
Housing and Community Advice Service- Update on Impact of COVID-19

Committee: Operational Services Committee

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Author: Housing & Community Advice Manager

[V125]

1.0 ISSUE

- 1.1 To receive an update on the Housing and Community Advice Service and the impacts arising from COVID-19.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

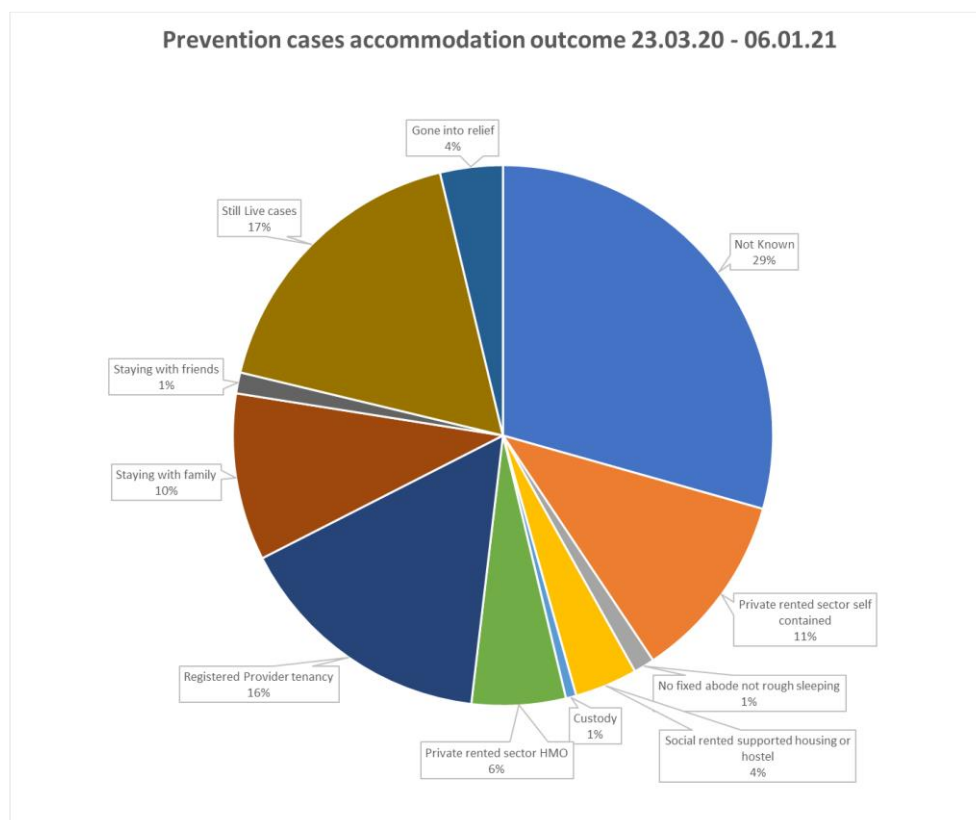
- 2.1 Members are requested to note the update in this report.

3.0 UPDATE

- 3.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the impacts of COVID-19 on the Housing & Community Advice Service since 23 March 2020 and to identify the challenges faced by the service for the foreseeable future.

Prevention

- 3.2 In the period running from 23 March 2020 until 5 January 2021 the service managed 160 prevention cases. Of these cases there are 28 cases which are still live and being actioned, 6 cases were placed into a Relief status, 18 cases went into private sector self-contained, 2 went into no fixed abode not rough sleeping, 6 went into Social rented supported housing or hostel, 1 went into Custody, 9 went into Private rented sector HMO, 25 went into Registered Provider tenancy, 16 stayed with family, 2 stayed with friends and 47 were 'not known' or 'other'.



