

Appendix 2

# Supplementary Item –

# Further information on Homelessness

Quarter 2 2019-20

# Appendix 2

## Introduction

All councils have a legal responsibility to help homeless people and their families and to ensure their rights are upheld. The council has strict rules about who is homeless and in priority need. The work of the Housing Options and Homelessness Service is guided by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which brought in a number of significant changes and extended and strengthened the duty for local authorities deal with the causes of homelessness. The main changes brought in by the 2017 Act can be summarised as follows:

- ▶ A household or person can now be assessed as threatened with homelessness in 56 days where it was previously 28 days;
- ▶ For all households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness their case worker will agree with them a personal housing plan setting out what the case worker will do and what the household will do to prevent or alleviate their homelessness. Agencies working with the household may contribute to some of the steps in a personal housing plan;
- ▶ The Act formalises the Prevention and Relief duty – for those threatened with homelessness the Councils have a duty to take steps to prevent homelessness and for those already homeless the Councils have a duty to relieve homelessness. It is only at the end of this process that a full duty decision can be made;
- ▶ Households can present anywhere in the Country and Local Connection referrals cannot be made at the prevention stage – only once a relief duty has been accepted.

Furthermore, Public Bodies have a duty to refer households to the Council where there is a threat of homelessness (as long as they get the consent of their client). This is an area of work which has grown since the Act and in South Ribble we have had 37 households referred to the Council under the duty to refer. The main agency undertaking referrals has been the Department of Work and Pensions but also from increased referrals being received from probation / police / prisons and mental health services. The referrals do support the prevention agenda and are a tangible sign of a more joined up and holistic approach to preventing homelessness.

Referrals can be made to the Council using the link on our website to the ALERT system or by emailing [housing@southribble.gov.uk](mailto:housing@southribble.gov.uk) or [dutytorefer@southribble.gov.uk](mailto:dutytorefer@southribble.gov.uk).

## Prevention of Homelessness

Where a household is threatened with homelessness but they have not yet lost their accommodation, the prevention duty will apply.

At the prevention stage, the Council will not offer temporary accommodation as the accommodation has not yet been lost. The prevention duty continues for 56 days but this can be extended if they are able to remain where they are pending re housing – for example we negotiate with a private landlord for the tenant to remain in the property until alternative accommodation is sourced. The prevention duty can be ended in a number of ways for example if accommodation is secured, the household becomes homeless as opposed to threatened with it, they fail to co-operate or contact with the household is lost.

If the household subsequently becomes homeless or is already homeless on presenting to the Council then the relief duty will apply.

At the relief stage, temporary accommodation will be offered if the following factors are applicable:

The Household is:

- ▶ Eligible for assistance;
- ▶ The Council is satisfied that the household is homeless and has no accommodation available to them either here or abroad;
- ▶ The household is in priority need. Priority need is defined in legislation and case law supported by the Code of guidance. If a household has children or a member of the household is pregnant they are deemed to be in priority need. For single people the assessment is more complex and a test of vulnerability is applied.

At this stage, a referral back to another Council can be made if there is no Local connection to South Ribble. It is important to note that the relief duty is temporary and will come to an end. At this stage the Council will need to determine whether or not a main housing duty is owed and in doing so it will consider in addition to the above whether or not the person(s) presenting are intentionally homeless due to their own actions or a loss of contract etc. If they are, the Council will have a limited duty to provide them with accommodation (usually 28 days but this depends on individual circumstances) and the applicant(s) will be provided with advice and assistance to secure accommodation.

## Some Statistics on Homelessness

These statistics are taken from the CIVICA database. They are uploaded quarterly to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The statistics are regarded as “experimental” by Government at present. This is due to Local Authorities and software providers getting used to the new legislation and duties and how to record them. The MHCLG statistics do not include all local authorities and the statistics are not comparable with historical performance as the responsibilities of Local Authorities were fundamentally changed under the 2017 Homelessness Act. However, we believe the statistics below provide for a reasonably accurate account of Homelessness performance in South Ribble.

