

**Report of the Executive Director of Communities
and the Director of Human Resources,
Performance & Communications,
to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC)
on 7th February 2017**

Homelessness in Barnsley

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of homelessness both at a national level and in Barnsley. The report provides a summary of the key issues relating to homelessness, the trends and statistics, the role of the Housing Options, Advice and Homeless Prevention (HOA&HP) Team, including the legal duties and future challenges faced by the service and homeless people in the borough.

2.0 National Context

- 2.1 Homeless duties and legislation are complex and whether the council has a responsibility to provide accommodation to a household or individual depends on a number of factors.
- 2.2 Homelessness in England is continuing to grow, with data showing a 33% rise in people accepted as homeless by councils since 2010. Shelter's analysis shows that nationally there has been a 6% year-on-year rise in the total number of households accepted as homeless up to 2015, including an 8% rise in homeless households with dependent children. The loss of a private tenancy remained the biggest cause of homelessness in 2015, including 17,000 households given emergency accommodation by local authorities after being evicted from a privately rented home.
- 2.3 The Homeless Monitor, undertaken annually by Crisis, shows that rough sleeper numbers are also up by 55% since 2010. Statutory homeless acceptances in 2014/15 were 54,100, which is an increase of 14,000 across England since 2009/10. The same report acknowledges that local authorities are reporting far greater difficulties providing 'meaningful help' to single homeless people, especially those aged 25-34, and homeless people with complex needs, than they do for homeless families with children. The most up to date government figures for quarter one of 2016/17 shows that nationally there were 14,780 households accepted as statutory homeless, up 2% on previous years and up 9% on the same quarter last year. The total number of households in temporary accommodation on the 31st March 2016 was 71,540, up 11% on a year earlier and up 49% since 31st December 2010 where the numbers in temporary accommodation was 48,010.
- 2.4 In recognition of this the government is supporting the Homeless Reduction Bill which is currently making its way through parliament. This will place additional responsibilities on councils including, but not limited to: the duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible households; increasing the period during which an authority should treat someone as threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days; and implementation of a new duty on public services to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at

risk of becoming homeless. Whilst these duties are welcomed they need to be sufficiently resourced both in terms of staff capacity and the availability of accommodation options that can meet the range of presenting needs. The introduction of the Bill for Barnsley is likely to see an increase in homeless applications which in turn has the potential to increase the number of full duty acceptances.

3.0 Local Context

3.1 The council's HOA&HP Team offers comprehensive housing advice and assistance to prevent and resolve homelessness. This involves operating a telephone advice line, assessing customer needs, taking homeless applications in line with the legislation, promoting the prevention of homelessness and working with a range of partners, including but not limited to, relatives, landlords, support providers, social care, mental health and CRC (Community Rehabilitation Company). The team has a lead officer for the private rented sector, working closely with landlords to source properties for vulnerable customers to support the prevention of homelessness. There is also a dedicated Tenancy Support Worker who works across the team providing a range of practical support to tenants in private rented properties and homeless temporary accommodation. In July 2016 a Support Navigator role was appointed to, recognising the need for a targeted resource to respond to rough sleepers and to support those with more complex needs on a one to one basis to address issues preventing individuals from accessing mainstream and supported housing.

3.2 The current contact channels for the service are:

- Public access telephone advice line 01226 773870
- Email – housingadvice@barnsley.gov.uk
- Drop in and appointments at the Civic, Eldon Street, Barnsley.
- Information is available on the council website <https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/housing/homelessness-and-housing-advice/>

3.3 People access the service for a variety of reasons, some require basic housing advice, some require more in depth support and others present in crisis with a range of multiple and complex needs.

3.4 The team has a strong focus on the prevention of homelessness. In its broadest sense this is where 'the council takes positive action to provide housing assistance to someone who considers themselves to be at risk of homelessness, and as a result of work undertaken the person is able to remain in their existing accommodation or obtain alternative accommodation, providing a solution for at least the next six months'. The government guidance states that local partners who also provide positive action to prevent homelessness should be included in the recording of figures. In Barnsley, currently the council, Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) and Foundation Housing provide quarterly homeless prevention figures.

3.5 Due to the hard work of the team and the continued focus on preventing homelessness the number of homeless approaches in Barnsley has fallen from a high of 658 in 2009/10 to 201 in 2015. In addition, homeless acceptances (full

duty) have fallen from 96 in 2009/10 to 14 in 2015/16. This correlates with the prevention figures increasing over the same time period from 85 to 619.

