

REPORT TO: Health Policy & Performance Board
DATE: 20th June 2017
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director - People
PORTFOLIO: Health & Wellbeing
SUBJECT: Homelessness Service Update
WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform the Board of recent developments within the homelessness service, and to advise of recent legislative changes that will affect future homelessness and the demand for the service.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the report be noted..

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Housing Solutions Team

The Housing Solutions Team has been proactively working with all client groups to reduce and prevent homelessness. Staff retention has been good; however, during the past 6 months there have been two vacant posts, due to maternity leave, which has placed additional pressure on staff and performance. The Team should be back to full capacity by mid-November 2017

The aim of the Housing Solutions Team is to assist and prevent people who are threatened with homelessness in Halton. To provide a community focussed and accessible service to ensure people know where and how they can seek help and assistance to prevent them becoming homeless and receive a quality and confidential housing options service. The priority aims for the Housing Solutions Team are to:

- Reduce homelessness presentations and acceptances; and
- Increase and improve homelessness prevention and access to housing services.

3.1.1

Displayed in the table below are some key statistics taken from the statutory data report. It is evident that although homelessness presentations are increasing (which is most likely due to prevailing economic conditions/welfare reform etc. and will be replicated in many local authority areas), actual acceptances are decreasing alongside a significant increase in homelessness prevention and

relief work (i.e. where households are assisted by the local authority to remain in their home or find alternative accommodation).

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Homeless Presentations	197	202	319
Homeless Acceptances	32	49	34
Homeless Prevention/Relief	777	798	989
A&A Prevention	1525	1502	1616
B&B Usage	0	0	0

3.1.2

Youth Officer

The designated Youth Officer role has had a positive impact upon partnership working between the Housing Solutions Team and Children's Social Care. In line with the Southward Judgement, Halton has introduced a joint protocol which outlines clear service pathways, including, agency roles and responsibilities, which has improved the level of advice and assistance and accommodation provision for young people. The designated Youth Officer works across a number of statutory services and is based within Children's Services for part of the week.

The Youth Officer role deals specifically with young people aged 16/17 year olds who are at risk of homelessness. The officer also works directly with 18 – 25 year olds and makes full use of the service provision and resources across the Borough to prevent youth homelessness. The following table highlights the level of presentations by young people and the interventions delivered through the Youth Officer role:

Homeless Prevention Activity	Total 2016/17
Negotiated return home	21
Placed into LA temp accomm	12
Placed in other YP accomm	4
Remained at home	12
Move on through PPP	11
Homelessness Decision	6
TOTAL	66

The Youth officer has had a greater success rate with young people presenting to the service, supporting them to return home. The youth officer places great emphasis upon prevention and works closely with a number of statutory and voluntary services, to ensure the required support is in place to tackle both housing and social issues. The officer will visit the client's home and negotiate with both parent and the young person to establish and resolve the

issues, enabling the young person to remain within the family home. The officer will also refer into external support, mediation and accommodation services in order to address and meet the needs of the young person.

3.1.3 Each of the Housing Solutions officers has their own service specialisms. The officers are community focused and conduct a number of outreach advice services across the district.

One officer deals specifically with mental health and offender issues. The officer now works closely with health professionals and holds advice sessions within the Brooker centre. This initiative has proven highly successful, thus reduced the level of crisis presentations to the service and reduced hospital discharge. Due to the success of the early intervention, there is now a clear pathway plan in place to ensure vulnerable clients are advised accordingly of the options and services available and all professionals are involved in the move on process.

The Mortgage Rescue and Rent Repossessions Officer have made a big impact upon tenancy sustainment. The officer is actively involved with the courts and attends the court action group to raise awareness of the homelessness and prevention options available. The courts recognise the post and will adjourn possession orders to allow the client to work with HBC.

3.1.4 Halton forms part of the Merseyside and Cheshire Sub Regional groups and has been involved with a number of projects that are contributing towards homelessness prevention. A number of successful projects are;

- Pan Merseyside Bond Scheme - Vulnerable clients
- Complex Needs Team - Intense support service
- Cheshire Covenant - Armed Forces
- Mainstay - Data recording system
- Hospital Discharge - Improve Delayed discharge

3.1.5 Homelessness Database
A new in-house homelessness database system is due to be developed and implemented during this financial year. The system upgrade will prove to be more cost effective, offering additional efficiencies and accurate data recording.

3.2 Homelessness Trends
Nationally and locally there has been a gradual increase in homelessness presentations and statutory homelessness acceptances. The main causes of homelessness are due to family exclusions, relationship breakdown and the loss of private rented accommodation.

