PERFORMANCE, FINANCE AND CUSTOMER FOCUS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE- HOMELESSNESS BRIEFING

1. Introduction

At a time when Plymouth has an increasing number of households approaching the Council as homeless or with concerns about the security of their home; there are more households than ever before in temporary accommodation including bed and breakfast; and households are in temporary accommodation for longer periods of time.

Responding to this is not a small or singular task and should be recognised as the financial and public health emergency that it is, with support for the medium and long-term strategic plans to meet the current and future challenges we face.

This paper provides an update on our current position and sets out the background, response, and ongoing challenges to highlight the current homelessness emergency.

2. National and Local Challenges

National Homelessness continues to rise across the country and is set to be at unprecedented levels. The economic landscape remains dire, with high inflation not seen for many decades, and increasing cost of living as the prices of energy and day to day essentials put a tight squeeze on household incomes and the ability of an increasing number to meet rent and mortgage payments.

The impact of rising inflation and the lack of affordable housing across all housing tenures continues to result in further demand for housing and homelessness services by those both in work and not. Low-income households are further challenged as Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates do not align with inflation.

"The expansion of high-cost private renting and the decline of social renting have contributed to greater numbers of households struggling to pay for housing, especially working-age households. Housing supply across the UK fell sharply in 2020/21 and in England is now well below the government target of providing 300,000 homes annually by the mid-2020s"

(UK Housing Review, CIH (Chartered Institute of Housing), 2022)

This national picture is reflected in Plymouth where over the last 18 months private sector rents and property values have increased significantly at a time when household incomes are, in real terms, declining. Private rental prices paid by tenants in the Southwest rose by 4.4% in the 12 months to January 2023. (ONS, Feb23)

The Private Rented Sector is a significant proportion of the housing stock in Plymouth at 22.60% and is 4.2% higher than the social housing stock.

Since the pandemic started the private rented and owner-occupied sectors have become unaffordable to both families and individuals living in the city creating a high level of demand for both temporary and social housing.

The affordable private rented sector has declined as private sector landlords are exiting the market, passing on costs to tenants through increased rents, selling up completely or, converting to alternative income models i.e. student accommodation, holiday accommodation/ Air B and B.

The Renters (Reform) Bill which had its second reading in the House of Commons in October this year is also bringing some uncertainty for landlords and is a factor in landlords exiting the market. The Renters (Reform) Bill will deliver on the government's commitment to "bring in a better deal for renters", including abolishing 'no fault' evictions and reforming landlord possession grounds. It will legislate for reforms set out in the private rented sector white paper published in June 2022.

The experience for homeless households currently attempting to access private rented accommodation is that there are more than 30 (often up to 100) applicants for every available property, with some being able to offer higher rent or several months' rent up front to secure the property, and/or landlords favouring other applicants.

"In England, over 4.5 million households now live in the PRS, with a share of households of over 20%. For around 10 years now, renting privately has been the second most common tenure after owner occupation, overtaking social renting in 2011/12. Correspondingly, the social rented sector, housing 4 million households (17%), is now the smallest tenure" (CHI: Tackling Tenancy Insecurity, 2022)

Access to Social Housing Stock in Plymouth has also slowed. There are 18,926 general needs social housing properties and Plymouth has experienced the South West's second-largest percentage-point fall in the proportion of households in the social rented sector from 19.3% in 2011 to 18.4% in 2021.

The 874 social housing units let in 2022/23 represents only 4.6% of the total stock and demonstrates the current static nature of the social housing stock in Plymouth. In 2022/23, the number of households in significant need of an affordable home (Band B and C) outstripped supply by 2575.

The number of available social housing lets has declined by 36% over the last 5 years and this further exacerbates the challenges faced by homeless households and the length of time in temporary accommodation.

