



South
Cambridgeshire
District Council

Homelessness Review

2023

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South Cambridgeshire Hall

Cambourne Business Park

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Outcomes from the 2018 – 2023 strategy

The 2018 – 2023 strategy focussed on four main areas:

- Working closer with partner agencies to prevent homelessness
- New private rent initiatives
- Access to information
- Access to accommodation and support

Working closer with partner agencies to prevent homelessness

This was a priority of the Trailblazer project, which included many agencies signing up to the commitment to make homelessness the unacceptable outcome. The Trailblazer project came to an end in December 2020; however, great work was achieved with partner agencies and these links remain in place with a stronger commitment to work together to improve outcomes for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Specific outcomes

- Procedures in place for public services to refer those at risk of homelessness to the local housing authority, under their 'duty to refer'.
- Criminal Justice protocol
- Care Leavers protocol
- Increased casework with all homeless applicants (including non-priority homeless applicants), including personal housing plans.
- Mental Health, Substance Misuse and Housing toolkit
- Emmaus – increased referrals and supported the completion of pods to provide move on accommodation.



- Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation due to work on domestic abuse including joint panels such as MARAC and the Perpetrator Panel.

New private rent initiatives

Prior to the start of this strategy, the ending of an assured shorthold tenancy was the Council's main cause of homelessness and there was a severe lack of affordable accommodation in the private sector. Social rented accommodation was unable to keep pace with demand and therefore we needed to look to the private sector for alternative forms of affordable accommodation.

Specific outcomes:

- Increased supply of private rented properties through the Shire Homes Lettings private sector leasing scheme.
- Completion of pilot scheme for houses of multiple occupation (HMO's) within the Shire Homes Lettings scheme – this proved to be successful and has continued as business as usual.
- Evaluated the outcomes of the new business development officers, through the Trailblazer scheme, and methods to increase access to private rented sector, however, concluded that specific schemes were best achieved at a local level based on needs and supply.
- The Greater Cambridge Build to Rent Policy was published in July 2021 as an Annex to the Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy. This sets out the Council's expectations in terms of the delivery of Build to Rent and the provision of Affordable Private Rent. Early discussions with developers on some of the strategic sites within South Cambridgeshire are ongoing regarding the delivery of Build to Rent as part of the overall housing delivery.
- Reviewed rent deposit guarantee scheme and agreed to bring this in-house and manage alongside other spend to save initiatives.



- Continued use of discretionary housing payments (DHP) specifically for homeless prevention.
- Continued close working relations with Ermine Street Housing in their capacity as a Council owned company and private landlord.

Access to information

Access to information was identified as a priority prior to this strategy, and events over the past couple of years have also highlighted the need for access to helpful and useful advice and information that can help residents to resolve their housing difficulties and / or that they can access at any time via the internet.

Specific outcomes

- Updated written and website information covering advice on rights and responsibilities to help residents prevent homelessness from their current accommodation.
- Updated information covering advice on housing options available.
- Improved working to ensure better advice and information for partner agencies. This includes joint working on protocols and pathways.

Access to accommodation and support

Affordability is a severe problem in South Cambridgeshire and access to affordable and decent accommodation is crucial to meeting housing need. Solutions therefore centred around preventing homelessness and providing temporary or longer term social and affordable rented homes.

Specific Outcomes:

- Increased the supply of affordable accommodation through new build programme, private sector leasing and access via other private rent incentives.



- Regular monitoring of temporary accommodation including hostel vacancies and the use of B&B.
- Increased the number of properties under management by Shire Homes Lettings private sector leasing scheme.
- Continued to work with the City and contributed to the Single Homeless Service.
- Commenced the use of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) within the Shire Homes Lettings scheme.
- Worked with Emmaus to improve referrals from the Housing Advice Team to Emmaus and supported the completion of six Pods on site.
- Enabled existing and potential tenants to access appropriate support to enable them to maintain their accommodation – this included floating support, visiting support, Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) money advice service and discretionary housing payments.
- Worked with our Housing Benefit colleagues to support clients through the Universal Credit roll out in South Cambs.
- Reviewed the lettings policy in light of impact of Homeless Reduction Act responsibilities and duties.
- Awarded Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation.
- Created money advice and income maximisation roles within the team.
- Accommodated four Syrian families, 10 Afghan families and worked with over 350 Ukrainian households, totalling 769 guests, to offer support and assistance as required.

Profile of South Cambridgeshire

South Cambridgeshire is located centrally in the East of England region at the crossroads of the M11 / A14 roads and with direct rail access to London and to Stansted Airport. It is a largely rural district, which surrounds the city of Cambridge and comprises 105 villages. It is surrounded by a ring of market towns just beyond its borders, which are generally 10 – 15 miles from Cambridge. Together, Cambridge, South Cambridgeshire and the market towns form the Cambridge Sub-



Region. South Cambridgeshire has long been a fast-growing district and in 2021 census recorded a population of 162,119, showing an 8.9% increase since the 2011 census.

Affordability remains a growing problem for South Cambridgeshire with the cost of buying or renting on the open market consistently high; with South Cambridgeshire being the second most expensive district for house prices in the county after Cambridge City. The average house price in October 2022 was £513,935, an increase of £46,598 in just six months (compared to an increase of £23,897 in the East of England and £22,664 in England). The lower quartile house price to income ratio is 11.4 for South Cambridgeshire (October 2022) – generally house prices of 3 to 3.5 times income are considered affordable.

There is an active private rental market with high demand. Rents in the district are expensive, making most private rentals unaffordable for those on benefits or a low income. Private rentals at the lower end of the market are few and far between and for those relying on housing benefit to pay their rent, the difference between the Local Housing Allowance rate and the median rent payable represents an average shortfall of £65 per week (October 2022).

Links with other Strategies

Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy

This strategy outlines the strategic direction for housing activity in Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire. Its purpose is to set the context as to how both councils aim to meet the housing challenges facing the area for both new and existing homes and residents.

The strategy is currently under review but will support a strong emphasis on preventing homelessness.

Sub-Regional Homeless Strategy Action plan

As a sub region there are a number of common themes shared between ourselves and our neighbouring authorities. These are therefore joined together within a sub-



regional action plan where we can monitor trends, issues and good practice and identify opportunities for joint working between ourselves and other agencies.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership

The Partnership is made up of key agencies in the county that have a role in preventing and providing services and support to survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence. These key partners form the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategic Board. The Board is responsible for producing and updating the Strategy and action plan for domestic abuse services in Cambridgeshire, along with commissioning safe accommodation and outreach support, the Independent Domestic Violence Advisory Service (IDVA's), awareness raising and training for professionals.

Cambridgeshire Safe Accommodation Strategy

This strategy sets out the ways in which provision for accommodation-based domestic abuse support will be developed, commissioned, and delivered. Accommodation-based domestic abuse support includes provision of support to victims and their children in a range of settings, including refuge accommodation, specialist safe accommodation, dispersed accommodation or sanctuary schemes. The strategy also covers how other forms of domestic abuse support will be provided including advocacy support, prevention advice, specialist support for victims with relevant protected characteristics, children's support, housing related support and counselling and therapy for adults and children.

The Joint Health and Wellbeing and Integrated Care strategy

The joint Health and Wellbeing and Integrated Care strategy highlights the importance of housing on health and wellbeing including a chapter focussed on housing and employment. In particular it includes actions around rough sleeping and access to health services, and homeless prevention and how early intervention from health services can have better outcomes.



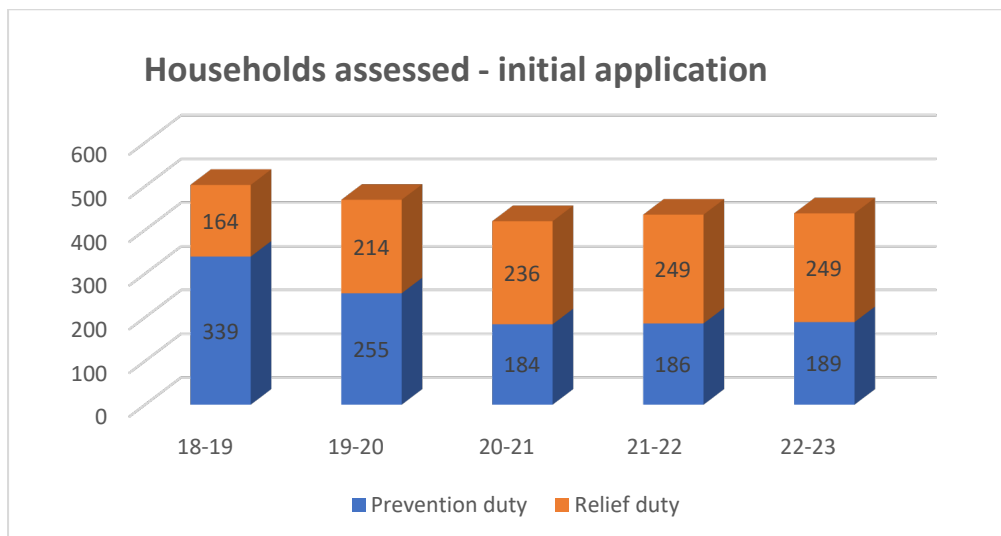
Chapter 2 – Homelessness in South Cambs

Current levels of homelessness

Homeless assessments

The following table shows the number of homeless assessments completed due to the applicant being homeless or at risk of homelessness. This has been relatively steady across the past five years and demand for the service remains high though anecdotally the main impact over recent years has been the complexity of cases. Under the Homeless Reduction Act there are two stages to prevention, the first being ‘prevention’ prior to the applicant leaving the accommodation they are to become homeless from, and the second being ‘relief’, where homelessness is resolved after they have become homeless, but prior to a main duty decision being decided. Statistics are recorded at each stage.

Our aim is to see most clients at prevention stage, as the earlier we see them the more chance we have of being able to resolve their homelessness. However, in the more recent years we have seen a shift towards more people seeking assistance when they are already homeless (relief stage). This reflects the impact of Covid, where people have been unable to make or extend any temporary arrangements and needed emergency assistance.





When we compare our figures for 2021 / 2022 to the East of England and the rest of England, we can see that whilst there are small differences, levels of prevention duties accepted are slightly higher across the East of England than relief, but across England as a whole there are slightly more relief duties accepted than prevention at the initial assessment.

Area	South Cambridgeshire District Council	East of England	England
Prevention duty accepted	42.5%	48.5%	46%
Relief duty accepted	56.8%	46.6%	49.9%
Not homeless	0.7%	4.9%	4.2%

Reason for loss of last settled accommodation

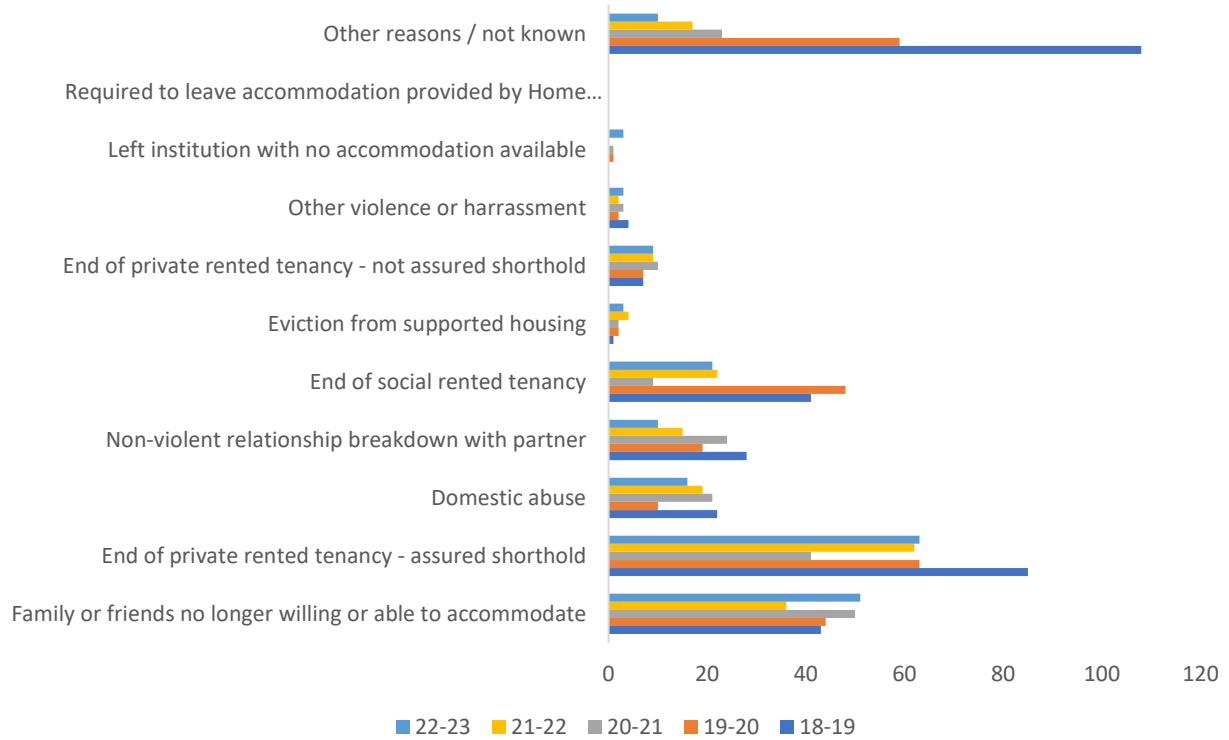
The following graphs show the main causes of homelessness at the prevention stage and the relief stage.

At the prevention stage the main cause is loss of an assured shorthold, followed by family or friends no longer being able to accommodate and domestic abuse. (Please note a considerable number of reasons are recorded as not known, which is largely due to an issue with the recording system and is reflected nationally – this is an ongoing issue that we are trying to improve).