3.6 The causes of homelessness are varied and will often be due to a combination of factors that go beyond the immediate housing issues; the impact of becoming homeless has significant consequences for individuals and families, which can include:

- Loss of connection to support from friends and family networks
- Physical and mental health impacts on adults and children
- Disruption to schooling for children and impacts on social and educational development
- Worsening of existing problems, whether financial, health or addiction, leading to increased difficulty in returning to and maintaining a stable tenancy and lifestyle
- Difficulties accessing employment
- Increased risk of injury and being a victim of crime
- Reduced life expectancy - for rough sleepers the average life expectancy is 42.

3.7 Apart from the obvious distress that such broad ranging impacts have on individuals and families, there are clearly implications for public services and costs to public finances. This includes increased need for health services (physical and mental), social care involvement, police response to crime etc.

3.8 The top three most common reasons for approaching service in Barnsley have been fairly consistent over the last five years as:

- Other relatives/friends unwilling to accommodate
- Required to leave National Asylum Support Services (NASS)
- Parents no longer willing to accommodate

3.9 However during the first three quarters of 2016/17 the top three reasons for people making a homeless application have changed to:

- Left prison or remand
- Other friends/relatives unwilling to accommodate
- Sleeping rough

3.10 The majority of people approaching the service for assistance are single and are local to Barnsley. A large proportion of the single people will not be owed a statutory homeless duty in terms of accommodation but all options will be explored to prevent rough sleeping/sofa surfing. The options for appropriate placements, particularly for supported or emergency accommodation outside of the borough has been reduced, as most neighbouring local authorities have implemented 'local connection' criteria and also allocate all their supported housing through a 'Gateway' model i.e. all referrals through one central hub who assess and allocate accommodation based on needs and local connection.

3.11 The table below summarises local homeless trends over the last couple of years:

	2015/16					2016/17			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Total to date
Total homeless applications i.e. those where we had reason to believe the applicant was homeless or would become homeless in the next 28 days	50	43	66	42	201	44	51	64	159
Full duty cases i.e. eligible, homeless, priority need, not intentional and got a local connection	4	3	4	3	14	5	1	3	9
No of placements into temporary accommodation	29	24	28	20	101	18	17	12	47
No of those above which were B&B placements	11	5	17	13	46	4	3	4	11
Housing advice applications	396	463	384	460	1703	272	262	323	857
No of homeless preventions (this includes stats from Housing Advice, CAB and Foundation Housing)	162	145	163	149	619	115	114	129	385

3.12 In order to determine homelessness the team have to undertake in-depth assessments of the customer's current and historic housing circumstances, gather details of their family composition, any support and health needs etc. This will assist them to make a decision about what legal duty, if any, is owed to the customer. The majority of people who are currently presenting to the service are single people who are often deemed non priority and therefore we have no legal duty to provide accommodation. However in these circumstances we will provide comprehensive advice and support to assist with finding suitable accommodation. If people are eligible, homeless and priority need, we have a legal duty to provide interim accommodation, the amount of time this is provided for depends upon further enquiries undertaken by the team and the decision reached in relation to their application.

4.0 Temporary Accommodation

4.1 Temporary accommodation can take many forms including hostels, supported housing, Bed & Breakfast (B&B) and family accommodation. The B&B accommodation used by Barnsley is out of area, in Sheffield. A summary of the

temporary accommodations placements including B&B for the last couple of years are summarised below:

Year	B&B placement	Total placements in temporary accommodations	Costs (please note this includes placement costs as well as void costs)
2012/13	54	117	£188k
2013/14	46	104	£61K
2014/15	39	94	£77K
2015/16	35	101	£40K
2016/17 (April-Dec)	19	47	£11k

4.2 The significant activity undertaken to prevent homelessness contributes to the ongoing reduction in the use and expenditure of placing households in interim accommodation such as B&B. The majority of placements in temporary accommodation are single people. Temporary accommodation placements can also be seasonal, often seeing increases over the winter months.