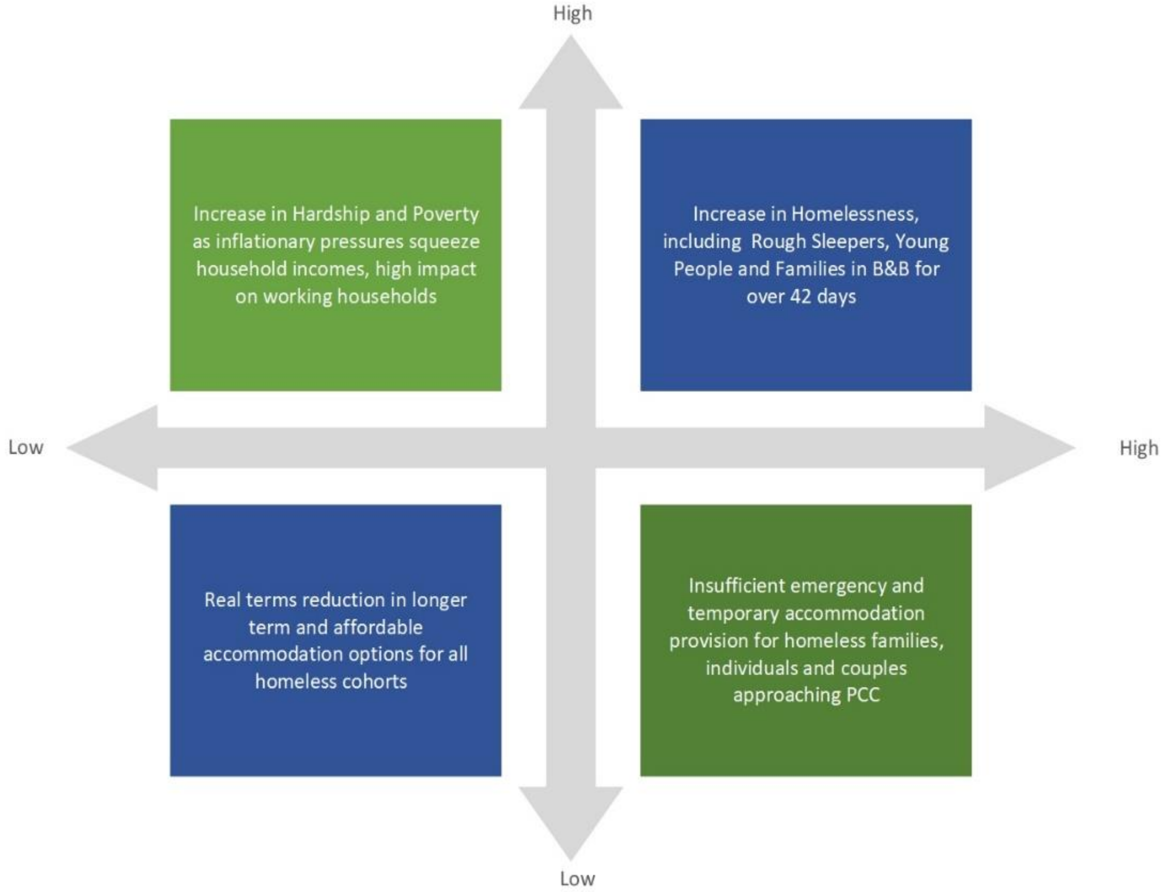
These factors impact the ability for homeless households to move on to an affordable home and means that homeless households in all forms of temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast, are there for longer periods.

The experience of the uncertainty of homelessness, temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast accommodation is known to impact on outcomes for adults and children, affecting physical and mental health and the ability to cope and prioritise needs in practical terms. This puts additional pressure on universal and specialist social care and mental and physical health services.

While the number of households presenting to the Community Connections Housing Options Team is increasing, it is also noticeable that there is an increase in the number of working households presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness, with higher numbers in emergency temporary accommodation than has been seen before.

Plymouth LHA rates have always been low, historically set at the 1/30th percentile, meaning that 30% of all private rents in the area should be available at LHA rates. This has always been questionable and is not the case now as rental property at LHA rate is non-existent. This excludes many households from accessing the private rented market as the prices and demand for properties continue to rise.

The Position Snapshot below demonstrates the impact of the factors highlighted above.



These factors taken together require a focussed response to meet the challenge of the increasing number of households in our city experiencing rising levels of hardship, poverty, and housing need.

The Homelessness Recovery Programme reflects the external and internal operating environment to rise to the challenges and sets out four pillars of response. This is overseen by the Homelessness Programme Recovery Board and the PCC Housing Taskforce.

