

HOMELESSNESS IN PLYMOUTH

Community Connections – Customer Focus Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report



1. Introduction

Homelessness can happen for a variety of reasons and often with circumstances out of the control of those involved. It is recognised that in a time of crisis, people are often more vulnerable, and there is a need to ensure the right support is available at the right time to prevent homelessness wherever possible.

This report will:-

Set out the recent change in legislation with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA), our duties in respect of this and the impact of this on service delivery in the City;
Provide data to demonstrate the levels of homelessness in the City;
Highlight the current work and initiatives to prevent and relieve homelessness including some of the work of The Plymouth Alliance.

2. Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA), came into effect in April 2018, placing a new duty on local authorities to help prevent the homelessness of families and single people, who are eligible for assistance and threatened with homelessness, regardless of priority need.

The Act significantly reformed England's homelessness legislation by placing duties on local authorities to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness.

The key changes brought about by the Act are:

- An extension of the period 'threatened with homelessness' from 28 to 56 days.
- A new duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible applicants threatened with homelessness, regardless of priority need.
- A new duty to relieve homelessness for all eligible homeless applicants, regardless of priority need.
- A new 'duty to refer' - public services are under a duty to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

3. Impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA)

The HRA has increased the number of people eligible for services.

The time taken to deal with cases is longer due to the change in the law (now 112 days from application to decision, previously it was 33 working days.)

Both of these factors has increased demand on front line services with the time spent on cases doubled and reduced capacity within the service.

The government has provided new burdens funding to support the provision of services however this falls short of requirements to address fully the implications of the HRA and the associated administrative burden.

Critical issues identified in the implementation and delivery of services in line with the new legislation are:

- Presentations are increasing significantly, and more time is being spent on each application, leading to capacity issues
- Culture change is taking time to embed
- The administrative burden is the biggest drawback of the Act for councils which had already implemented a lot of the underlying principles and good practice. This risks a decreased focus on prevention work

- The Act itself does not address the systemic causes of homelessness. In light of this it is key to work closely with and consider the contribution of other government departments (particularly the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)) and the additional resource burden placed on Councils.
- The Duty to Refer stops short of a duty to cooperate, and can result in cost implications both financial and social when people do not receive timely support to prevent or relieve their homelessness.

4. Main Homelessness Duty and Intentionally Homeless

When a homeless application is taken, the Community Connections Officer will work with the applicant under the prevention and relief duties of the HRA to try to prevent or relieve their homelessness.

There may be a duty to provide temporary accommodation while the application is assessed as to whether the local authority have a main homelessness duty to the household.

A main homelessness duty means that the local authority has a duty to secure settled accommodation for the household to move into away from homelessness.

The prevention and relief duties owed to eligible households for assistance and homeless, or threatened with homelessness support, apply regardless of whether or not they may be homeless intentionally.

If a household is assessed to be intentionally homeless there will not be a duty to secure settled accommodation. There does however remain a duty to provide advice and assistance and temporary accommodation to the household for a period reasonable for them to find alternative secure accommodation.

There is not a blanket approach to intentionality in terms of homelessness and in the spirit of the HRA and in adopting a trauma informed approach to support and decision making, the decisions are made on a case by case basis taking into account all the relevant information available.

The legal definition of intentional homelessness states that a person becomes homeless intentionally if ALL of the following apply:

- (a) they deliberately do or fail to do anything in consequence of which they cease to occupy accommodation; and,
- (b) the accommodation is available for their occupation; and,
- (c) it would have been reasonable for them to continue to occupy the accommodation.

An act or omission made in good faith by someone who was unaware of any relevant fact would not be treated as deliberate.

5. Homelessness in Plymouth

5.1 Advice and Homeless Applications

The number of households approaching the Local Authority for advice around homelessness and being threatened with homelessness have been rising over the last few years.

In 2016/17, advice was provided to 1,654 households. This rose to 1,869 households in 2017/18. In 18/19 there was a further increase to 2,514 households.

Of the 2,514 applicants who presented for assistance between 1st April 2018 and March 31st 2019 :-
77 opted for advice service only and chose not to complete an initial assessment.

