



Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025



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This Homelessness Strategy has been prepared by arc⁴ Ltd on behalf of Wirral Council.

The strategy is based upon the findings of a separate Homelessness Review which is an appendix to this strategy and provides a detailed analysis of the levels and nature of homelessness, an audit of the services and a review of the resources available to spend on homelessness within the county.

Both the strategy and review comply with the associated and relevant legislation Section 1 of the Homeless Act 2002 along with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government’s Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (2018).

Foreword

Recent welfare changes against a backdrop of rising rents in some areas have put increasing pressure on the affordability of housing for residents. This along with a shortage of affordable homes and a range of complex social and health factors have led to an increase in homelessness and rough sleeping over the last five years, nationally, regionally and within the Borough.

While homeless presentations in the borough have increased, we have worked hard with our partners and made good progress in preventing homelessness and reducing rough sleeping in recent years, however, there is still more to do. The implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act place additional responsibilities on the Council and has resulted in significant changes to the way the Council responds to the issue of homelessness.

To understand the current position in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping in Wirral, a comprehensive independent review of current homeless services was undertaken during Summer 2019. Wirral's new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy has been informed by this review and the consultation undertaken with our partners and stakeholders.



The strategy sets out a five-year delivery plan setting out short, medium and long-term solutions and actions identified to deliver lasting change to those at risk of, or currently homeless in Wirral.

I would like to thank everyone who has helped develop this strategy, in particular, those stakeholders, partners and individuals who have been homeless themselves, who have helped us deliver the priorities we need to focus on to prevent homelessness and eradicate rough sleeping.

Councillor Stuart Whittingham
Cabinet Member Housing and Planning

Introduction

Homelessness can be understood to mean different things to different people. Whilst rough sleeping (those who sleep or live on the streets) is often the most visible and concerning form of homelessness, the definitions of homelessness extends much wider than this. It also includes anyone who cannot access suitable accommodation and maybe staying with friends or family (sofa surfing) or living in temporary accommodation provided by the Council.

Wirral's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy sets out how we will prevent homelessness, including rough sleeping and support those who face homelessness or those at risk of becoming homeless over the next 5 years. Our actions will be focussed on the following themes:-

Theme 1

Providing a joined-up approach to early intervention and homeless prevention across the Wirral

Theme 2

Ensure that housing-related support services meet the diverse needs and complex needs of customers

Theme 3

Preventing and ending rough sleeping

Theme 4

Ensuring the adequate supply of temporary accommodation is available

Theme 5

Improving access to and developing more settled accommodation solutions

'Homelessness is about more than rooflessness. A home is not just a physical space; it also has a legal and social definition. A home provides roots, identity, a sense of belonging and a place of emotional well being'

Crisis

Recognising the rise of homelessness as a significant issue, the Chancellor of the Exchequer reiterated a number of the Government's manifesto commitments around homelessness as part of his 2017 Budget speech. These included:

- A commitment to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminate it by 2027.
- The creation of a Homelessness Reduction Taskforce to develop a cross-government strategy to deliver the manifesto commitment.
- £28m investment into 'Housing First' pilot projects which prioritises an individual's need of stable housing, rather than the traditional approach of moving them through different 'levels' of supported accommodation.

Since the implementation of the Wirral Homeless Strategy in 2013, the largest change in national policy has been the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act which came into force in April 2018.

National Policy

The Homelessness Reduction Act

The Homelessness Reduction Act provides new legislation to prevent homelessness for households and individuals at risk through the following clauses:

- Improved advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness, tailored to individual need and accessible.
- Extension of the period at which a client may be considered as 'threatened with homelessness' and thus potentially owed a duty to be housed, from 28 to 56 days.
- Introduced new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible people, regardless of priority need and local connection.
- Introduced needs assessments and personalised housing plans, setting out the actions housing authorities and individuals will take to help secure accommodation.
- Encouraging public bodies to work together to prevent and relieve homelessness through a mandatory duty to refer.

Rough Sleeping Strategy

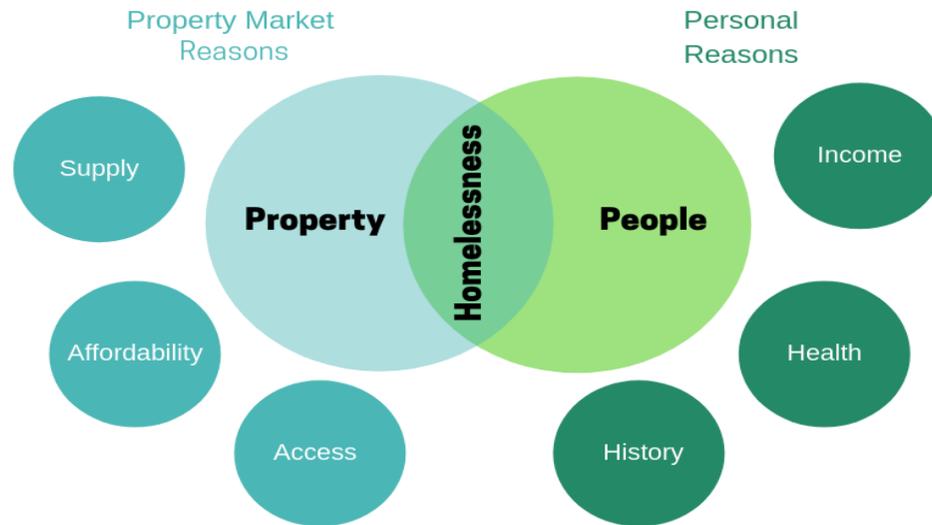
In addition to policies to prevent homelessness through the Homelessness Reduction Act, commitment is further emphasised through the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018. In summary, this committed:

- To halve rough sleeping by 2022, and to end it for good by 2027.
- £100m of funding and a three-pronged approach to ending rough sleeping through prevention, intervention and recovery.
- A wider review of homelessness and rough sleeping legislation, which will include the Vagrancy Act.

National Picture

Homelessness can occur for a wide variety of reasons. For some, it will be due to the housing market and the supply and affordability of appropriate housing options. For others, their personal circumstances, their health, life experiences or the income will have a role to play. Often though it is a combination of all these factors that leads to someone needing support and assistance to resolve their situation.

The Complex Nature of Homelessness



Welfare Reform and freezing of the Local Housing Allowance since 2011 are key contributing factors to homelessness and people’s ability to afford accommodation. High demand for social housing stock and a limited supply of affordable housing to meet needs leave some households with fewer options leading to homelessness occurring and people’s ability to resolve their own housing needs.

Key National Statistics

- Since the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act, prevention duties owed by Councils increased nationally by 7.2%.
- Number of prevention duties ended has trebled from 11,030 to 31,930.
- The number of relief duties owed (where someone is actually homeless increased by 23.6%, from 26,480 to 32,740.
- The main reasons for homeless nationally is where friend and family can no longer accommodate them, the second largest reason (not including other) was termination of a private tenancy.
- There has been a overall decrease in the national numbers of rough sleepers by 5.8% from October to December 2018.

Local & Regional Policy

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority

While homelessness remains a matter for national and local governments, Steve Rotheram, the Elected Mayor of the Liverpool City Region made a manifesto pledge to tackle homelessness and street sleeping.

A strategic lead for homelessness has been appointed to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

£7.7m has been awarded to the Combined Authority to carry out a Housing First Pilot, together with £2.2m for a homeless trailblazer initiative which is being implemented.

Wirral Council Plan 2025

Wirral's 2020 Plan highlights the need to tackle the challenges and causes of homelessness as a priority and The Council Plan for 2025 sets out Wirral's position and commitment to what we will deliver over the next five years. The plan vision is that 'we will secure the best possible future for our residents, defined by the community prosperity we create. For residents this means people will live in safe and pleasant communities with access to services which help people live active and healthy lives and can benefit from a prosperous and inclusive economy.

Key outcomes include:

- Residents having access to great job and good quality, affordable housing;
- Residents feeling safe inside and outside their home;
- Encouraging quality, affordable, sustainable homes;
- Bringing empty properties back into use; and
- Improving private sector properties.

The delivery plan for 2019/20 includes tackling homelessness and launching our new strategy for social and affordable homes.

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy

This Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy sets out our long term ambitions for homelessness services in Wirral. It sets out how we will work in partnership with a wide range of partners and stakeholders to tackle homelessness in the Borough and to ensure that appropriate support and accommodation can be accessed.

Other relevant strategies/plans

In addition to Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategies, we have a range of other complementary strategies and plans to address both the root causes and impact of homelessness and rough sleeping. These include:

- LCR tenancy Strategy (2016-19)
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment rebadged as "This is Wirral"
- Improving Life Chances Strategy (2016-2020)
- Zero Tolerance to Abuse Strategy (2016-2020)
- Alcohol Strategy (2015-2020)
- Emerging Local Development Plan (2020-2035)
- LCR Property Pool Plus Review (scheduled for completion 2020)

What we've already achieved so far

This is not our first Homelessness Strategy, and we should not forget the considerable achievements of the last five years.

<p>Preventing Homelessness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16/17-year-old protocol developed with Children's Social Care Services. • Young person's accommodation-based services reviewed and recommissioned. • Accommodation Pathway developed for 16/17-year olds to include 6 beds of emergency accommodation, a 25 unit move on project and 23 supported lodging places. • Enabled substance misuse clients with complex needs to access appropriate accommodation through provider training, strengthened partnerships with health and floating support. • Reviewed policies and partnership arrangements to strengthen homeless prevention activities for offenders upon release • Begun a review of Liverpool City Region common allocation policy. • Increased temporary accommodation provision to respond to demands.
<p>Strengthening partnership working</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported a Liverpool City Region CRISS service for complex/entrenched rough sleepers. • Secured funding from the Rough Sleeping Initiative and implemented a night time outreach service to provide a personalised approach to engagement. • Public Health funded Outreach Team to engage with rough sleepers. • Appointed a mental health practitioner to work with hostels and Charles Thompson mission. • Retendered and commissioned all supported housing services. • Commissioned mental health-focused floating support service via the 'Whitechapel Centre'. • Committed to using Council DFG funding for adaptations in Registered Provider properties for homelessness households where necessary. • Implementation of the No Second Night Out Rough Sleeping Initiative.

Evaluating and realigning homelessness and prevention services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Citizens Advice Bureau officer embedded in Housing Options Team.• Introduced the Mainstay system to improve our data and knowledge of support needs across the Borough.• Developed an abstinence house for rehab clients.• Two controlled drinking environments funded by Public Health.
Increasing access to the Private Rented Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Established a policy to discharge the Council’s homelessness duty into the private rented sector.• Appointed a Private Sector Liaison Officer to ensure effect liaison with landlords.• Introduced a private rented access bond scheme.• Grants products linked to nomination rights for homeless people.

Our vision and priorities over the next five years

This strategy is underpinned by a comprehensive review of homelessness and rough sleeping across Wirral in accordance with the current Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government Code of Guidance. Detailed findings from the review can be found in the accompanying Homeless Review document and Executive Summary.

We have carried out detailed research and analysed key statistics and data from a range of sources to consider current services and identify opportunities for gaps to be filled and improvements to be made. Consultation has taken place with people who are homeless or have been homeless in the past, support and accommodation providers as well as officers from the Council Housing Options team.

The priorities to be achieved through this strategy and associated plans are grouped under the following five themes:

- 1. Providing a joined-up approach to early intervention and homeless prevention across the Wirral;**
- 2. Ensure that housing-related support services meet the diverse and complex needs of customers;**
- 3. Preventing and ending rough sleeping;**
- 4. Ensuring the adequate supply of temporary accommodation is available; and**
- 5. Improving access to and developing more settled accommodation solutions.**

Our Vision

“We will work in partnership to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping across the Borough; ensuring that those who require help are assisted to access appropriate, affordable accommodation and support services are tailored to improve an individual’s health and well-being”

Theme 1: Providing a joined-up approach to early intervention and homeless prevention across the Wirral

Early intervention and prevention is the key to successfully tackling homelessness. We also know that homelessness cannot be reduced by working in isolation; but rather a strong partnership approach across the Wirral will be essential if we are to successfully intervene earlier and prevent homelessness.

What the homelessness review told us

Increased demand for services

There was an increase in footfall to the Council's Housing service of 17% in 2018/19 following the introduction of the HRA 2017. It will be important to continue to monitor demand on a quarterly basis so that any increases can be appropriately responded to.

Raising awareness of the prevention duty and maintaining contact

During 2018-19 the Council owed a larger proportion of customers a relief duty (57%) compared to a prevention duty (43%). This suggests that more work may be needed to raise awareness of the service and the work that can be done to prevent homelessness occurring.

This is true not only for households but for partner services who have a duty to refer such cases to the housing options service. Of the Duty to Refer cases, 18% resulted in a duty being owed. The majority of cases referred under duty to refer (80%) were assessed at the homelessness relief stage as opposed to the prevention stage, indicating that the referral may not have been made soon enough.

For 22% of prevention cases and 9% of relief cases, the duty came to an end due to loss of contact. This is currently being monitored by the team.

3,555 households accessed by the Council's Housing Options Service (2018/19)	17% increase in service footfall (2018/19)	57% of customers approaching at relief duty stage when homelessness has already occurred (2018/19)
57% of those owed a prevention duty had their homelessness successfully prevented during first half of 2019/20	31% of all cases homeless due to loss of private rented accommodation (2018/19)	16% of all cases homeless due to leaving accommodation provided by family or friends (2018/19)
Single people accounted for 53% of all households owed a duty (2018/19)	60% of cases had self-declared support needs (2018/19)	Securing social housing was the most successful prevention activity, 56% of cases where homelessness was prevented (2018/19)
80 households owed a main duty (2018/19)	32 main duty cases discharged through offer of social housing (2018/19)	7 main duty cases discharged through private rented sector (2018/19)

Single households

Single people are significantly over-represented in terms of households to whom a relief duty is owed accounting for 62%. This is due to single people approaching the service once they are already homeless.

Focus on the main causes of homelessness

The main reason for homelessness in Wirral is the loss of private rented accommodation; this accounted for 31% of cases. The main reason for private rented accommodation coming to an end is the landlord wishing to sell or re-let the property - accounting for 48% of all cases. Arrears accounted for 33% of cases. This data identifies opportunities to better focus prevention activity, including fast access to money and debt advice.

The second leading cause of homelessness is being asked to leave accommodation provided by family and friends (153 cases) and accounts for 16% of all cases.

A range of prevention tools need to be developed to address all the main causes of homelessness, alongside making best use of the existing prevention tools. This includes:

- support and advice for both landlords and tenants as tenancy difficulties arise;
- effective and timely family mediation;
- increased awareness of domestic abuse services through all appropriate channels such as website information, factsheets etc.; and
- a pre-eviction protocol with social housing and supported accommodation providers.

Enabling households to remain in their existing accommodation

44% of those owed a prevention duty had their homelessness successfully prevented, compared to 58% nationally (although this has increased to 57% during the first half of 2019/20). This highlights the positive impact homeless services have and in particular how the Housing Options team has been learning lessons following the first 12 months of the implementation of the HRA legislation.

The Housing Options service is much more successful at helping households to secure alternative accommodation than enabling them to remain in their existing accommodation. The most successful prevention activity was securing social housing (56%), followed by securing private rented accommodation (34%).

In 2018/19, 57% of those owed a relief duty had their homelessness successfully relieved, compared to 43% nationally. Positively, this also increased to 63% in the first two-quarters of 2019/20.

What we plan to do next

- Through the Homeless Forum, we will formalise our commitment to joint working through the establishment of a range of task-and-finish groups to lead on individual projects identified within the accompanying delivery plan, while also providing a platform for joint working and collaborative initiatives. These groups will be responsible for delivering key actions and feeding back to the main homeless forum.
- All agencies operating across the Wirral have opportunities to reduce housing crisis amongst their clients. We can achieve this by working in a more joined-up way to identify those households at high risk of homelessness. Preventing homelessness is everyone's responsibility, and we will work with agencies to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to achieve this.
- Following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act implemented in 2018, the Housing Options team has achieved success in preventing and relieving homelessness, although we recognise we can and need to do more in response to the ever-increasing demand. It is now timely to review how the service operates, our systems and processes, alongside how resources are focused to ensure that we are maximising opportunities for prevention, while effectively managing demand.
- Building on our Early Intervention Trailblazer work, we will intervene earlier to prevent homelessness. To be able to do this, we will identify the specific triggers, risk factors and causes of homelessness. Based upon this, we will develop a range of interventions specifically targeted at responding to these. Our Housing Options team will work with clients before the 56-day threat of homelessness.
- The provision of good quality timely housing advice and effective interventions are integral to being able to effectively prevent homelessness. Evidence from the Homelessness Review identified a large proportion of customers approaching the service at the point of crisis, with missed opportunities for homelessness prevention work.
- To enhance opportunities for effective homeless prevention, customers must contact the Housing Options service as soon as they begin to experience housing difficulties. We will, therefore, invest in an awareness-raising campaign to raise the profile of the issue of homelessness across the borough and Housing Options service internally within the Council, with partners particularly those that have a duty-to-refer cases to the Council, and the wider public.

Theme 1: Providing a joined-up approach to early intervention and homeless prevention across the Wirral**Key Actions:**

- 1. Ensure Wirral's Homeless Forum oversees the delivery of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.**
- 2. Publish an annual report detailing the current levels of homelessness and the progress of homeless services, in order to aid elected members and chief officers with decision making.**
- 3. Ensure joined up service delivery, joint protocols and effective referral arrangements are in place to both prevent and respond to homelessness.**
- 4. Provide a consistent high-quality Housing Options Service.**
- 5. Undertake an awareness-raising campaign in relation to homeless prevention and services in order to help address the underlying causes of homelessness.**
- 6. Prevent homelessness through an effective homelessness toolkit.**

Theme 2: Ensure that housing-related support services meet the diverse and complex needs of customers

Housing Related Support Services play a critical role in preventing and responding to homelessness. The Council is committed to investing in a supported housing model that acts as a place of change, not only meeting the housing needs of homeless people; but supporting people to tackle the underlying causes of homelessness, raising their aspirations, empowering change and assisting them to access training, education and employment.

What our review told us

High demand

Despite significant levels of housing-related support provision across the Wirral for homeless and socially excluded clients, demand for this accommodation outstrips supply. The gap between demand and supply is increasing on an annual basis.

The waiting list for accessing supported housing peaked at its highest level in October 2019 with 196 people waiting to access supported housing. This is linked to the lack of move-on options for people in supported provision.

Increasingly complex needs

The most frequently occurring support need is mental health, followed by physical health and disability and domestic abuse. 72% of all MainStay assessments identified poor mental health as a current issue.

There are a number of refusals by providers due to high levels of risk and clients needs being too high. This may indicate that some provision may require reconfiguration to fully meet the increasing complexity of need that clients are presenting with.

During 2018/19, the majority of cases have moved on in a planned way, 66.5%.

While the majority of people move on from supported accommodation in a planned way into alternative accommodation, eviction is the second-highest single reason for leaving supported housing and accounts for 18% of all moves. This may link to the higher and more complex support needs that clients are presenting with, leading to a rise in challenging behaviour and a lack of engagement.

406 units of supported accommodation (Dec 2019)	155 floating support places (Dec 2019)
196 people waiting to access supported housing (October 2019)	18% of all moves from supported housing are due to eviction (2018/19)
72% of mainstay assessments self-identified mental health needs (2018/19)	Some current provision may no longer be able to fully meet the increasing complexity of need

Suitability and gaps in provision

Some issues have been identified concerning the physical nature of some of the supported housing projects, with concerns that these may not provide the best environment for recovery out of homelessness. The lack of provision of supported accommodation specifically for women was also identified.

There is a need to undertake a detailed needs assessment and review of housing-related support services, in order to respond to the current identified need and shape what future provision should look like. The findings from this should be used to inform a robust commissioning plan.

Move-on

There is a significant issue concerning a lack of move-on from supported accommodation, and undertaking Homeless Link's MOPP may provide a better understanding of the issue. Reviewing the Move on Priority Panel and developing a coordinated private landlord offer could help improve move-on options.

What we plan to do next

- It is therefore essential that we make the most effective use of the current provision ensuring that referrals are appropriate and based on a comprehensive assessment of need and that vacancies are prioritised to those in the greatest need.
- We recognise that the needs of clients are diverse and varied; therefore we need to create a range of housing-related support services that meet these needs. We understand that traditional supported housing projects, particularly those that operate on a large scale, may not be suitable for all clients; we will, therefore, continue to work with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority to deliver the Housing First Pilot. Learning from the pilot will be incorporated into our approach to housing-related support moving forward.
- We recognise the need for accommodation that provides a safe environment for women. We will respond to this need through the provision of female-only provision and in the short term will ensure that some female-only emergency accommodation provision is made available.
- The Homelessness Review identified a high level of refusals, evictions and abandonments from supported housing projects. We will work with providers to change practice to reduce evictions and abandonments including working with a wide range of providers to ensure that services and practices are psychologically informed building upon the assets of the individuals supported.
- Move on from supported housing at the point when it is right for the client is an essential part of the accommodation pathway. We will work with providers to improve move on options for clients into both move-on accommodation, social housing and the private rented sector.
- To ensure that supported housing provision can meet the increasingly complex and multiple needs that clients are presenting with, we will undertake a detailed review of housing-related support services to respond to the current identified need and shape what future provision should look like. This will provide the basis for a robust commissioning strategy.

Theme 2: Ensure that housing-related support services meet the diverse and complex needs of customers

Key Actions:

- 1. Work with providers of supported housing services to ensure that the principles of psychologically informed approaches and trauma informed care are embedded within service delivery.**
- 2. Work with providers of supported housing to reduce evictions and abandonments.**
- 3. Develop a coordinated approach to improve move on from supported accommodation.**
- 4. Delivery of Housing First on the Wirral as part of the Liverpool City Region Housing First Pilot.**
- 5. Evaluate the effectiveness of housing related support services to both inform further gaps in provision, such as accommodation for female service users, and the development of a new commissioning plan.**
- 6. Consider opportunities to support individuals to raise their aspirations, assisting them to access training, education and employment.**

Theme 3: Preventing and ending rough sleeping

It is widely recognised that rough sleeping is a complex issue. The support needs of rough sleepers are wide-ranging, and the lack of accommodation is rarely the sole issue - indeed is often the symptom of the other issues. It is widely recognised that access to a stable home is essential to break an often revolving cycle and to ensure that wide health and support needs can be addressed. We recognise that not all rough sleepers may want to engage with all services but feel that services should continue to work with these individuals, understand route causes and be there at the point when they feel ready to access them.

What our review told us

Levels of Rough Sleeping

There was a significant increase in rough sleeping from 2014 to 2018. This mirrored the national increase in rough sleeping.

In 2018 Wirral had the highest level of rough sleeping across the City Region. However, during 2019 Wirral Council made a successful bid for RSI funding for an assertive outreach service. This has resulted in a 62.5% decrease in levels according to the official annual count.

The Assertive Outreach Service has been successful in reducing the number of individuals sleeping rough and increasing access to the emergency accommodation.

In October 2019, 5 rough sleepers were found by the Assertive Outreach Service, and 20 individuals were accessing emergency accommodation on any given night. It should be noted that some of these may have accessed the accommodation directly.

There is a need to develop a continued service that prevents clients from rough sleeping, reducing the flow of new rough sleepers onto the street, and to secure longer-term funding for the Assertive Outreach Service.

Understanding of the nature of rough sleeping

There is no centralised database to capture details about rough sleeping. Having adopted the stock/flow/returner intelligence, the Council will have a better understanding of the level and nature of rough sleeping across the Wirral.

There is a need to better understand the health needs of this client group to address both immediate and longer-term needs and, in the longer term, develop options for respite and end of life care.

62.5% decrease in rough sleeping
2018 to 2019

In September 2019 60 individuals
slept in the night shelter for at least
one night

6 individuals as identified as
sleeping rough by the Outreach
service in September 2019

The Streetlink number should be more widely promoted to ensure that agencies and the public know how to report rough sleepers, so that targeted help can be offered.

Alternative accommodation options

There is a need to ensure that emergency accommodation provision makes the best use of the available beds, helping to create a clear pathway off the streets and into services, and including a review of how beds are allocated (and for how long).

Alternative, private accommodation should be procured to provide a safe, private space for clients requiring an emergency bed. Funding opportunities should be explored.

Day service provision

There is also potentially a need to strengthen formal and structured day service provision to engage with rough sleepers throughout the day, offering a range of services and activities under one roof.

A collaborative approach

It is important to continue to harness the goodwill of volunteers, the Faith community and providers, and it is envisaged that the delivery of actions within the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will provide a co-ordination vehicle for doing this.

What we plan to do next

- Throughout the lifetime of this Strategy, we will work to reduce rough sleeping, with a wider commitment to end rough sleeping by 2027 in line with the Governments target.
- We will reduce rough sleeping and the multiple harms it brings, by firstly working to prevent people sleeping rough, and where they do sleep rough, we will respond by a rapid intervention to offer a route off of the street and a pathway for recovery.
- To minimise rough sleeping, we must maximise multi-disciplinary and partnership approaches to best meet these multiple and often complex needs.
- A partnership approach led by the Council will be critical in developing targeted services and interventions. We will review the strategic and operational rough sleeping multi-agency groups and their remits to ensure the aims of this strategy can be met. We will facilitate multi-agency responses through a new Co-ordinator role.

- We will end the need for anyone to sleep rough through three clear strands mirroring the Government’s Rough Sleeping Strategy; prevention, intervention and recovery.

Prevention

- If we are to minimise the considerable harm caused by rough sleeping, the most important thing we can do is to prevent it from happening in the first place. However, we can’t do this on our own; rather we need to ensure that the right support is in place from other key agencies, with a multi-disciplinary approach to support the most vulnerable people from ending up in crisis.
- We will identify the key triggers that lead to rough sleeping, and work with partner agencies to ensure that these key triggers and risk factors are identified, and referrals to appropriate services. We will also ensure that effective preventative work is targeted at groups who have a greater likelihood of becoming homeless and rough sleeping. We will work to develop a No First Night Out project that will ensure that no one at risk of rough sleeping has to ever sleep rough.

Intervention

- To better understand the profile of Wirral’s rough sleeping population and develop appropriate service responses, we will improve data recording.
- We will provide a rapid route off the streets for anyone sleeping rough, through continuing to fund an assertive outreach service, that works effectively and rapidly with those new to the streets, alongside supporting more entrenched rough sleepers into accommodation and support.
- We recognise the importance of diversionary activities in promoting recovery and reducing street-based activity. We will review the need for structured day service provision.
- We will ensure that no one on the Wirral has to sleep rough through the creation of a clear accommodation pathway from the streets into a range of accommodation options. We will ensure that emergency accommodation is available to anyone who needs it, and we will explore the viability of an assessment centre as part of this pathway. Direct access provision on the Wirral will support a clear pathway from the streets into support, offering stability, safety, and a person-centred, psychologically informed approach.
- There is a body of evidence that indicates homelessness, especially rough sleeping, has significant and adverse consequences for an individual’s health. We will work to improve access to health services for single homeless people to address both immediate and longer-term needs.
- We will develop a coordinated approach to tackling street activity associated with rough sleeping, including begging, street drinking, and substance misuse reducing harm.

Recovery

- A secure and stable home is essential to recovery; we will work to ensure people who sleep rough can access appropriate accommodation so that they can begin to build a new future.
- We will ensure that there is a range of accommodation options available to meet the diverse needs of this client group, including a rapid rehousing and Housing First approach.

Theme 3: Preventing and ending rough sleeping

Key Actions:

1. **Develop a multi-agency response to tackling rough sleeping and street activity.**
2. **Work to prevent anyone from sleeping rough on the Wirral.**
3. **Develop a rapid intervention for all rough sleepers through an assertive outreach service, and supported reconnection.**
4. **Review the need for structured day services to engage with rough sleepers and support them in their journey off the streets.**
5. **Develop a clear accommodation pathway off the streets into a range of accommodation provision.**
6. **Consider the feasibility of the provision of self-contained night shelter units.**
7. **Reduce poor health for rough sleepers.**

Theme 4: Ensuring the adequate supply of temporary accommodation is available

Where homeless cannot be prevented, temporary accommodation can be the starting point on a household's rehousing journey. A move at any time can be stressful, but at this point of crisis in people's lives, it is vital that the accommodation they are provided with is somewhere where they can feel safe and supported. A stay in this type of accommodation is only a short-term solution, and adequate move-on arrangements should be in place.

What our review told us

Increase in placements

The number of households in temporary accommodation at the end of each year has increased, reflecting the overall increase in homelessness demand. There has been an increase in Bed & Breakfast usage since 2014/15.

Reliance on Bed & Breakfast

Following the introduction of the HRA, in 2018/19 there was an increased reliance on Bed & Breakfast accommodation placements.

There is a need to more fully understand the current and future demand for temporary accommodation through a detailed temporary accommodation review, which will also consider an options appraisal for future delivery and management arrangements.

What we plan to do next

- We will ensure an adequate supply of temporary accommodation is in place to meet the needs of customers while reducing the use of Bed & Breakfast.
- Through our Early Intervention Trailblazer work and our enhanced focus on homeless prevention, we will stem the flow of new placements into temporary accommodation.
- We will undertake a review of our approach to temporary accommodation to ensure that it meets the current needs, ends the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation. This review will respond to the immediate need but will also take a longer-term approach to ensuring a model that

24 units of temporary accommodation

29 households in temporary accommodation (End of March 2019)

6 of these households were in Bed & Breakfast accommodation (End of March 2019)

is flexible and responsive to the changing demand; it will also include an options appraisal for future delivery and management arrangements. The Review will result in a more effective strategic approach to temporary accommodation provision and its management.

- We will work to reduce the number of households placed in temporary accommodation and to minimise their length of stay. We will actively work with households in temporary accommodation to continue to review their housing options and plan their move into settled accommodation through individual move-on plans.
- We will ensure that every household in temporary accommodation has access to support where needed, to enable them to sustain future accommodation.
- We intend to use Bed & Breakfast for emergencies only, but for no longer than is absolutely necessary. In the longer term, we will aim to end the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation.

Theme 4: Ensuring the adequate supply of temporary accommodation is available

Key Actions:

- 1. Undertake an independent Strategic review of the use of temporary accommodation and establish options for future delivery.**
- 2. Reduce the reliance and use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation.**
- 3. Reduce the time spent in temporary accommodation through improved monitoring and management of accommodation.**

Theme 5: Improving access to and developing more settled accommodation solutions

For those who require alternative accommodation, appropriate, affordable housing is key to ensuring a long-term solution to a household's housing situation. A range of accommodation options are needed across the social and affordable sector to cater for a wider range of housing needs.

What the review told us

High demand for social housing

The 2018 Statistical Data Return (SDR) reports a total of 23,234 affordable dwellings across Wirral Borough (22,823 affordable/social rented and 471 intermediate tenure).

According to the emerging SHMA household survey 2019, households in Birkenhead are more likely to live in this type of accommodation (25.7% of households). Rural areas and those to the west of the Borough have the lowest levels of affordable accommodation.

Since 2016/17 the number of households on the Housing Register has remained relatively steady at around 9,000. As at 31st March 2019 there were 8,797 registered households. The register is dominated by applicants requiring one-bed homes, representing 58% of the register.

Reducing supply of social housing

During the financial year 2018/19, there were 649 properties allocated to people on the Wirral Housing register via Choice Based Lettings or via direct Council nomination of urgent cases. This figure has fallen by 49% since 2013/14.

The number of 4-bedroom properties being let has seen the most significant decrease over this time at 71%. One-bed property lettings have declined by 40%.

Demand for social sector rented housing far outweighs the supply available, with 25 single person applicants for every one-bed property let. A shortfall of 705 affordable homes is estimated by the emerging strategic housing market assessment; however, it is important that this is considered further and placed in the context of viability in terms of developing supply further.

8,797 registered households waiting for social housing (31 st March 2019)	649 social homes re-let during 2018/19, a 49% decrease since 2013/14
58% of social housing applicants require one-bedroom	25 single person applicants for each one-bed property let
The shared room rate fails to cover rental levels for 1-bedroom properties in all of the ward areas.	A lack of knowledge from private landlords on the incentives to work with homeless households

Affordability in the private rented sector

From 2001 to 2011, Wirral's private rented sector grew from 8.8% to 15.8%. This is reflective of the picture across the North West of England as a whole. Private rented accommodation makes up almost one in four (24.9%) of households in Wallasey, compared to 16.9% for Wirral Borough as a whole.

Comparing the rental price in 2018 with that in 2010 indicates that there has been around a 5% increase in median and lower quartile rental prices locally, which is higher than that experienced regionally.