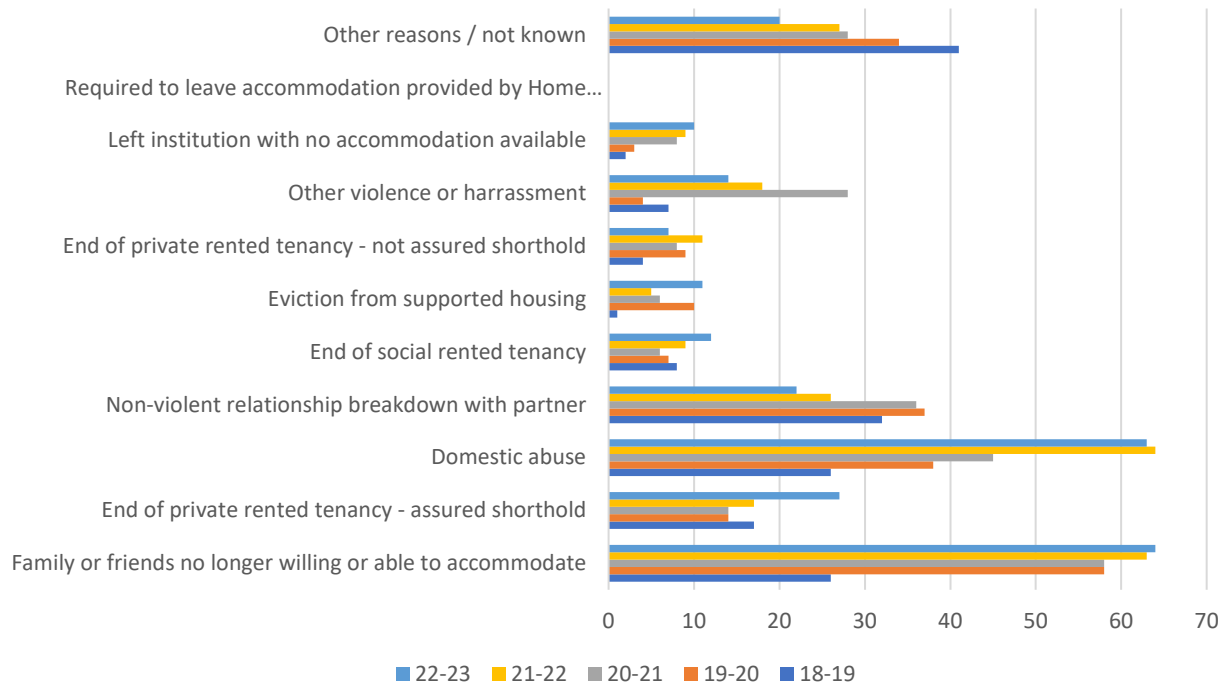
At the relief stage, where clients are coming into us with more urgent housing needs the highest causes of homelessness is family and friends no longer being able to accommodate and domestic abuse both of which have increased over recent years. Again, this reflects the impact of the COVID pandemic and an increase in family breakdown.



Reason for loss of settled – owed prevention duty



Reason for loss of settled – owed relief duty



(Estimated figures for Q4, 2022 / 2023)



If we look at the combined figures for prevention and relief duties accepted during 2021 / 2022, we can see that overall 'family and friends no longer willing or able to accommodate' is the highest reason for homelessness in the district. 'End of an assured shorthold tenancy' had been our highest cause of homelessness but this dropped in recent years, reflecting the ban on privately rented evictions during the pandemic, but is now on the increase again. Domestic abuse has also increased, becoming our third highest cause of homelessness in 2021 / 2022. This mirrors the main three causes of homelessness across both the East of England and England as a whole.

Area	Prevention	Relief	Combined
South Cambs	1.End of AST 33.3% 2.Friends and family 19.4% 3.Domestic abuse 10.2%	1.Domestic Abuse 25.7% 2.Family and friends 25.3% 3.Non-violent relationship 10.4%	1.Family and friends 22.35% 2.End of AST 20.05% 3.Domestic abuse 17.95%
East of England	1.End of AST 32.5% 2.Friends and family 26.5% 3.End of social rented 7.2%	1.Friends and family 30.4% 2.Domestic abuse 17.9% 3.Non-violent relationship 10.8%	1.Friends and family 28.45% 2.End of AST 21.15% 3.Domestic Abuse 12.25%
England	1.End of AST 33.1% 2.Friends and family 25.5% 3.Domestic abuse 7.8%	1.Friends and family 30.5% 2.Domestic Abuse 16.8% 3.End of AST 9.9%	1.Friends and family 28% 2.End of AST 21.5% 3.Domestic abuse 12.3%

*AST – Assured Shorthold Tenancy

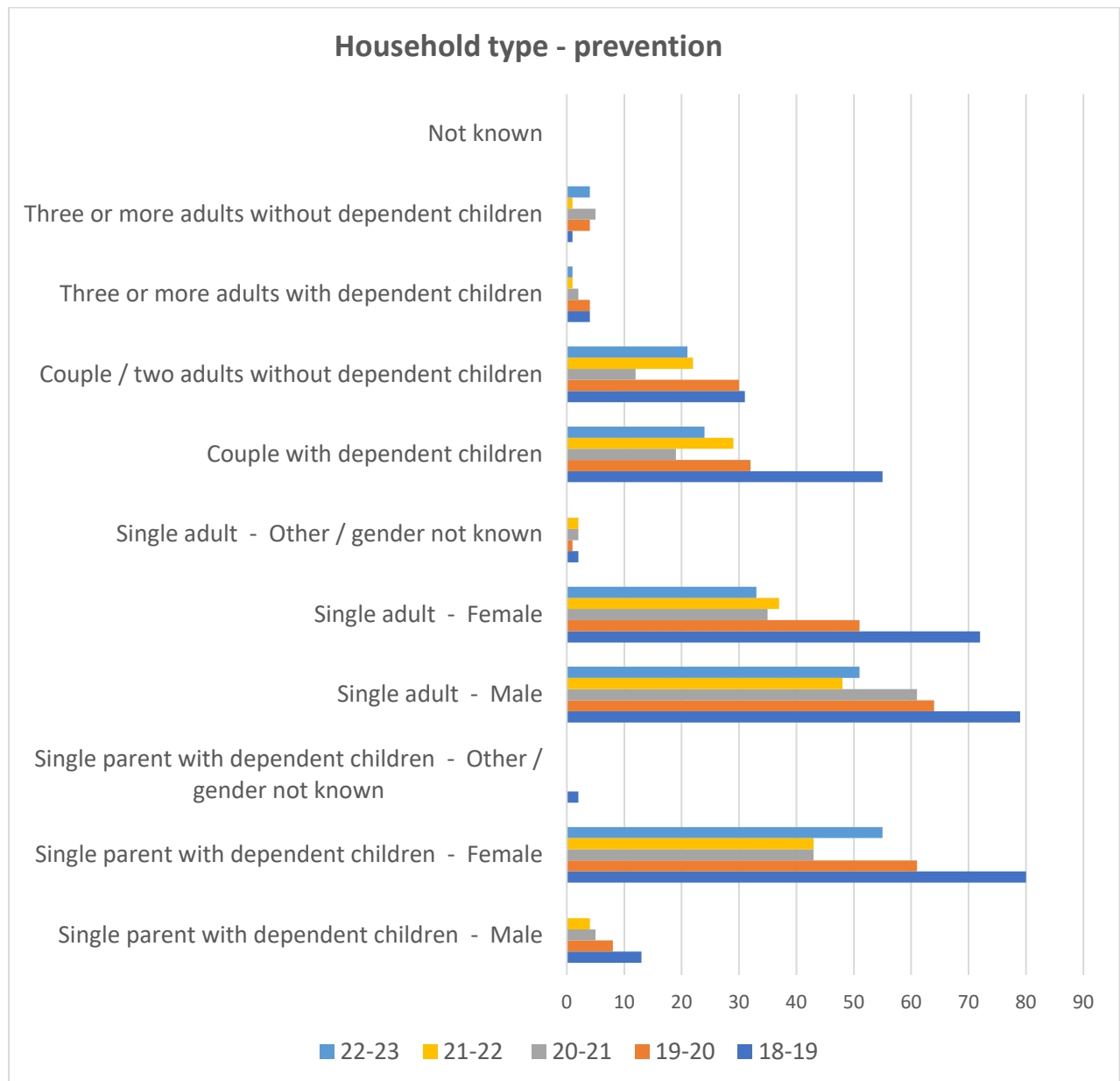


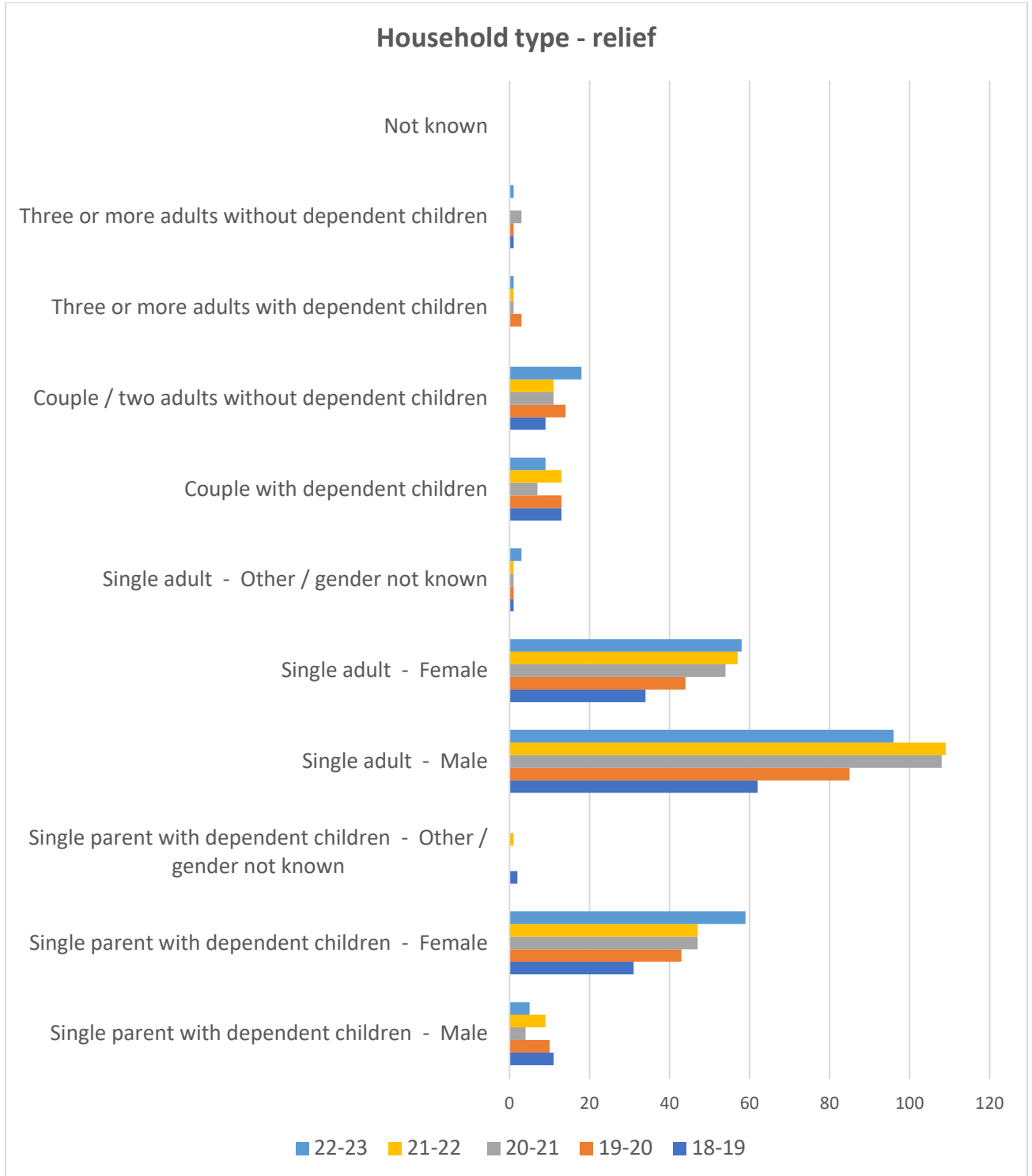
Household type

In the following tables we can see that the family compositions are different in terms of those who contact us at the earlier stage of prevention and those who approach us at an emergency stage.

Single people (with the greater proportion being single men) are more represented at the relief stage, possibly reflecting more insecure living arrangements, where notice is either not required or very short term.

These groups also show high representation at the prevention stage, although their numbers are lower, along with female single parents.



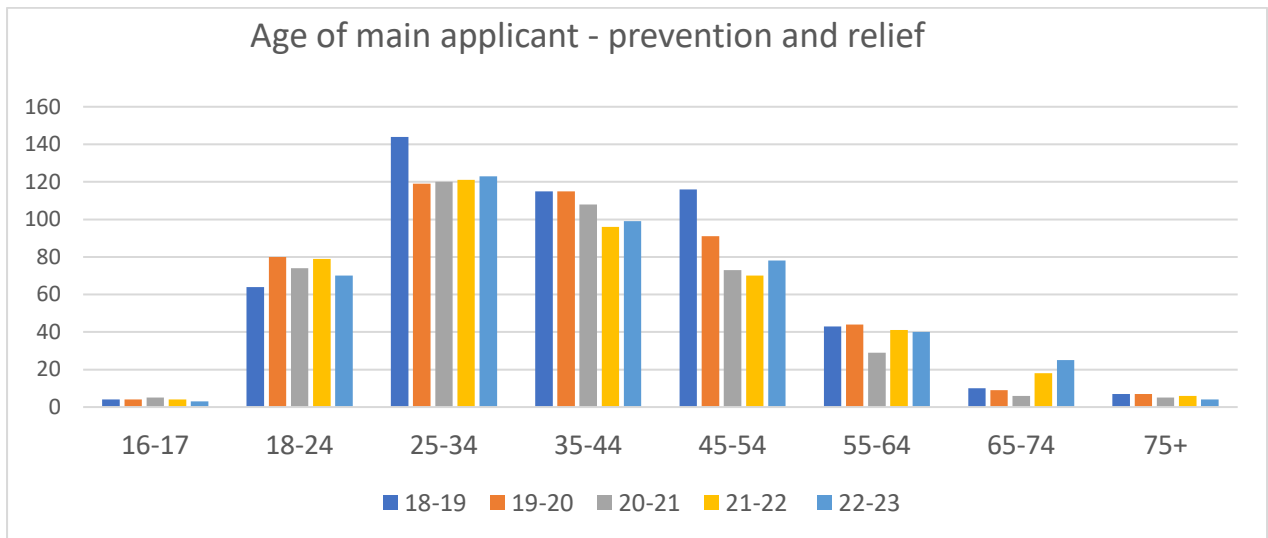


(Estimated figures for Q4, 2022 / 2023)



Age of applicants

The following table shows that the age of most applicants is within working age groups, with the highest numbers within the 25 – 34 age category. We receive very small numbers from the younger and older age range categories.



