

REPORT TO: Health Policy & Performance Board
DATE: 3 November 2015
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, People & Economy
PORTFOLIO: Health & Wellbeing
SUBJECT: Homeless 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 homeless service, and to advise of a recent Supreme Court decision likely to affect future demand for the service.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the report be noted..

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Homelessness Strategy 2013/18

3.1 In accordance with Homelessness Act 2002 the local authority has conducted a full Strategic Review of Homelessness within the area and formulated a Homelessness Strategy covering the period 2013/18.

3.2 As part of the Homelessness Strategy implementation, it was agreed that the Strategic Action Plan would be reviewed annually. A consultation event was held to review the Strategic Action plan in June 2015, which involved active engagement with all partner agencies, service providers and members.

3.3 The review provided clear direction for preventing and addressing Homelessness within Halton and reflects the relevant factors known to affect future homelessness. It also highlights the identified actions completed the last financial year and new tasks added to ensure the action plan remains current and reflect legislative and economic changes. The amended Action Plan will be the subject of a report to Executive Board on the 5th November 2015.

Housing Solutions Team

3.4 The Housing Solutions Team has been proactively working with all client groups to reduce and prevent homelessness. During the past 6 months staff turnover and recruitment delays have placed

additional pressure upon the service but recruitment is now complete and the Team should be back to full capacity by mid-October 2015.

3.5 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 aims of the strategy are to:

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

3.6 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).

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Homeless Presentations	168	197	249
Homeless Acceptances	86	46	42
Homeless Prevention/Relief	431	744	798
A&A Prevention	2079	1781	1897
B&B Usage	0	0	0

3.7 The Authority is looking to introduce a youth homelessness strategy and action plan later this year, which will be led by young people and give them a voice around future service provision. Due to the level of success around youth homelessness the Youth Officer role has been approved for a further 12 month period.

3.8 The Mortgage Rescue and Rent Repossessions Officer has 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.

3.9 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;

- No Second Night Out - Rough Sleepers
- 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

Homelessness Trends

- 3.10 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.
- 3.11 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.
- 3.12 The accommodation and support recording system Mainstay went live October 2014 and has proven successful. All housing and support providers are registered onto the system which gives an accurate record of the client's needs, reduces repeat assessments and allows the user to gain a full overview of the services and locations that the clients have accessed. The local data is recorded to monitor performance and helps to determine future demands and changing trends.
- 3.13 A new homelessness database system is due to be implemented in October 2015. The system upgrade will allow more efficient and accurate data recording and will link into the Mainstay system to allow the user access to all the relevant details.
- 3.14 The PPB Scrutiny Review conducted in 2012/13 highlighted the high vacancy levels across all the supported hostel accommodation schemes. Due consideration was given towards reducing capacity and during the last 12 months a number of recommendations have been actioned to address the changing homelessness culture and reliance upon supported housing provision.
- 3.15 The review of contracts has seen a positive shift in how temporary accommodation is administered, with less focus upon dependency and more around skill based learning; move on process and sustainable independent living.

Brennan Lodge is a new Local Authority commissioned service that opened in July 2015. The Building is owned by Halton Housing Trust and managed by the Salvation Army, and provides 39 supported units for single vulnerable homeless clients. To date, there have been a number of issues around building maintenance and procedural practice, however, discussions are underway with the relevant partners to address and resolve identified problems and devise a clear action plan to ensure the service is fully compliant, efficient and sensitive to local needs

Legislation

- 3.16 The Localism Act 2011 introduced many changes to homelessness and allocations legislation, and it is anticipated that welfare reform and recent legislative changes will result in a future increase in the levels of homelessness across the district.
- 3.17 In November 2012, the Localism Act brought into force provisions that allow local authorities to end the main housing duty to a homeless applicant by means of a private rented sector offer, i.e. a fixed term assured shorthold tenancy for a minimum of 12 months. The authority has devised a policy and toolkit to enable the use of this power in Halton, which is the subject of a separate report to Executive Board on the 5th November.
- 3.18 A Supreme Court Judgement in May 2015 will impact on future homelessness assessments. The case marks an important change to how Authorities assess homeless people’s ‘vulnerability’ when deciding on whether they have a statutory duty to house them. In effect it will require more applicants to be deemed vulnerable and so have a priority need. It will place additional pressure upon homelessness services and place further pressure upon temporary and long term housing accommodation providers.
- 3.19 Authorities will have to widen the criteria for deciding who gets housed as a result of the Supreme Court decision. For Halton this will likely lead to increased homeless acceptances but it is considered that the temporary accommodation provision in place is sufficient to meet these potential demands.
- 3.20 For information, the number of applicants deemed non priority over recent years was as below.

YEAR	DECISIONS
2013 / 14	79
2014 / 15	105
Q1 2015	36

Health & Homelessness

- 3.21 The Homelessness Strategy review identifies the gaps in provision and the need to improve communication between partner agencies. An integrated approach will enable the Authority to address both the social and health care issues, reduce homelessness and encourage lifestyle change.
- 3.22 Halton is fully committed and focused upon health care and service provision for vulnerable homelessness clients. The action plan identifies 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.
- 3.23 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.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 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
- 4.2 In this context policies are only required where the Authority decides to exercise a discretionary power. The only policy referred to in this report is around the use of accommodation in the private rented sector to discharge homelessness duty, and this is the subject of a separate report to Executive Board on the 5th November.

5.0 OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no immediate financial or resource implications.

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 actions contained within the strategy will have 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 'No Second Night Out' initiative.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

N/A.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

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**

There are none under the meaning of the Act.