

Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee

5 April 2013



Update on the Housing Solutions Service

Report of Ian Thompson, Corporate Director, Regeneration and Economic Development

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on progress made by the Housing Solutions Service.

Background

- 2 The Homelessness Act 2002 placed a duty on every local authority to produce a Homelessness Strategy. The strategy must include a review of current services and performance over the preceding five years against the action plan put in place following the first strategy in 2003. The strategy must also predict future levels of need and demand based on research findings and consultation with partners and service users.
- 3 Prior to Local Government Reorganisation each of the seven District Councils within County Durham worked within their strategy action plan to meet the housing needs of customers over the previous five years. In addition, the seven districts, the County Council and other partners worked together through the County Durham Homelessness Action Partnership (HAP) to further improve and develop services.
- 4 In 2008 and in preparation for the commencement of a Unitary Authority the County Durham Homelessness Action Partnership agreed to develop a Homelessness Strategy. This document represented the strategic vision for services across the new unitary authority from April 2009 to meet housing needs across a diverse geographical and demographic area. As a consequence of this work, Housing Solutions along with the HAP are currently reviewing the Homelessness Strategy, consultation events will take in May which Members will be invited to.

Housing Solutions Service

- 5 The Housing Solutions Service has responsibility for the following areas:
Homelessness and Housing Advice - Since Local Government Reorganisation the Housing Solutions Service has adopted an options approach to customer needs.

This is a two-stage approach, with options and prevention considered first, but with safeguards in place where an applicant is eligible for and requires assistance under the Part VII statutory requirements. The Housing Solutions Officers fulfil a generic role providing a holistic assessment delivering support and advice enabling customers' needs to be assessed and met through prevention, housing options and the Council's statutory responsibilities.

Durham Key Options (DKO) - The Choice Based Lettings scheme for County Durham is known as Durham Key Options and was introduced in October 2009. The scheme is a partnership of social housing providers across County Durham and currently consists of:

- Durham County Council. (Lead Partner)
- East Durham Homes.
- Durham City Homes.
- Dale & Valley Homes.
- Cestria Community Housing.
- livin.
- Teesdale Housing Association.
- Derwentside Homes.
- Accent Homes (12 month pilot)

Family Wise - The Familywise Programme has been up and running in Durham County since April 2012 and will run up until December 2014 on a 100% Payment by Result basis. The programme will be delivered alongside the Family Intervention Service within Housing Solutions and is subcontracted from The Wise Group who are the prime provider for the 12 Local Authority areas in the North East. Over its 3 year delivery period Familywise will work with 1267 individuals who are from a family with multiple problems where at least one member is on a working age benefit at the start of the programme. The main objective of this programme is to work with individuals whose families face multiple/generational unemployment and worklessness and support them to address barriers they are facing that have historically and continuously prevented them from working.

Progress measures need to be worked towards, these include the following:

- Money matters- (inc welfare reform)
- Housing
- Parenting
- Employability skills

Family Intervention Service (FIS) - The FIS offer intensive support to families who are at risk of homelessness and where at least one member of the family is a perpetrator of ASB. Working with families facing multiple problems to tackle the root causes of ASB and homelessness we aim to make sustainable changes and reach positive outcomes for the whole family and the community in which they live.

The FIS offers support and guidance to families to address the causes of their behaviour, alongside supervision and enforcement tools to provide them with incentives to change. The project uses intensive and individually tailored packages of support, supervision and clear sanctions to improve the behaviour of families at risk of homelessness and anti-social households.

This whole family, multi agency and intensive approach is a cost effective way of engaging the most challenged and challenging families many of who make the highest demands on services and the highest cost to the public purse. Evidence based methods of support and assessments are used and the FIS Key Workers have multi disciplinary backgrounds. This varied and wide skill set allows the team to support families and one another to find the most suitable solutions to the challenges faced.

- 6 This report will not be providing an update on DKO as this will be provided at a later date.

Legal context

- 7 Local housing authorities have a statutory duty to provide assistance to all households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, regardless of whether there is any duty to accommodate.
- 8 Over recent years central government has emphasised the need for local authorities to take a more proactive approach to the prevention of homelessness to all in housing need and to work in partnership across sectors to meet housing, support and advice needs.
- 9 Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 – provides the statutory under-pinning for action to tackle homelessness. This legislation places a general duty on housing authorities to ensure that advice and information about homelessness, and its prevention, is available free of charge to everyone in their area. The legislation also requires authorities to assist individuals and families who are homeless or threatened with homelessness to apply for help.

