

HOUSING OPTIONS

Your Plymouth Scrutiny Panel – 8 July 2013



Report to Your Plymouth Scrutiny

Context

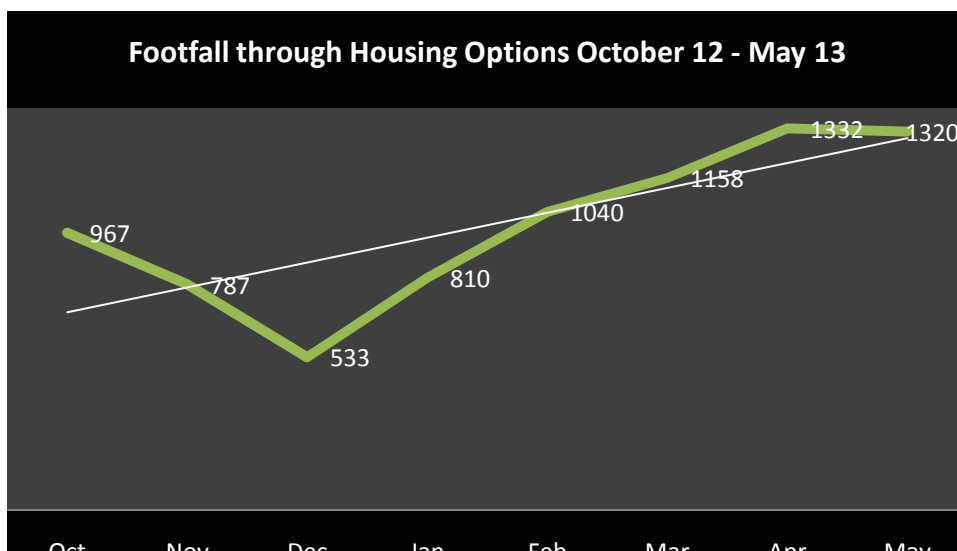
- 1.1. The Housing Options Service is responsible for managing advice to people about housing issues, preventing homelessness, statutory homelessness, temporary accommodation and the housing register. Over the last few years the service has managed to reduce the use of temporary accommodation and increased the amount of households that are prevented from becoming homeless
- 1.2. The Government's program of Welfare Reform has meant that more people are finding that their income has been reduced meaning they are likely to have more difficulty in paying housing costs.
- 1.3. There is a risk that demand will grow beyond the capacity of current provision as a result of welfare reforms and the recession.
- 1.4. The increasing complexity of homeless people that also need support as well as housing presents a challenge to keeping applicants safe and well, and to prevent re-offending.
- 1.5. Demand for social housing vastly exceeds available supply, with consequent risks to child poverty and health for families that are overcrowded and are unable to move to larger accommodation as well as the impact on households of waiting longer in temporary or unsuitable housing whilst bidding for homes.
- 1.6. Welfare reforms are particularly impacting on large families who will experience the biggest losses and face the choice of moving to alternative (cheaper and perhaps smaller) accommodation or spending a larger proportion of their household income on rent.
- 1.7. The Under occupation surcharge was implemented in April 2013 and has led to households having their rent reduced for bedrooms that are seen to be surplus to their requirements. This means more people are looking to move to smaller accommodation with a larger number needing 1 bedroom accommodation, well in excess of current supply.

Housing Options Service Demand

2.1. The Housing Options Service is beginning to see an increasing number of customers:-

2.2. Footfall

- 2.2.1 The number of people approaching the Housing Options Service is increasing.
- 2.2.2 Average footfall for Apr 12 to Mar 13 was 792 people this has risen to an average of 1326 for Apr and May 13. This is a rise of about 67%
- 2.2.3 This rise also needs to be seen in the context of rising need. Cases are becoming more complex with more people needing casework support. This level of service demand makes it difficult for the customer service team to continue offering the current level of service.



2.3. Telephony

- 2.3.1. We have 2 people on telephones at most times of the day (excluding early morning and lunchtimes due to staff numbers) We are manually recording calls answered to give some understanding of workload.
- 2.3.2. In a 12 week period we took 2874 calls which worked out to an average of 240 calls per week.
- 2.3.3. In the same 12 week period we dealt with 794 voicemail messages which works out at an average of 66 per week.
- 2.3.4. This doesn't allow us to know how many calls we miss. We have asked for reports from the Lync system to allow us to fully understand our demand and our ability to meet that demand.