3.3 Comparison for the same period in 2019.

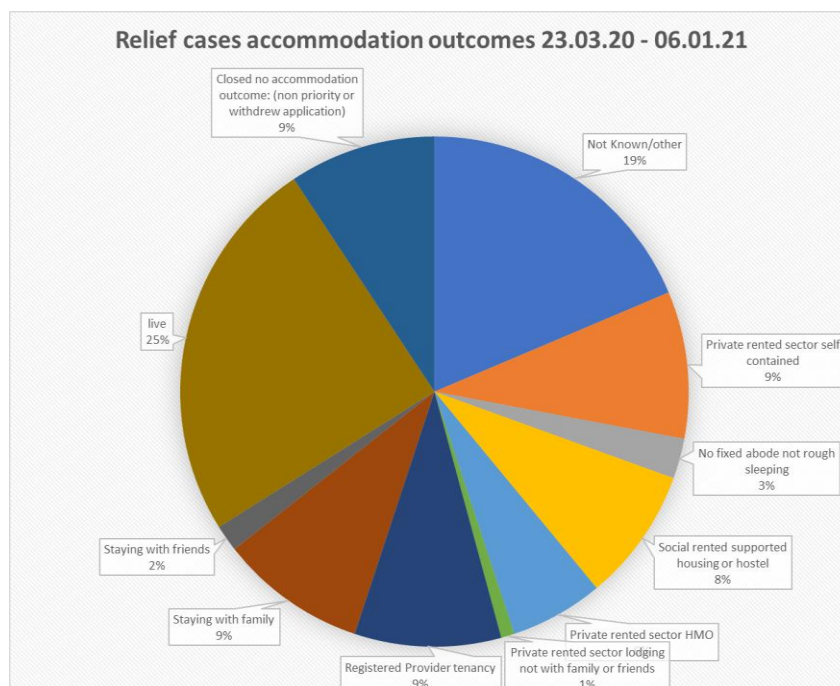
Preventions	2019	2020
	263	160

3.4 Year to year comparisons accounting for Section 21/8 evictions.

There have been no Section 21/8 evictions (section 21 or section 8 are notices issued when the landlord wants possession of their property back) from 23 March 2020 to 5 January 2021. In the same period in 2019 68% (284) of prevention cases were due to Section 21/8 cases.

Relief

- 3.5 In the period running from 23 March 2020 until 5 January 2021 the service managed 118 relief cases. Of these cases there are 29 cases which are still live and being actioned, 11 cases were found to be non-priority or withdrew their application, 11 went into Private rented sector self-contained, 3 into No fixed abode not rough sleeping, 10 to Social rented supported housing or hostel, 7 into Private rented sector HMO, 1 into Private rented sector lodging not with family or friends, 11 into Registered Provider tenancy, 11 stayed with family, 2 stayed with friends and 22 were 'not known' or 'other'.



3.6 Comparison for the same period in 2019.

Relief	2019	2020
	88	118

- 3.7 There have been no Section 21/8 evictions from 23 March 2020 to 5 January 2021. In the same period in 2019 58% of prevention cases were due to Section 21/8 cases.
- 3.8 The impact of COVID-19 is yet to be fully realised in this service as the emergency legislation preventing any evictions within private and social rentals is still in force and is not due to end until later in the month (March 2021). In previous years these types of cases would contribute to the need for support to be provided.
- 3.9 Prior to the 21 August 2020 the legislation required private landlords to issue 3 months notices. The 3 months notice requirement applies to all notices issued before the changes on 21 August 2020. For any notice issued after this date, six months' notice is required. This change in position will provide the service with more time to deal with cases.
- 3.10 The service is predicting that there will be an increase in Section 21/8 evictions. This is an obvious prediction when the Section 21/8 evictions come back in to force. The difficulty is trying to predict the amount of cases that the Council is likely to be dealing with once evictions resume. As the unknown is not quantifiable, the Housing & Community Advice Manager will be monitoring workloads and cases very closely to ensure that the service can cope with any additional demand.

