introduction of the SSSC was brought about primarily to reduce expenditure on Housing Benefit and to reduce under-occupation in the social sector. The scheme reduces Housing Benefit for social tenants (of working age) with more bedrooms than they are required to have. Those people affected have had their Housing Benefit reduced by 14 per cent for one spare bedroom and 25 per cent for two or more spare bedrooms. As of September 2015 222 households were affected by SSSC in Uttlesford. The council's Allocations Policy in 2013 was amended so that the allocation of housing was in line with SSSC.

Incentivising Right to Buy

In October 2011, the Coalition government announced that they wanted to "raise Right to Buy discounts which will make the scheme attractive again and rejuvenate the housing stock." Since this announcement in April 2012 the government increased the maximum cap on the discount to £70k. This maximum cap is now raised on an annual basis from April 2015 by CPI. It is likely that these rises in discounts will mean that more council houses will continue to be sold in Uttlesford. Over the five year period between 2010 and 2015 38 homes were sold through Right to Buy.

Ending of mortgage rescue

The Mortgage Rescue Scheme was designed to support vulnerable owner-occupiers at risk of repossession to remain in their own home. Since its inception in

2009 there has been 5 successful mortgage rescues in Uttlesford. The Government ended the scheme in 2014.

Interest only mortgages

There is some concern that homeowners who took out interest only mortgages in the late 80s and 90s will struggle to find the necessary funds to repay the capital element of their mortgage when their mortgage term comes to an end. The Financial Conduct Authority estimates around 260,000 homeowners (10% of cases) whose mortgage matures before 2020 do not have a strategy in place to repay their mortgage at the end of their term.

National Strategies and Guidance

Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England 2011

The national housing strategy published in 2011 set out the government's approach for housing by giving local communities a greater say over decisions on housing in order to provide a stable, long term increase in housing supply.

It also identified addressing homelessness as a key priority for the government to tackle, with greater focus on prevention as well as targeting action for dealing with rough sleeping. The strategy introduced the Ministerial Working Group comprising of representatives from across eight government departments working together to prevent homelessness and crisis. The group published its first report "No Second Night Out nationwide in July 2011, this focused on ending rough sleeping. This report was followed in August 2012 by "Making Every Contact Count", a joint approach to preventing homelessness. The document provided detailed guidance for how councils should work collaboratively with other local authority services to prevent homelessness through early intervention in order to avoid households reaching crisis point.

No Second Night Out nationwide: Vision to End Rough Sleeping (July 2011)

- The report set out 6 joint commitments:
- Helping people off the Streets
- Helping people access healthcare
- Helping people into work
- Reducing bureaucratic burdens
- Increasing local control over investment in services
- Developing responsibility in tackling homelessness

The aim being for the working group to work across government to give local people the tools to tackle rough sleeping and put an end to second nights out on the street

Making Every Contact Count: A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness (August 2012).

The aim of the report by the Ministerial Working Group was to make sure that every contact local agencies have with vulnerable people and families has value. It brought together five government commitments to:

- Tackle troubled childhoods and adolescence
- Improve health
- Reduce involvement in crime
- Improve skills, employment and financial advice
- Pioneer social funding for homelessness

The report poses ten local challenges to the sector. The following table shows the current position of the council in relation to each challenge

| Making Every Contact Count | Current Uttlesford Position |
|--|--|
| Adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services | In place – see forward to this strategy |
| Actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs. | In place – Uttlesford Homelessness Partnership |
| Offer a Housing Options prevention service including written advice to all clients. | In place |
| Adopt a ‘No Second Night Out’ model or effective alternative. | In place |
| Having housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support. | In development |
| Develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups including advice and support to both clients and landlords. | In place |
| Actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the mortgage rescue scheme. | In place |
| Have a homelessness strategy that sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is | In place |

| | |
|---|----------------|
| reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs | |
| Not place any Young Person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. | In development |
| Not place any families in Bed & Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks. | In development |

The Government is also encouraging Local Authorities to take part in the Gold Standard Challenge and in doing so commit to continuous improvement.

Uttlesford has started this process by participating in the Diagnostic Peer Review process with 4 other neighbouring authorities.

Improving outcomes and supporting transparency – A Public Health Outcomes Framework for England 2013 – 2016 Part 1 January 2012

This document sets out the new framework for public health and recognises the factors that influence public health over the course of a lifetime including poverty, education, housing, employment, crime and pollution

The document outlines how the NHS, social care, the voluntary sector and communities will work together to plan and deliver services to improve health inequalities.

The new Public Health Outcomes Framework is in three parts. Part 1 introduces the two overarching outcomes that set the vision for the whole public health system.

Theses two outcomes are:

- Increased healthy life expectancy
- Reduced differences in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy between communities

The document recognises the important link between health inequality and homelessness

The Local Context

Uttlesford Housing Strategy

The Council's new Housing Strategy draws on a wide ranging consultation with stakeholders as well as building on existing evidence and local knowledge. As the

new Local Plan is drafted, the Housing Strategy will form a key part of the evidence base of the Local Plan.

The Council is committed to producing and adopting a sound Local Plan and has set out the programme for completing this work. The Council will continue to work towards the delivery of the Housing Strategy through both Local Planning and Development Management.