2.4. Casework

- 2.4.1. We have seen a rise of 20% in statutory homelessness applications from 439 in 2011/12 to 561 in 2012/13.

| Statutory Homelessness Approaches | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------|---------|
| 2010/11 | 2011/12 | 2012/13 |
| 476 | 439 | 561 |

- 2.4.2. We continue to prevent homelessness and saw a rise in preventions of about 16% from 484 in 2011/12 to 554 in 2012/13.
- 2.4.3. Both of the above figures show a rising number of people approaching the Housing Options Service needing a casework response. This means that the capacity of the

team is being tested as there are larger numbers of households needing a full service

2.5. Temporary Accommodation

2.5.1. Numbers of households in temporary accommodation have remained fairly stable over the last year.

2.5.2. The number of Children in Temporary Accommodation has risen by 60% from last year to 105 children at any one time, this is due to the size of households in temporary accommodation having grown. This is due in part to the number of larger houses available for social rent in the city.

2.5.3. Children in temporary accommodation

| 2010/ 11 (ave) | 2011/ 12 (ave) | Qtr 1 2012/ 13 | Qtr 2 2012/ 13 | Qtr 3 2012/ 13 | Qtr 4 2012/ 13 |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 77 | 60 | 95 | 90 | 95 | 105 |

2.5.4 Welfare reform and increased people needing casework support continues to mean that there is a risk that the use of temporary accommodation will rise, especially costly emergency accommodation such as Bed and Breakfast.

2.5.5. From average costs and our B+B monitoring we are able to forecast costs per family in Bed and Breakfast.

Devon Home Choice, the housing register

3.1. Context

3.1.1. Devon Home Choice is a choice based letting scheme that covers the whole of Devon.

3.1.2. Devon Home Choice is a partnership between the 10 Devon local authorities and housing associations working in Devon.

3.1.3. All applicants are assessed in the same way, using the rules set out in this policy to ensure fairness and consistency.

3.1.4. Whilst all applicants are assessed in the same way, some partner housing associations may have different criteria to let their homes (for example the number of people that can live in a home of particular size etc). Where this is the case any differences will be made clear on the Devon Home Choice website.

3.2. Current Plymouth register

3.2.1. As of 25 June 2013 there are 10,341 households on the register

- 3.2.2. of these 2,824 are in priority bands A to C
- 3.2.3. 5906 households require 1 bed accommodation, 3066 require 2 beds, 1153 require 3 beds, 188 require 4 beds and 28 require 4+ beds.
- 3.2.4. There are 1,541 people requiring an accessible home (with no more than 3 steps) on the register
- 3.2.5. Over 4,604 people currently registered for social housing through Devon Home Choice state that their health and welfare is compromised by their current accommodation
- 3.2.6. There are high levels of overcrowding in Plymouth. Of the 10,341 people currently registered 1795 (17%) lack a bedroom, and 244 (2%) lack two bedrooms.
- 3.2.7. There are 481 households currently registered who under-occupy by 1 bedroom and 192 households who under-occupy by two or more bedrooms

What is the authority doing about it?

Housing Choices Smarter Solutions Delivery Plan

Sets out the Authority's plans for:

- 4.1. **Preventing homelessness, and mitigating the likely rise in homelessness:** This includes significant resources invested in targeting families who are vulnerable to homelessness following welfare reform changes; mortgage rescue for home owners; and negotiating alternative solutions to repossession/eviction by a specialist court desk.
- 4.2. **Finding housing solutions for rough sleepers:** Implementation of 'No 2nd Night Out' initiative with significant investment in funding rough sleepers outreach work, prioritisation of rough sleepers for access to George House hostel, and developing multi-agency support plans for rough sleepers with multiple and complex needs.
- 4.3. **Ensuring that vulnerable people can access a range of support to sustain accommodation and build skills toward independence:** Adult Social Care commissioning team support Housing to commission supported temporary accommodation, ensure hostel accommodation is accessible to women, and provide support to families in their own homes to sustain tenancies.
- 4.4. **Make the best use of social/affordable housing:** The rising demand for social housing may be mitigated to some extent by the implementation of the Localism Act that enables homelessness duty discharge into private rented homes (currently people can refuse this). In addition there are initiatives to target social housing fraud, and to reduce overcrowding by supporting and incentivising under-occupiers to move to smaller, more appropriate homes. Despite this, the lack of 3+bed social housing is a significant cause of overcrowding in the city.
- 4.5. **Linking with broader causes and effects of homelessness such as unemployment; poor health; and the transition from care, hospitals or prisons:** Resources are invested in improving pre-employment pathways for homeless/vulnerable people; providing support for offenders released from prison to no fixed abode, and providing interventions for young people at risk of homelessness/coming into care. Significant challenges remain with regard to broader partnership buy in to prevent homelessness.