

**REPORT TO:** Health Policy and Performance Board  
**DATE:** 11<sup>th</sup> August 2020  
**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, People  
**PORTFOLIO:** Physical Environment  
**SUBJECT:** Homelessness Services Update  
**WARDS:** Borough wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To update the Board of the Homelessness service provision and robust activity during the Covid-19 pandemic. The report will also outline future service development, highlighting agency engagement and activity towards reducing homelessness within the Borough

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That**

**1) the report be noted**

## **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

3.1 On 26<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) issued guidance to all Local Authorities, designed to ensure that everyone known to be rough sleeping, or those deemed to be at imminent risk of rough sleeping, would be offered accommodation. The purpose of the guidance was to protect vulnerable clients from the risk of contracting COVID-19, with additional funding made available to support the response, whereby, Halton was allocated a total of £6,000

3.1.1 In accordance with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, Local Authorities have a statutory obligation to provide temporary accommodation to those in *priority need* of housing accommodation. However, the new COVID-19 guidance required Local Authorities to accommodate all clients, regardless of *priority need* status. The guidance and funding did not specify a time-period, and MHCLG have not issued further guidance to revert to the statutory homelessness legislation. Subsequently, decisions are likely to remain with Local Authorities to determine future end date and implemented changes.

### **3.2 Halton response**

3.2.1 The Housing Solutions Team are working from home and completing homelessness assessments via phone and skype. The service is managing the process exceptionally well and staff morale is good. Staff home working is reviewed and managed in accordance with Government guidelines and safety measures. However, the pandemic will have an impact upon future service delivery, staff working patterns and partnership engagement, which will be reviewed and agreed accordingly.

3.2.2 During the past months, there has been a fluctuation in homelessness presentations. Mid/late March there was a significant increase in homelessness presentations, partly due to the government announcement to remove all rough sleepers from the streets. However, the service has seen a gradual flow of manageable homelessness presentations and the team are striving towards reducing hotel/b&b usage. The table illustrates the temporary

accommodation usage June 2020.

<b>Accommodation Provision</b>	<b>Usage</b>
Hotel / B&B Use	25
Single Hostel	97
Grangeway Court	18
Women's Refuge	12
Private Rented Sector	16

3.2.3 As the government restrictions are eased and relationships breakdown / eviction warrants are executed, we anticipate a gradual increase in homelessness presentations. The team are working extremely hard to facilitate a number of prevention measures to mitigate tenancy re-possession and will work with families to facilitate clients to remain within the home, if safe to do so.

3.2.4 Additional measures to provide additional short-term accommodation have been implemented, to meet the anticipated demand. Further discussions are underway with the private rented sector to encourage them to work directly with the Local Authority to increase accommodation options and tenant choice, to address and reduce future homelessness.

<b>Homelessness Presentations</b>	<b>March – May 2020</b>
Presentations	373
Homelessness Relief	255
Homelessness Prevention	188

3.2.5 Halton has taken a robust approach to tackling homelessness and meeting the needs of vulnerable homelessness clients. The main objective was to review the housing provision available within the Borough to ensure increased demand can be met. A number of options were agreed to secure and develop additional self-contained accommodation provision, which included;

- Working with My Space Housing to secure 17 units of housing accommodation.
- Procurement Lease arrangements for 14 additional accommodation units within Columba Apartments, Widnes.
- Block purchase of 6 self-contained units within Nightstop Communities
- Refurbishment of four mothballed units within Grangeway Court.
- Hotel and B&B usage across Merseyside and Manchester.

3.2.6 Halton remains committed to providing accommodation for all homeless clients that are rough sleeping or at imminent risk of homelessness. Halton has extended its commitment to continue to provide temporary accommodation to vulnerable homelessness/or at risk of homelessness clients until 31<sup>st</sup> July 2020, which will be reviewed and actioned accordingly.

### 3.3 Options and implications:

3.3.1 All options for the continuing service delivery to people presenting as homeless have been given due consideration and outlined within the preferred option below. Central government guidance/advice has not yet been released, it is therefore, considered unsafe to make substantial changes to the agreed process at this stage.

