

Adult, Community & Housing Services Scrutiny Committee – 18th February 2015

Report of the Strategic Director of Environment, Economy and Housing

The Homelessness Service

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide Members with information on the operational delivery of the Council's homelessness service.

Background

2. Since 2003 the service has produced a Homelessness Annual Report, which uses P1E data to analyse demand for the service, and to inform strategic development and service delivery. The report produced for 2013/14 was the eleventh annual report, and this report provides an update with data to 31st December 2014 ie Quarter 3 of 2014/15.
3. In the year 2013/14, 2400 homelessness decisions were made, representing an increase of 5.7% over the previous year. In the first three Quarters of 2014/15, 1896 decisions have been made, representing an increase of 3.9% on the 1825 made in the same period last year.

Homelessness Decisions

4. Table 1 is compiled from P1E homelessness statistical returns to the Department of Communities and Local Government, and charts the number and outcome of homelessness decisions recorded since 2006/7. The figures shown in the final column are for Q1-3 (year to date), and have been profiled to an end of year anticipated figure shown in brackets.

Table 1 – Decisions

	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	2010/ 2011	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013	2013/ 2014	2014/15 YTD and (Forecast)
Full duty decisions	372	386	296	154	188	158	171	150	79 (104)
All Decisions	2143	2569	2701	2280	2223	2388	2270	2400	1896 (2493)
% full duty	17%	15%	11%	7%	8%	7%	7.5%	6.25%	4.16% (4.16%)
Preventions (BVPI 213)	190	245	363	476	552	645	577	973	1011 (1200+)

Homelessness Presentations and Outcomes

5. The recording of homelessness decisions does not fully reflect the range of outcomes achieved for customers who present to our homelessness service. Every customer's outcome has to be recorded; the categories and examples are as follows
- **“No homeless reason”** – it is obvious on first meeting that there is no actual or threatened homelessness, but nevertheless advice and assistance is given eg a customer may approach the service to enquire about what happens when a periodic tenancy comes to an end, but has not been asked to leave their home and there are no reasons apparent to suggest that they should no longer continue to live there.
 - **“Not eligible”** – customer may or may not be homeless but is not eligible for assistance due to their nationality and immigration status, and may be referred to social care or third sector services eg a person in the UK from a country outside of the European Economic Area who does not have recourse to public funds on entry.
 - **“Not homeless”** – an investigation needs to be conducted but concludes that there is no actual or threatened homelessness, but again advice and assistance may be offered eg many customers approach the service as homeless following an argument with parents or other host household. If after making enquiries it is established that the accommodation is still available to them, and that it is reasonable for them and anyone who resides with them to continue to occupy the accommodation, then they are not homeless.
 - **“Homeless but not in priority need”** – an investigation concludes that the customer is homeless or threatened with homelessness, but that they do not fall within one of the priority groups defined in law eg does not have dependent children and is not vulnerable through a mental or physical disability.
 - **“Intentionally homeless”** – an investigation concludes that the customer is homeless through their own actions, and our duties are limited but may include a period in temporary accommodation and/or a band 4 waiting list application eg a council tenant who is evicted through rent arrears or anti social behaviour, despite having been warned of the consequences
 - **“No local connection”** – the customer is homeless and in priority need but is the responsibility of another local authority and will be referred back eg a customer may approach for help after losing accommodation in another Borough, is found to be eligible, homeless, and in priority need, but is found not to have a connection to Dudley, and may therefore be referred back to the Borough to which they have a connection.
 - **“Eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need”** known as “full duty” – the customer is homeless through no fault of their own and belongs to a priority need group, so the council will have a duty to ensure that accommodation is found for them eg the most common scenario is where a relationship has broken down often involving domestic abuse, and a place of safety needs to be found. It can often happen with little notice and gives the homelessness team less chance of finding a preventative solution.

- **“Homelessness prevented”** – this outcome can be secured at any point in the process by intervening to keep the customer in their existing accommodation or finding them somewhere else eg a customer has received a notice from a private landlord. The homelessness team and application team will work at this early stage to establish the landlords intention to recover his property and if confirmed will recommend higher preference on the waiting list. This process helps the household to secure alternative housing in advance of having to leave their current home.

