

## **Homelessness Strategy Review Group August 2012**

### **Homelessness Annual Report 2011/12**

#### **Purpose of Report**

1. To advise of homelessness activity during 2011/12 and consider any implications.

#### **Background**

2. A management review of service delivery was undertaken in June 2003 alongside the production of the Council's first Homelessness Strategy.
3. The Strategy published in July 2003 included a commitment to produce an annual report on service development and delivery. This is the ninth annual report.

#### **Demand**

4. Following several years of escalating numbers of initial enquiries, demand for service levelled out from 2003/4 at around 2000 per year. From 2004/5, the number of full duty acceptances decreased as prevention of homelessness became our highest priority, following an increase last year; this year has seen a decrease in acceptances coupled with a further increase in the numbers of preventions.

	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Full duty decisions	448	372	386	296	154	188	158
All presentations	2009	2143	2569	2701	2280	2223	2388
% full duty	22%	17%	15%	11%	7%	8%	7%
Preventions (BVPI 213)	138	190	245	363	476	552	645

5. The majority of households with a full rehousing duty are in priority need because they contain children or an expectant mother.

	2005/06	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Total households accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need	448	372	386	296	154	188	158
Those with dependent children/pregnant	331	282	290	230	109	152	120
Households without children	117	90	96	66	45	36	38

6. We closely monitor the main reasons for homelessness acceptances, and use this information to prioritise service development. During 2011/12, there has been an increase in three of the top four categories and work is already underway to review our current service provision in these areas.

	Number 2007/8	Number 2008/9	Number 2009/10	Number 2010/11	Number 2011/12	% of Total 2010/11
<b>Termination of assured shorthold tenancy</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>31.0%</b>  (21.3% in 2010/11)
<b>Relationship breakdown</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>27.2%</b>
(Of which violent)	77	76	56	39	<b>34</b>	(24.5% in 2010/11)
(Of which non-violent)	29	14	11	7	<b>9</b>	
<b>Breakdown of relationship with parents/other host household</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>13.9%</b>
(Of which parents)						
(Of which other family/friends)	29	30	10	20	10	(18.6% in 2010/11)
	23	21	8	15	12	
<b>Mortgage arrears</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>11.4%</b>  (4.8% in 2010/11)
<b>End of Home Office asylum seeker accommodation</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6.3%</b>  (15.4% in 2010/11)

7. This year has seen a change in the primary cause of homelessness to the ending of Assured Shorthold Tenancies. On analysis of the 49 cases, the following themes have been identified:-
- i) 22 x Landlords' affordability issues, meaning that they are returning to their property or having to sell the property. Of these, 3 were already at possession proceedings, either at the rented property or the landlord's resident property. It is apparent that some Landlords, fail to understand the financial constraints, management and responsibilities when renting properties to customers.
  - ii) 12 x Tenant cannot afford to continue to live in the property due to

affordability issues. Of these all were affected by an unexpected change in circumstances, including losing work, reducing hours worked, one partner's income being reduced and illness. We will continue to work with customers to provide a suite of financial advice, through CAB, in order to try to maximise income and prevent possession. We will also continue to ensure that customers are aware of our services in order to try to take preventative action including use of the Preventing Repossessions Fund and Local Housing Allowance.

- iii) 6 x Condition of property. In some cases Landlords are serving notice to re-possess properties in order to either improve properties to re-let, presumably at an higher rate, or have given notice as they cannot afford to carry out necessary improvements, in 3 cases after some contact with the Private Sector team.
- iv) 3 x Landlords needing the property in order to re-house relatives. Undoubtedly this is tied into affordability issues as relatives either cannot afford to buy or rent or they have lost their own accommodation.
- v) 6 x Other reasons. Of these 3 the landlord advised they were exercising their right for possession, but refused to go into detail, it is likely this means they will be looking to increase the rent on re-letting. The remaining 3 were all being sold by executors/beneficiaries following death of the landlord.

It is highly likely that the ending of Assured Shorthold Tenancies will continue to lead to more homelessness presentations, particularly as Welfare Reforms continue to bite. We will need to consider what further work can be done with landlords, and whether the establishment of a social lettings agency would potentially be helpful.

8. Relationship breakdown remains consistently high, but continues to be addressed by the range of options available in this area. This year has seen the opening of the new refuge service, and good take up of the Staying Put service.
9. Since the introduction of the Mortgage Arrears Advice Service the number of customers accepted due to mortgage arrears has decreased dramatically. However, the changes to the Mortgage Rescue scheme, whereby every Council was obliged to introduce its own priority criteria and setting an allocation of seven for the Council, as detailed in last years report, impacted significantly on the number of rescues achievable. Midway through the financial year the local number allocated was reviewed and removed, but there is no doubt this affected the total number of acceptances. It should also be noted that the number of Mortgage Arrears Advice Service preventions increased during the year.
10. In respect of the number of acceptances through the end of the Home Office Asylum Seeker accommodation, the numbers continue to reduce.
11. Work continues to look at the impact of changes in welfare benefits, however, to date this has not had the expected impact in the area of family and friend exclusions, and there have not been many approaches resulting from the extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate to 25-34 year olds. However, the changes to Local Housing Allowance rates are prompted by renewals, and this combined with the incremental nature of other changes to benefits, tax credits and potentially council tax mean that the impact will inevitably be felt in the coming financial year and we are likely to see an increase in the number of