### Presentations to services 2018 -2019 (April to March)

Total number	Advice only	Prevention duty owed	Relief Duty Owed	Enquiries establish not homeless	Local connection referral
817	48	482	177	109	1

### Presenting reasons April 2018 to March 2019

Loss of social rent	24
Domestic Violence	107
Other violence	14
Left institution to No Fixed Abode	8
Required to leave Home office accommodation	3
End of private rent not Assured Shorthold Tenancy	11
Family no longer able to accommodate	190
Friends no longer able to accommodate	24
Relationship Breakdown (non-violent)	73
Fire/Flood/other emergency	4
Left HM forces	2
Mortgage Repossession	10
Property disrepair	9
End of Assured Shorthold Tenancy	121
Eviction from Supported Housing	13
Other	128

## Top 5 Reasons for presenting

### 1- Family no longer willing to accommodate (190)

Of these:

- ▶ 110 cases were owed a prevention duty;
- ▶ 68 cases were owed a relief duty;
- ▶ 12 cases were not deemed as being homeless.

In the year:

- ▶ 43 cases were prevented;
- ▶ 20 cases were relieved;
- ▶ 58 cases were closed – We have lost contact or the applicant has stated that they no longer require advice.
- ▶ 14 cases had their duty discharged – These are cases where we have moved on from the relief stage and made a main housing decision. We have discharged the duty either by accommodating them or by them losing the accommodation provided in the interim.

## 2- Other (128)

These cases in the main relate to cases added so that Discretionary Housing Payments can be recorded. We work closely with the Housing Benefit service who can award additional payments of housing benefit to assist people to remain in their home, an example would be if a person is subject to an under occupation charge or have had a change in circumstances and can't afford the rent. Discretionary Housing Payments can also be used to fund things such as moving costs where people need to move but cannot meet the costs. If a Discretionary Housing Payment were not made in these cases, the result would be them becoming homeless. This category also includes move on from supported housing and cases that do not relate to other categories.

In the year:

- ▶ 93 cases were prevented;
- ▶ 3 cases were relived;
- ▶ 1 case required the main duty to be discharged;
- ▶ All the remaining cases were closed apart from 6 cases which are still ongoing.

## 3- End of Assured Shorthold Tenancy (121)

These are mainly used for private lets and the break-down is as follows:

- ▶ 62 cases were due to the landlord selling the property;
- ▶ 18 cases related to rent arrears due to a change in circumstances;
- ▶ 1 case involved a breach of tenancy (not rent arrears);
- ▶ 1 case involved an illegal eviction;
- ▶ 1 case was due a rent increase;
- ▶ 4 cases related to rent arrears due to reduction in employment income;
- ▶ 10 cases related to difficulty with budgeting;
- ▶ 2 cases were due to changes in benefit entitlement;
- ▶ 2 cases were due to complaints about disrepair;
- ▶ 20 cases of "other" were recorded.

### For Assured Shorthold Tenancies as a whole:

- ▶ 47 cases were prevented;
- ▶ 12 cases were relived;
- ▶ 41 cases were closed;
- ▶ 8 cases had a duty discharged.

## 4. Domestic Violence (107)

The Council shall support victims of domestic violence both through providing additional security into the victims home and helping with securing suitable alternative accommodation when it is not safe to stay in the family home. The breakdown for domestic violence is as follows:

- ▶ 72 cases were owed a prevention duty (these include referrals under the Sanctuary Scheme where we put additional security in place so that victims of domestic violence feel safer to remain in their home);
- ▶ 31 cases were owed a relief duty;
- ▶ 5 cases were not deemed to be homeless.

In the year:

- ▶ 55 cases were prevented;
- ▶ 8 cases were relieved;
- ▶ 5 cases had a duty discharged;
- ▶ 33 cases were closed.

## 5. Relationship breakdown (73)

The number of relationship breakdown cases are outlined below:

- ▶ 32 cases were owed a prevention duty;
- ▶ 29 cases were owed a relief duty;
- ▶ 12 cases were not deemed to be homeless.

In the year:

- ▶ 7 cases were prevented;
- ▶ 8 cases were relieved;
- ▶ 5 cases had a duty discharged;
- ▶ 46 cases were closed.

It is worth noting that the main reasons for loss of social rent were difficulty in budgeting and change of circumstances and the main reasons for the loss of supported housing were breach of tenancy other than rent arrears. Only 1 case was due to rent arrears and 1 person was no longer eligible for supported housing.