1,186 applicants met threshold for prevention and/or relief duties within the Homeless Reduction Act.

1,178 applicants withdrew their application or failed to provide evidence to satisfy eligibility or that they were homeless/ at threat of homeless. (In light of these high numbers the processes have been reviewed and additional support is provided to assist clients in obtaining this evidence.)

During this time there has also been an increase in statutory applications however there has been a reduction in the number of households accepted for the main homelessness duty. This decrease is as a result of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) primarily focusing on prevention and the requirement for applications to be in Relief Duty for 56 days prior to accepting the Main Homelessness Duty – some applicants have disengaged prior to Main Duty decision. (The additional administration work and increased duties have impacted the time taken to finalise Main Duty decisions.)

In 2018/19 the recorded positive outcomes of prevention or relief of homelessness represents only the actions taken by the Local Authority. Prior to the Homelessness Reduction Act, quarterly statistical returns included prevention work provided by commissioned partners also. This explains the reduction in recorded positive outcomes between 17/18 and 18/19. Working closely with the Alliance, measures are becoming embedded to ensure all those eligible can access the right service and support under the HRA and the number of successful outcomes continues to increase.

Rough Sleeper numbers in Plymouth (the most visible form of homelessness) have risen over the last few years however there was a decrease to 23 in the official count in November 2018 from 26 in November 2017.

This year's count was undertaken in November 2019 and official figures will be published in January 2020. The data collated weekly by the commissioned rough sleeper outreach team as part of The Plymouth Alliance suggest there has been a continued decrease in the number of rough sleepers in Plymouth. This is largely as a result of the work commissioned through the Alliance from successful funding bids to Government to tackle and prevent rough sleeping.

	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19
Advice Casework	1557	1654	1869	2514
Statutory Homelessness Applications	698	804	985	1186
Statutory Homelessness Applications accepted as full duty	238	322	314	213
Homelessness Prevention (and Relief post April 2018) housed outcomes	1030	932	955	373
Rough Sleeper Numbers	12	20	26	23
Number of Vulnerable single people accepted as full duty	92	140	140	107

Figure 1 Key figures 2015/16 - 2018/19

5.2 Reasons for Approach to Plymouth City Council

The reasons for homelessness are often not straightforward and can be as a result of a number of influencing factors.

The main cause of overall homelessness reported by households approaching Plymouth City Council as homeless or threatened homelessness is issuing of notice from both private and social rented sector landlords. This is followed by being asked to leave family/ supported housing and relationship breakdown.

Homelessness is an issue that can effect anyone and the complexity of needs of those presenting as homeless or at risk of homeless is significantly increasing. Figure 2 below shows a breakdown of the age and gender of applicants presenting between April 2018 and March 2019.