The new Strategy also stands alongside the HRA Business Plan, Homelessness Strategy and Developers Guide and sets out how Uttlesford Council plans to deliver the key priorities and objectives outlined in the strategy over for next five years. The key objectives being:-

- Increasing Housing Supply across all tenures
- Helping People to live independently
- Ensuring decent, safe and healthy homes
- Creating sustainable communities

West Essex Tenancy Policy and Uttlesford Tenancy Policy

The Localism Act 2011 requires local authorities to publish a Tenancy Strategy which must set out the matters to which registered providers are to have regard in formulating their policies relating to:

- The kinds of tenancies they grant;
- The circumstances in which they will grant a tenancy of a particular kind;
- Where they grant tenancies for a term certain, the lengths of those terms; and
- The circumstances in which they will grant a further tenancy on the coming to an end of an existing tenancy.

Uttlesford District Council joined with Epping and Harlow Councils to form the West Essex Housing Forum and produced the West Essex Tenancy Strategy the objectives of which are as follows:

- To fulfil the statutory requirement to publish a Tenancy Strategy, following consultation with stakeholders;
- To ensure that affordable housing meets locally, identifiable housing need;
- To provide guidance and direction to RPs regarding their use of social and affordable housing tenancies;
- To set out clearly to partner agencies and others, the expectations of the West Essex Housing Forum in relation to the use of flexible tenure;

- To indicate to home seekers what they can expect from their fixed term tenancy, if one is granted, including arrangements for statutory reviews;
- To provide a framework for working in partnership over flexible tenure, including establishing a joined up approach and joint governance arrangements;
- To ensure that local authorities have regard to the Tenancy Strategy when reviewing its allocations policies and exercising its housing management functions; and
- To keep the Tenancy Strategy under review.

Uttlesford Council then formulated its Tenancy Policy, taking account of the West Essex Tenancy Strategy and the local context within Uttlesford. Uttlesford's Tenancy Policy set out:-

- The type of tenancies we will grant and the circumstances in which we will grant tenancies of a particular type.
- The circumstances in which fixed term tenancies will not be renewed
- The use of Affordable rents

Uttlesford Council's Housing Allocations Scheme – Offer to those owed the full housing duty

In 2014 Uttlesford Council carried full consultation on a review of its Allocations Policy, this involved staff, elected members, partner agencies as well as public consultation via the Citizens Panel.

The review looked at whether Uttlesford, following government guidance, needed to strengthen its local connection criteria for applicants wishing to apply for social housing within the district. The consultation also covered financial eligibility criteria and the offer made to homelessness applicants.

Following adoption by the Council's Cabinet in December 2014 the new policy was implemented in January 2014 with some minor amendments being implemented in August 2015 following a six month review of the new policy.

The local connection criteria is now set at three year residence or three years working within the district (for full details please see the Allocation Policy). This is less than some of our neighboring authorities but members felt that this was the correct degree of connection to satisfy the public desire for local houses going to 'local people' in an area where alternative housing options, other than social housing, can be out of reach for many Uttlesford residents.

To ensure that tenants with young children living in flats, who are otherwise suitably housed but who have conducted their tenancies satisfactorily for a minimum of two years, get the opportunity to move to a house of the same size, the policy was

changed to give these tenants priority over higher banded applicants that require the same size of accommodation. It was felt that as accepted homeless applicants were often the highest banded applicants it would be fairer if their offer to discharge the council's full housing duty was to be firstly, if available, a private sector offer or if this was not available then flatted accommodation. The rationale being that this was fairer to existing tenants with young children, who were not getting the opportunity to move to houses.

The current offer to accepted homeless applicants of all household types is as follows:-

Accepted homeless households are applicants to whom:

- The Council has accepted a duty under Part VII of The Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 (the duty towards households who are in priority need and unintentionally homeless) **and**
- The council accepts a duty to provide suitable accommodation.

In the first instance the Council will look to discharge its homelessness duty for all accepted homeless applicants within the private rented sector. The Council will ensure that any offer of private rented housing is appropriate to the needs of the household, that the length of any tenancy is a minimum of 12 months and that the property meets the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012. An assessment will also be carried out to assess the affordability of the property, including the eligibility to receive Local Housing Allowance/Housing Benefit. The property may be outside the Uttlesford District.

Whilst the Council is looking for suitable accommodation within the private sector, applicants will be allowed to make expressions of interest on suitable properties advertised through the CBL system. If after a period of 2 cycles from when the applicant received their S.184 decision letter they have either not been offered a suitable private sector property or been successful through the CBL system, the Council will express interest on their behalf and make one final offer of suitable accommodation. The property will be either a privately rented property or social housing depending of which type of accommodation is available first, and will generally be flatted accommodation. If this offer is refused, the Council's homelessness duty under the Housing Act 1996 to provide accommodation will be considered to have been discharged.

Accepted homeless applicants, who meet the Council's Allocation Policy eligibility criteria, who are housed in temporary accommodation provided by the Council, including Bed & Breakfast accommodation, hostels or homeless at home, will be placed in Band B. Accepted homeless applicants in severe need will be placed in Band A

When a private rented property becomes available it will be offered to the accepted homeless applicant for whom the property is suitable and if this is more than one applicant, it will be offered to the applicant with the earliest homeless application date.

Any private rented tenancy that discharges the council's homelessness duty will be for a period of not less than 12 months. If within 2 years, beginning with the date on which the applicant accepts a private rented sector offer, the applicant re-applies for accommodation, or for assistance in obtaining accommodation, and if the applicant is found to be homeless (from the date of the expiry of the termination notice) and did not become homeless intentionally from the private rented accommodation, the Council will accept a homelessness duty regardless of whether the applicant has a priority need.