5.0 Housing Advice

5.1 The majority of the team's work is focussed on early intervention and prevention through the provision of quality advice at the earliest opportunity, which can often prevent homelessness and reduce the number of homeless applications at a later date. The type of assistance provided includes:

- Responding to affordability issues
- Negotiating with landlords to assist with arrears payment plans
- Assisting with linking customers to wider support services
- Reinstating tenants following illegal evictions
- Exploring and referring to appropriate accommodation providers
- Giving advice and support to a range of professionals around tenancy agreements, the legality of notices etc.

6.0 Local Provision

6.1 Locally commissioned provision for homeless people include a 42 bed hostel, two supported accommodation based schemes specially for young people (16-24), 20 beds, a homeless families unit (8 properties), a refuge (8 units) and a range of floating support schemes, which are delivered to the customer in their own tenancy.

6.2 The trends over the last couple of years have seen an increase in single males approaching the service as homeless/rough sleeping, many of whom have a range of complex needs including offending, substance misuse and mental health. This can mean that placements are difficult to source and sustaining engagement in support services is challenging. The majority of these customers would not meet the statutory homeless threshold, but the team will continue to provide comprehensive support and assistance to source accommodation. In 2015/16 90% of all homeless applications were from single people. There has also been an increase in the number of rough sleepers across the borough and homeless young people particularly in the 16-21 age range. The reasons for these increases are

varied but contributory factors include the impact of welfare reform, parents no longer willing to accommodate due to challenging behaviour, increase in prison releases with no fixed abode, complex needs, availability of services and changes in thresholds to other services such as social care, mental health etc.

7.0 Single Homelessness

7.1 As a result of the increase in presentations with complex needs and the use of out of area B&B placements it was agreed to pilot a crash pad in one of the young person's scheme and six assessment beds in the hostel. These resources provide the team with access to a local resource where an assessment of the customer's needs can be undertaken and future housing options explored. These are temporary placements for no longer than 12 weeks. This model supports prevention work and cases where we have no legal duty to the customer. These commenced in May 16 and to date 49 individuals have been placed. This has led to a significant reduction in the use of B&B and has assisted a number of rough sleepers to come off the streets. The biggest challenge however remains finding suitable move on accommodation and engagement in support services to address wider needs.

8.0 Rough Sleepers

8.1 The numbers of rough sleepers varies often on a weekly basis, as does the length of time anyone spends on the streets. In Barnsley there is a mixture of those who spend a couple of nights on the street and engage well with services offered. However there is a small number of entrenched rough sleepers at any one time, who may be unwilling to engage or have exhausted the resource options available. It must be noted however that particularly in Barnsley town centre there are a number of 'beggars', the majority of whom, after making general enquiries, are not homeless.

8.2 In recognition of the increasing numbers of rough sleepers a Support Navigator post was appointed to in July 16. The aim of the post is to provide a proactive response to rough sleepers across the borough and try to engage them in support and find suitable accommodation. Any reports of rough sleepers from the public or StreetLink, a national website for reporting rough sleepers, are visited by the worker and attempts are made to engage them. For those that want to engage, ongoing support will be provided by the worker until it is no longer required. This postholder has worked with 37 clients to date and a number of these have accessed supported accommodation and have re-engaged with wider services and their families.

8.3 Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (BMBC) have recently been successful in a sub-regional bid to the government's Rough Sleepers Grant, which will see the sub region working together to tackle rough sleeping.

8.4 BMBC, like all other councils, operates cold weather provision for rough sleepers where the temperature falls below zero for three consecutive nights. In Barnsley we operate it for any night where temperatures fall below zero. A camp bed in a hostel is offered on a night by night basis and attempts are made to engage and support the individual to come off the streets. In 2015/16 we placed 47 individuals; the majority of these were single males.

9.0 Young People and Homelessness

- 9.1 There has been an increase in the number of 16-21 year olds approaching the council (HOA&HP and social care) as homeless. This has led to some positive joint working between the two services to assess needs, provide support and where appropriate, accommodation. A joint protocol has been developed and a joint panel meets monthly to discuss and progress cases.

Future Plans

10.0 National Challenges

- 10.1 Homelessness is firmly back on the government agenda and there are several future changes which will have an impact on how the service is delivered. The major ones include the Homeless Reduction Bill, the review of funding for Supported Housing and the continued implementation of welfare reforms, particularly the roll out of Universal Credit, as well as access to good quality, affordable housing in both private and social housing sectors.

