



# Northumberland

## County Council

### COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 31ST OCTOBER 2018

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#### HOMELESSNESS IN NORTHUMBERLAND

**Report of** Paul Johnston, Interim Executive Director, Place

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor John Riddle, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing & Resilience

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#### Purpose of report

The report provides an update for members of the service provision for residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Northumberland, providing an outline of the key strategic objectives and numbers of service requests received.

#### Recommendations

It is recommended that members note the content of the report.

#### Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the “We want you to feel Safe, Healthy and Cared for” [LIVING] ” priority included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2021 which states

*Having a decent roof over your head is fundamental to this health and well being. None of you should be forced to live on the streets, or in a “home” that is a health hazard or physically impedes independence.*

#### Key issues

1. Monitoring shows that the number of homeless applications reduced from **378 In 2016/17** to **279 in 2017/18**, an overall **decrease of 26%** in the number of homeless applications taken.
2. Reductions in applications have been achieved by increased prevention work with people at risk of homelessness supporting them to either remain in their current home, or move to a new home in a planned way.

3. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) came into force on **1st April 2018** and has placed a greater emphasis on intervention and acting quickly to provide advice and prevent homelessness
4. The main reason for homelessness in Northumberland is **domestic abuse**, with the next highest **loss of assured shorthold tenancy** in the private rented sector, followed by that **parents are no longer willing or able to accommodate** and exclusion by other relatives and friends.
5. Rough sleeping is generally under-reported in Northumberland with **only 2** identified during the 2017/18 national count reflecting that a number of **'hidden homeless' and 'sofa surfers'** exist and cannot be easily identified.
6. Challenges to the service continue to be the increasing number of complex cases where applicants have multiple needs and dependencies, including mental health issues, drug and alcohol dependencies, personality disorders and offending histories. With limited support provision, accessing appropriate housing is often difficult.

## **Background**

### **Strategic Priorities**

The Homelessness Strategy (2016 -2021) sets out the Council's priorities for tackling homelessness. These are:

**Priority 1:** Reduce levels of homelessness through targeted prevention initiatives

**Priority 2:** Make better use of all temporary accommodation to ensure that all household types are provided for

**Priority 3:** Support people through Welfare Reform

**Priority 4:** Improve access to permanent accommodation and support

**Priority 5:** Prevent youth homelessness

The existing Strategy is currently being reviewed and refreshed to consider and reflect the Council's Corporate Plan and changes to Government legislation. Consultation has taken place with partners at a recent workshop and further discussions are planned to ensure that the Strategy continues to reflect the needs of the Council and residents of Northumberland.

To support the delivery of the priorities within the Homelessness Strategy the Council currently hosts the **Northumberland Homelessness Partnership** which meets on a quarterly basis to discuss issues affecting people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and how best to deliver the services required to support them.

### **The Statutory Role of the Council**

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) came into force on 1st April 2018 and has placed a greater emphasis on intervention and acting quickly to provide advice and prevent homelessness. It also extends the duty placed on the council to offer more help to people considered to be 'non priority'.

Previously the housing duty only applied where someone was homeless or threatened with homelessness and they had a 'priority need'. This included someone with children who resided with them, someone who was pregnant or vulnerable due to age or illness/disability or for another reason (such as domestic abuse). The HRA extends this duty to people who are 'non priority' and also increases the timeframe where help has to

be provided.

A person is also entitled to advice and assistance even if they have no local connection to the Authority meaning that there is could be an increase of referrals from people who have been placed by other local authorities into Northumberland's regional facilities such as the Northumbria Specialist Emergency Care Hospital, St George's Mental Health Hospital and HMP Northumberland. It is anticipated that a new duty to refer will significantly increase the number of homeless clients being referred into the service.