Progress since LRG

- 10 Following LGR there was a need to bring together former district council services to respond to housing, advice and support needs for those in housing need.
- 11 To enable housing options to be effective and consistent in responding to the needs of customers, services must have comprehensive procedures in place therefore Housing Solutions implemented new office processes and systems to ensure the delivery of our prevention focused service and statutory duty in a consistent manner.

- 12 The prevention of homelessness is a key strategic aim for Durham County Council and it is vital that individuals are encouraged to seek assistance at the earliest possible stage when experiencing difficulties which may lead to homelessness. In many cases effective early intervention can prevent homelessness occurring.
- 13 Not only does homelessness have significant negative consequences for the people who experience it, homelessness can have a profound impact on health, education and employment prospects.
- 14 Research carried out by Heriot-Watt University explains that preventing homelessness can achieve direct cashable savings for local government. Research published in 2007 showed preventing homelessness can save money when compared to the cost of helping someone is already homeless. The savings are based on the assumption that the cost to the public purse of providing temporary accommodation and the re-housing afterwards amounts to £5,300 per case per year.
- 15 It is estimated that Durham County Council is spending on average £741.36 per prevention case. Based on this figure these prevention cases represent a significant saving for Durham County Council.
- 16 Durham County Council Housing Solutions Service has developed a range of prevention tools, aimed at helping all in housing need to avoid homelessness, remain in their own home or access suitable, affordable accommodation.
 - **Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme:** To assist customers to find and maintain accommodation in the private rented sector, with linked tenancy support.
 - **Homelessness Prevention Fund:** Offering financial assistance to prevent homelessness, part of a wider “spend to save” policy.
 - **Remain Safe:** Offering free security measures for customer’s homes to enable them to remain and feel safe, regardless of tenure. Now delivered by Direct Services funded by Housing Solutions and Safe Durham Partnership seeing significant increases in the number of clients assisted over the past 12 months.
 - **Enhanced Housing Support Protocol:** Bringing advice, support and accommodation services together to tackle the causes of homelessness and create sustainable tenancies for vulnerable adults.
 - **Early Intervention Specialist Advice and Support Referral Protocol:** Ensuring customers experience a seamless service when referred for specialist advice to external agencies.

- **County Court Duty Scheme Referral Protocol:** Enabling customers at risk of homelessness to access free, specialist legal advice at court to defend claims for possession.
- **Personalisation Pilot:** Funding to be allocated to individuals to assist in engagement with support providers where housing related support funding will not cover the cost.
- **Hospital Discharge Protocol:** Agreement with Tees Esk & Wear Valley NHS Trust to implement an early referral protocol into Lanchester Road Hospital to provide housing advice and support to patients with mental health problems.
- **Possession & Repossession Loan Fund:** A short term fund for any households which risk becoming homeless through repossession or eviction. The fund will clear home owners arrears, but only if the accommodation is then affordable to them in the longer term.
- **CLASP:** Care Leavers Accommodation & Support Protocol. Ensuring young people leaving care have their accommodation and support options explained and planned for in advance of leaving care.

