

**Economy and Enterprise  
Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee**



**23 February 2016**

**Homelessness Update**

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

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**Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee with background information on Homelessness in County Durham. A presentation will be delivered at the meeting by Marie Smith, Housing Manager.

**Background**

2. The Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee have received a number of presentations in relation to homelessness and progress on delivery of the homelessness strategy. The presentation on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2016 will highlight the work of the Homeless Action Partnership (HAP), the headline statistics and the ongoing work to address homelessness in County Durham.

**Background to the HAP**

3. Since its inception in 2004, the work of the Homeless Action Partnership (HAP) chaired by Housing Solutions continues to highlight concerns and respond effectively to identified needs and Government policies.
4. New initiatives are developed and managed to assist in reducing homelessness across County Durham in line with the Homelessness Strategy aims and objectives.
5. It is essential in the prevention of homelessness that key stakeholders are informed of the causes, consequences and possible solutions available to those in housing need across County Durham to ensure those in need of service can seek access as soon as possible to avoid crisis.
6. The Homeless Action Partnership (HAP) & Homelessness Strategy involves multi-agency working to prevent and address homelessness. This involves joint working with partners and third sector agencies in relation to funding bids, for example the Government initiative Fair Chance Fund. The fund aims to improve accommodation and work outcomes for a group of young, homeless people (predominantly 18 to 24 year olds) whose support needs are poorly met by existing service because of the complexity of their circumstances. A recent Health Audit in partnership with Homeless Link produced an assessment of health needs across County Durham of those who present as homeless.

## **Strategic Objectives**

One of the overall aims of the Housing Strategy for County Durham is to provide Better Housing Support. The HAP regularly revisits priorities within its action plan to ensure policy & legislation changes and updates are reflected in the actions. Members of the HAP consider relevant data and discuss ideas/suggestions & problem solving and consider innovative ways of reducing homelessness. The four strategic objectives as set out in the homelessness strategy are:-

- To prevent homelessness for all in housing need across County Durham.
- To ensure that services work in partnership to meet the needs of all clients, including those with complex needs and/or those at risk of rough sleeping.
- To ensure that sufficient, appropriate and affordable accommodation is available for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- To understand legislation changes and the impact.

## **Headline Statistics for Homelessness**

7. The number of contacts to the Housing Solutions service is captured and analysed to determine the type of assistance offered. Clients are signposted for assistance by the Gateway team to a range of specialist officers. These include Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT), Private Landlord Initiatives, Homeless Advice and Prevention, Home Improvement Agency (HIA), Regeneration & Warmer Homes, Durham Key Options choice based lettings scheme & Family Intervention support.
8. A general assessment of need is made via a gateway triage system that looks to identify need and refer onto specialist officers where necessary. Those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness are assigned to a Homeless and Prevention Officer for more detailed assessment. This system is a more efficient way of identifying those who require a higher level of support from a dedicated specialist worker and minimises delays in intervention.

In Quarter 3 2015/16, table 1 show that 3807 clients accessed the service. This is broken down as follows:

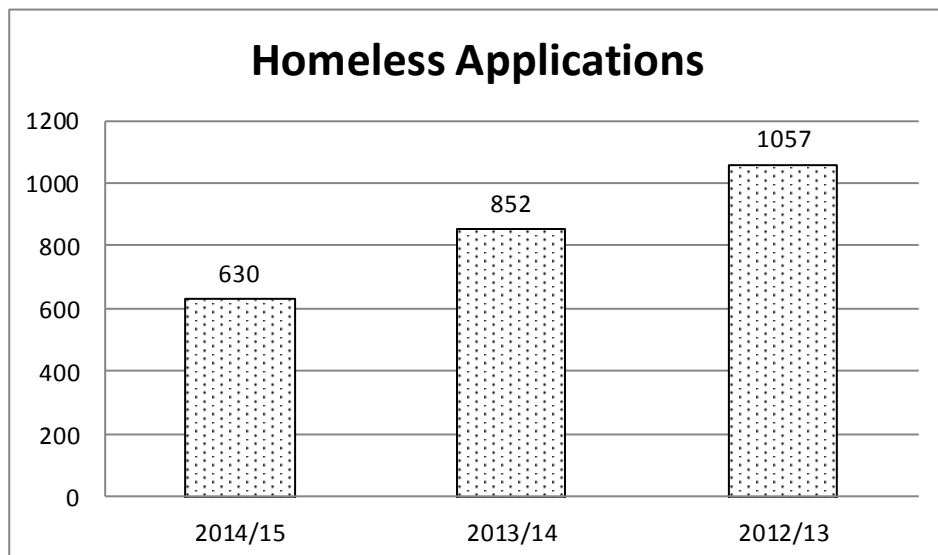
Table 1

Older Persons Under Occupation Scheme	11
Hardship Under Occupation Scheme	19
Welfare Reform	361
Warm & Healthy Homes	71
Gateway Only	567
FIP	27
HIA	177
Private Sector Initiatives Team	326
Homeless & Prevention Team	321
Soft Touch Management/Wizard Cases	1927

For example, during the quarter 142 cases were opened by the gateway triage team but transferred to a Homeless & Prevention Officer for more specialised advice.