6. Table 2 shows the numbers of households recorded with each of the above outcomes

Table 2 – Outcomes

	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	2010/ 2011	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013	2013/ 2014	2014/15 (YTD)
Total presented	2143	2569	2701	2280	2223	2388	2270	2400	1896 To Q3
No homeless reason	Included in “not homeless” figures					93	27	83	76 To Q3
Not eligible	9	4	9	23	14	18	27	33	38 To Q3
Not homeless	1439	1779	1908	1569	1564	1617	1537	1322	995 To Q3
No priority need	99	104	143	171	102	135	192	378	358 To Q3
Intentional	34	51	48	37	40	34	34	38	27 To Q3
No local connection	Included in “full duty accepted” figures							6	4 To Q3
Full duty accepted	372	386	296	154	188	158	171	150	79 To Q3
Prevention by HPRT	190	245	297	326	315	333	282	390	319 To Q3
Partner preventions	N/A	N/A	66	150	237	312	295	583	692 To Q3
All preventions	190	245	363	476	552	645	577	973	1011 To Q3

Preventing Homelessness

7. The team always aims to prevent homelessness whenever it can regardless of statutory duty owed to the individual customer. The numbers of cases where homelessness is prevented is one of the key performance indicators for the team.
8. Since April 2008, we have been asked to report on preventions secured by partners, and have gathered more of this data year on year. These are households who have not approached our team, but may otherwise have needed to do so. It is clear from this data the contribution that partner agencies are making to keeping actual homelessness in Dudley so low.
9. Many of the preventions recorded by the Homelessness Team are cases where homelessness was prevented by finding the customer alternative accommodation rather than retaining current accommodation. This reflects the timing of the approach for assistance - many customers do not approach the team for help until the home has already been lost, or at a stage when it is inevitable that their home will be lost. This is in contrast to prevention work recorded by partners, where the prevention work undertaken is focussed upon keeping the customer in their own home. This demonstrates that joint working and referrals to partner agencies at an early stage work well to retain accommodation, whilst the crisis work undertaken by the team, often when the home has already been lost, or cannot be saved, is effective in preventing homelessness in an emergency.
10. The way we record preventions currently does not always accurately reflect how much work has been done by the team to help customers who are not owed a rehousing duty by Dudley MBC, but who nevertheless are homeless and in need of assistance. The preventions of homelessness in these cases are described by CLG as 'reliefs' and to more accurately capture this work we are working to improve our data recording.

Acceptances – Main Reason for Homelessness.

11. We have a statutory duty to secure that accommodation is available for customers who are eligible for assistance, homeless, in priority need, and who are not intentionally homeless. Table 3 below provides details in regard to the main causes of homelessness for customers accepted as owed a rehousing duty.

Table 3- Main Causes of Homelessness

	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	2010/ 2011	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013	2013/ 2014	2014/15 YTD
Termination of assured shorthold tenancy	74	41	18	40	49	55	43	15 To Q3
Relationship breakdown	106	90	67	46	43	40	49	29 To Q3
(Of which violent)	77	76	56	39	34	30	39	17
(Of which non-violent)	29	14	11	7	9	10	10	12

Breakdown of relationship with parents/other host household	52	51	18	35	22	27	18	10
(Of which parents)	29	30	10	20	10	18	14	9
(Of which other family/friends)	23	21	8	15	12	9	4	1
Mortgage arrears	81	7	11	9	18	12	11	3
								To Q3
End of Home Office asylum seeker accommodation	23	22	19	29	10	7	6	5
								To Q3

12. Looking at the causes of homelessness recorded, the two main causes of homelessness were relationship breakdown, with the majority of cases involving violence, and the end of tenancies in the private rented sector.
13. Dudley has a range of options available for those fleeing violence. The Team works with New Beginnings and Women's Aid to source places of safety for women, families and sometimes men who feel they are no longer safe to remain in their home. The team offers refuge in all cases. Another option is 'Staying Put' a scheme funded by Supporting People which works with victims of violence to help them to stay in their own home by providing safety solutions such as locks, lighting, panic alarms and sometimes safe rooms. To date this year the project has successfully assisted 44 households to stay safe in their homes. As domestic violence plays such a significant part in the team's work we attend the Domestic Abuse Forum and have links in place with MARAC.
14. Although the private rented sector in Dudley is relatively small, homelessness from this sector is one of the biggest drivers of demand on the service. Tenants leaving this sector have notice, in most cases two months' notice, and in reality after taking into account the time it takes to progress through the court system, a tenant taking prompt action following service of notice will have at least 4 months in which to secure alternative accommodation. With that in mind measures have been implemented, by way of joint working between the Homelessness Team and the Application Team, to allow higher preference to be awarded at an earlier stage to households who have been served with notice. It is envisaged that this will allow households ample time to bid for and to secure housing in advance of reaching the crisis point of homelessness.