### **Current Council Provision**

Housing Services currently manage 5 council-owned properties, providing 36 rooms and 77 bed-spaces, for temporary and emergency accommodation. These properties are generally shared accommodation, sharing kitchen and bathroom facilities. In addition there are 3 self-contained flats, one in Alnwick and two in Berwick. The shared units are located across the county; Woodlands Lodge, Hexham, The Hawthorns in Ashington, Lamb House in East Cramlington and Middle Street, Berwick. The properties are staffed during general office hours, with out of hours cover provided for emergency admissions.

Provision at Lamb House has recently increased by 4 rooms (6 bed spaces) in 2017 with the conversion of the former Warden's House. This enabled the provision of an additional accessible room and bathing facilities for clients with a disability.

### **Commissioned Provision**

With the enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 it was recognised that there was a requirement for increased availability of temporary accommodation for clients with complex needs, and those requiring more low level support to ensure that the Council's Homeless Team could meet the statutory requirement of Relief of Homelessness required by the Act.

Following a procurement exercise completed in September 2017 Changing Lives were successfully commissioned to deliver 11 units of Supported Accommodation and an additional 25 units of Dispersed Accommodation to clients with complex needs, expanding their current service provision across the county, and extending their client group from being all-male to including female clients.

Places for People were successfully commissioned to deliver accommodation-based and community-based support using 3 one-bedroomed flats and supporting up to 10 young people at any one time to sustain tenancies.

To support victims of Domestic Abuse, in 2017 Northumberland County Council commissioned the Domestic Abuse Support Service Northumberland (DASSN) which is a fully integrated service with a single point of contact available 24 hours a day. The service provides confidential, high quality specialist support and advice for women and men who are at risk of domestic abuse.

DASSN is delivered by Places for People alongside other services working in Northumberland covering different aspects of domestic abuse, such as counselling, outreach support, legal advice, parenting support, perpetrators programmes and delivering the Freedom Programme.

The coordination of domestic abuse agencies in Northumberland has meant less duplication of services leading to comprehensive service provision being offered to anyone suffering domestic violence or from the effects of it, wherever they live in the county.

As a result of this coordinated approach, Northumberland homelessness service is seeing a reduction in homelessness due to domestic abuse because when a person approaches the service for support for this reason we can ensure that the most appropriate support is made available to them to either leave and find alternative accommodation or arrange support to remain in their current home.

In addition, the Homelessness & Housing Options Service works closely with Veterans with two Armed Forces Outreach Workers providing a dedicated resource to support veterans who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness, contributing to the Council's commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant.

#### **A brief outline of services available in Northumberland**

Barnardos	Perpetrator programme - which also operates in prisons
Cygnus Support	Counselling services for both men and women
DASSN	Support women and children in Bedlington refuge.  IDVA service support to women and men in high risk DV situations  Legal advice and support to apply for Restraining Orders and Non Molestation orders
IMPACT	Run a support programme for children still living in DV situation
NDAS	Counseling and support to both men and women (low to medium risk). CADAN Project for children of service users Safety measures to stay in home
Sure Start	Freedom Programme Domestic violence recovery toolkit

#### **Challenges**

In Northumberland single homeless adults who have an **offending history, drug or alcohol issues or mental health problems** often struggle to access mainstream housing in the social rented sector or decent private rented accommodation. They often move around, staying with family and friends and cycling in and out of low-quality accommodation. Whilst the procurement of services goes some way to meeting this need the accommodation of this group will remain a challenge.

The Homelessness and Housing Options Team work closely with the Northumberland Recovery Partnership delivered in partnership between Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust, Changing Lives and Turning Point, the Northumberland Recovery

Partnership (NRP) is a dedicated service for anyone in Northumberland, 18 years old or over, who is experiencing problems with drugs and alcohol.

Figures for rough sleeping in the county are reported to Government on annual basis in the Autumn via a statutory return. The count takes places on one night and partner organisations are asked to report how many people are found rough sleeping on that day. **Two** were reported for Northumberland in **2017/18**. During **2016/17 six people** in total identified themselves as having slept rough, reflecting the number of ‘hidden homeless’ and ‘sofa surfers’ that exist and cannot be easily identified.