### Preventions and Reliefs April 2018 to March 2019

	Secured existing accommodation for 12 months	Secured existing accommodation for 6 months	Secured alternative accommodation for 6 months	Secured alternative accommodation for 12 months
Preventions	67	51	40	84
Reliefs			18	29

### Rough Sleepers

The Borough does not have a significant number of rough sleepers and where reports are received the Housing Options Team are proactive in attending sites to offer advice and assistance. If there is no duty to accommodate, wherever possible the Housing Options team will arrange accommodation on a night by night basis. During October and November each year the service is required to submit to MHCLG the number of rough sleepers we have on a single night. We can do this by either conducting a count on the night or by doing an estimate involving partners. In the past, the service has gone out and conducted a count however, this year we do not have any sites to go out to and so will be doing an estimate involving partner agencies and the service shall also ask members to report any knowledge of rough sleepers to the Housing Options Team.

In November 2018, the Housing Options Service reported 5 rough sleepers 4 of whom were working with Preston Homelessness service but had camped on South Ribble land at the border between South Ribble and Preston.

The Service will be submitting an application to the Cold Weather Fund this year to enhance the service we can provide to anyone sleeping rough over the winter months. We were successful in this bid last year. Councils with less than 5 rough sleepers can claim back up to £10,000 in total. Our bid was to enhance the severe weather provision we have in place with Cotswold House in Chorley so that the provision was kept open throughout the winter not just when the temperatures drop below zero. We were also able to fund transport costs. We assisted 5 people – 2 longer term and 3 for a couple of nights. The fund was also used to pay rent in advance for 1 to access permanent accommodation. The total claimed back was £2271.46. This covered the actual cost of provision for those who accessed the scheme. We did not turn anyone away from cold weather provision.

### Main Duty Decisions April 2018 to March 2019

Accepted	29
Intentional	7
Non priority	16
Not homeless	4

### Categories of priority need for those accepted main duty

Dependent children	15
Pregnancy	4
Physical Health	8
Mental health	1
Domestic Abuse	1

In the period 2017/2018 - 73 decisions were made of which 51 were main duty acceptances which resulted in rehousing being provided.

### **Temporary Accommodation**

The Service has access to 30 self-contained flats in South Ribble and 4 rooms in a Shared House of Multiple Occupation in Preston. In addition to this, the Service can also access refuge accommodation where appropriate

Typically the Service has between 25 and 30 households in temporary accommodation. The rooms are also used to alleviate rough sleeping for non-duty households when we have availability. Currently there are 23 households in Temporary Accommodation – 15 of which have children.

The Senior Housing Needs Officer visits this accommodation regularly to ensure issues are kept to a minimum and move on can be facilitated as quickly as possible. There are however, a number of households with previous tenancy failures or other issues that are difficult to move on and in such instances the services adopts a multi-agency approach to ensure households receive the support they require to facilitate move on.

Bed and Breakfast (B&B) is always deemed as a last resort and is used infrequently and only for a very short period of time. An example of when B&B has been used is on one occasion a client required wheelchair accessible accommodation and there was none available at the time. The Service is now adapting one of the temporary accommodation units to be wheelchair accessible as a result of this issue. On another occasion B&B was utilised when the temporary accommodation portfolio was full or the household was unable to access it. There is statutory guidance that B&B should not be used except in an emergency for families, households with a pregnant woman or 16/17 year olds. Where B&B is used it cannot be for no longer than a period of 6 weeks and the Council have not exceeded this target. It is worth noting that in contrast to the above categories of client there are no restriction on the use of B&B for single people.

### **Access to Permanent Housing**

Access to social housing is in the main via Select Move, although a small percentage of lets are done outside of this.

The waiting list South Ribble as stated on Select Move contains the following information as at September 2019:

	South Ribble
Band A – highest priority urgent need to move	30
Band B – priority Urgent need to move	67
Band C - housing need	90
Band D – positive community contribution , under occupancy and 1 bedroom over crowded	267
No preference band - no housing need	344
Open property register – those who do not qualify for Select move	1038

Bands A, B and C contain customers who are entitled to reasonable preference on the waiting list as defined in law.