Acceptances – Reason for Priority Need

15. Table 4 demonstrates the number of households accepted as in priority need and owed a re-housing duty, and breaks down that number to give details about the number of households which include dependent children. As shown above the majority of customers were households containing children or an adult who was pregnant. From within that group, 85 were lone female parents. There were 3 single male households containing children and the remainder of that group were couples with children or households including a pregnant woman.

Table 4 – Homeless, In Priority Need and not Intentionally Homeless

	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	2010/ 2011	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013	2013/ 2014	2014/15 YTD
Total households accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need	372	386	296	154	188	158	171	150	79 To Q3
Those with dependent children/ pregnant	282	290	230	109	152	120	122	113	60 To Q3
Households without children	90	96	66	45	36	38	49	37	19 To Q3

Acceptances - equality issues

16. Ethnicity - within those accepted as owed a rehousing duty in the first three Quarters, there were 24 cases, 30% of all acceptances, from households who described themselves as from an ethnic minority group. The number of households found to be ineligible for services has risen; 38 households have been found to be ineligible so far this year, compared to 33 in the whole of 2013/14. In cases where a person is found to be ineligible for services, and where their household includes a dependent child, a referral is made to Children's Services.
17. Disability - a total of 9 acceptances this year (11%), were due to the person having priority need as a consequence of a physical or mental illness. These households were single and did not include children. The percentage is the same as last year.
18. Gender - the statistics show that the majority of applicants accepted as homeless, in priority need and owed a re-housing duty are female, with most being single parents whose households included dependent children. This statistic does not indicate that women are overly represented and find obtaining housing more difficult as a consequence of their gender, but shows that the person with parental responsibility is more likely to be female. A household which includes children is automatically in priority need, so will be owed a rehousing duty, and these are overly represented in the statistics for that reason. In contrast, the largest group found to be homeless but not in priority need and not owed a re-housing duty is single males.
19. Religion – this data has not previously been recorded but we are amending our information management system to start recording and reporting it.
20. Age - the statistics demonstrate that 87% of all customers accepted as owed a rehousing duty are below the age of 45. Of the 69 households this represents, 21 were under 25.

Temporary accommodation

21. The Homelessness/Housing Advice service is a statutory service whose duty is to ensure that accommodation is available for those owed a re-housing duty. The service is subject to former Best Value Performance Indicators.

Table 5 – numbers in temporary accommodation

Indicator Description	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/15 Q3
NI 156 – Number of households living in temporary accommodation as at end of year	56	41	37	43	36	55	29	19 (31.12.14)

22. Analysis of placements during 2013/14 showed that a total of 79 separate households made use of our own stock temporary accommodation at some point over the year whilst awaiting an offer of housing. This number included 48 households who were already counted as in temporary accommodation on March 31st 2013 and 31 further placements during the year. Temporary accommodation is also used for households who have been found to be intentionally homeless to allow them a reasonable period to secure alternative accommodation.
23. For 32 households using our own stock temporary accommodation, their length of stay was 6 months or less. The remainder of households spent longer than 6 months in the accommodation. The time spent in temporary accommodation can be prolonged for families with an adverse tenancy history as they are case managed and provided with an opportunity to build up a good tenancy history to enable them to access housing from Dudley MBC, other social landlords, or the private sector. The target time for moving these households on or converting their temporary accommodation to permanent is within 9 months. All households are referred for Housing Support on entry to temporary accommodation. All are provided with information and assistance to claim housing benefit and are supported to address issues such as debt and access to welfare benefits.
24. Bed and breakfast accommodation is another form of temporary accommodation that is used. It is used in emergencies, for short term occupation in cases where accommodation is imminently due to become available, or for short stays pending the outcome of enquiries. On average B&B is used three times each week. Many of the households accommodated in our own stock will have first spent a short period of time in B&B. This is often due to the time in the day that customers present as homeless and the practicalities of placing them in independent accommodation late in the day. In line with CLG guidance B&B has not been used by the Homelessness Team over the past year or the year to date to accommodate 16 or 17 year olds, In the year 2013/14 no families with children were placed in B&B accommodation for longer than 6 weeks. There has been one instance in the year to date where a household with children has been in B&B over this time period; the family stayed for 49 days. In this instance the family were not owed a duty to accommodate by Dudley MBC and had refused to return to the Borough to which they had local connection. The homeless Team assisted them to find accommodation in Dudley, but the moving date was delayed several times which caused them to remain in B&B longer than had been anticipated.

