

13 January 2017

Homelessness Update

Joint report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Director of Transformation and Partnerships and Ian Thompson, Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide Members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on Homelessness in County Durham prior to a presentation delivered at the meeting by Marie Smith, Housing Manager.

Background

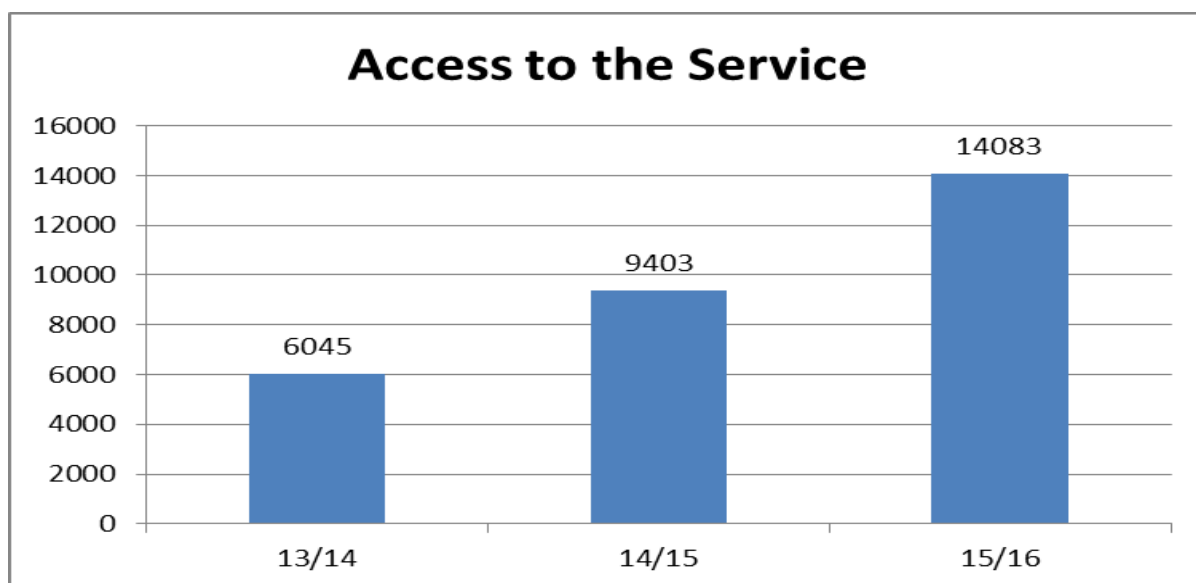
- 2 The Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee have received a number of presentations in relation to homelessness and progress on delivery of the homelessness strategy. The presentation on the 13 January 2017 will cover, headline statistics for homelessness in County Durham, existing priorities and future challenges.

Headline Statistics

Overall contacts to Housing Solutions

- 3 The first point of contact for Housing Solutions is The Housing Advice Line. The number of contacts to the Housing Advice Line is monitored and analysed to inform future service development.
- 4 Clients are provided with one off advice by Housing Advice Line officers or are referred for further assistance to a range of specialist officers. These include Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT), Private Sector Housing, Homeless Advice and Prevention, Home Improvement Agency (HIA), Regeneration & Warmer Homes, Durham Key Options choice based lettings scheme & Family Intervention support. Clients who are homeless or threatened with homelessness are referred to a Homeless and Prevention Officer for a more detailed assessment.
- 5 Diagram 1 shows the number of contacts made to Housing Solutions over the last 3 years. This has increased as Housing Solutions is now a larger team covering more functions and a more comprehensive data recording system is now in place.

Diagram 1: Number of contacts to Housing Solutions



6 In Quarter 2 of 2016/17, 4081 clients required housing advice. Table 1 illustrates further detail of the types of advice requested.

Table 1

Housing Options Wizard (on line portal)	1282
One off advice cases	983
Homeless & Prevention	1030
Warm & Healthy Homes Programme	43
Private Sector Housing	551
Home Improvement Agency	192
TOTAL	4081

Homelessness

7 The number of homeless applications has steadily reduced over the last 3 years and diagrams 2 and 3 shows the figures for applications and acceptances. Interventions such as intensive family support through the Family Intervention Project, the Welfare Reform team and the Housing Advice Line triage service have all contributed to the reduction in homeless applications. More holistic, intensive support allows for the prevention of homelessness and the right amount of support offered matching the level of need has contributed to the reduction.