Further indicative data identified from web sites such as Zoopla suggests that in some areas of the Borough, private rents are within or close to Wirral's Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates. This is particularly the case for Bidston, Birkenhead and wards LHA would cover or be within £50 PCM of average rental levels for most the corresponding property types. In some wards however such as Heswall, there are greater gaps between LHA rates and private rent levels, for example, here there is a £361 PCM shortfall in LHA for a 3-bedroom property, illustrating the variety of conditions within Wirral's rental market.

The shared room rate fails to cover rental levels for 1-bedroom properties in all of the ward areas.

Landlords reported that generally, tenants stay in their properties for more than three years, and the average length of tenancy is increasing.

Working with private sector landlords

The homelessness review identified that there was some potential to work more closely with private sector landlords, 78% of those who responded to our survey believing that the private rented sector has a role to play in meeting the needs of homeless households.

There was a lack of awareness of incentives such as the payment of cash deposits, rent in advance and housing-related support.

What we plan to do next

- We recognise the importance of enabling homeless households to be rehoused in affordable accommodation which is suitable for their needs as soon as possible so that they can move with their lives.
- Ideally, we would be in a position to secure social housing for everyone who needs it, when they need it, but the supply of accommodation simply does not meet current demand, especially for single people.
- The Council is committed to increasing housing supply. Homes England's current Shared Ownership and Affordable Housing Programme identified that in Wirral by 2021 at least 283 new affordable homes will be delivered in partnership with Registered Providers. This will go some way towards meeting demand, but resources and land availability will limit the extent of development in the Borough overall. The Wirral Local Plan is currently being developed, and this must support the maximisation of affordable housing delivery wherever possible.

- Where social sector rented accommodation across our housing association partners becomes available for reletting, it is important that those in the greatest need of rehousing are prioritised. A review of the Property Pool Plus allocation policy was ongoing at the time of the homelessness review, and we will take account of its findings.
- For households facing a long wait for social housing, we want to make the private rented sector a more attractive and sustainable option than it appears to be currently. There are areas of the Borough where private rental accommodation is in good supply and affordable compared to the local housing allowance levels. Yet, it is not the tenure of choice for many due to a reputation for short term tenancies and less reputable landlords.
- Equally, private sector landlords will be wary of taking on tenants who are on lower incomes or reliant on benefit payments. For them, they need to know that the rent will be paid and properties looked after. As landlords face growing amounts of regulation, they may choose to leave the market.
- We want to support positive landlord/tenant relationships where both feel supported. For landlords, we already have a number of ways to support landlords from as the payment of cash deposits, rent in advance and housing-related support, but the homelessness review suggests that these are not widely known about.
- We also know from the review that landlords may consider housing a homeless household if tenant history checks were available, or there was a property cleansing service. Financial incentives were also suggested, and this is something which we wish to explore further. If we can redirect the money, it would cost to keep a household in temporary accommodation into an incentive to access a suitable privately rented home and a much quicker move into settled accommodation; we can deliver better value customer outcomes.
- As landlords consider leaving the market, we believe that there are opportunities to reduce their management burden. We will work with our private sector landlord steering group to provide accommodation options and models for homeless people- such as social lettings agencies - either directly as a Council, or in partnership with other providers.
- For tenants, we will explore the development of a tenant accreditation scheme. This is a training programme which provides the essential skills, knowledge and understanding required to seek accommodation and successfully maintain a home and tenancy. Certification could be provided to demonstrate that they are “tenancy” ready and less of a “risk” to prospective landlords.

Theme 5: Improving access to and developing more settled accommodation solutions

Key Actions:

- 1. Maximise opportunities to develop more social and affordable housing.**
- 2. Ensure the homeless households needs are recognised and given relevant priority as part of the Property Pool Plus allocation policy review.**
- 3. Expand the landlord offer to incentivise private sector lettings.**
- 4. Increase awareness of support available to engage Private Rented Sector Landlords.**
- 5. Conduct a feasibility study of the potential models to take on the management of private sector properties.**
- 7. Bringing empty homes back into use, targeting them at households in housing need.**

Consultation & Feedback

The draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was made available for consultation on the Council's web site. The consultation took place between 10th January and the 29th January 2020. A questionnaire was placed onto an online survey website, and a specific invitation to participate in the consultation was sent to key stakeholders, private landlords registered on the Council's mailing list and past users of the Council's Housing Options Service in order that as wide an audience as possible were able to comment on the draft Strategy.

The questionnaire consisted of four key questions relating to the draft vision and the strategic themes developed and also offered the opportunity for any additional information to be given to the Council on the intended strategy. In total, 66 respondents took part in the consultation.

Feedback

The majority of the responses were in support of the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

A number of comments, however, suggested there was a need for the vision to include a focus on the individual's health and wellbeing and not just the accommodation.

Some respondents raised the difficulty of engaging with entrenched rough sleepers, and the need to explore other models of support.

There was general agreement with the themes set out in the strategy, with a recognition that the focus should be on identifying permanent housing solutions, rather than temporary ones; the need to prevent evictions and improve working relationships with private landlords; and the importance of co-ordinating the range of responses across providers and community groups.

It was reassuring to note that respondents were keen to ensure that their organisations played a role in responding to homelessness and rough sleeping.

Our response

We have amended the vision to include a focus on the individual's health and wellbeing as well as the accommodation.

We have developed a Delivery Plan that contains key actions and tasks to deliver the strategy and an additional key action to "Consider opportunities to support individuals to raise their aspirations, assisting them to access training, education and employment" was added within Key Theme 2 as a direct response to the consultation.

We have also included a clear statement that we will ensure that when rough sleepers do not want to engage with services that those services will always be there at the point when they feel ready to access them.

Monitoring and Governance

In developing this strategy, we are striving to be aspirational but also realistic in our ambition. To meet our commitments, we need to ensure across all partners; we have the skills, services and resources. A joined-up partnership approach is critical to delivering our ambitious and innovative plans and this strategy's vision for homelessness services within the Borough.

A detailed delivery plan has been formulated as a key outcome of the consultation, which sets out what actions and projects we will be undertaking over the next five years. This shows what we will work on first and how will take the lead on ensuring that the work we have identified takes place.

Our new Task-and-Finish Groups will be responsible for the delivery of the key actions of the monitoring of this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and delivery plan. This will be reported to, and monitored by the Multi-Agency Homeless Forum The plan will be monitored quarterly and reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs, policy and legislative changes and achieves the priorities contained within it.

Progress against the delivery plan will be reported to elected members.

Wirral Council will continue to contribute to the work and priorities of the Liverpool City Region to ensure an effective regional collaborative approach to tackling homelessness and ending rough sleeping.

Theme 1 – Providing a Joined-Up Approach to Early Intervention and Homeless Prevention across the Wirral					
Priority order	Action	Task	Progress Measure (s)	Who	Timescale
1	Ensure Wirral’s Homeless Forum oversees the delivery of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy	Review membership of Wirral’s Homeless Forum to ensure appropriate representatives from a range of agencies participate and attend each meeting to effectively to respond to tasks identified in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping action plan.	Effective oversight of the strategy and action plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Service • Public Health/NHS • Merseyside Police • Merseyside Probation Trust • Housing/Supported Housing Provides • Adult Services. • Children’s Services • Homeless Services • CVS 	July 2020
		Hold quarterly Homeless Forum meetings with stakeholders including Crisis, Shelter, Public Health, Housing Benefits, Liverpool City Region colleagues along with clients who have “lived experience” of homeless services in Wirral.	Clear work programme established and engagement with all stakeholders		July 2020
		Produce and monitor a clear work plan which drives forward all actions associated with each theme within the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper strategy. This will include the establishment of appropriate Homeless Forum Task and Finish sub- groups to respond to key actions identified in the strategy.			October 2020
		Utilise appropriate Task and Finish sub- groups to develop a range of comprehensive agreements and joint protocols with key partners to proactively respond to homelessness.			Dates TBC with individual task and finish groups
2	Publish an annual report detailing the current levels of homelessness and the progress of homeless services, in order to aid elected members and chief officers with decision making	Undertake an in-depth analysis of key performance data, footfall through services, reasons for homelessness and rough sleeping and all associated outcomes achieved for vulnerable groups.	Improved awareness and understanding of homelessness and rough sleeping and the measures taken by Wirral Council and its partners to respond to this.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services 	September 2020
3	Ensure joined up service delivery, joint protocols and effective referral arrangements are in place to	In partnership with Registered Providers and Commissioned Supported Housing providers, develop a specific pre- eviction protocol which reviews and further develops prevention activities. This will include support, advice and training regarding tenancy evictions and service exclusion.	Increased prevention activity resulting in a reduction in the number of evictions, ensuring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • Housing /Supported 	March 2021

	both prevent and respond to homelessness		people can remain in their own homes where possible	housing providers/landlords	
		Develop new and review existing agreements and joint working arrangements to ensure a consistent, collaborative approach to addressing homelessness. This includes identified groups that require specific rather than generic advice such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offenders becoming homeless following prison release • care leavers • victims of domestic violence • people leaving hospital or care • armed forces 	Improved pathways into suitable housing for marginalised groups which increases choice and reduces waiting times.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • Merseyside Probation Trust • HM Prisons • CYPD • Community Safety • NHS • DASS • Housing/Supported Housing • Armed Forces Veterans 	
		Target training and awareness raising to agencies dealing with potential homeless cases helping them to identify opportunities for earlier notification of homelessness.	Increase in homeless prevention as a result of earlier identification of those at risk of homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trailblazer Team/Housing Services 	Rolling programme commenced Dec 2019
	Develop and deliver to key partners, a training package which explains the role and services provided by Wirral Council housing services teams.				
4	Provide a consistent high-quality Housing Options Service.	Develop a clear vision and associated service standards for the Housing Options Team underpinned by a robust suite of policies and procedures which are informed through annual customer satisfaction feedback.	Ensure the Housing Options service is more customer focused and able to adapt to the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services 	February 2021

		<p>Complete an annual consultation exercise with service users to inform how policy and procedures should be shaped to continually identify and respond to future improvements to service delivery.</p>	<p>changing demands on the service.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • Supported Housing Providers • Homeless People/lived experience. • Adult Services • Children Services • CVS • NHS • Probation/H M Prisons 	<p>Annually to 2025</p>
<p>Undertake an audit of the Housing Options service and its role of administering Wirral Council statutory homeless duties, to ensure it is efficient and offers quality advice and assistance to clients.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • Independent Consultants 	<p>June 2021</p>			
<p>Continue to produce and review the quarterly performance management service standards and outputs for Wirral’s Housing Options Service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services 	<p>Quarterly/Ongoing</p>			
<p>Utilise new IT software system to improve Housing Options service delivery by enable greater agile working and more effective home visits to discuss housing options and case progress with clients</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services 	<p>October 2020</p>			
<p>5</p>	<p>Undertake an awareness-raising campaign in relation to homeless prevention and services in order to help address the underlying causes of homelessness.</p>	<p>Develop an appropriate ‘Communications’ strategy for the Housing Options Service that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures opportunities for prevention are maximised by analysing the circumstances by which customers approach the Housing Options Service. • Explores the use of publicity material/social media to promote the housing options available in Wirral • Improve availability of online information, ensuring it is easily accessible and includes self-help functions. • Explores the appetite for holding bi-annual awareness-raising events for stakeholders and partners. 	<p>A Wirral Council co-ordinated corporate training programme providing clarity regarding services available.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • Homeless Forum • PR/Marketing • Public Health • NHS • Merseyside Probation/HM Prisons • DWP • Police • Adult Social Care • Children’s Services 	<p>September 2021</p>

6	Prevent homelessness through an effective homelessness toolkit.	<p>Further develop homeless prevention options/activities ensuring they are effective in responding to and alleviating the main causes of homelessness, this includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular updating of homeless toolkit to ensure effective interventions are utilised by the Housing Options Service • Working with Liverpool City Region partners to explore opportunities to expand the housing options available to people fleeing domestic abuse • Delivery of early intervention and prevention “trailblazer” initiative in Wirral (part of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority initiative) • Carrying out homelessness case file audits to identify if any other prevention activities could be carried out • Re-commissioning ‘fit for purpose’ IT software for Housing Options service • Undertaking a mapping exercise of available mediation/counselling services which includes understanding how accessible those services are for those at risk of homelessness. 	Increased prevention activity to alleviate demand on services, enabling more targeted early intervention and prevention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • LCR Authorities • Combined Authority • Community Safety • Procurement 	February 2022
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Theme 2 - Ensure that housing related support services meet the diverse and complex needs of customers

Priority Order	Action	Task	Progress Measure (s)	Who	Timescale
1	Work with providers of supported housing services to ensure that the principles of psychologically informed approaches and trauma informed care are embedded within service delivery.	Work in partnership with providers to commission training for their staff regarding psychologically/trauma informed care and assistance.	Supported housing providers are better able to respond to the diverse needs of homeless people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • Supported Housing Providers • Training Consultancy 	March 2022
		Monitor and challenge where appropriate supported housing commissioned services to ensure that the principles of this approach are embedded in each organisation.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services 	

2	Work with providers of supported housing to reduce evictions and abandonments	<p>Analyse data from homeless accommodation services to understand the main causes of exclusion/evictions/abandonments in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform commissioning of services • Develop a protocol for approaches to reducing exclusions, evictions and abandonments • Facilitate learning and development for providers of homeless accommodation services, which is responsive to those findings and is informed by relevant best practice. 	Increased number of people who can sustain their supported housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • Supported Housing Providers 	September 2022
3	Develop a coordinated approach to improve move on from supported accommodation	<p>Maximise opportunities for hostel residents who are ready to live independently by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborating with homeless accommodation services to explore the feasibility of implementing a borough-wide ‘tenancy-ready’ training programme • Ensuring that move-on is considered as part of the allocations policy review and through the development of an improved Private Landlord offer • Reviewing the current Housing Priority Panel process and considering the feasibility of implementing Homeless Link’s Move-On Plans Protocol (MOPP) 	Reduction in the time spent in temporary supported accommodation for homeless people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • Housing/Supported Housing Providers/landlords • Floating Support Providers • HPP members 	April 2021
4	Delivery of Housing First in Wirral as part of the Liverpool City Region Housing First Pilot	Work in partnership with the Combined Authority to deliver the Housing First pilot and ensure that any learning from the ‘Test & Learn’ phase informs future commissioning activity.	Reduction in repeat homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combined Authority • Housing Services • LCR Authorities • MHCLG 	March 2021
5	Evaluate the effectiveness of housing related support services to both inform further gaps in provision such as female-specific supported housing, and the development of a new commissioning plan.	<p>Undertake a process of review and engagement which focuses on understanding the future need for housing related support services by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing Mainstay and other relevant data sources regarding use of existing provision • Conducting workshops with existing homeless clients and those with lived experience to understand the effectiveness of exiting supported housing services • Conducting stakeholder workshops to identify and inform gaps in provision including provision for complex clients and those who may not meet other statutory thresholds 	Housing related support services are commissioned to respond to identified needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • Supported Housing Providers • Homeless People/lived experience. • Public Health/NHS • Merseyside Police • Merseyside Probation Trust 	April 2021

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult Services. • Children’s Services • Homeless Services • CVS 	
		Develop detailed commissioning plan which is responsive to the needs identified			
6	Consider opportunities to support individuals to raise their aspirations, assisting them to access training, education and employment.	<p>Establish a working group to include representatives from multiple agencies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • map existing options for those living in temporary and supported housing services regarding access to training, education and employment. • Develop initiative to respond to gaps that are identified • Produce a pathway document to assist providers and to raise awareness of option available. 	Improved access and take up of training, education and employment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • Housing/Supported Housing • DWP • Chamber of Commerce • CVS 	July 2022

Theme 3: Preventing and Ending Rough Sleeping

Priority Order	Action	Task	Progress measure (s)	Who	Timescale
1	Develop a multi-agency response to tackling rough sleeping and street activity.	Through the Rough Sleeper Steering Group, oversee the development of coordinated responses to tackling rough sleeping including the feasibility of implementing a new co-ordinator and ‘Navigator’ role focusing on preventing rough sleeping for those at greatest risk.	Rough sleeper services are responsive and coordinated ensuring no duplication or gaps in provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • RSI Assertive Outreach (YMCA) • CA Assertive Outreach • CGL Outreach • Public Health • NHS • MHCLG • Police • Housing/ Supported 	August 2020

				Housing Provides/Landlords <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DASS. • Homeless Services • CVS • Local Businesses 	
		Carry out a mapping exercise of the services available to rough sleepers and work collaboratively with colleagues in Community Safety & Police to identify and address street activity.	Reduction in visible street drinking and anti-social behaviour		October 2020
		Develop a plan for combating anti-social 'street' behaviour			January 2022
2	Work to prevent anyone from sleeping rough on the Wirral	Undertake a detailed analysis of the routes into rough sleeping, identifying key triggers and risk factors where an early effective intervention may have prevented rough sleeping	Fewer rough sleepers Faster assessment to determine best pathway		Dec 2020
		Ensure that the 'Streetlink' service is well-publicised with all agencies and the general public are aware of and can access it.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • WYMCA RSI • CGL Outreach • LCR Assertive Outreach 	July 2020
3	Develop a rapid intervention for all rough sleepers through an assertive outreach service, and supported reconnection.	Develop an accurate Rough Sleeper intelligence database to better understand the number and presenting issues rough sleepers have, using findings to secure longer-term funding for an effective outreach service(s) offering tailored solutions for new, returning and entrenched rough sleepers.	Assertive Outreach services effectively engage with rough sleepers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • WYMCA RSI • CGL Outreach • LCR Assertive Outreach 	Sept 2020

		Further develop the Mainstay database to contain more information to analysis Wirral rough sleepers, specifically their primary and secondary presenting needs.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • MainStay Liverpool 	Sept 2020
4	Review the need for structured day services to engage with rough sleepers and support them in their journey off the streets	Research best practice in relation to day services for rough sleepers and explore the need for day provision in Wirral.	Improved engagement with Rough Sleepers during the day to reduce likelihood of rough sleeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • WYMCA RSI • CGL Outreach • WCAP (Ark) • Public Health • LCR Assertive Outreach • Charles Thompson Mission • CVS's 	February 2021
		Work collaboratively with voluntary and community sector partners on the provision of services which can link responsively to the work of outreach street workers			
5	Develop a clear accommodation pathway off the streets into a range of accommodation provision	<p>Explore and develop a range housing options which can be used as a pathway off the streets including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the viability of an assessment centre • rapid rehousing (including emergency and medium/long-term housing) • Housing first approach. which can be used as clear pathway off the streets. 	<p>Fewer rough sleepers</p> <p>Faster assessment to determine best pathway</p> <p>Adequate and appropriate supply of accommodation for anyone rough sleeping in Wirral,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • WYMCA RSI • Public Health • LCR Assertive Outreach • Combined Authority • Housing Providers/Landlords 	December 2021
6	Consider the feasibility of the provision of self-contained night shelter units	Review current arrangements for all emergency accommodation provision and ensure it's continued relevance	Fewer rough sleepers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • Housing/Supported Housing Providers. • CVS • Other LA's • Suppliers 	August 2020
		Identify and explore feasibility of other models of emergency accommodation provision.	Reduced risk of street deaths		
		Develop, implement and monitor a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services

7	Reduce poor health for Rough Sleepers	Conduct Homeless Links Health Needs Audit to develop a detailed understanding of the health needs of Wirral’s Rough Sleepers, ensuring the findings of this audit are reflected in the ‘This is Wirral’ evidence base.	Improve access to health services, and health outcomes for rough sleepers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • NHS Wirral • Public Health 	February 2021
		Map commissioned services for Health, Mental Health and Substance Misuse identifying any gaps and associated opportunities for joint commissioning and/or integrated service provision, including respite and end of life care.	Remove barriers some homeless people experience when attempting to access primary healthcare services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • NHS Wirral • Public Health • Supported Housing Providers 	Feb 2021
		Undertake an awareness campaign to ensure all accommodation and support providers understand how those at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping can access the borough’s health care services.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • NHS Wirral • Public Health • Supported Housing Providers 	May 2021

Theme 4: Ensuring the adequate supply of temporary accommodation is available

Priority Order	Action	Task	Progress measure (s)	Who	Timescale
1	Undertake an independent Strategic review of the use of temporary accommodation and establish options for future delivery.	Commission a review which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyses demand for temporary accommodation • reviews Wirral Council temporary accommodation options and those who provide this to ensure value-for-money • reviews Wirral Council management of temporary accommodation (<i>including repair/maintenance systems, rent collection, tenancy enforcement and support</i>) • reviews temporary accommodation allocation procedures to ensure they are clear and transparent. 	Improved access, use and client experience of Wirral Council’s temporary accommodation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • Other Councils 	December 2020
2		Increase access to alternative emergency temporary accommodation.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services 	Sept 2020

	Reduce the reliance and use of B&B accommodation	Target case work to prevent people from requiring temporary accommodation.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing Providers 	
3	Reduce the time spent in temporary accommodation through improved monitoring and management of accommodation.	<p>Develop a responsive rehousing pathway for those in temporary accommodation by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewing and agreeing resources required to effectively manage the temporary accommodation portfolio to include a robust risk management process. Formalising the process for multi-agency working to respond to complex cases, setting out accountable actions and timeframes. Increasing move-on options which are responsive to client’s needs. Implementing customer feedback questionnaires to inform service delivery 	<p>Less time spent in temporary accommodation</p> <p>Reduction in the number of evictions</p> <p>Improved customer journey for those in temporary accommodation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing Services Housing Providers/Landlords Floating Support Services 	March 2021

Theme 5: Improving access to and developing more settled accommodation solutions

Priority Order	Action	Task	Progress measure (s)	Who	Timescale
1	Maximise opportunities to develop more social and affordable housing	<p>Support the consultation being undertaken as part of the Local Plan process to ensure that the need of homeless households are accurately understood and are reflective in the Local Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation distributed to Hostel to support enable them to engage with the Local Plan consultation process Facilitation of focus groups for those in services and with lived experience. 	New and existing homes are available to meet needs	Wirral Council / Registered Providers Homeless people/those with lived experience	November 2020.
	Deliver in partnership with Registered Providers, an affordable homes programme which will be reflective of the findings of the new 2019 Strategic Housing Market Assessment in terms of need for new homes in the social sector for a range of people including vulnerable groups and young people	2025			

2	Ensure that homeless households needs are recognised and given relevant priority as part of the Property Pool Plus allocation policy review	<p>Independent consultant currently undertaking a review of the Social Housing Allocations procedure for the Liverpool City Region partners.</p> <p>Consultant meeting with all Local authorities collectively and individually to discuss overarching themes and each LA priority in relation to new policy</p> <p>Housing Options team to review initial draft procedure (completed) to inform final Social Housing Allocations procedure ensuring it supports homeless prevention and relief activity, and those households that are homeless, or threatened with homelessness (including those with complex needs) receive adequate priority for housing.</p>	New procedure agreed	Property Pool Plus / Combined Authority	Autumn 2020
3	Expand the landlord offer to incentivise private sector lettings	Review the existing range of landlord incentives and in consultation with Private Landlords, develop a new, comprehensive, responsive landlord offer.	Increase the number of Private landlords offering accommodation to Housing Options referrals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • Private Landlords • Floating Support Services 	April 2020
4	Increase awareness of support available to engage Private Rented Sector Landlords	<p>Increase access to private sector housing through a marketing campaign targeted at Private Landlords by;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recruiting a Private Sector Liaison Officer who targets homeless prevention support to private tenants and landlords. • publishing Landlord incentives including the housing support available, households who are struggling to maintain their tenancy can access. • reviewing arrangements for engagement with the existing Landlord Forum and Steering Group • Exploring landlords' views of the value of a tenant accreditation training scheme 	Better understand the reasons why private tenancies are breaking down and what we can do to mitigate this	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • Private Landlords • Floating Support Services 	March 2021
5	Conduct a feasibility study of the potential models to take on the management of private sector properties.	<p>Explore the feasibility of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing a local/social lettings agency • Leasing properties from Private Landlords and use them as prevention/relief solutions and/or final offers. 	Increased access to a range of housing options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services • Other Councils • Private Landlords 	April 2021

6	Bringing empty properties back into use, targeting them at households in housing need.	Target and provide support for empty homes to be brought back into use for homeless households	Increased access to a range of housing options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Services 	December 2020
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Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Review 2019

Executive Summary

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Please note that in this report some of the tables include rounded figures. This can result in some column or row totals not adding up to 100 or to the anticipated row or column ‘total’ due to the use of rounded decimal figures. We include this description here as it covers all tables and associated textual commentary included. If tables or figures are to be used in-house, then we recommend the addition of a similarly worded statement being included as a note to each table used.

This Homelessness Review has been prepared by arc⁴ Ltd on behalf of Wirral Council.

This report takes into account the particular instructions and requirements of our client. It is not intended for and should not be relied upon by any third party, and no responsibility is undertaken to any third party.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Homelessness Review has been prepared and undertaken by arc4 Ltd on behalf of Wirral Council. As such, this Review complies with the associated and relevant legislation Homelessness Act 2002 and the associated Code of Guidance. arc4 have undertaken an independent review of homelessness across the Wirral using a range of data sources and undertaken extensive consultation.
- 1.2 This Homelessness Review forms the principal element of the required evidence base for Wirral Council to develop its Homelessness Strategy. It sets out to identify, capture and quantify the levels of current provision and future demand for homelessness services within the Borough and through its findings will underpin and inform the development of the Council's strategic response to homeless prevention and ending rough sleeping.

Legislative Context

- 1.3 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires every local authority to carry out a review of homelessness in the Borough every five years, to develop and publish a Homelessness Strategy based on this review and to consult with other local statutory and voluntary organisations.
- 1.4 This review will provide a basis for a strategic approach to tackle and prevent homelessness and rough sleeping and will build upon the positive work already taking place to provide individuals in housing need with a range of housing options to prevent and alleviate homelessness across the Borough.

Wirral's Approach

- 1.5 Whilst Wirral Council, as part of its statutory duty, has produced this document; it is not simply a review of the services provided by the Council. There are multiple and complex issues that can cause homelessness, therefore in compiling this review, arc4 together with the Council has worked closely with a variety of other statutory and voluntary agencies to gain a detailed understanding of homelessness across the Wirral.
- 1.6 The review is a multi-agency document, which recognises that partnership working is key to preventing homelessness and developing sustainable housing and support solutions.

Methodology

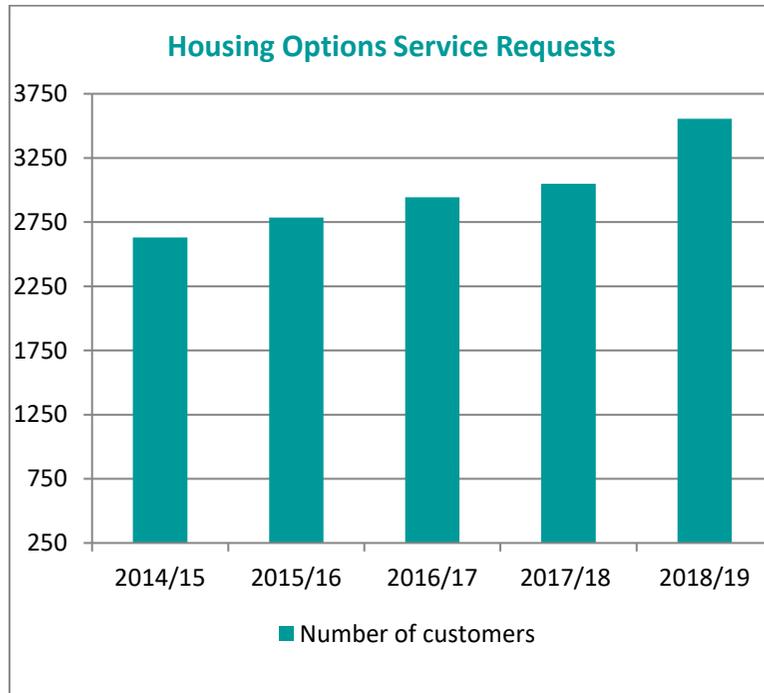
- 1.7 The Review pulls together available data from a wide range of sources including H-CLIC data, Mainstay data, outreach data together with information from partner agencies. At the current time, there are some concerns about the accuracy of experimental H-CLIC data so where available we have used the Council's own verified data. Where H-CLIC Data has been used some caution should be given to the analysis and findings associated with this data.
- 1.8 A number of consultation and mapping exercises were also completed. This information provides a detailed picture of the levels and causes of homelessness across the Wirral and used together with demographic data, the review identifies unmet need and future trends.

- 1.9 Consultation with staff, partners and customers was critical to the review process, and will continue to inform the development of the strategy and improvements to existing Council services. We have consulted extensively with service users and stakeholders through a range of methods to ensure that the Review directly reflects the experiences of those who have been homeless and those working in the sector.

2. Homelessness in Figures

Service Requests

- 2.1 In 2018/19 the recorded footfall accessing the Housing Options Service was 3,555 households, a total of 3,159 cases were closed during the same period. In 2018/19 there were a total of 2,459 advice only cases, accounting for 78% of all closed cases.



Financial Year	Number of service requests
2014 /15	2630
2015 /16	2785
2016 /17	2944
2017 /18	3048
2018 /19	3555

Source: Housing Options data

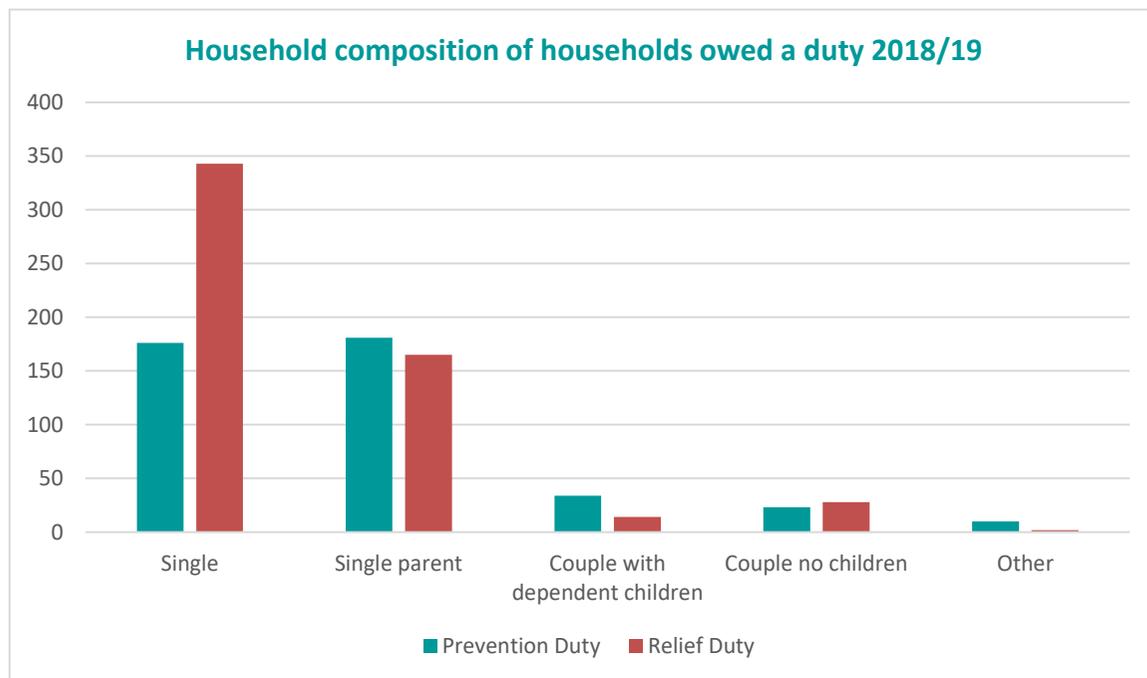
Assessments

- 2.3 Half-year data from 2019/20 indicates an increase in assessments with 613 having been completed in the first six months of the year compared with 963 full-year data from the previous year.
- 2.4 Of the 320 cases where a prevention duty was owed in 2018/19, 70 cases went on to have a relief duty owed, equating to 22%. In the first two-quarters of 2019/20 of the 227 cases where a prevention duty was owed 54 cases went on to become homeless and had a relief duty owed, equating to 24%.

Closed cases where a duty was owed		
Cases	2018/19	Q1 & Q2 2019/20
Number of Prevention duties that ended	320	227
Number of Relief duties that ended	531	397

Source: Wirral Council

- 2.5 While prevention activity is not successful for around 22-24% of clients, the data indicates that more clients are accessing the service once they are already homeless.
- 2.6 The majority of households owed a prevention duty were households with dependent children, accounting for 52% of households. The majority of households owed a relief duty were single people accounting for 62%. This may indicate that families are more likely to approach the service prior to becoming homeless than single people.



Source: Wirral Council

- 2.7 Of the clients owed a duty by the Housing Options team, 60% had declared that they had a support need. The most frequently occurring support need is mental health, followed by physical health and disability and domestic abuse. Information from the Housing Options team indicates that there are a very high number of complex cases, including both single people and families with multiple and challenging needs.