Homelessness without priority need

25. The information above relates in the main to those who are owed a re-housing duty by Dudley MBC; those who are eligible, homeless, and in priority need. As Table 1 above demonstrates, out of the 2400 decisions made in the year 2013/14, there were 150 households accepted as owed the full re-housing duty.
26. However, from within these 2400 decisions, 1322 people were eligible to have their circumstances considered, but were found to be not homeless, and another 377 were considered to be eligible and homeless, but not in priority need.
27. These figures demonstrate that 'not homeless' customers account for 55% of those presenting for assistance. These customers are all approaching for advice and assistance in regard to their housing, but all have accommodation already and are looking to move for various reasons. The team advise them of their options and provide as much information as possible.
28. The figures show that 15% of customers are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, but are not in priority need. For these applicants, although Dudley MBC is not under a statutory duty to find them temporary accommodation or to re-house them, a duty to advise and assist them to find accommodation is owed. This group can be one of the most difficult to immediately assist. There is a lack of affordable private sector accommodation for this group and those with an adverse tenancy history may experience barriers to rehousing in both the private and social housing sectors. This group is predominately male with applications from men accounting for approx 80% of the total.
29. There were a variety of reasons for homelessness recorded for this group, with the reason 'homeless due to parents/friends/other relatives no longer willing to accommodate' accounting for approximately 40% of the total. A further 14% gave the reason as 'non violent relationship breakdown with partner'.
30. The information above shows that 70% of the approaches made to the homeless service in 2013/14 were groups who will not be owed a re-housing duty, but who will need advice and assistance to secure housing. The position is similar (71%) in the first three Quarters of 2014/15. Further resources are required to assist this group.

Joint working

Project First Step Youth Hub

31. Working with young people aged 16-24 - the Hub focus is upon young people with housing needs. The service is accessed through the Homelessness Team and after an initial interview a young person can obtain advice, assistance and support from a range of service providers including Connexions, Supporting People and the Early Intervention Team from Children's Services. The services work together around the young person after contact has been made to deliver one co-ordinated service to meet that young person's needs, relieving the need for that young person to make separate enquiries of multiple services. From April to December 2014, the Youth Hub provided homelessness advice to 826 young people, education and training advice to 263 young people, and a package of ongoing floating support to 234 young people.

32. 16 and 17 year olds - a steady flow of 16 & 17 year olds approach for help, many finding relationships difficult at home and feeling that there is no option other than to leave. Work with this group has been very successful. Since March 2014 the Hub has had its own mediator on hand to intervene at crisis points as they arise. The work of the mediator will be reported in the next year but early indications are that this can be a very successful intervention for young people if mediation is used quickly. The team's work with Children's Services in respect of this customer group is evolving. A protocol is in place and The Hub staff work to the protocol in every case.
33. The Hub Team meets weekly to discuss cases and a range of other agencies is involved to ensure that information is shared where appropriate to safeguard young people and to resolve their issues.
34. Supported Housing has played a key role in this service. Spaces are prioritised for those owed a rehousing duty, but where there are vacancies these are released to young people with low support needs. In general accommodation remains full, but a steady turnover, aided by 'move on' preference on the Dudley Housing Waiting List keeps the accommodation from silting. The Homelessness Prevention Team has access to supported vacancies, but also has specifically reserved emergency beds that are used whilst cases are assessed.

Working with Young Offenders

35. The Homelessness Team works in partnership with Dudley MBC's Youth Offending Service, to provide a 'crash pad', short term emergency accommodation, to young offenders who find themselves without accommodation. The service provides accommodation and support whilst a longer term housing solution is sought. The YOS team is working in partnership with our Hub Team. Some of the young people who are in need of accommodation may be placed in adult accommodation such as Troman House, managed by Midland Heart, and supported to move into their own accommodation from there.

Rough Sleepers

36. Work with rough sleepers remains a priority. Streetlink is a reporting tool that allows members of the public and professionals to report an incident of rough sleeping, and we currently have an outreach service with Midland Heart that responds to these referrals. In the year to date, we have made 41 referrals to the Midland Heart team, more than a quarter of which were made in respect of the same person. This strategy works within the No Second Night Out approach, identifying rough sleepers, signposting them to immediate shelter, and then continuing to work with them to assist them to find a longer term remedy to their issues.
37. Dudley operates a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol, SWEP, and does so more flexibly than required within national guidance, using its discretion to provide emergency accommodation to anyone street homeless affected by particularly adverse weather conditions.

38. A rough sleeper estimate is produced annually with information from partners, and the number identified in November 2014 was 6. The true number of those who are homeless is masked by the numbers sofa surfing, moving from place to place. Dudley does not have a direct access hostel, and does not have any day centres or provision for washing facilities for those without accommodation. However, in March 2015 we anticipate the completion of a 57 bed mixed provision unit managed by Midland Heart. There will be a range of facilities on site, and the units will provide both emergency accommodation and move on units, that will work as a stepping stone into independent living.