3. Increasing Demand

3.1 Rough Sleeping

Rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness.

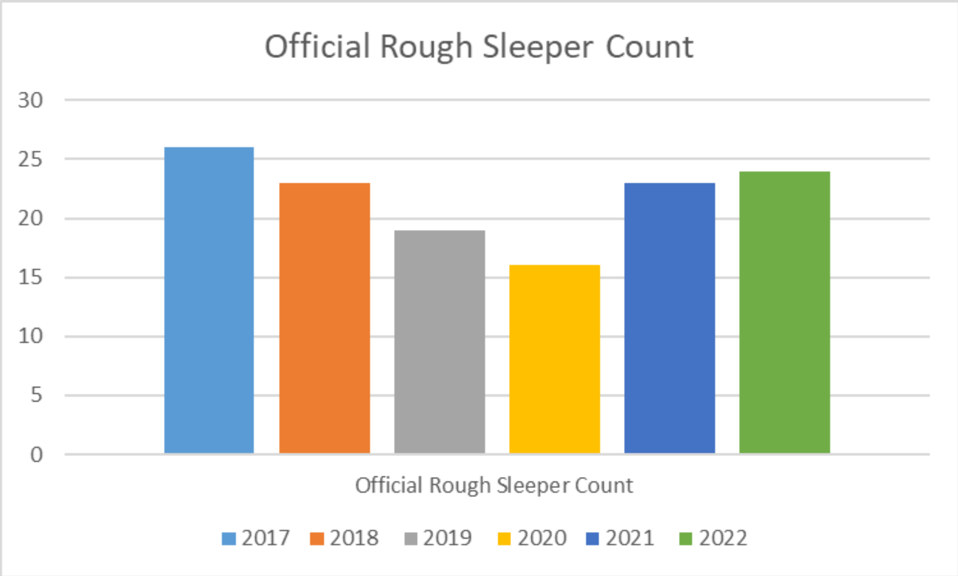
There is a holistic, multi-agency response in place to support people away from the streets into supported accommodation. Key agencies work closely with people in a co-ordinated way, to develop bespoke plans around housing and other related needs.

Despite this there has been an increasing number of rough sleepers evidenced in Plymouth.

The reasons for rough sleeping are diverse and there is a small cohort of very entrenched people who have been rough sleeping for over 12 months, this reflects their complexity of need.

Our aim is that rough sleeping individuals are only rarely, and briefly rough sleeping and that this is non-recurrent. Wherever possible, rough sleeping should be prevented.

Every November an official street count is carried out by the street outreach team and related partners to identify verified rough sleepers, who are seen bedded down. This is on a trajectory to reach beyond the high levels seen in 2017.



Official Rough Sleeper (RS) Count Snapshot Data from November 2017-2022

3.2 Homelessness Services and Temporary Accommodation

Demand for homelessness services and temporary accommodation continues to increase pressure on existing teams and financial resources.

The Housing Options Team within the Community Connections Service are responsible for the delivery of the Councils statutory response to homelessness.

People can approach the service for advice and assistance, and there will be a statutory duty where there is a risk of homelessness within 56 days (Prevention Duty) or homelessness (Relief Duty).

Where legislative conditions are met, temporary accommodation must be provided.

The increasing demand is demonstrated in the tables below where it can be seen that: -

- Between 2019/20 and 2021/22, the number of households approaching PCC (Plymouth City Council) for advice and assistance increased by 18.5%.
- Based on presentations in the first 6 months of 23/24 the forecast for approaches to the service this year is close to 3800.
- The complexity of cases and those facing multiple challenges alongside homelessness including, poverty, mental and physical health, care needs, engagement with children's services and domestic abuse has also increased significantly, indicating the wider impact of homelessness.

Demand Indicators for the Housing Options Service	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	23/24(to 30th Sept)
Number of households approaching PCC for housing advice and assistance (includes homeless/at risk of homelessness)	2564	2404	2818	2850	3405	1891
Number of households progressing to a homeless application (homeless or at risk of homelessness within 56 days)	1143	1506	1980	2163	2225	1141

People present as homeless for several reasons and where the statutory conditions are met, PCC is required to find an immediate temporary accommodation solution.

