

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING	Housing & Major Projects Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel	
TITLE:	Homelessness Update	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	20 January 2015	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE: n/a
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: None		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 The Council delivers support and assistance to people at risk of becoming homeless and people who are homeless by commissioning services, developing effective partnerships with the voluntary sector and having an effective Housing Options Team. This report sets out the most recent information on demand for these services and provides reassurance that the responses currently in place are good and that there are new initiatives planned to further improve the offer.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The Housing and Major Projects Development and Scrutiny Panel are requested to note the contents of the paper.

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 3.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The report is approved by the Council's s151 Finance Officer.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The delivery of services for homeless people has implications for statutory considerations such as equalities, crime and disorder, safeguarding children and public health and inequalities.
- 4.2 In addition the [Housing Act 1996](#), and the [Homelessness Act 2002](#), place statutory duties on local housing authorities (the Council) to ensure that advice, assistance and other housing duties are available to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

5 THE REPORT

Value for Money

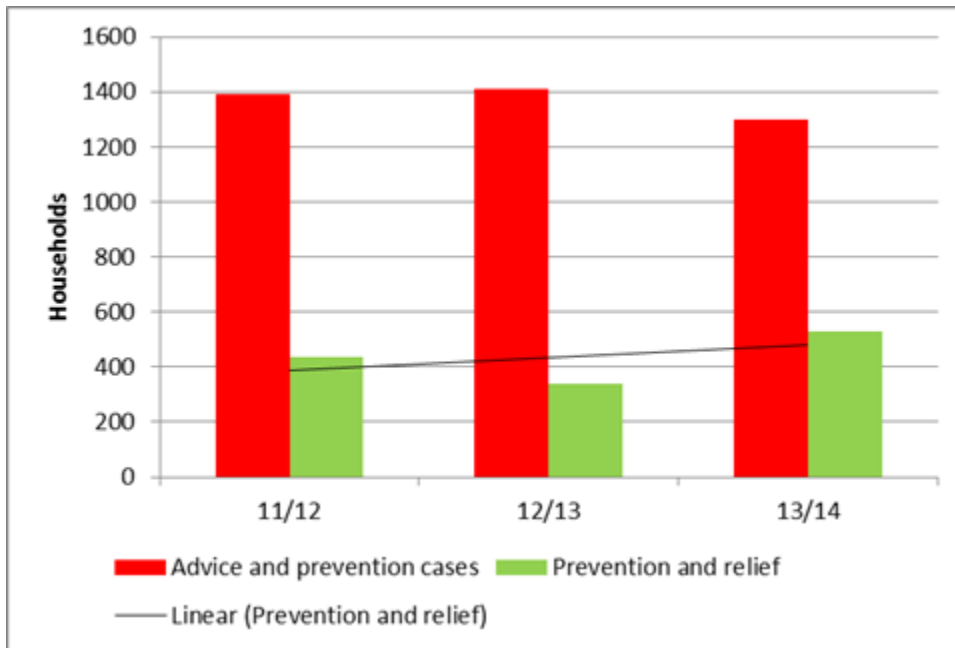
- 5.1 The Housing Options Team, within Housing Services, is the Council's frontline service for people at risk of homelessness and for those who are already homeless. The team provides specialist advice and assistance and has access to a number of practical options and resources to prevent homelessness.
- 5.2 The CIPFA Value for Money analysis for frontline services (2013/14 data) showed that the unit costs of the Housing Options Team are significantly lower than the average across other unitary authorities and the 15 nearest statistical neighbours. Compared to other West of England authorities Bath and North East Somerset Council has a relatively low unit cost homelessness service. Performance against two indicators was rated as excellent and overall the service was rated as 'Good'.
- 5.3 In 2014 the Housing Options Team participated in a peer review sponsored by the Department of Communities and Local Government and achieved an overall rating of 73%, well above the baseline threshold of 60%. Housing Services has submitted further information and is currently applying for the National Practitioner Prevention Partnership Gold Standard which demonstrates its commitment to continuous service improvements.

