

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 15th April 2021

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, People

PORTFOLIO: Physical Environment

SUBJECT: Eligibility criteria and Move on Pathway Plan for the Council's Housing and Homelessness Services.

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To update the Executive Board in respect of the changes to the eligibility criteria for accessing housing and homelessness support that were made as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board

1. note the contents of this report; and
2. agree the recommendations at 3.2 that the Housing Solutions Team revert to using the homelessness eligibility criteria and adopt a phased approach to its implementation.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Background

3.1.1 At the beginning of the pandemic, central government announced that all local authorities should continue with the statutory eligibility criteria for services but also adopt an approach of supporting all people who contact housing and homelessness services for help, irrespective of their priority need. The 'Everyone In' approach meant that, although those in priority need would continue to be supported as before, there was now an additional layer of support for a wider group of vulnerable people that was needed.

3.1.2 The widening of the eligibility criteria resulted in substantially more direct involvement with people who would not otherwise have been deemed eligible for services, and in particular a considerable number of single homeless people who would previously have been given advice and support, but who would not have fallen within the statutory

duty to be accommodated.

- 3.1.3 The Covid restrictions led to a further increase in demand for support and placements. The main increases were from “sofa surfers” (people who are essentially homeless but who sleep in the homes of friends or family on a temporary basis) and the increased number of relationship breakdown within families. In addition, the fear of transmission of the virus, meant that many people no longer had the option of staying with family and friends and therefore had no choice other than to present themselves as homeless.
- 3.1.4 This increased the level of demand on services. Existing temporary accommodation provision very quickly reached capacity, and it was necessary to place a number of people in hotel accommodation, Presently, there are approximately 20 clients staying in temporary hotel accommodation at any given time and placements continue to increase.

Dates	People Placed	Total Number of Nights	Cost
Mar 20 – May 20	43	468	£29,772
June 20 - August 20	74	639	£31,007
Sept 20 – December 20	176	2027	£62,573
Jan 21 – 23 March 21	168	1909	£64,573
TOTAL	461	5043	£187,925

- 3.1.5 Additional temporary accommodation provision was commissioned to meet the increased demand, which included reinstating the mothballed units at Grangeway Court; a new scheme at Columba Hall, Widnes providing 21 apartments on a short-term basis, allowing placements of people with less complex needs. Private landlords were contacted to see if they could help; other currently commissioned services also expanded their provision.
- 3.1.6 Central Government had previously ordered an embargo on evictions of people in rented properties. Although this embargo has now been lifted the impact of this is not likely to appear for some months (due to the time it takes to get eviction cases through court), it is likely that this will further increase the numbers of people across the country who will present themselves as homeless.
- 3.1.7 The Local Authority made a commitment to extend the ‘Everyone In’ approach up to 31st March 2021, and all clients presenting as homeless will continue to be accommodated. Discussions with Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) have advised that move on pathway plans to reduce temporary accommodation must be put in place.

3.1.8 The thrust of current government policy is now to support people to move on from their homeless accommodation into more permanent settings, and transition back to the routine approach to the delivery of homelessness services.

3.2 **Move On Pathway Recommendations:**

3.2.1 In order to follow government policy it is recommended that the Housing Solutions Team revert to using the homelessness eligibility criteria.

3.2.2 Officers will continue to work with all clients in accordance with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, offering advice and assistance to clients who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, to secure permanent housing options and support.

3.2.3 It is recommended that a phased move on approach be implemented to reduce the future use of hotel placements and ensure that commissioned accommodation services are available to meet demand and Local Authority statutory obligations.

3.2.4 The proposed move on pathway plan;

- Full move on plan to be developed to arrange a move on approach over a three-month period, commencing 1st May 2021.
- Vaccination roll out within all homelessness services, whereby, all clients should have received first Covid vaccination by June 2021
- Direct Property Matches via social landlords will continue for clients up to 2nd July 2021
- All clients presenting as homeless from 1st May 2021 will be assessed in accordance with Homelessness legislation
- All clients presenting as rough sleeping from 1st May 2021 will need to be verified by commissioned outreach service Whitechapel.
- Move on transition and dispersal of private sector commissioned apartments will commence from 1st May 2021.

3.2.5 MHCLG have confirmed that additional funding of up to £100.000 will remain available to offset temporary accommodation costs during the move on transition period. A further bid is due to be submitted to MHCLG to outline the relevant expenditure costs.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There are no policy implications arising from this report.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 To delay the proposed move on pathway process may result in further financial costs to cover temporary hotel placements.

5.2 Failure to adhere with the homelessness legislation and meet statutory obligations could subsequently lead to further legal challenges, with the Local Authority incurring legal court costs.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

Children and young people, and any families where children are dependents, have always been a priority need for temporary accommodation, and this has not changed under the local amendments to the eligibility criteria. All children and families who have needed temporary accommodation during the period of the pandemic have been provided with accommodation and support.

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

There are no implications for employment, learning and skills in Halton arising from this Report.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

People who are at risk of homelessness, and rough sleepers in particular, frequently have complex lives and multiple health problems. People in this position are regarded as being vulnerable, which has placed them within the priority for support, and the changes to the eligibility criteria have not changed this.

6.4 A Safer Halton

There are no direct implications for a Safer Halton arising from this Report.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

There are no implications for Halton's urban renewal arising from this Report.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 Continuing with the current approach will require increased financial support for the service.

7.2 The impact of changing the approach will affect those clients within temporary accommodation and future placements. There are risks that

people could become homeless and potentially revert to rough sleeping, which will increase the risks to their health.

7.3 The provision of a managed approach to this unique situation can potentially mitigate some of the health risks and reduce the potential for additional coronavirus infection in the Borough.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 There are no equality implications arising from the contents of this Report.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002	Through Contact Officer	Patricia Preston
Homelessness Reduction Act 2017	Contact Officer	Patricia Preston