(Estimated figures for Q4, 2022 / 2023)

Employment status of those owed a duty

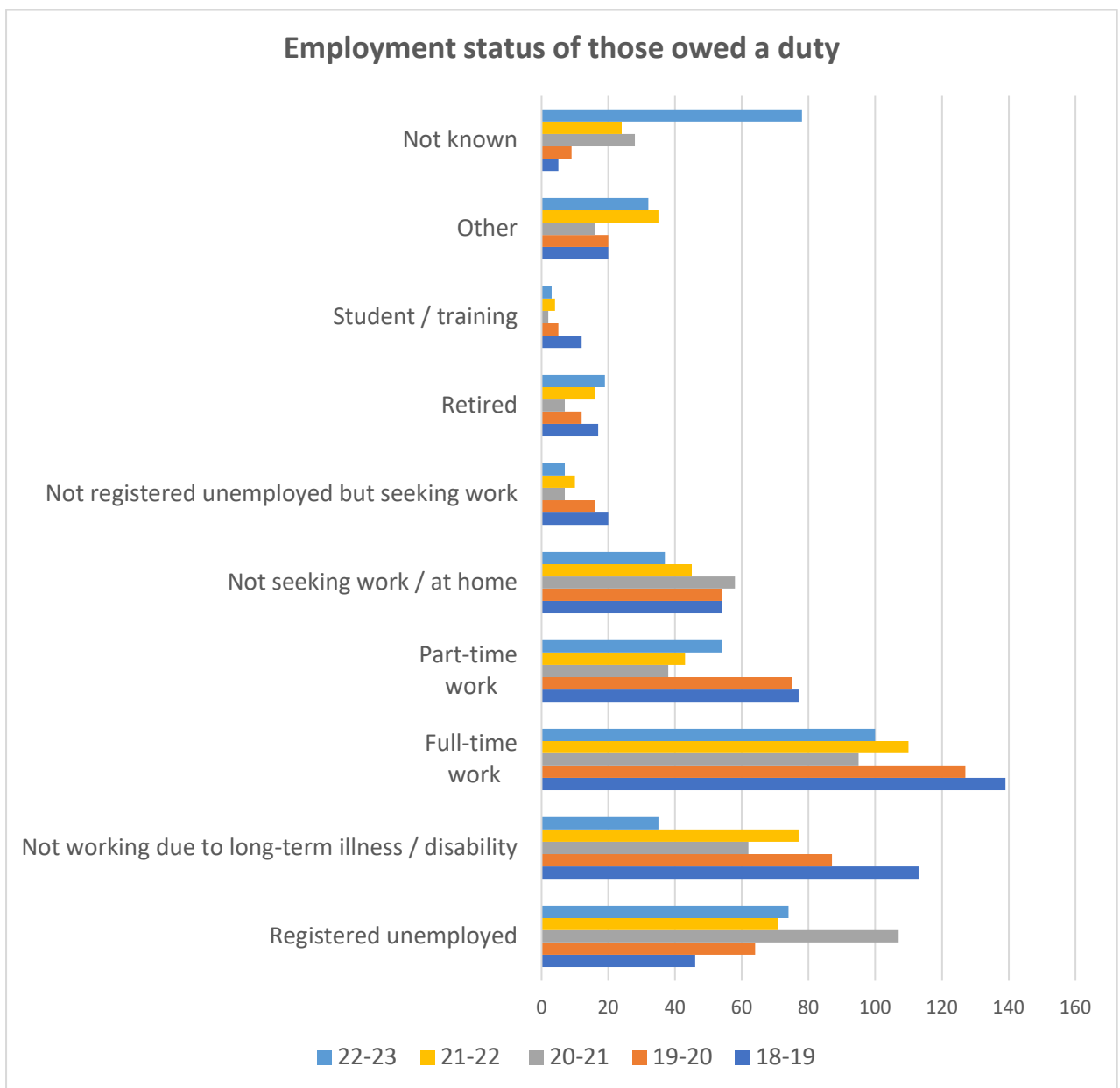
These figures vary over the previous five years, however, with the exception of 2020 / 2021, the highest employment status for those owed a duty is working full time. This is followed by those who are unable to work due to long term illness or disability, reflecting the high level of vulnerability amongst applicants, and those registered as unemployed.

Employment status categories:

- Registered unemployed
- Not working due to long-term illness / disability
- Full-time work

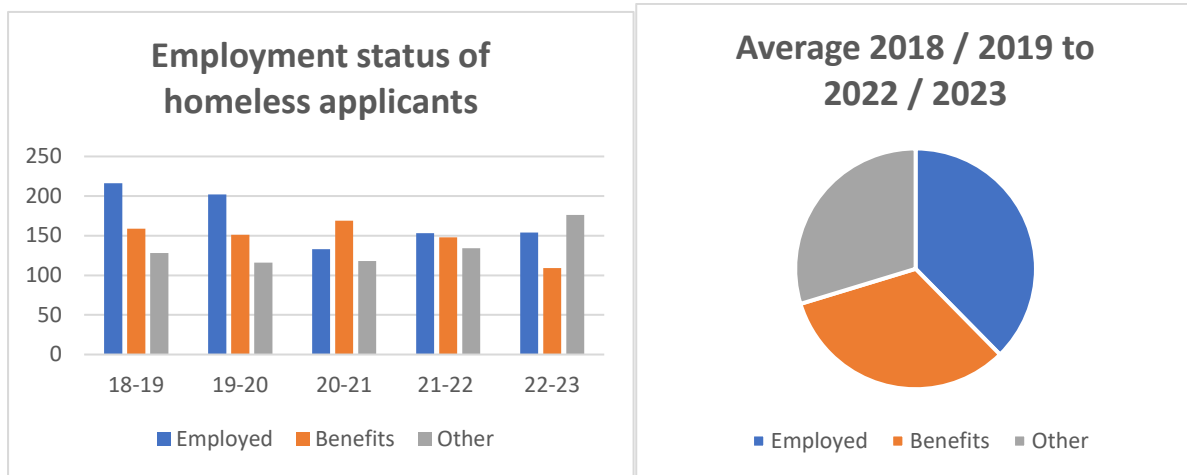


- Part-time work
- Not seeking work / at home
- Not registered unemployed but seeking work
- Retired
- Student / training
- Other
- Not known





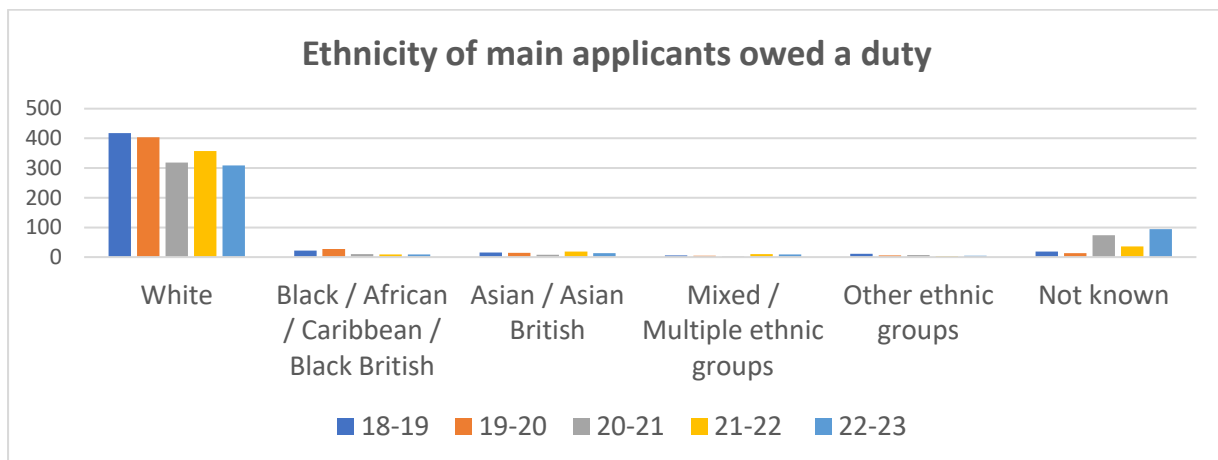
Grouping these categories into employment, benefits and other, it is clear that a high proportion (the highest proportion in three of the four previous years) of applicants are in employment.



(Estimated figures for Q4, 2022 / 2023)

Ethnicity

The ethnic minority population in South Cambridgeshire remains very small and this is reflected in the ethnicity of our applicants. In the 2021 census 11% of South Cambridgeshire’s population were from ethnic minority groups. This is the same proportion as those owed a homelessness duty.

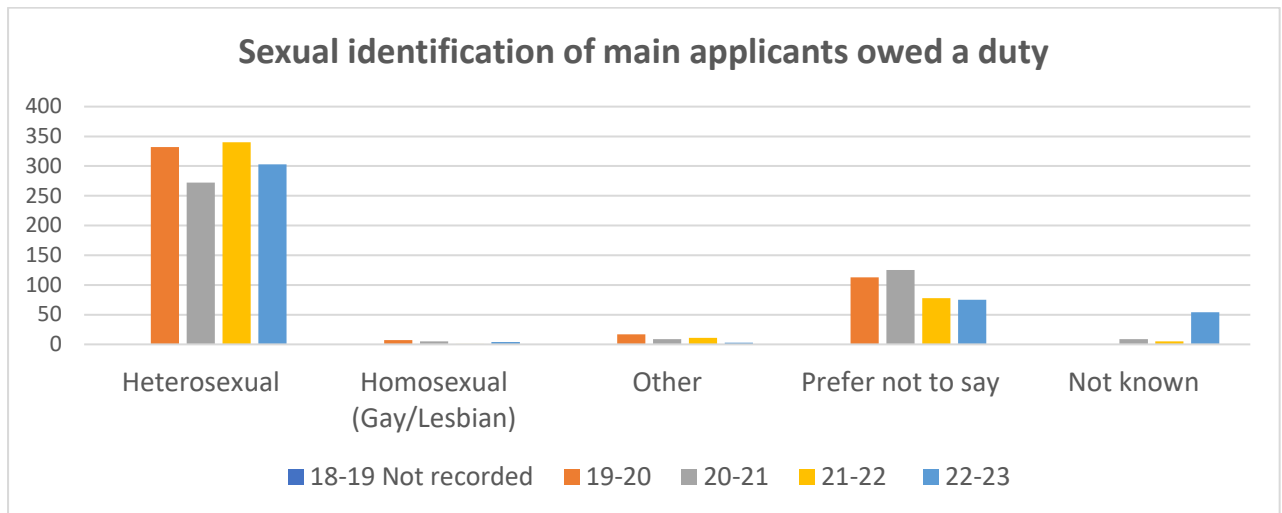


(Estimated figures for Q4, 2022 / 2023)



Sexual identification of main applicants owed a duty

The highest proportion of applicants are heterosexual, with the second highest being ‘prefer not to say’. In 2021 /2022 79% of homeless applicants considered themselves to be heterosexual, compared to 90% of the population of South Cambridgeshire in the 2021 census. However, 18.1% of homeless applicants preferred not to answer this question compared to 7.2% of the South Cambridgeshire population in the census. This could reflect our need to be more inclusive to those in need from gay, lesbian or other communities. For example, for those fleeing domestic abuse we have been / are developing more awareness and signposting to specialist services to support these groups and the type of abuse they may experience.



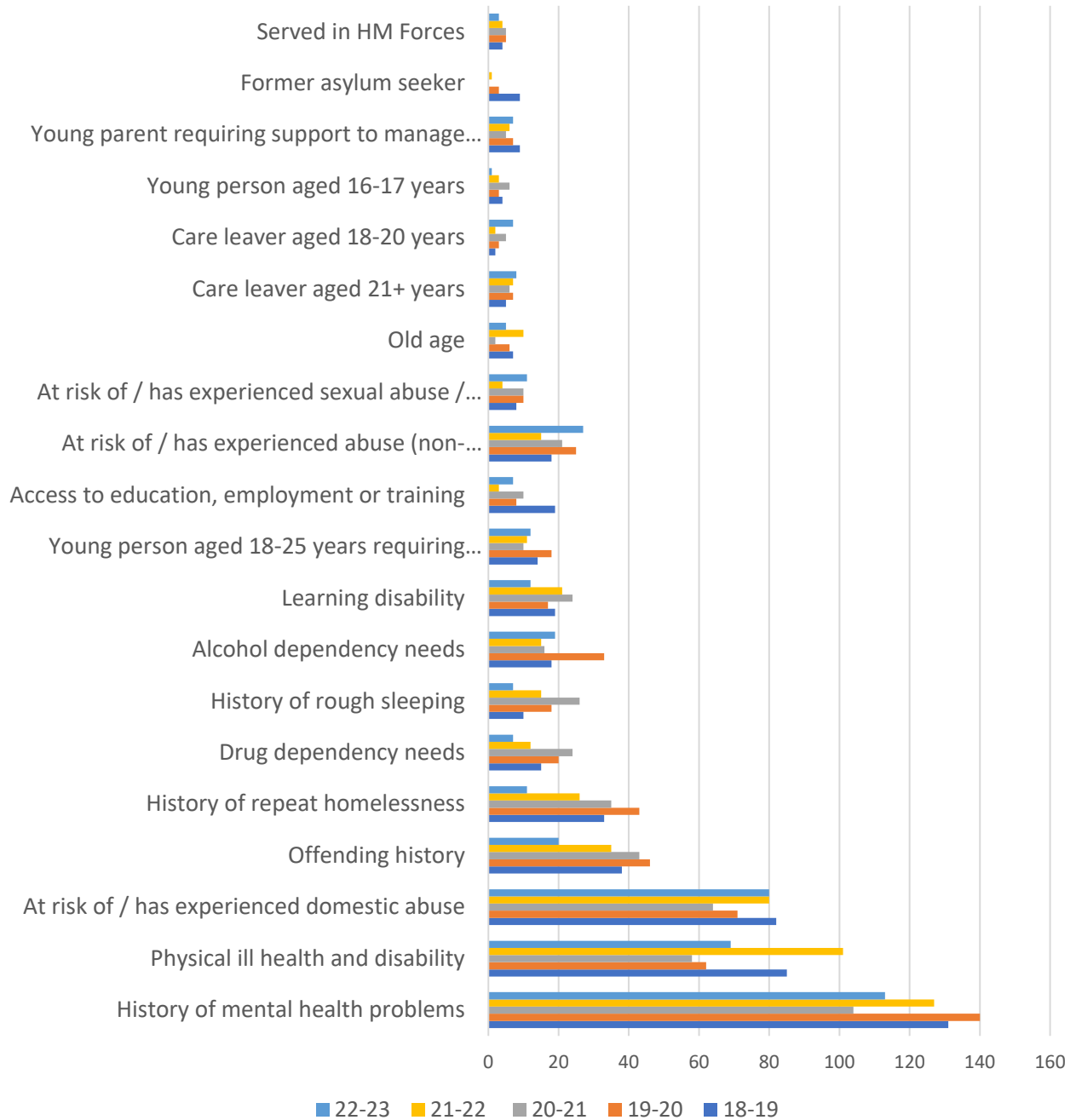
(Estimated figures for Q4, 2022 / 2023)

Support needs

The highest category of support needs is a history of mental health problems. This highlights the importance of mental health support for the many vulnerable applicants who need help with their housing. This is followed by physical health and disabilities showing the impact health can have on someone’s welfare. The third highest relates to domestic abuse and correlates with one of our highest causes of homelessness.