17 The service has also developed or participates in the following:

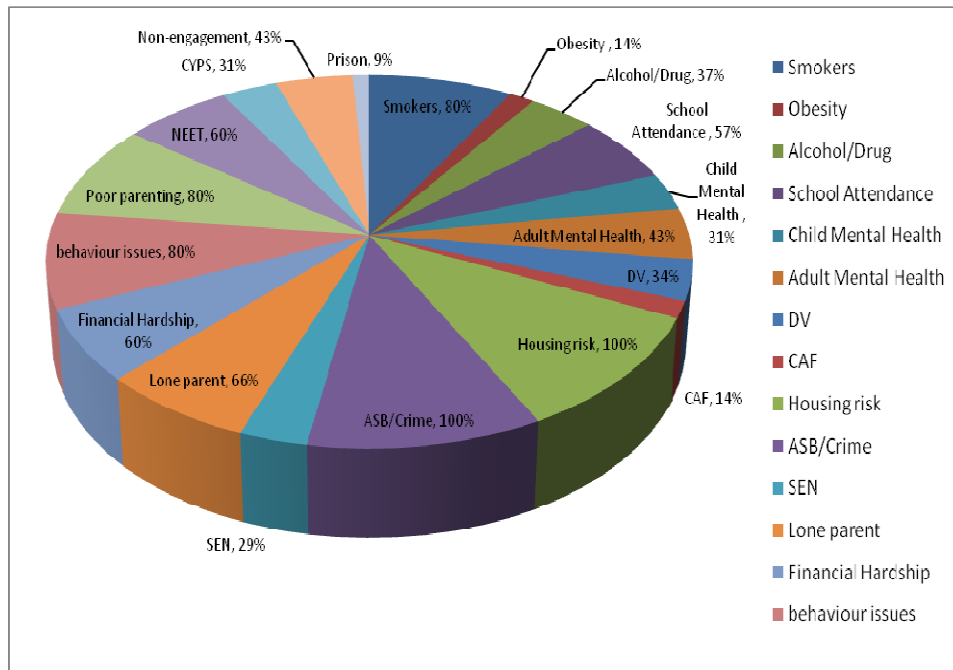
- **Emergency Supported Lodgings:** Working in partnership with Children and Young Peoples Service to provide emergency accommodation to homeless young people aged 16/17 and 18+ care leavers, in family homes with support. From April 2013 this service will be extended to offer accommodation to those over 18 who are vulnerable to ensure we remove the use of private B&B accommodation.
- **Mortgage Rescue:** Part of a national scheme to offer shared equity or conversion to social rented tenure for home owners who are struggling with their mortgage payments.
- **Radio and Community TV Adverts:** Developed media campaigns to increase self referral to the service for those in housing need.
- **Debt Advice:** Specialist Debt advice worker from Chester-le-Street CSAB funded by Housing Solutions to work with our client to reduce debts enabling them to remain in their home.
- **Welfare Rights Worker:** Internal service level agreement with the Welfare Rights Service to provide specialist welfare rights advice to clients at risk of homelessness to ensure access to benefits is maximised.
- **Prevention Champions Training:** Free training delivered by the Housing Solutions Service to internal and external partners seeking to highlight the need for early intervention and referral to prevent homelessness.

- **Regional Through The Gate:** By securing regional funding from DCLG and National Offender Management Service, led on the procurement of a regional service working to support offenders in North East prisons to access accommodation and support.
- **Integrated Offender Management (IOM) Officer:** Secured funding for Housing Solutions Officer to work to secure safe and suitable accommodation and support for Priority and Prolific Offenders.
- **Enhanced Housing Options Wizard:** Developed innovative web based tool to enable customers to assess and access their own housing options. Is currently being further reviewed to assist in our response to welfare reform.
- **Digital TV:** Enables customers to seek advice on housing options in addition to viewing and bidding for property on Durham Key Options via their TV or mobile phone.
- **Under Occupation Officer:** Using funding secured from DCLG – the service offers support to older people seeking to downsize in social rented accommodation. Service will extend to offer support to those affected by welfare reform seeking mutual exchange.
- **Adults facing Chronic Exclusion (ACE) & No second Night Out:** Durham is the lead Authority for the Durham and Tees Valley area to develop a response to rough sleeping using nationally allocated funding. In Durham, No Second Night Out has been assisting clients off the street since August 2012 via a service delivered by a third sector organisation, funded by DCC. The service has secured additional central government funding for the next 3 years to support people off the streets and into suitable accommodation and support.
- **Holistic Temporary Accommodation & Support Service:** The largest procurement undertaken by Housing Solutions. Commissioned by 3 DCC Teams, Housing Solutions, Children and Young Peoples Service and Adult Services, HTASS delivers huge improvements to the management and support offered to 22 units of temporary accommodation across the County, in addition to 13 crash pads for young people. HTASS also delivers a joint protocol for 16/17 years olds and access to over 200 private rented tenancies for client referred by the Housing Solutions Service. The service commenced in May 2012 under a 3 year contract and has already seen significant reductions in the use of expensive and inappropriate B&B placements.
- **Step Forward:** Proving 14x2 bed shared housing with support for young people leaving supported housing. The service has been developed in response to welfare reform changes resulting in a lack of affordable accommodation in the county for single households who now have to share.