The roll out of **Universal Credit** in Northumberland is likely to produce additional challenges to the service and on the current available resource. Officers are currently working closely in partnership with the DWP and housing providers to ensure that support will be available to anyone that encounters difficulties as a result of UC.

## Homelessness statistics from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2018

In 2016/17 there was a total of 378 homeless applications made of which 208 were found to be unintentionally homeless and in priority need.

In 2017/18 279 homeless applications were made and 176 were found to be unintentionally homeless and in priority need.

This shows an overall decrease of 26% in the number of homeless applications taken and a 15% decrease in households accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need.

**Table 1: Homeless applications 2016/17 and 2017/18**

Outcome of homeless applications	2016/2017	2017/2018
Eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need	207	176
Eligible, homeless and in priority need, but intentionally so	15	8
Eligible, homeless but not in priority need	73	34
Eligible, but not homeless	81	62
Ineligible households	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>279</b>

### Reasons for Homelessness

The figures below show that the main reason for homelessness in Northumberland remains consistently domestic violence, however there was a 30% decrease from 2016/17 to 2017/18. The next reason for homelessness is loss of assured shorthold tenancy in the private rented sector, which saw a small increase of 11% from 2016/17 to 2017/18.

The 3rd highest reason for homelessness is that parents are no longer willing or able to accommodate followed by exclusion by other relatives and friends. The majority of cases that are homeless from other relatives or friends are usually the result of a person initially being excluded from the parental home and then going to live with another relative to resolve the situation

**Table 2: Reason for homelessness**

Reason for homelessness	2016/2017	2017/2018
Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate	13	20
Other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	25	8
Non-violent breakdown of relationship with partner	15	11
Violence: Violent breakdown of relationship involving partner	83	58
Violence: Violent breakdown of relationship involving associated persons	7	8
Violence: Racially motivated	0	1
Violence: Other forms of violence	6	5
Harassment, threats or intimidation: Racially motivated harassment	1	0
Harassment, threats or intimidation: Other forms of harassment	7	7
Mortgage arrears (repossession or other loss of home)	2	1
Rent arrears on: Local authority or other public sector dwellings	0	0
Registered Provider dwellings	0	1
Rent arrears on: Private sector dwellings	1	2
Loss of rented or tied accommodation: Termination of assured shorthold tenancy	35	39
Loss of rented or tied accommodation: Reasons other than termination of assured shorthold tenancy	6	7
Required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office as asylum support	0	1
Left prison/on remand	0	0
Left hospital	1	0
Left other institution or LA care	2	5
Other reason (e.g. homeless in emergency, sleeping rough or in hostel, returned from abroad)	5	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>207</b>

## County Areas of Homelessness

An analysis of postcodes showed that 48% of all cases of domestic violence in 2016/17 were from the former Blyth Valley area with the figure decreasing to 40% in 2017/18.

The second highest area for domestic violence in 2016/17 was the former Wansbeck area with 22% of all domestic violence cases this rose to 28% in 2017/18.

Other areas of the county have consistent levels of homelessness accounting for the remaining 30% in 2016/17 and 32% in 2017/18

## Applicant Profiles

The figures below show that the main household type is lone parent families, within this group the main reason for homelessness is domestic violence, showing that domestic violence is the main cause for family breakdown in Northumberland.

In 2016/17 lone parent households accounted for 45% of all homeless cases. In 2017/18 the figure was 43%.

The main reason for homelessness for couples with dependent children was loss of assured shorthold tenancy in both years.

In 2016/17 there was a total number of 244 dependent children included in all households that were accepted as being homeless and in priority need, in 2017/18 the figure increased slightly to 258.

