



## **HOMELESSNESS WORKING PARTY**

### **REVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS - FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**MAY 2025**

**Adult Social Care | Adults Directorate**

## Background

A Homelessness Working Party was established by Cllr Marie Wright to bring Officers and Members together in order to increase the understanding amongst Members regarding homelessness in the borough and make any necessary recommendations for change.

The Working Party has provided Members the opportunity to gain an understanding of Homelessness in Halton, the current service offer, pressures, data and how resources are mobilised to provide quality services that support some of the most vulnerable adults in the Borough.

## Scope of the Review

The following areas were identified to be included in the scope of the review:

1. Councillors to visit services to understand current service provision in relation to homelessness;
2. Councillors to review the performance of current homelessness services, including the views from people who use services;
3. Councillors to review the remit of the Homelessness Forum, regularity of meetings and associated attendees;
4. Councillors to review current governance/reporting lines for homelessness data and regularity of reporting;
5. Councillors to review data on the number of empty homes in the Borough and plans around their use;
6. Councillors to review current numbers of rough sleepers within the borough and provision of services to support rough sleepers;
7. Councillors to review the monitoring arrangements for commissioned and grant-funded Homeless services;
8. Councillors to understand current homelessness service offer and gaps in services;
9. Councillors to review the funding position for homelessness services including budget, spend and variance.

## FINDINGS

### 1. **Councillors to visit services to understand current service provision in relation to homelessness**

A number of Councillors visited some local homeless services. After visiting the services, Councillors fed back their initial thoughts on the services visited.

#### **Grangeway Court (Supported Accommodation for Families)**

The Councillors thought that Grangeway Court was not fit for purpose and conditions were not up to standard and require improvement.

#### **Brennan Lodge (Homeless Hostel, Widnes)**

The Councillors thought that Brennan Lodge was a brilliant place, the rooms are sparse but the support was very good and the staff were welcoming and helpful.

#### **Halton Lodge (Homeless Hostel, Widnes)**

The Councillors thought that Halton Lodge was similar to Brennan Lodge but on a larger scale, the rooms are sparse and some re-decorating was needed but the support was very good and again, the staff were welcoming and helpful.

#### **Columba Hall**

The Councillors found a lack of supervision at Colomba Hall, with one member of staff doing an 8 hour shift and no weekends. Councillors asked what would happen in an emergency situation.

#### **Nightstop**

The Councillors thought that Nightstop was very impressive and thought that the aftercare for the residents and workers was very good.

### 2. **Councillors to review the performance of current homelessness services, including the views from people who use services**

Officers provided a presentation to Councillors which sets out the performance of the current commissioned homelessness services within the borough. This presentation also captures the views of people who are currently using these services.



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There are three main contracts which are commissioned i.e. have been through a formal procurement process based on the value of the service/contract.

The presentation provides an overview of each service and sets out the value of each commissioned service and the duration of each contract.

The performance data contained within the presentation is based on annual data and there may be some variation each quarter.

Performance data is reviewed on a quarterly and annual basis.

The data presented includes referral activity, an overview of the needs of the service users using each service, case study examples and an understanding of the outcomes achieved by users of the commissioned services.

### **3. Councillors to review the remit of the Homelessness Forum, regularity of meetings and associated attendees**

Officers informed Councillors that the Homelessness Forum was initially held quarterly, but due to the decrease in services and lower attendance it was agreed that the Forum would change to meeting annually. The group can review the membership and frequency of meetings and amend as necessary.

Officers and Councillors discussed that there is an opportunity to explore the viability of a quarterly Forum for Councillors and Officers and then an Annual Forum where other people are invited, including Service Users and residents.

The Homelessness Forum group's membership is open and includes internal and external agencies, Councillors, homelessness managers and officers, statutory agencies including Adult & Children's Social Care, Police, Registered Social Landlords, Supported Housing Providers, Voluntary Sector, Home Office, SERCO, British Red Cross, Youth Council. Other Councils within the Liverpool City Region are often invited so they can look at commonality and shared practice.

The purpose of the group is to review and have oversight of homelessness within the borough. The methods the group uses includes sharing best practice, working with other organisations, identifying common areas of improvement, identifying and developing innovative methods of reducing homelessness, sharing statistical information, identifying common trends and exploring potential funding options for quality assurance.