people who are threatened with homelessness. There are corporate strategic and operational groups looking at this area and the impact on homelessness is a key theme; strategies are being devised to try to minimise the impact and raise awareness for residents of Dudley. More families than we might initially have expected may be affected by the Benefit Cap, whilst it will be of critical importance how social landlords and their tenants respond to the Housing Benefit Size Criteria Restrictions and the implementation of Universal Credit next year.

12. Through the ongoing development and promotion of partnership services such as debt prevention, Staying Put, the Preventing Repossessions Fund, Family Intervention Project, crash pad, tenancy support, housing options, new affordable housing, rough sleepers initiative and private sector liaison we continue to work to address homelessness across the borough. These have contributed to the year on year increase in the number of preventions, which have again outnumbered acceptances by over 4 to 1. It is worth mentioning that in 2011/12 and despite the economic situation that, once again, there were no homelessness acceptances in Dudley arising from council rent arrears or from the RSL providers; this suggests that social landlords in the borough have responsible income management policies and good tenancy support arrangements.

## **Performance**

13. The Homelessness/Housing Advice service has in previous years been subject to an increasing number of Best Value Performance Indicators. Two of these were dropped in 2007/8, and in the performance framework of National Indicators effective from April 2008, the sole PI wholly to do with homelessness was NI 156 – the total of households in temporary accommodation. The government has set out to reduce the reporting requirements even further, but has reaffirmed its commitment to tackling homelessness, and in particular rough sleeping.

<b>Indicator Description</b>	<b>2007/8 Actual</b>	<b>2008/9 Actual</b>	<b>2009/10 Actual</b>	<b>2010/11 Actual</b>	<b>2011/12</b>
<b>NI 156</b> – Number of households living in temporary accommodation as at end of year	65	41	37	43	36
Local indicator formerly <b>BVPI 213</b> – % of households who considered themselves as homeless, who approached the LA's housing services and for whom housing advice casework intervention resolved their situation.	1.94 % (245) h/holds	2.88% (363) h/holds	3.78% (476) h/holds	4.16% (552) h/holds	4.97% (645) h/holds

## **Resources & value for money**

14. As usual, we have pursued any funding opportunities that have arisen, and have secured funding to maintain the Mortgage Arrears Advice Service in partnership with Dudley Citizens' Advice Bureaux. That service produces its own annual report, and we will be examining the outcomes and trends from 2011/12 to see how they can be used to secure an appropriate level of ongoing funding. The service has been crucial in achieving thirty mortgage rescues since it began in 2009, but has assisted many more households to resolve their mortgage worries without having to resort to mortgage rescue.
15. Lye Family Centre is run as a separate business unit with a balanced budget to cover its own running costs, and is generally fully occupied as are our dispersed furnished units of accommodation.

### **Service development**

16. The Housing Options Service continues to offer
  - Housing Options appointments with specially trained staff for any resident in Dudley Borough
  - A dedicated resource for Registered Social Landlords participating in Dudley at Home (CBL) – this has been extended to include private landlords
  - Outreach events and services for the wider community when capacity permits
17. Staff training in 2011/12 has included the areas of the impact of Loan Sharks, Mental Health Awareness, Safeguarding Children and bespoke training provided through our partnership with Dudley Citizens Advice Bureaux, particularly in the area of Welfare Reform. Individual staff have also attended various external events and fed back to the team. Four members of staff were recently able to join eight days of housing advice training commissioned by Private Sector Housing, as a result of which it has been decided to provide the same training for the rest of our team.
18. Our primary front of house service continues to be delivered at Dudley Council Plus, although our Housing Access Points are also able to deal with initial enquiries. Specialist Homelessness, Housing Applications, Housing Occupational Therapy and Housing Support staff are co-located at Solus House.
19. Most of our partners have participated this year in the development of a pre tenancy website for young people, which as well as providing reliable and helpful information will incorporate an inter-active tool for the production of a personal leaving home plan. The look and feel of the site has been determined by students from Dudley College as part of an ICT and graphic design course. Young people will be able to use the site independently or with support from agencies.
20. We are working with neighbouring authorities to strengthen our approach to rough sleeping by utilising some grant funding from the Government to provide an outreach service for entrenched rough sleepers with a view to offering personalised support to encourage them back into housing. We are also working across 12 local authority areas, using just over £1 million Government funding, to develop and enhance services that will help to prevent single people who are often non-priority in homelessness terms from becoming homeless.

### **Finance**

21. This report is for information and has no new financial implications.

## **Law**

22. The homelessness duties of local housing authorities are set out in the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002.

## **Recommendations**

23. Members are invited to comment upon the contents of this report.

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