Duty to Refer Cases

- 2.8 334 duty to refer cases were received between 1/10/19 and 31/3/19. 213 of these (69%) were received from DWP. Only 12% of all referrals resulted in a duty being awarded, with the remainder closed at the advice stage. The majority of these were awarded a relief duty.

Causes of Homelessness

- 2.9 The main reason for homelessness on the Wirral is due to the loss of private rented accommodation (AST), which accounted for 301 cases (31%). The second main cause of homelessness is recorded as Other Reasons. Further work is underway within the Housing Options team to reduce the use of this category.
- 2.10 The next main reason for homelessness is being asked to leave accommodation provided by family and friends (153 cases) and accounts for 16% of all cases.

Prevention Outcomes

Prevention duty outcomes 2018/19		
Total number of households where prevention duty ended	330	%
Secured accommodation for 6+ months	148	45%
Homeless (including intentionally homeless)	70	21%
No longer eligible	1	0%
Contact Lost	72	22%
Refused suitable accommodation offer	6	2%
Refused to cooperate	1	0%
56 days lapsed & no further action	23	7%
Application withdrawn	9	3%

Source: MHCLG HCLIC data

- 2.11 For the 330 cases owed a prevention duty, where the duty has ended, accommodation was secured for 148 of these households. This indicates that of those households owed a prevention duty, homelessness was successfully prevented for 45% of these households. This compares to a national prevention rate of 58%. For 22% of cases, the duty came to an end due to loss of contact, which Wirral has identified as an issue. Measures such as strengthening the working practices of the Housing Options team to respond to the new legislation have contributed to successfully reducing this figure to 10% in Quarter 2 2019/20.
- 2.12 The most successful prevention activity was accommodation secured by the Housing Options Service, 82 of the 148 cases (55%).

Relief Outcomes

Relief duty outcomes 2018/19	2018/19	%	2019/20 (Q1 & Q2)	%
Total number of households where relief duty ended	531		397	
Secured accommodation for 6+ months	304	57%	251	63%
Intentionally homeless from accom provided	1	0%	1	0%
No longer eligible	1	0%	4	1%

Contact Lost	112	21%	65	16%
56 days lapsed	68	13%	37	9%
Refused final accommodation offer	18	3%	18	5%
Local connection referral accepted by LA	1	0%	4	1%
Refusal to co-operate	0	0%	0	0%
Application withdrawn	26	5%	17	4%

Source: MHCLG HCLIC data

- 2.13 In 2018/19 the relief duty ended for a total of 531 households, of which 304 had accommodation secured. This indicates that of those households owed a relief duty homelessness was relieved for 57% of these households. This is above the national average for England of 43%. For 21% of the cases, the duty ended as contact was lost with the applicant. The first half-year data for 2019/20 shows that homelessness was relieved for 63% of cases, indicating improved customer outcomes.
- 2.14 The majority of households were accommodated in the social rented sector (56%), followed by 39% into Supported/Hostel Accommodation, private rented accommodation (16%). The high use of supported accommodation reflects the increased demand on services from single-person households under the HRA.

Main Duty Decisions

- 2.15 A total of 80 main duty decisions were made, of which 46 (61%) were owed the full homeless duty under s193, compared with 58% nationally. A total of 24 households (30%) were found to be intentionally homeless, this is significantly higher than the average for England of 8%. Only 6% of households were found to have no priority need compared with the national average of 19%.

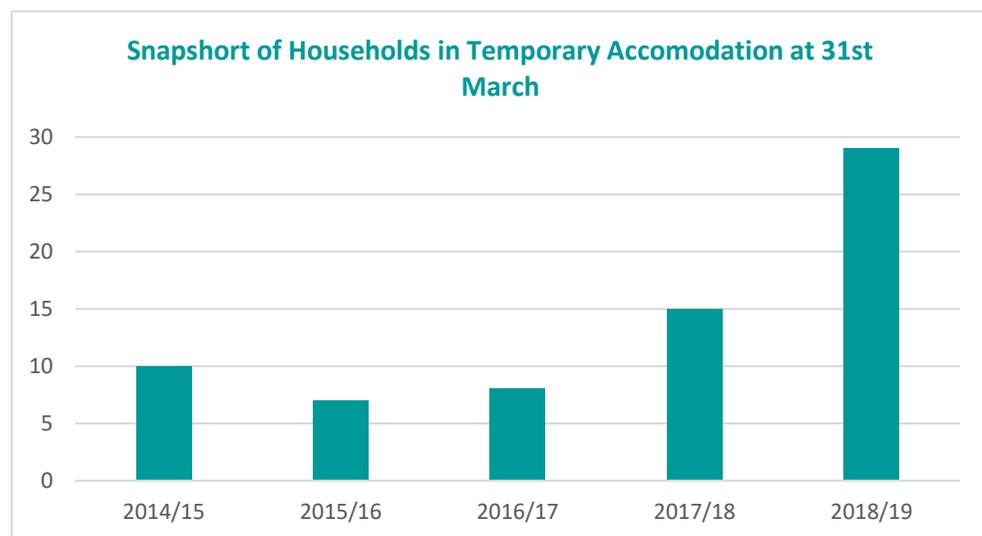
Year	Homeless + priority need + unintentionally homeless	Homeless + priority need + intentionally homeless	Homeless + no priority need	Not homeless	Total
2018/19	46	24	5	5	80
2019/20 (Q1 & Q2)	24	3	9	1	37

Source: MHCLG HCLIC data

- 2.16 In the first two quarters of 2019/20, a total of 37 main duty decisions were made, of which 24 (65%) were owed the full homeless duty. The percentage of households found to be intentionally homeless has decreased to 8%, compared with 30% the previous year. This improvement is as a result of embedding the new legislation into how the Housing Options team works with clients. The main reason for priority need in 2018/19 is dependent children, followed by physical disability.

Use of Temporary Accommodation

- 2.17 Wirral Council has direct control of 24 units of temporary accommodation, of which 23 are leased from Magenta Living, and 1 is owned by the Council. They are a mix of 1 to 4-bedroom properties, of which 3 have been adapted and/or are fully/partly Equality Act 2010 compliant. Temporary accommodation is accessed via the Housing Options Team for statutorily homeless applicants to whom the Council has an interim duty to accommodate, this also includes the use of bed and breakfast accommodation and refuges.
- 2.18 In anticipation of the introduction of the new legislation, the Council increased its temporary accommodation portfolio by an additional 14 units. This mirrors similar provision in the sub-region. This increase has helped to minimise the number of households accommodated in Bed & Breakfast at any one time.
- 2.19 At the end of March 2019 there were a total of 29 households in temporary accommodation, 6 of these households were in Bed & Breakfast accommodation and 5 households occupying refuges.
- 2.20 The number of households in temporary accommodation at the end of each year has increased from 2015/16. The data shows a trend of rising temporary accommodation placements which has seen an increase since 2015/16. The most significant increase is evident since the introduction of HRA on 1st April 2018 due to wider duties to accommodate within the legislation. The rise of temporary accommodation use nationally has been evidenced as a result of the HRA implementation. The team's focus upon homelessness early intervention and prevention, particularly via the recently appointed Trailblazer Officer posts is anticipated to help reduce the number of households needing temporary accommodation in the future.

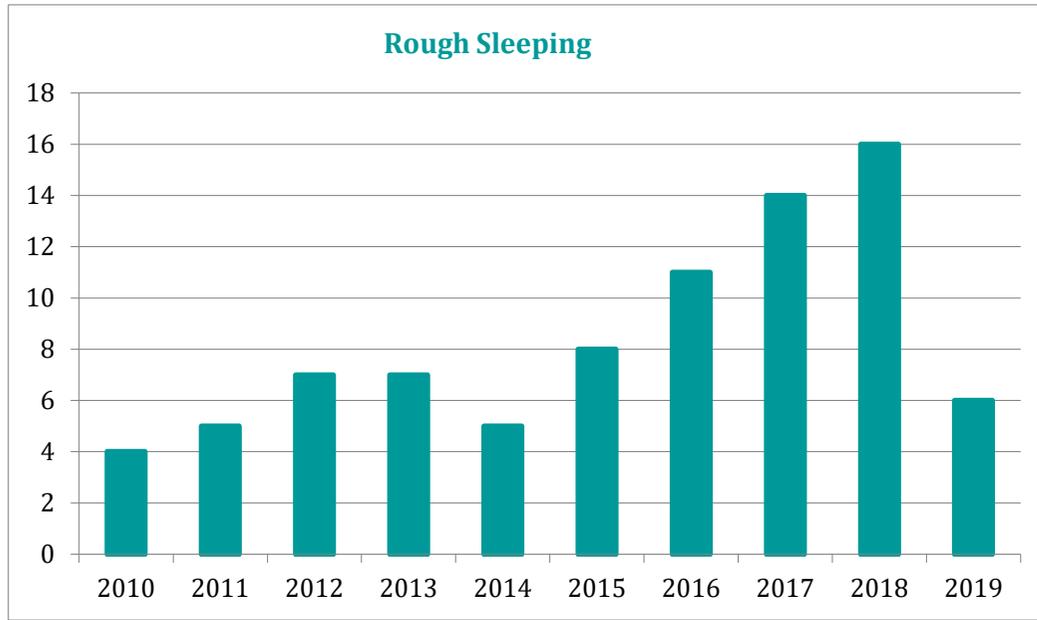


Source: Wirral Council

- 2.21 Despite the overall increase in the use of temporary accommodation, the number of households placed in Bed & Breakfast accommodation over the same time period has remained relatively stable. The number of households accommodated in Bed & Breakfast accommodation at the end of each financial year averaged around 3 from 2014/15 to 20 in Q2 19/20.

Rough Sleeping

- 2.23 There has been a significant increase in rough sleeping from 2014 to 2018. This mirrored the national increase in rough sleeping. This also reflects the trend across the Liverpool City Region Authorities with the exception of Liverpool.
- 2.24 In 2018 Wirral had the highest level of rough sleeping across the City Region. This is due in part to Wirral having the 2nd largest population as well as a contained market (being a peninsular) with little or no migration. Further, Liverpool Council was allocated additional Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding by MHCLG during 18/19 in order to respond to the high level of visible rough sleeping in the city. This has had a positive impact in reducing rough sleeping in the city.
- 2.25 During 2019 Wirral Council made a successful bid for RSI funding and is now also seeing a reduction in the level of rough sleeping. The bid enabled the implementation of an assertive outreach service which targets rough sleepers and is co-located in the night shelter. This has resulted in a 62.5% decrease in levels according to the official annual count.
- 2.26 Each Authority is required to submit an official figure of numbers of rough sleepers found per year or to submit an estimate, on a typical night. The graph below details the number of rough sleepers found/estimated since 2010. In 2019 this figure was 6.



Source: MHCLG Rough Sleeping Data

Supported Accommodation

2.27 Wirral Council has continued to commission a good amount of Housing Related Support Services for socially excluded groups, including for clients who are homeless. There is a total of 155 floating support units and 406 accommodation- based units for homeless and socially excluded clients.



Source: MainStay Data

- 2.28 Demand for supported accommodation outstrips supply, and this gap between demand and supply is increasing on an annual basis. In 2018/19, 1060 unique individuals were referred for supported accommodation, and only 794 were successfully accommodated, indicating an annual shortfall for that year of 266. The number of annual referrals for floating support is broadly similar to the total number of clients supported.
- 2.29 The delivery of the Housing First Model in the Liverpool City Region has begun its initial ‘Test & Learn’ phase. The Staff Team, which is directly employed by the Combined Authority, is now all in place. The 16 delivery staff from the Liverpool City Region’s Housing First programme are currently working with 60 homeless people in the first phase, and more teams will be established over the coming months to support approx. 350 people.
- 2.30 The Wirral Council has referred 23 individuals to Housing First. The table below shows the current status of the referred clients as at the beginning of November 2019.

Status of Housing First Referrals at beginning of November 2019	Number
Client engaged with support and being assisted to submit a property request	5

Client engaged with Support and property request submitted and sent to HA partners	0
Client engaged with Support and property request returned, and suitable property identified.	1
Housed	3
Not eligible	5
Watch and Wait <i>(Clients are eligible for HF and already engaged with services - 'watch and wait' approach in order not to undermine current support plans and to continue assertive approaches to encourage clients to engage with Housing First.)</i>	3
Exhausted all options	5
Deceased	1

Settled Accommodation

Social Housing and Affordable Housing

- 2.31 All social properties in the Borough are owned by housing associations with the exception of 23 homes which were built in 2011 as part of the Governments Local Authority New Build programme. Wirral Council transferred its remaining stock to Wirral Partnership Homes (now known as Magenta Living) and Beechwood and Ballantyne Community Housing Association (now Onward) in 2005.
- 2.32 The 2018 Statistical Data Return (SDR) reports a total of 21,809 affordable dwellings across Wirral Borough (21,395 affordable/social rented and 414 intermediate tenure). According to the emerging SHMA 2019 household survey, households in Birkenhead are more likely to live in this type of accommodation (25.7% of households) followed by the Mid-Wirral area (18.9%). Rural areas and those to the west of the Borough have the lowest levels of affordable accommodation.
- 2.33 Wirral Council is a member of the Sub Regional Property Pool Plus Choice Based Lettings scheme. The partnership has a common housing register and a allocations policy which is currently being reviewed. At 31st March 2019, there were 8,797 registered households. The register continues to be dominated by applicants requiring 1-bed homes, representing 58% of the register.

- 2.34 It is clear that demand for social rented housing far outweighs the supply available. Most noticeable is the 5,119 applicants in priority bands A-C waiting to be considered for only 202 relets, representing 25 applicants per letting.
- 2.35 The early data emerging from the 2019 Strategic Housing Market Assessment suggests that there is a net shortfall of 705 affordable homes each year however this has to be placed in the context of the overall housing requirement figures being developed as part of the Local Plan. The emerging data also suggests that across the Borough, it is recommended that 17.2% of new affordable dwellings have one-bedroom, 46.8% two-bedrooms, 29.7% three-bedrooms and 6.3% four +bedrooms.

Private Rented Sector

- 2.36 Early data emerging from the 2019 SHMA household survey (table 10.2 in the full review) indicates the proportion of households living in the private rented sector by sub-area. This shows that Wallasey contains 24.9% private rented households compared to an average of 16.9% across Wirral as a whole. In the Borough, there are almost 25,000 households living in the private rented sector
- 2.37 Census figures reveal that from 2001 to 2011, Wirral's private rented sector grew from 8.8% to 15.8%. This is reflective of the picture across the North West of England as a whole. Comparing the rental price in 2018 with that in 2010 indicates that there has been around a 5% increase in median rental prices locally.
- 2.38 Further indicative data identified from the Zoopla website suggests that in some areas of the Borough, private rents are within or close to Wirral's Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates. This is particularly the case for Bidston, Birkenhead and wards where the LHA would cover or be within £50 PCM of average rental levels for most the corresponding property types. In some wards however such as Heswall, there are greater gaps between LHA rates and private rent levels, for example, here there is a £361 PCM shortfall in LHA for a 3-bedroom property.
- 2.39 The shared room rate fails to cover rental levels for 1-bedroom properties in all of the ward areas.

Shared Accommodation

- 2.40 The draft Housing section of the 'This is Wirral' evidence base estimates that there are approximately 1,850 houses in multiple occupation (HMO) with the majority of these being made up of licensed HMOs. The evidence base further highlights that in recent years there has been an increase in shared and bedsit accommodation.
- 2.41 Analysis of listings on spare room.com indicates that there is a bigger pool of house sharing options available in Birkenhead, Prenton and Wallasey areas. However, even the single rooms advertised are above the PCM LHA shared room of rate of £238. Only 15 of the 125 listing on the 1st December 2019 stated that they would consider HB dependent households.

3. Key Findings

- 3.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires a Homelessness Review to consider the following;
- a) Current and future levels of homelessness;
 - b) Activities which are carried out for any of the following purposes:
 - i) Preventing homelessness
 - ii) Securing that accommodation is available for homeless people in the district and will be available for people in the district who may become homeless;
 - iii) Providing support for people in the district who
 - are homeless
 - may become homeless
 - have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again;
 - c) Resources available to the housing authority, the social services authority for the district, other public authorities, voluntary organisations and other persons for activities mentioned in b.

Current and Future Homelessness Levels

Increased demand

- 3.2 There was an increase in footfall to the service of 17% in 2018/19 following the introduction of the HRA 2017. It will be important to continue to monitor demand on a quarterly basis so that any increases can be appropriately responded to.

Raising awareness of the prevention duty and maintaining contact

- 3.3 During 2018-19 the Council owed a larger proportion of customers a relief duty (57%) compared to a prevention duty (43%). This suggests that more work may be needed to raise awareness of the service and the work that can be done to prevent homelessness occurring.
- 3.4 This is true not only for households, but for partner services who have a duty to refer such cases to the housing options service. Of the Duty to Refer cases, 18% resulted in a duty being owed. The majority of cases referred under duty to refer (80%) were assessed at the homelessness relief stage as opposed to the prevention stage, indicating that the referral may not have been made soon enough.
- 3.5 For 22% of prevention cases and 9% of relief cases, the duty came to an end due to loss of contact. This is currently being monitored by the team.

Single households

- 3.6 Single people are significantly over-represented in terms of households to whom a relief duty is owed accounting for 62%. This is due to single people approaching the service once they are already homeless.

Focus on the main causes of homelessness

- 3.7 The main reason for homelessness in Wirral is the loss of private rented accommodation; this accounted for 31% of cases. The main reason for private rented accommodation coming to an end is the landlord wishing to sell or re-let the property - accounting for 48% of all cases. Arrears accounted for 33% of cases. This data identifies opportunities to better focus prevention activity, including fast access to money and debt advice.
- 3.8 The second leading cause of homelessness is being asked to leave accommodation provided by family and friends (16%). Despite this, there was no successful negotiation/mediation work to secure the return to family and friends.
- 3.9 A range of prevention tools needs to be developed to address all the main causes if homelessness is to be successfully prevented - alongside making best use of the existing prevention tools. This includes:
- support and advice for both landlords and tenants as tenancy difficulties arise;
 - effective and timely family mediation
 - increased awareness of domestic abuse services through all appropriate channels such as website information, factsheets etc.
 - a pre-eviction protocol with social housing and supported accommodation providers

Enabling households to remain in their existing accommodation

- 3.10 44% of those owed a prevention duty had their homelessness successfully prevented, compared to 58% nationally (although this has increased to 57% during the first half of 2019/20) highlighting the positive impact homeless services have and in particular how the Housing Options team has been learning lessons following the first 12 months of the implementation of the HRA legislation.
- 3.11 The service is much more successful at helping households to secure alternative accommodation than enabling them to remain in their existing accommodation. The most successful prevention activity was securing social housing (56%), followed by securing private rented accommodation (34%).
- 3.12 In 2018/19, 57% of those owed a relief duty had their homelessness successfully relieved, compared to 43% nationally. This too increased to 63% in the first two quarters of 2019/20.

Temporary Accommodation

Increased in placements

- 3.13 The number of households in temporary accommodation at the end of each year has increased, reflecting the overall increase in homelessness demand.
- 3.14 There has been an increase in Bed & Breakfast usage since 2014/15.

Reliance on Bed & Breakfast

- 3.15 Following the introduction of the HRA, in 2018/19 there was an increased reliance on Bed & Breakfast accommodation placements.
- 3.16 There is a need to more fully understand the current and future demand for temporary accommodation through a detailed temporary accommodation review, which will also consider an options appraisal for future delivery and management arrangements.

Activities & Services

Housing Options Service Delivery

- 3.17 The team provides a good quality service, with a focus on positive customer outcomes. Partner agencies speak positively of the service received.
- 3.18 The impact of the HRA has led to an increased paperwork burden, the focus on legal compliance reduces the amount of time that can be spent on casework and achieving positive outcomes for clients.
- 3.19 The majority of customers approach the service once they are homeless, meaning that opportunities for prevention are missed. This results in staff time focusing on securing accommodation for these households rather than working with households to prevent them from becoming homeless.
- 3.20 The complexity of need that customers are presenting with is increasing, and at times becoming increasingly difficult to find suitable and sustainable housing solutions for people, this is especially the case for clients who exhibit violent and threatening behaviour.
- 3.21 There is a need to raise awareness of the service with both partners and customers to encourage clients to come in as soon as a risk of homelessness has been identified and to improve the appropriateness of referrals by agencies.
- 3.22 It may be timely to review the following policies and procedures:
- notification letters
 - Case closure after 10 days where supporting documentation – this may result in missed opportunities for prevention
 - service standards and the introduction of regular customer satisfaction monitoring

3.23 There is a need to update the website and develop factsheets to increase the amount of information and advice available to customers, including details of the duties owed under the HRA.

Gaps in service provision

3.24 There is a need to consider the need for a mediation service to prevent family/friends evicting.

3.25 Consideration should be given to expanding the dedicated resource to work with tenants and landlords with a focus on preventing homelessness from the private rented sector.

3.26 The ongoing review of the landlord offer should result in a competitive offer being developed that will increase access to private rented accommodation.

3.27 The results of the Property Pool Plus review need to be recognised and actioned where appropriate. There is a need to maintain and build upon the strong working relationship between Property Pool Plus and the Housing Options Team.

3.28 There is a need to review pre-eviction protocols with the main social landlords.

3.29 There is a need to continue to review and develop joint protocols with a number of internal and external partners, including pre-eviction protocols with social landlords and supported housing providers.

3.30 There is a need to continue to provide training for partner organisations, and in the longer term, identify how they may be able to assist in the delivery of personal housing plans.

Rough Sleeping

Levels of Rough Sleeping

3.31 There was a significant increase in rough sleeping from 2014 to 2018. This mirrored the national increase in rough sleeping.

3.32 In 2018 Wirral had the highest level of rough sleeping across the City Region. However, during 2019 Wirral Council made a successful bid for RSI funding for an assertive outreach service. This has resulted in a 62.5% decrease in levels according to the official annual count.

3.33 The Assertive Outreach Service has been successful in reducing the number of individuals sleeping rough and increasing access to the emergency accommodation.

3.34 In October 2019, 5 rough sleepers were found by the Assertive Outreach Service, and 20 individuals were accessing emergency accommodation on any given night. It should be noted that some of these may have accessed the accommodation directly.

- 3.35 There is a need to develop a continued service that prevents clients from rough sleeping, reducing the flow of new rough sleepers onto the street, and to secure longer-term funding for the assertive outreach service.

Understanding of the nature of rough sleeping

- 3.36 There is no centralised database to capture details about rough sleeping. Having adopted the stock/flow/returner intelligence the Council will have a better understanding of the level and nature of rough sleeping across the Wirral
- 3.37 There is a need to better understand the health needs of this client group to address both immediate and longer-term needs and, in the longer term, develop options for respite and end of life care.
- 3.38 The Streetlink number should be more widely promoted to ensure that both agencies and the public know how to report rough sleepers, so that targeted help can be offered.

Alternative accommodation options

- 3.39 There is a need to ensure that emergency accommodation provision makes the best use of the available beds, helping to create a clear pathway off the streets and into services, and including a review of how beds are allocated (and for how long).
- 3.40 Alternative, private accommodation should be procured to provide a safe, private space for clients requiring an emergency bed. Funding opportunities should be explored.

Day service provision

- 3.41 There is also potentially a need to strengthen formal and structured day service provision to engage with rough sleepers throughout the day, offering a range of services and activities under one roof.

A collaborative approach

- 3.42 It is important to continue to harness the goodwill of volunteers, Faith community and providers, and the delivery of actions within the Homelessness Strategy may provide a co-ordination vehicle for doing this.

Housing Related Support Services

High demand

- 3.43 Despite significant levels of housing-related support provision across the Wirral for homeless and socially excluded clients, demand for this accommodation outstrips supply. The gap between demand and supply is increasing on an annual basis.

- 3.44 The waiting list for accessing supported housing peaked at its highest level in October 2019 with 196 people waiting to access supported housing. This is linked to the lack of move-on options for people in supported provision.

Increasingly complex needs

- 3.45 The most frequently occurring support need is mental health, followed by physical health and disability and domestic abuse. 72% of all MainStay assessments identified poor mental health as a current issue.
- 3.46 There are a number of refusals by providers due to high levels of risk and clients needs being too high. This may indicate that some provision may require reconfiguration to fully meet the increasing complexity of need that clients are presenting with.
- 3.47 During 2018/19, the majority of cases have moved on in a planned way, 66.5%.
- 3.48 While the majority of people move on from supported accommodation in a planned way into alternative accommodation, eviction is the second-highest single reason for leaving supported housing and accounts for 18% of all moves. This may link to the higher and more complex support needs that clients are presenting with, leading to a rise in challenging behaviour and a lack of engagement.

Suitability and gaps in provision

- 3.49 Some issues have been identified concerning the physical nature of some of the supported housing projects, with concerns that these may not provide the best environment for recovery out of homelessness. The lack of provision of supported accommodation specifically for women was also identified.
- 3.50 There is a need to undertake a detailed needs assessment and review of housing-related support services, in order to respond to the current identified need and shape what future provision should look like. The findings from this should be used to inform a robust commissioning plan.

Move-on

- 3.51 There is a significant issue concerning a lack of move-on from supported accommodation. Undertaking Homeless Link's MOPP may provide a better understanding of the issue. Progressing the existing review of the current 'virtual' Move on Priority Panel and developing a coordinated private landlord offer could help improve move-on options.

Settled Accommodation

High demand for social housing

- 3.52 The 2018 Statistical Data Return (SDR) reports a total of 23,234 affordable dwellings across Wirral Borough (22,823 affordable/social rented and 471 intermediate tenure).
- 3.53 According to the emerging SHMA household survey 2019, households in Birkenhead are more likely to live in this type of accommodation (25.7% of households). Rural areas and those to the west of the Borough have the lowest levels of affordable accommodation.
- 3.54 Since 2016/17 the number of households on the Housing Register has remained relatively steady at around 9,000. As at 31st March 2019 there were 8,797 registered households. The register is dominated by applicants requiring one-bed homes, representing 58% of the register.

Reducing supply of social housing

- 3.55 During the financial year 2018/19, there were 649 properties allocated to people on the Wirral Housing register via Choice Based Lettings or via direct Council nomination of urgent cases. This figure has fallen by 49% since 2013/14.
- 3.56 The number of 4-bedroom properties being let has seen the most significant decrease over this time at 71%. One-bed property lettings have declined by 40%
- 3.57 Demand for social rented housing far outweighs the supply available, with 25 single person applicants for every one-bed property let. A shortfall of 705 affordable homes is estimated by the emerging strategic housing market assessment; however, it is important that this is considered further and placed in the context of viability in terms of developing supply further.

Affordability in the private rented sector

- 3.58 From 2001 to 2011, Wirral's private rented sector grew from 8.8% to 15.8%. This is reflective of the picture across the North West of England as a whole. Private rented accommodation makes up almost one in four (24.9%) of households in Wallasey, compared to 16.9% for Wirral Borough as a whole
- 3.59 Comparing the rental price in 2018 with that in 2010 indicates that there has been around a 5% increase in median and lower quartile rental prices locally, which is higher than that experienced regionally.
- 3.60 Further indicative data identified from web sites such as Zoopla suggests that in some areas of the Borough, private rents are within or close to Wirral's Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates. This is particularly the case for Bidston, Birkenhead wards where LHA would cover or be within £50 PCM of average rental levels for most the corresponding property types. In some wards however such as Heswall, there are greater gaps between LHA rates and private rent levels , for example, here there is a £361 PCM shortfall in LHA for a 3-bedroom property, illustrating the variety of conditions within Wirral's rental market.
- 3.61 The shared room rate fails to cover rental levels for 1-bedroom properties in all of the ward areas.

3.62 Landlords reported that generally, tenants stay in their properties for more than three years, and the average length of tenancy is increasing.

Working with private sector landlords

3.63 The homelessness review identified that there was some potential to work more closely with private sector landlords, 78% of those who responded to our survey believing that the private rented sector has a role to play in meeting the needs of homeless households.

3.64 There was a lack of awareness of incentives such as the payment of cash deposits, rent in advance and housing-related support.

Resources

Budget uncertainty against increased demand

3.65 The Council homelessness budget has remained fairly static and has therefore not increased with higher demand on services, homelessness and rough sleeping levels although the Council has been successful in securing grants to support wider activity. Work is on-going to look at changing needs - such as those for homelessness – and new ways of working.

3.66 Expenditure on temporary accommodation has increased significantly. Financial support from Government through New Burdens Funding and Flexible Homelessness Grant has an uncertain future and the potential for further pressure on Council budgets.

3.67 Short-term Trailblazer Funding for 2019-21 is being used to fund three specialist posts within the Housing Options Team - Private Rented Sector Officer, Debt & Money Adviser and Early Intervention and Prevention Officer.

3.68 The role of Discretionary Housing Payments in supporting homeless prevention activities is recognised by the authority with the Government funding supplemented by Council reserves.

3.69 The Local Welfare Assistance scheme, another source of prevention funding, is currently under review.

3.70 The Support Budget for socially excluded groups has reduced over the years as part of reviewing previous strategy commissioning. Funding split between client groups has however remained fairly constant over the last few years and is consistent with the cohort of people presenting to the service, albeit demands and pressure for those over-25 have been increasing.

3.71 A further bid to MCHLG's Rough Sleeper Initiative funding to enable the continuation of the service will be made in December 2019.

3.72 As a minimum, it will be essential to safeguard the homelessness budget. Moving forward, the budget should be increased to respond to the increasing demand on the service and the wider costs of homelessness to the public purse.

Informal Consultation

- 3.73 Consultation has been central to the development of this homelessness review and strategy. A range of different methods were used, including:
- 3 focus group with services users/residents;
 - Customer questionnaire (21 responses);
 - Rough sleeper and single persons questionnaire (12 responses);
 - Individual discussions with selected stakeholders (Shelter, Property Pool Plus, Cheshire & Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, Public Health, Adult Social Care, Children’s Services, Probation and Substance Misuse Specialist Nurse);
 - Stakeholder questionnaire (19 responses);
 - Consultation with stakeholders at two Homelessness Forum meetings (20-30 attendees);
 - Private sector landlord questionnaire (23 responses);
 - Focus group with Housing Options Staff, Property Pool Plus and Housing Related Support Teams; and
 - Follow up Staff questionnaire (12 responses).

Customers

- 3.74 Customers identified the need to raise awareness of services so that people know where to go for help when they become homeless.
- 3.75 Some users had mixed experience of the help that they had received from the Housing Options Service. Although, others spoke positively about the support they were receiving, providing both practical help but also someone that would listen to them.
- 3.76 Customers were very positive about the support they received in supported accommodation. A small number of people raised some concerns in relation to the quality of support provided within supported accommodation and also raised issues in relation to safety, and lack of move on into more permanent accommodation was identified as an issue.
- 3.77 Those who had slept rough raised concerns in relation to the current Night Shelter provision, both in relation to priority for hostel beds, safety and the lack of personal space. They identified the need for self-contained emergency provision and somewhere for rough sleepers to go during the day.

Staff Consultation – Housing Options, Property Pool Plus and Housing Related Support Teams

- 3.78 There is a strong team approach to working to prevent and relieve homelessness. Although, following the implementation of the HRA, there is now a need to review service delivery and resources to ensure the team can achieve prevention and early intervention.
- 3.79 While the HRA has led to an improved service for customers, it has also led to a significantly increased workload, with paperwork impacting upon casework. There is a need to review systems, processes and structures to deal more efficiently with triage/advice cases, ensuring the service is accessible to all customers and opportunities for prevention can be maximised
- 3.80 There is a need to raise awareness of what the service can offer with both customers and partner agencies and to improve joint working with Housing Associations to ensure homelessness can be prevented.
- 3.81 There is also a need to improve joint working and procedures between Housing Options and Property Pool Plus, alongside reviewing the policy. Improved working practices include integrated computer systems, notification protocols and arrangements for nominations.
- 3.82 The following gaps were highlighted:
- Improvements to website and development of self-help tools
 - A better offer to private sector landlords and ensure that the team has sufficient resources to deliver it
 - Raise awareness of the housing options and support available to people fleeing domestic abuse, including assessing if more refuge provision is required. More affordable provision for people under the age of 35.
 - Specialised provision for those who have poor mental health who are assessed as having capacity who do not meet the criteria for social care
 - Female-specific provision
 - a need for specific supported housing provision that meets the needs of the most complex customers

Stakeholder Consultation

- 3.83 Partners spoke positively of the service delivered by the Council's Housing Options service with good joined-up working although the online referral system to access Housing Options can be a barrier for some clients, including prisoners. Stakeholders (Public Health and Substance Misuse Specialist) would like to see a dedicated Housing Options Post within the hospital although numbers for discharge may not warrant a FTE post.
- 3.84 There is a lack of any specialist supported housing provision for those who have addressed drug/alcohol use, being accommodated within existing provision is very detrimental to the client and is likely to result in them using again.
- 3.85 It is difficult to find appropriate solutions for those with complex needs. Floating support needs to be available for longer than 12 weeks – need to recognise that some high needs/complex clients will need on-going longer support in order to be able to maintain a tenancy
- 3.86 There is a need for an accommodation project for domestic abuse perpetrators to reduce the risk to the survivors and other family members
- 3.87 A need for an increased range of move on options for young people was identified including houseshares and a matching service
- 3.88 Barriers to move on were identified as rent arrears and service charge arrears, lack of effective private sector landlord offer, allocations policy and social landlord's position in relation to arrears and offending, lack of affordable accommodation, including single persons accommodation.
- 3.89 Issues were raised in relation to the allocations policy by a number of stakeholders especially in relation to accommodating offenders
- 3.90 There is a gap in the provision of affordable social housing provision and a need to improve access to the private rented sector
- 3.91 Issues were raised in relation to the Night Shelter in relation to some people finding it an unsafe environment, and also the need to improve the provision moving forward to provide private safe areas for people

4. Next Steps

Consultation

- 4.1 In order to ensure that the information contained within this review is a true reflection of homelessness across the Wirral, the review will be made available to all stakeholders and the wider public for consultation.
- 4.2 The consultation process is an integral part of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy development process. Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council is required to give all partners who supply services and those who use them, the opportunity to discuss and agree what the future priorities that underpin the Homelessness Strategy should be.