### **4. Councillors to review current governance/reporting lines for homelessness data and regularity of reporting**

Officers provided a presentation to Councillors which describes the current governance arrangements for Homelessness. Data is currently presented on a quarterly basis to Health Policy and Performance Board (HPPB).

Some information is also shared at Community Safety Partnership. Priorities which are currently separate to homelessness: Housing;

Refugees & Asylum Seekers; Community Safety Gypsy Traveller sites are currently subject to separate reporting lines.



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## **5. Councillors to review data on the number of empty homes in the Borough and plans around their use**

Councillors were provided with information on the number of homes which are empty across the borough, which currently stands at approximately 800 homes. There are often many reasons why homes are vacant and this can include, for example, properties awaiting refurbishment or repairs, properties under private ownership, properties undergoing sale or being prepared for rental.

Councillors proposed stronger links should be made with Registered Social Landlords around repeated Homelessness issues and the status and re-use of empty homes. Councillors proposed that this information is reported to the appropriate Policy and Performance Board on a regular basis.

Councillors also requested information on the number of empty houses that have been bought by SERCO that are being used to house Asylum Seekers/Refugees within the borough. Officers advised that when SERCO first came on board, they had a quota. SERCO have now met that quota and therefore will not be purchasing any additional properties. The Council has regular meetings with SERCO and has developed a process for the purchase of a property which involves the Housing Solutions team undertaking a postcode check to check there is no element of risk, including anti-social behaviour.

It was discussed that the Council's corporate teams are currently working to develop a Housing Strategy for the borough. Adult Social Care is represented on this group and this participation will inform the development of the strategy. The Council's plans to make use of any empty homes will fall within the remit of the new Housing Strategy. It was discussed that it would be beneficial for links to be made in terms of reporting lines for the Housing Strategy and its links with Homelessness. A members seminar planned for June for all members of the Council will focus on the emerging housing strategy and this will include empty homes and possible options.

Councillors wanted to understand the number of applications for properties within the borough that are subject to applications made by people who live outside of the borough. Data was provided to show this, indicating the number of applications made via Property Pool Plus (PPP) for Halton properties and the location of the person applying for a property in Halton. The data shows that there were 135 applications for Halton properties from people who were living outside of the borough.



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Councillors also wanted to understand how many Halton residents have applied for properties outside of the borough. This would assist Councillors in understanding the how many people have applied for a property within the borough as well as those applying to leave Halton and take up a property outside of the borough. However, it is not possible to ascertain this data as Halton residents would need to apply directly to the Housing provider and this data is unknown to the Council.

## **6. Councillors to review current numbers of rough sleepers within the borough and provision of services to support rough sleepers**

Officers provided a presentation to Councillors which included statistics on the number of Rough Sleepers within the borough. Between April 2024 and September 2024 there were 19 verified Rough Sleepers.



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Changing Lives provide a Crash Pad service for Rough Sleepers at Halton Lodge Hostel, Runcorn. This provides temporary supported accommodation for up to 5 days. The Council is working with Changing Lives to increase this service from 3 to 6 spaces via additional funding to assist with refurbishment within Halton Lodge. The refurbishment will ensure that there are separate facilities for males and females.

There are two properties in Market and Lacey Street for Rough Sleepers who are ready for move-on accommodation, but not yet ready to live independently without support. A support officer from Changing Lives will work with people within these properties to support their readiness for their next move-on into independent accommodation. People can stay in the Market and Lacey Street accommodation for up to 2 years, with outreach support provided by Changing Lives during their residency.

## **7. Councillors to review the monitoring arrangements for commissioned and grant-funded Homeless services**

Councillors were provided with the details of the services which are commissioned and those which are grant-funded.

Both commissioned and grant-funded services are monitored on a regular basis, at least quarterly, annually and more frequently if required.

Monitoring activity is generally proportionate to the contract value, with commissioned services being subject to pre-determined monitoring requirements which are set out in tender processes.

Performance requirements for commissioned services are ‘triangulated’ and include data, outcomes and case studies to provide a balanced and in-depth view of how a service is performing.

Services are expected to adhere to strict reporting deadlines and must adhere to the Council’s policies regarding information governance and the security of personal data captured and stored.

From time to time monitoring requirements may change in light of any changes to national legislation or local policy.