A number of prevention initiatives are in place through which the Council works in partnership with statutory, voluntary and third sector partners to prevent homelessness. Examples of partnerships include:

- ▶ Joint Protocol for 16/17 year olds – working with social care, KEY and young people's schemes;
- ▶ Floating support, Young People's Housing Advice Service and Pre tenancy training is undertaken in partnership with KEY Youth Charity;
- ▶ Sanctuary Scheme – to support victims of domestic violence is run in partnership with Preston care and Repair and Chorley Council;
- ▶ Bonds and rent in advance are provided by the Council to assist clients to access private sector accommodation or funds can be released to:
  - Prevent homelessness –for example the service will liaise closely with the benefits team in respect of accessing discretionary housing payments;

- ▶ Homelessness prevention is a top corporate priority and a corporate plan project has commenced which incorporates enhancing homelessness prevention and building on the duty to refer. The project includes a proposal to carry out proactive inspections of private sector properties to raise standards (subject to funding being agreed), identifying property condition issues as part of Disabled Facilities Grant inspections and facilitating a quick turnaround for grants to enable people to leave hospital.

The project also incorporates:

- ▶ A training event to be held with voluntary sector partners to raise awareness of safeguarding, services available to prevent homelessness and identifying opportunities for collaboration;
- ▶ Working with probation and the police to address the specific issues in relation to offenders and ensure that risks are effectively managed and minimised;
- ▶ Reviewing and enhancing prison and hospital discharge protocols – particularly in relation to mental health and adult social care – the mental health and adult social care are to be looked at in their own right and not just as part of prisons and hospital discharge;
- ▶ Social Housing is accessed across Chorley, Preston and South Ribble via the Select Move partnership which has a common allocations policy and housing register;
- ▶ Severe weather extra provision is delivered with Chorley Borough Council.

The Council works collaboratively with Preston City Council with regards to the provision of a shared House of Multiple Occupation in Preston. Preston also provide a scheme for ex-offenders which we can use by agreement and we jointly work with a private sector landlord who provides accommodation for single people. More recently Preston have been awarded funding to deal with rough sleeping in the city and have opened a 24 hour hub with accommodation, support and outreach attached to it for rough sleepers.

South Ribble submitted a bid to source funding to enable access to this with the support of Preston Council – this was unsuccessful which was not surprising as we cannot evidence large numbers of rough sleepers. We are however, discussing with Preston the use of homelessness grant to facilitate access to this service for our rough sleepers when we become aware of them.

There is a Lancashire Homelessness forum which meets quarterly to share best practise and discuss cross cutting issues.

### **Homelessness Strategy Review**

The Homelessness Strategy is due for review and consultation has been carried out with the homeless network. Consultation with Elected Members shall be conducted through a Member briefing session. The Homelessness Strategy must address the following:

- a. Preventing homelessness in the district;
- b. Securing sufficient accommodation is and will be available for people in the district who are or may become homeless;
- c. Securing the satisfactory provision of support for people in the district who are or may become homeless or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.

The variety of prevention initiatives currently in place appear to work well. However, there are a number of gaps and improvements that could be made and feedback from partner agencies at the homeless network identified the following National, Regional and local issues requiring further work and addressing to help improve the service further:

- ▶ Lack of support to clients since floating support was dis-continued;
- ▶ Lack of safe places for people to go to;
- ▶ Young people falling through the gap – particularly due to funding changes for supported accommodation;
- ▶ Universal Credit and its impact on people the effect of advances is under reported;
- ▶ Accommodation the most important thing for everyone to move forward;
- ▶ Affordability for under 25's;
- ▶ Joint protocol issues;
- ▶ Lack of supported accommodation for over 18's;
- ▶ Lack of shared accommodation for under 35's;

- ▶ Intermediary accommodation with different packages of support brought in as a stepping stone to independent tenancies;
- ▶ Supported housing for complex needs;
- ▶ Chaotic lifestyles – lack of support;
- ▶ Payment of universal credit in arrears leads to housing debt and stress for households when notices are served;
- ▶ Criminality – hard to access social housing – may be easier with support;
- ▶ Lack of affordable 1 bedroom accommodation.

It is envisaged that the review shall be completed by the end of December 2019. The strategy shall need to be signed off by Cabinet and consultation will be undertaken with Members ahead of this to determine their priorities for the service. It is clear that prevention is a top priority for the Council and this shall be a focal point of the new Homelessness Strategy. An action plan will be drawn up to address the issues highlighted within the strategy. The action plan will seek to deliver the priorities as identified within the strategy. Officers shall prioritise actions under their control and will work with partners to highlight and lobby for change in relation to wider national and strategic issues.