Effective Prevention

- 5.4 Welfare reforms are bringing significant changes to the cost of renting social housing and to benefit entitlement for under 35 year olds as well as making Housing Benefit recipients responsible for paying rent. These changes correlate with increased risk of homelessness for poorer households. Housing Services has developed a Homelessness Strategy in partnership with local service providers including Curo to prevent homelessness through early interventions.
- 5.5 The Housing Options Team provides early and expert advice and is a signpost for other services such as debt and family mediation. This type of work has remained relatively consistent over the last three years. However the team also

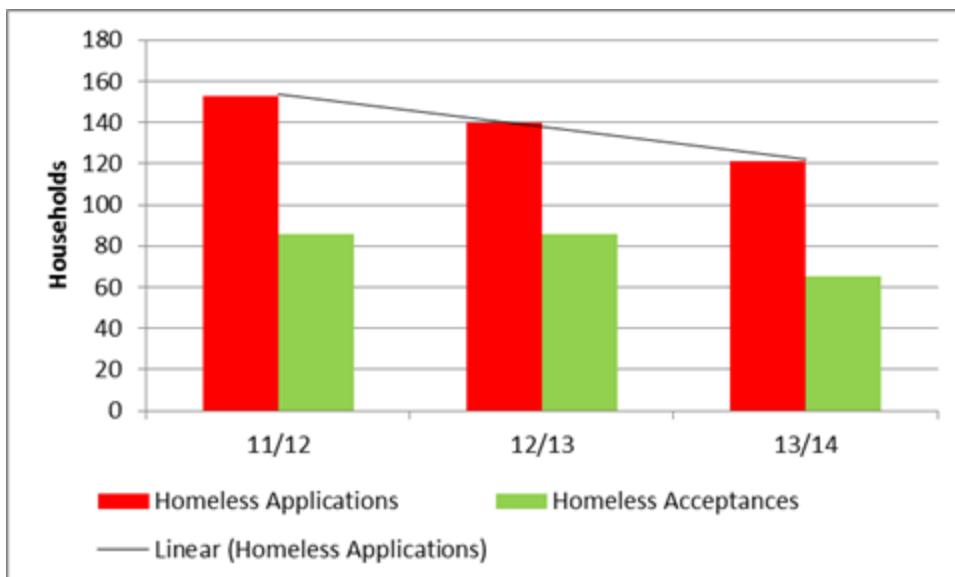
deals with more intensive casework to prevent and relieve homelessness and the number of these cases has gradually increased over the last three years as shown in the chart below.

5.6 Chart 1 Homelessness Preventions



5.7 Effective homelessness prevention and relief casework means that fewer people actually become homeless. The rate of homelessness presentations and acceptance of the statutory accommodation duty has decreased over the last three years as shown in the chart below.

5.8 Chart 2 Homelessness Applications and Acceptances.



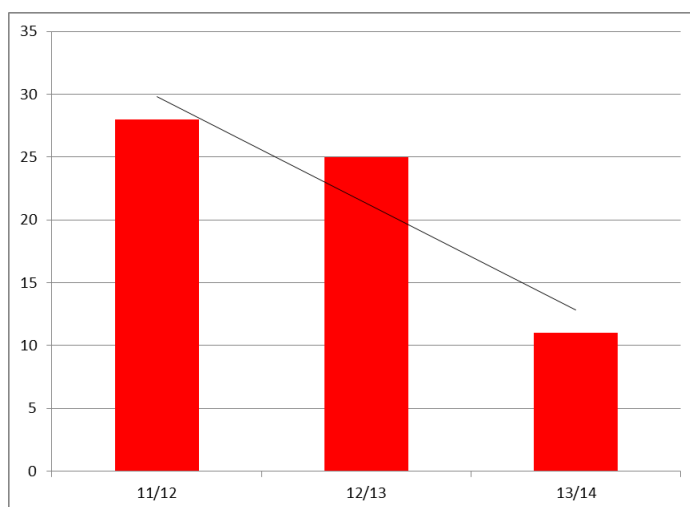
5.9 Sometimes homelessness cannot be prevented or people are already rough sleeping (rough sleeping means someone has been unable to use or have access to accommodation for at least one night).

- 5.10 The most common causes of homelessness during 2013/14 in Bath and North East Somerset were loss of private rented accommodation, parents no longer willing or able to accommodate and having to leave home because of relationship breakdown.
- 5.11 Housing Services assess the level of statutory homeless service to be provided and decide if it is appropriate to secure accommodation for those with a priority need and a local connection or to provide advice and assistance to those without or who are intentionally homeless.
- 5.12 People have a priority need if they have children, are aged 16 or 17 or have a disability or illness that makes them particularly vulnerable. Being homeless with a priority need triggers a requirement for the authority to provide temporary accommodation pending enquiries.