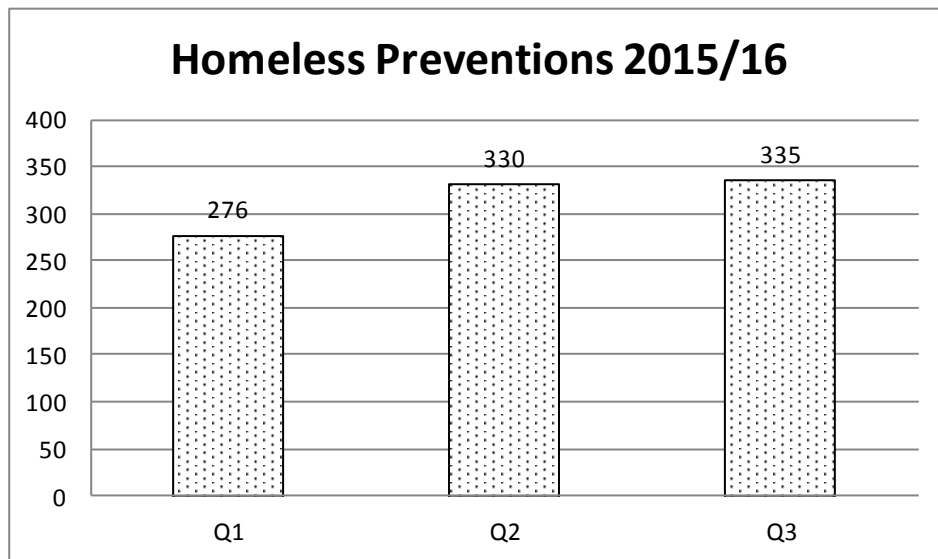
- Homeless applications have steadily reduced over the last 3 years. Interventions such as intensive family support, Single Homeless Officers, the Welfare Reform team and the recently implemented Gateway triage service have all contributed to the reduction in homeless applications. More holistic, intensive support allowing for prevention and the right amount of support offered matching the level of need has contributed to the reduction.

Graph 1



During the first three quarters of 2015/16, a total of 334 homeless applications have been recorded, a further reduction in homeless applications is expected this year. This figure is in-line with current trend.

Graph 2



Housing Solutions continue to aim to prevent homelessness where possible using a range of tools. Over the last three quarters prevention of homelessness has been achieved as shown in graph 2.

10. The number of cases accepted as statutorily homeless has reduced from 339 in 2012/13 to 187 in 2014/15. In the first three quarters of 2015/16 a total of 103 cases were accepted meaning that a further reduction is expected this year. This again reflects earlier intervention from other parts of the service.
11. The 2 main reasons for homelessness are violent relationship breakdown along with loss of assured short hold tenancy.
12. In response to this the Remain Safe project was established. This acts to assist those fleeing domestic abuse to enable clients to remain in their own home or seek alternative, suitable accommodation.

## Prevention

A number of other initiatives and projects to tackle homelessness include:

- Joint Protocol – A system in place to safeguard all 16/17 year old presenting as homeless or threatened. Stronger Families – An embedded Think Family approach has been adopted throughout the service to ensure wider issues/causes are identified
- Pre- eviction protocol – Working together with landlords to prevent eviction stage via early intervention from specialist teams
- Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) – Joint working with Revenue and Benefits making use of the fund to help people remain at home where there is a shortfall in rent or to move onto more affordable accommodation
- No Second Night Out and links to Outreach services – Rough Sleeper count

- Hospital Discharge Protocol – Health and Housing working together to ensure people have suitable accommodation to return to on discharge from hospital
  - Family Intervention – Intensive work carried out by funded key workers to address complex issues around housing, health, debt, worklessness and anti-social behavior
  - Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme – to assist in breaking down financial barriers in to the private rented sector a rent agreement can be made with the landlord to guarantee payment of bond for any damage to the property or abandonment for those clients not in a position to pay upfront
  - Prevention fund – a fund made available to specialist officers to provide solutions which allow clients to access accommodation this could be in the form of support costs, essential furniture items, admin fees, moving costs etc. This scheme can reduce the use of unsuitable accommodation and time in temporary accommodation
13. The homeless data analysed over the last 3 years shows the majority of homeless applicants to be aged between 25-44 years of age. This figure has remained consistent with very little change since 2012.
  14. The majority of homeless applications come from lone parent (female) with dependent children.
  15. The east of the County - Easington, Blackhall, Peterlee and the surrounding villages continue to receive the highest number of accepted homeless clients which is likely to be due to the high stock numbers in the area.
  16. The number of tenants and residents suffering financial hardship has increased considerably within the last 18 months. This is due to changes to the welfare system and other economic policies which have affected people's income. This is recognised as a wider cause of homelessness and additional resources have been targeted to address this for example, specific welfare reform officers who work with housing providers and private landlords to target those most affected.