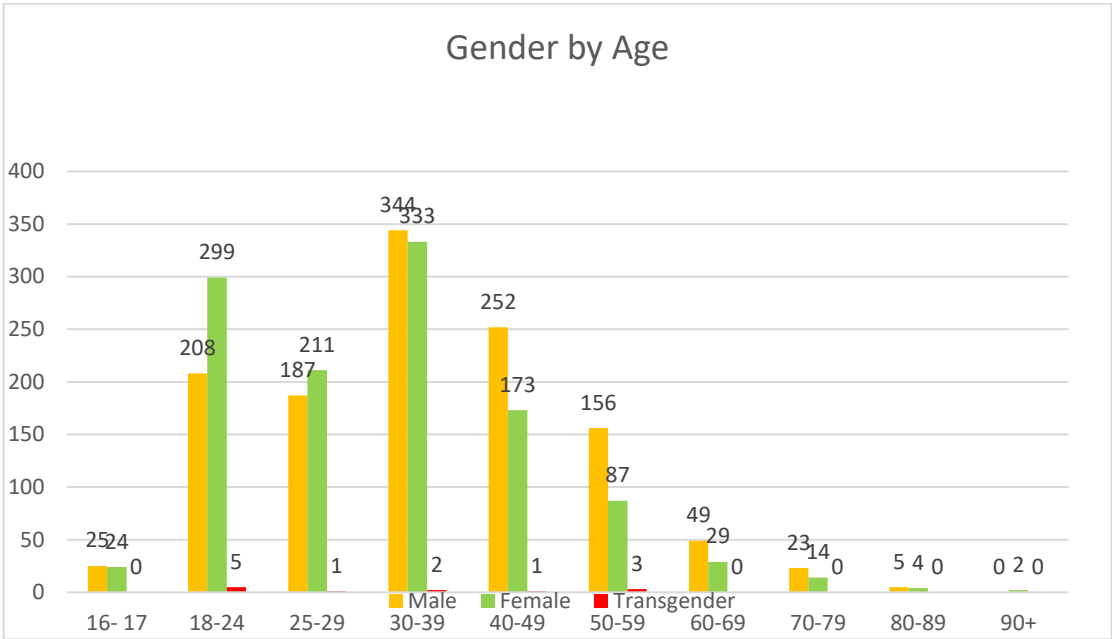


Figure 2: Applications by age and gender April 2018 – March 2019

The information in Figure 3 presents the number of applicants stating they have additional factors relating to health, drug/alcohol or history of prison, care or armed forces. These total more than those presenting as some clients present with more than one aspect.

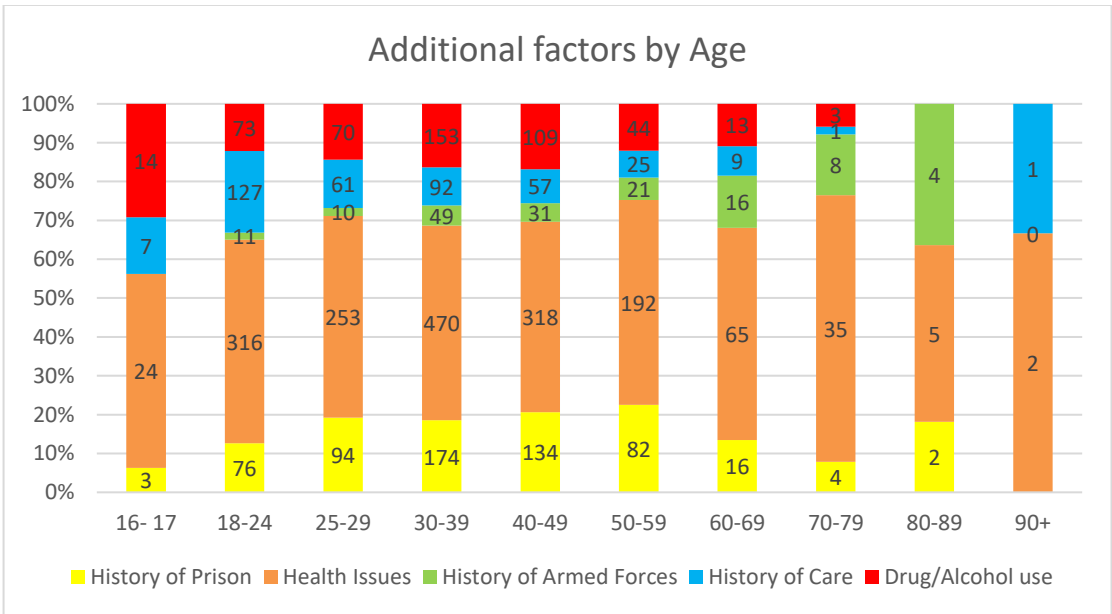


Figure 3: Additional factors behind application by age group April 2018 – March 2019

5.3 Successful Prevention and Relief of Homelessness – April 2018 - March 2019

The successful prevention and relief of homelessness is essential to support households away from homelessness as soon as possible. Between April 2018 and March 2019 a total of 373 Prevention and Relief Duties were met by resolving issues or sourcing alternative accommodation for homeless households as set out in the table below.