**Table 3: Household type**

Household type	2016/17	2017/18
Couple with dependent children	31	39
Lone parent	93	76
One person household	58	47
All other household groups	26	14
Total	208	176

Table 4 shows the number of successful homeless preventions carried out by the team. The figures decreased by 48% from 2016/17 to 2017/18 with the number of reduced preventions reflecting the early work that partner agencies (described above) and the council teams completed to either maintain and sustain a tenancy or mediation allowing people a managed move on from a property, rather than reaching a crisis point requiring immediate intervention.

In both years securing a social rented property through the Northumberland Homefinder was the main prevention method, in 2016/17 a total of 354 households were rehoused to a social rented property and in 2017/18 the figure was 214.

**Table 4: Prevention cases**

Action	2016/17	2017/18
Homelessness Preventions (assisted to remain in own home)	109	53
Homeless Prevention (assisted to find alternative home)	568	296
Total number of preventions	677	349

## Homelessness Reduction Act

On the 3 April 2018 the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) came into force. Amongst many changes was the extension of the threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days, placing a greater emphasis on prevention of homelessness. Statistics for the first six months of working with the new legislation are presented below.

A total of 709 households contacted the Homelessness and Housing Options service from 3 April to 30 September 2018 of which 343 only required advice and information and no further action was taken. A total of 97 cases were deemed to be not threatened with homelessness within 56 days, the remaining 97 households were either prevented from becoming homeless or were already homeless and were found alternative accommodation. Only 5 applications have gone through to the main duty (homeless application). There are currently 178 cases still under investigation where no decision has been made.

The low figure of homeless applications reflects the impact of the Homeless Reduction Act where the expectation is that fewer applicants will progress to a full homeless application with increased preventative and relief work taking place over a longer period of time before a formal application is made.

**Table 5: Status of new cases under the HRA**

Status of application	3 April to 30 September 2018
Not threatened with homelessness within 56 days	91
Already homeless - Relief Duty owed (include accepted local connection referrals)	49
Threatened with homelessness - Prevention Duty owed	37
Threatened with homelessness due to service of valid	11



Section 21 Notice - Prevention Duty owed	
Main Duty (homeless application)	5
Total	193

The table below shows that the main reason for loss of settled home is end of assured shorthold tenancy in the private rented sector (24%) followed by family no longer able to accommodate at 19% and domestic abuse at just 10% of the total.

**Table 7: Main reason for loss of settled home**

Main reason for loss of settled home	
Domestic abuse	19
End of private rented tenancy - assured shorthold tenancy	46
End of social rented tenancy	4
Eviction from supported housing	3
Family no longer willing or able to accommodate	36
Friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	3
Left institution with no accommodation available	2
Mortgage repossession	1
Non-racially motivated / other motivated violence or harassment	7
Other	42
Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown)	25
Total	188

Some cases are still under investigation and as yet there is no recorded outcome

**Table 6: Current ongoing HRA cases**

Status of application - ongoing	Number of current cases
Under prevention	92
Under relief	38
Triage	48
Total	178

## Conclusion

Services to residents are provided county-wide with specific officers based in the south-east, west and north of the county ensuring that a consistent offer is provided to all requiring support and assistance.

The changes required to service provision required due to the implementation of the HRA has led to increasing pressure on the team, with added admin processes required to ensure that data is collected in line with Government requirements. A new computer system has also had to be introduced, funded by grant provided by Government, which the team are becoming familiar with, adding to the challenge of implementing the new requirements.

## Implications

<b>Policy</b>	Supports the delivery of the Corporate Plan and the priorities within the Homelessness Strategy
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	Funding for the service provision and temporary accommodation is supported through grant funding from Government.
<b>Legal</b>	The Homelessness & Housing Options Service is a statutory requirement of the council.
<b>Procurement</b>	none
<b>Human Resources</b>	none
<b>Property</b>	Effective management of the council-owned temporary accommodation is a key part of service provision and delivery
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ensures fair access to housing
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	none
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	none
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	We are required to meet the requirement of the Homelessness Reduction Act to ensure that all customers receive a fair and equitable service.
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	none

<b>Wards</b>	All
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**Background papers:**

none

**Report sign off.**

***Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:***

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