Strategy Development

- 4.3 Following this review, the Council will produce and publish a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. This will ensure a strategic approach to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping across the Wirral, ensuring that local solutions can be developed to meet the needs of its community.
- 4.4 Wirral's Homelessness Forum will be fundamental to the development of this strategy, and the implementation and monitoring of the targets agreed within the action plan.
- 4.5 The Strategy must reflect the joint approach by agencies to tackle and prevent homelessness in the Borough and therefore, it is appropriate that a multi-agency approach is taken to: -
- Agreeing priorities.
 - Identifying key actions.
 - Agreeing an action plan.
 - Jointly delivering the action plan.
- 4.6 The Council is committed to working with its partners to preventing homelessness and ending rough sleeping in Wirral.



Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Review 2019

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Please note that in this report some of the tables include rounded figures. This can result in some column or row totals not adding up to 100 or to the anticipated row or column 'total' due to the use of rounded decimal figures. We include this description here as it covers all tables and associated textual commentary included. If tables or figures are to be used in-house then we recommend the addition of a similarly worded statement being included as a note to each table used.

This Homelessness Review has been prepared by arc⁴ Ltd on behalf of Wirral Council.

This report takes into account the particular instructions and requirements of our client. It is not intended for and should not be relied upon by any third party and no responsibility is undertaken to any third party.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Homelessness Review has been prepared and undertaken by arc4 Ltd on behalf of Wirral Council. As such this Review complies with the associated and relevant legislation Homelessness Act 2002 and the associated Code of Guidance. arc4 have undertaken an independent review of homelessness across the Wirral using a range of data sources and undertaken extensive consultation.
- 1.2 This Homelessness Review will form the principle element of the required evidence base for Wirral Council to develop its Homelessness Strategy. It sets out to identify, capture and quantify the levels of current provision and future demand for homelessness services within the Borough and through its findings will underpin and inform the development of the Council's strategic response to homeless prevention and ending rough sleeping.

Legislative Context

- 1.3 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires every local authority to carry out a review of homelessness in the Borough every five years, to develop and publish a Homelessness Strategy based on this review and to consult with other local statutory and voluntary organisations.
- 1.4 This review will provide a basis for a strategic approach to tackle and prevent homelessness and rough sleeping and will build upon the positive work already taking place to provide individuals in housing need with a range of housing options to prevent and alleviate homelessness across the Borough.
- 1.5 The Homelessness Review is required to cover;
- A picture of the scale and nature of homelessness in the Borough, and likely future levels of homelessness.
 - A map and audit of services including the homelessness service, temporary accommodation, advice, prevention, access to permanent accommodation and provision of support.
 - The gaps in provision and any overlaps.
 - A review of resources available to be spent on homelessness.
 - A record of the views of stakeholders and service users.
 - An analysis of the links between homelessness and other key strategies.
- 1.6 The Homelessness Act requires every local authority to carry out a review of homelessness in the Borough every five years, to develop and publish a Homelessness Strategy based on this review and to consult with other local statutory and voluntary organisations.
- 1.7 The Homelessness Review must consider the following;
- d) Current and future levels of homelessness;
 - e) Activities which are carried out for any of the following purposes:
 - i) Preventing homelessness

- ii) Securing that accommodation is available for homeless people in the district and will be available for people in the district who may become homeless;
 - iii) Providing support for people in the district who
 - are homeless
 - may become homeless
 - have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again;
 - f) Resources available to the housing authority, the social services authority for the district, other public authorities, voluntary organisations and other persons for activities mentioned in b.
- 1.8 The Homelessness Strategy must include actions to:
- a) Prevent homelessness;
 - b) Ensure there is sufficient accommodation available for people who are, or may become homeless;
 - c) Ensure there is satisfactory support for people who are, or may become homeless, or need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again.
- 1.9 The Act states that reviews and strategies apply to all homeless people, not just those who the Council has accepted a full duty towards under the Housing Act.

Wirral's Approach

- 1.10 Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping is a key priority for Wirral Council and its partner organisations. This comprehensive review will provide an evidence base to inform the Authority's Homelessness Strategy.
- 1.11 This review will provide a basis for a strategic approach to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping and provide the services to support and accommodate those in housing need.
- 1.12 Whilst Wirral Council as part of its statutory duty has produced this document; it is not simply a review of the services provided by the Council. There are multiple and complex issues that can cause homelessness and therefore in compiling this review, arc4, together with the Council has worked closely with a variety of other statutory and voluntary agencies to gain a detailed understanding of homelessness across the Wirral.
- 1.13 The review is a multi-agency document, which recognises that partnership working is key to preventing homelessness and developing sustainable housing and support solutions.

Methodology

- 1.14 The Review process sought to identify the needs of all homeless people, and those likely to become homeless. This was achieved by compiling a detailed picture of the past, current and future nature and levels of homelessness across the area.
- 1.15 The Review pulls together available data from a wide range of sources including H-CLIC data, Mainstay data, outreach data together with information from partner agencies. A

number of consultation and mapping exercises were also completed. This information provides a detailed picture of the levels and causes of homelessness across the Wirral, and used together with demographic data, the review identifies unmet need and future trends.

- 1.16 Consultation with staff, partners and customers was critical to the review process, and will continue to inform the development of the strategy and improvements to existing Council services. We have consulted extensively with service users and stakeholders through a range of methods to ensure that the Review directly reflects the experiences of those who have been homeless and those working in the sector.
- 1.17 Data following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2018/19 is not directly comparable with data from previous years due to the change in legislation and the newly introduced Government monitoring framework H-CLIC.
- 1.18 This review was undertaken 18 months following the implementation of the HRA 2017 on 3rd April 2018. The review has analysed the published H-CLIC data; however, it is acknowledged that this data is experimental, and that performance of the Housing Options service directly following the implementation of the new legislation does not reflect current operational practice or performance. As such some caution should be given to the analysis and findings associated with this data, and also when making comparisons to both national statistics and regional statistics.
- 1.19 For this reason, we are committed to undertake another data review in 2020 using the refined 2018/19 data set and the full year data for 2019/20. This will ensure that our Strategy and associated action plan fully considers findings based upon up –to-date accurate data that reflects current performance. We will review the Strategy and action plan following this future data review.

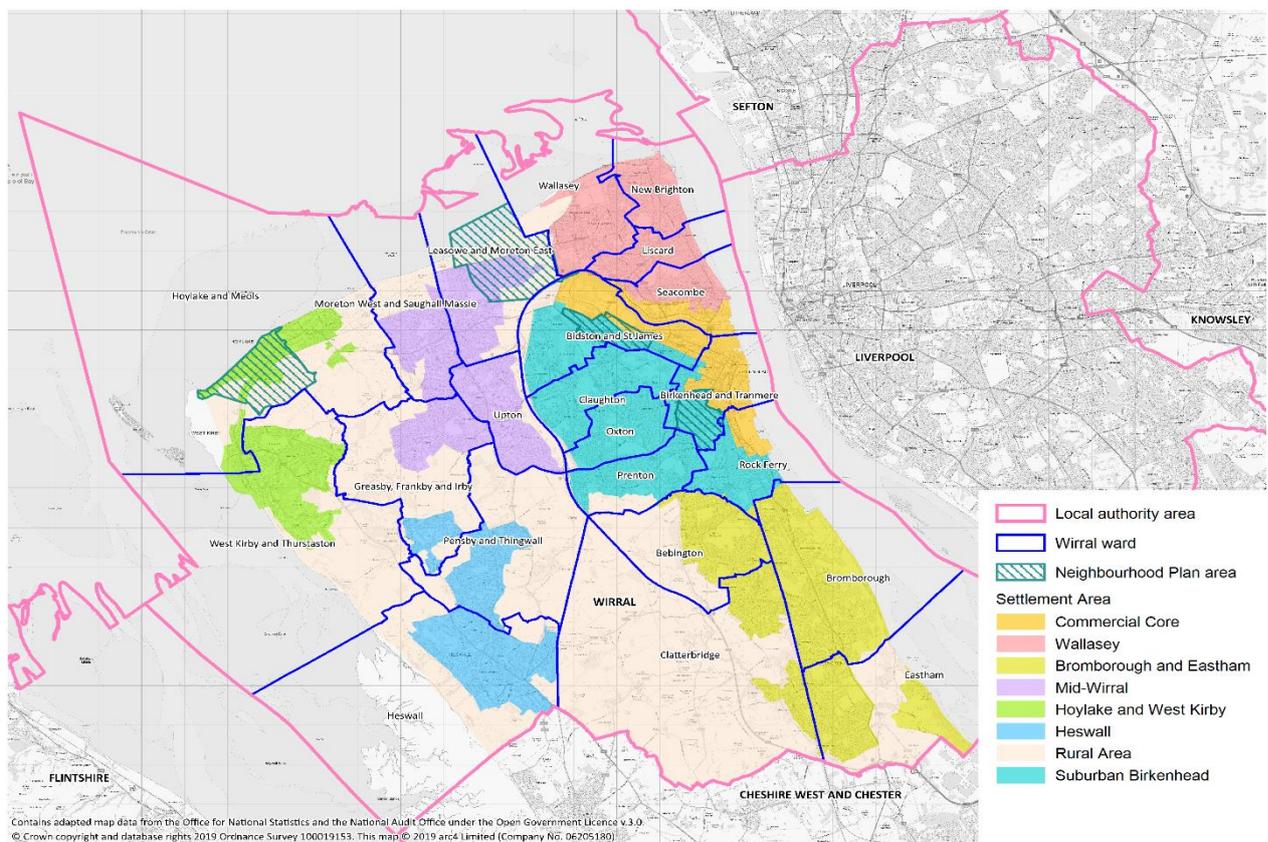
2. A profile of the Wirral - people and housing

2.1 Wirral is a metropolitan Borough in Merseyside located in the North West of England. It is located on a peninsula with Cheshire West and Chester to the South and contains several key transport corridors. The Borough is also connected to the Liverpool City Region across the River Mersey. The resident population of the Borough is estimated to be 323,235 in 2018.

2.2 The diverse Borough includes the town of Birkenhead, a series of towns and suburban areas and rural localities. For planning policy purposes, the Borough is divided into 8 settlement areas:

- SA1 Wallasey
- SA2 Commercial Core
- SA3 Suburban Birkenhead
- SA4 Bromborough & Eastham
- SA5 Mid-Wirral
- SA6 Hoylake and West Kirby
- SA7 Heswall
- SA8 Rural Areas

Map 2.1 Wirral Council Area



Source: Wirral SHMA 2019

- 2.3 Census 2011 statistics help paint a picture of the nation and how we live. They provide a detailed snapshot of the population and its characteristics and underpin funding allocation to provide public services.
- 2.4 Key data is set out here about the people and housing in Wirral to provide contextual information for the homelessness review.

People

Table 2.1 Age profile		
Age Groups (Persons)	Number	%
0 to 4 years	18,514	5.8%
5 to 15 years	40,771	12.7%
16 to 29 years	51,782	16.2%
30 to 44 years	58,992	18.4%
45 to 59 years	67,018	21.0%
60 to 74 years	53,059	16.6%
75 to 89 years	26,794	8.4%
90 and over	2,853	0.9%

Source: Census 2011 NOMIS

Table 2.2 Gender profile		
Sex (Persons)	Number	%
Male	153,847	48.1%
Female	165,936	51.9%

Source: Census 2011 NOMIS

Table 2.3 Ethnic profile		
Ethnicity (Persons)	Number	%
White	310,156	97.0%
Mixed	3,286	1.0%
Asian	5,116	1.6%
Black	695	0.2%
Other	530	0.2%

Source: Census 2011 NOMIS

Table 2.4 Religious profile		
Religion (Persons)	Number	%
Christian	225,147	70.4%
Buddhist	905	0.3%
Hindu	742	0.2%
Jewish	265	0.1%
Muslim	1,809	0.6%
Sikh	236	0.1%
Other religion	830	0.3%
No religion	68,209	21.3%

Religion not stated	21,640	6.8%
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Source: Census 2011 NOMIS

Table 2.5 Economic profile		
Economic Activity (Persons)	Number	%
Economically active: In employment	135,543	58.7%
Economically active: Unemployed	11,939	5.2%
Economically active: Full-time student	5,758	2.5%
Economically inactive: Retired	38,761	16.8%
Economically inactive: Student (including full-time students)	10,491	4.5%
Economically inactive: Looking after home or family	9,046	3.9%
Economically inactive: Long-term sick or disabled	14,724	6.4%
Economically inactive: Other	4,589	2.0%

Source: Census 2011 NOMIS

Table 2.6 Household profile		
	Number	%
One person household: Aged 65 and over	20,621	14.7%
One person household: Other	26,708	19.0%
One family only: All aged 65 and over	11,955	8.5%
One family only: Married couple	42,673	30.4%
One family only: Same-sex civil partnership couple	132	0.1%
One family only: Cohabiting couple	11,934	8.5%
One family only: Lone parent	18,994	13.5%
Other household types: With one dependent child	1,643	1.2%
Other household types: With two or more dependent children	1,345	1.0%
Other household types: All full-time students	22	0.0%
Other household types: All aged 65 and over	519	0.4%
Other household types: Other	4,037	2.9%

Source: Census 2011 NOMIS

Housing

Table 2.7 Housing tenure		
Tenure (Households)	Number	%
Owned outright	46,806	33.3%
Owned with a mortgage or loan	48,037	34.2%
Shared ownership	713	0.5%
Social rented	21,329	15.2%
Private rented	22,275	15.8%
Living rent free	1,423	1.0%

Source: Census 2011 NOMIS

Housing Type (Households)	Number	%
Whole house or bungalow: Detached	23,818	16.9%
Whole house or bungalow: Semi-detached	58,520	41.6%
Whole house or bungalow: Terraced	34,760	24.7%
Flat, maisonette or apartment: Purpose-built block of flats or tenement	16,066	11.4%
Flat, maisonette or apartment: Part of a converted or shared house	5,439	3.9%
Flat, maisonette or apartment: In commercial building	1,667	1.2%
Unshared dwelling: Caravan or other mobile or temporary structure	17	0.0%
Shared dwelling	296	0.2%

Source: Census 2011 NOMIS

3. Strategic and Legislative Context

- 3.1 In taking forward the recommendations from this review it is important to understand what is driving homelessness and housing demand and how policy decisions at a national and local level are shaping the response.

National Context

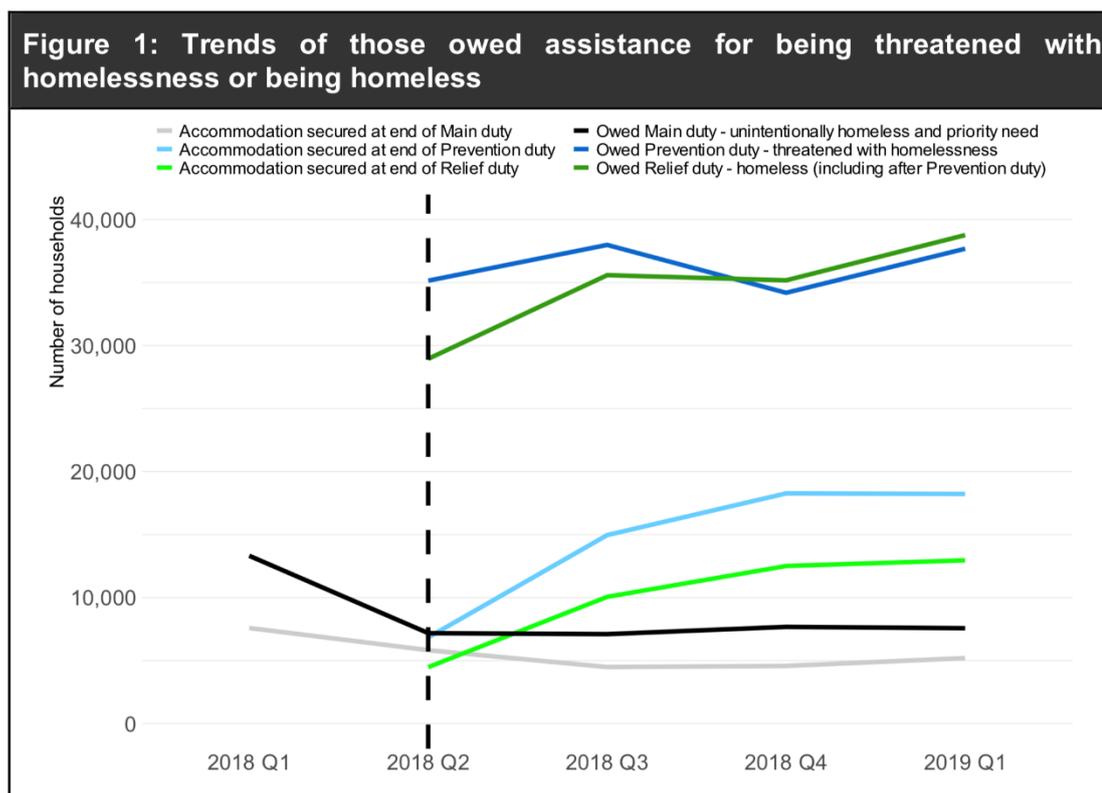
Legislative Change – Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

- 3.2 The HRA fundamentally reforms existing homelessness legislation, placing new duties on local authorities and public bodies. The Act introduced new prevention and relief duties, each of which last for 56 days, meaning local housing authorities must now take reasonable steps to try to prevent and/or relieve people of their homelessness if they are eligible. The local housing authority must work with the applicant to develop a personalised housing plan. The plan identifies the reasonable steps that the applicant and the local housing authority will take to ensure the applicant has and is able to retain or obtain suitable accommodation. Any accommodation that they secure at prevention or relief stage must be available to the household for a period of at least six months.
- 3.3 The reforms brought in by the Act mean that:
- support must be offered to all eligible people who are threatened with homelessness or who are homeless, providing support to a greater number of people than before;
 - there is a shift in the focus of services from crisis intervention to prevention, meaning that services must intervene earlier and help more people to avert crisis; and
 - there is a stronger duty on local housing authorities to provide free advice and information designed to meet the needs of certain vulnerable groups, including those who are not eligible for further assistance.

National Homelessness Levels

- 3.4 In September 2019 MHCLG published its fourth quarterly statistical release since the Homelessness Reduction Act came into effect. The table below summarises the breakdown of outcomes each quarter in 2018/19 under the HRA. As detailed in the introduction this data is classed as experimental. It has been reviewed by MHCLG and new data reports being produced for Local Authorities but have not yet been published. There is therefore an acceptance that local data may differ from the published H-CLIC data. This also needs to be taken into account when making any national or regional comparisons.

Figure 3.1 Breakdown of homelessness outcomes 2018/19



Source: MHCLG Statutory Homeless Release

3.5 The following observations can be made from this data and the majority reflect the impact of the HRA in its first year of implementation:

- Over the year from April to June 2018 (Quarter 1) to January to March 2019 (Quarter 4) the number of prevention duties owed increased 7.2%, from 35,150 to 37,690; which would be expected due to the introduction of the HRA which implemented a prevention duty.
- The number of households where prevention duty ended nearly trebled from 11,030 to 31,930. Of which the number of households who ended the prevention duty with secure accommodation over the year also nearly trebled from 6,840 to 18,220;
- 58% of the 100,800 prevention outcomes during 2018/19 were for accommodation secured. 20% of the outcomes were because the households were homeless;
- from April to June 2018 to January to March 2019 the number of relief duties owed from the initial assessment increased 23.6%, from 26,480 to 32,740;
- the number of households that were homeless at the end of the prevention duty and would be owed a relief duty has more than doubled from 2,470 to 6,030;
- the number of households where the relief duty ended more than doubled from 7,920 to 32,270. Of which the number of households who ended the relief duty with secure accommodation over the year from April to June 2018 to January to March 2019 has also more than doubled from 4,480 to 12,960;

- 43% of the 93,200 relief outcomes during 2018/19 were for accommodation secured. 32% of the outcomes were because 56 days had elapsed, and the household was still homeless;
- in the first quarter of 2018/19, main duty acceptances fell. From April to June 2018 to January to March 2019 the number of households owed the main duty has increased 5.4%, from 7,180 to 7,570. This figure has increased over the year due to the lag in households progressing through either/both the prevention and relief duty before reaching an assessment for main duty;
- between January to March 2019, the most common reason for loss of last settled home was friends or family no longer willing or able to accommodate which accounted for 18,150 households or 25.8% assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness. The second largest category not including ‘other’ was termination of an assured shorthold tenancy (AST), 14,700 households or 20.9%; and
- 1,780 households were rough sleeping at time of application, 380 of which were in London and 1,400 in the rest of England. This is a 5.8% decrease from the 1,890 households reported in October to December 2018.

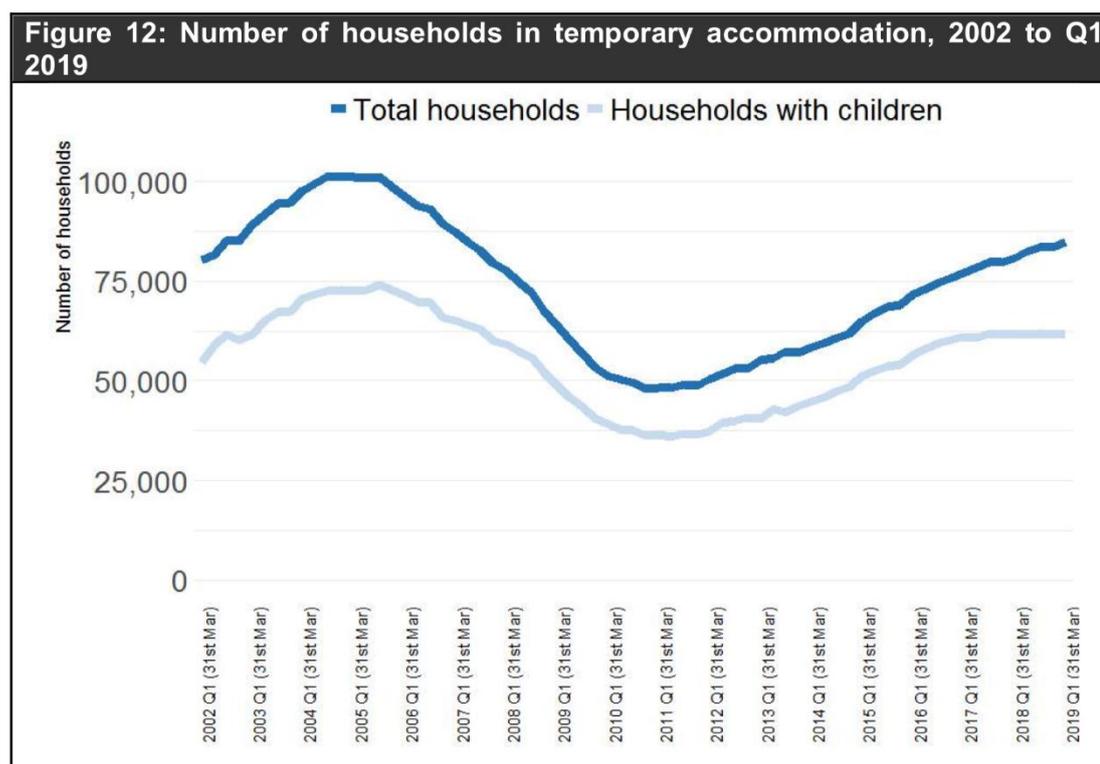
3.6 The graph below details the number of homeless acceptances quarterly since 1998. The number of main homelessness duty acceptances peaked in Q3 2003 at 35,770 before falling to the previous low of 9,430 in Q4 2009. For Q1 2019 the number of main duty acceptances is 7,570, which has decreased 1.4% from 7,680 in October to December 2018.

Figure 3.2 Homeless acceptances 1998 onwards



Source: MHCLG Statutory Homeless Release

Figure 3.3 Households in temporary accommodation 2002 to 2019



Source: MHCLG Statutory Homeless Release

- 3.7 On 31 March 2019, the total number of households in temporary accommodation arranged by local authorities under homelessness legislation was 84,740. This was 5.0% higher than the 80,720 households reported a year earlier and up 76.5% on the low of 48,010 on 31 December 2010.

National Rough Sleeping Strategy

- 3.8 The National Rough Sleeping Strategy¹ August 2018 sets out Government plans to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027. It includes a range of commitments, intended both to help those who are sleeping rough currently or are at risk of doing so, and to lay the foundations for a system focused on prevention, early intervention, and a rapid rehousing approach to recovery.
- 3.9 The 2027 vision is to “Prevent, Intervene, and Recover” recognising that if the Government is to minimise the considerable harm caused by rough sleeping, the most important thing is to prevent it from happening in the first place.
- 3.10 Key measures include:
- embedding prevention across Government: £3.2 million per year for two years for a new range of pilots to help people leaving prison to find stable and sustainable

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733421/Rough-Sleeping-Strategy_WEB.pdf

accommodation. New funding for intensive support for care leavers with complex needs;

- new measures to ensure the structures are in place to end rough sleeping. This includes a review of legislation around homelessness and rough sleeping, including the Vagrancy Act;
- strengthening local homelessness strategies and introducing a new emphasis on rough sleeping;
- looking at affordability in the private rented sector, to develop policy options for post-2020 when the current Local Housing Allowance freeze ends;
- up to £45 million to continue the work of the Rough Sleeping Initiative;
- somewhere Safe to Stay Pilots – up to £17 million for work in approximately 15 areas to rapidly assess the needs of people at risk of rough sleeping and support them to get the right help;
- funding for rough sleeping navigators: new specialists who will help people who sleep rough to access the appropriate local services, get off the streets and into settled accommodation;
- funding mental health and substance misuse treatment;
- up to £135 million of dormant accounts funds, the majority of which will be used to support innovative financing for homes for people who sleep rough or are at risk of rough sleeping;
- Move On Funding – a £50 million fund that will deliver a new supply of homes outside of London for people who are sleeping rough, as well as those who are ready to move on from hostels or refuges and might need additional support;
- Supported Lettings – up to £19 million of new funding to provide flexible support in homes provided for people with a history of rough sleeping;
- Local Lettings Agencies – new funding to help local areas grow enterprises to support vulnerable people into accommodation; and
- Housing First – £28 million of funding for Housing First pilots in Greater Manchester, the West Midlands and the Liverpool City Region to support people with multiple complex needs. The Housing First model, which was first implemented in the US during the 1990's differs from the 'staircase' model by adopting the principle that housing is an inalienable right, and should not be used as a 'carrot' to ensure engagement with support, but rather that other support needs should be, in theory, easier to address when someone is already living in stable housing. In the Housing First model, the independent accommodation is provided right at the outset of the process.

National Rough Sleeping Levels

- 3.11 In February 2019 MHCLG published the rough sleeping data for Autumn 2018. The key findings were:

- the total number of people counted or estimated to be sleeping rough on a single night was 4,677;
- this was down by 74 people or 2% from the 2017 total of 4,751, and was up 2,909 people or 165% from the 2010 total of 1,768;
- London accounted for 27% of the total number of people sleeping rough in England. This is up from 24% of the England total in 2017;
- 64% were UK nationals, compared to 71% in 2017. 22% were EU nationals from outside the UK, compared to 16% in 2017. 3% were non-EU nationals, compared to 4% in 2017; and
- 14% of the people recorded sleeping rough were women, the same as in 2017; and 6% were aged 25 years or under, compared to 8% in 2017.

Policy Drivers

Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment

- 3.12 The UK Government's Welfare Reform Act 2012 legislated for the biggest change to the welfare system for over 60 years. The main elements of the Welfare Reform Act introduced two new benefits: Universal Credit (UC) which replaces six current Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) income-related/based working-age benefits for people in and out of work; and Personal Independence Payment (PIP).
- 3.13 Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is a benefit for people aged 16 to 64 with a long-term health condition or disability. Claimants currently in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) have been required at the point of renewal to make a new claim for PIP. The DWP is gradually inviting DLA claimants with a long term or indefinite award to claim PIP.

Shared Room Rate for single persons aged under 35

- 3.14 The introduction of the shared room rate has reduced the housing options available to young single people aged under 35. It was introduced in January 2012 and meant that the maximum Local Housing Allowance that can be paid for a single person under 35 is limited to the rate for a single room in a shared property or a bedsit. There are exemptions, e.g. people who have previously spent at least three months living in supported accommodation – this may lead to individuals between the ages of 25 and 34 wishing to remain in supported accommodation for a longer period than they need in order to benefit from this exemption.

Under-occupancy charge or the Spare Room Subsidy

- 3.15 In April 2013 property size restrictions for working-age people in social housing were introduced, bringing the same rules in that had been applied to private sector lettings. This has become known as the "bedroom tax" and affects how much rent can be covered by both housing benefit or the universal credit element for households who are

under-occupying. The maximum rent that can be covered is reduced by 14% for one spare bedroom and 25% for 2 or more spare bedrooms.

Benefit Cap

- 3.16 The Benefit Cap restricts the total amount of benefits an out-of-work household can receive. From 7th November 2016, the benefit cap was reduced to £384.62 for couples and those with children, and £257.69 a week for single people. There are exemptions for households where someone is in work and in receipt of DLA/ESA.

Supported Housing Funding

- 3.17 Following Government's announcement that the Local Housing Allowance Cap for supported housing had been shelved, it consulted upon a new funding model in October 2017 but concluded that² *"continuing to provide funding via the welfare system, together with a robust oversight regime, is the better option. We will maintain Housing Benefit for all supported housing, reflecting the needs of the vulnerable people who rely on it and the need for continued supply across the sector."*
- 3.18 It was noted that an oversight of quality and value for money must be achieved across the supported housing sector. Government committed to continue to work with providers, local authorities, membership bodies and resident representatives to put together a sound and robust oversight regime. This work will ensure quality and value for money across the whole supported housing sector.
- 3.19 In addition, a review of housing related support will be undertaken to better understand how housing and support currently fit together.

Changes to Private Rented Tenancies

- 3.20 The Government is *"committed to modernising the rented sector, and intends to introduce a new, fairer deal for both landlords and tenants"*. On 15 April 2019, it announced that it would put an end to so-called 'no-fault' evictions by repealing section 21 of the Housing Act 1988. Under the new framework, a tenant could not be evicted from their home without good reason. The end of assured shorthold tenancies is one of the main causes of homelessness nationally. It is hoped that this would provide tenants with more stability, protecting them from having to make frequent moves at short notice and enabling them to put down roots and plan for the future.
- 3.21 Under the proposals, landlords would have to issue a section 8 notice which can be implemented when a tenant has fallen into rent arrears, has been involved in criminal or antisocial behaviour or has broken the terms of the rent agreement, such as damaging the property. The Government has proposed to amend section 8 also to

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/funding-for-supported-housing-two-consultations>

include circumstances where a landlord wishes to regain their property should they wish to sell it or move into it themselves.

- 3.22 As at July 2019, a consultation³ was seeking views on how section 21 of the Housing Act 1988 has been used in the past, and the circumstances in which landlords should be able to regain possession once it has been abolished – including what changes may be necessary to the existing grounds for possession.
- 3.23 While these proposals are positive in responding to one of the main causes of homelessness, concerns have been expressed that the proposed changes may have a detrimental impact on the number of landlords wishing to continue to either rent their property, or becoming increasingly selective as to whom they rent, with the likely impact being felt most by vulnerable groups and those dependent on benefits.⁴

Other policy areas under consideration

- 3.24 Other policy areas currently being consulted upon or considered through calls for evidence:
- **Tackling homelessness together**⁵ - a consultation on statutory and non-statutory structures that support partnership working and accountability in homelessness services. This includes the role and effectiveness of homelessness forum meetings and the influence of the position of homelessness services in authorities' structures on the prominence given to reducing homelessness;
 - **Tenancy deposit reform**⁶ - a call for evidence to understand the barriers tenants face in providing a second deposit when moving from one tenancy to the next;
 - **Support for victims of domestic abuse in safe accommodation**⁷ - consultation on a new delivery model for accommodation-based support, including a statutory duty on local authorities to provide support to meet the diverse needs of victims of domestic abuse and their children; and
 - **Improving access to social housing for members of the Armed Forces**⁸ - consultation on new statutory guidance for local authorities to assist members of the Armed Forces, veterans, and their families, to access social housing.