Essex Health and Wellbeing Board – Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Essex October 2012

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy has been developed and is being implemented by the Health and Wellbeing Board, which brings together key partners to improve health and wellbeing of communities across Essex.

The main source of evidence for this strategy has been the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. This has provided information on the health and wellbeing of the population of Essex, the wider determinants of health and the quality of life in the county. The assessment has provided the basis for the key priorities of the strategy, namely

- Starting and developing well
- Living and working well
- Aging well

The main focus of the strategy is to reduce health inequalities and tackle the wider determinants of health to increase life expectancy and reduce inequalities between areas and groups.

Uttlesford council recognises the significance of the links between health and homelessness particularly amongst single homeless people and the effect it has on families. We also recognise that we need to work together to achieve better outcomes for people who are affected by homelessness and ill-health. We know that if someone becomes homeless they are likely to "suffer significant health inequalities in comparison with people in more secure accommodation, in terms of both their health status and their ability to access health services. We also recognise the direct relationship between an individual's physical and mental wellbeing can have on their own housing situation if their health needs are not met.

All local authorities (unitary and district) have a general statutory duty to protect and improve health and wellbeing and to tackle inequalities and the 'social determinants' of health – that is, those aspects of people's social and economic condition that impacts on their health. Extending far beyond social care from education to housing, economic development to leisure services, planning to trading standards, they all have a significant impact on people's health.

In particular District authorities, such as Uttlesford, have a significant function and role in helping improve people's health and wellbeing through the homeless prevention work we do. Examples of this work include:

- The function of the housing options teams in helping vulnerable people find (or keep) safe and secure good quality housing
- Direct provision of permanent and temporary housing
- Joint commissioning of services to help reach out to vulnerable people who are either young, rough sleeping or fleeing domestic abuse
- Helping people stay in their own homes through grants and adaptations to help them live more independently
- Improving the quality of private sector housing for people
- Working with other Essex authorities on protocols for working with Social Care for families and 16 and 17 year olds

Joint Commissioning Strategy for Domestic Abuse 2015 - 2020

This Strategy aims to assist partnerships and agencies across Greater Essex in delivering appropriate joined up responses to those affected by domestic abuse, underpinned by a recognition and an understanding that no single agency can address this complex issue in isolation. The strategy has the aim of ensuring that by working together partners can make the best use of existing collective resources, and draw upon additional resources, to address the issue of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse impacts on quality of life and can ultimately destroy people's lives. Despite being a significant contributor to crime statistics and the causes of homelessness, it is also a pattern of behaviour that often happens behind closed doors and is grossly under-reported. It is an issue that cuts across all social, geographical and cultural groups. Domestic abuse causes harm to both adults and children, both directly and indirectly, and is of high financial cost to public agencies, the economy, the individuals concerned and wider society. Furthermore it produces patterns of behaviour that are often replicated from generation to generation and these inter-generational cycles must be broken.

Uttlesford District Council has been working with Essex County Council on and the wider work that has been undertaken across the county in relation to housing up domestic abuse services. The council has signed up to the countywide reciprocal agreement TUTIS to enable social housing tenants who are the victims of domestic abuse to move more easily across the county.

Uttlesford also takes part in the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences for high risk domestic abuse cases and provides funding for an outreach service for victims within Uttlesford. The council is also currently looking at transferring land at nil cost for the development of a specialist refuge within the district.

Joint Protocol between Essex County Council and Local Authority Housing Services to Address the Needs of Intentionally Homeless Families with Children

This is a joint protocol agreed between Essex County Council Social Care and Essex Housing Authorities. The protocol covers the assessment and provision of services to families with dependent children who are homeless and no longer eligible for assistance from the Homeless Team within Housing Services. The Homelessness Act 2002 states the need for cooperation between Housing authorities and Children's Social Care when dealing with intentionally homeless households with dependent children and this protocol details how Social Care and housing will work together when dealing with intentionally homeless families.

Joint Protocol between Essex County Council and Local Authority Housing Services in Dealing with Homeless 16 and 17 Year Olds

This joint protocol recognises that the welfare of the child is paramount and all parties need to work together to ensure young people are safe and have their needs met. The protocol was developed following the House of Lords judgement in May 2009 in the case of G v LB Southwark and the subsequent statutory guidance issued by the department for Children, Schools and Families and Communities and Local Government department in April 2010. These clarified the legal responsibilities of Children and Young People's Services towards homeless 16 and 17 year olds and the interrelationship between duties under the Children Act 1989 and homelessness legislation.

Essex County Council (ECC) and the twelve district local housing authorities (LHA's) are committed to meeting the social and housing needs of young people who are at risk of homelessness and who are unable to live with their (wider) family or suitable friends.

The protocol details how Essex County Council and the 12 district local authorities in will work together with supported housing providers to deliver the most effective options for young people, ensuring they have appropriate advice and guidance, and that the young person continues to take responsibility for the decisions they take about their lives and the subsequent consequences of these. Both agencies have responsibilities to ensure young people are safeguarded and that services are jointly planned and secured. These services will include: homelessness prevention services (provision of advice and guidance to young people), supported accommodation schemes, relevant support services and more specialised supported housing provision for more vulnerable young people.

Uttlesford has only one supported housing scheme within the district for single people. This is Bromfield House in Saffron Walden, which is a 17 bed unit run by Genesis Housing Association. Although the unit can take single people from 16 to 65 the majority of referrals are at the younger end of the spectrum. Bromfield House would be the first choice of accommodation for any 16 and 17 year olds that the local authority has a duty to house.