8 Diagram 3 reveals the reduction of cases accepted as statutorily homeless has reduced consistently over the last few years. This again reflects earlier intervention from other parts of the service.

Diagram 2: Homeless applications

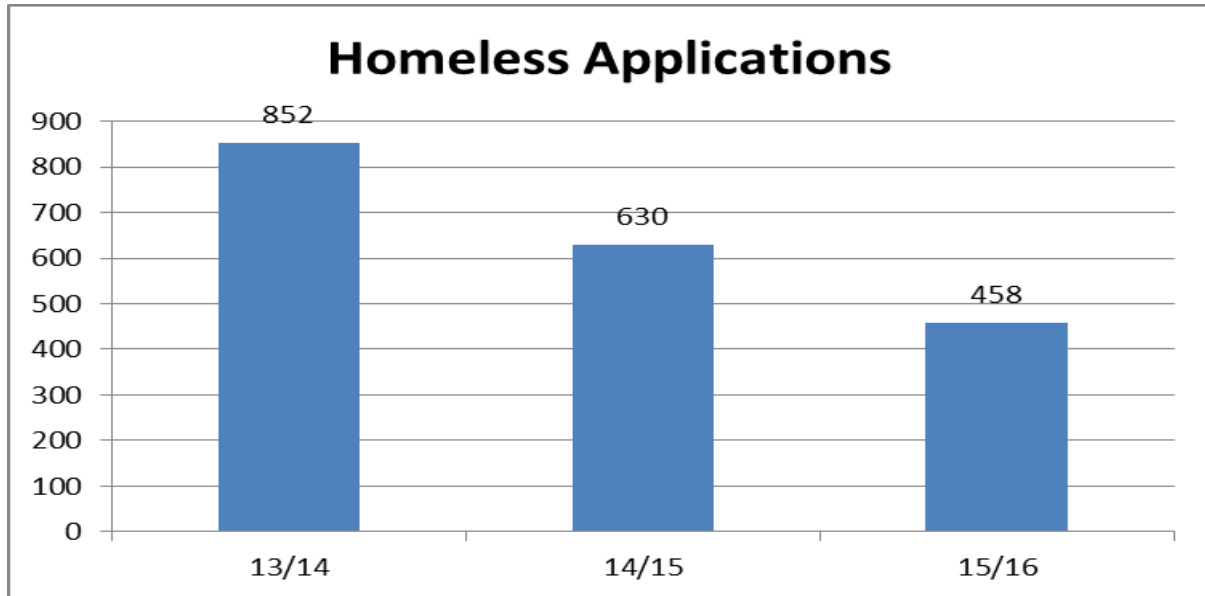
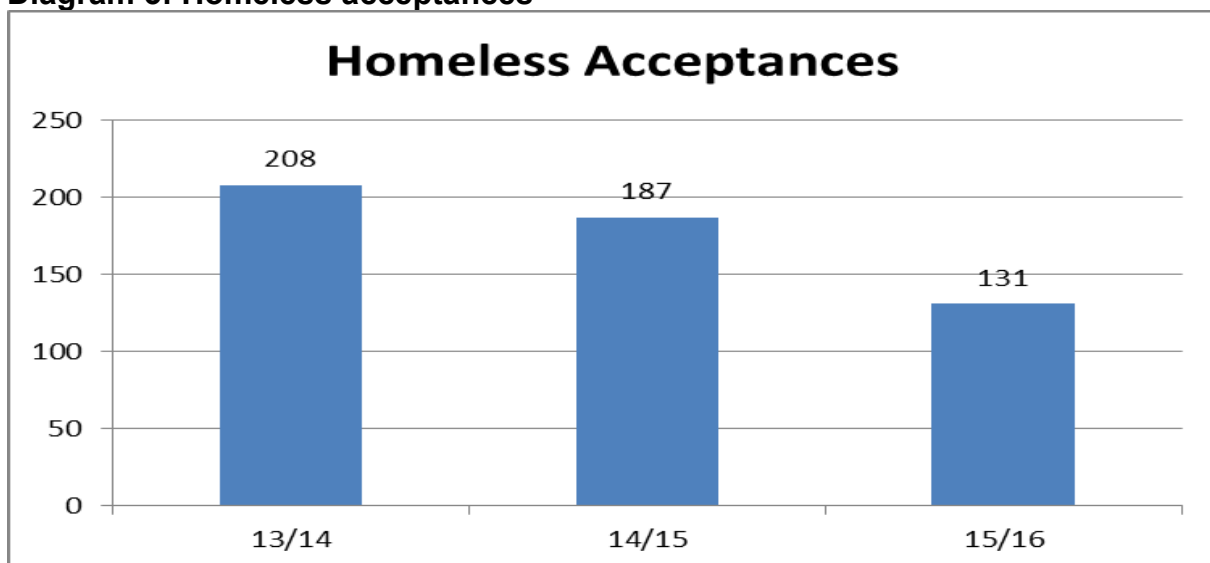
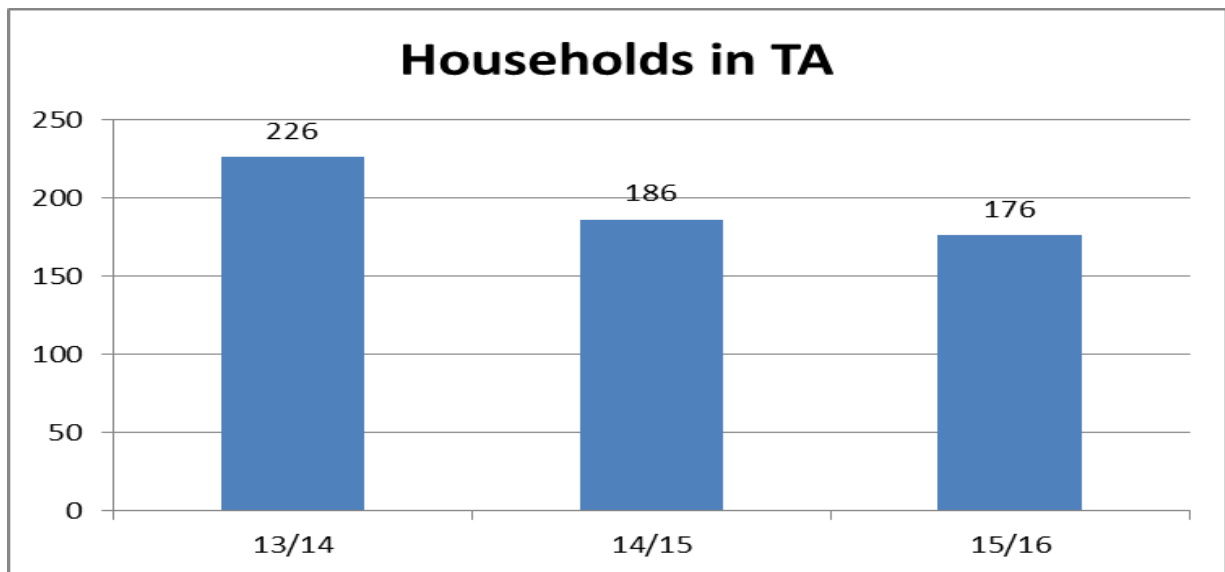