Halton will continue to provide accommodation to all homelessness clients; however, the process will be reviewed regularly. Details of activity to date;

- Increased costs and requirement to secure temporary accommodation (Columba Apartments) - £73,980 for 3 month period
- Accommodation will be deemed exempt and therefore, individuals placed will be eligible to apply for housing benefit, which would recoup some costs
- Additional allocation of present and future funding from MHCLG
- Re-allocation of proportion of Rough Sleepers Initiative Funding 2020 -21, to utilise towards incurred costs of temporary accommodation and furnishings.

3.3.2 Halton will continue to work directly with MHCLG and all agencies to address the ongoing issues and ensure that the Local Authority is fully equipped to deliver a competent and efficient service across the Borough.

### 3.4 Future Activity

#### 3.4.1 Rough Sleepers.

Halton made a commitment to accommodate all vulnerable homeless clients, to ensure no one is sleeping out on the streets. To date, this has been achieved; however, it is monitored daily.

3.4.2 Engagement with the Police and local agencies is ongoing; to identify and accommodate all rough sleepers, so together we can promote lifestyle change for clients and assist them to achieve positive outcomes. Communication and teamwork between service agencies is excellent, enabling a quick response and implemented action to address crisis issues.

3.4.3 The Government recognises that there is not one single solution to end homelessness, and a strategic approach to tackling the causes of homelessness and the health and well-being of rough sleepers is as important as the supply of affordable homes and supported housing

YEAR	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
National	3569	4134	4751	5251	5815
Halton	2	4	4	5	9

3.4.4 The numbers of rough sleepers remain low within Halton, but is no less important in our efforts to reduce homelessness. The figures represent a core group of rough sleepers with multiple complex needs such as drug and alcohol addictions, mental and physical health issues. The Local Authority now works alongside the relevant agencies to deliver a multi-agency approach to deliver solution-based options.

3.4.5 To date, there are no known rough sleepers on the streets within Halton. However, there is often confusion around begging and rough sleeping, which is being tackled daily by the Housing Solutions Team, Street Link, Police and the local community. All queries received are acted upon the same day, to address and resolve the identified issues.

3.4.6 **Domestic Abuse**

Halton has not seen a vast increase in DA referrals or helpline enquiries; however, we do anticipate that this will gradually change as the government ease the lockdown restrictions. Changing Lives' have reported that the IDVA service have had a significant increase in referrals, which is being managed effectively by the commissioned service provider.

3.4.7 Due to anticipated increase in demand, it was agreed that Halton Refuge won't accept out of area referrals. The units will be retained for local victims, to ensure they are safe and to minimise movement and risk of infection.

3.4.8 **Armed Forces**

All Armed Forces Personnel are considered a priority and would be awarded housing priority banding status in accordance with the Cheshire Covenant. A designated Youth Officer is situated within the Housing Solutions Team, and manages this client group, to ensure an accelerated assessment approach is completed and the relevant support and accommodation is available.

To date, there have been no presentations for the armed forces.

3.4.9 **Prison Release**

It was confirmed that there would be approximately 7 Offenders due for release to Halton Borough, during June– July, which will be managed by Probation. Within the Housing Solutions Team, there is a designated officer, who works directly with Probation, prisons and Shelter to complete early assessments and arrange a structured planned move for offenders. The service in place is working exceptionally well and been highlighted as good practice.

3.4.10 The Early Prison Release Programme is aimed at offenders on remand or near the end of their sentence. The criteria for the programme, is that any identified offenders must have a secure address to reside at until the end of the sentence period. The offenders will also be GPS tagged and monitored regularly by Probation.

3.4.11 MHCLG funding is available to contribute towards temporary and long-term accommodation needs, which has eased the pressure upon Homelessness budgets.

3.4.12 **Agency Support**

Whitechapel are a Liverpool City Region commissioned service, working with vulnerable homelessness clients and rough sleepers. The Whitechapel service is based in Liverpool and delivers an intensive outreach support service across the six Merseyside Local Authorities, to encourage rough sleepers to move off the streets and engage with the relevant services, e.g. health, housing, substance misuse etc.

3.4.13 The objective aim of the service is to assist Local Authorities to meet government targets and to reduce the level of rough sleepers within the Borough. During the past weeks, the level of engagement with this client group has proven positive, with all rough sleepers placed within temporary accommodation and working with agencies to address any complex needs.

3.4.14 HBC will continue with its commitment to accommodate all clients sleeping rough, to work directly with them to address any issues they have and promote positive lifestyle change and long-term tenancy sustainability.