11.0 Re-commissioning of Services

- 11.1 Locally a lot of work is taking place to support the work of the team. This includes the re-commissioning of all supported housing services (previously Supporting People funded services) to meet complex and multiple needs alongside the recommissioning of substance misuse and domestic violence services. These new services will be in place from April 17 and it is anticipated that all referrals for supported accommodation will come through the HOA&HP Team to ensure that resources are allocated effectively to meet customer needs.

12.0 Public Services Hub (PSH)

- 12.1 From April 17 the HOA&HP Team will be moving into the Safer Communities Business Unit and will be part of the PSH. This model will provide a fully integrated service offer for housing, anti-social behaviour and vulnerable people. It will take a risk-based approach, share intelligence and co-ordinate targeted responses to complex and multiple need cases. This new way of working will assist with those cases who present with multiple needs, rough sleepers and those that are not engaging with the services on offer. There will also be a focus on early intervention as it is envisaged that the model will support early identification of the potential for homelessness.

13.0 Service Specific

- 13.1 Within the HOA&HP Team the work with rough sleepers will continue to develop and evolve, some strong partnerships have already been forged and some cases are showing positive outcomes. The team are moving towards assessing and supporting the wider needs of customers and seeking to address these where possible to reduce the number of repeat customers. This will involve closer working, with key statutory and voluntary partners including family centres, criminal justice, credit union, social care and mental health. To support this we are considering more creative ways to use the homeless prevention fund. Work will continue in developing relationships with private landlords to ensure a wide range

of quality accommodation is available and that where possible the private sector is used to discharge our statutory duties. There will also be a schedule of awareness-raising around homelessness for both the public and other professionals to ensure that people are aware of what services are available and also to ensure we are capturing all the homeless prevention work which is taking place across the borough. The service is actively involved and contributing to key council priorities such as the regeneration of the town centre, improving the quality and access to the private sector, actively working to address poverty across the borough and early help.

14.0 Invited Witnesses

14.1 At today's meeting, the following representatives have been invited to answer questions from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) regarding work undertaken in relation to Homelessness in Barnsley:

- Wendy Lowder, Executive Director of Communities, BMBC
- Michelle Kaye, Service Manager - Housing and Welfare, BMBC
- Ruth Newton-Scott, Housing Options Team Leader, BMBC
- Diane Lee, Head of Public Health, BMBC
- Councillor Jenny Platts, Cabinet Member for Communities

15.0 Possible Areas for Investigation

15.1 Members may wish to ask questions around the following areas:

- How effective is the integrated working and sharing of intelligence between different teams and agencies? Are all key stakeholders on board?
- What is in place to enable homeless people to access support services, particularly as they have no fixed abode, such as health, housing and social services?
- Are effective performance measures in place? How does Barnsley's performance compare with neighbouring authorities?
- What is being done to ensure services utilise best practice and learning from other areas?
- What preventative work is done to target specific groups at risk of homelessness such as care leavers, asylum seekers and prison leavers?
- What are the reasons for it being more challenging to provide meaningful help to single homeless people and those with complex needs, compared with homeless families with children?
- What are the key areas for development and how will these be achieved, including utilisation of the recently obtained Rough Sleepers Grant?
- What actions could be taken by Members to assist in this work?

16.0 Background Papers and Useful Links

- Housing Corporation & Chartered Institute of Housing, (2006) Homeless Prevention and Housing Associations-Contributing to Efficiency:
<http://www.cih.org/resources/PDF/Policy%20free%20download%20pdfs/Homelessness%20prevention%20and%20HAs.pdf>
- Shelter-Facts and Figures on Homelessness:
http://england.shelter.org.uk/campaigns/_why_we_campaign/housing_facts_and_figures/subsection?section=homeless_households
- Crisis: The Homelessness Monitor Report (2016):
[http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Homelessness_Monitor_England_2016_FINAL_\(V12\).pdf](http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Homelessness_Monitor_England_2016_FINAL_(V12).pdf)
- Government Homelessness Statistics:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics>
- Homeless Reduction Bill (2016-17) (currently going through Parliament):
<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/homelessnessreduction.html>

17.0 Glossary

B&B - Bed and Breakfast

BMBC - Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

CAB - Citizen's Advice Bureau

CRC - Community Rehabilitation Company

HOA&HP - Housing Options, Advice and Homeless Prevention Team

NASS - National Asylum Support Services

PSH - Public Services Hub

18.0 Report Author and Officer Contact

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