

REPORT TO: Health Policy and Performance Board
DATE: 26th November 2024
REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director Adult Services
PORTFOLIO: Health and Wellbeing
SUBJECT: Housing Solutions Performance Update
WARD(S) Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To update the Board of the Homelessness service provision administered by the Housing Solutions Team, to include performance and contributing factors affecting the service delivery.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Housing Solutions Team

The Housing Solutions Team are responsible for the homelessness administration and must be fully compliant with the homelessness legislation. The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 changed the administration process, with further emphasis upon prevention, which had a vast impact upon the team.

3.2 The legislation also affected the decision-making process, whereby, clients threatened with homelessness are placed under relief for 56 days, subsequently, the officer cannot issue the homelessness decision until after this period. Consequently, this resulted in an increase in demand for temporary accommodation.

3.3 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.

3.4 Each officer within the team has their own specialism and work closely with the designated client group. Each of the officers provide drop-in advice sessions across the Borough, to ensure the service is accessible and provides a less formal setting for vulnerable clients. It also allows officers to work directly with hard-to-reach clients and break down formal communication barriers.

3.5 Staffing

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. During the later years there has been a gradual increase in homelessness presentations, placing additional pressure on commissioned and none commissioned housing providers.

3.6 There continues to be a gradual increase in homelessness presentations, placing the team under extreme pressure, whilst managing increased caseloads of approximately 55 cases per officer. Furthermore, a number of issues during the past months have had a detrimental impact upon the service delivery, which include, staff sickness absence and recruitment delays, resulting in agency staff cover, to ease the pressure upon the service.

3.7 The Housing Solutions Team are hybrid working, completing face to face advice sessions and homelessness appointments/assessments, with additional time working from home on decisions etc. The staff are managing the process, though the additional prevention activity has placed considerable pressure upon the team, resulting in an increase in homelessness reviews and legal challenges.

3.8 Homelessness Performance

The past year has proven extremely challenging for the Housing Solutions Team, due to the increase in homelessness presentations and the reduction in housing accommodation availability within both the social and private rented sectors. However, the service has continued to see a gradual flow of homelessness presentations, placing additional pressure upon the team, who are striving towards reducing/preventing homelessness and reducing the reliance upon hotel usage.

3.9 As anticipated, there continues to be a gradual increase in homelessness, which due to present economic issues is deemed to increase further. The team are working extremely hard to facilitate a number of prevention measures to mitigate tenancy re-possession and enable clients to remain within the home, if safe to do so. The table gives a comparison between the last three years, further illustrating the level of prevention activity achieved during the identified period.

YEAR	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Apr 24- Sept 24
Presentations	2039	3156	3382	1888

Relief	986	1180	852	547
Prevention	757	1423	1969	864
Statutory Homeless	190	433	417	364

3.10 The team work tirelessly to source temporary accommodation, in order to avoid hotel usage. Unfortunately, due the pressures mentioned above, using hotels is a last option, but often needed to meet the local authority statutory requirements. However, there is a robust plan in place to manage the move-on transition from temporary hostel and/or permanent accommodation to free up availability within commissioned services. The table illustrates the decreased reliance upon hotel usage during the past three years.

YEAR	2021/22`	2022/23	2023/24	Apr 24-Sept 24
Placement	149	114	68	36
Total Families	115	67	28	27
Total Singles	34	47	40	9

3.11 Halton has taken a robust approach to tackling homelessness and meeting the needs of vulnerable homelessness clients. The main objective is to continue to review the housing provision available within the Borough to ensure increased demand can be met. Details of commissioned and leased temporary accommodation provision within the Borough is as follows.

3.12 Commissioned Services

Brennan Widnes	Lodge,	39 units	self-contained	Single Clients
Halton Runcorn	Lodge,	66 units Inc 3 sit up spaces	self-contained	Single Clients Rough Sleepers
Grangeway Runcorn	Court,	14 units	self-Contained	Families
Maya Court, Widnes		12 units	self-contained	Victims of Domestic Abuse
NSAP Lacey Widnes	Market & Street,	3 apartments	self-contained	Rough sleepers / Offenders

3.13 None Commissioned

Columba Widnes	Hall,	16 self-contained apartments	Families
Whitchurch Runcorn	Way,	3 shared house units	Singles

Halton remains committed to providing accommodation for all homeless clients that are rough sleeping or at imminent risk of homelessness. Halton has a robust service provision for rough sleepers, which has proven successful in retaining low rough sleeper figures.

3.14 Future Challenges

The Local Authority continues to face many challenges around homelessness. As detailed above, staffing recruitment is proven to be a major concern for many Local Authorities across the country. The present economic crisis and increased levels of inflation are having a detrimental impact upon many households. Details of the levels of activity across the team are.

3.15 S21 Notice Seeking Possession / Eviction

The majority of households are experiencing varying levels of affordability, which is a major issue. Many households struggle to afford to remain within their properties and therefore, threatened with homelessness.

3.16 During the past twelve months the Local Authority has seen an increase in the level of clients approaching the Housing Solutions Team for support and assistance, as many landlords pursue legal possession of their properties. The table below illustrates the level of repossession notices issued within the social, private, and home ownership sectors during past two years.