- **The Fells:** Overseeing £1.8 million capital investment in direct access accommodation.
- **Youth Charter:** Durham County Council is the first Council in the region to sign up to the Charter, developed by Youth Homelessness North East, making pledges to strive to provide accommodation and support outcomes for young people.
- **Development of new IT system:** New, bespoke IT system to be implemented by April 2013 which will provide efficiencies in the delivery of front line services together with enhanced monitoring and reporting functions.
- **Think Family** – The service has confirmed its commitment to the Think Family programme by signing up to Durham County Councils Partnership agreement. Funding has been secured from the Troubled Families grant which will allow us to train two dedicated workers. The aim is to embed the Think Family approach into mainstream practice. In addition to this we will work with Housing Providers and other external agencies.

- 18 Between April 2012 and February 2013 FIS has provided intensive support to 46 families including 114 children and is on track to exceed its target of a minimum of 48 new families per year.
- 19 The FIS service receives referrals, known as requests for intervention, from a variety of sources. Most of these requests for intervention are then taken to their local LMAPS for discussion; this is carried out on the premise that families who are causing ASB in County Durham should be known to this group.
- 20 The service has built a vast network of successful partnerships and has developed an excellent reputation amongst these agencies and organisations. However, referrals continue to be received at a higher rate than we have capacity to respond.
- 21 This year, out of the families that have worked with FIS and have exited the programme, 90% of families have reduced the ASB they presented at referral and 90% no longer face the homelessness risk they presented with at referral. In addition, 100% of families were offered support and 100% of referrers were contacted within the targeted timescales set by the service.

22 During the assessment stage of an intervention records are kept of key presenting issues of each family. The table below shows the key presenting issues of the families we worked with in Qtr1-Qtr3 of 2012/13.



23 Alongside its family intervention programmes the FIS also deliver projects within local communities often alongside our partners this year they have included:

- Parenting Programmes-** The FIS has been delivering a minimum of 4 parenting courses a year across the County since 2010/11. This service is open to all families in County Durham and participants do not have to be attached to the FIS programme to attend. These programmes are also the main parenting programme provision for parents who have court ordered parenting orders from the Education Welfare Service.
- Coast Night-** As part of the Time limited Partnership Project, FIS took the lead in planning 'Coast Night'. This was a diversionary activity to reduce ASB in Easington; children in the local area were consulted with and decided they would like a UV Glow Party. Funding was provided by LMAPS & HIL's, David Boyes County councillor, Accent Foundation and Easington Social Welfare Centre (ESWC). Additional partnership staffing resources were provided by ESWC, DCC youth workers, police officers and also the local councillor who helped out on the night.

As well as the UV party there was a sexual health worker on site, local door supervisors, drugs dog and alcohol testing strips. The event was very successful and there wasn't a single reported incident of ASB in the community during the event.

- **Father Christmas-** For a second year running and this year in partnership with the Salvation Army, TFM Radio and Xcellocal FIS co-ordinated a Christmas appeal for the families and individuals currently working with FIS and Familywise. FIS were able to provide food hampers to 43 families and 3 single people and also provided gifts for 118 children.
- **Investing in Children Status** This was achieved in 2012 by working with FIS children and young people in the Sedgefield and Easington Areas. Group sessions and one to one practice was observed during this process and a full report is accessible by contacting the FIS Manager.

- 24 The start of the Familywise programme was delayed due to contractual problems. The prime contractors, The Wise Group (www.thewisegroup.co.uk) have since resolved these issues with DWP which has allowed us to re profile and start to process the back log of work and allow us to move on and deliver the programme effectively in the year ahead.
- 25 As part of an engagement process for the new service we adopted a variety of ways to engage with other organisations and professionals, both internally and externally. These included presenting to large audiences at events such the Parenting Network and the Altogether Housing days and attending regional and national meetings during the development stage.
- 26 In addition we have also used Durham County Councils intranet front page, setting up promotional stands at job fairs and other large events and attending partners team meetings such as, One Point, Job Centre Plus, Mental Health, Safeguarding and specialist services.
- 27 Following the engagement and promotion of the service, referrals are now being received and we are seeing an average of 30 a week. Familywise Coaches have large case loads of up to 50 at any one time, however they are supported by in house training officers, placement officers and support staff to deliver an individually tailored package of support to each participant.
- 28 We have adapted the service to ensure it aligns with other services, for example it sits as part of the Think Family process and works closely with teams from Economic Development. Durham's Family Wise was asked to join the Wisegroup at the Welfare to work UK Convention in the summer of 2012 to present as an example of best practice.
- 29 The Familywise programme has to date worked successfully with 130 people across county Durham with a further 220 ready to start. Our first participants were targeted to find employment in the autumn of 2012 and we have managed to support 15 people in to work and a further 30 who are assessed as job ready (as of Feb 2013).