Support needs of households owed a prevention or relief duty

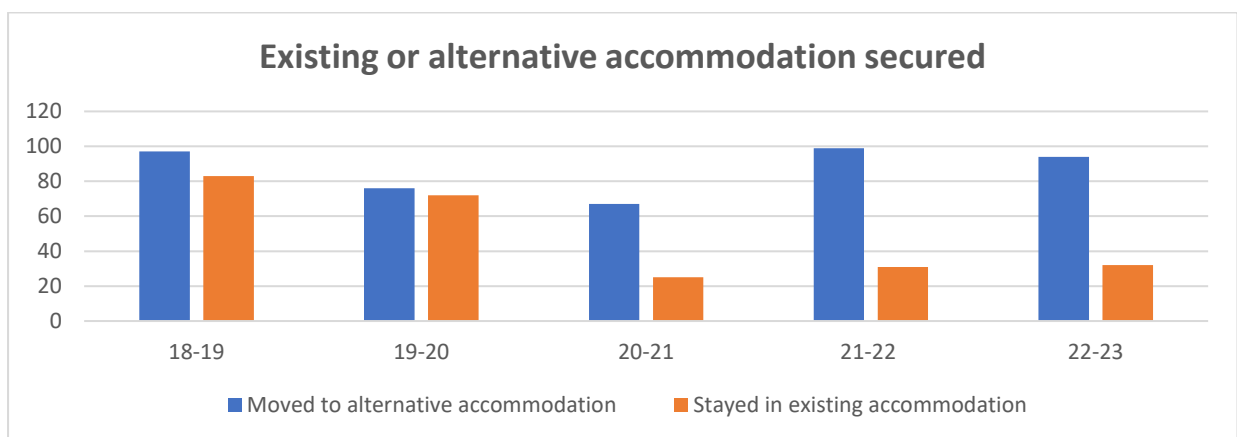
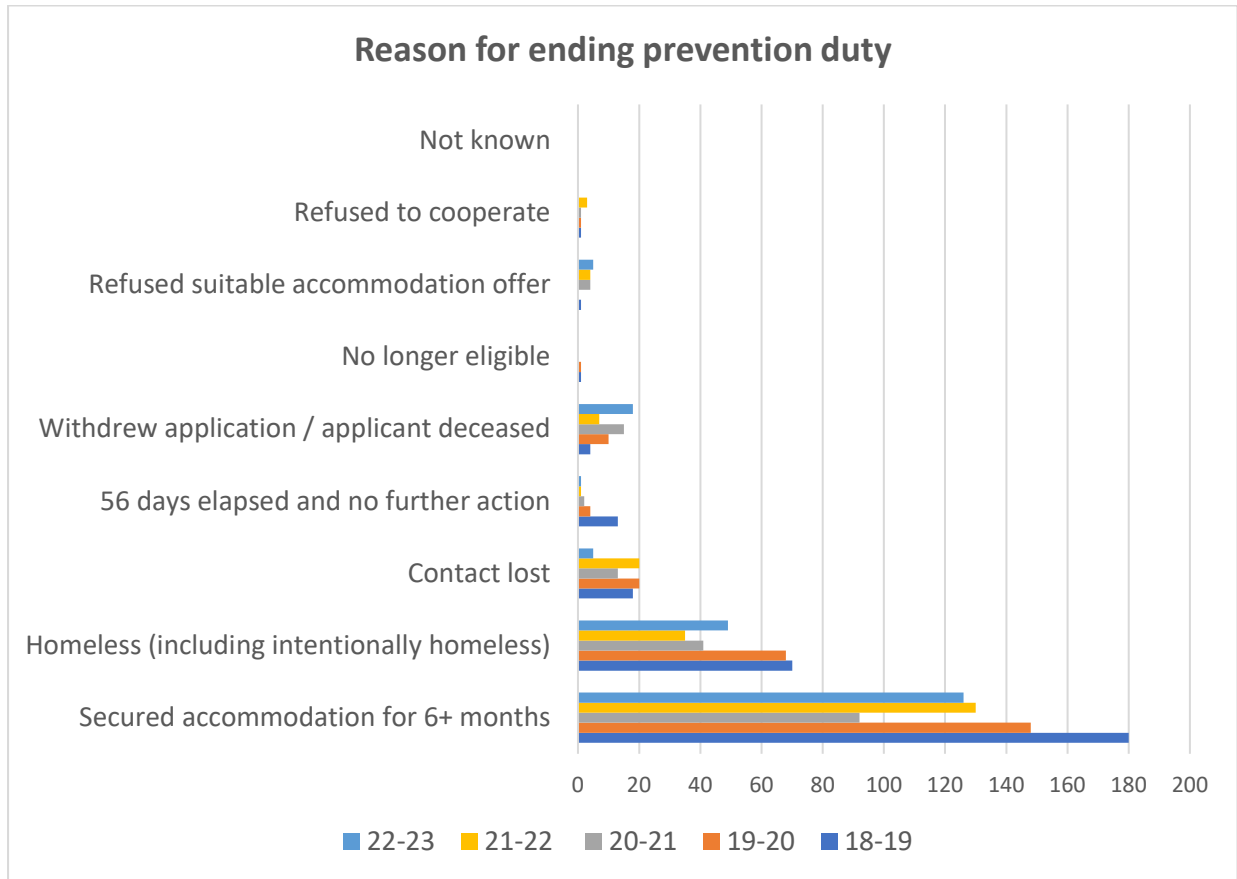


End of prevention and relief duties

In the majority of cases, (where applicants are not already homeless when they approach us), homelessness is resolved at the prevention stage. In 2020 / 2021, 65% of homelessness resolved at this stage, compared to 56% nationally. In a small



amount of cases applications are withdrawn, or contact is lost, but most others continue with their homeless application onto the relief stage.



(Estimated figures for Q4, 2022 / 2023)

In most cases the best outcome would be to enable an applicant to remain in their current accommodation and ideally most incidents of homelessness would be

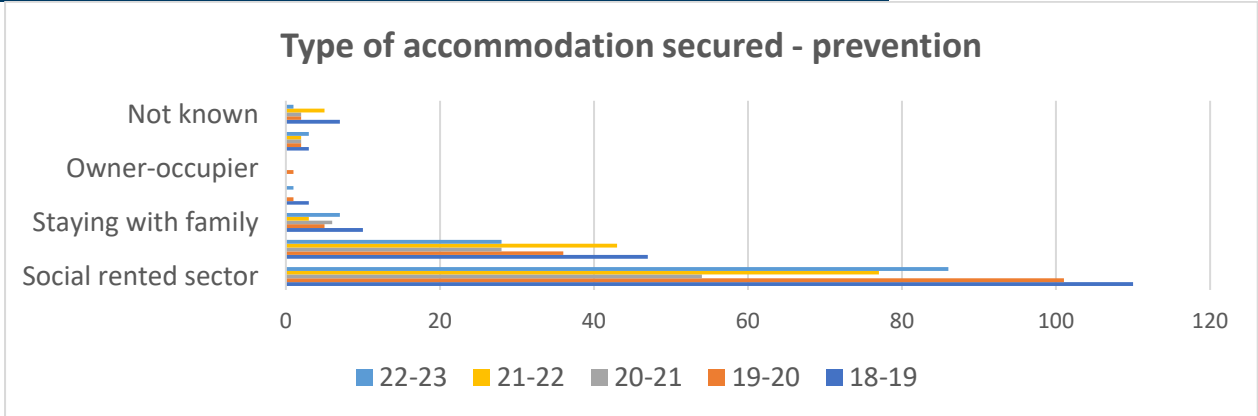


prevented in this way. However, the above graph shows that in more cases than not homelessness is prevented through finding alternative accommodation. In the earlier years there was little difference between the two outcomes, however, this changes from 2020 / 2021 where significantly more homelessness is prevented through moving to alternative accommodation. This reflects our experience through the pandemic where people approached us from more insecure accommodation that could not be maintained.

The following table shows how we compare to the East of England and England as a whole for the first three quarters of 2022 - 2023. All figures show that, in the majority of cases, homelessness is prevented by finding an alternative solution to their current home.

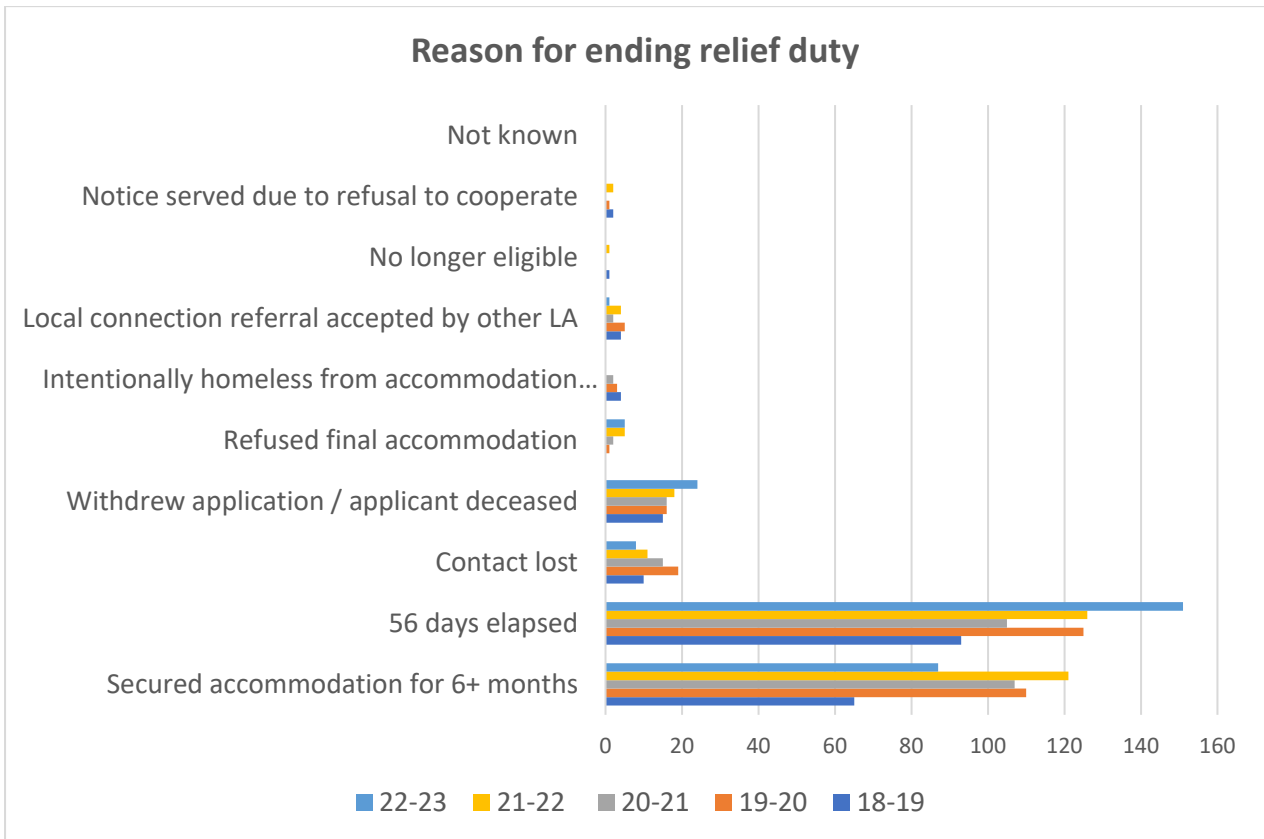
Area	Moved to alternative accommodation	Stayed in current home
South Cambridgeshire	74.5%	25.5%
East of England	69%	31%
England	66.5%	33.5%

The following graph shows that social housing is the main means of preventing homelessness. This will involve an offer through Home-Link our choice-based lettings scheme, although this has reduced over the five-year period. Homeless applicants are awarded a Band B at prevention stage, to give them a level of priority at this stage, although it is by no means a guarantee of an offer. The private rented sector also plays an important role in preventing homelessness and we offer assistance through a rent deposit scheme and our private sector leasing scheme, Shire Homes Lettings.