### **Success of the HAP to date and further work**

17. The HAP is made up of a number of statutory agencies, housing providers, third sector and voluntary agencies. This joint working approach delivers on the homeless strategy objectives with the overall aim being to prevent homelessness for all in housing need across County Durham. Some examples of the joint working include;
  - Holistic Temporary Accommodation Support Service (HTASS). This scheme provides temporary accommodation and is managed by Stonham Housing. This was jointly commissioned with Children's and Adult Services and funded supporting the Council's duties owed under the Children's Act and Homelessness legislation After recent negotiations Stonham have recently been awarded a 12 month extension of the contract to expire May 2017.

- Development of and continuation of the Joint Protocol for 16/17 year olds (part of the HTASS service) ensures a joint assessment of young people's housing, advice; training & employment and emotional needs are considered. A number of partners are signed up to the protocol to include, Housing Solutions, Children and Young People's Service, One Point and the Youth Offending Service.
  - Maintaining links with the private/voluntary and 3<sup>rd</sup> sector.
  - Creation of more effective links/joint working with DWP – linked initially to sanctions.
  - Additional funding for Churchill Square – via Regional Homeless Group – linked to MEAM approach; Making Every Adult Matter.
  - Links with Homeless Link and wider support for activity of the HAP.
  - No Second Night Out – Housing Solutions have established referral routes with a range of partners and the general public to report rough sleepers with assistance from Street link – Rough Sleeper Count – joint work with Homeless Link and partners to establish rough sleeper numbers in County Durham.
18. Consultation with members of the HAP has resulted in agreement of priorities over the next two years. It was established that the partnership would continue to meet every 8 weeks. Discussions around understanding future welfare changes and changes to legislation are to be discussed and agreed in terms of how to respond as a partnership. Opportunities to explore external funding and develop new initiatives are a key area for discussion. It is recognised that links with other strategic groups such as, Poverty, Durham Key Options and Health will add value to discussions and can improve outcomes.

### **CLG Committee Enquiry**

19. In December 2015 DCLG announced inquiry into causes of homelessness and approaches taken by national and local government to prevent and tackle homelessness. The information will be considered and a decision made in relation prevention of homelessness becoming a statutory function.
20. Durham contributed to a joint Regional response via the North East Regional Homeless Group. However, it was felt the Regional response did not capture the wider work of Durham around preventing homelessness.
21. A separate Durham response was submitted on Monday 8th Feb 2016. This document highlights the key recommendations from the regional response with additional information from Durham which adds value and includes additional detail around Housing Solutions and the continued work on prevention of homelessness.

## **Overview**

22. Significant progress has been made in achieving the Council's overall strategic priorities in regard to homelessness and housing need. However, pressures remain for both households and services seeking to respond to housing need. Households continue to feel the pressures from welfare reform, the increased cost of living and slow growth in the economy across the North East, compared to other parts of the country.

## **Summary**

23. The Housing Solutions Service and many partners continue to monitor, respond and develop services to meet housing need and homelessness across County Durham. The current environment is a challenging one for all services seeking to support some of the most vulnerable members of our communities. The Housing Solutions Service has had to evolve to meet financial pressures and ensure it delivers a more efficient and effective service, yet still maintain quality and a focus on supporting customers to find a sustainable home. Over the past 6 years the service has invested, innovated and developed services to prevent homelessness and support those in housing need.
24. The need for homelessness services is not diminishing. Financial hardship, debt, insecure private sector housing and relationship breakdown, both violent and nonviolent, remain the main reasons for people seeking support. The partnership will therefore continue to develop and innovate to ensure services are able to respond to meet the challenges faced by many residents.

## **Recommendations**

25. Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note and comment upon the information provided in the report and during the presentation.
26. That the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the refresh of the work programme for 2016-2017 receive a further update on homelessness in County Durham.

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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**Finance** – None

**Staffing** – None

**Risk** – None

**Equality and Diversity**– Impact assessment completed.

**Accommodation** - None

**Crime and Disorder** – None

**Human Rights** – None

**Consultation** – None

**Procurement** – None

**Disability Discrimination Act** –None

**Legal Implications** – Legal requirement under the Homelessness Act 2002 for Local Authorities to publish and review the Homelessness Strategy.