As can be identified from the tables above and below, the number presenting in crisis and already homeless is significant in driving the demand across emergency temporary accommodation.

Plymouth City Council commissions a significant number of temporary accommodation provision, however, the described challenges in accessing affordable accommodation to move on to results in this being silted up and Bed and Breakfast must be utilised.

Reason for Homelessness Presentations 23/24	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Total
S21 Notice	42	41	31	49	39	33	37	**272**
Family/Friends No Longer Able or Willing to Accommodate	25	29	34	43	47	39	31	**248**
Fleeing Domestic Abuse	23	23	21	20	20	19	10	**136**
Relationship Breakdown (nonviolent)	8	12	18	12	12	8	8	**78**
Eviction from Supported Housing	12	12	12	12	10	7	8	**73**
Other	2	10	8	17	11	13	6	**67**
Leaving Prison	8	10	16	8	6	8	10	**66**
Leaving Hospital	4	11	5	10	4	2	4	**40**
Fleeing Harassment	7	4	10	4	4	4	5	**38**
Information to be completed	2	8	8	8	8	2	0	**36**
Notice to Vacate (Not S21/ S8)	4	4	4	5	6	4	5	**32**
S8 Notice	3	5	1	4	4	6	3	**26**
Leaving NASS Accommodation (granted leave to remain)	0	0	1	2	13	3	5	**24**
Abandoned Accommodation	5	4	2	1	4	2	5	**23**
Rough Sleeping	1	3	3	3	3	6	1	**20**
Affordability	2	1	0	3	2	1	1	**10**
Unreasonable to Occupy (other)	1	2	3	2	4	5	2	**19**
Rent Arrears - Private Sector	1	3	6	2	3	1	3	**19**
Leaving Care	5	0	0	1	4	2	0	**12**
Bailed not to Return Home	2	4	4	1	2	0	1	**14**
Parents no Longer Willing to Accommodate	2	1	0	3	2	0	0	**8**
Leaving Tied Accommodation (Not MOD)	1	2	0	0	1	1	1	**6**
Rent Arrears - Registered Provider	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	**5**
Unreasonable to Occupy (property unfit for habitation)	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	**4**
Emergency	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	**2**
Leaving HM Forces	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	**2**
Mortgage Repossession	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	**2**
Returning from Abroad	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	**1**
Totals	**162**	**190**	**192**	**212**	**212**	**168**	**147**	**1283**