(Estimated figures for Q4, 2022 / 2023)

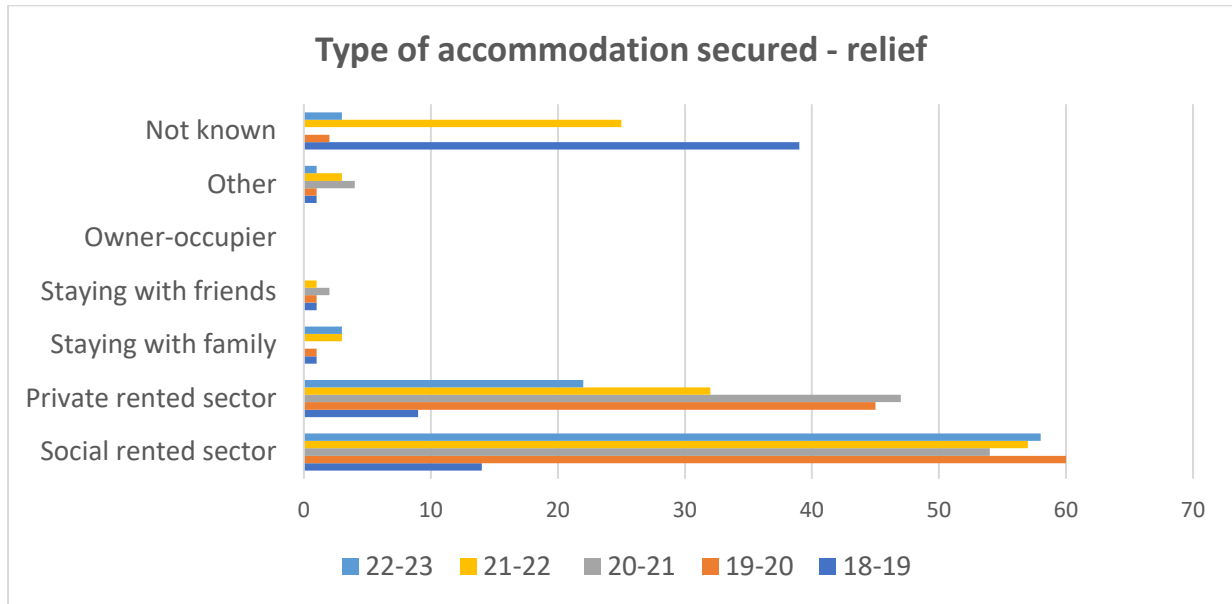
Looking at the main reasons for ending the relief duty and a high proportion are ended through securing alternative accommodation. However, 56 days having elapsed is slightly higher in most years. Where we have been unable to assist the applicant into alternative accommodation within 56 days of the relief duty starting, we can then end the relief duty and continue to the next stage of their homeless application.



(Estimated figures for Q4, 2022 / 2023)

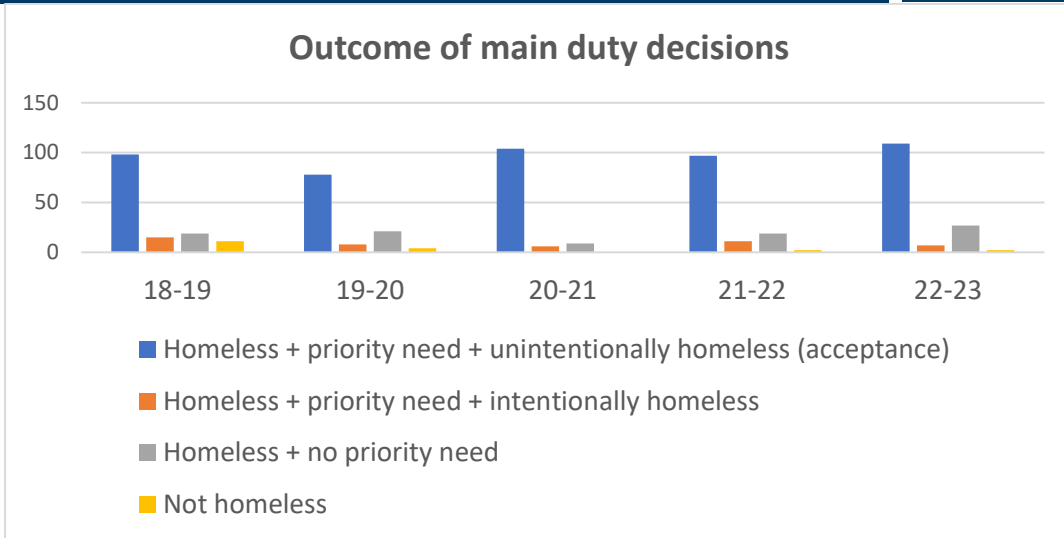


Again, at the relief stage, the highest option for securing alternative accommodation is social rented housing through our Home-Link scheme, followed by private renting.



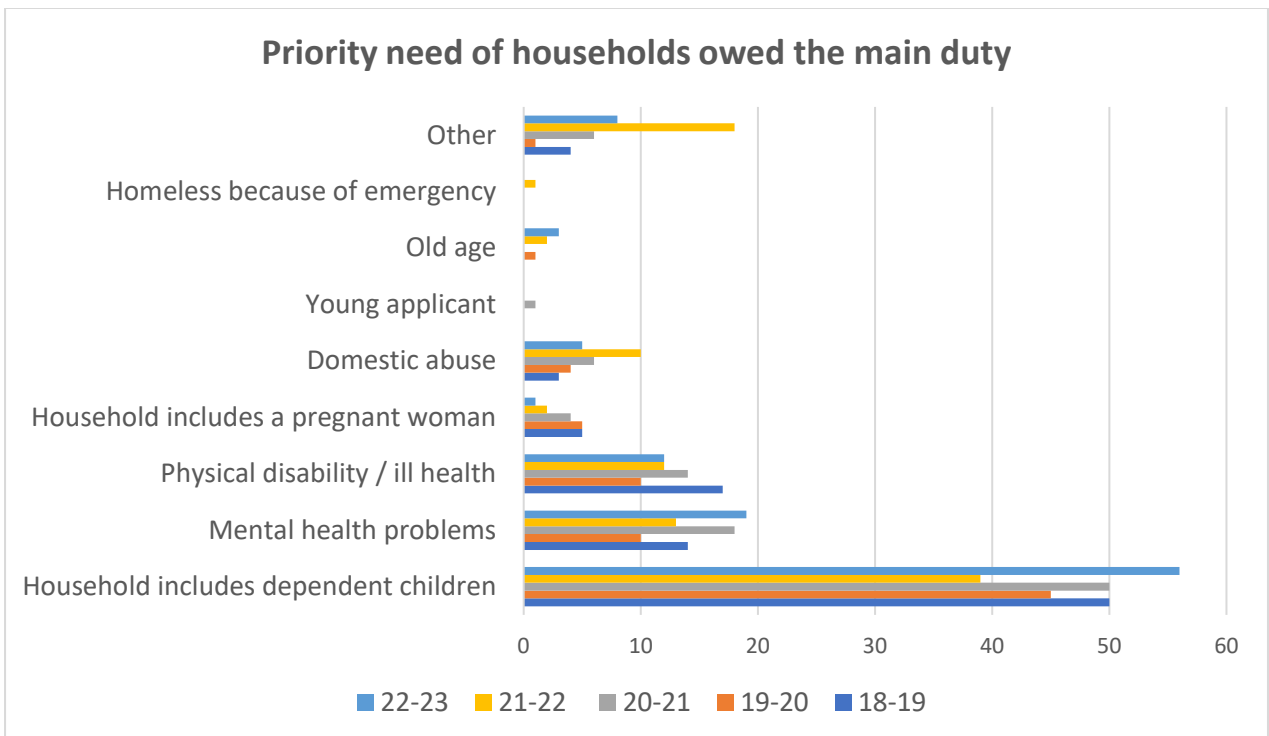
(Estimated figures for Q4, 2022 / 2023)

Where homelessness cannot be prevented or relieved, we will go on to make a main duty decision. This will include determining if the applicant has a priority need for accommodation, such as dependent children, pregnancy or an issue that makes them vulnerable within the meaning of the Act, such as mental or physical health issues, fleeing abuse or leaving care. We also need to determine whether they have become homeless intentionally where they have either done something or not done something that had resulted in their homelessness, such as not paying rent that was affordable to them or anti-social behaviour. As the table below shows, at this stage in the process, the full duty is accepted towards most applicants. This is because Housing Advice Officers are constantly advising their clients on the best options for them, investigating their circumstances and explaining the likelihood of any decision. Those who are likely to be assessed as not being in priority need, or intentionally homeless will not be owed an ongoing duty by the Council and therefore alternative options are all the more important to them.



(Estimated figures for Q4, 2022 / 2023)

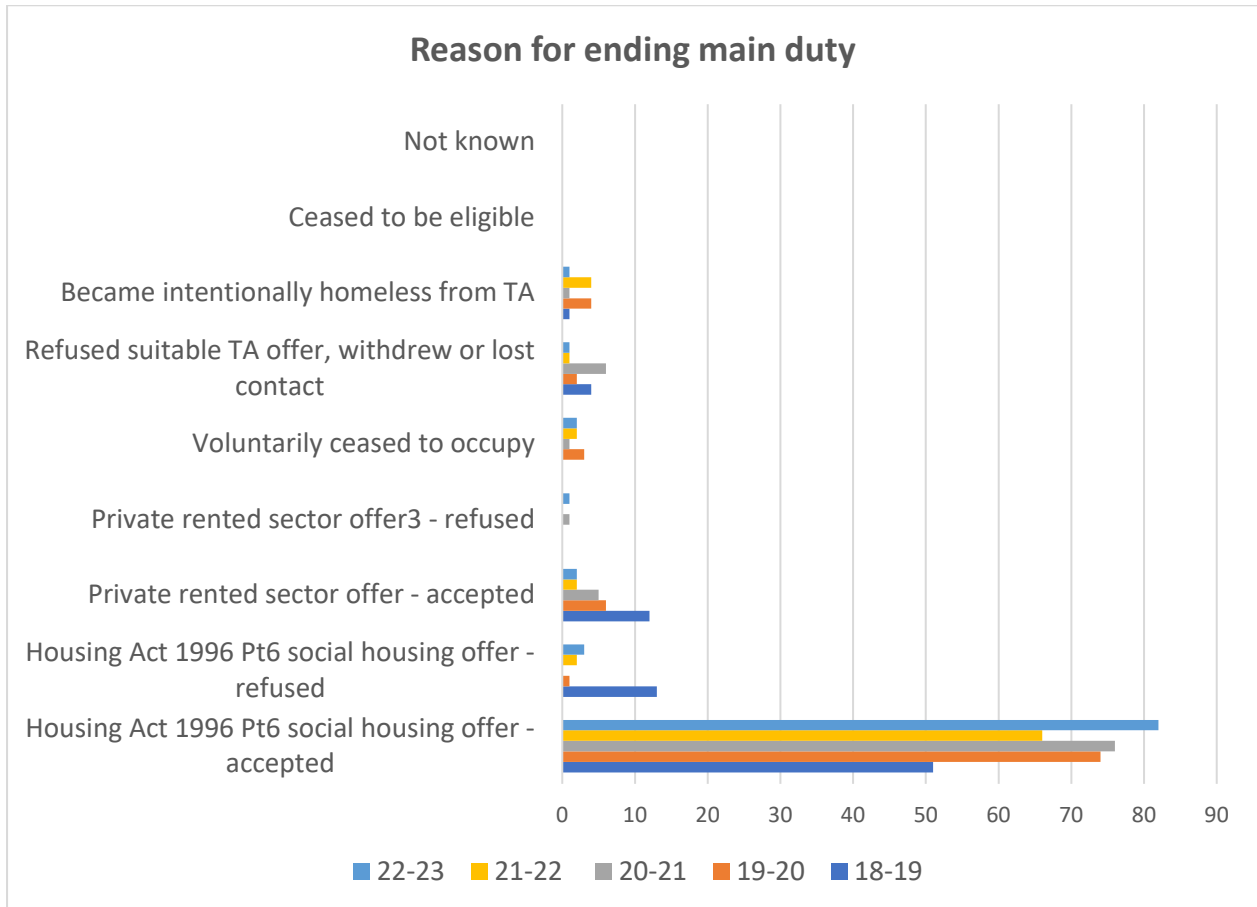
The following table shows the reason for priority need of those who go onto the main duty decision stage. In the majority of cases this is due to the family having dependent children. For those who don't have children the reason for priority need is largely down to mental or physical health problems, closely followed by domestic abuse.



(Estimated figures for Q4, 2022 / 2023)



As the table below shows, by far, the main reason for ending main duty is due to the household receiving an offer of social rented through the Home-Link scheme.



(Estimated figures for Q4, 2022 / 2023)

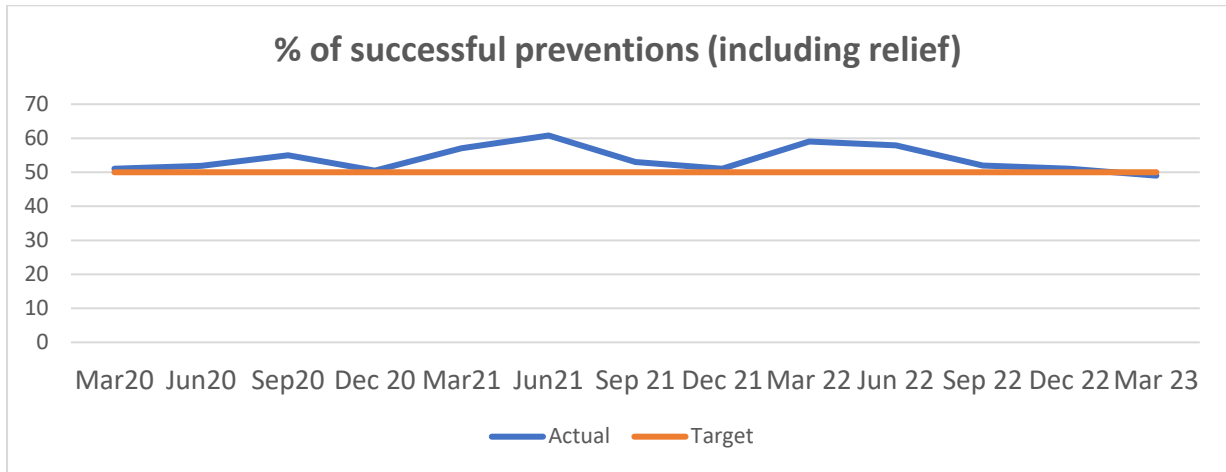
Key Performance Indicators (KPI's)

We measure two KPI's for this service:

1. % successful homeless prevention as a proportion of all homelessness cases closed.
2. Number of households with family commitments who have been accommodated in B&B for longer than six weeks. (This is a new KPI which has been measured since 2022 and reflects a statutory requirement not to accommodate families with children in B&B for more than six weeks. To date we have met the target of zero.)



The table below shows how we have performed against our prevention target, generally at or above the target of a 50% success rate.



Levels of Rough Sleeping

Annual Rough Sleeping Estimate

The Council are required to complete a rough sleeping count or provide an estimate each year by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). Because of the rural nature of the district and the relatively few numbers of rough sleepers it is not feasible to undertake rough sleeping counts across the district on a particular night. Therefore, SCDC provide an estimate each year. District Councillors and Parish Councils are written to asking whether there are any known rough sleepers in their areas. In addition, staff and local agencies - such as the police and homeless services - are contacted and asked to respond with any rough sleepers they were aware of.