Working with the Citizens Advice Bureau

39. Over the year 2013/14 we continued to fund the Mortgage Arrears Advice Service (MAAS), and introduced weekly surgeries alongside the Homelessness Team at Dudley Council Plus, bringing an increase in referrals. The Homelessness Prevention Team accounts for the highest number of referrals to MAAS from an external team. Homelessness acceptances as a result of the loss of mortgaged property remain very low, while preventions recorded by the MAAS project are high, a total of 148 in the year to date. Timely access to money advice is an important tool to help to prevent homelessness and the statistics show that the co-location of services to create a multi discipline team on one site has been very effective.

Hospital Discharge Protocol

40. Housing Services works with the hospitals and Adult Social Care and endeavours to find housing solutions for those who are unable to return home after a stay in hospital or for those whose accommodation has been lost. There is a joint protocol and the Homelessness Team assists in emergencies.

Prison Discharge Arrangements

41. Working with Probation and the Prison Service, a protocol is in place to help those released from prison secure housing in advance of their release. By applying for housing assistance in advance of a release date it helps to prevent those released from needing to present as homeless.

Working with the Private Rented Sector

42. The Homelessness Team works with customers to help them to access private accommodation where appropriate. Help in the form of rent bonds and rent in advance can be accessed from the team through their partnership with the Castle and Crystal Credit Union or through referral to the Dudley MBC Private Rented Sector Team. The team finds this to be one of the most effective prevention tools.

Team Performance

43. The Homelessness Code of Guidance suggests that we should aim to complete enquiries into cases and issue decisions within a time frame of 33 working days. The average time taken to reach a decision across the caseload in 2013/14 was 33 calendar days, rather than working days, with 64% of decisions made in less than 33 days.

44. Section 202 of the Housing Act 1996 provides customers with an avenue of challenge if they are unhappy with the decision reached in their case. They are entitled to seek a review of the decision made. Over the year 2013/14 there were 13 cases where a statutory review was sought. In 11 out of the 13 cases the original decision was upheld. In 2013/14 to date, 9 reviews have been requested, of which 2 are currently under consideration, 1 resulted in a different decision, and in 6 cases the original decision was upheld.

Access to the service

45. The Homelessness & Housing Advice service can be accessed in a variety of ways. Our primary front of house service continues to be delivered at Dudley Council Plus, although our Housing Access Points, at locations around the borough, are also able to deal with initial enquiries.
46. The team provides a drop in duty service every week day from 9am until 5pm operating from Dudley Council Plus. Help is accessible 24/7, as an out of hours service operates between 5pm and 9am every week day, and continuously throughout the weekend and all public holidays.
47. Link work - in addition to the work completed on site the team also provide a service at external venues. The link with these venues enables joint working between agencies as well as providing for additional service access points around the borough. Link workers provide a service to Bushey Fields Hospital, Atlantic House, Summit House, New Beginnings refuge, Highland Road supported accommodation, Tromans House supported accommodation, Blackheath supported accommodation, Top Church Training and Bromford's Young Parents Scheme.

Priorities for the next year/ongoing

48. The Homelessness Strategy is refreshed each year and sets out the Council's objectives. The priorities for the next year, and the contributions that the Homelessness Team will make to them are as follows:
- To maintain low levels of homelessness within the Borough – working with Women's Aid to better understand and respond to domestic abuse, and ensuring throughput in supported housing
 - To minimise rough sleeping – developing individual solutions for entrenched rough sleepers, and working with partners in respect of ineligible households
 - To improve our offer to people who make enquiries to our service who are in insecure housing arrangements but do not have a priority need under current homelessness legislation – building on the work already done through the Youth Hub and further work on private sector options.

Finance

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

Law

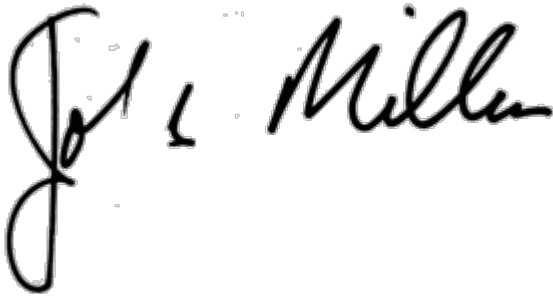
50. The homelessness duties of local housing authorities are set out in the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002.

Equality Impact

51. The Homelessness Strategy is subject to an Equality Impact Assessment, and the service is monitored against the protected characteristics as outlined above.

Recommendation

52. This report is for information and comment.



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List of Background Papers

P1E data
Previous Annual Reports
Homelessness Strategy