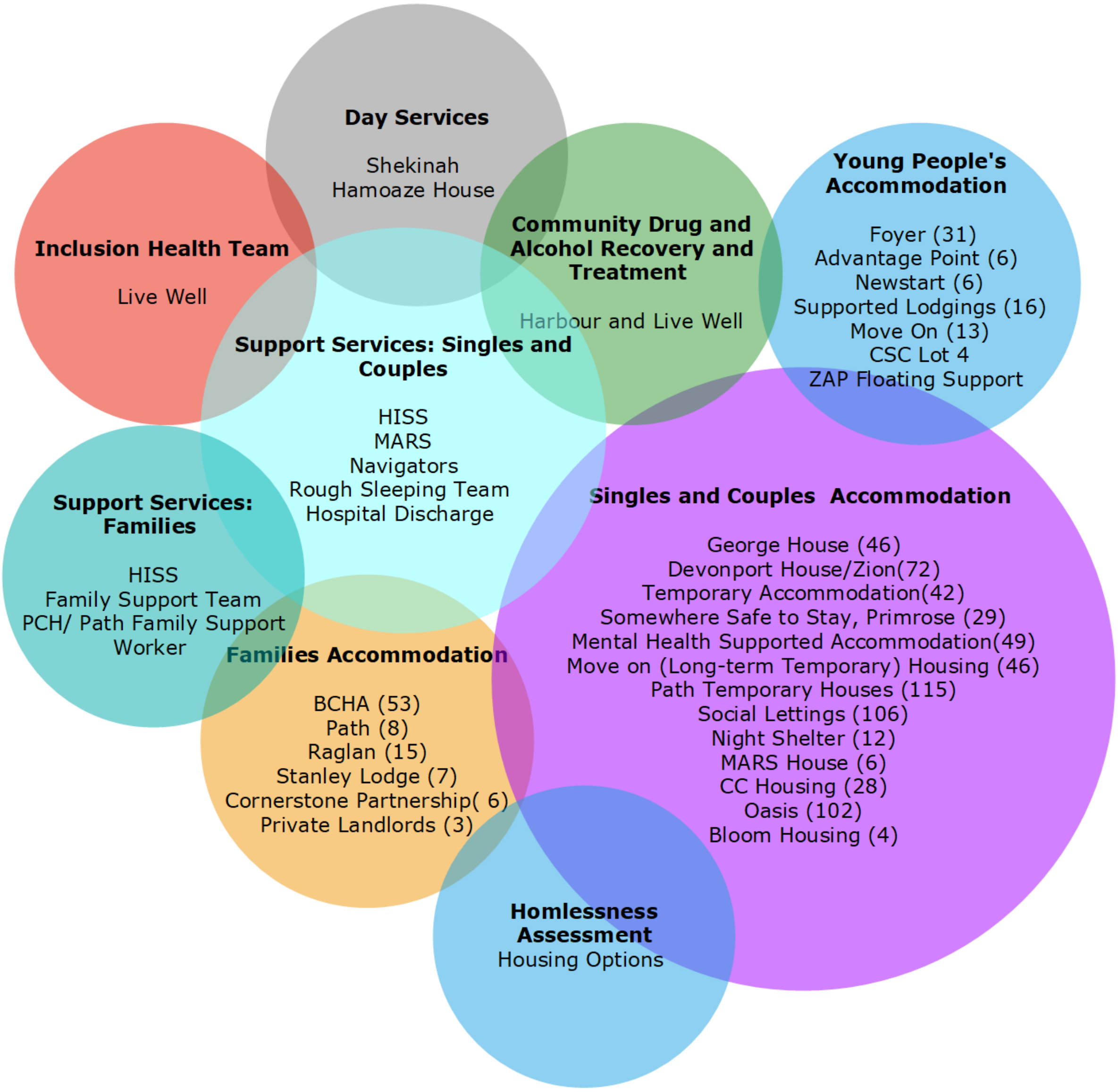
In respect of the three highest reasons for presentation :

- A section 21 notice is a no fault eviction and directly reflects the situation in Plymouth where there are significantly reduced affordable private rented sector options as landlords exit the market or seek alternative opportunities.
- During and post COVID, and more recently as a result of the cost of living crisis, a number of families and individuals moved in with family and friends to manage affordability challenges and homelessness. This often puts undue pressure on relationships resulting in the individual or family eventually being asked to leave.
- The increase in the number of households approaching as a result of domestic abuse is an indicator of many issues, including the additional financial stress caused by the cost of living crisis. There have been significant campaigns regarding understanding domestic abuse and how to access support, therefore this could also be an indication of the success of these campaigns.

As described, the ongoing rise in the number of households presenting as homeless and requiring temporary accommodation continues to outstrip our current temporary accommodation provision, resulting in a reliance on Bed and Breakfast (B&B). When temporary provision is full, and every other option, such as staying with family and friends has been exhausted, households are placed in B&B.

The Plymouth Alliance deliver a range of accommodation and support services that work with people who are homeless/at risk of homelessness, these include:

- Emergency and temporary accommodation
- Supported accommodation
- Floating support, including advice and information to prevent households becoming homeless
- Community treatment services and inclusion health team



To highlight the shift and the extent of the challenge currently faced, it is worth noting that at the end of the financial year 2019/20 (pre pandemic), Plymouth was well placed to meet the needs of those at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping.

In partnership with The Plymouth Alliance and through utilising Department of Levelling up, Housing and Communities' (DLUHC) Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding, the number of homeless households in emergency Bed and Breakfast had reduced over a 12-month period from around eighty households to **18** households in bed and breakfast, no families with children in bed and breakfast, and **8** people evidenced rough sleeping.

In contrast, and evidencing the increase in demand, the table below shows the total number of households in B&B in this financial year (23/24) to date.