Review of Homelessness in Uttlesford since 2011

The Statistics

Uttlesford District Council is a stock holding council with 2850 properties scattered across 56 parishes in what is the largest geographical district in the county of Essex. The district has a population of around 83,500 (2014 figure).

The average household price across the district is £421,100 (Sept 2014) whilst the average income is £24,575

The Local Housing Allowance for a 2 Bedroom House in Saffron Walden is £609.87 (2015) whilst the average rent for a 2 bedroom house in Saffron Walden is £900.00

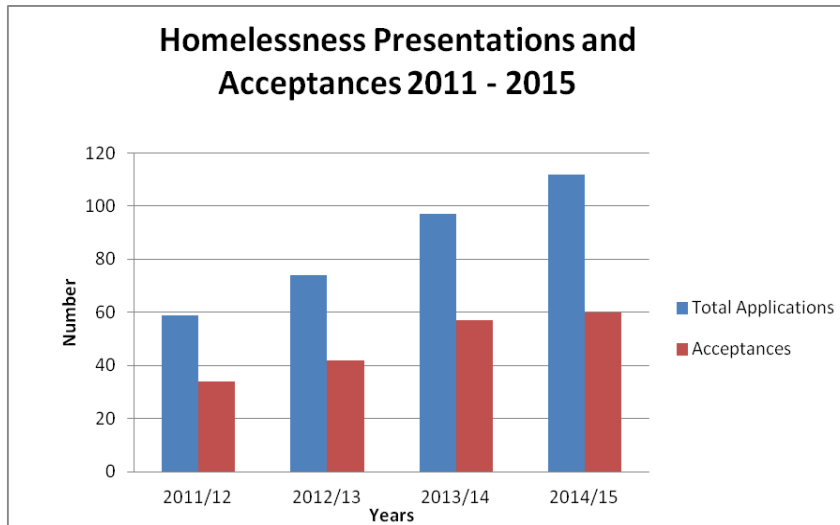
In the last 4 years Uttlesford has delivered 284 new affordable homes across the district

The housing register as at 1 April 2015 had 1193 registered applications with 483 of them within Bands A –D (in recognised need of alternative housing)

The number of social housing allocations from the housing register in Uttlesford in 2014/15 was 252

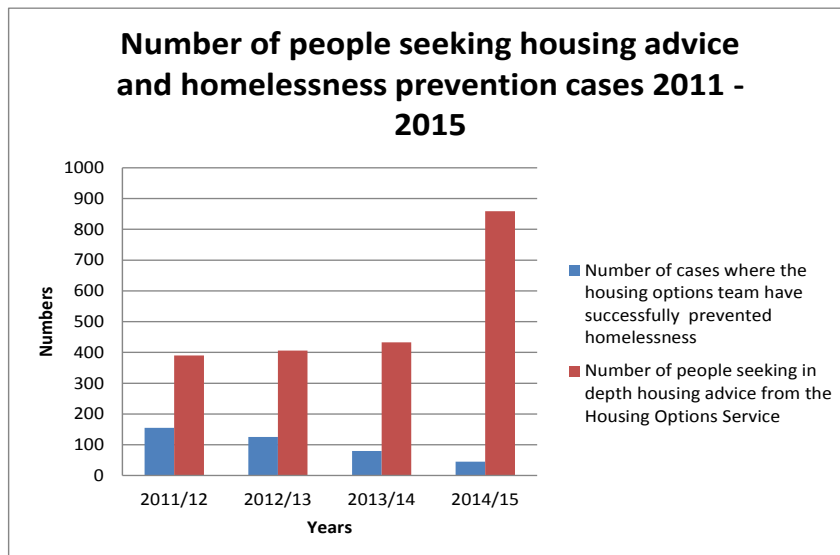
The estimated numbers for rough sleeping in Uttlesford was 2 as at November 2014

Homelessness has increased within Uttlesford, as it has nationally, over the past 4 years. The table below shows the number of homeless applications the council has taken in this time and the number of those applications for which the council has accepted the full homelessness duty – to find them permanent housing.



