

Environmental Scrutiny Committee 16th June 2011

Report of the Director of Adult, Community & Housing Services

The Homelessness Service – Annual Report 2010/11

1. Purpose

1.1 To advise of homelessness activity during 2010/11 and consider any implications.

2. Background

2.1 A management review of service delivery was undertaken in June 2003 alongside the production of the first Homelessness Strategy.

2.2 The Strategy published in July 2003 included a commitment to produce an annual report on service development and delivery. This is the eighth annual report.

3. Demand

3.1 Following several years of escalating numbers of initial enquiries, demand for service levelled out from 2003/4 at around 2000 per year. From 2004/5, the number of full duty acceptances decreased as prevention of homelessness became our highest priority, but this year has seen an increase in acceptances, although they remain significantly lower than previous years except 2009/10.

	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11
Full duty decisions	602	448	372	386	296	154	188
All presentations	2103	2009	2143	2569	2701	2280	2223
% full duty	28%	22%	17%	15%	11%	7%	8%
Preventions (BVPI 213)	N/A	138	190	245	363	476	552

3.2 The majority of households with a full rehousing duty are in priority need because they contain children or an expectant mother.

	2004/5	2005/06	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11
Total households accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need	602	448	372	386	296	154	188
Those with dependent children/pregnant	396	331	282	290	230	109	152
Households without children	206	117	90	96	66	45	36

3.3 We have closely monitored the main reasons for homelessness acceptances, and used this information to prioritise service development. During 2010/11, there has been an increase in three of the top four categories and work is already underway to review our current service provision in these areas. Relationship breakdown continues to be our primary cause of homelessness. Since the introduction of the Mortgage Arrears Advice Service, mortgage arrears has moved from being our second highest cause, and this year once again no longer features in our top four at all, but is still included in the table below for information. In respect of the increase in the other areas; regarding the number of Termination of Assured Shorthold Tenancies, in the majority of these there are affordability issues either through arrears accruing, change in financial circumstances or alternatively landlords moving back to the property or looking to sell the property. Work is already under way to look at the impact of changes in welfare benefits, which may also impact in this area this year. The area of family and friend exclusions is one that we will investigate further as there are no specific trends in this area. In respect of the number of acceptances through the end of the Home Office Asylum Seeker accommodation, the UKBA has proactively sought through its case resolution process to reduce the backlog of cases and has also introduced a new Asylum model process to conclude its cases more effectively.

	Number 2006/7	Number 2007/8	Number 2008/9	Number 2009/10	Number 2010/11	% of Total 2010/11
Relationship breakdown	113	106	90	67	46	24.5%
(Of which violent)	84	77	76	56	39	(43.5% in 2009/10)
(Of which non-violent)	29	29	14	11	7	
Termination of assured shorthold tenancy	76	74	41	18	40	21.3% (11.7% in 2009/10)
Breakdown of relationship with parents/other host household	35	52	51	18	35	18.6%
(Of which parents)	20	29	30	10	20	(11.7% in 2009/10)
(Of which other family/friends)	15	23	21	8	15	
End of Home Office asylum seeker accommodation	8	23	22	19	29	15.4% (12.3% in 2009/10)
Mortgage arrears	91	81	37	11	9	4.8% (7.1% in 2009/10)

3.4 Through the ongoing development and promotion of partnership services such as debt prevention, Staying Put, Preventing Possessions Fund, crash pad, tenancy support,

housing options, new affordable housing, rough sleepers initiative and private sector liaison we continue to work to address homelessness across the borough. These have contributed to the year on year increase in the number of preventions, which now outnumber acceptances by around 3 to 1. It is worth mentioning that in 2010/11 and despite the economic situation there were no homelessness acceptances in Dudley arising from council rent arrears and one from the RSL providers; this suggests that social landlords in the borough have responsible income management policies and good tenancy support arrangements.

4. Performance

- 4.1 The Homelessness/Housing Advice service has in previous years been subject to an increasing number of Best Value Performance Indicators. Two of these were dropped in 2007/8, and in the performance framework of National Indicators effective from April 2008, the sole PI wholly to do with homelessness was NI 156 – the total of households in temporary accommodation. The new government has set out to reduce the reporting requirements even further, but has reaffirmed its commitment to tackling homelessness, and in particular rough sleeping.