3.4.15 **CGL – Substance Misuse Support Service**

The CGL service is situated within Halton and deliver outreach and intensive support for clients with substance misuse. The team are actively involved and working with all agencies, to deliver a joined up approach and to ensure the clients' needs are met.

3.4.16 CGL are monitoring the issues around methadone prescriptions and working with clients to manage the dosage, though, to date, there have been no reported issues. The service is presently operating from the Widnes location, to enable them to manage social distancing measures. They also provide an outreach support service with a designated nurse, which relieves pressure on the GPs.

#### 4.0 Funding

4.1 MHCLG funding has enabled the Local Authority to develop a sit up service for rough sleepers, which is located within Halton Lodge, Runcorn. The service offers short-term temporary accommodation for upto 3 days, thus allowing the designated officers to complete the necessary assessments and refer the client to the relevant agencies for additional support. Details

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>FUNDING</b>	<b>SERVICE DELIVERY</b>
2018/19	£47.000 Rough Sleeper Initiative	Sit Up Service
2019/20	£106.000 Rough Sleeper Initiative	Continuation of sit up service

There are a number of varying funding streams available to tackle homelessness and assist with the additional costs incurred. To date, Halton has been successful with a number of funding bids, however, the Local Authority will continue to work directly with MHCLG to access future funding, to improve service delivery across the Borough and reduce homelessness.

#### 4.2 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no policy implications associated with the information within this report. Although the potential solutions for some of the issues highlighted may lead to changes in the future.

#### 5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial implications have been identified, due to the increased hotel/b&b usage, which will have a significant impact upon local budgets.

Further financial risks identified are part of the procurement process, and the agreement to increase temporary accommodation provision. However, MHCLG funding will cover/offset a proportion of the incurred costs..

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

##### 6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

6.2 The outreach intensive support team will identify and support young people sleeping rough to access the relevant services and ensure they are accommodated to eliminate any risk factors.

Housing support services provided to young people, within both supported accommodation and their own home, ensure they are empowered to access, maintain

existing education, training, health services, and support networks.

The Housing Solutions Team have a statutory duty to accommodate people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. There is a designated youth officer within the Housing Solutions Team, who works directly with young people, to address their needs and refer into the relevant services. The officer will strive to ensure that young people are supported, safe and accommodated within a secure environment.

## **7.0 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

- 7.1 The Housing and Support Gateway ensures that the appropriate referrals are made into housing support services to meet any identified employment and training needs. The
- 7.2 officers work directly with Halton into Jobs and conduct drop in advice sessions.

- 7.3 Additional prevention funding used to recruit an officer within the housing solutions team. The purpose of the role is to work with statutory and voluntary agencies and clients to facilitate access to the relevant services, to assist clients back into training and employment.

## **7.4 A Healthy Halton**

Rough sleepers can experience additional complex health problems and prolonged periods of rough sleeping will have a significant impact upon a person's mental and physical health, which can be detrimental to their life expectancy.

There is potential for health services and housing providers to be more proactive in their approach to tackling rough sleeping and clients who are at risk of homelessness. Whitechapel provide intensive outreach support, whilst the designated nurse will address all health needs for this vulnerable client group. The officers will work with clients to tackle the initial crisis and encourage engagement with agencies to make positive and sustainable lifestyle choices.

## **8.0 A Safer Halton**

- 8.1 The Housing and Support Gateway ensures appropriate referrals are made into the relevant housing support services, to ensure vulnerable people are safe in the community. Rough Sleeping can have a negative impact upon the community and local businesses, which will be addressed via a multi-agency approach.

- 8.2 Whilst there have been a small amount of concerns shown reported by the general public, there are services who act to address, support and resolve the issues. However, homelessness and rough sleeping is monitored closely, which is complimented by the positive partnership working to support these vulnerable client groups.

## **9.0 Halton's Urban Renewal**

- 9.1 None specifically highlighted.

### **RISK ANALYSIS**

- 9.2 Financial risks identified above. However, the Homelessness service receives additional funding via the MHCLG grant, which will contribute towards some of the incurred costs. Also, Halton has been successful with a number of recent bids, which further support and fund the activity around homelessness

**10.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

- 10.1 Halton Borough Council is an equal opportunities organisation. All housing support Services are required to demonstrate that they embrace and comply with the Equality Act and ensure services are closely monitored.
- 10.2 It has not been appropriate, at this stage, to complete an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA).

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

- 11.1 There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.