Diagram 3: Homeless acceptances



9 The number of households placed in emergency temporary accommodation has reduced in line with the numbers of homeless applications received as outlined in diagram 3.

Diagram 3: Emergency accommodation



- 10 The 2 main reasons for homelessness continue to be violent relationship breakdown along with loss of assured short hold tenancy.
- 11 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.
- 12 The majority of homeless applications come from single people – in 2015/16 there were 138 from single males and 95 from single females. However, acceptance of a full statutory duty is highest to lone female with dependent children or pregnant.
- 13 Previously the east of the county received the highest number of accepted homeless clients. In 2015/16 the North of the county provided equal numbers to the east.
- 14 The Remain Safe project continues as a response to the high number of presentations from those experiencing domestic violence or harassment from outside the home. This scheme acts to assist those fleeing domestic abuse to enable clients to remain in their own home or seek alternative, suitable accommodation.
- 15 The number of tenants and residents suffering financial hardship continues to increase and be the highest reason for presentation to the service. 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.

Preventing homelessness

- 16 A number of initiatives and projects to tackle homelessness are used and some of these include:
- (a) 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.
 - (b) Pre-eviction protocol – Working together with landlords to prevent eviction stage via early intervention from specialist teams.
 - (c) 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.
 - (d) Family Intervention – Intensive work carried out by funded key workers to address complex issues around housing, health, debt, worklessness and anti-social behavior.
 - (e) 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.
 - (f) 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.
- 17 In Quarters 1 and 2 of 2016/17 various methods were used to assist 259 households into alternative accommodation, for example in to supported accommodation or into social housing.
- 18 In Quarters 1 and 2 of 2016/17 various methods were used to assist 529 households to stay in their existing home, for example through providing adaptations and home improvements through grant and loan programmes, resolving housing benefit problems and providing sanctuary scheme measures for those who have experienced domestic abuse.