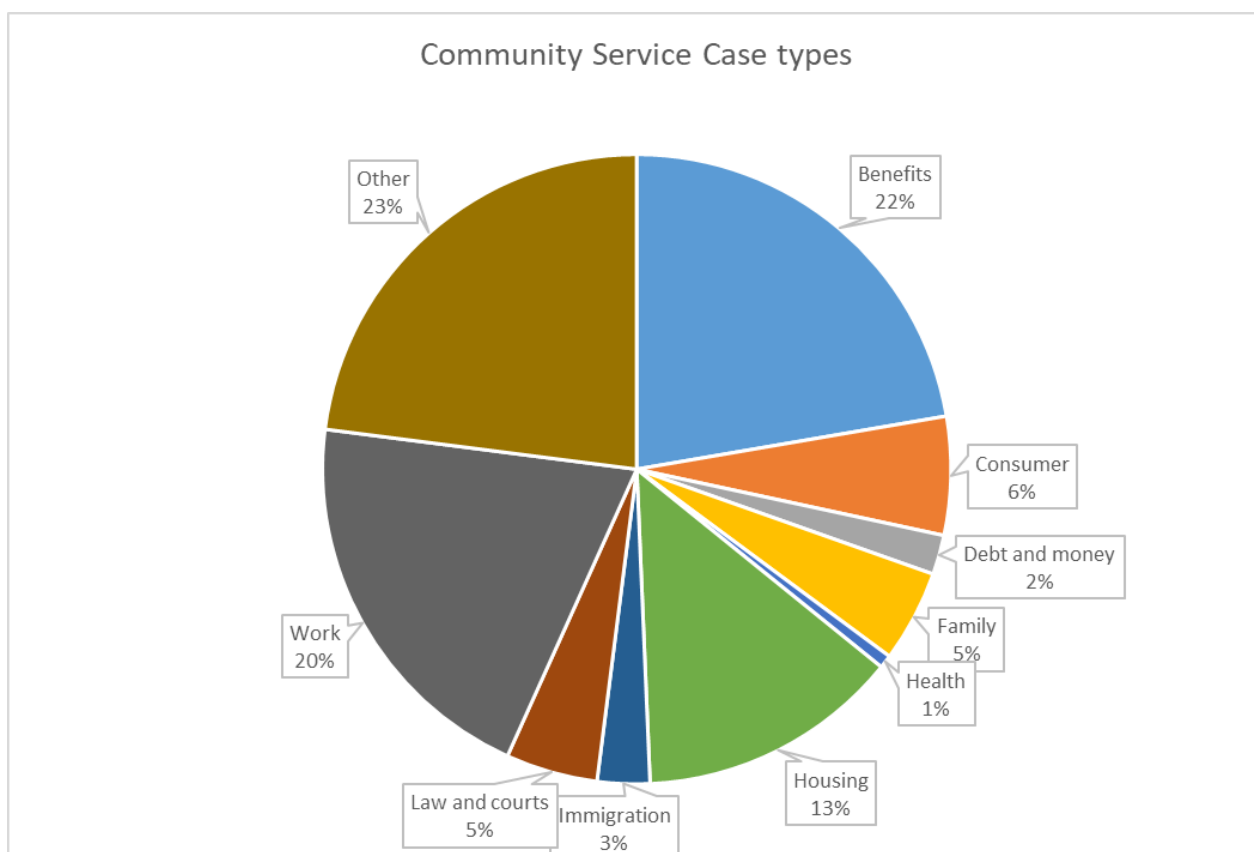
As part of the Covid-19 Recovery Group work, led by Director Operations, Jo Brooks, a bid was submitted to Cambridgeshire County Council for additional funding to support ongoing community work. The Council was awarded £200,000, part of which can be used to fund a new 12 month fixed term post for a Court Officer. This will enable us to provide dedicated advice, support and attendance at all court hearings currently due to recommence in March 2021.

Community Advice

- 3.11 In the period running from 23 March 2020 until 5 January 2021 the service dealt with 398 community service cases. The table below provides a summary of the nature of the cases.

The team continue to work closely with CAB and Nick Blencowe (Manager of CAB) is working within our office for at least 1 day a week. This is invaluable to still be working side by side and offering support to all officers.

Case	Number
Benefits	54
Consumer	33
Debt and Money	9
Family	23
Health	2
Housing	30
Immigration including EUSS	24
Law and Courts	26
Employment, redundancy, furlough	120
Emergency Fuel payments and advice	38
Other (including food bank vouchers and translation)	39



30% of the above cases were referred from Citizens Advice.