Historically our figures have been very low. Our figures are generally in the region of 0 - 3 although the estimate undertaken in November 2022, showed the highest figure in recent years:



Date	Rough Sleeping estimate
November 2018	0
November 2019	2
November 2020	3
November 2021	2
November 2022	5

Nationally there has also been an increase in rough sleeping with a 26% increase between 2021 and 2022. Nationally the rate of rough sleeping per 100,000 population is 5.4, (Official statistics February 2023). In South Cambridgeshire, this rate is 3.1 per 100,000 population. South Cambridgeshire does not therefore have a significant problem with rough sleeping, in proportion to its population, and it is unlikely that this will become a problem in the future since rough sleepers tend to migrate to Cambridge City where there are support services / facilities. It is, however, acknowledged that there are a number of single people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness that could be at risk of rough sleeping and therefore solutions are required for this group.

Helping Rough Sleepers during the pandemic

The risk of rough sleeping was evident during the pandemic when it was harder for people to stay temporarily with friends and family, and we were required to accommodate those rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping, under 'Everyone in'. During this period (end of March 2020 to July 2021) we accommodated 32 individuals on this basis.

End to rough sleeping plan

During 2021 / 2022 we developed an 'end to rough sleeping plan'. This includes objectives on prevention, intervention and recovery for rough sleeping.



Stage	Objective
Prevention	<p>Reducing rough sleeping through early intervention through protocols and pathways including the criminal justice system and care leavers.</p> <p>Access to private rented accommodation including a rent deposit scheme and our private sector leasing scheme, Shire Homes Lettings</p> <p>Links with housing register applications that is, all applicants identified as at risk of homelessness are referred to housing advice.</p>
Intervention	<p>Street outreach service provided by P3</p> <p>Personal housing plan for each rough sleeper</p>
Recovery	<p>Increase provision of single person accommodation including HMO's through Shire Homes Lettings, more single person accommodation through new build schemes and supporting the provision of six modular homes at Emmaus.</p>

The government published its rough sleeping strategy “Ending Rough Sleeping for Good” in September 2022, which continues this approach of providing prevention, intervention and recovery actions for ending rough sleeping. These objectives therefore remain relevant and will feed into our new Homeless Strategy action plan.

P3 Street Outreach Service

A joint bid between Huntingdonshire, East Cambs and South Cambs District Councils to the Rough Sleeping Initiative funds was successful in 2019. This was for a Street Outreach Service that could provide dedicated assistance to rough sleepers in the three districts. The service supports people sleeping rough, works to find solutions and helps them off the street.



Since December 2019 to August 2022, 55 referrals had been made to the service regarding rough sleepers in South Cambridgeshire, representing 26% of the total referrals received by the service. Many of the referrals may provide vague or unclear information about the location of a rough sleeper, resulting in only 33% of referrals being located, however, the service has a high success rate with regards to engaging with people with 89% of those found, engaging in a needs assessment and support plan with the Outreach Service. 37.5% of referrals gain access to accommodation either through support from P3, the housing team or independently.

Other assistance offered to assist or prevent rough sleeping

Advice and assistance offered to single homeless people include requests for welfare checks, advice on private rent, referral to the rent deposit guarantee scheme and referrals to suitable properties within our private sector leasing scheme. Our private sector leasing scheme, Shire Homes Lettings, provides rooms in shared houses / houses of multiple occupation for single people. However, we also recognise that some single people are particularly vulnerable and sometimes unsuitable for living in shared accommodation. We have therefore been working with Ermine Street Housing to find a solution and increase the number of self-contained single person properties. Ermine Street will use their existing model for assessing financial viability, and South Cambs will pay Ermine Street the amount required to bridge the gap between actual costs and those required to make the purchase financially viable.

Chapter 3 – Key impacts

COVID pandemic

The pandemic had a significant impact on homelessness and the service. The team had to adapt to a new way of working whilst continuing to provide advice and assistance to those in housing need and fulfil our statutory responsibilities. Interim requirements were directed through legislation and guidance including the need to accommodate those who were rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping and



changes to the rules around evictions for those in privately rented accommodation. In addition to this, residents were concerned about their own financial positions and affordability of their current homes, and it was difficult to move people on from temporary accommodation due to a reduced number of properties going through the voids process. This led to a high increase in temporary accommodation costs as more B&B placements were used.

Private renting

Temporary measures to protect tenants were put in place during the coronavirus pandemic. These included:

- a stay on possession proceedings between 27 March and 20 September 2020
- a stay on evictions between 17 November 2020 and 31 May 2021
- extended notice periods between 26 March 2020 and 30 September 2021

These measures have now ended.

Whilst this had a positive effect on the levels of homelessness during the pandemic, along with a temporary uplift in the local housing allowance, there is concern about the ongoing impact on homelessness, particularly linked to rent arrears, affordability and the economic climate.

Rough sleepers

At the beginning of the pandemic, the increase in demand largely came from those already in insecure accommodation, or already homeless through, for example, sofa surfing. When temporary arrangements broke down there were little, if any, options for alternative arrangements with family and friends.

Under 'Everyone In' local authorities were instructed to provide emergency accommodation for anyone sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough or where they were in accommodation where they could not self-isolate.



Cost of living crisis

Following on from the COVID pandemic is the cost-of-living crisis, where affordability becomes even more difficult. The cost of fuel and households having to make difficult decisions between rent, heating, and sometimes eating has the potential to put many people at risk of homelessness. The cost-of-living crisis is impacting both working and non-working households.

The Council agreed a cost-of-living package of almost £400,000 to help individuals, families and businesses in the district. This includes additional funds for Discretionary Housing Benefit payments and Discretionary Council Tax discounts along with the expansion of warm hubs, warm packs and food parcels.

We have also used our homeless prevention grant to create three additional posts within the housing advice and homelessness service, to increase the provision of money advice, affordability assessments and signposting to specialised services to help us prevent more homelessness whilst costs are rising.

Refugee schemes

Since the Homes for Ukraine scheme began 414 sponsors have taken Ukrainian guests into their homes. There are currently 233 sponsors providing a home to Ukrainian guests. This is among the highest number of arrivals from Ukraine in the country.

We have a moving on team who have been working to prevent homelessness where hosts can no longer accommodate their guests. They have rematched 84 guests with new hosts and have helped to secure alternative accommodation for 22 households so far. They work closely with hosts and the welfare team to offer advice and support to help people either remain where they are or to move when appropriate. We are working closely with other teams and with Housing Associations to secure accommodation and prevent homelessness. We are also working with Shire Homes who have provided the scheme with eight properties so far.

The Council have also secured housing for five Syrian families under the UK Vulnerable Person and Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme and for another



nine Afghan families. The support provided to families under this scheme is provided by Cambridge City resettlement team.

Domestic Abuse Act

The Domestic Abuse Act received Royal Assent and became an Act of Parliament on 29 April 2021. A key aspect of the act is that it created a statutory definition of domestic abuse, emphasising that domestic abuse is not just physical violence, but can also be emotional, coercive or controlling, and economic abuse. As part of this definition, children under 18, are explicitly recognised as victims if they see, hear or otherwise experience the effects of abuse.

The act also established in law the role of Domestic Abuse Commissioner and placed a duty on local authorities in England to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation and provided that all eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse automatically have 'priority need' for homelessness assistance. District Councils in Cambridgeshire are working collaboratively with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Domestic Violence Partnership to meet the housing needs of households experiencing domestic abuse.

In order to improve its response to domestic abuse, South Cambridgeshire District Council committed to achieving accreditation with the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA). Full accreditation was achieved in November 2022. Some of the changes that have been implemented include:

- Domestic abuse training programmes for all employees delivered by a domestic abuse specialist.
- Updated policies and procedures including a tailored policy and procedure to support staff and a separate policy to support residents. A network of Domestic Abuse Workplace Support contacts to provide guidance and signpost support.
- Closer working arrangements with specialist support services
- Targeted publicity and awareness raising campaigns



The council remains committed to improving its response to domestic abuse and this continues to be an important aspect of the work undertaken by the housing colleagues.

Chapter 4 – Existing temporary accommodation and options available

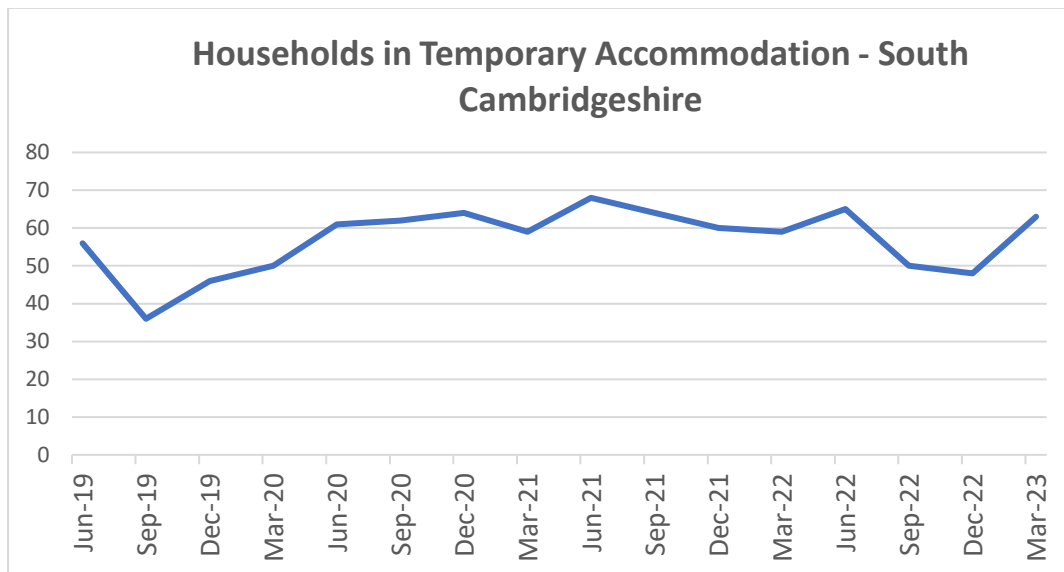
Temporary accommodation

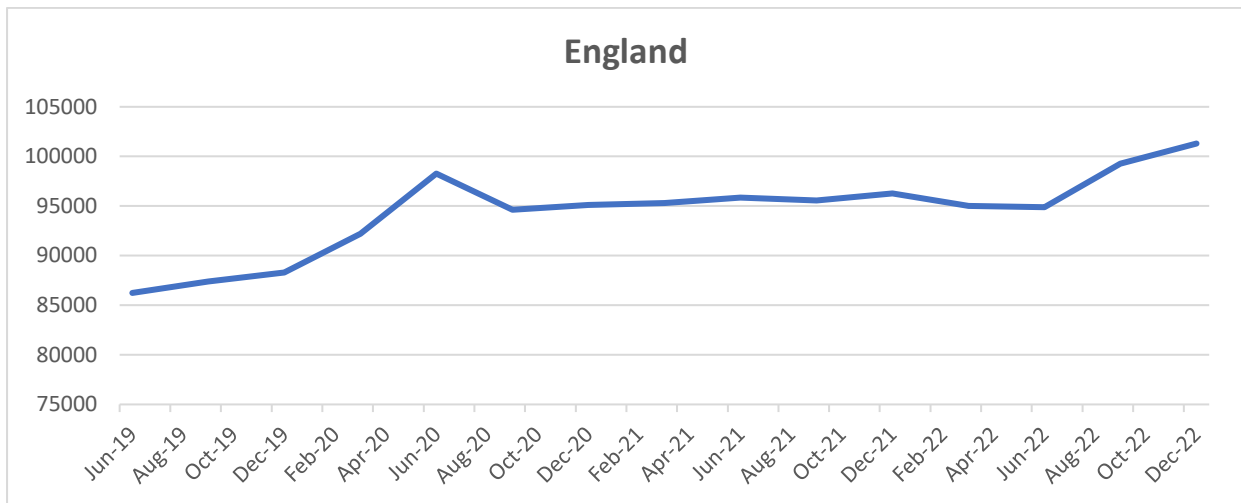
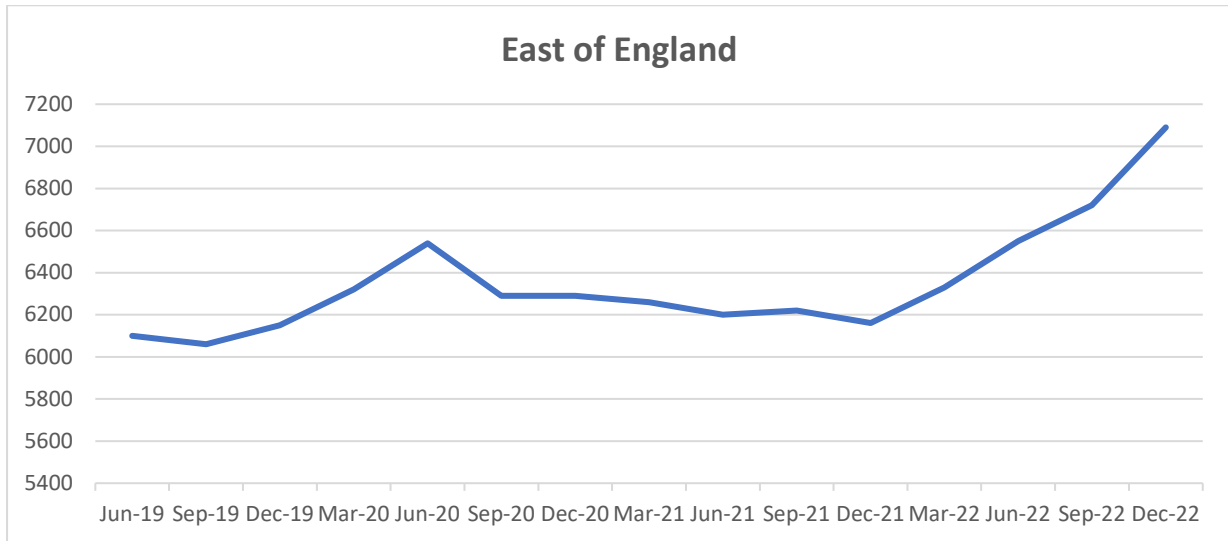
The Council has the following resources for temporary accommodation:

- 30 self-contained flats provided and managed by Sanctuary Housing
- Four hostel rooms managed by Sanctuary Housing
- Varying numbers of self-contained SDCDC properties

When these are full or there are no suitable vacancies B&B accommodation will be used, until such time as a suitable property can be identified.