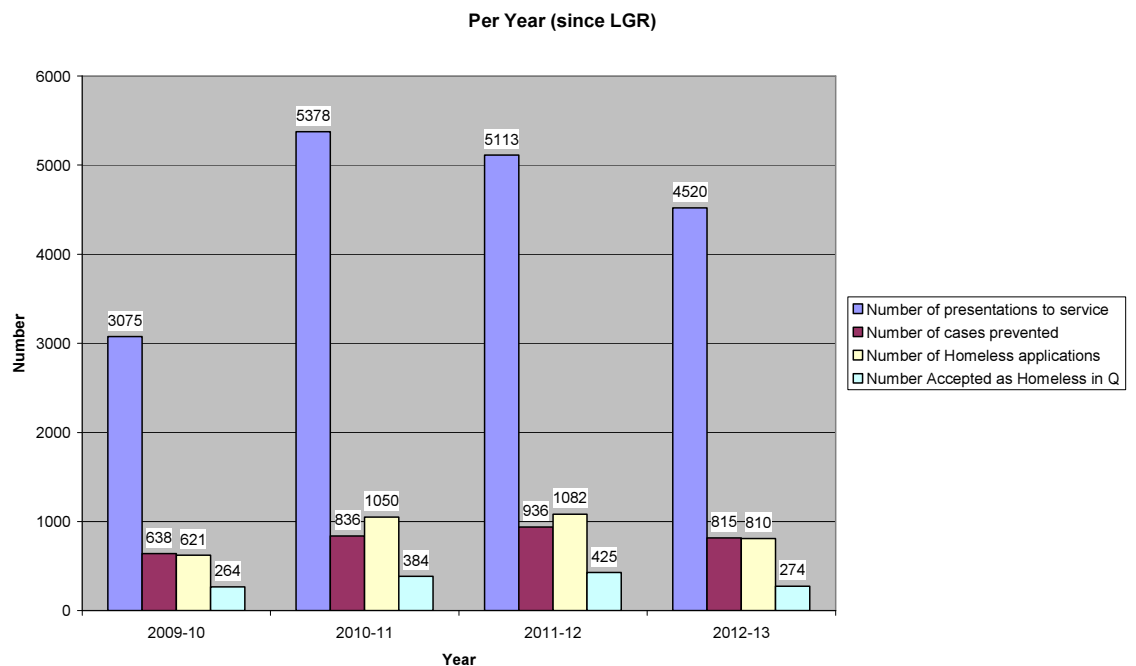
Current position

30 The Housing Solutions Service continues to see an increase in presentations to the service. The following table shows year on year figures for:

- Presentations to the service
- Number of cases prevented from becoming homeless
- Number of homeless applications
- Number of homeless cases accepted

31 Total presentations to the service include those customers applying as homeless, those threatened with homelessness and customers seeking advice on housing options, Durham Key Options, information regarding their housing rights or one off assistance to enable customers to make informed choices about their future housing options.

32 Presentations up to and including quarter 3 for this financial year stands at 4517 compared to 3711 in the same period in 2011/2012. This is a 21% increase in presentations to the service in just one year.