2023/24	**April**	**May**	**June**	**July**	**Aug**	**Sept**
Number of households accommodated in temporary accommodation under homeless	356	353	365	364	342	329

duties (all forms of temp) (Snapshot as of the 1st of Month)						
Number of Households in B&B (Snapshot as of the 1st of Month)	232	198	216	211	181	186
Number of households with children/expected children in B&B (Snapshot as of the 1st of Month)	36	38	44	40	29	49
Number of households with children/ expected children in Bed and Breakfast accommodation for more than 42 days (snapshot as of the 1st of Month)	14	13	10	10	8	8
Number of 16/17 year olds placed in statutory temporary accommodation during the month	0	0	2	1	1	2
Number of 16/17 years placed in Bed and Breakfast during the month	0	0	2	1	1	2

The unprecedented demand and reduced access to affordable move on accommodation means there are increasing numbers of homeless households in B&B provision as the vacancies in other forms of current temporary accommodation become ‘blocked’.

Placing families in bed and breakfast is not considered to be suitable accommodation and where this is for more than 42 days, this is against legislation.

Bed and breakfast provision is also unsuitable for 16/17yr old homeless young people as set out in joint guidance from DLUHC and the Department for Education and monitored through quarterly statistical returns to Government.

Under the recent Domestic Abuse (DA) Act, the Local Authority has Safe Accommodation Duties to provide Safe Accommodation and support for those fleeing domestic abuse. Under these duties bed and breakfast is unsuitable and states there must be alternative provision to meet the Safe Accommodation duties under the Act. The new Domestic Abuse contract is currently out to tender.

In the current climate, our statutory duties are not being met.

The focused response set out in the Homelessness Recovery Programme and the work of the Housing Taskforce sets out the plans to address this challenge.

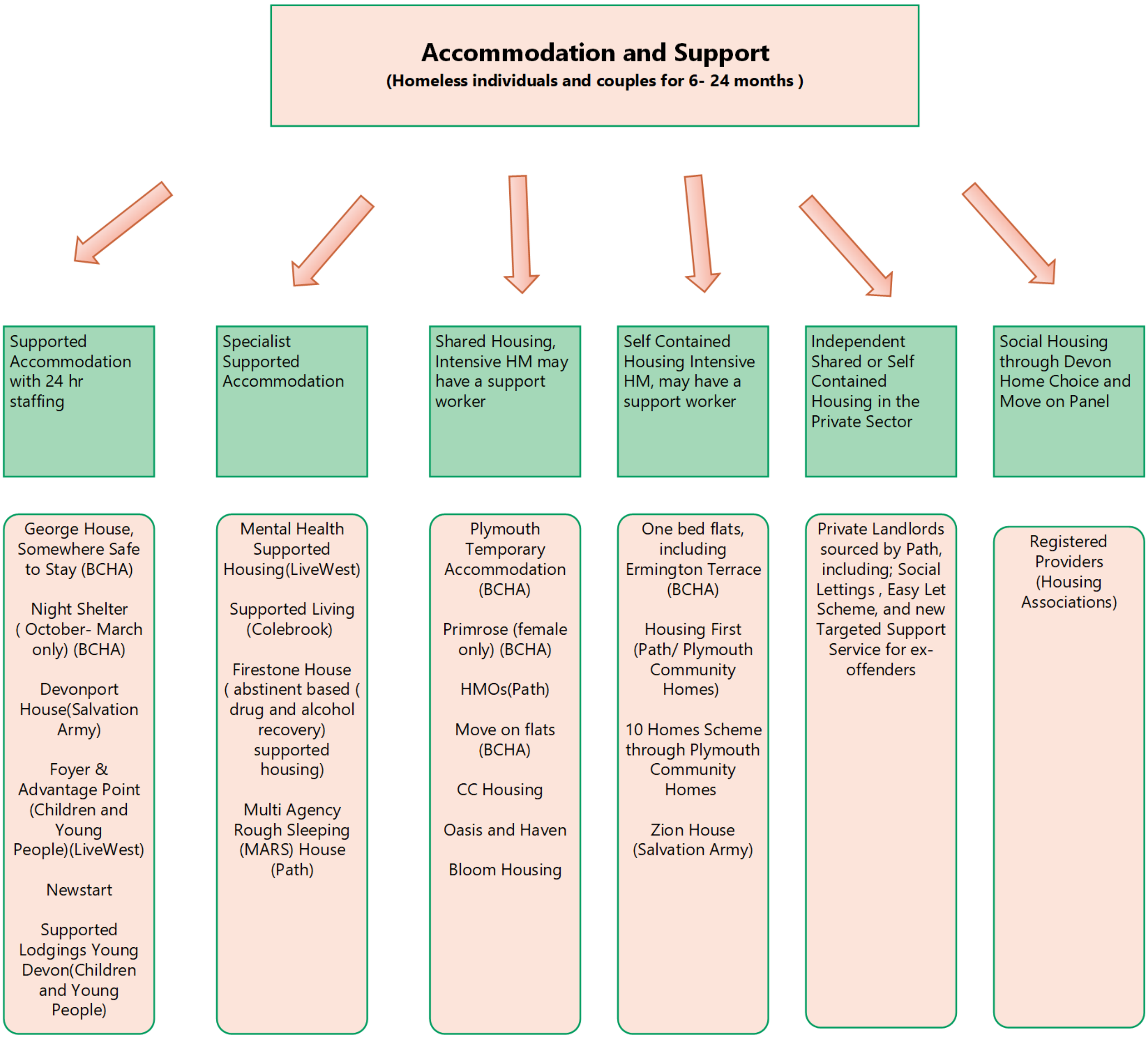
The budgetary impact of the increased use of nightly paid accommodation (bed and breakfast and holiday lets) is of great concern with a current forecast of £2.4 million pressure at month 6.