There are a number of client groups that do not meet the statutory homelessness criteria, but have a pressing housing need. Concerted efforts are being made by the Housing Solutions Team to assist these client groups, offering temporary accommodation for a limited period and facilitating a more efficient and accessible move on process

3.3 Health & Homelessness

The Homelessness Strategy review identifies the gaps in provision and the need to improve communication between partner agencies. An integrated approach has enabled the Authority to address both the social and health care issues, reduce homelessness and encourage lifestyle change.

Halton is fully committed and focused upon health care and service provision for vulnerable homelessness clients. The action plan identified that further integration between CCG, Public Health and Homelessness will enable the Authority to develop a holistic approach, thus offering a more flexible and accessible service to vulnerable clients to empower them to achieve positive and sustainable lifestyle choices.

The Housing Solutions Team is working closely with a number of health services to ensure they have a good understanding of homelessness. This has resulted in a local hospital discharge policy that gives a clear pathway plan of the agreed accommodation and support process.

3.4 Gypsy Travellers

There are a number of sites across Halton that offer accommodation pitches for gypsy travellers. Details below;

Site	Total Pitches	Status
Riverview, Widnes	24	Permanent
Warrington Road, Runcorn	12	Permanent
Warrington Road, Runcorn	14	Temporary

The new residential site officially opened November 2016, with occupancy now at 80%. The Local Authority administered a phased allocation process and a further round of interviews will be held July 2017

3.4.1

Illegal encampments are low within Halton, compared to other Cheshire and Merseyside Authorities. A clear procedural pathway has been completed to give guidance to both the Local Authority and Police when dealing with illegal encampments, this has proven successful.

3.4.2 Due to the service offered to gypsy travellers within Halton, the Authority has been identified as a lead for good practice. Many Authorities across the country have visited Halton to establish what service provision and resources have been put in place to successfully tackle the growing issues around travellers.

3.5 Syrian Refugee Programme

Halton forms part of the Merseyside Sub Region and committed to the Syrian Refugee Programme. Collectively the 6 Merseyside Authorities have agreed to accommodate 510 refugees, with Halton taking 100 individuals. The required tender and procurement process was completed December 2016 and the support contract was awarded to Refugee Action. Each authority has agreed what services will be commissioned and the Buy in process.

The Sub Region has appointed a LCR coordinator, who will work directly with the Merseyside Authorities and oversee the Vulnerable Person programme. Liverpool is the lead Authority and therefore, responsible for the support contract and Financial constraints, whereby, the coordinator will draw down the finance for each Local Authority within the required time period.

To date, Halton has successfully settled 7 families within the Borough since January 2017. There is a schedule for pre-arranged arrivals agreed throughout the year. The support and professional approach demonstrated by both statutory and voluntary agencies has been excellent, which contributed towards the overall transition and community integration with the families.

3.6 Supported Housing Accommodation

The temporary accommodation provision within the Borough was deemed sufficient to meet the needs of future homelessness. However, the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 will have an impact upon future supported housing provision.

The temporary accommodation provision presently available;

Accommodation	Number of Units	Client Group
Halton Lodge, Runcorn	66	Single Homelessness
Grangeway Court, Runcorn	10	Homelessness Families
Brennan Lodge	39	Single Homelessness
DA Refuge	14	Domestic Abuse

3.6.1 Brennan Lodge supported housing scheme was recommissioned by the Local Authority and re-opened February 2017. The Building is owned by Halton Housing Trust and the support contract was awarded to Creative Support. The scheme provides 39 supported units for single vulnerable homeless clients, and there has been a

vast improvement in the service delivery and support provision.

The temporary accommodation provision is deemed suitable to meet the needs of homelessness clients. However, due to new legislation, this may need to be reviewed to ensure the provision fully meets future service demands.

3.7 Local Policy Reviews

3.7.1 Gypsy Travellers

The gypsy traveller policy is presently being reviewed to ensure it is fully compliant with the Mobile Homes Act and new legislation. The consultation process is underway and the draft allocations policy is due to be completed and presented to the relevant Management Boards for approval Mid-June 2017.

3.7.2 Youth Strategy

The Authority is looking to introduce a youth homelessness strategy and action plan, which will be led by young people and give them a voice around future service provision.

Halton is committed to working with all young people to ensure they are fully integrated and work alongside the Local Authority to develop future services. The consultation process is underway and a youth conference will be conducted late June 2017.

All agencies will be involved in the consultation process, whereby, the findings will be incorporated within the final policy document. It is anticipated that the policy and action plan will be completed July 2017 and submitted to the relevant Management Boards for approval.

3.7.3 Homelessness Strategy

In accordance with Homelessness Act 2002 the local authority is required to conduct a full Strategic Review of its Homelessness strategy within the area and formulate a five year Homelessness Strategy covering the period 2018 - 2023.

The present strategy is due to expire March 2018, whereby, arrangements are underway to review and formulate a new five year strategy.