The following table shows the number of households in temporary accommodation at the end of each quarter. This has fluctuated over the course of the last four years, though a general increase since the COVID pandemic and subsequent cost of living crisis.



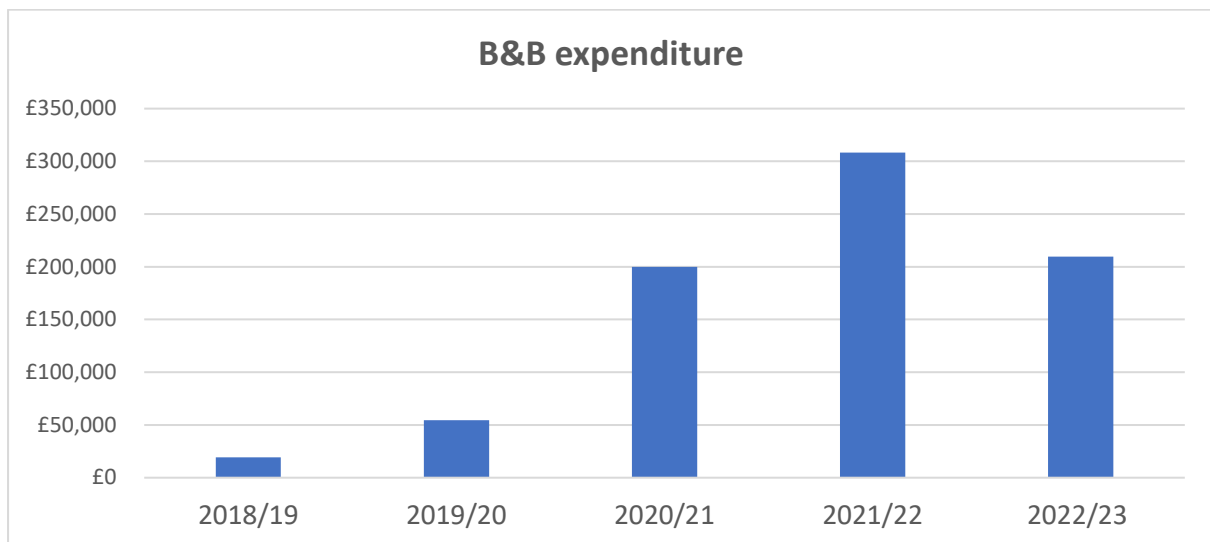


Comparing our figures to the East of England and England as a whole and, whilst we experienced the same spike around April to June 2020, largely due to COVID and, in particular, the ‘Everyone In’ requirements, our numbers have remained proportionally higher in the following years. This reflects the teams concerns over a lack of availability within our temporary accommodation due to limited move on accommodation. Lettings to social housing slowed down due to fewer voids coming through and it was more difficult to find suitable and affordable privately rented accommodation. Appointment times also backed up during this time, resulting in applicants being placed in temporary accommodation whilst awaiting their appointments.



Cost of B&B

The following table shows the amount we have spent over the past five years on B&B, which has increased dramatically over the last three years. Most expenditure on B&B is for single people who are vulnerable and unsuitable for shared accommodation. As we have very few self-contained single person accommodation, this can result in lengthy stays in B&B which is also unsuitable and expensive. In addition, the above reasons for ongoing higher numbers in temporary accommodation, will also apply to the higher costs of B&B. This is an area where we recognise we need to find alternative solutions.



Shire homes Lettings

Shire Homes Lettings is our in-house private sector leasing scheme. This is operated through a SCDC solely owned company to enable Assured Shorthold tenancies to be issued and provides a private rented housing solution. The scheme takes away the main concerns people may have in relation to private renting. Although the tenancies are Assured Shorthold tenancies there is more peace of mind for tenants that their tenancies will be renewed (lease arrangements with owners are generally for three years), no rents are above the Local Housing Allowance and therefore an affordable option and SCDC staff manage the scheme providing a reputable and professional service.



The purpose of having a private sector leasing scheme is to provide access to affordable, good quality private rented accommodation to help prevent homelessness. The scheme can also be used to provide temporary accommodation for those owed a homelessness duty and as an offer of suitable accommodation to end our homelessness duties.

As of March 2023, Shire Homes Lettings has 67 properties and five houses of multiple occupation (HMO's) providing 21 single occupancy rooms. The scheme has housed over 150 households since its inception in 2017.

Other accommodation / specialist support

Supported specialist accommodation is largely located within the City of Cambridge (and therefore not within the boundaries of South Cambridgeshire District), as it is close to facilities, services, transport links etcetera. Although SCDC does not have specific nomination rights to most of the specialist schemes, referrals can be made to many of the young people's schemes via the in-form facility shared by other partners. The Council has nomination rights to 10 bed spaces at the YMCA for young people aged 16 - 25 as well as a shared emergency bed space with Cambridge City Council.

Supported accommodation for the mental health client group is administered by the monthly accommodation forum at Cambridge and Peterborough Foundation Trust (CPFT). Officers can support applicants within the forum if they have been referred by a Community Psychiatric Nurse, but there are no direct referral mechanisms. Residents of supported accommodation who are ready to move on, can be assessed under the Home-Link Sub-Regional choice-based lettings scheme and, where appropriate, will be awarded Band A.

Permanent accommodation

Council housing

SCDC is a stock holding authority with 5,295 social rented homes. The stock profile has a strong bias towards provision for older people with 21% being sheltered housing and a further 29% being bungalow accommodation. Whilst there is no age restriction on our bungalow accommodation, this is likely to be more attractive to



older people and priority is given to those with mobility issues where adaptations have been provided in the bungalows. Sheltered housing is available to those of pensionable age, or those with disabilities. (Asset Management Strategy 2021 - 2026)

Stock Category	Bedsit	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4+ bed	Total
House (general needs)	0	40	551	1,801	70	2,462
Flat (general needs)	0	133	95	0	0	228
Bungalow (general needs)	13	393	1,077	31	1	1,515
Sheltered housing	7	489	592	2	0	1,090
Total	20	1,055	2,315	1,834	71	5,295

(Asset Management Strategy 2021 - 2026)

The lack of smaller / single person accommodation is increasingly presenting a difficulty in rehousing single homeless people in priority need. This trend is likely to continue as welfare reforms have resulted in an increased demand for smaller accommodation. Meanwhile, pressures remain on the stock of family housing especially for 2-bedroom accommodation.

The New Build Council Housing Strategy 2020 - 2025 (Revised 2023) retains the aims from the previous New Build Strategy from 2015 which are still relevant but takes account of changes to policy and practice. This includes:

- Increase the supply of housing, which is affordable to local people
- Re-balancing of housing supply (number of bedrooms) to offset welfare benefit changes
- Increase the housing choices available to people with disabilities – including an increased supply of wheelchair accessible housing
- To make the best use of the Council's land and property assets
- Reducing fuel poverty and promoting energy efficiency
- Being able to build homes that achieve high standards of design and construction; and the procurement of new homes to achieve best value for SCDC



Following the elections in May 2018 a revised target was set in the Business Plan for the number of new build homes acquired by the Council, increasing the target from 35 to 70 over five years giving a total of 350. South Cambs met the initial target to double the amount of new council homes and a revised target of 75 new homes a year was set for 2023 / 2024 and 2024 / 2025. Between 2018 / 2019 and 2022 / 2023, 309 council owned properties have been built including rented and shared ownership.

Over the last three years (up to March 2023) on average 318 allocations have been made each year from the housing register into Council stock, 24% of which are generally for sheltered accommodation and would not normally be suitable for homeless households.

Housing Associations / Registered Social Landlords

Affordable Housing Completions since the publication of the Homelessness Strategy in 2018:

2018 / 2019 – 341 affordable homes

2019 / 2020 – 379 affordable homes

2020 / 2021 – 264 affordable homes

2021 / 2022 – 340 affordable homes

2022 / 2023 – 529 (indicative)

Since the last strategy, there have been on average 371 new affordable homes completions each year. The Greater Cambridge Affordable Rents Policy was published in July 2021 as an Annex to the Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy. This looks to keep Affordable Rents at an affordable level of 70% of a market rent in South Cambridgeshire and 60% for Cambridge City and the city fringes crossing the border with South Cambridgeshire. This was developed following the sharp increase in the Local Housing Allowance rates from March 2020, which adversely affected the affordability of Affordable Rents where these were set using the new LHA rates.

There has been a drop in completions for 2020 / 2021 and 2021 / 2022 which can be attributed to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, with construction being stalled, people unable to move and the lack of supplies and materials.



The number of lettings made to RSL's on average each year is 93.

Choice Based Lettings (CBL)

The Cambridgeshire sub region introduced their CBL scheme in 2008, called Home-Link. The lettings policy was reviewed in 2021 to ensure it remained compatible with the new legislation.

As at 31 March 2023, there were a total of 1,918 applicants on the housing register for South Cambridgeshire, split into the following housing needs bands by bedroom need:

Banding	1-bed (of which sheltered)	2-bed (of which sheltered)	3-bed	4+bed	Total
A	102 (37)	57 (3)	71	36	266
B	131 (59)	168 (8)	175	55	529
C	475 (92)	129 (6)	25	2	631
D	230 (116)	179 (9)	72	11	492
Total	938 (304)	533 (29)	343	104	1,918

Affordability has become an increasing issue in relation to allocations made through the Home-Link scheme. There are two main strands to this:

- 1) The difference in rent levels, with 'affordable' rents on new build properties being considerably more expensive than the rents on existing properties. For example, a new two bed flat at £195 pw attracted far fewer bids than an older two bed house where the rent was £126 pw.
- 2) Landlord practices which place a pressure on low-income households. For example, the requirement for tenants, including those in receipt of benefits, to fund Rent-in-Advance and requests for prospective tenants to provide a deposit to secure a property viewing.

Work is ongoing between Home-Link Management Board and our Home-Link partners to address this to ensure properties offered through Home-Link continue to meet the needs of our applicants. This includes updates to the Partnership



agreement to encourage better allocation practices (for example, in terms of Rent in Advance), liaison with Housing Development and Strategy partners in terms of the bidding preferences and improvements to the Home-Link website to provide advice and signposting in relation to money advice. In addition, this council has invested in specialist money advice posts to support households with managing with increased financial pressures. As part of this work, Money Advisers have started to develop a tenancy training program to support new tenants understand their responsibilities and to help them budget.

Home Ownership

South Cambridgeshire is the second most expensive district for house prices in the county after Cambridge City. The average house price in October 2022 was £513,935, an increase of £46,598 in just six months (compared to an increase of £23,897 in the East of England and £22,664 in England for the same period). The lower quartile house price to income ratio is 11.4 for South Cambridgeshire (October 2022) – generally house prices of 3 to 3.5 times income are considered affordable.

For many households therefore living in the district home ownership continues to be unaffordable.

Private rent

There is an active private rental market with high demand. Nationally, the Index of Private Housing Rental prices reported record-high UK annual inflation in private rental prices (4.2% in the 12 months to December 2022). Rents in the district are expensive, making most private rentals unaffordable for those on benefits or a low income. Private rentals at the lower end of the market are few and far between and for those relying on housing benefit to pay their rent, the difference between the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate and the median rent payable represents an average shortfall of £65 per week (October 2022).



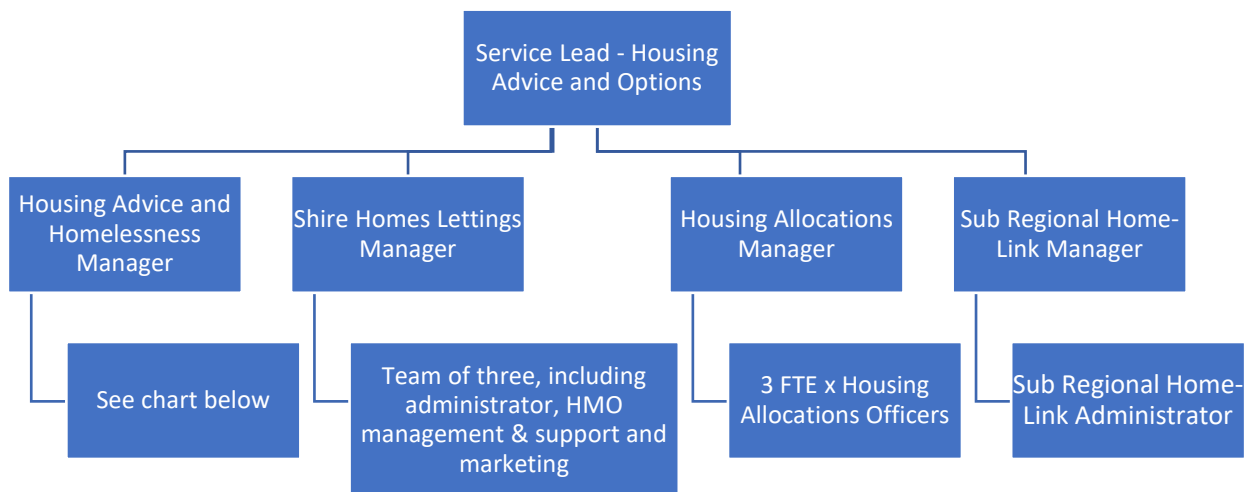
Property size	Median weekly rent	LHA	shortfall
1 bed	£196	£178	£18
2 bed	£253	£196	£57
3 bed	£311	£219	£92
4 bed	£392	£299	£93

(Cambridgeshire Insights – figures for October 2022)

Homeless prevention activities

The Housing Advice and Options Team

The housing advice and options team is part of the Housing department of the Council. The team provide services that are tenure neutral and available to all residents of South Cambridgeshire.