DCLG P1E data

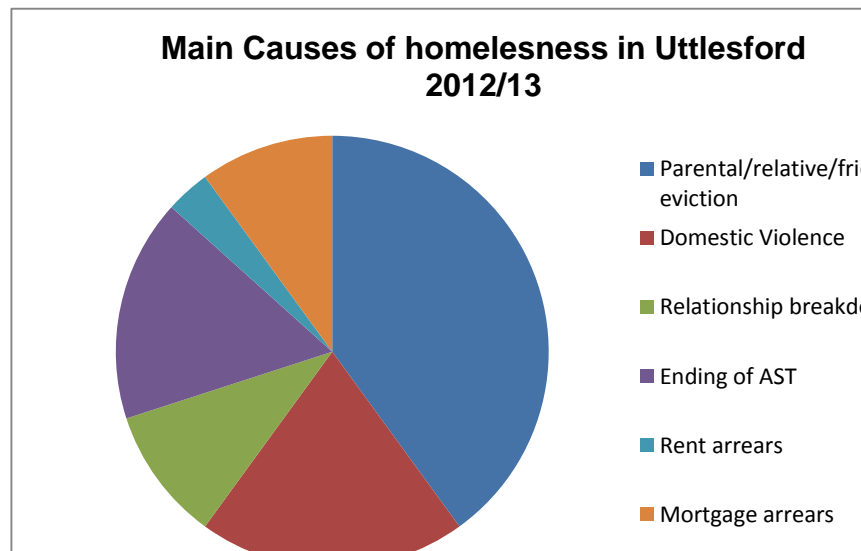
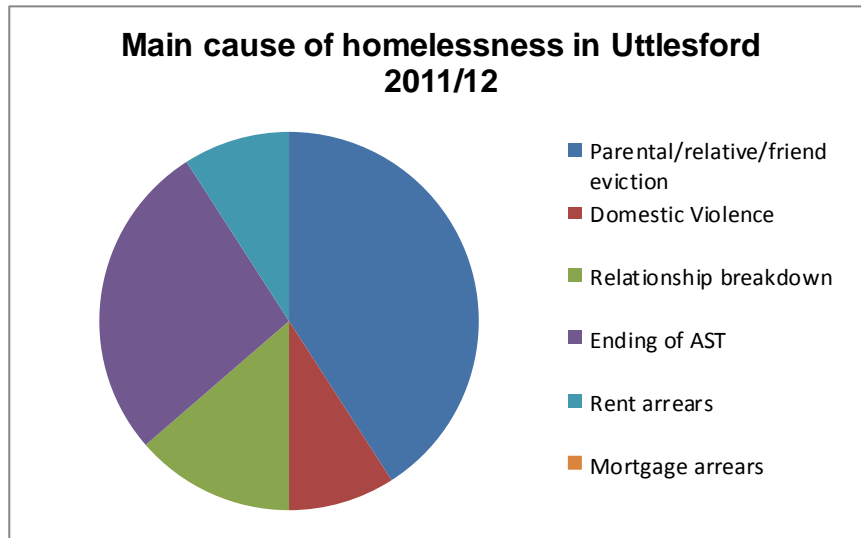
The number of people making homeless applications is only one part of the homelessness picture with Uttlesford. The table below shows the number of clients that have sought in depth housing advice from the council’s housing options service. These will be people who are having problems with their current housing and can be across any tenure type. Some of these clients will be people threatened with homelessness and the council will work with these clients and other partner agencies to try to prevent homelessness. The chart clearly demonstrates that as difficult economic climate has prevailed it has become increasingly difficult to prevent homelessness by finding suitable affordable accommodation for clients.



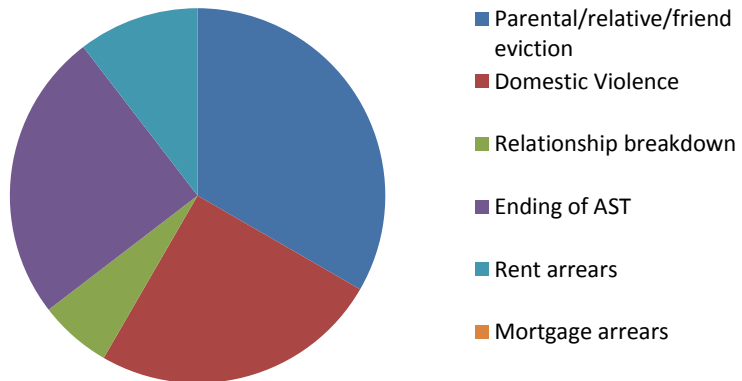
Council and P1E data

The following charts taken from the council’s P1E returns data show the main causes for homelessness within Uttlesford over the past 4 years. They demonstrate

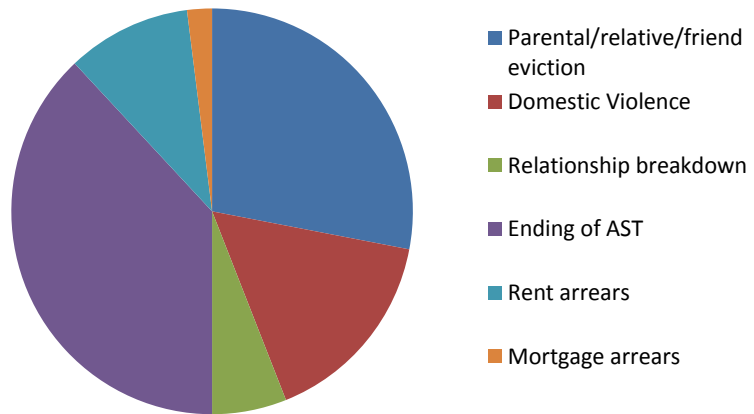
how the main cause has changed from parental/relative/friend eviction in 2011/12 to the ending of privately rented Assured Shorthold Tenancies (AST) in 2014/15.