3.3 Move On Accommodation

The aim is always to access longer term housing in a timely way.

Families are mostly offered longer term housing in the socially rented and private rented sectors. For single individuals, couples, young people, and larger families there are often less affordable move on options.

The Devon Home Choice System is under increasing demand pressure, and so move on into other longer-term temporary accommodation, where individuals and couples can stay for between 6 and 36 months (dependent on the provision) is often the most realistic option.



3.4 Social Housing – Devon Home Choice

Devon Home Choice is the choice-based lettings, Devon wide, social housing register where individuals can register and apply for social housing in Plymouth.

Allocation is prioritised on a need led (banding) and date of application basis to provide a fair and consistent allocation approach.

The increase in demand for social housing is fuelled by the lack of affordable private rented housing and financial uncertainty.

The data in the table below shows: -

- An increasing number of applicants registering on Devon Home Choice for social housing
- A decreasing number of social housing properties available to let

Devon Home Choice data	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022/23	2023/24(to date)
Number of applications for Plymouth housing received	N/A	7387	7972	6577	7027	4861
Number of households on the Plymouth housing register	9721	11916	7819	10428	11302	11095
Number of Plymouth social housing homes let	1460	1258	1007	1025	952	368

The table below shows the number of people currently on the Plymouth housing register. Devon Home Choice applicants are assessed and banded according to their housing need: -

Housing Register (23/24)						
Housing Demand	**Apr**	**May**	**Jun**	**July**	**Aug**	**Sept**
Band A - Emergency	9	8	12	12	9	9
Band B - Urgent	1620	1732	1746	1750	1730	1698
Band C - Medium	1965	2081	2162	2209	2134	1985
Band D - Low	4203	4469	4634	4728	4532	4038
Band E - No housing need	3695	3816	3950	4010	3787	3365
Total	11492	12106	12504	12709	12192	11095

- **Band A:** Emergency need, the most serious cases- people needing to flee violence, serious medical condition made worse by their home, or serious property disrepair issues
- **Band B:** Urgent need, includes statutory homeless cases, move-on from supported housing, lacking 2 or more bedrooms, under occupying, high health and wellbeing issues
- **Band C:** Medium need, includes lacking 1-bedroom, medium health issues, moves for work
- **Band D:** Low need, includes. No permanent home, sharing facilities, low wellbeing need
- **Band E:** No housing need

3.5 Move on – All tenures

The table below shows the number of households prevented from or relieved from homelessness through moves to supported move on accommodation, Private Rented Sector housing and social housing in this financial year to date.