BVPI Description	2006/7 Actual	2007/8 Actual	2008/9 Actual	2009/10 Actual	2010/11 Actual
NI 156 – Number of households living in temporary accommodation as at end of year	N/A	65	41	37	43
Local indicator formerly BVPI 213 – % of households who considered themselves as homeless, who approached the LA's housing services and for whom housing advice casework intervention resolved their situation.	1.52% (190) households	1.94 % (245) households	2.88% (363) households	3.78% (476) households	4.16% (552) households

5. Resources and Value for Money

- 5.1 As usual, we have pursued any funding opportunities that have arisen, and have secured funding to maintain the Mortgage Arrears Advice Service in partnership with Dudley CABx until late 2012. That service produces its own annual report, and we will be examining the outcomes and trends from 2010/11 to see how they can be used to secure an appropriate level of ongoing funding. The service has been crucial in achieving twenty three mortgage rescues since it began in 2009, but has assisted many more households to resolve their mortgage worries without having to resort to mortgage rescue. From 1st March 2011, the scheme has changed, and the Council is now obliged to introduce its own priority criteria, against which our recent referrals and any future potential referrals will be measured. The Council has a local allocation of 7 rescues for 2011/12.
- 5.2 Lye Family Centre is run as a separate business unit with a balanced budget to cover its own running costs, and is generally fully occupied as are our dispersed furnished units of accommodation.

6 Service Delivery and Access

6.1 The Housing Options Service continues to offer

- Housing Options appointments with specially trained staff for any resident in Dudley Borough
- A dedicated resource for Registered Social Landlords participating in Dudley at Home (CBL) – this has recently been extended to include private landlords
- Outreach events and services for the wider community

6.2 Staff training in 2010/11 has included Alcohol Awareness, the New Mortgage Rescue scheme and bespoke training provided through our partnership with Dudley CABx. Individual staff have also attended various external events and fed back to the team. In 2011/12 we will be commissioning Homelessness Update Training to be delivered in-house.

6.3 Our primary front of house service continues to be delivered at Dudley Council Plus, although our Housing Access Points are also able to deal with initial enquiries. Specialist Homelessness, Housing Applications, Housing Occupational Therapy and Housing Support staff are now co-located at Solus House.

6.4 We have successfully commissioned an updated and on-line directory of homelessness services in partnership with the other three Black Country boroughs, which has already received nearly 3,500 visits since its launch in October 2010. It is also planned in 2011/12 to improve our customer feedback arrangements and to continue to update our own website. Other service development projects include a pre tenancy service for young people, a review of rough sleeper services, Family Intervention Project in partnership with Children's Services, and a task group established to identify and address the risks implied in the current programme of welfare benefit reform.

6.5 During 2010/11, we embarked upon a lean systems thinking review of our lettings process for council properties. As a result of this, a new streamlined process has been introduced so that people who apply for housing receive better information before they decide to do so and their applications are dealt with within three to four weeks. Everyone who applies now attends an interview where they receive advice on the bidding process and on their housing options, and by the end of the interview their application is usually live for bidding. The new process has been live since 31st January on a trial basis, and customer satisfaction is in excess of 99%. The interview is also an opportunity for us to identify customers who may be vulnerable and require ongoing support, or who could potentially be at risk of homelessness.

7 Equality and Diversity

7.1 The number of homeless acceptances involving BME households was 16.93% in 2006/7, 16.6% in 2007/8, 21.8% in 2008/9, 26.6% in 2009/10 and 30.1% in 2010/11. The Housing Options service is tasked with ensuring that all of our housing advice services are appropriate and accessible to BME communities and other potentially disadvantaged and excluded groups. There was one homeless acceptance resulting from racial harassment during 2010/11 and none for racial violence compared to a total of four over the previous four years. It is intended to promote the "Staying Put" (previously known as Sanctuary) service more proactively as a response to all hate crimes.

- 7.2 In 2006/7, twice as many single women as single men were accepted as homeless (42 as opposed to 20); in 2007/8 the gap reduced to some extent at 44 single women and 29 single men. In 2008/9, the figures were 33 single women and 24 single men, in 2009/10 18 single women and 21 single men. In 2010/11, the figures are 17 single women and 15 single men. There is very little temporary accommodation for women; Gibbs Road House is the main provision for single people, and caters almost exclusively for men. This gap in service was identified as a priority in the updated Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan and it is expected that a new female provision will open in this financial year.
- 7.3 In 2007/8, 15 priority need acceptances were the result of physical disability and 15 of mental illness or disability. In 2008/9, these figures were 16 and 12 respectively, in 2009/10 6 and 16 and in 2010/11 were 15 and 7. The Homelessness Service strives to work in partnership with Adult Social Care Services and the PCT to ensure that people with physical or sensory disabilities or poor mental health do not become homeless and dependent on crisis services. 2010/11 has seen the assessment of all health related housing needs transferred in house, to our Housing Occupational Therapy Service.
- 7.4 The number of people accepted as priority need through old age reduced from 15 in 2005/6, to 10 in 2006/7, one in 2008/9, two in 2009/10 and one in 2010/11. The number of 16- and 17- year olds accepted reduced from five in 2005/6, one in 2006/7, three in 2008/9, three in 2009/10 and one in 2010/11. The majority of households accepted as homeless are in the 25-44 age group – 74% in 2007/8, 56% in 2008/9, 53% in 2009/10 and 55% in 2010/11.

8 Recommendations

- 8.1 The group is invited to comment on the contents of this Annual Report.



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