The last 6 months has seen an increase of 250 cases.

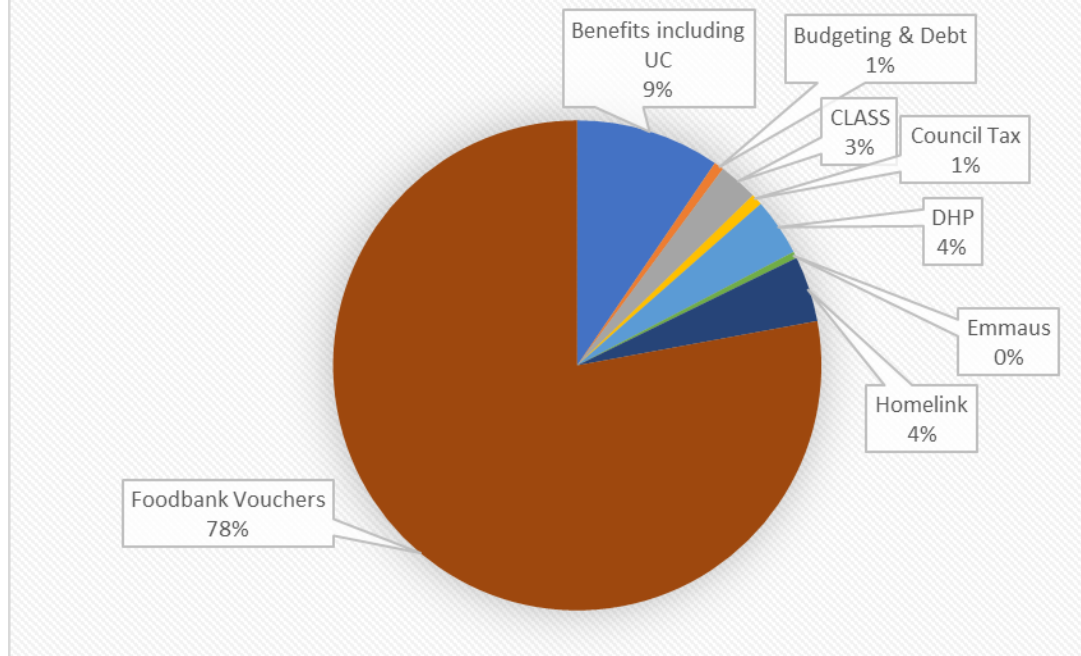
Tenancy Support

- 3.13 In the period running from 23 March 2020 until 5 January 2021 the service dealt with 808 tenancy support cases. The table below identified the nature of the cases.

Benefits including UC	88
Budgeting & Debt	6
CLASS	24
Council Tax	7
DHP	35
Emmaus	4
Homelink	40
Foodbank Vouchers	719

The last 6 months has seen an increase of 808 cases.

Tenancy support case breakdown 26.03.20 - 06.01.21



- 3.15 It is clear from the statistics that the Community Advice and Tenancy Support Service has seen an increase in demand over the last few months. The service did prepare for the increase in advance and continues to be ready to meet further increases and provide the best possible service.
- 3.16 In recent months Officers have undertaken many training courses. Attached at Appendix 1 is a list of the training that has been undertaken by several members of the team.

General

- 3.17 The Council's Housing and Community Advice Service prides itself on being the leading voice in preventing homelessness and will continue to build and maintain the excellent working relationships with partners; both internal and external, voluntary and statutory to prepare for any additional spike in requests for assistance. The recent experience and impact of COVID-19 has only strengthened this resolve.
- 3.18 The Council continues to be in a fortunate position in that it has not had to face many of the challenges that other local authorities have been dealing with. The Council has not needed to house people in bed and breakfasts or hotel accommodation. This places the Council in a stronger position than some, as the Council will not have to deal with trying to accommodate those in temporary accommodation as well as those facing possible evictions later on this year.

As the Council does not own any housing stock we rely on data provided by Sanctuary Housing on properties becoming available. The availability of properties changes from week to week and therefore it is impossible to predict when properties will become available. However, we are still using the direct let option during this Covid-19 period to ensure smooth transitions for all of our clients that cannot stay in their current accommodation.