Discussions are underway and It has been agreed that the Homelessness consultation will commence September 2017. A number of interactive consultation sessions will be held to ensure that all partner agencies, statutory and voluntary are involved and their participation and identified priorities are incorporated within the final strategic document report.

The Strategy review will aim to incorporate operational and service

provision changes, identifying clear direction for preventing and addressing Homelessness within Halton. The five year strategy will reflect the relevant factors known to affect future homelessness and outline the identified actions completed within the financial year and new tasks added to ensure the action plan remains current and reflect legislative and economic changes.

The final five year Homelessness Strategy report and action plan will be submitted to all the relevant management boards for approval January 2018.

3.8 Legislation

3.8.1 The Localism Act 2011 introduced many changes to homelessness and allocations legislation. The legislative changes have resulted in a change in how homelessness is administered, with further emphasis placed upon prevention. There has also been a gradual increase in homelessness both locally and nationally.

As part of the Localism Act, the bedroom tax subsidy was introduced; however, this has not had the anticipated impact upon homelessness. Registered Social Landlords have been affected by the tax subsidy, forcing many to revise their policies and housing stock. Many Registered Social Landlords have introduced local strategies to address the issue, resulting in additional building work to regrade and reduce property size.

3.8.2 Homelessness Reduction Bill

The Homelessness Reduction Bill received royal ascent April 2017. The Act will include a number of legislative clauses that will impact and change homelessness service provision and affect how it is administered in the future.

The Homelessness Reduction Bill places particular emphasis on homelessness relief and prevention. The revised statutory duty will be to assist those threatened with homelessness and the time period to work with clients will change from 28 days to 56 days, which will be very positive for all those facing homelessness. However, the legislation will place additional pressure upon the Local Authority, further extending the decision making process and duty to provide temporary accommodation for none priority clients.

The Homelessness Reduction Bill is due to be introduced April 2018, with further legislative guidance due to be issued mid/late 2017. Due to the identified changes, it is necessary for Local Authorities to start making changes to ensure they are fully equipped to administer and comply with legal statutory duty due to commence April 2018.

The changes in legislation cannot and will not be effective in

isolation. To be truly effective, these new duties need to be underpinned by a renewed, cross-departmental Government strategy and policies to ensure suitable accommodation is available in areas where it is needed to prevent homelessness and councils have the resources required to respond adequately and compassionately.

Failure to comply with the legislative changes could result in unintended consequences, such as 'gate-keeping' of services, unlawful decisions and repeat homelessness, with damaging consequences for children and other vulnerable applicants and a lack of meaningful outcomes for single adults.

The Housing Solutions Team will undergo a service review to ensure the necessary procedural and legislative changes can be applied and the Authority is fully compliant. It is also necessary to conduct a number of briefing sessions across the Borough, with both statutory and voluntary agencies, to ensure they are fully aware of the legal requirements and their role within the new administrative guidelines.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The homelessness service operates within a tightly regulated environment, dictated by the following statutes/orders.

- Housing Act 1996
- Homelessness Act 2002
- Localism Act 2011
- Equality Act 2010
- Suitability of Accommodation Order 2012
- Homelessness Code of Guidance 2006
- Localism Act 2011
- Homelessness Reduction Bill 2017

5.0 **OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no immediate financial or resource implications. However, upon further clarity of the Homelessness Reduction Bill, this will affect future service delivery and financial budgets.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

Homelessness can have an adverse impact on the wellbeing of children and young people with educational attainment being affected by adverse residential mobility. The prevention focus of the Strategy will ensure that families with children are assisted swiftly to ensure minimal disruption. In addition, the Strategy recognises that

homelessness amongst young people in Halton is a particular problem and therefore includes priorities to strengthen joint working to ensure this group is provided with the most appropriate support by the relevant agencies.

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

The lack of a settled home can adversely impact an individual's ability to find and sustain employment – the Strategy's focus on homelessness prevention allows people to remain in their homes wherever possible.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

The Homelessness Strategy places emphasis on the links between health and homelessness and one of the strategy objectives is specifically focussed on this issue. Therefore, implementation of delegated actions contained within the strategy has had positive implications for the health and wellbeing of those experiencing homelessness.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Criminal activity can be both a cause and consequence of homelessness and homeless prisoners are more likely to re-offend following release than those who have settled accommodation. Therefore, the Strategy includes a priority to improve joint working with the police and probation service to address the growing housing need for offenders.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

The presence of rough sleeping can have a negative impact on the environment and the Strategy seeks to continue to ensure that this does not pose an issue for Halton through the intensive support initiative scheme.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 None identified.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 The Strategy includes priorities targeted at providing support for those who are vulnerable or have complex needs and other marginalised groups such as young people and offenders.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

9.1 None under the meaning of the Act.