Temporary Accommodation

- 5.13 The current preventing homelessness strategy has been highly effective in reducing the use of temporary accommodation (TA) in Bath and North East Somerset as shown in the chart below. TA is commissioned from Curo Choices who provide 24 self-contained units in Bath and dispersed accommodation in the district as needed, Bed and Breakfast is only used in emergency situations.

- 5.14 Chart 3 Households in Temporary Accommodation (number per night)



- 5.15 Households provided with TA usually have priority on the housing register, Homesearch, and move into social housing tenancies. They are also provided with support to access private rented tenancies or supported or shared housing if this is a more suitable option for them.

Early Interventions

- 5.16 The Council's Advice & Information Strategy 2014-2017 identifies housing and homelessness as a priority and the Council commissions accommodation based and floating support services to prevent homelessness and support homeless people via the Supporting People & Communities programme.
- 5.17 The Council's private rented sector access scheme, Homefinder, is delivered by Housing Services in partnership with voluntary and community

sector organisations such as the Bristol Credit Union, Bath & District Citizens Advice Bureau and Swan Housing Advice. The Bristol Credit Union is commissioned to provide and maintain repayable loans for rent in advance, deposit and any agency fee to facilitate access to private rented tenancies. In 2012/13, Homefinder prevented homelessness for 78 households who were enabled to choose and rent a private sector home. Since April 2014, a further 57 households have gone on to use the service successfully.

Rough Sleeping

5.18 Bath and North East Somerset Council and other local partners provide services, including health, welfare, housing and employment services to help rough sleepers make a transition into safer and healthier lives. The housing related services include:

- Provision of 29 units of modern high quality accommodation with on-site medical provision. (20 direct access & 9 move-on units in self-contained, supported housing where residents develop skills and confidence to live independently.)
- Reach Floating Support Service – provides individual rough sleepers with assertive help & support
- All day drop in centre –providing help, advice & assistance, hot meals, meaningful activities services etc.
- Supported Housing Gateway – web-based single access point for supported housing schemes.
- Priority on Homesearch Scheme for people in supported housing, and in some cases rough sleepers.
- Homefinder scheme - provide homeless people with funding for advance rent and deposit to access private housing. as well as people actually rough sleeping
- A Task & Targeting multi-agency group that shares information on and identifies solutions for named, entrenched rough sleepers.
- A Strategic Homelessness Partnership of local providers, commissioners and other interested parties to consider services and plan resources.

5.19 The number of rough sleepers in the area is estimated every autumn in accordance with best practice. In 2014 it was estimated that there were 27 people sleeping rough on a single night in Bath and North East Somerset (one in three did not have a local connection with the area). The previous year the estimate was 33 and in 2012 the estimate was 22 so the position has remained relatively similar over the last three years.

5.20 Julian House provides the direct access hostel in Bath. It is usually fully occupied and the move-on provision rarely has a void bed for more than one or two nights.

5.21 The hostel is one of only six direct access hostels in the region; the others are located in Bristol, Yeovil, Taunton, Bournemouth and Winchester and it attracts rough sleepers from the surrounding areas.

5.22 Newly-arrived rough sleepers without any local connection are reconnected to their home area when it is safe and reasonable to do so. This ensures that accommodation available in their home town is not lost and that vital support services are maintained. Rough sleepers can decline a reconnection which ends their entitlement to local services and can mean they continue to rough sleep.

New Initiatives

5.23 No Second Night Out was a Government initiative to assist rough sleepers to access accommodation and support by part funding voluntary agencies to deliver an outreach service. This funding ended on 31st December 2014 but alternative funding has already been secured and the service will continue to be provided.

5.24 Bath and North East Somerset Council have successfully bid for money from a Help for Single Homeless fund with North Somerset Council and Bristol City Council to provide a “rapid response and outreach” service to identify and assist rough sleepers. The funding is £239K between the three authorities and runs until April 2016.

6 RATIONALE

6.1 N/A

7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

7.1 None

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 The report aims to provide a briefing only and does not make recommendations for changes to provision service delivery or policy. A full stakeholder consultation on the report has therefore not been undertaken.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

9.1 N/A

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Background papers	none
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