Main causes of homelessness in Uttlesford 2013/14



Main causes of homelessness in Uttlesford 2014/15



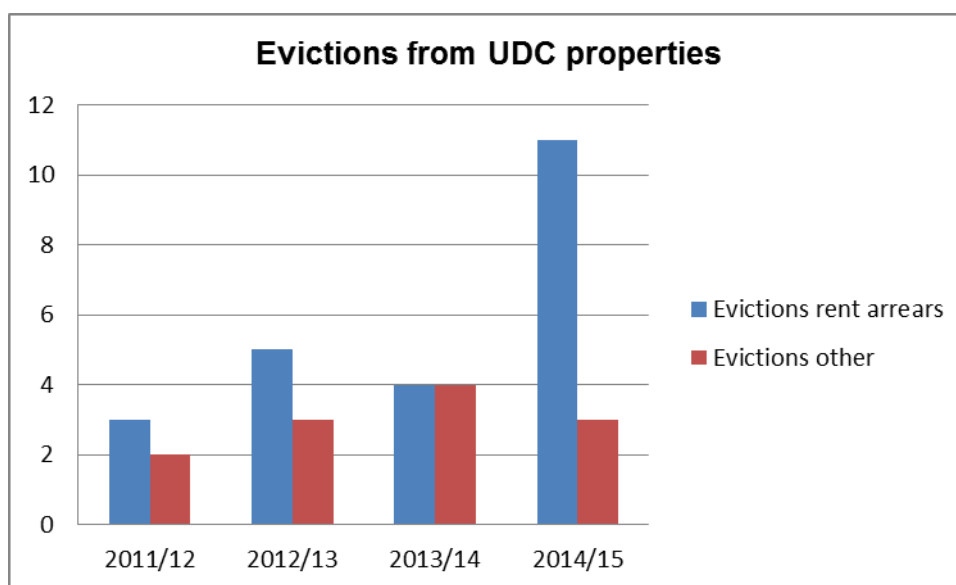
Uttlesford Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) statistics

Uttlesford CAB are an important partner to the local authority in preventing homelessness, particularly in the work that they do on debt, this is an area for which the council has used government grant money to assist the CAB in training their staff to deal with debt issues. The following statistics show the levels of debt work the CAB has carried out over the past two years and the increase in housing advice that clients have sought from them during the same period.

| Debt | Unique clients | |
|---|----------------|------------|
| | 2013-14 | 2014-15 |
| Mortgage and secured loan arrears | 35 | 43 |
| Hire purchase arrears | 7 | 7 |
| Fuel debts | 38 | 66 |
| Telephone and broadband arrears | 14 | 40 |
| Rent arrears – LA or ALMOs | 28 | 50 |
| Rent arrears – housing | 25 | 33 |
| Rent arrears – private landlords | 16 | 11 |
| Council tax arrears | 70 | 82 |
| Mag. Ct. – fines and compulsory orders | 16 | 11 |
| Maintenance and child maintenance | 3 | 2 |
| Bank and building society overdrafts | 63 | 89 |
| Credit, store & charge card debts | 107 | 164 |
| Unsecured personal loan debts | 58 | 122 |
| Catalogue and mail order debts | 17 | 32 |
| Water supply and sewerage debts | 24 | 42 |
| Unpaid parking penalty & congestion charge | 6 | 9 |
| Overpayments of WTC and CTC | 11 | 20 |
| Overpayments of IS / JSA / ESA | 2 | 4 |
| Overpayments of housing and council tax | 19 | 15 |
| Social fund debts | 5 | 4 |
| Payday loan debts | 7 | 16 |
| 3rd party debt collection | 8 | - |
| Private bailiffs | 8 | - |
| Debt relief order | 28 | 30 |
| Bankruptcy | 33 | 26 |
| Logbook / bill of sale loan debts | - | 2 |
| Loan sharks / illegal lenders | - | 1 |
| Arrears of income tax, VAT or NI | - | 26 |
| Overpayment of other benefits | - | 8 |
| Other legal remedies | 5 | 1 |
| Other | 125 | 130 |
| Total | 437 | 473 |

| Housing | Unique clients | |
|--|----------------|------------|
| | 2013-14 | 2014-15 |
| Discrimination | 2 | - |
| Actual Homelessness | 44 | 60 |
| Threatened Homelessness | 91 | 132 |
| LA homelessness service | 26 | 23 |
| Access to & provision of accommodation | 61 | 50 |
| Local Housing Authority | 96 | 114 |
| Housing Association property | 44 | 40 |
| Private sector rented property | 127 | 141 |
| Owner occupier property | 53 | 48 |
| Environmental & neighbour issues | 35 | 45 |
| Other housing issues | 56 | 80 |
| Total | 468 | 518 |

The table below shows the number of evictions carried out by Uttlesford Council, although the numbers are low it can be seen that the trend is increasing particularly on rent arrears. The council works hard to avoid having to resort to court action on arrears and has processes in place for the council's housing management and housing options teams to work together to try to avoid eviction. Referrals are also made to other agencies who can support clients with debt problems such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and the districts floating support provider.



Council data

Strategic Priorities for the Next Five Years

The following priorities have been developed alongside the key priorities within the council's Corporate Plan and the council's Housing Strategy:

1. Prevent homelessness by providing a high quality housing advice service to clients in all housing tenures, by sustaining tenancies and by mitigating the negative effects of welfare reform
2. Provide good quality suitable temporary accommodation and work towards ending the use of bed and breakfast even in an emergency
3. Engage with the private rented sector to improve access to accommodation for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness
4. Improving the Health and Wellbeing of homeless people

Priority 1: Prevent homelessness by providing a high quality housing advice service to clients in all housing tenures and by sustaining tenancies

The review has highlighted the need for the council and its partner organisations to continue to prevent homelessness and help people to sustain their tenancies by early intervention and providing good quality advice and support services. Analysis of data regarding households who have approached the council as being potentially homeless shows that a significant proportion have accessed assistance from the housing options team more than once.