³<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/a-new-deal-for-renting-resetting-the-balance-of-rights-and-responsibilities-between-landlords-and-tenants>

⁴<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-49032915>

⁵<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/tackling-homelessness-together>

⁶<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/tenancy-deposit-reform-a-call-for-evidence>

⁷<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/support-for-victims-of-domestic-abuse-in-safe-cocommodatio>

⁸<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/improving-access-to-social-housing-for-members-of-the-armed-forces>

Homeless Levels across the North West

- 3.25 In November 2018 Shelter published their report ‘Homelessness in Great Britain – the number behind the story’,⁹ estimating the true level of homelessness in Great Britain. It found there are estimated to be 13,000 more people who are homeless as at Q1 2018 than there were as at Q2 2017. This is a 4% increase in less than a year and an increase in the rate from 1 in 208 to 1 in 201.
- 3.26 The report identifies an “increase since the method was first used in Q2 2016 of over 25,000 people. The increase is largely driven by rises in people who are homeless and living in Temporary Accommodation and people who are rough sleeping. The biggest increases in England have been seen in the Midlands, Yorkshire and Humber and the North West.”¹⁰
- 3.27 The following table details rates of homelessness across the North West, Wirral has the 25th highest level of homelessness in the region out of 39 Boroughs/areas and ranks 275th nationally.

⁹

¹⁰https://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/1620236/Homelessness_in_Great_Britain_-_the_numbers_behind_the_story_V2.pdf

Local Authority	Homeless in Temp Acc	Rough Sleeping	Total people homeless	Population	Rate (1 in x)	National Rank	Regional rank
Manchester	3,948	94	4,042	545,501	135	34	1
Salford	603	49	652	251,332	385	83	2
Trafford	349	5	354	235,493	666	121	3
Bury	245	10	255	189,628	744	133	4
Tameside	220	43	263	244,119	856	146	5
Warrington	210	4	214	209,704	980	154	6
Bolton	245	17	262	284,813	1,086	164	7
Oldham	171	2	173	233,759	1,347	187	8
Rochdale	146	8	154	218,459	1,420	191	9
South Ribble	74	-	74	110,400	1,492	195	10
Blackpool	79	13	92	139,870	1,514	197	11
St Helens	101	9	110	179,331	1,629	204	12
Stockport	133	10	143	291,045	2,028	225	13
Barrow-in-Furness	31	-	31	67,099	2,165	231	14
Liverpool	181	33	214	491,549	2,292	235	15
Ribble Valley	25	-	25	59,504	2,346	237	16
Cheshire West & Chst	111	18	129	337,986	2,610	246	17
Knowsley	51	-	51	148,560	2,920	252	18
Wigan	81	30	111	324,650	2,925	253	19
Preston	29	19	48	141,346	2,953	254	20
Lancaster	43	4	47	142,489	3,032	258	21
Chorley	35	-	35	115,772	3,264	260	22
Burnley	24	1	25	87,705	3,545	266	23
Cheshire East	81	21	102	378,846	3,697	268	24
Wirral	66	14	80	322,796	4,035	275	25
Carlisle	25	1	26	108,274	4,086	276	26
Fylde	16	2	18	78,863	4,351	278	27
Blackburn w Darwen	31	2	33	148,772	4,492	279	28
Allerdale	19	1	20	97,213	4,777	283	29
South Lakeland	18	3	21	104,321	5,046	285	30
Halton	19	4	23	127,595	5,465	287	31
Sefton	40	9	49	274,589	5,605	288	32
West Lancashire	20	-	20	113,881	5,694	289	33
Pendle	14	-	14	90,969	6,478	295	34
Eden	7	1	8	52,779	6,597	296	35
Hynburn	-	6	6	80,410	13,402	305	36
Copeland	-	1	1	68,689	68,689	315	37
Wyre	-	-	-	110,426	N/A	321	38
Rossendale	-	-	-	70,365	N/A	321	38

Source: Shelter Homelessness in Great Britain – the numbers behind the story

Regional Context – Liverpool City Region

- 3.28 The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) was established on 1 April 2014. The area includes Wirral and five other local authorities; Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton and St Helens. The LCRCA works collaboratively with the Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to deliver economic growth. While the responsibility for Homelessness is the legislative responsibility of each individual local authority, regional responses to preventative initiatives can help achieve consistency and value for money.

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Plan 2018-2020¹¹

- 3.29 The LCRCA Plan for 2018-2020 contains eight high level priorities. Priority five is: *‘Good quality and affordable housing’*.

This priority is accompanied by the following vision:

‘We want everyone in the city region to have access to a good-quality home in a safe neighbourhood - safe, secure, good quality housing is a basic human right’.

To achieve this vision the Authority has developed a City Region Spatial Framework and Housing Strategy.

- 3.30 The LCR Strategic Housing & Employment Land Market Assessment (SHELMA)¹², 2012-2037, has been produced to inform the Spatial Strategy and each local Council’s Local Plan. The SHELMA identifies that Wirral sits within the Central Liverpool City Region Housing Market Area.
- 3.31 The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority has adopted a ‘brownfield first’ approach to housing development and reports having around 400 sites on its register to help identify priority sites for sustainable urban housing.

Liverpool City Region's Homelessness Approach

- 3.32 The Liverpool City Region recognise that “A safe and secure home is a basic human right. However, for far too many people across our city region homelessness and rough sleeping is a fact of life.”

Housing First

- 3.33 Liverpool City Region is one of just three places in England to be chosen to pilot the Housing First approach, which aims to tackle homelessness in a new way, based on international evidence.
- 3.34 Since being awarded £7.7 million by central Government to run the pilot, the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, in conjunction with its six local authorities, has put in place the necessary infrastructure to deliver this initiative.

¹¹ https://www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/LCRCA_Corporate_Plan_261018.pdf

¹² Liverpool City Regional SHELMA Executive Summary, March 2018, GL Hearn

- 3.35 This infrastructure has been based around advice from people with experience of homelessness and includes working with housing associations across the city region to make appropriate homes available.
- 3.36 The sixteen delivery staff from the Liverpool City Region’s Housing First programme are currently working with 60 homeless people in the first phase, and more teams will be established over the coming months to support approx. 350 people.
- 3.37 The Housing First pilot will be based upon the following 7 principles:
- People have a right to a home
 - Housing and support are separated
 - Flexible support is provided for as long as it is needed
 - Individuals have choice and control
 - An active engagement approach is used
 - The service is based on people’s strengths, goals and aspirations
 - A harm reduction approach is used

Homeless Prevention Trailblazer Programme

- 3.38 MHCLG awarded Liverpool City Region £2.1 million as part of the Homeless Prevention Trailblazer Programme. The Liverpool City Region will use this funding to provide an integrated package of support which would enable a step change in homelessness services across Liverpool City Region. This will include a focus on early intervention to improve upstream advice and support to all those at risk of homelessness.
- 3.39 The outcomes which will be achieved include:
- increase in homeless prevention;
 - reduction in the use of temporary accommodation and associated cost savings;
 - increase in numbers of people accessing employment, training and education;
 - improved health and wellbeing; and
 - reduction in rough sleeping.
- 3.40 The programme is funding 17 staff embedded across the 6 local authority districts to deliver the Trailblazing service. Those staff will be line managed locally but liaise closely with counterparts in the LLCR which is co-ordinated by the LCRC Homelessness Strategy Team.

Local Context – Wirral Council

Wirral Council Plan: A 2020 Vision ¹³

- 3.41 The Wirral Council Plan: A 2020 Vision (2015) contains 20 pledges which the Council and its partners are committed to achieving. Within the priority ‘Environment’ is the pledge to achieve ‘good quality housing’ and specifically the document states:

We will build and improve 7,000 houses over the lifetime of this five-year plan. Our plans include building 3,500 new homes, improving 2,250 private sector properties and bringing 1,250 empty homes back into use by 2020. We will also continue to tackle the challenges and causes of homelessness in Wirral.

Wirral Housing Strategy 2016 ¹⁴

- 3.42 The Wirral Housing Strategy sets out how the ambition for housing, set out in the Wirral Plan, will be achieved. The Housing Strategy contains the targets of delivering at least 3,500 new homes, including 1,000 new homes at Wirral Waters and developing 300 new extra care units, both by 2020.

- 3.43 The strategy contains three priorities:

- Building more homes to meet our economic growth ambitions;

We want to ensure housing in Wirral is affordable for households in the owner-occupied, social and private rented sectors and will therefore explore housing development opportunities for a range of different housing tenures and requirements, including affordable and starter homes.

- Improving the quality of housing available to our residents; and

Significant improvements have been made to the Borough’s social housing, however there is still further work to be done the responsibility for maintaining private housing standards rests first and foremost with the homeowner; however, the Council and its partners have a key role to support our most vulnerable residents where serious hazards have been identified in the home that affect an individual’s health and wellbeing.

- Meeting the housing and support needs of our most vulnerable people to enable them to live independently.

The needs of homeless people are becoming increasingly complex, with high incidences of unresolved mental health problems, alcohol and substance misuse, anti-social and offending behaviour. We will continue to support our homeless residents to address these challenges in order that they can access both temporary homeless services and future accommodation. We know welfare reform changes are impacting on many groups including disabled people, lone parents, families and young people. We will continue to review the impact of welfare reform on our residents and consider packages of support required.

¹³ <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/About%20the%20council/Wirral%20Council%20Plan%20-%20a%202020%20Vision.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/About%20the%20council/Wirral%20Plan/Housing%20Strategy.pdf>

- 3.44 The 2019-20 Action Plan¹⁵ outlines the following action in relation to homelessness:
- complete homelessness review following introduction of Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and develop strategy to target service to respond to challenge;
 - implement the 'Housing First Model' in conjunction with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority; and
 - implement training and awareness programme for stakeholders and partners regarding the Homeless Reduction Act and their responsibilities under the duty to refer;

Emerging Local Development Plan ¹⁶

- 3.45 Work is well underway to produce a new Local Plan for Wirral. This is an important document which will help to shape the future of the Borough. The new Plan will set the long-term vision, objectives and policies for the Borough over a 15-year period between 2020 and 2035.
- 3.46 A key evidence document for the Local Development Plan is a Strategic Housing Market Assessment which considers the need for further market and affordable housing provision during the plan period. We are in the fortunate position that arc4 was preparing the Draft Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2019 at the same time as conducting this review and is able to benefit from its early findings in our review of access to settled accommodation.

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

- 3.47 The Wirral Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, recently rebadged as “This is Wirral” ¹⁷ is a systematic review of the health and wellbeing needs of the local population, informing local priorities, policies and strategies that in turn informs local commissioning priorities that will improve health and wellbeing outcomes and reduce inequalities throughout the Borough. It covers a wider range of subject areas and is regularly updated to take account of new data sources.
- 3.48 The housing report is currently being updated but an as yet unpublished draft provides key messages regarding:
- homelessness and rough sleeping;
 - availability and accessibility of accommodation; and
 - quality of accommodation.
- 3.49 Rather than outlining the detailed findings, consideration had been given to them throughout this review document.

¹⁵

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/About%20the%20council/Wirral%20Plan/Action%20Plans/Pledge%2018%20Good%20Quality%20Housing%20that%20meets%20the%20needs%20of%20Residents%20-%202019-20%20Action%20Plan%20Update.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/planning-and-building/local-plans-and-planning-policy/wirral-new-local-plan/local-plan>

¹⁷ <https://www.wirralintelligenceservice.org/jsna/>

Healthy Wirral¹⁸

- 3.50 Wirral’s Integrated Health and Care System recognises that it will only be through collective actions as an integrated care system that they will deliver the best population health and wellbeing outcomes. In order to meet the mission of ‘Better health and wellbeing in Wirral by working together’ Healthy Wirral partners have agreed a broad vision which is:

‘To enable all people in Wirral to live longer and healthier lives by taking simple steps of their own to improve their health and wellbeing. By achieving this together we can provide the very best health and social care services when people really need them, as close to home as possible’.

- 3.51 This vision stresses the importance of preventing ill health and our people being in the right place at the right time. Recognising also the need to live within our means as a system, we also aim to maximise the value of the Wirral pound, by ensuring that this is invested in place-based care that will deliver evidenced based, quantifiable quality outcomes for the population of Wirral.

Other relevant Strategies

- 3.52 A suite of strategies which support the Wirral Plan and have a relevance to those likely to be affected by homelessness include:

- Improving life chances strategy¹⁹

This strategy aims to reduce child poverty and its impact on the lives of children, young people and their families in Wirral. It also recognises the need to improve life chances for our young people, enabling the cycle of disadvantage to be broken so that it does not continue into adulthood.

- Zero tolerance to domestic abuse strategy²⁰

This sets the ambition for Wirral to be free from all forms of violence and abuse and a culture of empowerment for those who have experienced abuse. The Council plan to raise awareness of the health, psychological and social implications of domestic abuse and make sure that individuals know how and where they can get help.

- Alcohol strategy²¹

Through this strategy Wirral Council want to reduce the impact of alcohol-related health harms to individuals, reduce alcohol-related crime, domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour in the local communities and establish a diverse, vibrant and safe night-time economy in Wirral.

This strategy outlines the ambition to work with local partners to improve the alcohol environment, by rebalancing the place that alcohol has in the community and

¹⁸ <https://www.wirralccg.nhs.uk/healthy-wirral/>

¹⁹ <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/About%20the%20council/Wirral%20Plan/Improving%20Life%20Chances%20Strategy.pdf>

²⁰ <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/About%20the%20council/Wirral%20Plan/Domestic%20Abuse%20%20Strategy.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/About%20the%20council/Wirral%20Plan/Alcohol%20Strategy.pdf>

supporting people of all ages to have a healthier understanding of the role that they want alcohol to have in their lives.

- Look after children strategy 22

The Wirral Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy sets out the Council and its partners plans to secure safe and supportive accommodation for children in care and care leavers over the next three years. This includes plans to manage demand in the market by working to reduce the number of children within our care system.

4. Achievements of 2013-2018 Strategy

4.1 Following the development of the last Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018 there have been a number of significant achievements in delivering its overall vision and aims, including the following actions, many of which have been delivered through successful partnership approaches.

Priority 1 - Preventing Homelessness	Achievements
<p>Better services for young people to prevent homelessness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16/17-year-old protocol developed with Children’s Social Care Services • Young person’s accommodation-based services reviewed and recommissioned • Developed an accommodation pathway 16/17-year olds to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manor Road (6 bed) emergency accommodation • Move On project of 25 units over 4 sites • 23 supported lodgings
<p>Enable substance misuse clients with complex needs or chaotic behaviour can access appropriate accommodation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training provided to service providers. Further training is now scheduled as part of the Trailblazer project/duty to refer. • Drug treatment contract now has floating support provision to assist client to maintain and access accommodation. • Housing representation at “Frequent attender group” facilitated by A&E Arrowe Park hospital and Complex Panel established by CGL • All supported housing tenders require providers to demonstrate how they would incorporate physiologically informed environments that minimises placement breakdown
<p>Prevent homelessness amongst offenders who are released or due to be released from prison, and ensure there is access to suitable accommodation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of LCR common allocation policy currently underway • Monthly meetings held with Shelter to improve access to accommodation for offenders leaving prison • Implementation of pre-release procedure to encompass statutory homelessness route and supported housing options pre-release to secure positive outcomes for individuals

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing attendance and input at MAPPA and multi-agency meeting
<p>Ensure frontline staff are able to deal effectively with all client groups and customers feel welcome to use the Council's One Stop Shops for advice on housing and homelessness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate training provided for front line staff. • Range of tools available for staff to respond to clients/customers

Priority 1 - Preventing Homelessness (cont)	Achievements
<p>Enable homeless people to contribute to meeting their own and other people's housing need through the use of empty properties</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private sector liaison officer appointed to ensure effective liaison to the Housing Standards Property Team, to utilise empty properties for homeless clients, this work continues through the appointment of a Trailblazer post, to develop further relationships with CVS partners. • Financial assistance products offered to support empty homes linked to nominations for homeless people
<p>Review the Council's Bond Scheme and its effectiveness in homeless prevention</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Private Rented Access Scheme introduced in 2014 to widen the financial assistance options because the bond scheme did not benefit some client groups.

Priority 2 - Strengthening partnership working	Achievements
<p>Continue to address and respond to the needs of rough sleepers and non-priority homeless, tackle entrenched rough sleepers and work to break the cycle of repeated hostel use by other vulnerable people with drug and or alcohol problems</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioned new homeless services • LCR CRISS service for complex/entrenched rough sleepers • Rough Sleeper Initiative funding secured to respond to personalised approach to rough sleepers, to be reported and monitored by MHCLG • Public Health funded Outreach Team to engage with rough sleepers
<p>Ensure a partnership approach is taken in relation to the housing, support and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health practitioner appointed to work with hostels and Charles Thompson mission

care needs of people with mental ill health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commissioned mental health focused floating support service via the 'Whitechapel Centre'
Establish the development of a robust evidence base that will inform future housing, support and care requirement of people with Learning Disability and Mental Health problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MainStay data provided and used to inform commissioned services e.g. mental health floating service
Ensure support options are available to offenders and assist in reducing the number of people returning to prison from supported accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All supported housing services have been retendered and commissioned which was informed by MainStay data
Ensure households requiring an adaptation are not discriminated against in gaining access to housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agreement with registered providers that the cost of adapting accommodation to meet the needs of homeless clients will be fully met by the Council's DFG budget, where an already adapted property is not available

Priority 3 – Evaluating and realigning homelessness and prevention services	Achievements
For the Council and registered providers to work together to raise awareness amongst tenants of the housing solutions available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Universal Credit/Welfare Benefit training provided by DWP for registered providers and Council officers CAB officer embedded in Housing Options Team
Improve existing services and information available to substance misuse clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MainStay system introduced to improve needs information. Abstinence houses developed for those who had been through rehab.
Ensure clients with learning disabilities or those who appear to have learning disabilities are adequately supported and their needs are met	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of schemes developed in general needs tenancies. Support has been commissioned separately. Easy read leaflet developed and provided Learning Disabilities Housing Panel in operation
Undertake a feasibility study of the viability of a controlled drinking environment and seek funding opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two controlled drinking environments commissioned and funded by Public Health

Priority 4 – Increasing access to the Private Rented Sector	Achievements
<p>Increase housing supply by making better use of existing stock and wherever possible enable homeless people to contribute to their own housing need through use of empty properties</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private sector liaison officer - links to PRS landlords and client • Bond scheme literature developed to assist and sustain access to private rented properties • Financial assistance products to support supply to come back into the market
<p>Support vulnerable people to access homes in the private rented sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services tendered and commissioned to respond to need/demand. • Private Sector Landlord Officer with access to commissioned floating support services to offer support
<p>Develop a policy to discharge the Council's homeless duty into the private rented sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy established and due to be implemented in early 2020

Priority 4 – Increasing access to the Private Rented Sector (cont)	Achievements
<p>Develop a plan across agencies to direct and co-ordinate action to assist people to move into the private rented sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accredited Landlord list available as a register of reputable private sector landlords with affordable, good quality properties. • Housing Options PRA team established; however, this has been reviewed in light of legislative changes to incorporate generic working for access to all accommodation types and the management of temporary accommodation.
<p>Encourage and support private landlords to accept more vulnerable people as tenants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PRAS Team liaise with floating support services. • Private Sector Liaison Officer post in place to act as point of contact for learning, advice and support to landlords

5. Homelessness Levels

5.1 Government guidance to Local Authorities on conduction of a Homeless Review is contained within the Homeless Code of Guidance. This states:

“when carrying out the review housing authorities should consider including the following as a basis for assessing current and future levels of homelessness in their district:

- *homelessness casework records and other local sources of data;*
- *trends in homelessness approaches and in underlying causes;*
- *which cohorts may be more likely to become homeless or be threatened with homelessness;*
- *the profile of households who have experienced homelessness in their district;*
- *equality monitoring data, including that relating to homelessness applications and outcomes;*
- *the range of factors that may affect future levels of homelessness;*
- *the personal and structural factors that may contribute to people becoming homeless; and,*
- *any planned legislation or local policy changes that are likely to impact on levels of homelessness for particular groups in the district.*

5.2 To understand fully the levels and causes of homelessness a range of data collected by both Wirral Council and a number of other agencies is taken into account. These sources include:

- Housing Options Service Requests;
- Homelessness Statistics submitted to MHCLG (Experimental Data);
- Data from other services
- Housing Association data
- Mainstay data
- County Court eviction data; and
- Housing Register data.

5.3 **NB. All of the data contained in this document needs to be read in context. Low figures could result in higher percentages and distort some of the results.**

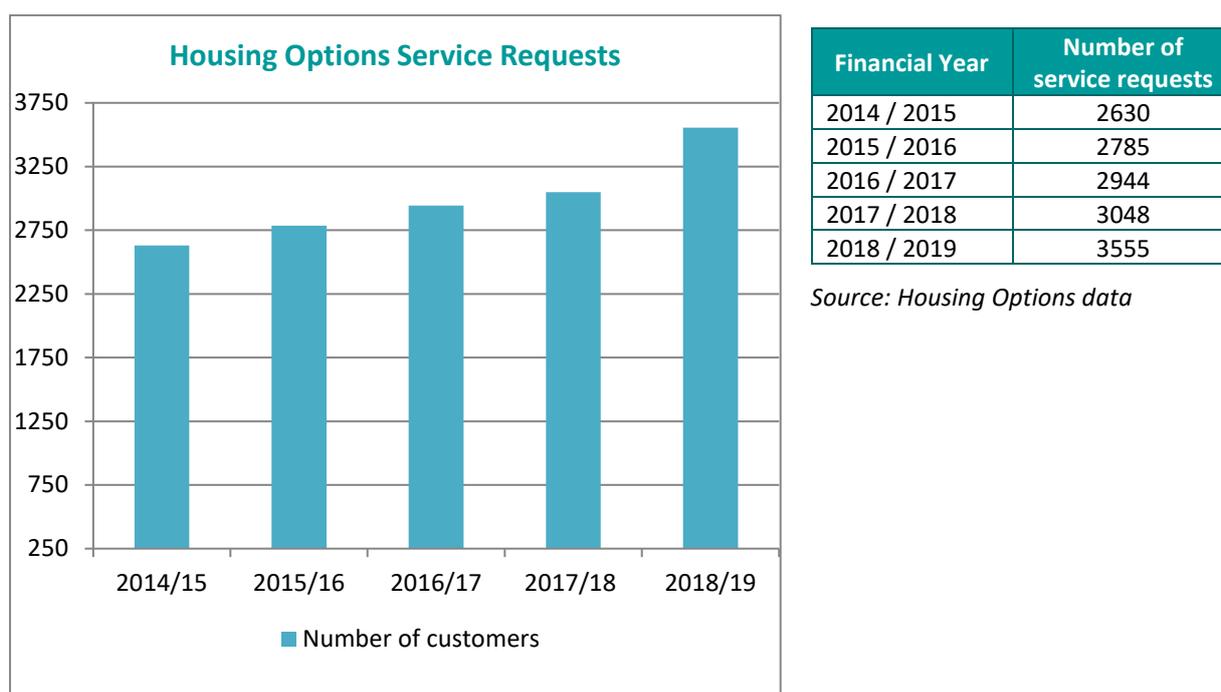
Note on Data Comparisons

5.4 Data for 2018/19 onwards is not directly comparable with data from previous years due to the change in legislation and newly introduced Government monitoring framework, H-CLIC which came into force from April 2018. Specific issues include:

- the data collected under the previous legislation (Part VII of the Housing Act 1996) was based only on the final assessment decision made by local authorities on households who applied for assistance with housing. From April 2018 onwards, local authorities are required to record all outcomes. It is possible for a single household to have up to three separate outcomes under this process depending on the outcomes of each duty within the legislation;
- under the previous legislation, data sets were based only on households accepted as homeless (i.e. were eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need) and were owed a main homelessness duty by the local authority to secure suitable accommodation. Under the new legislation, data relates to households owed a prevention, relief and final homeless duties, and a household can be recorded across all three data sets.
- H-CLIC has introduced new recording categories and data specifications, restricting direct comparisons with previous P1E reported data sets provided by Council pre-April 2018.
- the new legislation extends the time limit for being threatened with homelessness to 56 days, which will impact on the overall numbers recorded on the statutory homelessness data collection returns from April 2018 onwards.

Housing Options Service Requests

- 5.5 Wirral's Housing Options Service provides housing advice and assistance, together with working to prevent and relieve homelessness, and assistance to those that do become homeless. The graph below shows the number of households approaching the service for assistance over the last 5 years. The table details the footfall for previous years, however prior to 2018/19 a different IT system was used which means that the data may not be directly comparable, and advice only cases cannot be extrapolated.
- 5.6 In 2018/19 the recorded footfall accessing the Housing Options Service was 3,555 households, a total of 3,159 cases were closed during the same period. The number of cases has been steadily increasing since 2014/15. There was an increase of 17% in 2018/19 following the introduction of the HRA 2017.
- 5.7 In 2018/19 there were a total of 2,459 advice only cases, accounting for 78% of all closed cases. This is a very high proportion of cases, and the Council implemented a specific monitoring tool in 2019/20 to better understand the reasons why so many cases were closed at the advice stage. Early data shows that 59% of cases in the first two quarters of 2019/20, were closed when households failed to provide necessary documentation to progress their case or officers were unable to contact them. There may be value in understanding what number of these cases go on to become homeless at a later date, and whether the upstream prevention work needs to be targeted at these households.

Figure 5.1 Housing Options Service requests

Statutory Prevention & Relief Duties in 2018/19

- 5.8 Wirral Council is required to provide homelessness statistics in the forms of quarterly submissions to MHCLG, which record the number of households who have approached the Council as homeless or threatened with homelessness, and what duties are owed.
- 5.9 To date only the H-CLIC (Government’s Homelessness Monitoring Framework) returns for 2018/19 have been published, and these have been published as Experimental rather than Official or National Statistics. Given that this section examines the year’s data of the new H-CLIC data under the HRA 2017, it is important to understand that there may be issues relating to the quality of the data, therefore some caution should be taken when making comparisons either between local authorities or in comparison to other collected data.

Assessments

- 5.10 The data below analyses the outcomes recorded under the amended legislation for 2018/19. The data used in this section of the review is the revised H-CLIC returns held by the Council and will therefore differ from the data that was currently published at the time of the Review by MHCLG. The Council is in the process of discussing these anomalies with MHCLG. There were a total of 1,522 initial assessments, with a total of 963 initial assessments made.

Table 5.1 Homeless Assessments		
Assessments	2018/19	2019/20 (Q1 & Q2)
Cases Submitted to H_CLIC	1,522	1,043
Initial decision of homeless duty owed - Assessments in Quarter	963	613
Not homeless	36	2

Source: MHCLG HCLIC data

- 5.11 Half-year data from 2019/20 indicates an increase in assessments with 613 having been completed in the first six months of the year compared with 963 full year data from the previous year.
- 5.12 The table below details the number of cases closed within the year where a prevention or relief duty was owed. Of the 320 cases where a prevention duty was owed in 2018/19, 70 cases went on to have a relief duty owed, equating to 22%. In the first two quarters of 2019/20 of the 227 cases where a prevention duty was owed 54 cases went on to become homeless and had a relief duty owed, equating to 24%.

Table 5.2 Closed cases where a duty was owed		
Cases	2018/19	Q1 & Q2 2019/20
Number of Prevention duties that ended	320	227
Number of Relief duties that ended	531	397

Source: Wirral Council

- 5.13 While prevention activity is not successful for around 22-24% of clients, the data indicates that more clients are accessing the service once they are already homeless, meaning that opportunities for effective early intervention and prevention are not available.
- 5.14 Moving forward it will be essential to encourage customers to seek help from the Housing Options team at a much earlier point in order for opportunities for effective early intervention and prevention to be maximised.

Duty to Refer Cases

- 5.15 The table below details the number of duty to refer cases between 1/10/18 -31/3/19.

Table 5.3 Duty to refer cases 2018/19			
Agency	No of Referrals	Relief Duty awarded	Prevention Duty awarded
Prison	48	9	1
Probation	11	3	0
CRC	4	2	1
DASS	9	0	0
C&YPD	20	4	0
DWP	213	7	4
Hospital	29	10	0
TOTAL	334	35	6

Source: Wirral Council

- 5.16 The largest number of referrals were received from the DWP. Of these referrals 12% resulted in a duty being awarded, with the remainder closed at the advice stage. The majority of these were awarded a relief duty. This highlights that further work would be beneficial with specified public bodies to ensure appropriate and timely referrals to increase positive outcomes for households.
- 5.17 The table below details the duty to refer cases for the first half of 2019/20. There has been an increase in duty to refer cases in the first half of 2019/20 compared with the last half of 2018/19.
- 5.18 Around 22% of referrals resulted in a duty being awarded, with the remainder being closed at housing advice stage. As with the previous year the majority of duties awarded are at relief stage rather than prevention

Agency	QUARTER 1 2019/20			QUARTER 2 2019/20		
	No of Referrals	Relief Duty awarded	Prevention Duty awarded	No of Referrals	Relief Duty awarded	Prevention Duty awarded
Prison	54	14	0	63	19	1
Mental Health Service – Acute in-patient	2	1	0	1	0	0
Probation	16	1	1	7	0	0
CRC	3	0	0	6	3	0
Adult Social Care	12	2	3	7	2	0
Children’s Social Care	22	5	1	25	3	0
Department of Work & Pensions	96	7	9	80	8	3
Hospital	18	5	0	35	9	1
Armed Forces	0	0	0	1	0	0
TOTALS	223	35	14	225	44	5

Source: Wirral Council

- 5.19 The primary referring agency continues to be the DWP, however a slight decrease in referrals is evident compared to Q1, followed by HMP. The number of DWP referrals resulting in a duty continues to be low. This may indicate that the service is not placing appropriate/ actionable referrals and may benefit from Homeless Champion intervention.
- 5.20 Hospital referrals have increased 94% since Q1 and this may be due to recent issues and the highlighting of potential ‘bed blocking’. This should be considered in terms of impact on the team and the hospital rota, particularly as 29% of referrals result in a duty award.

Agency Referrals

- 5.21 The table below details all referrals from partner agencies into the service for 2018/19. In 2018/19 agency referrals account for 14 % of all closed cases, 50% of all agency referrals were made by the DWP. 18% of agency referrals result in a duty being awarded.

Agency	No of Referrals	Prevention Duty awarded	Relief Duty awarded
Adult Secure Estate (Prison)	50	1	11
Adult Social Services	10	0	1
Children Centre	7	0	1
C&YPD	23	0	7
CAB	1	1	0
Community Rehabilitation Company	5	1	3
DWP	215	5	8
Env Health	1	0	0
GPs	1	0	0
Hospital	31	0	11
Housing Benefit	2	1	0
Housing First Provider	1	0	0
Floating Support Provider	2	1	1
Mental Health In Patient service	8	1	2
Mental Health -Community Based service	4	0	0
NASS	5	0	4
National Probation Service	16	0	8
Other Local Authority	17	2	3
Other service Provider	5	0	0
Registered Provider	13	2	2
Refuge	2	0	1
School	1	0	0
Substance Misuse Treatment service	3	0	1
Supported Housing provider	5	1	1
Family Intervention Project	3	0	0
Youth Services	1	0	0
TOTAL	432	16	65

Source: Wirral Council

- 5.22 The majority of duties (80%) awarded were at relief stage as opposed to prevention. Encouraging earlier referrals at the prevention stage is likely to result in more effective early intervention and successful prevention outcomes. There is a need to work with referring agencies to provide training so that referrals are appropriate and timely.
- 5.23 There was a low number of referrals from social housing providers, which account for 3% of all agency referrals, again this may be an area to focus on moving forward.
- 5.24 The table below details agency referrals for the first half of 2019/20. Non DTR Agency referrals account for 14 % of Q1 closed cases which is an increase upon the previous quarter (5%), and an increasingly broader spectrum of agencies are referring into the service.

