

REPORT TO: Health Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 15 February 2022

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director - People

PORTFOLIO: Health & Wellbeing

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 26th 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. During pandemic Halton made a commitment to accommodate all homelessness clients and make one offer of secure accommodation.

3.1.2 Halton took 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 was 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

3.1.3 As part of the approach, additional measures were put in place to deliver a move on transitional plan for those placed in temporary accommodation. It was agreed with the Registered Social Providers that a direct property match process would be applied from

July 2020 and was further extended upto October 2021. Subsequently, all void properties were offered in the first instance to the Homelessness team to match with vulnerable clients. The process offered a positive response to effectively move clients out of temporary accommodation and into properties, offering sustainability.

3.2 Halton response

3.2.1 The Housing Solutions Team continue to work 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 impact upon future service delivery, staff working patterns and partnership engagement, which is presently being reviewed in accordance with Council guidelines.

3.2.2 The past year has proven extremely challenging for the Housing Solutions Team, due to the increase in homelessness presentations. During mid/late 2020 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 continued to see a gradual flow of homelessness presentations, placing additional pressure upon the team, who are striving towards reducing/preventing homelessness and hotel/b&b usage.

3.2.3 The table illustrate the commissioned temporary accommodation provision in place

Commissioned Accommodation Provision	Usage
Single Hostels	101
Grangeway Court	14
Women's Refuge	12
Private Rented Sector	7

3.2.4 The table illustrates hotel / B&B usage.

Year	Number of Clients	Number of Night
2018 - 2019	22	107
2019 - 2020	80	337
2020 - 2021	859	5191
2021 - Dec 21	690	5762
Jan 22	39	51

3.2.5 The Housing Solutions 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.

Homelessness Presentations	October 2021 – December 2021
Presentations	397

Homelessness Relief	280
Homelessness Prevention	156

3.2.6 Further discussions are ongoing with the private rented sector to encourage them to work directly with the Local Authority. The Bond Guarantee Scheme was reviewed to offer increased incentives to landlords, in order to increase accommodation options and tenant choice, to address and reduce future homelessness.

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.

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.

3.4.2 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	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
National	4871	5251	5815	5815	5850
Halton	4	5	9	0	0

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.

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 commissioned support service, Whitechapel, 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.

The Local Authority has also commissioned a sit up service that provides temporary refuge for vulnerable rough sleepers to move off the streets and access the necessary services to make lifestyle changes.

3.4.3 **Domestic Abuse**

Halton did initially see a vast increase in DA referrals and helpline enquiries; however, this has gradually reduces as Government restrictions have eased. 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.

Due to the initial increase in demand, it was agreed that Halton Refuge would restrict out of area referrals. However, the restriction has now ceased, though the service provider is working closely with agencies to support local victims, to ensure they are safe and to minimise movement and disruption.

3.4.4 **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 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.

3.4.5 **Prison Release**

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.

Halton was recently successful with joint funding bid to recruit an Offender Co-ordinator who will work across Halton and Knowsley. The officer will co-ordinate services to ensure there is a planned pathway in place prior to the client being discharged from prison, making full use of the resources available across all statutory services.

3.4.6 **Refugee Resettlement Programme**

Due to the Covid 19 Pandemic the resettlement programme was suspended. As restrictions ease, the programme has recommenced and arrivals are being scheduled for the next 6 months.

As part of the initial Council commitment, Halton will has agreed to resettle the remaining 48 refugees. It is anticipated that the next cohort of arrivals will be March/April 2022.

As part of the resettlement programme, a bi-lingual case officer from British Red Cross has been commissioned to provide case work, support and signposting to asylum seekers who receive positive decisions to remain. The officer sits within the Housing Solutions Team and supports both statutory and voluntary agencies to meet the needs of this vulnerable client group.

3.4.7

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.

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.

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.

3.4.8

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.

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.

3.5 Funding

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

YEAR	FUNDING	SERVICE DELIVERY
2021/22	£106,000 Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI 4)	Sit Up Service Outreach support officer Outreach move on officer Nurse Practitioner Prevention Fund
2022/23	Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI 5) submitted by 27/2/22	Continuation of sit up and support services
2022/23	£344,849 Annual Homelessness Grant	Continuation of homelessness delivery services Increase prevention incentives

5.0

5.1

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.

6.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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, DLUHC funding will cover/offset a proportion of the incurred costs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

7.0 Children and Young People in Halton

- 7.1 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.

7.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

- 7.2.1 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 officers work directly with Halton into Jobs and conduct drop in advice sessions.

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.

7.3 A Healthy Halton

- 7.3.1 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.

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.