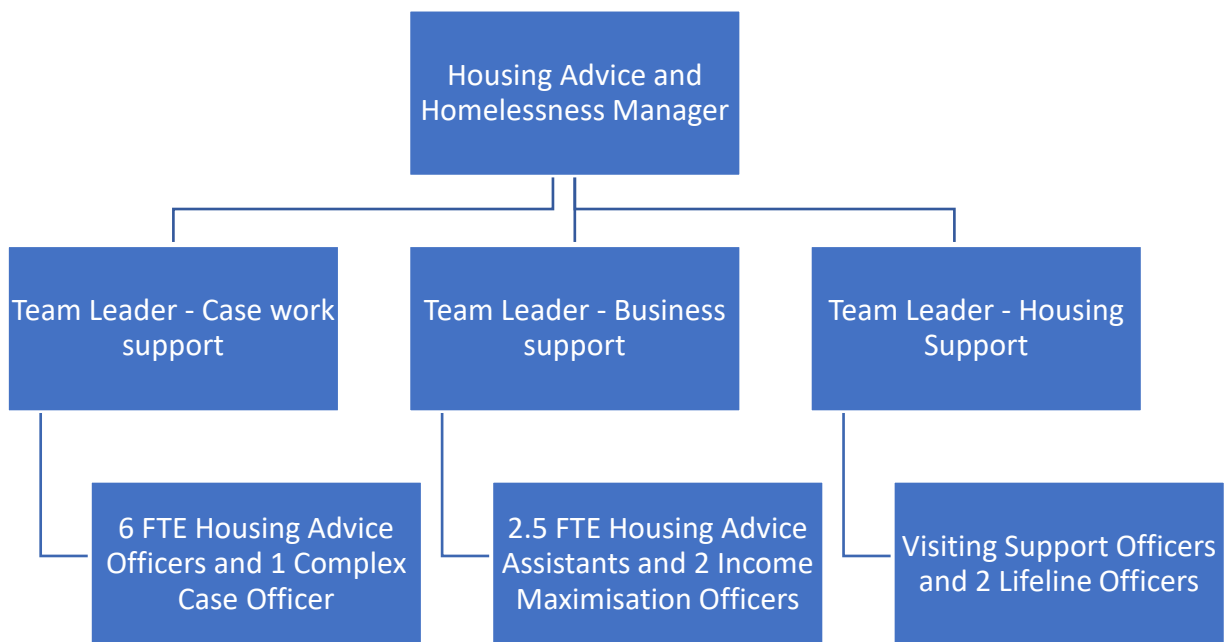
The chart above shows the structure of the housing options and advice team. The service lead for housing advice and options manages the housing advice and homelessness manager, the shire homes lettings manager – who manages a team of three, the housing allocations manager – who manages three allocations officers,



and the sub regional Home-Link manager – who manages a Home-Link administrator.

Housing Advice and Homelessness

The housing advice and homelessness service is responsible for providing free and confidential advice to the residents of South Cambridgeshire District, including homeless prevention and other statutory duties under the homeless legislation.



The chart above shows the structure of the housing advice and homelessness team. The housing advice and homelessness manager sits above a team leader for case work support, a team leader for business support and a team leader for housing support. The team leader for case work support manages six housing advice officers and one complex case officer. The team leader for business support manages three housing advice assistants and two income maximisation officers. The housing support team leader manages visiting support officers and two lifeline officers.

The housing advice and homelessness section within the team have continued to focus on prevention, whilst fulfilling the Council’s statutory obligations under the homeless legislation contained in the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness



Reduction Act. This includes working with clients to prevent and relieve their homelessness, assessing our duties and providing temporary accommodation where necessary.

The team has recently expanded to include an additional Housing Advice Assistant and additional Income Maximisation officers in light of the affordability issues within the district which have been exasperated by the COVID Pandemic and Cost of Living Crisis. These roles help to assess affordability, provide budgeting advice, signposting to specialist services and develop a training package for new tenants. This has been a popular service, having received 157 referrals since October 2022 with 69% being positively helped with through positive change, financial gain or homeless prevention.

The team also work closely with, and provide line management support for, the Homes for Ukraine team. This team includes Housing Advice Ukraine Liaison officers, who work with Ukrainian guests who need other housing options and Homes for Ukraine welfare officers, who check on the welfare needs of Ukrainian guests in the district.

As with all services across the Council, the team had to adapt the service in response to the COVID pandemic and during lockdown were required to work from home, communicating with clients, applicants and agencies largely over the phone or through video calls. The team now operate under a more hybrid approach combining home working and time in the office, maintaining the new ways of working that proved successful during the pandemic whilst recognising that in person discussions are better for some clients and circumstances.

The team are also making changes to their working processes and moving away from an appointments-based system, which was creating a backlog and are now seeing clients and assessing needs in a more responsive way. It is hoped that this will improve the customer experience, create a more efficient service and combine with the additional roles, increase opportunities for early prevention.

The service also provides services specifically for elderly residents in the district including a Visiting Support service that supports residents and helps them to maintain their homes and the Community Alarm service.



Allocations

This service has responsibility for allocating affordable and social rented properties within the district. Properties are allocated via Home-Link, the sub-regional choice-based lettings service. This includes both our own council properties and nominations to housing associations. The team also maintain our housing register, assessing and reviewing new and existing applications in line with the Council's lettings policy.

Shire Homes Lettings

There is a team of four who manage all aspects of Shire Homes Lettings, our private sector leasing company. This includes negotiations with landlords to agree lease arrangements, letting and managing the tenancies, additional management and support for those living in shared accommodation within our HMO's and marketing to attract new business.

Sub regional Home-Link scheme

The Sub-Regional Home-Link Team consist of a Manager and an Administrator. Their roles are to manage and support the Sub-Regional Home-Link partnership. The posts are funded by all partners, but the roles are hosted by South Cambridgeshire District Council and form part of the council's Housing Advice and Options service.

Floating support

A county wide floating support service is in place to support a range of clients aged 16 – 64 who may need housing related support to help them to maintain their accommodation. This is provided by P3, and includes mental health support, which was previously provided under a separate floating support service.

In addition, the Housing Advice service refers clients, who are excluded or struggling to engage and in need of support with mental health issues to the Counting Every Adult service.



Deposit guarantee scheme

The rent deposit guarantee scheme has been in operation for a number of years. The scheme provides either the deposit or a guarantee of the deposit to private landlords. The team have recently brought this scheme inhouse.

The scheme is offered to both priority need and non-priority need applicants at risk of homelessness and enables them to find and choose their own accommodation, subject to checks around affordability and suitability.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs)

DHP's are extra payments to assist with housing payments for those in receipt of housing benefit. The policy prioritises homeless prevention and additional payment towards housing costs such as rent can be made to help prevent homelessness. Funds for DHP's are allocated from Central Government. Our annual budget for 2022 / 2023 was £110,515.00 and it will remain unchanged for 2023 / 2024. The entire budget was spent during 2022 / 2023, but the Council have topped this up by £100,000 to support the household / fuel crisis for 2022 / 2023 and 2023 / 2024. Over 500 applications were received during 2022 / 2023.

Safe at Home

The Housing Advice service work with the Bobby scheme to provide added safety and security measures to survivors of domestic abuse where they wish to remain in their own homes and these measures will provide a safer environment. The team also work with our tenants and our repairs contractors Mears to provide additional security measures within our Council tenancies where necessary.

Spend to Save

As well as the prevention schemes mentioned above, there is also provision within the homeless budget for officers to determine other prevention measures. This is usually a one-off payment and can be creative as long as it will help to prevent homelessness. This will not only be a cheaper option for the Council but will reduce



the disruption and distress to the families caused by homelessness. Some examples include:

- Clearing rent arrears to prevent a family having to leave their home.
- Purchase of driving licence, to provide a form of ID.
- Payment of a guarantor fee to enable access into privately rented accommodation.

These payments are made as a loan which the applicant agrees to repay at an affordable weekly / monthly repayment.

CAB – Money Advice service

The Council works in partnership with Cambridge CAB to provide a money advice outreach service from the Council's offices. Many applicants approach the Council with debt issues, which the CAB can assess and assist with.

Homeless prevention via Home-Link

As part of the Home-Link lettings policy, Band B can be awarded to applicants, likely to be in priority need, who are working with us to prevent their homelessness. As demand and housing need for housing increases there can be no guarantee of rehousing prior to homelessness, however, where households are willing to be as flexible as possible there is some chance of rehousing.

As at March 2023, 70 households were registered on Home-Link with a housing need of homeless prevention and over the last three years on average 116 applicants have been housed each year as a result.



Chapter 5 – Resources

Financial resources

Expenditure and income of the Housing advice and homelessness service

Description	2012 / 2013	2017 / 2018	2022 / 2023
Payments for Accommodation	£152,324	£117,420	£586,256
Associated homeless costs	£14,992	£17,558	£43,747
Homeless prevention Grants	-	£11,413	£12,519
Prevention Measures	£69,982	£25,327	£50,474
Staff & Central Support Costs	£265,739	£401,403	£970,473
Total Expenditure	£503,036	£573,121	£1,663,469
Income – Contributions	£71,586	£51,782	£119,054
Income – Government Grant	£55,166	£109,047	£639,110
Total Income	£126,752	£160,829	£758,164
Net Expenditure	£376,284	£412,292	£905,305

The above figures show that expenditure on homelessness has tripled over the previous five years, largely due to staffing and staff related costs. This reflects the additional responsibilities placed on homeless services including the requirements of the Homeless Reduction Act and an emphasis on increased prevention at a time when external factors are impacting on homelessness. This is also evident from the increase in government grants, which covers a significant amount of the increase. The government provide an annual grant for homeless prevention, which as can be seen above has increased substantially over the last five years. As well as the annual homeless prevention grant over recent years additional government funding has been provided for rough sleeping and severe weather provision, Everyone In (for rough sleepers during Covid) and the Domestic Abuse Act.



Grants to external organisations

The Housing Related Grants scheme offers 3-year funding support to voluntary organisations for the delivery of housing advice and homeless prevention related services across South Cambridgeshire. Grants are awarded to services that support the core service aim of preventing homelessness and / or improving housing options. In addition, grant applicants were asked to demonstrate how the application would support one of the following supplementary service aims:

- Supporting Domestic Abuse services
- Support for people with complex mental health needs
- Support for families on low income

A sum of £14,250 was agreed for each of the years: 2023 / 2024, 2024 / 2025 and 2025 / 2026 with the deadline for applications closing in October 2022.

Three grant applications were received, and these were from Cambridge Cyrenians, Cambridge Re-Use, Cambridge Women's Aid. All applications were scored against the published criteria and the following award proposals were agreed by the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing on 4 November 2022.

Award Proposals for 2023 - 2026

Organisation	Proposed award	Comments
Cambridge Cyrenians	£2,000	The Cyrenians provide support and accommodation for people with an increasing level of need, including ex-offenders and people experiencing mental health issues.
Cambridge Re-Use (previously known as SOFA)	£2,750	Re-use provides low cost household goods to families with a limited income in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire. The funding will be used to reimburse expenses of the volunteers who help provide the service.



Cambridge Women's Aid	£9,500	CWA has been providing specialist services to survivors of domestic abuse in Cambridge and the surrounding areas for over forty years. Although a new, county-wide service has recently been commissioned this offers a different type of service to the CWA outreach provision (which provides an out of hours response and specialises in support for women). In addition, the council has been able to benefit from the specialist knowledge held by CWA in terms of working with survivors to develop / improve the council's response to domestic abuse.
Total	£14,250	-

Partnership Working

Key Forums

The teamwork in partnership with a number of other agencies to support those who are homeless, address their associated needs and improve joint working. Key forums attended by the service include:

- Counting every adult service
- County protocol meetings with social care
- Home-Link Management Board
- Home-Link Operations group
- Temporary accommodation provider meeting
- Mental Health accommodation forum
- MAPPA
- MARAC
- Sub regional homelessness group



- Residents at risk
- Criminal Justice – rehabilitation and resettlement group
- Operational housing pathway group (Criminal Justice)
- Pre-release meeting for HMP Peterborough

This is not an exhaustive list and one-off or ad-hoc meetings are also attended with other agencies as the need arises.

Protocols

The housing advice and homelessness service have a number of protocols in place with other agencies. Most protocols are, and will need to be, County wide to ensure a consistent approach for County-wide agencies.

Some key existing protocols include

Homeless 16 / 17-year-olds: A vital area of work between Housing and Children's Services to ensure vulnerable 16 / 17-year-olds receive the help and support they need to either resolve the issues at home that have led to the threat of homelessness or those who are living away from their families for the first time, whilst still legally being a minor.

Intentionally homeless families: Another protocol between Housing and Children's Services relates to assistance offered to intentionally homeless families. This protocol is due for review, particularly in light of the Homeless Reduction Act, where even greater emphasis is put on prevention.

Care Leavers protocol: Covers planned and emergency moves for children leaving care. This protocol is currently under review.

MAPPA: This is a protocol between housing and key agencies who are part of Multi Agency Public Protection.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Accommodation Protocol Pathways for people with experience of the Criminal Justice System: To promote a multi-agency approach to working together to provide effective support to people in prison and prison leavers, to reduce homelessness and in turn the risk of reoffending.



Mental Health, substance misuse and housing toolkit: This toolkit looks at how the three areas; mental health, substance misuse and housing; all based in separate organisations, need to cooperate to achieve the best outcomes for individuals.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions

Demand for homeless services have continued to be high over the past five years. In addition, there have been some unprecedented impacts over these previous five years, including the Covid pandemic, cost of living crisis and support for refugees. This combination has exacerbated some of the main challenges facing South Cambridgeshire District Council and its homeless service, including:

- The need to promote early intervention to increase the opportunities to prevent homelessness, including family breakdown and other forms of insecure housing.
- Rectify the high number of 'not known' recordings.
- Improve the housing options available for single people including those who are unsuitable for shared accommodation.
- Ensuring we prevent and intervene to resolve rough sleeping.
- Early and targeted money advice for those on a low income, including those in employment, to help with affordability.
- Ongoing support and assistance for tenants and landlords in the private rented sector.
- Ensuring we provide an inclusive service, taking account of all protected characteristics, particularly due to the increase in domestic abuse and high levels of homeless applications from those with mental and physical health needs.
- Further work to build on the improvements to the Council's response to domestic abuse.
- Joint working with health services to improve early intervention for those with mental and physical health needs.
- Reducing the use of B&B, which is unsuitable as a form of temporary accommodation.



- Joint work through the Home-Link partnership to reduce affordability concerns preventing offers of social housing.
- Ongoing work to support government refugee schemes including guests from Ukraine.