Agency	QUARTER 1			QUARTER 2		
	No of Referrals	Prevention Duty awarded	Relief Duty awarded	No of Referrals	Prevention Duty awarded	Relief Duty awarded
Children's Early Help services / Children's Centres	2	0	1	6	1	1
Community midwives	1	0	0	0	0	0
Community Health Visitor	0	0	0	1	0	0
Community Safety	2	0	0	2	1	1
Housing Benefit	0	0	0	1	0	1
Housing First Provider	0	0	0	2	0	1
Housing related (floating) support provider	2	1	0	2	0	0
Local Authority Landlord	0	0	0	2	0	0
Mental Health Service – Community based	3	0	0	6	1	1
NASS accommodation provider	4	0	1	15	2	3
Other local authority service	8	1	3	23	2	1
Local connection referral	0	0	0	3	0	1
Other service provider (not housing related)	10	0	2	7	1	2
Police	0	0	0	1	0	0
Private Registered Provider (Housing Association) 25	7	0	0	8	0	1
Refuge	0	0	0	2	1	0
Substance Misuse Treatment Service	3	0	1	2	0	0
Supported housing provider	5	0	1	3	0	0
Troubled Families / Families Intervention Programme	1	1	0	0	0	0
Citizens Advice Bureau	0	0	0	1	0	0
TOTAL	48	3	9	87	9	13

Source: Wirral Council

- 5.25 Referrals originating from 'other service providers' (predominantly referrals from PPP (15), Healthy Homes (4) and FSU (4)) and 'NASS' have risen by 187% however continue to result in low duty award rates.
- 5.26 24% of non DTR agency referrals result in a duty award which is slightly higher than those referrals made by public bodies.
- 5.27 Approximately half (43%) of duties awarded were at prevention stage which is encouraging and shows that other agencies are increasingly identifying homelessness at an early stage.

Household Composition

- 5.28 The majority of households owed a prevention duty were households with dependent children, accounting for 52% of households. Single households accounted for 41% of households with couples accounting for 6%.

Table 5.7 Household composition of households owed a prevention duty 2018/19

Household Composition	Number
Single parent with dependent children male	13
Single parent with dependent children female	168
Couple with dependent children	34
Three adults dependent children	7
Couple no children	23
Three adults no children	3
Single male	98
Single females	78

Source: MHCLG H- CLIC data

Table 5.8 Household composition of households owed a relief duty 2018/19

Household Composition	Number
Single parent with dependent children male	13
Single parent with dependent children female	152
Couple with dependent children	14
Three adults dependent children	1
Couple no children	28
Three adults no children	1
Single male	230
Single females	113

Source: MHCLG H- CLIC data

- 5.29 The majority of households owed a relief duty were single people accounting for 62%, households with dependent children account for 33% of those owed a relief duty, and couples account for 5%. In total singles account for 53% of all households owed a prevention or relief duty. Single households are significantly over-represented for households to whom a relief duty is owed.
- 5.30 The data may indicate that families are more likely to approach the service prior to becoming homeless than single people. More work may need to be done to raise awareness of the service with single people to ensure that they approach the service when there is a threat of homelessness as opposed to once they become homeless.
- 5.31 Further analysis of cases for single people to identify how many of these single people owed a relief duty were also owed a prevention duty will help to better understand this and target interventions accordingly.

	16-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+	Not known
Age	1	159	339	201	150	87	31	8	0

Source: MHCLG HCLIC data

- 5.32 The majority of households are aged 25-34 years accounting for 35% of all households, followed by 35-44 years (21%). 16-24 year olds account for 16% of all households.
- 5.33 Only 1 16/17 year old was owed a prevention or relief duty, prior to December 2018 all 16/17 year olds were assessed and assisted by Children and Young Peoples service. A joint protocol has been in place since December 2018.

White	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	Asian/Asian British	Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	Other ethnic groups	Not known
927	5	14	1	8	21

Source: MHCLG HCLIC data

- 5.34 White households account for 95% of all households owed a prevention or relief duty.

Support Needs

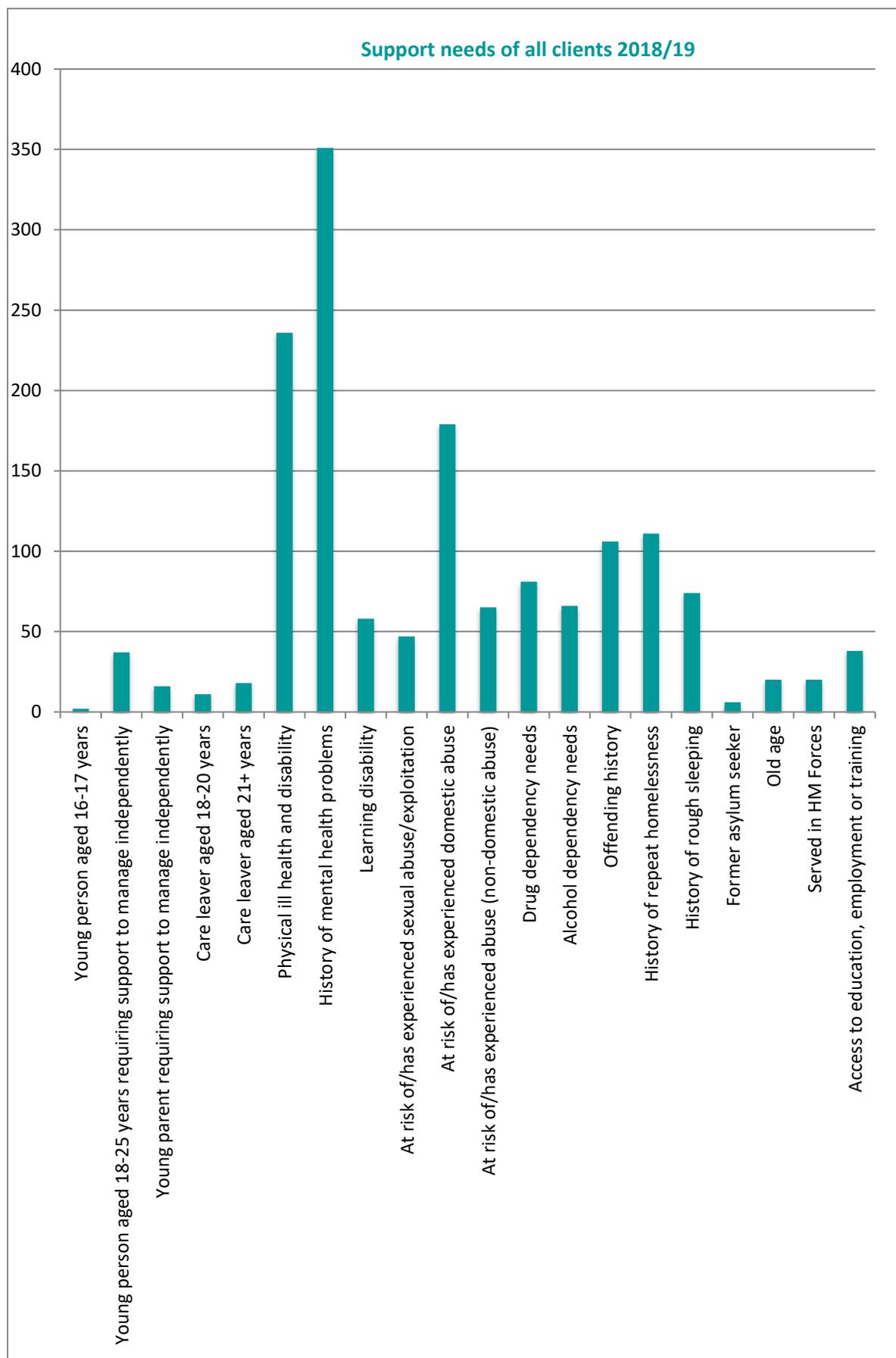
	Number
Households with a support need	581
Households with no support need	395
Households with support need unknown (legacy cases)	0
Total support needs	1,542

Source: MHCLG HCLIC data

- 5.35 Of the clients owed a duty by the Housing Options team 60% had declared that they had a support need. A total of 1,542 support needs were identified for 581 clients. The total support needs include all support needs identified by the client, and clients can declare as many as they wish too. The nature of the identified support needs are detailed below.

Figure 5.2 Support needs

Source: MHCLG HCLIC data



Young person aged 16-17 years	2
Young person aged 18-25 years requiring support to manage independently	37
Young parent requiring support to manage independently	16
Care leaver aged 18-20 years	11
Care leaver aged 21+ years	18
Physical ill health and disability	236
History of mental health problems	351
Learning disability	58
At risk of/has experienced sexual abuse/exploitation	47
At risk of/has experienced domestic abuse	179
At risk of/has experienced abuse (non-domestic abuse)	65
Drug dependency needs	81
Alcohol dependency needs	66
Offending history	106
History of repeat homelessness	111
History of rough sleeping	74
Former asylum seeker	6
Old age	20
Served in HM Forces	20
Access to education, employment or training	38

Source: MHCLG HCLIC data

- 5.36 The most frequently occurring support need is mental health, followed by physical health and disability and domestic abuse. Other frequently occurring support needs include offending history, repeat history of homelessness, alcohol and drug dependency issues and history of rough sleeping.
- 5.37 Information from the Housing Options team indicates that there are a very high number of complex cases, including both single people and families with multiple and challenging needs. The Housing Options Service has struggled to find sustainable solutions for these households. There is a need to further develop quantitative and qualitative understanding of these cases, alongside understanding if existing provision meets the needs of these customers.

Accommodation at the time the prevention or relief duty owed

- 5.38 The table below details the type of accommodation that clients were living in at the time when the prevention or relief duty was owed. Prior to approaching the Housing Options service, the greatest proportion of customers (35% in 2018/19 and 31% Q1 and Q2 2019/20) had been living in the private rented sector, followed by living with family (19% 2018/19 and Q1 and Q2 2019/20) and of no fixed abode (15% 2018/19 and 16% Q1 and Q2 2019/20).

Accommodation type	2018/19	Q1 & Q2 2019/20
Private rented sector	325	186
Living with family	175	116
No fixed abode	140	96
Social rented sector	27	23
Living with friends	77	46
Homeless on departure from an institution	52	56
Rough sleeping	3	7
Owner-occupier/tied	13	10
Registered Provider (housing association)	55	36
Temporary accommodation	3	2
NASS accommodation	13	10
Refuge	5	3
Other	33	12
Total	921	602

Source: Wirral Council

Hidden Homelessness

- 5.39 Rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness, but many households are often described as being the ‘Hidden homeless’, often living in insecure accommodation, living on a temporary basis with family or friends, or sofa surfing. It is very difficult to quantify the number of households who may be the hidden homeless. The data below provides a small indication of the level of hidden homelessness on the Wirral, but this only relates to households who approach the Housing Options service for help, many households do not do this. Therefore, the level of hidden homelessness will be much higher than indicated by these figures.
- 5.40 The table below details applicants who may be hidden homeless. There were a total of 140 applicants who were recorded as No Fixed Abode in 2018/19, and a further 252 who were living with friends and family.

	NFA	Living with friends	Living with family
2018/19	140	77	175
2019/20 Q1&Q2	96	43	116

Source: Wirral Housing Options

Reasons for Homelessness 2018/19

Figure 5.3 Reasons for homelessness

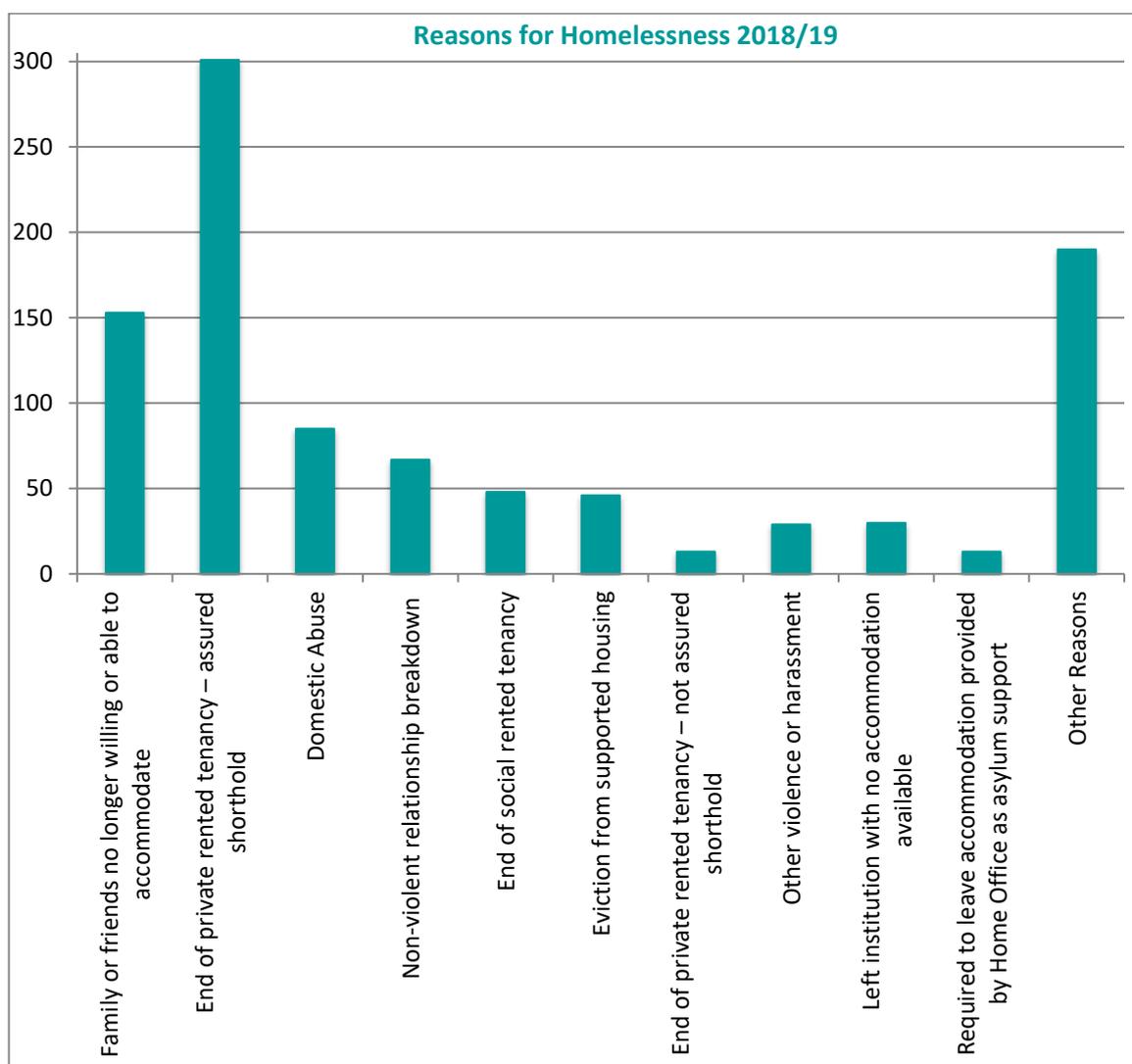


Table 5.15 Reasons for homelessness	Number
Family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	153
End of private rented tenancy – assured shorthold	301
Domestic Abuse	85
Non-violent relationship breakdown	67
End of social rented tenancy	48
Eviction from supported housing	46
End of private rented tenancy – not assured shorthold	13
Other violence or harassment	29
Left institution with no accommodation available	30
Required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office as asylum support	13
Other Reasons	190

Source: MHCLG H- CLIC data

- 5.41 The main reason for homelessness on the Wirral is due to the loss of private rented accommodation (AST), which accounted for 301 cases (31%). The second main cause of homelessness is recorded as Other Reasons. Further work is underway within the Housing Options team to reduce the use of this category.
- 5.42 The next main reason for homelessness is being asked to leave accommodation provided by family and friends (153 cases) and accounts for 16% of all cases.
- 5.43 The other main causes of homelessness on the Wirral are domestic abuse (85 cases, 9%), non-violent relationship breakdown (67 cases, 7%), end of social rented tenancy (48 cases, 5%) and eviction from supported accommodation (46 cases, 5%).

Table 5.16 Reasons for the loss of the private rented accommodation 2018/19

Reason	Number
Tenant difficult budgeting or making other payments	35
Rent arrears due to increase in rent	2
Rent arrears due to reduction in employment income	10
Rent arrears due to changes in benefit entitlement	16
Rent arrears due to personal change in circumstances	37
Breach of tenancy (not rent arrears)	7
Landlord wishing to sell or re-let property	145
Tenant complained about disrepair	1
Illegal eviction	2
Tenant abandoned property	9
Other reasons	36

Source: MHCLG H- CLIC data

- 5.44 The main reason for private rented accommodation coming to an end is due to the landlord wishing to sell or re-let the property accounting for 48% of all cases. There is anecdotal evidence that some private sector landlords are seeking to sell their properties and leave the sector due to the impact of national changes. This includes welfare reform, such as Universal Credit, which can pose a risk to income streams via direct payment to tenants, and increased levels of regulation.
- 5.45 Arrears account for 33% of cases. The Trail Blazer project has implemented a dedicated Private Rented Sector officer who aims to engage with landlords to provide support and advice, and a Debt/ Money Advice officer. The Trail Blazer roles focus on early intervention and are well placed to work with private landlords going forward to secure or sustain accommodation for households.
- 5.46 This data also identifies an opportunity to target those landlords looking to sell or re-let their property to understand what landlord incentives may make them either keep their current tenant or continue to operate as a private landlord, it may also identify opportunities for a social lettings agency to manage these properties or for a social landlord to buy and let these units of accommodation.

Table 5.17 Reason for the end of social rented accommodation for those that the Housing Options team assessed 2018/19

Reason	Number
Rent arrears	34
Breach of tenancy (not arrears)	5
Other reasons	9

Source: MHCLG H- CLIC data

- 5.47 The main reason for the loss of social housing is due to rent arrears, accounting for 71% of these cases. For 19% of these cases the reason recorded is ‘other reasons.’ Wirral is closely monitoring the use of this category in 2019/20 to ensure accurate and informative recording.

Table 5.18 Reasons for the eviction from supported housing for those that the Housing Options team assess 2018/19

Reason	Number
Rent arrears	1
Breach of tenancy/licence (not arrears)	38
Other reasons	5

Source: MHCLG H- CLIC data

- 5.48 The main reason for eviction from supported housing is due to a breach of the licence/tenancy (not arrears). There may be opportunities to work with support providers to reduce evictions and abandonments.
- 5.49 Prevention work needs to focus on these main causes of homelessness:

- Loss of Private Rented Accommodation

There is a need to ensure that there is a much more targeted approach to preventing people losing their home in the private rented sector. Both landlords and tenants need to be able to access immediate support and advice as soon as difficulties arise in the tenancy. Landlord and tenant liaison/mediation alongside a dedicated resource to resolve any difficulties at the outset will provide an important prevention tool. The Trail Blazer project was introduced in April 2019 to focus on early intervention and the small team combines the skills of three posts including a prevention officer, a debt/ money advice officer and a private sector liaison post to tackle the main causes of homelessness, including end of an assured tenancy. Early intervention work will be supported by the relaunch of Wirral’s private landlord incentive scheme which aims to implement measures to help households access sustainable tenancies, and wider work, such as selective licensing to improve property and management standards.

- Family/Friends Evicting

There is also a need to ensure a much more targeted and pro-active response for households who are being asked to leave by family or friends. Effective and timely mediation, together with home visits, and planned moves into alternative accommodation should be introduced. Property Pool Plus currently offers an

enhanced level of banding within the social housing register for households living with friends/ family to support homeless prevention and access to accommodation.

- **Non-violent Relationship Breakdown**

Access to mediation and relationship counselling services may assist in preventing homelessness and buying time to enable planned moves into alternative accommodation.

- **Domestic Abuse**

Timely access to a range of options, including emergency provision and support, floating support, planned moves and target hardening may assist in helping to prevent and resolve homelessness. These options are available in the Wirral. There is evidence of positive working relationships between the Housing Options Team, landlords, Wirral Refuge and the Family Safety Unit who work together to safeguard households affected by domestic abuse, and further supported by the strategic MARAC.

- **Eviction from social housing**

GDPR compliant Pre-eviction protocols need to be put in place with all social landlords operating on the Wirral, to ensure that timely referrals are put in place to notify the Housing Options team of any intended eviction activity. Under the current Pre-Court protocol Housing Associations signpost service users to the Housing Options service.

- **Eviction from supported housing**

Pre-eviction protocols need to be developed between the Housing Options team and support providers to ensure that timely referrals can be made. The Council monitors exclusions via the Mainstay system and hold monthly meetings with providers to discuss any issues arising, however the Council should continue to work with providers to reduce evictions and abandonments and share good practice in relation to preventing evictions due to behavioural issues i.e. restorative approaches.

Social Housing Eviction Levels

5.50 The table below provides details of the number of evictions from social housing stock over the last 4 years. There are a total of 17,702 units of general needs social housing across the Wirral.

Financial Year	No. of evictions	Reason		
		Number due to Rent arrears	Number due to ASB	Number due to other
2015/16	44	42	2	0
2016/17	49	42	2	5
2017/18	32	29	3	0
2018/19	23	20	3	0

Source Homelessness Review Questionnaires

5.51 The Housing Options Service and its housing providers will need to work closely to identify how evictions from social housing can be reduced, with a joined up approach to prevention embedded across both teams, this can include an early response approach as soon as payments are missed to prevent arrears accumulating. There is a need to develop effective pre-eviction protocols.

Possession Type		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Accelerated Landlord		350	282	359	330	310
Mortgage	Claims	295	158	133	138	138
	Outright Orders	108	70	47	59	55
	Repossessions	82	58	41	41	31
	Suspended Orders	116	56	39	45	25
	Warrants	314	190	129	116	107
	Total	915	532	389	399	356
Private Landlord		220	274	248	291	384
Social Landlord		1,283	1,587	1,517	1,231	1222

Source: Ministry of Justice

5.52 The table above shows action within the County Court relating to possession action since 2014. Key observations include:

- The number of accelerated possession claims peaked in 2016 and has since reduced slightly.
- The number of private landlord possession claims not using the accelerated route has increased since 2014, with a significant increase in the last year.
- Social landlord possession claims peaked in 2015 and have since then slowly reduced to below 2014 levels.
- The number of mortgage repossession cases has reduced since 2014 and has remained relatively stable at around just under 400 for the last three years.

Prevention Outcomes

- 5.53 The table below shows outcomes where the prevention duty came to an end during the year.

Total number of households where prevention duty ended	330	%
Secured accommodation for 6+ months	148	45%
Homeless (including intentionally homeless)	70	21%
No longer eligible	1	0%
Contact Lost	72	22%
Refused suitable accommodation offer	6	2%
Refused to cooperate	1	0%
56 days lapsed & no further action	23	7%
Application withdrawn	9	3%

Source: MHCLG HCLIC data

- 5.54 For the 330 cases owed a prevention duty, where the duty has ended, accommodation was secured for 148 of these households. This indicates that of those households owed a prevention duty homelessness was successfully prevented for 45% of these households. This compares to a national prevention rate of 58%. For 22% of cases the duty came to an end due to loss of contact, which Wirral has identified as an issue. Measures such as strengthening the working practices of the Housing Options team to respond to the new legislation have contributed to successfully reducing this figure to 10% in Quarter 2 2019/20.
- 5.55 The table below details the type of accommodation secured for those households where a prevention duty was owed. Of these 148 households, 115 had their homelessness prevented by moving to alternative accommodation, and only 33 were able to remain in their existing accommodation. The service is much more successful helping households to secure alternative accommodation than enabling them to remain in their existing accommodation. In order to improve prevention outcomes, the service should work with customers at the earliest stage possible to identify if early intervention work would enable them to remain in their existing accommodation. The Liverpool City Region has successfully secured CLG 'Trailblazer' Funding to focus on homelessness early intervention measures within the areas of prevention, the private sector and debt/money advice.
- 5.56 In 2018/19, 42% of cases were accommodated by staying with friends. 39% had accommodation secured in the private rented sector and 16% securing a social rented tenancy.

Table 5.22 Type of accommodation secured for those households where a prevention duty was owed

Year	Private rented sector	Social Housing	Staying with family	Staying with friends	Hostel accomm	Owner occupier	Other	Not known	Total
2018/19	58	24	2	62	0	0	1	1	148
Q1 & Q2 2019/20	59	14	2	54	0	0	0	0	129

Source: Wirral Council data

- 5.57 The most successful prevention activity was accommodation secured by the Housing Options Service. It should be noted that this data set only captures one prevention activity per case when multiple activities could have been undertaken. From the data available it would appear that, despite the fact that family/friends evicting is the second largest cause of homelessness on the Wirral, there have been no recorded successful negotiation/mediation work to secure the return to family and friends.

Table 5.23 Prevention activity that resulted in accommodation being secured 2018/19

Activity	Number
Accommodation secured by local authority or organisation delivering housing options service	82
Helped to secure accommodation found by applicant, with financial payment	6
Helped to secure accommodation found by applicant, without financial payment	11
Supported housing provided	8
Negotiation/mediation work to secure return to family or friend	0
Negotiation/mediation/advocacy work to prevent eviction/repossession	9
Financial payments to reduce rent service charge or mortgage arrears	5
Discretionary Housing Payment	1
Other	7
No activity – advice and information provided	12

Source: MHCLG HCLIC data

5.58 The table below details the reason why the prevention duty has come to an end.

Reason	2018/19	Q1 & Q2 2019/20
56 days or more expired (case closed)	23	7
Contact Lost	72	27
Homeless	70	54
No longer eligible	1	0
Refused suitable offer of accommodation	6	1
Refused to cooperate	1	1
Secured alternative accommodation	115	91
Secured existing accommodation	33	38
Withdrew application	9	8
Total	330	227

Source: MHCLG HCLIC data

5.59 The table shows a prevention rate of 45% for 2018/19, compared with a prevention rate of 57% for the first two quarters of 2019/20, indicating improved prevention outcomes. 22% of prevention cases went on to become homeless in 2018/19 and 24% in the first half of 2019/20.

Relief Outcomes

Relief duty outcomes	2018/19	%	2019/20 (Q1 & Q2)	%
Total number of households where relief duty ended	531		397	
Secured accommodation for 6+ months	304	57%	251	63%
Intentionally homeless from accom provided	1	0%	1	0%
No longer eligible	1	0%	4	1%
Contact Lost	112	21%	65	16%
56 days lapsed	68	13%	37	9%
Refused final accommodation offer	18	3%	18	5%
Local connection referral accepted by LA	1	0%	4	1%
Refusal to co-operate	0	0%	0	0%
Application withdrawn	26	5%	17	4%

Source: MHCLG HCLIC data

5.60 In 2018/19 the relief duty ended for a total of 531 households, of which 304 had accommodation secured. This indicates that of those households owed a relief duty

homelessness was relieved for 57% of these households. This is above the national average for England of 43%. For 21% of the cases the duty ended as contact was lost with the applicant.

- 5.61 The first half-year data for 2019/20 shows that homelessness was relieved for 63% of cases, indicating improved customer outcomes.
- 5.62 The high number of lost contact cases is linked to the high caseloads that officers are managing following the implementation of the HRA. Wirral has put measures in place to improve case management and has subsequently reduced the percentage of lost contacts to 16% for the first two quarters of 2019/20.

Table 5.26 Accommodation type secured for households who had their homelessness relieved 2018/19

Accommodation Type	Number
Private rented sector	67
Supported housing/hostel	120
Registered provider	101
Owner-occupier	0
Staying with family	2
Staying with friends	1
Other	2
Not known	11
Total	304

Source: MHCLG HCLIC data

- 5.63 The majority of households were accommodated in the social rented sector (56%), followed by 39% into Supported/Hostel Accommodation, private rented accommodation (16%). The high use of supported accommodation reflects the increased demand on services from single person households under the HRA. There may be opportunities to improve both prevention and relief outcomes by improving access to the private rented sector which is an area of focus for Wirral using combined services around private landlord incentives, selective licensing, bringing empty properties back into use, tenancy start up floating support and property accreditation to continue to improve private sector properties and management standards. It should be acknowledged that the planned re-launch of the private sector incentive scheme in early 2020, aims to promote access to sustainable private tenancies by offering an enhanced level of support to both landlords and tenants. It is anticipated that these measures will help to reduce the number of people presenting as homeless as a result of the end of a private rented tenancy.
- 5.64 The high use of supported accommodation as a relief outcome is linked to the high number of single people presenting as homeless.
- 5.65 Very few households had their homelessness relieved by staying with family or friends, which is a suggested area for future focus in terms of mediation and other services.
- 5.66 The most successful relief activity was securing accommodation by the Housing Options Service followed by accessing supported housing. Again this may not be reflective of the

whole activity taking place as the data set only allows for one activity to be recorded per case.

Table 5.27 Main relief activity that resulted in homelessness being relieved 2018/19

Activity	Number
Accommodation secured by local authority or organisation delivering housing options service	183
Helped to secure accommodation found by applicant, with financial payment	28
Helped to secure accommodation found by applicant, without financial payment	18
Supported housing provided	53
Other activity through which accommodation secured	7
No activity	10
Total	299

Source: MHCLG HCLIC data

Main Duty Decisions

- 5.67 A total of 80 main duty decisions were made, of which 46 (61%) were owed the full homeless duty under s193, compared with 58% nationally. A total of 24 households (30%) were found to be intentionally homeless, this is significantly higher than the average for England of 8%. Only 6% of households were found to have no priority need compared with the national average of 19%.

Table 5.28 Main duty decisions for households where the homelessness was not prevented or relieved 2018/19

Year	Homeless + priority need + unintentionally homeless	Homeless + priority need + intentionally homeless	Homeless + no priority need	Not homeless	Total
2018/19	46	24	5	5	80
2019/20 (Q1 & Q2)	24	3	9	1	37

Source: MHCLG HCLIC data

- 5.68 In the first two quarters of 2019/20 a total of 37 main duty decisions were made, of which 24 (65%) were owed the full homeless duty. The percentage of households found to be intentionally homeless has decreased to 8%, compared with 30% the previous year. This improvement is as a result of embedding the new legislation into to how the Housing Options team works with clients.
- 5.69 The main reason for priority need in 2018/19 is dependent children, followed by physical disability.

Table 5.29 Priority need reason for those households owed a full duty 2018/19

Priority Need Reason	Number
Dependent children	27
Mental health problems	1
Physical disability/ill health	9
Pregnancy	2
Domestic abuse	2
Young applicant	2
Old age	0
Emergency	0
Other	3

Source: MHCLG H-CLIC data

Table 5.30 Discharge of Duty for those households owed the full homeless duty 2018/19

Housing Act 1996 Pt6 social housing offer		Private rented sector offer		Refused suitable TA offer, withdrew or lost contact	Ceased to be eligible	Became intentionally homeless from TA	Voluntarily ceased to occupy
Accepted	Refused	Accepted	Refused				
32	0	7	0	8	0	0	4

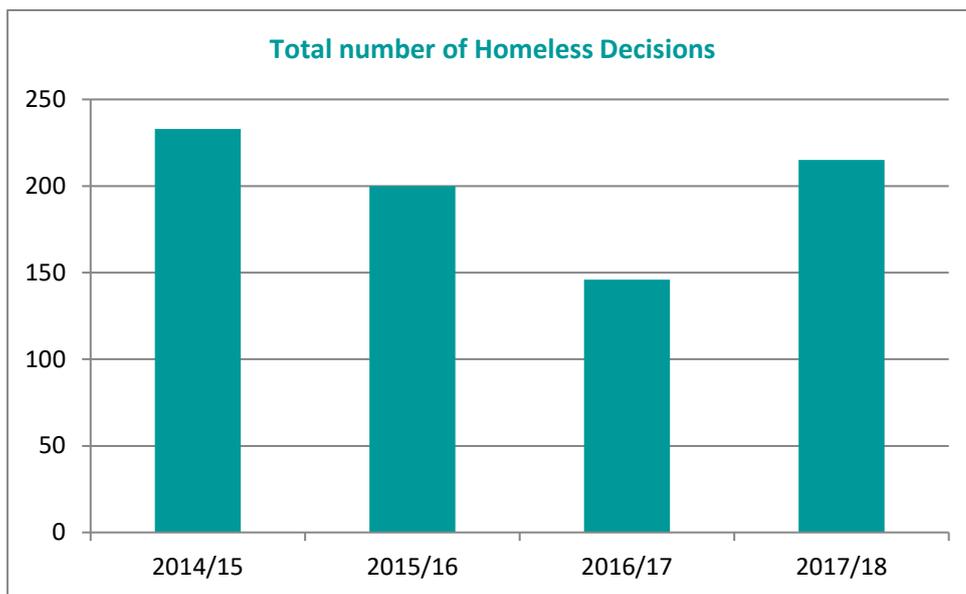
Source: MHCLG HCLIC data

- 5.70 For those households owed the main homeless duty, 32 had these duties discharged through an offer of social housing under part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 and 7 through an offer of private rented accommodation. Once again better use of the private rented sector may enable the Council to successfully discharge its duty and move households out of temporary accommodation. NB this data does not tally with table 5.28 above as there may be some cases which started before 2018/19.