Successful Move On 2023/2024	**April**	**May**	**Jun**	**July**	**Aug**	**Sept**
Number of households prevented from homelessness	20	13	12	20	30	28
Of which offered social housing	1	4	5	7	5	11
Of which offered private rented accommodation	17	9	4	11	21	12
Of which offered supported housing	2	0	3	2	4	5
Number of households relieved from homelessness	37	40	7	35	36	28
Of which offered social housing	3	4	1	4	6	2
Of which offered private rented accommodation	14	9	3	9	5	7
Of which offered supported housing	20	27	3	22	25	19

The numbers moving on are monitored as the increase in demand and a landscape of slowing move on continues to impact on numbers and length of stay in bed and breakfast contributing to wider short and long term health and social care needs.

Of particular concern is the availability of family homes and the impact of this on children as well as the ability to deliver against statutory duties. The acquirement of alternative family temporary accommodation is a focus of the Homelessness Recovery Board.

4. Homelessness Recovery Board

The scale of the current and on going challenges means there has been a need for a wide ranging and escalating response to meet current and future demand.

The Plymouth Alliance have supported with increasing the number of accommodation units over recent years and continue to be a part of the solution however, this response cannot keep up with the current demand.

The Homelessness Recovery Programme Board oversees the delivery of works to respond to the challenges. There is a whole Programme of works and below are some examples of current actions:

- Reducing Demand for Homelessness Services
    - Realignment of Alliance services to support increased demand

  - Stringent monitoring and management oversight of approaches and emergency accommodation placements – reduced placements and numbers in Bed and Breakfast
  - Use of Household Support Fund and Homelessness Prevention Grant to support retention of existing tenancies/licences and move on
  - Co location of Children and Young Peoples focused homelessness officers and ASC posts to prevent homelessness and support appropriate assessment/accomm
- Creating a more sustainable moving on service
  - Creation of Modular Units schemes
  - Supported accommodation as move on CC Housing, Bloom
  - Supported Accommodation Review Team work – pivot an additional 100 units to meet homelessness move on demand
- Reducing reliance on Nightly Paid Emergency Accommodation
  - Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme – bids for capital and revenue funding
  - 7 Bed (plus 2 crisis beds) for Women (Oct 23)
  - 4 Flats for 18 – 25 year olds with support needs (Nov 23)
  - 20 Family Units (Cornerstone) (Nov 23 – Mar 24)
  - 10 family units (Livewest Regen) (Nov 23)
  - Development of business case for the purchase of property to provide temporary accommodation (Dec 23)
  - Redevelop supported family temporary accommodation at Raglan Court
  - Develop additional supported family temporary accommodation in the City
- Increasing Long term Housing Solutions
  - Deliver existing Housing Developments – 43 developments on going in the City under the Housing Development Team
  - Local Authority Housing Fund 1 and 2 – working with BCHA to deliver 16 additional affordable homes by Mar 24 to provide family accommodation for those people accessing Resettlement Schemes and Family temporary accommodation (2 units) (BCHA confirmed LAHF 1 , LAHF 2 under negotiation)

4. Conclusion

National and local challenges alongside the data tells us several things that are causing ongoing and increasing demand for homeless emergency and temporary housing, and related services: -

- More people are approaching the Council for advice and assistance.

- Families and individuals are staying in Bed and Breakfast and other forms of temporary accommodation longer as access to all forms of permanent accommodation are more difficult to find.

- More people feel they are living in unsuitable accommodation so have applied to DHC. There has been an increase in people in Band E as rents rise in the PRS sector

  - ✓ Less people moving into Private rented. Access to PRS in Plymouth over the last 18 months has become more difficult. Rent levels have increased, so those on benefits or low incomes are finding it more difficult to access the PRS.

  - ✓ Most private sector rents are above the current local housing allowance rate this means that households claiming in work and out of work benefits are not able to afford to rent these properties.

  - ✓ The local housing allowance rate has not kept pace with the current private sector market.

Following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2018, the pandemic and the current financial climate, we have seen an increased demand on front line services, resulting in capacity within the housing support sector being reduced.

Working collaboratively with our partners and developing a robust strategic and operational framework with detailed plans to deliver our strategic goals is critical to successfully tackling the ongoing demands of homeless households within our limited and stretched financial resources.