The Council recognises the importance of multi-agency working to tenancy sustainment and will look for new and innovative ways to prevent homelessness and help tenants remain in their homes

To meet this priority the council will need to:

- Implement the recommendations made to improve the housing options service following the Diagnostic Peer Review
- Develop good quality, easily accessible housing advice materials, including web based material which reflect the diversity of applicants needs and abilities
- Prevent homelessness by helping people sustain their tenancies across all tenure through the increased provision of debt and welfare advice
- Work with partner agencies to mitigate the effects of the introduction of Universal Credit and the Benefit Cap

- Increase prevention of homelessness caused by domestic violence by working with partners to keep victims safe within their current accommodation where this is appropriate
- Flexible use of the Discretionary Housing Payments

Priority 2: Provide good quality suitable temporary accommodation and work towards ending the use of bed and breakfast even in an emergency

The review recognises the need to provide good quality temporary accommodation for those households that are or may become homeless so that the council can work towards ending bed and breakfast for all client groups and even in an emergency. The trend points to the growing need for smaller units of accommodation both as temporary accommodation and permanent housing

To meet this priority the council will need to:

- Ensure that enough ready to access temporary accommodation is available in the right location for homeless households to access support, maintain employment and education
- Ensure through the Council's Housing Strategy that the council is able to deliver sufficient units of social housing to allow the free flow of households from temporary accommodation into permanent housing
- Ensure through the Council's Housing Strategy that the council is able to deliver suitable supported housing for homeless households with complex needs, particularly single homeless households

Priority 3: Engage with the private rented sector to improve access to accommodation for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness

The review recognises that households made homeless from the private sector has increased and that access to this sector in Uttlesford is extremely limited, especially for clients reliant on local housing allowance to meet their rent payments as the local rates are well below local rent levels. As would be first-time buyers continue to struggle to access mortgages and turn to the private sector to meet their housing needs the sector has even less need to consider the clients of the council's housing options service as potential tenants. However as social housing is never going to be able to fully meet the housing needs of all those who would wish to access it, there is an increasing need to work with the private sector. The Localism Act gave the council the opportunity to discharge its homelessness duty into the private sector subject to certain criteria being met. The Act also allowed councils to end the idea of a tenancy for life with the introduction of Tenancy Strategies, this means that homelessness can no longer be an assumed route into social housing.

To meet this priority the council will need to:

- Promote the council's services to private sector landlords
- Continue to encourage owners of empty properties to bring them back into use
- Refer tenants within the private sector to appropriate support agencies to help them maintain their tenancies when difficulties first arise
- Have closer links between the Housing Options Team and the Housing Benefit Department
- Review the council's Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme to see if it can provide greater incentives for private sector landlords to work with the scheme
- Continue to hold a Landlords Forum and review other ways to connect with landlords

Priority 4: Improving the Health and Wellbeing of homeless people

The review recognises the impact that homelessness has on peoples' health and wellbeing and the role that the council and its partner agencies can have on improving outcomes for households who have experienced a period of homelessness

To meet this priority the council will need to:

- Work in partnership with other key agencies to prevent individuals and families from getting into a housing crisis
- Work with health partners to ensure that homeless households and linked into appropriate health services
- Work with the West Essex Joint Referral Panel to ensure clients with mental health issues are appropriately housed
- Make appropriate referrals to support agencies to ensure homeless households have access to support that meets all their needs
- Data sharing and data analysis with statutory and voluntary partners
- Review and strengthen existing protocols and implement new ones particularly with mental health, drug and alcohol services and probation

Consultation and Engagement

In preparing this Homelessness Strategy we have worked with a wide range of staff, elected members, partners and stakeholders to ensure that the document is shaped to reflect legislation as well as national and local priorities.

Consultation has been undertaken to get the views of as many people and organisations as possible to inform the development of this strategy. A draft document was circulated for comment and put out for public consultation via the council's website.

This has included work through the Homelessness Partnership and Housing Strategy Conferences.

The final document was been agreed by the council's Housing Board and Tenant Forum prior to be recommended to the council's Cabinet for adoption.

Implementing the Strategy

How the council will deliver the priorities within this Strategy is contained within the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan which sets out clear tasks and targets within identified areas of work. The Action Plan will be monitored and reviewed annually by the Homelessness Partnership, a multi-agency group, so that it is responsive to emerging needs and achieves the priorities within it.

By adopting the Homelessness Strategy Uttlesford Council is making a firm commitment to tackling and preventing homelessness within the District.

Action Plan – Homelessness Strategy 2016 - 2021

| Priority 1: Prevent homelessness by providing a high quality housing advice service to clients in all housing tenures, by sustaining tenancies and by mitigating the negative effects of welfare reform | | | | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------|---------------------------|---|---|---------------------------|
| How this priority will be achieved | Key Actions | When | Resources | Target | Key Officers | Comments /Progress |
| Implement the recommendations made to improve the housing options service following the Diagnostic Peer Review | Implement the key actions within the DPR improvement plan document | April 16 | Within existing resources | DPR improvement plan fully implemented | Housing Options Team Leaders | |
| Develop good quality, easily accessible housing advice materials, including web based material which reflect the diversity of applicants needs and abilities | Review and revise the information around homelessness on the councils website and leaflets | Start Jan 16 and ongoing | Within existing resources | Information provided to clients up to date, relevant and easily accessible, clients better informed | Housing Options Team Leaders | |
| Prevent homelessness by helping people sustain their tenancies across all tenures through the increased provision of debt and welfare advice | Utilise staff across housing department to support and advise tenants Make timely referrals to partners agencies | Ongoing | Within existing resources | No tenancy breakdown as a result of lack of ongoing tenancy support and advice | Housing Options and Housing Management team leaders | |
| Work with partner agencies to mitigate the effects of the introduction of Universal Credit and the Benefit Cap | Hold regular meetings with HB leads and CAB | Ongoing | Within existing resources | Minimize negative impact of welfare reform | Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager | |
| Increase prevention of homelessness caused by domestic violence by working with partners to | Work with partner agencies, including police and specialist support services | Ongoing | Within existing resources | Victims able to maintain local support networks | Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager | |