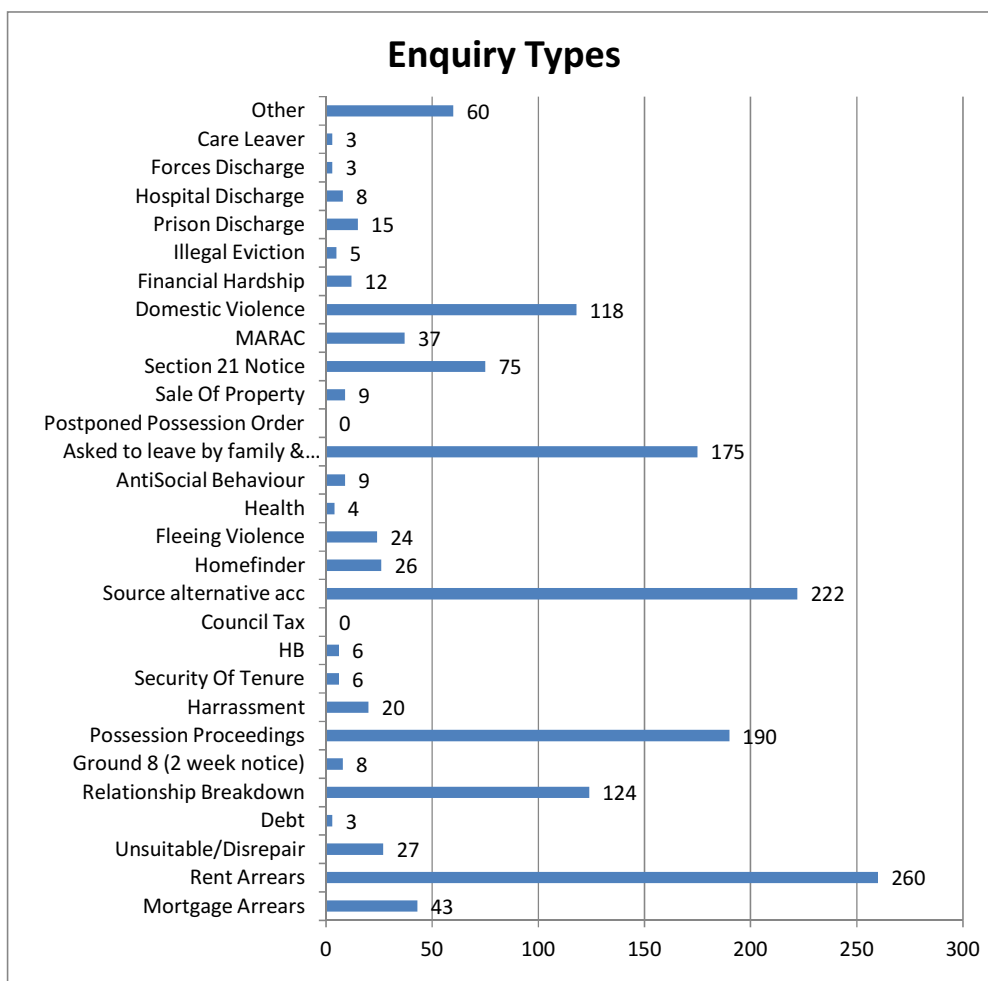


33 All Local Authorities must record and report on a quarterly basis to central Government the number of households where homelessness was prevented. To qualify for inclusion in these figures the customer must feel they are at risk of homelessness, there must be a case file which is subject to internal audit and quality control and confirmation of prevention, which must be for a minimum of 6 months, made by an officer not involved in the original case. The Local Authority must be able to demonstrate positive action in preventing homelessness, i.e. the provision of casework rather than one off advice. The number of cases prevented continues to rise and as mentioned previously, by preventing homelessness, we are achieving financial savings to the council.

- 34 Even though the presentations to the service continue to increase, the number of homeless applications and acceptances remain static, suggesting the early advice given is working.

Enquiry Types

- 35 Type of enquiry relates to the nature of the problem or problems customers seek advice from the Housing Solutions team to resolve. Customers may have more than one housing issue and will therefore select multiple enquiry types if required. This information is used by the service to ensure prevention tools and other service developments reflect the needs of our customers to ensure we are best placed to offer an appropriate solution.