There are currently 9 rooms void across our temporary accommodation units in preparation for when the courts resume.

There are currently 9 cases where clients have an outstanding Section 21/8 which cannot be carried out until the courts re-open.

The Team is also assisting Environmental Health in carrying out door knocking in line with Track and Trace legislation and to date the officers have carried out 6. These are carried out 7 days a week.

The Team has continued to deliver emergency food parcels with the help of our local food banks. Officers are available to deliver these as and when needed across the district.

With the additional funding obtained by the Covid-19 Recovery Group we have been pleased to offer £500 donations to all the food banks within our district.

We have also been able to donate £25,000 to The Lighthouse Centre who have provided invaluable support delivering emergency food packages, meals and our SWEP (Severe weather provision) provision throughout the pandemic.

The Team continues to administer the Discretionary £500 isolation payments and to date we have assessed 49 applications; 14 of these were successful, 28 were not eligible and we still have 7 pending waiting further information.

Key Challenges

3.19 The key challenge in the coming weeks and months will be supporting the residents of the district in these changing times. As Members will see from the schedule at Appendix 1, the team has undertaken a lot of training to prepare for (although already actively providing advice on) a number of areas related to the changing demand on the service. The key challenge areas include, but are not limited to:

- Furlough rules
- Debt management
- Universal credit
- Mental Health
- Employment
- Housing, including eviction
- Homelessness prevention

- 3.20 It is very clear that over the last 6 months demand on the Advice Service has increased drastically. When this element of the service was brought in-house there was a commitment to carry out a review following the first 12 months of delivering the service. The review will be undertaken and will assess whether there are any changes that need to be made to reflect the enhanced service that we now offer.

Despite this pandemic the team has achieved the NPSS Gold Standard award which is a huge achievement. The team have worked really hard over the last 3 years to achieve this.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS/EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this update.
- 4.2 An EIA is not required.

5.0 APPENDICES

5.1 Appendix 1- Training Schedule

<u>Background Documents</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Contact Officer</u>
None	The Grange, Ely	Angela Parmenter Housing & Community Advice Manager (01353) 616374 E-mail: angela.parmenter@eastcambs.gov.uk

APPENDIX 1

Training Undertaken between May 2020 and January 2021

Date	Title	Provider	Hours	Adviser
13/5/20	Furlough rules	ACAS	1	Aneta Sharp
21/5/20	Government Recovery Strategy	Webinar	1	Aneta Sharp
2-3/6/20	Introduction to welfare benefits	Social Welfare Training	6	Aneta Sharp
5,8/6/20	Covid benefit update 1&2	Social Welfare Training	6	Aneta Sharp
9/6/20	Debt Management	Community Money Advice	6	Aneta Sharp
11/6/20	Transition from lockdown	ACAS	2	Aneta Sharp
17-18/6/20	Universal Overview	Social Welfare Training	6	Aneta Sharp
24/6/20	Covid benefit update 3	Social Welfare Training	3	Aneta Sharp
25-26/6/20	Limited Capability for work: ESA & UC	Benefit Training Company	6	Aneta Sharp
30/6/20	Universal Credit in depth	Benefit Training Company	6	Aneta Sharp
14-15/7/20	Benefits for EEA Nationals	Benefit Training Company	6	Aneta Sharp
21/7/20	Debt Advice 2	Community Money Advice	6	Aneta Sharp
22-23/7/20	Mental Health and benefits	Social Welfare Training	6	Aneta Sharp
23/7/20	Flexible furlough	ACAS	1	Aneta Sharp
29/4/20	Grants for the Self Employed	HMRC	2	Nick Wyatt
11/6/20	Transition from Furlough	ACAS	1	Nick Wyatt
9/6/20	Debt management part 1	Community Money Advice	6	Nick Wyatt
29/6/20	Employment Law Update	ACAS	1	Nick Wyatt
21/7/19	Debt management part 2	Community Money Advice	6	Nick Wyatt
10/11/12 08/20	Interpersonal Mediation training	Mediation UK	18	Nick Wyatt
06.05.2020	Domestic abuse	Webinar	6	Suleman Salim
08.05.2020	Universal Credit and income	Social welfare Training	6	Suleman Salim
24.06.2020	Universal Credit covid19 Benefit 1+2	Social Welfare Training	6	Suleman Salim
09.06.2020	Debt Management	Community Money Advice	6	Suleman Salim
14+15.06.2020	Benefits EEA Nationals	Benefit Training Company	6	Suleman Salim
16.06.2020	Safeguarding	ECDC E-learning	2	Suleman Salim