Previous Legislative Framework

- 5.71 In order to provide some historic context to this analysis we have also considered the P1E statistics (replaced by H-CLIC from April 2018) which relate to the previous legislative framework. It is important to note that the majority of this data relates to those where a formal homeless acceptance has been made under s193. It therefore only relates to a small number of clients on the Wirral, and any percentages should be read in this context. As previously stated, this data cannot be directly compared to the new H-CLIC data.

Figure 5.4 Total number of Homeless decisions



Source: MHCLG P1E data

5.72 The total number of homeless decisions has remained relatively constant at around just over 200 decisions, however it dipped in 2016/17 to a low of just under 150 decisions. In 2017/18 there were a total of 215 homeless decisions made.

Figure 5.5 Total number of Homeless acceptances



Source: MHCLG P1E data

5.73 The level of acceptances reduced between 2014/15 to its lowest level in 2016/17. Homeless acceptances increased by 101% between 2016/17 and 2017/18.

Decision	Number
Eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need	113
Intentionally homeless	39
No priority need	16
Not Homeless	45
Ineligible	2
Total decisions	215

Source: MHCLG P1E data

- 5.74 Of the total decisions 23% resulted in a homeless acceptance, this compares with 52% across England for the same period. During this period 18% of cases were found to be intentionally homeless, compared with 8% nationally. 7% were found to not be in priority need compared with 16.9% nationally and 21% were found to be not homeless compared with 24% nationally.

Age	Number
16-24 years	20
25-44 years	63
45-59 years	26
60- 64 years	1
65-74 years	3
75+ years	0

Source: MHCLG P1E data

Composition	Number
Couple with dependent children	13
Lone male parent with dependent children	8
Lone female parent with dependent children	53
Single male	18
Single female	10
Other	11

Source: MHCLG P1E data

Reason	Number
Parents, relatives, friends no longer willing to accommodate	23
Non violent relationship breakdown	11
Domestic abuse	20

Termination of assured shorthold tenancy	22
Loss of private rented other than termination of assured shorthold tenancy	1
Leaving hospital	5

Source: MHCLG P1E data

- 5.75 Of the total 113 homeless acceptances:
- the majority were aged 25-44 years;
 - the majority of households are female lone parents with dependent children. It is noticeable that the Council owes a duty to a much larger proportion of single people under the HRA 2017 compared with the previous legislation;
 - the main reason for priority need was dependent children (77 households), other reasons include physical disability (13 households), and mental health (7 households); and
 - the main reasons for homelessness were due to family and friends evicting followed by loss of private rented accommodation.

Likely Future Levels of Homelessness

- 5.76 Whilst there has been considerable success in preventing homelessness on the Wirral, there are many factors which potentially may have an effect on the number of people faced with homelessness. It is important that these are recognised and, wherever possible, services enhanced to minimise the negative effect of each of the factors.
- 5.77 We are always cautious of predicting future trends where there are so many factors which may affect, such as the supply of affordable housing, the affordability of the private rented sector and wider Government policy and legislative changes.

NB. It should be clearly noted that these assumptions are simply based on population change and do not take into account any change of service focus on greater prevention activity etc. They should be viewed in the context of “if nothing else changed”.

Impact of Population Change on The Wirral

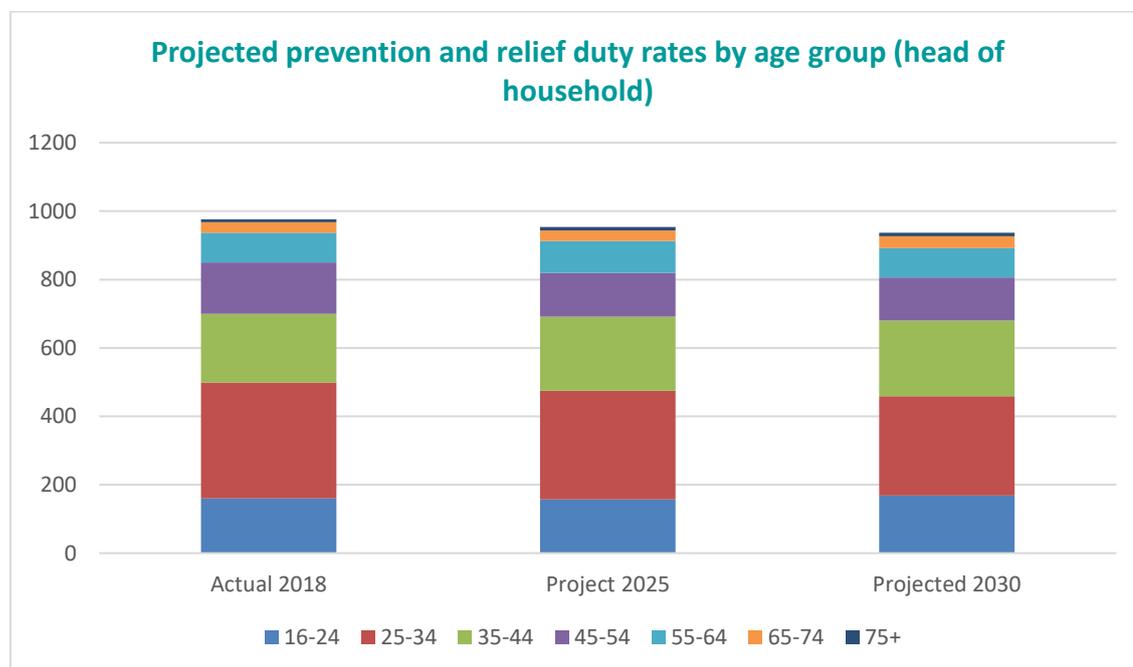
- 5.78 Analysis of population projections for Wirral allows us to cautiously consider the likely growth of specific groups within the population and the impact that these may have on homeless presentations. Taking our analysis of demand in terms of assessments where a Prevention of Relief Duty was owed in 2018, we have projected the likely change by age group by 2041 based on ONS 2014 based population projections.

Projected Changes in Age Groups

	Population 2018	Projected Population 2025	% Change 2018-2025	Projected Population 2030	% Change 2018-2030	Prevention and Relief Duty Cases 2018	Projected Prevention and Relief Duty Cases 2025	Projected Prevention and Relief Duty Cases 2030
16-24	32600	32000	0	34300	0	160	157	168
25-34	37500	35100	0	32100	0	339	317	290
35-44	36600	39500	0	40300	0	201	217	221
45-54	45700	39000	0	38400	0	150	128	126
55-64	43400	46300	0	42800	0	87	93	86
65-74	37700	38300	0	42200	0	31	31	35
75+	32000	38800	0	42600	0	8	10	11
Total	265500	269000	0	272700	0	976	989	1002

Source: 2016 based population projections/Housing Option Service Data

Figure 5.6 Projected levels of Prevention of Relief duty



Source: 2016 based population projections/Housing Option Service Data

5.79 Here we note the most prominent population changes on the Wirral between 2016 and 2041, and the likely impact on homeless service demand:

- although the population is set to rise by 4%, the prominent age groups owed a duty will see a decrease, leading to a potential small decrease in cases overall;
- the largest increase will be for the 75+ age group at 64.7% however, as this group only represent a small number of homeless cases, this will not have a significant impact of case numbers. That said, where older people do present, they are likely to be awarded a full duty and even a small increase in cases should be planned for;
- the size of the 16-24 age group remains fairly constant in the population and so too in predicted case number; and
- decreases are projected to be seen in the 25-64 age range within the population. This may also cause a small decrease in cases seen by the Council if there were no other factors at play.

Projected Changes in Household Type

- 5.80 Projections also consider household type and most notably an increase in single person households. 2014 projections estimate a 15% increase in single person households by 2039. This may result in an increase in single person households approaching the service and create further demand for one-bed accommodation options.

National Policy Change

- 5.81 The political and economic context over the next few years is currently highly uncertain, depending on the outcome of the forthcoming general election, the outcome of Brexit, and the changes which follow those events. Early evidence from the Homelessness Reduction Act is of a rise in demand from single households and stabilisation or even a potential fall in demand for temporary accommodation from homelessness families, but it is hard to forecast how this will change as the legislation is embedded.
- 5.82 The future level of demand and the ability of the Council to deal with that demand effectively depends importantly on future homelessness funding and wider local authority funding, which is currently highly uncertain, and which may pull in different directions. Examples of uncertain funding streams include:
- Flexible Homelessness Support Grant – there is a risk that this could be reduced or included within the in general local authority grant funding;
 - Housing Related Support funding – Many of the services which sustain people in their own tenancies or provide alternative accommodation options are funded through this programme. It is important to recognise that any reductions in funding would have a significant impact on future levels of homelessness.
- 5.83 Other factors which could also significantly affect future homelessness demand:
- reducing numbers of social rented housing through historic right to buy sales coupled with a reduction of void levels could result in less available accommodation for those on the housing register;

- there may be an on-going increase in evictions by housing providers due to rent arrears as a result of Welfare Reform, particularly following the roll out of Universal Credit;
- affordability issues and the very limited access to private rented accommodation, including shared accommodation options, makes it increasingly more and more difficult for the Housing Options Service to be able to find affordable and sustainable housing options for clients. Unless affordable accommodation is available it is anticipated that homelessness will continue to increase;
- changes to housing legislation including The Homes (Fitness for human habitation) Act 2015 has created an environment which some landlords believe makes it difficult for them to operate as a viable business. The impact of this may be a reduction in the number of privately rented accommodation properties available, together with an increase in homelessness from this sector;
- the end of interest only mortgages – the Financial Conduct Authority estimates that 600,000 interest-only mortgages will have reached the end of their term by 2020 – and half of those borrowers have no means to pay back the debt. A third of the shortfalls are expected to be more than £50,000. This has the potential to increase homeless applications;
- the proposed changes to ending private sector by ending no fault evictions is a positive move in responding to one of the main causes of homelessness, these proposed changes may have a detrimental impact on the number of landlords wishing to continue to either rent their property, or becoming increasing more 'choosy' as to who they rent to, with the likely impact being most felt by vulnerable groups and those dependent on benefits.

National Research

- 5.84 Research carried out by LSE London on behalf of London Councils and the London Housing Directors' Group ²³ recognises that the Homeless Reduction Act was expected (and intended) to increase the numbers of households presenting as homeless. Early H-CLIC statistics suggest that this has occurred although this data is known to have consistency issues.
- 5.85 The LSE research suggests that the Government's views on cost savings from the HRA were too optimistic, at least in the Capital. The Government suggested that the HRA would cost local authorities more in the short to medium term, but contended that in the long term (and indeed after three years) it would save them money, as fewer households will be accepted as homeless and have to be housed in temporary accommodation. The Government also assumed that the cost of prevention was relatively small compared to the cost of acceptances.
- 5.86 LSE interviewees said a long-term cost-neutral outcome was highly unlikely. Some (mainly in outer London) did expect numbers in TA to decline, but none expected the overall cost of homelessness provision to fall. Many said it was hard to foresee a fall in

²³ <https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/our-key-themes/housing-and-planning/homelessness/cost-homelessness-services-london>

the number of households in TA because of increasing pressures in the housing market. The Government's assumptions, they said, took no account of Boroughs' increasing difficulties in moving households out of TA into suitable secure accommodation.

- 5.87 The research concludes that, the policy is highly unlikely to be cost-neutral in terms of either the resources used for prevention and relief, or the costs of helping those who are accepted as homeless.

Key Findings

Increased demand

- 5.88 There was an increase in footfall to the service of 17% in 2018/19 following the introduction of the HRA 2017. It will be important to continue to monitor demand on a quarterly basis so that any increases can be appropriately responded to.

Raising awareness of the prevention duty and maintaining contact

- 5.89 During 2018-19 the Council owed a larger proportion of customers a relief duty (57%) compared to a prevention duty (43%). This suggests that more work may be needed to raise awareness of the service and the work that can be done to prevent homelessness occurring.
- 5.90 This is true not only for households, but for partner services who have a duty to refer such cases to the housing options service. Of the Duty to Refer cases, 18% resulted in a duty being owed. The majority of cases referred under duty to refer (80%) were assessed at the homelessness relief stage as opposed to the prevention stage, indicating that the referral may not have been made soon enough.
- 5.91 For 22% of prevention cases and 9% of relief cases, the duty came to an end due to loss of contact. This is currently being monitored by the team.

Single households

- 5.92 Single people are significantly over-represented in terms of households to whom a relief duty is owed accounting for 62%. This is due to single people approaching the service once they are already homeless.

Focus on the main causes of homelessness

- 5.93 The main reason for homelessness in Wirral is the loss of private rented accommodation; this accounted for 31% of cases. The main reason for private rented accommodation coming to an end is the landlord wishing to sell or re-let the property - accounting for 48% of all cases. Arrears accounted for 33% of cases. This data identifies opportunities to better focus prevention activity, including fast access to money and debt advice.
- 5.94 The second leading cause of homelessness is being asked to leave accommodation provided by family and friends (16%). Despite this, there was no successful negotiation/mediation work to secure the return to family and friends.
- 5.95 A range of prevention tools needs to be developed to address all the main causes, if homelessness is to be successfully prevented - alongside making best use of the existing prevention tools. This includes:
- support and advice for both landlords and tenants as tenancy difficulties arise;

- effective and timely family mediation
- increased awareness of domestic abuse services through all appropriate channels such as website information, factsheets etc.
- a pre-eviction protocol with social housing and supported accommodation providers

Enabling households to remain in their existing accommodation

- 5.96 44% of those owed a prevention duty had their homelessness successfully prevented, compared to 58% nationally (although this has increased to 57% during the first half of 2019/20) highlighting the positive impact homeless services have and in particular how the Housing Options team has been learning lessons following the first 12 months of the implementation of the HRA legislation.
- 5.97 The service is much more successful at helping households to secure alternative accommodation than enabling them to remain in their existing accommodation. The most successful prevention activity was securing social housing (56%), followed by securing private rented accommodation (34%).
- 5.98 In 2018/19, 57% of those owed a relief duty had their homelessness successfully relieved, compared to 43% nationally. This too increased to 63% in the first two quarters of 2019/20.

6. Temporary Accommodation

Housing authorities should review the existing supply of accommodation available to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and identify where there are gaps, or where existing resources do not match the most pressing needs.

This might include reviewing supply and demand for:

- *temporary accommodation provided on an interim basis, or under the main housing duty;*

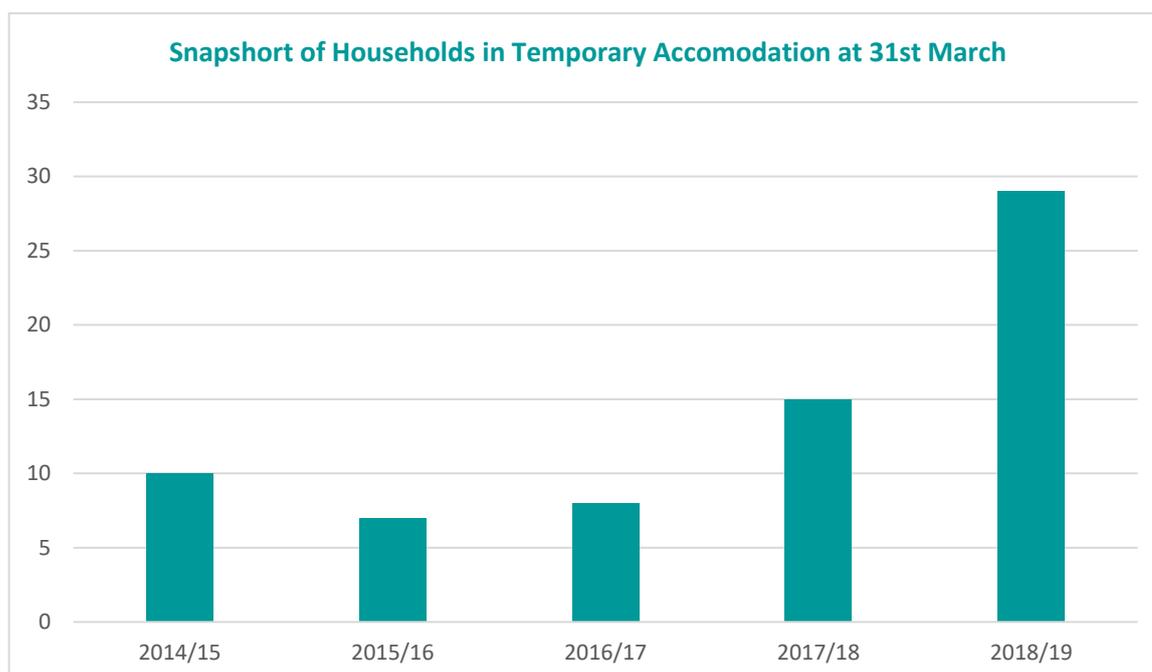
Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018, MHCLG

Provision

- 6.1 Wirral Council has direct control of 24 units of temporary accommodation, of which 23 are leased from Magenta Living and 1 is owned by the Council. They are a mix of 1 to 4-bedroom properties, of which 3 have been adapted and/or are fully/partly Equality Act 2010 compliant. Temporary accommodation is accessed via the Housing Options Team for statutorily homeless applicants to whom the Council has an interim duty to accommodate, this also includes the use of bed and breakfast accommodation and refuges.
- 6.2 In anticipation of the introduction of the new legislation, the Council increased its temporary accommodation portfolio by an additional 14 units. This mirrors similar provision in the sub-region. This increase has helped to minimise the number of households accommodated in Bed & Breakfast at any one time.

Placements

- 6.3 At the end of March 2019 there were a total of 29 households in temporary accommodation, 6 of these households were in Bed & Breakfast accommodation and 5 households occupying refuges.
- 6.4 The number of households in temporary accommodation at the end of each year has increased from 2015/16. The data shows a trend of rising temporary accommodation placements which has seen an increase since 2015/16. The most significant increase is evident since the introduction of HRA on 1st April 2018 due to wider duties to accommodate within the legislation. The rise of temporary accommodation use nationally has been evidenced as a result of the HRA implementation. The team's focus upon homelessness early intervention and prevention, particularly via the recently appointed Trailblazer Officer posts, is anticipated to help reduce the number of households needing temporary accommodation in the future.

Figure 6.1 Snapshot of Households in Temporary Accommodation at 31st March

Source: Wirral Council

- 6.5 The table below shows the number of households in temporary accommodation on the last day of the quarter following the introduction of the HRA 2017. This illustrates that the number of households in temporary accommodation at the end of each quarter has increased quarterly since the introduction of the HRA 2017. It is believed that this is linked to the increased demand on the service and pressures within the wider housing market. This is reflective of the wider national picture.

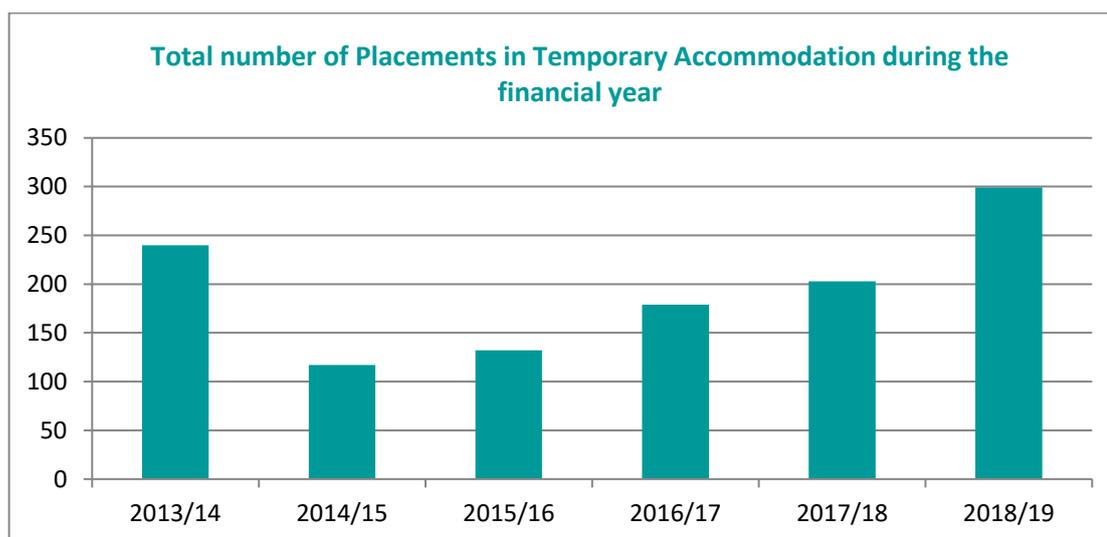
Quartile	Number
Q1 2018/19	19
Q2 2018/19	24
Q3 2018/19	25
Q4 2018/19	29
Q1 2019/20	31
Q2 2019/20	39

- 6.6 The graph below details the total number of households accommodated over the financial year including Bed & Breakfast accommodation. The data taken from below is based on the finance recording system which records the total number of nights and will also include duplicates where a household moves between TA addresses. It should also be noted that the data will include rooms advanced booked in Bed & Breakfast/

Hotels during high demand periods, such as bank holidays or Christmas, in order to support the Housing Options Team 'Out of Hours' service.

- 6.7 This data indicates that the number of temporary accommodation placements reduced in 2014/15 and has since increased on an annual basis, with a 155% increase over this period. There has been a 47% increase in the total number of placements since the introduction of the HRA 2017.

Figure 6.2 Number of placements in temporary accommodation



Source: Housing Options data

- 6.8 During 2018/19 placements were made into the following temporary accommodation types:

TA Type	No of Placements
Accommodation within registered provider stock	77
Accommodation within your own stock	1
Any other type of temporary accommodation	2
Hostels (including reception centres and emergency units)	3
Other nightly paid, privately managed accommodation, self-contained	3
Other nightly paid, privately managed accommodation, shared facilities	1
Privately managed Bed & Breakfast hotels (privately managed, meal/s provided, shared facilities)	161
Refuges	9

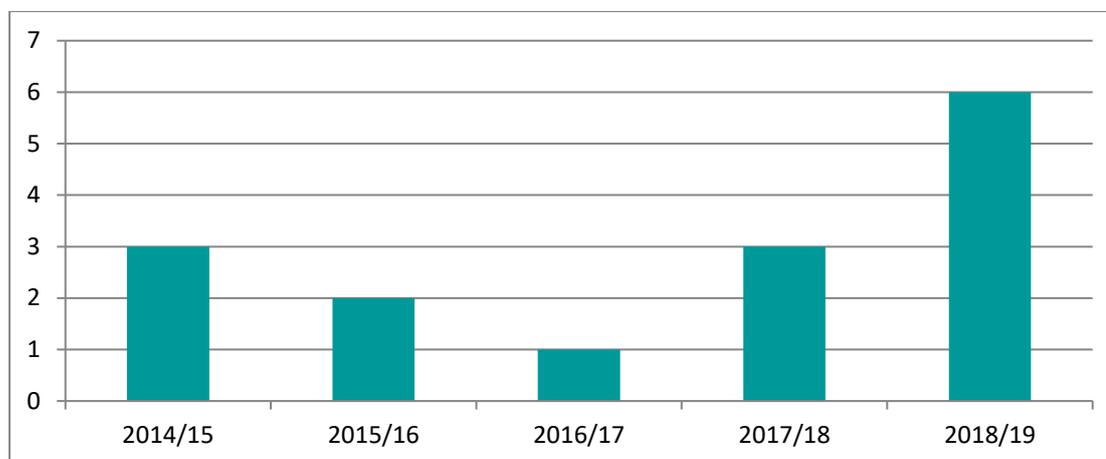
Source: Wirral Council

Bed and Breakfast Usage

- 6.9 Despite the overall increase in the use of temporary accommodation, the number of households placed in Bed & Breakfast accommodation over the same time period has

remained relatively stable. The number of households accommodated in Bed & Breakfast accommodation at the end of each financial year averaged around 3 from 2014/15 to 2018/19.

Figure 6.3 Snapshot of household in Bed & Breakfast at 31st March



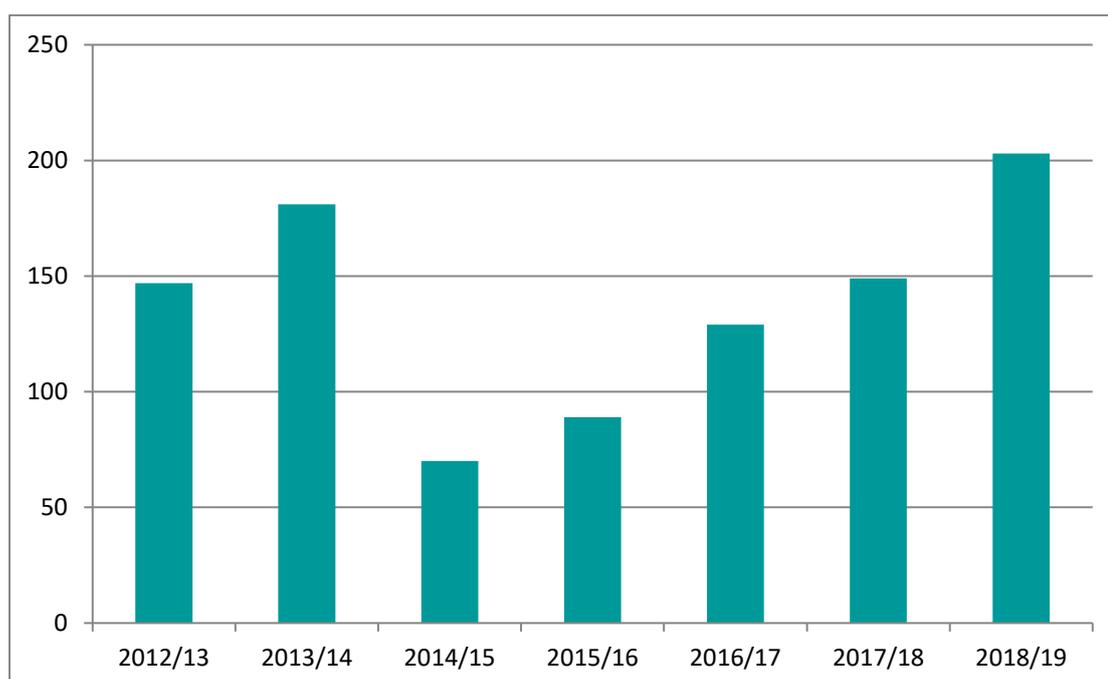
Source: Housing Options Data

- 6.10 The table below details the number of households accommodated in Bed & Breakfast on the last day of the quarter since the HRA was introduced. The use of Bed & Breakfast has increased quarterly, with a very significant increase in Q2 of 2019/20, this is linked to increased demand and issues in relation to suitable move on accommodation. The Council manages temporary accommodation occupation closely to reduce Bed & Breakfast use and move households into dispersed self-contained accommodation, which is more appropriate particularly for families.

Table 6.3 Number of households in Bed & Breakfast	
Quartile	Number
Q1 2018/19	5
Q2 2018/19	8
Q3 2018/19	5
Q4 2018/19	6
Q1 2019/20	11
Q2 2019/20	20

Source: Wirral Council

- 6.11 When looking at the number of Bed & Breakfast placements funded over the last 7 years, it can be seen that the number of Bed & Breakfast placements has increased significantly since 2014/15, increasing by 190% over this period. In response, the Council has sought to increase its own directly managed units of temporary accommodation which have increased from 10 units in 2016/17 to 23 units in 2019/20. The source of the data is the finance data base and is based on payments so contains some duplicate households and includes advance booking of rooms over high demand hotel/ Bed & Breakfast periods such as Christmas and bank holidays for the Out of Hours service which operates outside of office hours, that may not have been utilised.

Figure 6.4 Bed & Breakfast placements funded during financial year

Source: Wirral Council

Average Length of Stay

- 6.12 In 2018/19 there were 257 placements in temporary accommodation for 177 households. The average length of stay for households in temporary accommodation was 35 days, this increased to 41 days if refuge placements are included, however it should be noted that this data can be skewed by a small number of households. The Council has dedicated officers that work directly with households in temporary accommodation to reduce the average length of stay. Officers work with households to view, and secure accommodation linked to floating support to promote future tenancy sustainment. This work aims to help break the cycle of homelessness experienced by some households.

Table 6.4 Temporary accommodation placements	
Total Placements 2018-19	257
Number of Households	177
Total number of days placed (excluding refuge)	6365
Total number of days placed (inc refuge)	7233
Average number of days per household	35
Average number of days per household (inc refuge)	41

Source: Wirral Council

- 6.13 The table below details the total of number of nights by placement type during 2018/19. The greatest number of nights were spent in dispersed accommodation, followed by Bed & Breakfast.

Table 6.5 Temporary accommodation – number of nights	
TA type	Number of Nights
Bed & Breakfast	2,585
Dispersed	3,707
Supported	73
Refuge	868
TOTAL	7,233

Source: Wirral Council

- 6.14 The increase length of stay in temporary accommodation should be considered in the context of the new legislation whereby a household may be accommodated up to 56 days under a relief duty. Where a main duty is not owed review requests could result in an extended period of 8 weeks.

Household Composition

- 6.15 The largest number of placements during 2018/19 were for families accounting for 54% of all placements, closely followed by single people (43%), which reflects the overall presentations demographic.

Table 6.6 Temporary accommodation – household composition	
Household Type (TA)	Number of Placements
6-7 people or 4 children	15
8+ people or 5+ children	2
Couple	4
Family with 2 children	33
Family with 3 children	10
Family, 1 child	80
Non-cohabiting couple	3
Single Person	110
Grand Total	257

Source: Wirral Council

Key Findings

Increased in placements

- 6.16 The number of households in temporary accommodation at the end of each year has increased reflecting the overall increase in homelessness demand.
- 6.17 There has been an increase in Bed & Breakfast usage since 2014/15.

Reliance on Bed & Breakfast

- 6.18 Following the introduction of the HRA, in 2018/19 there was an increased reliance on Bed & Breakfast accommodation placements.

- 6.19 There is a need to more fully understand the current and future demand for temporary accommodation through a detailed temporary accommodation review, which will also consider an options appraisal for future delivery and management arrangements.

7. Activities & Services

Housing authorities should consider all the current activities which contribute to the provision of support for people who are, or may be at risk of becoming, homeless and those who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again. The range of providers whose activities will be making a contribution to this area are likely to embrace the public, private, voluntary and charitable sectors.

Having mapped all the current activities, the housing authority should consider whether these are appropriate and adequate to meet the aims of the strategy, and whether any realignment of resources or additional provision is needed.

Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018, MHCLG

Housing Options Team

- 7.1 The Housing Options team is delivered by the Council and is located in Wallasey, with the wider Housing Services function to support joined up service delivery. The service is delivered from the Town Hall Complex in Wallasey and is predominately a telephone-based service although it can arrange to see clients if face to face appointments are required. The Housing Options service delivers the Council's statutory duties in relation to homelessness. The Council's duties in relation to Allocations are delivered by the Property Pool Plus team also based within the Council.
- 7.2 The Housing Options team is fully integrated with the Supported Housing team and closely aligned with Housing Register staff, providing a joined-up service for customers with all teams sitting under the same Head of Service.

Position	Number
Housing Options	
Supported Housing & Homelessness Senior Manager	0.33
Homelessness & Housing Options Manager	1
Housing Options Team Leader	1
Homeless Review Officers	2
Homeless Prevention & Assessment Officers	8.5 Permanent Posts 2 Fixed Term Posts
Private Sector Officer	1
Supported Housing Assistant	2
Total	16.83
Temporary Accommodation	
	Number
Accommodation & Support Officer	4
Accommodation Assistant	1
Total	5
Trailblazer	
	Number (2years fixed Term)
Private Rented Sector Officer	1
Debt and Money Advisor	1
Early Intervention Officer	1
Total	3

- 7.3 The staffing levels recently increased following the implementation of the HRA. There is a general feeling amongst staff and managers that this increased level of resources is thought to be sufficient to manage the current demand. Caseloads have reduced from 60 to around 40 which is seen to be a more manageable level, although it should be noted that demand for the service can fluctuate.

Services Provided

- 7.4 The Housing Options Service undertakes detailed housing assessments under the homelessness legislation and develops personalised housing plans. The focus of the team is on homeless prevention. The service aims to reduce the risk of homelessness and to help people make planned moves rather than becoming homeless.
- 7.5 Housing Options offered by the team include:
- general housing advice;
 - advice on homeless prevention;
 - advice on tenancy law and security of tenure;
 - Private rented access scheme;
 - Homeless prevention fund;
 - debt advice;
 - referrals to supported accommodation;
 - referrals for floating support;
 - assistance with accessing permanent accommodation in both social and private rented sectors; and
 - referrals and signposting to wider services.