<u>Duty/Housing Solution</u>	<u>Private Rented</u>	<u>Social Housing</u>	<u>Supported Housing</u>	<u>Staying with friends/family</u>	<u>Owner-occupier</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Prevention Duty</u>							<u>193</u>
Alternative accommodation for 6 months	50	0	0	13	0	2	65
Alternative accommodation for 12 months	2	22	8	4	0	1	37
Existing accommodation for 6 months	43	0	0	4		1	48
Existing accommodation for 12 months	1	37	4	0	1	0	43
<u>Relief Duty</u>							<u>180</u>
Accommodation for 6 months	65	0	0	17	0	48	130
Accommodation for 12 months	4	17	23	4	1	1	50
<u>Overall Total</u>	<u>165</u>	<u>76</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>53</u>	<u>373</u>

Table 1: Prevention and Relief Duty outcomes April 2018 – March 2019

6. Emergency/ Temporary Accommodation and The Plymouth Alliance

Where it is not possible to prevent or relieve homelessness for eligible households presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness, Plymouth City Council may have a duty to provide emergency temporary accommodation if the household is determined to be in 'priority need'.

A Household will be determined to be in 'priority need' if they are:-

- A family with dependent children aged under 16, or under 19 and unable to support themselves i.e. in full-time education
- Pregnant
- Aged 16 or 17
- A Care Leaver
- Fleeing violence
- Classed as 'vulnerable' - this could be as a result of a number of reasons including old age, physical or learning disabilities, mental health problems, time spent in prison or the armed forces
- Homeless as a result of a fire or flood

The Plymouth Alliance supports Plymouth City Council in fulfilling its accommodation duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act. Responsibility for the budget historically spent on emergency accommodation and associated risks now sits within the contractual financial envelope; the Plymouth Alliance have the ability to utilise this budget differently to reduce emergency placements and provide more appropriate accommodation.

The Plymouth Alliance have a strategy which sets out their direction of travel for the next five years, which the overarching aims being to:

- Increase access to good quality, safe and affordable independent accommodation for people with complex needs
- End the use of bed and breakfast for families and young people (age 16/17) and reduce the use for single people
- Prevent homelessness earlier by taking a proactive approach
- Bring rough sleeping in Plymouth to an end by 2025, in line with the Government's target
- Reduce the reliance on large, accommodation based support services.

The Plymouth Alliance currently provides a range of accommodation options for young people, families and single people, both owned and leased, across the City with a support offer which varies from 24/7 onsite support to low level floating support. Currently they deliver in the region of 570 units of shared and self-contained accommodation.

Access to this accommodation is via an Access to Accommodation Hub (A2A); this operates as a single point of access into the accommodation system where a household will be assessed and allocated accommodation based on need.

Future plans include the development of an integrated accommodation hub, which will provide housing related information and advice, assessments and allocations for accommodation and support.

Bed and breakfast is also utilised to provide emergency temporary accommodation. The aim is to reduce this practice. Although it may not be possible to totally eradicate the use of bed and breakfast, the numbers in bed and breakfast have reduced considerably over the last 12 months with 18 households in bed and breakfast as at 6th December 2019 compared with 31 households in December 2018.

7. Homelessness Initiatives

Partnership working is crucial in responding to the challenges and complexities of tackling and preventing homelessness and rough sleeping. The focus is on identifying opportunities to improve early intervention pathways to prevent homelessness and to deliver initiatives to prevent and relieve homelessness for some of the most vulnerable in the City.

7.1 Complex needs / Plymouth Alliance

Plymouth City Council (PCC) commissions a broad range of statutory and non-statutory interventions for people who have support needs in relation to homelessness and may also have support needs around substance misuse, mental health, offending and risk of exploitation.

Using an Alliance model, the focus was on creating systemic change: changes to culture, funding structures, commissioning and implementing policies that support a new way of working. Furthermore working together to create a contractual environment where suppliers share responsibility for achieving outcomes and are mutually supportive, making decisions based on the best outcome for the service user.

A single contract for the provision of support for people with complex needs has been awarded to a partnership of the following organisations in Plymouth, working together in partnership with commissioners as The Plymouth Alliance for Complex Needs (TPA): BCHA, Hamoaze House, Harbour Trust, Livewell South West, Live West, PATH, Shekinah and The Zone.