Priorities

- 19 A Housing Support Group has recently been established and sits beneath the Durham Housing Forum. This group will continue the work of the Homelessness Action Partnership and have agreed the following priorities for homelessness:

- (a) Understand the proposed changes from the Homeless Reduction Bill and further welfare reform changes;
 - (b) Producing and analysing information to understand the picture of housing need across County Durham;
 - (c) Understand needs of clients with complex needs;
 - (d) Obtain a more comprehensive picture of the health needs of the homeless population;
 - (e) Review existing provision of supported accommodation and identify any gaps;
 - (f) Review existing provision of direct access emergency provision.
- 20 Durham County Council continue to be part of the North East Regional Homeless Group - The 12 North East Local authorities' homelessness leads have been meeting as a regional group since summer 2011 in order to develop sub regional and regional responses to single homelessness and rough sleeping. This terms of reference sets down the governance arrangements for this group and outlines how spending decisions will be made.
- 21 The Regional Homeless Group exists to develop regional and sub regional responses to single homelessness by sharing knowledge and good practice and commissioning specific pieces of work to achieve a reduction in rough sleeping and single homelessness. To further share good practice and develop joint working to promote homelessness prevention to all groups.

Future challenges

- 22 The Homeless Reduction Bill sets out to place much greater emphasis on local authorities taking preventative measures to help address homelessness before it occurs, and strengthens the provisions for 'non-priority need' households. The Bill is currently in draft stage and is due a third reading in the House of Commons in January 2017 and likely to become law in the autumn of 2017.
- 23 The Bill is made up of 12 measures and contains 2 new prevention duties irrespective of priority need.
- A duty to help to prevent homelessness for all eligible households threatened with homelessness within 56 days.
 - A duty 'to help to secure' accommodation, often referred to as the relief duty, to come to an end after 56 days.
- 24 An increase in casework activity is highly likely to fulfil the new prevention and relief duties, which both carry a 56 day timeframe. It is expected that cases

will be ongoing for a longer period of time whilst going through the new process with the aim being, to reduce homeless applications with a stronger focus on earlier prevention and intervention. With the addition of personal housing plans and an enhanced advice and assistance offer it is likely that Durham would struggle to cope with demand under the proposed changes if sufficient resource is not in place to aid prevention at an earlier stage.

- 25 Not only will this impact on the resources of people but is likely to put pressure on the use and cost of prevention tools. It is expected more people are going to be eligible for and require access to prevention funds / bonds / mediation / debt / welfare rights etc.
- 26 The benefit cap reduction to £20,000 per year for families/couples and £13,400 for singles will affect the ability to find affordable housing, particularly when considered alongside the four-year freeze on local housing allowance.
- 27 The proposed cap on housing benefit to Local Housing Allowance levels from April 2019 will have an impact on the supported housing schemes currently provided in County Durham. Examples include hostels and refuges, and would make the provision for single people under 35 extremely challenging.
- 28 A Homeless Prevention Trailblazer Bid for £580,000 was submitted to Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in November. This opportunity from the DCLG is to assist in establishing a network of ambitious areas across England to fundamentally reform the response to homelessness. Durham County Council aims to introduce an innovative approach which prevents homelessness for all clients at an earlier stage across the whole of the County, not just those owed a homeless duty under current legislation, thereby achieving longer term positive outcomes for clients. This includes improved health, employment opportunities, reduced debt and maximised income. This approach will complement the aims of the Homeless Reduction Bill and endeavour to introduce an earlier intervention duty, stated as 56 days.
- 29 A Rough Sleeper bid for £322,142 was submitted to DCLG. This aims to help those new to the streets, or at imminent risk of sleeping rough to get the rapid support they need. DCLG invited funding bids interventions to help new rough sleepers, or people at imminent risk of sleeping rough, get the rapid support they need to recover and move-on from a rough sleeping crisis.
- 30 An announcement was made on 21st December and unfortunately Durham were unsuccessful with their bid applications.

Recommendations

- 31 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.

- 32 That the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the refresh of the work programme for 2017-2018 receive a further update on homelessness in County Durham.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – N/A

Staffing – N/A

Risk – N/A

Equality and Diversity– Impact assessment completed.

Accommodation – N/A

Crime and Disorder – N/A

Human Rights – N/A

Consultation – N/A

Procurement – N/A

Disability Discrimination Act –N/A

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