21.07.2020	Debt Advice 2	Community Money Advice		Suleman Salim
22+23.07.2020	Mental Health and Benefits	Social Welfare Training	6	Suleman Salim
25+26.07.2020	Limited Capability for work ESA ,UC	Social Welfare Training	6	Suleman Salim
15/9/20	Green house grant	EEA	2	Aneta Sharp
21/9/20	Intro to housing cost entitlement for EEA nationals	shelter	1.5	Aneta Sharp
25/9/20	Assisting non-UK nationals	NHAS	1.5	Aneta Sharp
5/10/20	EEA nationals and housing	NHAS		Aneta Sharp
8-9/10/20	Appeal tribunal	Benefit Training company	6	Aneta Sharp
8/10/20	Non-UK nationals eligibility for housing	NHAS	1.5	Aneta Sharp
12/10/20	Covid-19 job retention	HMRC	1	Aneta Sharp
20-21/10/20	Immigration OISC1	HJT	6	Aneta Sharp
10/11/20	Intro to housing eligibility	NHAS	1.5	Aneta Sharp
11/11/20	Health & safety	Internal	3	Aneta Sharp
14/10/20	Self-employment grants	HMRC	1.5	Nick Wyatt
12/11/20	Small redundancies	ACAS	1	Aneta Sharp
16-17/11/20	Benefits for older people	Social welfare training	6	Aneta Sharp
18/11/20	Time management for remote working	NHAS	1.5	Aneta Sharp
18/11/20	Covid support for employers	HMRC	1	Aneta Sharp
23/11/20	Welfare benefits	NHAS	1.5	Aneta Sharp
26/11/20	EU settlement scheme	WAD	2	Aneta Sharp
26/11/20	Furlough	ELSG	1	Aneta Sharp
27/11/20	GDPR	Internal	1	Aneta Sharp
	Family law	Oplex	10	Aneta Sharp
10/12/20	Mental health at work	ACAS	1	Aneta Sharp
11/12/20	Statutory sick pay & covid	HMRC	1	Aneta Sharp
15/12/20	Working time & pay	HMRC	1	Aneta Sharp
16/12/20	Housing duties for young people	Shelter	1.5	Aneta Sharp
16/12/20	Advice in time of covid	Law centre	1.5	Aneta Sharp
20/12/20	Debt recovery for business	SV Legal	1	Aneta Sharp
20/12/20	Family Law	Oplex Careers	10	Nick Wyatt

Please note this only includes training carried out during this period from May 2020 onwards.

EUSS

ECDC has been registered and authorised by the Home Office to act as one of their Centres to assist the EU citizens in applying for settled/pre-settled status. The service is free however we will receive payment of £25 per completed appointment. Currently we have 3 advisers registered as allowed to offer this limited immigration service (Aneta Sharp,

Suleman Salim and Nick Wyatt). The deadline for applications is the end of June 2021. We have now carried out 11 applications generating an additional income of £275.

Debt advice

The Community Advice Service is providing general debt advice. Seven of the housing team have passed part 1 and 2 of the level 3 Award in Generalist Debt Advice (Money Advice Service (MAS) Accredited). After obtaining sufficient debt management experience staff will be permitted to apply to undertake part 3 of the qualification. Part 3 must be completed and passed by December 2021 in order to gain the full accreditation.

As a developing service the team will be undertaking training provided by the Institute of Money Advisors (IMA) which includes the Financial Conduct Authorities (FCA) Compliance and Quality of Advice. It should be noted that the training programme has been subject to disruption due to the Covid 19 crisis.