The vision of TPA is to improve the lives of people with complex needs, supporting the whole person to meet their aspirations and to participate in and contribute to all aspects of life. TPA will co-produce, co-ordinate and provide a range of support services and will drive forwards change and respond effectively to the complex needs of the citizens of Plymouth in an ever changing landscape, shaping the future system accordingly. The aim

is to improve the lives of people with complex needs by supporting the whole person to meet their aspirations, whilst also contributing towards national outcome targets in relation to statutory homelessness, children in care and care leavers, drug treatment, reoffending rates, preventing admissions to hospital and urgent care targets.

The purpose of TPA is to:

- enable people to fulfil their potential by resolving underlying issues and causes, the consequences of which are homelessness, substance misuse, offending, mental health and risk of exploitation and in the case of parents often has a negative impact on their capacity to meet their child(ren)'s developmental, wellbeing and health needs;
- provide support to enable people to become independent, by providing the right support at the right time, reducing the pressure on crisis and emergency services and moving towards independence and wellbeing;
- support people to achieve the things that matter most to the individuals through an honest relationship that changes over time as aspirations grow, develop and are achieved; and
- follow the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, support the local authority in discharging its statutory duties in relation to homelessness

7.2 Tackling Rough Sleeping

Actions within the Preventing Homelessness and Rough sleeping Action Plan to ensure the city's prevention and response offer to rough sleepers is robust and inclusive include:

- Work with the Plymouth Alliance to evaluate and integrate work of Multi Agency Rough Sleeper (MARS) team into wider complex needs offer.
- Review hostel and other temporary accommodation provision
- Identify and secure funding to develop rough sleeper prevention/response offer
- Improve responses and options for EEA nationals
- Improve response to hospital discharge with No Fixed Abode (NFA)
- Improve response to prison release NFA
- Further embed the work of the Shekinah Day Centre and Soup Run into the City's strategy and operational delivery
- Maintain and further develop links with partner agencies and community services to identify and engage at the earliest opportunity with people at risk of rough sleeping
- Ensure every rough sleeper has a named caseworker to deliver flexible, personalised and sustained support
- Develop emergency accommodation options to enable rough sleepers to have an option to move away from the streets and engage in support to move away from rough sleeping
- Work with housing providers to deliver the 'Housing First' model to some of the most hard to reach and vulnerable
- Deliver the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) response and ensure overnight Winter Provision is available annually for rough sleepers to access November to April

During this time there has been a reported slow, but significant reduction in rough sleeping in the City. Much of this work has been supported as a result of successful funding bids to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) allowing The Plymouth Alliance to provide a broader range of accommodation and services to prevent and tackle rough sleeping:-

Date	Funding	Initiative
2018/19	£363,280	Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) - Development of a multi agency rough sleeper team (MARS) made up of a co ordinator and five officers (including a Community Connections officer) to provide intensive support to some of the most entrenched rough sleepers. Providing a person centred approach to support individuals away from the streets and into accommodation. The funding includes funding pots to enable a housing first approach, access to temporary and permanent accommodation, and support towards providing a Winter Provision.
2019/20	£335,865	
2018/19	£ 21,875	Rapid Rehousing Pathway (RRP)- provision of :- 2 local lettings officers to work closely with the social lettings agency – Plymouth Homes for Let (PH4L) and local private sector landlords to bring on line and retain accommodation for access by those rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping. Building a relationship with the landlord and providing a point of contact when needed to retain the tenancy. 2 supported lettings officers to provide support to those currently in accommodation who may be at risk of eviction and rough sleeping as a result. Working with individuals to secure at risk tenancies wherever possible.
2019/20	£175,000	
2019/20	£92,700	Rapid Rehousing Pathway (RRP)- provision of:- 2 Navigators- working intensively with the most complex individuals rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping to enable them to navigate the support required to enable them to move towards the right accommodation to meet their needs. The navigators will act as a lead worker for the individuals linking them in with wider agencies and system.
2019/20	£185,750	Rapid Rehousing Pathway (RRP)- provision of :- Somewhere Safe to Stay- a 24 hour supported 11 bed accommodation providing very short term access for those at risk of rough sleeping for the first time and who need very quick support to divert them away from the complex needs system and into their own affordable sustainable accommodation in the shortest time possible.
2018/19	£21,000	Cold Weather Fund- provision of :- A 12 bed space winter provision supported night shelter between the coldest months of December and March enabling rough sleepers to access a safe place to shelter overnight and avoid death on the streets. In 2019/20 the shelter has extended opening hours to enable more meaningful work to be done to support the rough sleepers away from the streets and into accommodation wherever possible.
2019/20	£50,000	
Total		
2018/19	£406,155	
2019/20	£839,315	