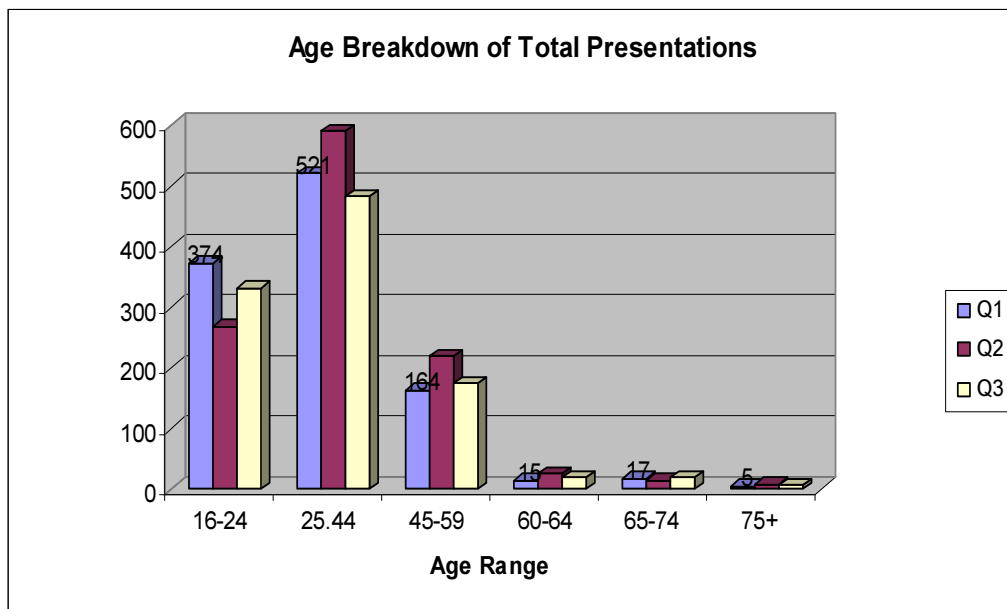


36 The following 6 reasons remain the most common for contacting the service:

- Rent Arrears
- Source Alternative Accommodation
- Possession Proceedings
- Asked to leave by family & friends
- Relationship breakdown
- Domestic Violence

Age breakdown

37 The following graph provides a breakdown of the ages of the customers presenting to the service. As you can see the predominant age group is the 25-44 year olds however we are aware that a large number of the cases recorded on the system are not known, these are likely to be the referrals received from third parties.



Age and Reason

38 The following information highlights the 2 main reasons for presentations broken down by age range:

Age Range	Main Reason	%	Secondary	%
16-24	Asked to Leave by Family/friends	28.1%	Source Alternative Accommodation	22.59%
25-44	Source Alternative Accommodation	18.26%	Relationship Breakdown (Closely followed by Asked to Leave by friends/family)	13.49%
45-59	Source Alternative Accommodation	19.43%	Mortgage Arrears	13.14%

Future Pressures and Developments

- 39 Although we don't know what the impact of the welfare reform changes will be, we do expect an increase in presentations due to the 'bedroom tax', welfare assistance policy and changes to the Discretionary Housing Payment process.
- 40 These changes and the impending introduction of Universal Credit will continue to put a strain on resources within the service. In preparation for the introduction of Welfare Reform all staff within the service will receive training to highlight the changes being implemented by the government.
- 41 To help us prepare for these changes the following has been introduced/ developed:
- **Protocol** – a triage/protocol to be developed between Housing Solutions, Revenues and Benefits and Housing Providers to deal effectively with those tenants effected by welfare reform
 - **Private Landlord Liaison Officer** – A temporary post has been created to forge links between Housing Solutions and Private Landlords
 - **Mutual Exchange and Under Occupation** – A dedicated Officer will be available within Housing Solutions to assist tenants subject to the "bedroom tax" who wish to move but require assistance. They will assist through arranging mutual exchanges or arranging removals and associated issues.
 - **Extension of Durham Key Options** – to increase housing choice, options are being explored to widen DKO to include Private Landlords and other Housing Providers.
- 42 The FIS continues to develop the work it carries out across the County. It is aligned with County Durham's Think Family Agenda and is an integral partner to the delivery of the Think Family Programme. Four of our Key Workers (2 full time equivalents) are Think Family Mentors and work with a wide range of professionals to support them to work with families in a consistent manner.
- 43 The FIS are also working to develop several new initiatives in 2013/14 including early intervention housing sustainability programmes, early intervention for young people programmes and peer support projects.

Recommendation

- 44 Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note and comment upon the information provided in the report.
- 45 That the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive a further update on the work of the Housing Solutions Service as part of the refresh of the Committee's Work Programme for 2013 - 2015.

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance - £100,000 has been set aside from Homeless CLG Prevention Grant for additional staffing which may be required

Staffing – Additional staff may be required if presentations to the service continue to rise

Risk – Increase on resources due to Welfare Reform

Equality and Diversity – None

Accommodation – not applicable

Crime and Disorder – not applicable

Human Rights – None

Consultation – not applicable

Procurement – not applicable

Disability Discrimination Act - not applicable

Legal Implications – not applicable