| | | | | | | |
|--|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|---|---|--|
| keep victims safe within their current accommodation where this is appropriate | | | | | | |
| Flexible use of the Discretionary Housing Payments | Work with HB department to review use of DHP | From April 16 and ongoing | Within existing resources | DHP money fully utilized by the authority | Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|--|----------|---------------------------|---|---|--|
| Priority 2: Provide good quality suitable temporary accommodation and work towards ending the use of bed and breakfast even in an emergency | | | | | | |
| Ensure that enough ready to access temporary accommodation is available in the right location for homeless households to access support, maintain employment and education | Carry out a review of temporary accommodation usage/location/access to inform development of portfolio of suitable TA | April 16 | Within existing resources | Portfolio of suitable temporary accommodation available | Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager | |
| Ensure through the Council's Housing Strategy that the council is able to deliver sufficient units of social housing to allow the free flow of households from temporary accommodation into permanent housing | Regular meetings between housing and planning to identify the right mix of units in the required localities | Ongoing | Within existing resources | Regular supply of new affordable housing | Housing Strategy Manager | |
| Ensure through the Council's Housing Strategy that the council is able to deliver suitable supported housing for homeless households with complex needs | Carry out further work to establish the precise requirements and find a suitable partner to be able to deliver the project | April 18 | Within existing resources | New supported housing units delivered | Housing Strategy Manager | |

| Priority 3: Engage with the private rented sector to improve access to accommodation for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness | | | | | | |
|---|---|----------------------|---------------------------|---|--|--|
| Promote the council's services to private sector landlords | Explore ways via different media to encourage private landlords to work with the housing department. Provide a named officer for landlords to deal with | April 16 and ongoing | Within existing resources | | | Housing Options Team Leaders |
| Continue to encourage owners of empty properties to bring them back into use | Take appropriate enforcement action Investigate potential for additional schemes to bring empty homes back into use | Ongoing | Within existing resources | Decrease in long-term empty homes | | Empty Homes and Private Sector Housing Officer |
| Refer tenants within the private sector to appropriate support agencies to help them maintain their tenancies when difficulties first arise | Work with CAB and floating support provider to make timely referrals | Ongoing | Within existing resources | Increased tenancy sustainment within the private sector | | Housing Options Team Leaders |
| Have closer links between the Housing Options Team and the Housing Benefit Department to increase access to DHP | Regular monthly meetings with HB colleagues | Ongoing | Within existing resources | Increased use of DHP to prevent homelessness | | Housing Options Team Leaders |
| Review the council's Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme to see if it can provide greater incentives for private sector landlords to work with the scheme | Look at whether cash incentives could be used to incentivise landlords to work with the scheme | June 16 | Within existing resources | Increase use of private sector to prevent homelessness | | Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager |
| Continue to hold a | Carry out a consultation | June 16 | Within | Annual Forum | | Empty Homes |

| | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Landlords Forum and review other ways to connect with landlords | exercise with private landlords and agents as to what type of forum event they would like to engage with | | existing resources | held with increased attendance | and Private Sector Housing Officer | |
|---|--|--|--------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|

| Priority 4: Improving the Health and Wellbeing of homeless people | | | | | | |
|--|---|---------|---------------------------|---|------------------------------|--|
| Work in partnership with other key agencies to prevent individuals and families from getting into a housing crisis | Work with the council's Homelessness Partnerships Group to identify ways for better partnership working to identify vulnerable clients at the earliest possible stage | Ongoing | Within existing resources | Increased number of sustained tenancies | Housing Options Team Leaders | |
| Work with health partners to ensure that homeless households and linked into appropriate health services | Provide clients with details of health services in the areas they are housed and where appropriate make direct referrals | Ongoing | Within existing resources | Homeless households linked in to local health services | Housing Options Team Leaders | |
| Work with the West Essex Joint Referral Panel to ensure clients with mental health issues are appropriately housed | Attend the West Essex JRP and make referrals where appropriate | Ongoing | Within existing resources | Homeless clients with mental health issues appropriately housed | Housing Options Team Leaders | |
| Make appropriate referrals to support agencies to ensure homeless households have access to support that meets all their needs | Review support available for clients moving in to temporary. Identify new sources of provision accommodation. Create referral routes | Ongoing | Within existing resources | No tenancy breakdown or re-occurrence of homelessness due to lack of resettlement support | Housing Options Team Leaders | |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|----------------------|---------------------------|--|---|--|
| | (Uttlesford Frontline) | | | | | |
| Data sharing and data analysis with statutory and voluntary partners | Through the homelessness partnership use data sharing to identify gaps in service provision | Ongoing | Within existing resources | Gaps in service identified | Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager | |
| Review and strengthen existing protocols and implement new ones particularly with mental health, drug and alcohol services and probation | Review exiting provision and develop new working arrangements through joint working | April 17 and ongoing | Within existing resources | New protocols in place that better support joint working | Housing Options Team Leaders | |

If you require any further information about the Uttlesford District Council Homelessness Strategy 2015 – 2020, please contact the Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager on 01799 510671 or email jsnares@uttlesford.gov.uk or write to:-

Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager
Uttlesford District Council
Council Offices
London Road
Saffron Walden
Essex
CB11 4ER