This funding has impacted the reduction and prevention of rough sleeping as follows :-

RSI – 19 people have been supported into long-term accommodation and 40 people supported to access other accommodation to end their rough sleeping (this may include short-term accommodation, emergency accommodation or other non-housing related services e.g. substance misuse support)

RRP –

Somewhere Safe to Stay – in November 2019, 31 people accessed the hub for support and 14 people accessed accommodation there to prevent rough sleeping

Navigators – this service started in October 2019 and since then 16 people have been supported into non-accommodation supported services and 15 people into accommodation to prevent rough sleeping

Local Lettings – 38 people have been supported into accommodation and 52 rooms/units have been made available to prevent rough sleeping

Supported lettings – 64 people have received support to retain their accommodation and avoid homelessness/rough sleeping

CWF – the 12 bed space provision opened at Hamaoze house on 9th December and is accessed every evening by up to 12 rough sleepers.

7.3 Trauma Informed Approach

Plymouth is working towards being a Trauma Informed City, and therefore benefits from the advantage of having a psychologically informed approach to providing support around the person in supported accommodation.

7.4 Early intervention pathways

Plymouth is striving to improve early intervention pathways to prevent homelessness. Current work ongoing includes:

- Work with Customer Services to identify risk of homelessness and provide solutions at first point of contact
- Work with Livewell to identify vulnerable clients at risk of homelessness as soon as possible and work to identify solutions
- Work with Social Housing Providers to ensure early intervention where risk of eviction is identified.
- Work with DWP to understand risks to vulnerable clients where Universal Credit has impacted.
- Work with criminal justice partners (prisons, probation, CRC) to identify early release risk of homelessness and identify solutions
- Work with Shelter and private sector Landlord Associations to pilot tenant /landlord mediation scheme to avoid tenancy breakdown

7.5 Young people

An action plan specifically focused on those aged 16/17 is being implemented to reduce the number of young people in temporary accommodation and increase accommodation options to meet the wider needs of homeless young people aged 16- 24years. In order to do this, Plymouth City Council will work with the Plymouth Alliance to review young people's accommodation and broaden the range of accommodation options for all young people. The Council will also work with local social housing providers to explore a prototype project for care leavers moving into Social Housing and work with strategic commissioning to identify options for crisis intervention accommodation with Children's Services.

8. Conclusion

Nationally and locally we are seeing a rise in demand for homelessness services and while funding streams to support this are most welcome, the short term nature of these provide a challenge to longer term strategic planning. The prevention focus of the HRA supports our priorities in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping however the implementation of the Act and the administrative burden of it impact on operational delivery.

Despite this, there is a lot of good work being done in the City to tackle and prevent homelessness for all. We are seeing the benefits of strategic commissioning and partnership working with the decreased use of bed and breakfast, improving prevention statistics and a reduction in the numbers of people rough sleeping.

To further support this work a Homelessness Review has been undertaken which has informed the Plan for Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping.

<https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/housing/homelessorrisk/tacklinghomelessness>

These documents will be used to support a review and update of the current delivery plan. In recognition of the ongoing nature of some of the work within the plan and the pace of change often required to meet the challenges to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping, a decision has been taken to introduce a rolling delivery plan with progress reports instead of a fixed term plan.