Grant funded services may be subject to specific reporting requirements as set out by the central government departmental funding body e.g. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

Annual performance data was shared with Councillors, to provide an overview of current monitoring activity and performance.



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## **8. Councillors to understand current homelessness service offer and gaps in services**

Officers presented to Councillors, an overview of the current service offer for homelessness within the borough, including which services are commissioned and services which are grant-funded, alongside services which are currently based within the borough that the Council currently does not commission or grant-fund.

Councillors reviewed current homelessness service provision in relation to supply and demand and have acknowledged that there is a particular shortfall in the current provision of supported accommodation for families, with demand outstripping supply. This leads to the use of other, more expensive options for temporary accommodation such as hotel use and one-off spot purchasing of temporary accommodation. These options often do not lead to positive outcomes and can be more costly in terms of additional on-costs, such as costs for meals and transport for families placed in temporary accommodation outside of the borough.

Part of the site at Grangeway Court has been identified for refurbishment in relation to 12 vacant units on the site. There are plans to bring the units back into use. Executive Board has recently approved the expenditure for the refurbishment of the vacant units. Once the refurbishment has been completed, the site will be reopened as dedicated accommodation for families and for Domestic Abuse provision, both of which are currently lacking within the borough.



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## 9. Councillors to review the funding position for homelessness services including budget, spend and variance

Officers provided Councillors with funding information in relation to both grant-funded homelessness services and the funding of homelessness services that are currently commissioned by the Council.

It was noted that for the financial year 2025/2026 the Council has received an uplift through the **Prevention of Homelessness Grant** of £200,000, making the total funding amount £547,000.

The **No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)** funding is to help Asylum Seekers that are contacting the Council for support, by providing accommodation for 2 weeks to allow them to access services and make an application to the Home Office for Refugee status.

The **Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI)** funding has stayed the same at £139,000 which will continue to fund existing Rough Sleeper services in the borough. Changing Lives are providing a Crash Pad service which is being re-modelled to increase the Halton Lodge Crash Pad service from 3 to 6 spaces. Through the RSI funding, Whitechapel provide an Outreach and Move-on process. There are two properties in Market and Lacey Street, predominately for Rough Sleepers who are ready for move on. An outreach support officer will work with people to support their move on into independent accommodation. People can stay in the Market and Lacey Street accommodation for up to 2 years with outreach support.

The Council has received **Winter Pressure Funding** of £400,000 which will help fund an Immigration Officer working within the Daresbury Hotel and Trinity Space, and also a Landlord Accreditation Officer which will complement the work that Environmental Health will be doing with the Renters Reform Bill. The Council is also looking at additional support for clients moving into social housing whereby the Council will assist with the first week's rent, as this is often a barrier for clients moving into new accommodation.

The Council is aiming to work with a number of landlords to create a **Private Leasing Scheme** and have them issue assured shorthold tenancy for 12 months or more. The Council would assist with the rent in advance and pay up to 12-months rent for those clients. The Council would pay the fees up-front and claim the costs back through the discretionary housing payments so there is no delay for the landlords.



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## RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the Homelessness Working Party's review of Homelessness within the borough, the following recommendations have been identified:

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Recommendation Description</b>
Governance	Propose a single reporting line for the scrutiny of homelessness performance, via the relevant Policy & Performance Board, to enable Member oversight and Member direction of Homelessness in the borough.
Governance	Propose a 6-monthly cycle of reporting of Homelessness data and service development activity to the relevant Policy & Performance Board.
Governance	Establish links with Halton BC's corporate Housing Strategy development work regarding understanding the status of, and proposals for the use of empty homes within the borough.
Governance	Clarify governance and reporting lines for the following closely linked priorities which are currently separate to homelessness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing;</li> <li>• Refugees &amp; Asylum Seekers;</li> <li>• Community Safety</li> </ul>
Governance	Establish greater contact with Registered Social Landlords regarding repeated Homelessness issues and establish a regular flow of reporting to the relevant Policy and Performance Board - especially regarding empty properties in the borough.
Homelessness Forum	Agree the remit and regularity of Homelessness Forum meetings and associated attendee list.
Service Offer	Understand any gaps in current homelessness services e.g. Grangeway Court Supported Accommodation for Families and consider options for increased provision.
Service Offer	Work alongside Officers regarding the development of the dedicated Rough Sleeper supported accommodation in the borough.

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