YEAR	2022/23	2023/24	Apr 24-Sept 24
Home Ownership	42	52	35
Private Rented	336	384	152
Registered Social Landlord	271	499	191

3.17 Within the Housing Solutions Team there is a designated officer who is actively involved in the court process. The officer works directly with lenders to reach an agreement that will allow the clients to remain within their home. The Mortgage Rescue Scheme and possession process has been identified as a priority and funding

allocated to assist homeowners and tenants.

- 3.18 The Home Ownership possession numbers are low in comparison with other housing sectors. However, we do anticipate that affordability for many homeowners and households will prove to be a major factor to clients losing their homes. The level of prevention activity has been successful, with a vast reduction in evictions. The tables illustrate the level of prevention activity within **Appendix 1**.
- 3.19 Although the number of private and social rented sector illustrates the highest possession figures, not all will result in the landlord pursuing possession of the property. Staff are working tirelessly with clients and landlords to address any issues and utilise the prevention fund to offset arrears, save the tenancy and prevent homelessness.
- 3.20 Further discussions are ongoing with the private rented sector to encourage them to work directly with the Local Authority, to increase the accommodation options available and offer clients choice. There are a number of prevention incentives available, to offer reassurance to the landlords and to strive to address and reduce future homelessness,
Details are:
- Bond Guarantee Scheme
 - HBC will act as guarantor.
 - Discretionary Housing Payments
 - Prevention Fund – Rent in advance, Deposits.
 - GIFT – Furniture package.
- 3.21 There is a robust process in place with the registered social landlords that notifies the housing solutions adviser at an early stage of pending action. The process has proven successful with the officer achieving positive outcomes to reduce evictions and negotiations to enable the client to remain within their home. Level of activity during April 2023 – Mar 2024 contained within Appendix 1.
- 3.22 The Local Authority is seeing an increase in the discontinuation notices being issued by the Home Office to asylum seekers/refugees. There is a designated officer within the Housing Solutions Team, with a robust approach, liaising directly with Serco to ensure all client referrals are registered at the earliest stage of the notice. The officers are working tirelessly to ensure all asylum seekers awarded positive refugee status are supported and advised accordingly, to source accommodation and can access all housing options and services available.
- 3.23 The main challenge is around asylum seekers who receive a positive decision to remain, which does not necessarily mean they meet the homelessness criteria. This has caused an element of confusion for the clients, which has been raised with the home office

and Serco, The recruitment of the British Red Cross caseworker sits within the Housing Solutions Team and work across all agencies, to assist and support asylum seekers within the Borough. The officer will work with clients to source move on accommodation and support them throughout the process.

3.24 Funding

The Government confirmed the allocation of a key element of the overall investment: funding through the Homelessness Prevention Grant, which is available to local authorities in 2024/25 to support and deliver services to prevent and tackle homelessness. The purpose of the Homelessness Prevention Grant is to give local authorities control and flexibility in managing homelessness pressures and supporting those who are at risk of homelessness, and to deliver the following priorities: Details.

Funding Grant	Initiative	Total Award
Homelessness Grant	Prevention	£369.000
Rough Sleeper Grant	Accommodation / Support	£69.000
Trailblazer Grant	Early Intervention Officer	£39.000
AFEO	2 x Offender Co-ordinators	£60.000

3.25 The AFEO funding introduced a new co-ordinator post in 2021/22 to work across offender services and improve service delivery. The post has achieved successful outcomes, resulting in a vast improvement in communication, partnership working and a consistent approach across Local Authority services. Subsequently, no offender has been released back to Halton without a full pathway plan and accommodation route. The service has been deemed good practice and the remaining Liverpool City Region Local Authorities have recently introduced the same approach.

3.26 Engagement with partner agencies is ongoing; to support and advise all client groups to source suitable accommodation. The aim is to assist clients to achieve positive outcomes and promote lifestyle change. Communication and teamwork between service agencies is excellent, enabling a quick response and implemented action to address crisis issues.

3.27 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 vulnerable client groups is as important as the supply of affordable homes and supported housing.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 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 reliance upon hotel usage, which will have a significant impact upon local budgets.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

Protect the most vulnerable households, as many are reliant upon accessing social housing to meet their housing needs. Facilitate a choice-based lettings scheme to promote access to suitable social housing, to promote stability, thus improving health and wellbeing, resulting in greater independence!

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

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.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

The services in place will tackle inequality and further identify that those most in need will be awarded priority and support to secure social housing

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

None at this stage.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

The local authority has a statutory duty to administer homelessness and support clients threatened with homelessness. The process and service options allow clients choice to secure social housing, therefore promote community stability within the Borough.

7.0 Risk Analysis

7.1 None at this stage.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 The equality implications have been identified and mitigated.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None at this stage

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

10.1 None under the meaning of the Act.

Repossession Notice Activity

Registered Social Landlord Activity	Total
Referrals	499
Evictions prevented via Crisis Interventions	159
Evictions prevented via Relief Stage	259
Property Relinquished / Tenant Deceased	9
Total Eviction Loss	28
Court attendance – Suspended Orders	125
Prevention Funding Applications	47 - £22,840
Discretionary Housing Applications	29 - £28,200

Home Ownership Activity

Owner Occupier Activity	Total
Referrals	52
Total evictions prevented	42
Cases carried over 24/25	10
Total eviction loss	0
Sold Property and rehoused via PPP	0