Accessing the Service

- 7.6 Access to the Housing Options team is via an online referral system, which can be completed by both customers and referring agencies. Once the referrals are received, they are logged on the system and allocated to staff in order to arrange a telephone assessment.
- 7.7 Customers can get assistance with making a homeless application via the online tool, over the phone, going into any library or via any One Stop Shop. Where necessary face to face interviews can be arranged. The service has adopted this approach in order to be able to manage the 17% increase in referrals received by the team since the introduction of the HRA in April 2018.
- 7.8 The team operates an 'Out of Hours' service to deliver a 24-hour homelessness service to respond to the needs of residents. The service is telephone based and officers undertake a telephone assessment and provide access to emergency accommodation where they have reason to believe a household has a 'priority need' under the homeless legislation. Non-priority need households are issued with advice and signposted to

available services, such as the YMCA Night shelter. Out of Hours cases are then linked in with the mainstream service on the next working day.

Impact of HRA on Delivery

- 7.9 The service has seen an increase in demand following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. During consultation, staff focus groups expressed some concerns regarding the challenges associated with the burden of additional administration under the new legislation, stating that it can be difficult to get the balance right between paperwork and casework. This has been compounded, at times, by high case-loads during periods of reduced staffing in the initial implementation stages of the HRA.
- 7.10 The HRA has led to an increased focus on complying with new legislation and issuing of notifications, resulting in lost time for casework and loss of some of the previous good practice innovation around prevention.
- 7.11 The majority of customers are approaching the service once they are already homeless, the team recognises this and is very much focused on how they can get people to contact the service at an earlier stage so that prevention and early intervention work can take place.
- 7.12 Under the HRA the team is working with a larger proportion of single people than under the previous legislation. The team also advises that the level of complex needs that customers are presenting with is increasing.

Case Management

- 7.13 Within the current Housing Options procedure cases are allocated to a dedicated officer who retains ownership of the application until completion. Regular case supervision is conducted between management and officers to ensure a positive outcome for applicants and guidance for staff.
- 7.14 The service places an emphasis on moving households on swiftly from temporary accommodation, with a weekly meeting to discuss every case in temporary accommodation and action plan the next steps.

Trailblazer Scheme

- 7.15 The service has been successful in receiving Trailblazer Funding (2 year funded 2019-21) to focus on early intervention and prevention. This funding is being used to fund three specialist posts within the team:
- Private Rented Sector Officer – the post will work to increase access to the private sector accommodation;
 - Debt & Money Adviser – this post has been seconded from the CAB; and
 - Early Intervention and Prevention Officer – this post will work with clients prior to the 56-day threat of homelessness.

- 7.16 Under the Trailblazer scheme the service will work to educate partners to encourage clients to access the service at an earlier stage so that opportunities for prevention can be maximised.

Prevention toolkit

- 7.17 There is a prevention fund in place which can be used for cash deposits, rent in advance, travel costs, rent arrears and other prevention initiatives.
- 7.18 The new Private Rented Sector Officer post will work to increase access to the private rented sector and sustainable tenancies and generic Homelessness Prevention and Assessment Officers will mediate between tenants and landlords in the case of disputes.
- 7.19 In relation to crisis intervention the Housing Options Staff can request that someone is given a Priority 2 Banding for MainStay. This has the effect of prioritising them for a placement within supported housing. The team also have access to 'safe seats' for overnight emergency accommodation.
- 7.20 Financial assistance to access the private rented sector can take the form of rent-in-advance and/or deposits. Eligibility for financial assistance is dependent on the assessed affordability of the property. This is currently under review and a policy to provide a range of financial and non-financial incentives is to be implemented in early 2020 with the aim of encouraging a partnership approach with private landlords to access suitable accommodation.
- 7.21 Target hardening is available through the Family Support Unit for victims of Domestic Abuse, also the FSU provides advice regarding legal remedies that can be taken to help the victim to continue living safely in their own home.
- 7.22 Officers work in partnership across internal teams and external partners to maximise positive outcomes for applicants.
- 7.23 Floating Support services actively engage with households threatened with homelessness to deliver homelessness prevention and provide support to residents to develop the wider skills needed to sustain their accommodation.
- 7.24 Officers signpost to relevant support services within the voluntary and community sectors and statutory agencies where unmet needs are identified.
- 7.25 A key prevention tool is the quick access to a specialist, dedicated Housing Options Citizens Advice Bureau officer for debt, and money advice. This role is further explored in the next section

Debt Advice Officer

- 7.26 Debt advice is provided by an officer employed by Wirral CAB, but who has been seconded to the Housing Options Service for the past three years. The post covers the following functions:
- provide free, confidential, high quality and independent money advice to individuals and families working with the Housing Options Service;

- complete income and expenditure assessments to prevent or alleviate homelessness, and form key evidence in statutory homeless investigations;
- advise about rent arrears, including rent assessments, rent tribunals and the implications for different tenures;
- provide multiple debt advice including mortgage, secured and unsecured loans, Council tax, utility and other priority debt. If mortgage debt, check the Mortgage Arrears Pre Action Protocol has been applied correctly and establish any Hardship Tools which have been or could be applied for by the lender;
- develop informal and formal financial arrangements based upon available disposable income;
- complete income maximisation exercises linked to benefit entitlement, tax allowances, etc;
- complete applications for Discretionary Housing Payments on behalf of clients; and
- make client referrals/work in partnership with Job Centre Plus to assist clients into work to mitigate impacts of welfare reform.
- The CAB officer has access to a wider range of third sector organisations to facilitate access for residents to meet a holistic range of needs, such as health or support based projects. Facilitating access to employment and training opportunities is also a key driver within the project.

Service Improvement Observations

7.27 From time spent shadowing the team, discussions with managers and a facilitated staff focus group we have made the following observations for potential service improvements:

- alongside the need to raise awareness of the service to ensure that both customers and partner agencies contact the team as soon as a risk of homelessness is identified, there is also the need to review how the team operates to ensure that sufficient resources are focused on early intervention and proactive prevention;
- customers are given 10 days to provide supporting information, if this is not provided the case is closed. While this process assists the team in managing demand this may also result in cases being closed where there is a genuine threat of homelessness, resulting in opportunities for prevention and early intervention being missed;
- there are no service standards in place, and no ongoing customer satisfaction monitoring;
- there are a number of policies and procedures in place to respond to the implementation of the HRA, however, these may need to be reviewed further to reflect the actual impact of the HRA, with a greater focus on prevention activities;
- while the service has a full suite of notification letters in place these will need to be reviewed to ensure that they are easy to understand;

- there is a need to update the website to increase the amount of information and advice available to customers, increasing the amount of self-help information available. The current website does not detail the new duties owed under the HRA. There is a need to review the website to ensure that it is up to date and clearly informs clients of their legal rights. Within this there is an opportunity to provide a range of information and advice for customers with a focus on early intervention and prevention, including a range of sources and resources to enable clients with the skills to do so, to resolve their own housing situation. In the longer term this could be complemented by an online Housing Options Wizard, to provide customers with bespoke housing plans. Both of these may assist the service in managing demand;
- there is also a need to develop a range of factsheets, and publicity material relating to the work of the Housing Options Team to be available electronically and/or on the website;
- as the HRA has been in place for over 18 months there may be value in undertaking a more detailed review of the Housing Options Service to identify what changes may be required to ensure that the team can focus on achieving more positive prevention outcomes, including enabling households to remain in their existing accommodation. The review should also consider how the team operates, demand management, customer focus, processes and procedures and legal compliance;
- whilst staff provide a mediation function, there is currently no commissioned mediation service in place. Due to the high level of family/friends eviction cases this is a gap in service provision that the Council will need to respond to;
- Given that the end of private rented tenancies is the main cause of homelessness on the Wirral, consideration should be given to a dedicated resource to work with tenants and landlords with a focus on preventing homelessness from the private rented sector; and
- the landlord offer should be reviewed in order to develop a competitive offer that will increase access to private rented accommodation.

Partnership Working

- 7.28 There are many very positive examples of effective joint working initiatives between the Housing Options team and other key partners.
- 7.29 The Housing Options service sits within the wider housing service which include, the Supported Housing Team, Aids and Adaptations team; Environmental Health Team, Private Sector Housing Team, Healthy Homes and Property Pool Plus. This ensures that there is very effective joint working between the teams. For example:
- Access to MainStay accommodation provides opportunities for vacancies to be prioritized for Housing Options clients, which is essential, especially in responding to the needs of single homeless people with complex needs, especially in responding to the needs of single homeless people with complex needs.

- This joined up approach also results in commissioners of housing related support services having a very informed understanding of the operational pressures and needs that clients are presenting with.
- Access to general needs accommodation via Property Pool Plus service, which assists with access to Social Housing, allowing the Council to meet their legal duties.
- “Fast track” adaptations process for those homeless or threatened with homeless households, this has resulted successful prevention outcomes and a reduced time spent in temporary accommodation.
- Access to properties that benefit from an Empty Property Grant, as these are now allocated via the housing option team.
- Early notification of Private Tenants risk of homelessness, via the Healthy Home Team for those tenants living in Selective Licencing areas.
- At the time of completing the homelessness review a wider review of Property Pool Plus across the sub-region was being undertaken. The findings of the review will inform the future provision of the services and its relationship with the Housing Options Service.
- There is an effective joint protocol in place with Children’s and Young People’s services, there are however at times some operational issues that are being addressed internally.
- Housing Options staff are members of key meetings such as the domestic abuse Multi- Agency Risk Assessment Conference and the multi-agency partnership group which manages high risk offenders or those who pose a risk to public protection (MAPPA).
- Hospital Discharge - in partnership with WUTH (Arrowe Park Hospital) and in order to respond to the issue of patients that are, or likely to be, homeless, or threatened with homelessness upon discharge from APH, the following is in place:
 - Within the Housing Options team, homeless hospital discharge cases are prioritised 5 days per week
 - A physical presence at APH is offered in the form of ‘Surgeries’ 3 ½ days per week (Monday, Wednesday & Friday)
 - Referrals outside of ‘Surgeries’ are made via ‘Duty to Refer’ portal and are followed up via telephone within an hour.
- During consultation a number of partners felt that having a surgery response to covering hospital discharge was not as effective as when there was a dedicated Housing Options Post covering this role.
- Regular meetings are held with Shelter Merseyside who support offenders in local prisons to ensure positive outcomes for this client group. Work completed includes pre-release telephone assessments, and effective partnership working to secure accommodation at point of release.
- There is a need to develop effective pre-eviction protocols with the main social landlords.

- As part of the Duty to Refer work, training has been provided to all partner agencies including HM Prisons, Merseyside Probation Trust, A&E and Mental Health Teams. There is a variation in the number of referrals received from organisations, with a view that partners have a basic understanding of the homeless prevention agenda but don't view it as a substantial part of their role.
- Moving forward it will be necessary to continue to provide training for partner organisations, and in the longer term identify how they may be able to assist in the delivery of personal housing plans.

Homelessness Forum

- 7.30 The Supported Housing and Housing Options Team convenes a multi-agency homelessness forum on a quarterly basis to provide networking and collaboration opportunities for all organisations working with homeless households in the district. This forum has been a key consultation tool for this homelessness review and it is hoped that it will take collective ownership of the emerging homelessness strategy.

Other Local Services

- 7.31 There are a range of services available within the Borough which are available to homeless households and who receive referrals from the Housing Service. Those specifically working with rough sleepers are detailed in section 8.

Debt advice

- 7.32 The two key local providers of debt advice services are:

- **Citizens Advice Wirral** - www.citizensadvicewirral.org.uk

Offer free, confidential, impartial and independent advice. Their advice helps people resolve their debt problems including: benefits, employment, housing, arrears and discrimination. It is available to everyone. Advice can be given face to face or by phone. There are a number of factsheets available covering such topics as budgeting, gas and electric arrears, child support and maintenance arrears. There is also money management pages with advice on mortgage problems, rent arrears etc.

- **Wirral Credit Union** - www.wirralcu.org.uk

Wirral Credit Union provides savings and low-cost loan services to anyone living or working in a CH postcode area. Established in 1992 they have provided over £47 million in small loans for our members for a variety of purposes such as, household bills, white goods, holidays, family events, Christmas expenses etc. They run an informal service and aim to help our members manage their finances better.

Mental Health

7.33 Mental health services are provided across of range of NHS and voluntary base organisations:

- **Wirral Mind Fountain Project** - www.wirralmind.org.uk

The Fountain Project Drop in the Drop-in Centre is a mental health resource available to people throughout Wirral and Merseyside. The Fountain Project has grown since it moved to its new home on the corner of Chester Street and Market Street, Birkenhead, in 1997. People can simply call in, have a cup of tea or some food from the restaurant. The Project has an extensive list of activities and facilities, which offer both leisure activities and the opportunity to undertake volunteering, such as in reception or conference hosting duties. It offers support and opportunities to people that are simply about improving their quality of life, taking back control and supporting one another.

- **Wirral Pathfinders** - www.wirralpathfinders.org.uk

Wirral Pathfinders is a Mental Health Self-Help Support Group which aims to support individuals to help themselves to learn to cope with their mental health difficulties.

- **NHS Community Mental Health Service - Stein Centre** - www.nhs.uk/Services/clinics/Services/Service/DefaultView.aspx?id=283547

Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust provides a range of mental health services via community mental health teams including assessment, diagnosis, treatment and follow up to people with severe and complex mental health problems. The mental health services are based in Tranmere.

- **Wirral Access Service** - www.cwp.nhs.uk/services-and-locations/services/wirral-access-service

The Wirral Access Service provides mental health assessment and sign posting to other services, including secondary care services for mental health. All referrals are made by GPs (General Practitioners) across Wirral.

- **The Open Door** - www.theopendoorcentre.org/

Provides creative support for young people suffering from stress, anxiety, low mood and money worries aged 15 to 30.

Substance Misuse

- **Wirral ways to recovery** (CGL)

Free and confidential drug and alcohol service for adults (including offenders), young adults, families and carers. The Spider Project is Wirral ways to recovery Abstinence Hub which provides creative arts, drama workshops, computer classes, interview skills, photography groups etc.

Offenders

- **Tomorrows Women Centre**

A charity for all Wirral women aged 18+ with a commitment to reduce offending and to provide support and assistance to those women who have never entered the Criminal Justice System but who want to make positive lifestyle changes. The women who attend are not judged and integrate to support and share skills and experiences. Helps to support women make positive lifestyle choices. Provides workshops and links to other services.

- **P3**

Responsible for the management of low to medium risk offenders in Merseyside. P3 works with them whilst they serve their community order, probation requirements or when they are released from prison on licence or parole.

Domestic Abuse

- **Wirral Women and Children's Aid** - <https://www.wwaca.org/>

The outreach team supports women with complex needs who are going through domestic abuse, the service aims to work alongside other service providers on Wirral to help the women to rebuild their lives without abuse.

- **RASA Merseyside**

Support and advice to males and females who have experienced sexual abuse or rape. Males and females who have been sexually abused as children.

- **WEB**

Support for women and children with complex needs, group work/one to one/holistic therapies.

Young People

- **The Hive Wirral Youth Zone**

Open to all young people, providing £1 hot nutritious meal, sport, arts, personal development, regular events, one-to-one youth work, mentoring, employability programmes, inclusion, and a second home for young people to raise aspirations.

- **Home start Wirral**

Offers groups for children with complex needs. Groups for parents and babies. Family support can be delivered by a volunteer support worker.

BME

- **Wirral Multicultural centre** - <https://www.wmo.org.uk>

The centre's purpose is to offer a range of professional and culturally sensitive services to improve the overall health and wellbeing of the local BME communities. A key focus is to support more vulnerable members of the local BME community by providing language support, advocacy, social support and activities, assistance to access primary care services and including advice and education services.

- **Wirral Change** - <https://wirralchange.org.uk/>

Providing a range of services to support disadvantaged and Black and Minority Ethnic groups.

Food Bank

- **Wirral Food Bank**- <https://wirral.foodbank.org.uk>

Part of a nationwide network of foodbanks, supported by The Trussell Trust, the bank works to combat poverty and hunger across the UK. The food bank provides three days' nutritionally balanced emergency food and support to local people who are referred in crisis. The food bank operates using a voucher referral system. There are a number of foodbank centres across the Wirral.

Key Findings

Housing Options Service Delivery

- 7.34 The team provides a good quality service, with a focus on positive customer outcomes. Partner agencies speak positively of the service received.
- 7.35 The impact of the HRA has led to an increased paperwork burden, the focus on legal compliance reduces the amount of time that can be spent on casework and achieving positive outcomes for clients.
- 7.36 The majority of customers approach the service once they are homeless, meaning that opportunities for prevention are missed. This results in staff time focusing on securing accommodation for these households rather than working with households to prevent them from becoming homeless.
- 7.37 The complexity of need that customers are presenting with is increasing, and at times becoming increasingly difficult to find suitable and sustainable housing solutions for people, this is especially the case for clients who exhibit violent and threatening behaviour.
- 7.38 There is a need to raise awareness of the service with both partners and customers to encourage clients to come in as soon as a risk of homelessness has been identified and to improve the appropriateness of referrals by agencies.
- 7.39 It may be timely to review the following policies and procedures:
- notification letters
 - Case closure after 10 days where supporting documentation – this may result in missed opportunities for prevention
 - service standards and the introduction of regular customer satisfaction monitoring
- 7.40 There is a need to update the website and develop factsheets to increase the amount of information and advice available to customers including details of the duties owed under the HRA.

Gaps in service provision

- 7.41 There is a need to consider the need for a mediation service to prevent family/friends evicting.
- 7.42 Consideration should be given to expanding the dedicated resource to work with tenants and landlords with a focus on preventing homelessness from the private rented sector.
- 7.43 The ongoing review of the landlord offer should result in a competitive offer being developed that will increase access to private rented accommodation.
- 7.44 The results of the Property Pool Plus review need to be recognised and actioned where appropriate. There is a need to maintain and build upon the strong working relationship between Property Pool Plus and the Housing Options Team.
- 7.45 There is a need to review pre-eviction protocols with the main social landlords.
- 7.46 There is a need to continue to review and develop joint protocols with a number of internal and external partners including pre-eviction protocols with social landlords and supported housing providers.
- 7.47 There is a need to continue to provide training for partner organisations, and in the longer term identify how they may be able to assist in the delivery of personal housing plans.

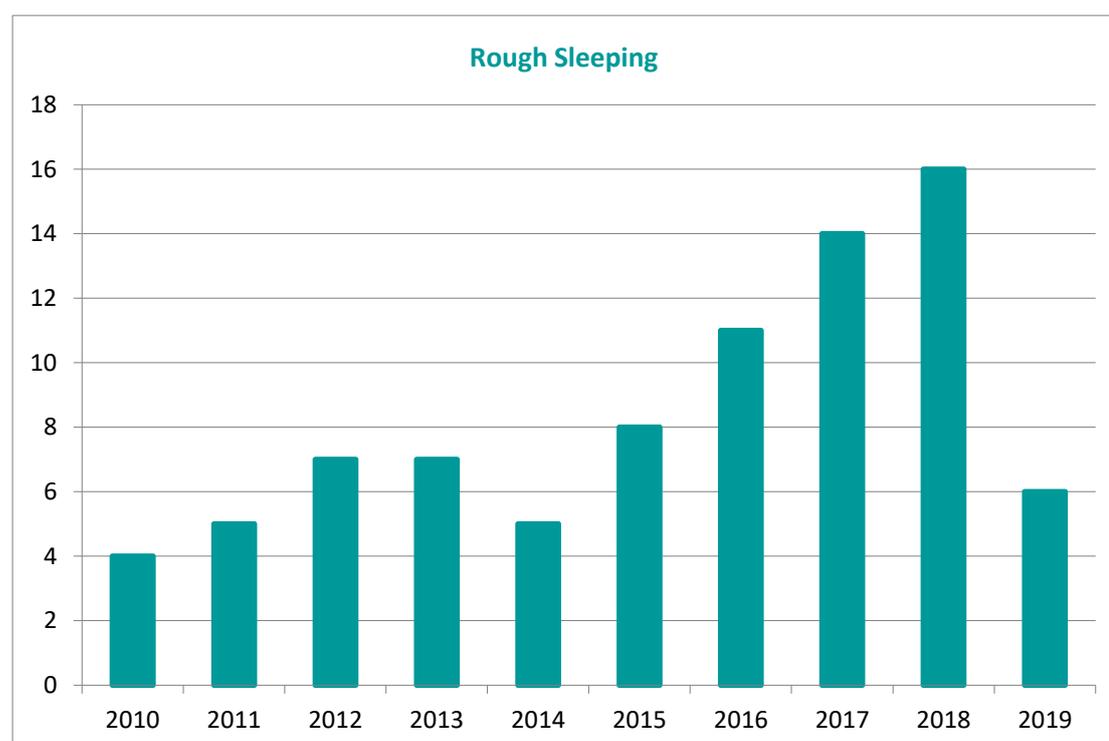
8. Rough Sleeping

Rough sleeping is defined as “People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or “bashes”). Each Authority is required to submit an official figure of numbers of rough sleepers found per year or to submit an estimate. This is an annual snapshot figure of the number of people sleeping rough in the area on a ‘typical night’.

Levels of Rough Sleeping

- 8.1 Available data indicates that rough sleeping has been on the increase in Wirral, predominantly centred in Birkenhead. The Authority has therefore taken a number of steps to respond to this increase including a successful bid for RSI funding which resulted in the commissioning of an Outreach Support service, improved partnership working and further investment in complimentary services. Through evidence collected in bi-monthly counts, this is delivering a reduction in the number of people sleeping rough for 2019.
- 8.2 Each Authority is required to submit an official figure of numbers of rough sleepers found per year or to submit an estimate, on a typical night. The graph below details the number of rough sleepers found/estimated since 2010.

Figure 8.1 Number of rough sleepers



Source: MHCLG Rough Sleeping Data

- 8.3 There has been a significant increase in rough sleeping from 2014 to 2018. This mirrored the national increase in rough sleeping. This also reflects the trend across the Liverpool City Region Authorities with the exception of Liverpool.
- 8.4 In 2018 Wirral had the highest level of rough sleeping across the City Region. This is due in part to Wirral having the 2nd largest population as well as a contained market (being a peninsular) with little or no migration. Further, Liverpool Council was allocated additional Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding by MHCLG during 18/19 in order to respond to the high level of visible rough sleeping in the city. This has had a positive impact in reducing rough sleeping in the city.
- 8.5 During 2019 Wirral Council made a successful bid for RSI funding and is now also seeing a reduction in the level of rough sleeping. The bid enabled the implementation of an assertive outreach service which targets rough sleepers and is co-located in the night shelter. This has resulted in a 62.5% decrease in levels according to the official annual count.

Figure 8.2 Number of rough sleepers across Liverpool City Region



Source: MHCLG Rough Sleeping Data

- 8.6 In addition to the Rough Sleeper figures shown in the table above relating to a “snap shot” taken on one night, the Council’s Mainstay data, collected from those people requesting access to supported accommodation services during 2018/19, reports that 47 individuals identified themselves as rough sleepers and a further 425 as being in danger of rough sleeping.

Response to Rough Sleeping

- 8.7 In recognition of the increasing problem of rough sleeping Wirral Council in 2019 allocated additional funding for a 'Complex Needs' support worker and also made a successful bid for RSI funding from MHCLG. As a result, the Authority has commissioned an additional Outreach service to engage with and support rough sleepers, particularly those who are hard to reach or resistant to engaging with accommodation services.
- 8.8 The Local Authority established a Rough Sleeper Steering Group in 2019, comprising membership from the Authority (including representation from Supported Housing & Homelessness Service), commissioned supported housing providers, Public Health, Police, and the Rough Sleeper Advisor (MHCLG). Further invitations have been extended to Adult Social Care. The purpose of this multi-agency group is to pull together relevant agencies so they can work in partnership and provide a co-ordinated and linked response to the problems associated with rough sleeping. The aim is to further assist rough sleepers, particularly those who are hard to reach and engage with, into stable and long-term housing solutions and to facilitate access to other services such as the Hostel nurse, Homelessness Mental Health nurse, Hostel GP, Social Care, Drug and Alcohol treatment services etc.
- 8.9 As a result of these developments the Authority and its partners are providing a more targeted response to support rough sleepers off the streets. However, it is acknowledged that there remain some gaps in provision.
- 8.10 Wirral Council continues to consult with its allocated Rough Sleeping Adviser, from MHCLG, with regard to identifying remaining gaps in service provision and opportunities to submit bids for future funding offered by MHCLG. The Authority is committed to maximizing available resources and opportunities to resolve the issue of rough sleeping, including utilisation of the LCR Combined Authority Assertive Outreach service that has been commissioned following a successful partnership bid for funding.
- 8.11 The Council intends to submit bids to MHCLG for: Continuation of Rough Sleeper Assertive Outreach Service to 31st March 2021; additional roles within services to deliver improved outcomes for those accessing the night shelters; to improve access to general needs accommodation for those who are able to move on or sustain a tenancy thereby freeing up supported accommodation for those who need it. These measures should therefore reduce the length of time spent in the night shelters and further reduce the risk of rough sleeping.

Services for Rough Sleepers

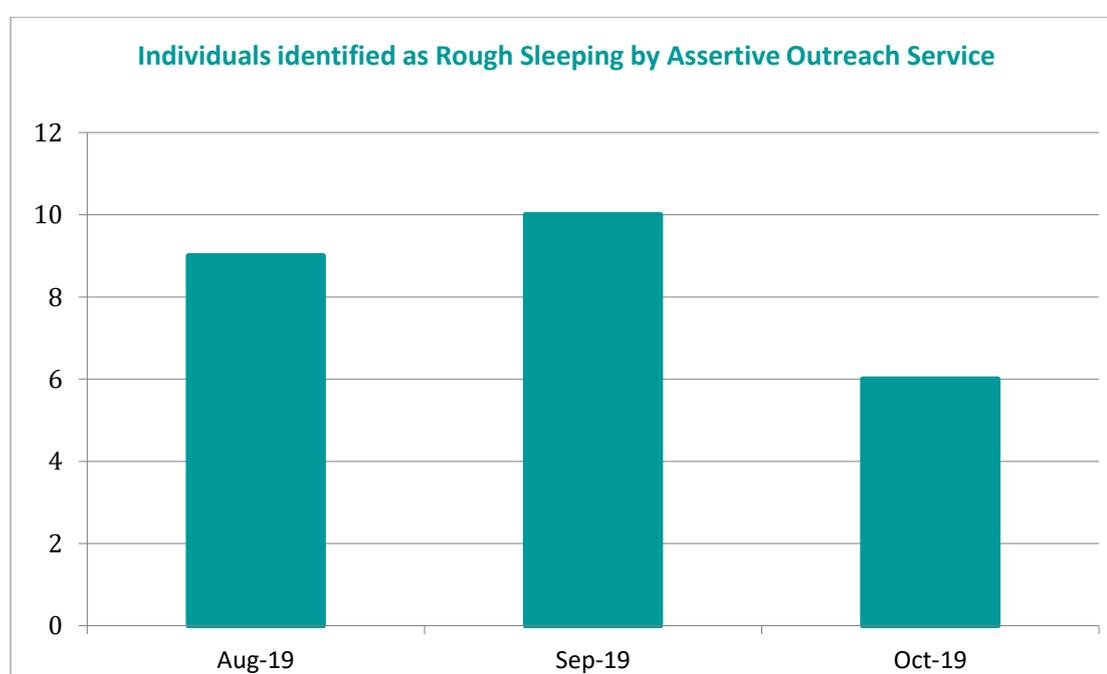
YMCA Assertive Outreach Service

- 8.12 In 2019, the Council was successful in receiving Rough Sleeping Initiative funding, for 12 months, to commission an Assertive Outreach Service. This service is delivered by the YMCA. The service has 3 outreach support workers and commenced operations on 5th August 2019. The staff go out onto the streets in the evening/overnight, including weekends, to contact people who are sleeping rough.
- 8.13 The service responds to Streetlink referrals and also works closely with Change Grow Live (daytime outreach service commissioned by Public Health), Complex needs worker,

Birkenhead Community Police Officer, etc. to accept additional referrals and share intelligence to ensure maximum engagement with rough sleepers. This approach means that services can provide a response to rough sleeping between the hours of 9am to 2 am each day (i.e. until they are bedded down for the night and therefore reluctant to engage).

- 8.14 The workers maintain contact with rough sleepers to try to help them to make the move into accommodation, either supported schemes or more stable and permanent housing. If a rough sleeper is not ready for housing, the service will stay in contact with them and will continue to offer support, ready to respond and help when they have a change-of-mind.
- 8.15 The outreach workers make persistent, regular attempts to work with the rough sleeper to get them off the streets. They provide practical advice and support to encourage the person into supported housing services, temporary accommodation, or into a tenancy.
- 8.16 The service also has access to funding for Personal Budgets, which can be allocated to individuals for items that would move them away from a life on the streets. E.G. Deposits to access PRS, purchase of essential items to furnish accommodation, etc.
- 8.17 The service undertakes a monthly count, which went live in August 2019. Over time the data will provide more intelligence and a better understanding of the level and nature of rough sleeping across the Wirral, and why individuals found themselves on the street. The details will form the basis for discussions at the Rough Sleeper Steering Group meeting and will then inform future commissioning.

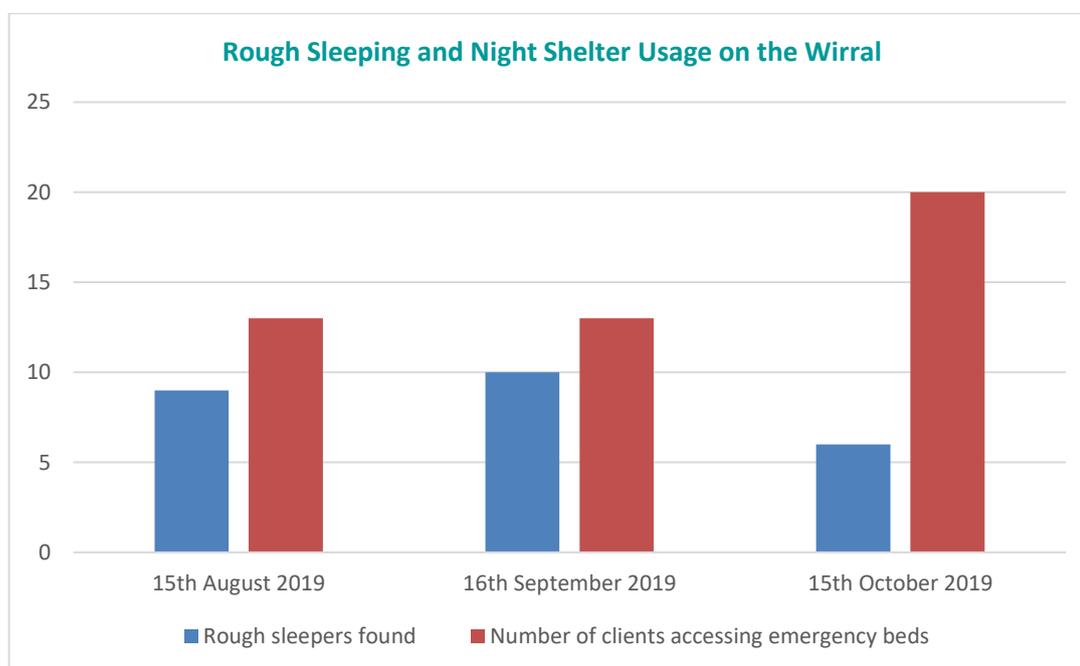
Figure 8.3 Assertive Outreach Service – identified rough sleepers



Source: Assertive Outreach Counts

- 8.18 The data from the Assertive Outreach team for September indicates that:
- the service identified 21 individuals sleeping rough over the month, 16 of these were male and 5 were female
 - The majority of rough sleepers are aged between 25 and 55 years. The youngest rough sleeper identified was 25 years old.
 - The majority of rough sleepers the service identified were British (86%). The remaining 3 individuals were from Latvia, Poland and Ireland.
 - The majority of rough sleepers identified had a local connection to Wirral (81%). Of the 4 that did not have a local connection they were from Liverpool, Ireland, Russia and Poland.
- 8.19 Since the service became operational, to date interventions by the Assertive Outreach Team (and partners) have meant that 13 individuals have been supported into long-term stable accommodation (of which 2 are waiting to access detox) and 1 individual has returned home. There are 10 individuals who continue to receive support to address and resolve their homeless situation. Sadly 1 rough sleeper has been recalled to prison, and another died after being accommodated in supported housing. The service has lost contact with 5 individuals who are no longer sleeping in the location they were originally found and are not responding to calls. However, should they return to rough sleeping or accept contact the service will re-engage them and support them.

Figure 8.4 Rough Sleeping and Night Shelter Usage August to October 2019



Source : Outreach team and Mainstay

- 8.20 The graph above provides information taken from the Mainstay data and the monthly spot counts. The data suggests that the Assertive Outreach Service is being successful in reducing the number of individuals sleeping rough and increasing access to the

emergency accommodation. In October 2019, 5 rough sleepers were found, and 20 individuals were accessing emergency accommodation on any given night. It should be noted that some of these may have accessed the accommodation directly.

Other Outreach Services

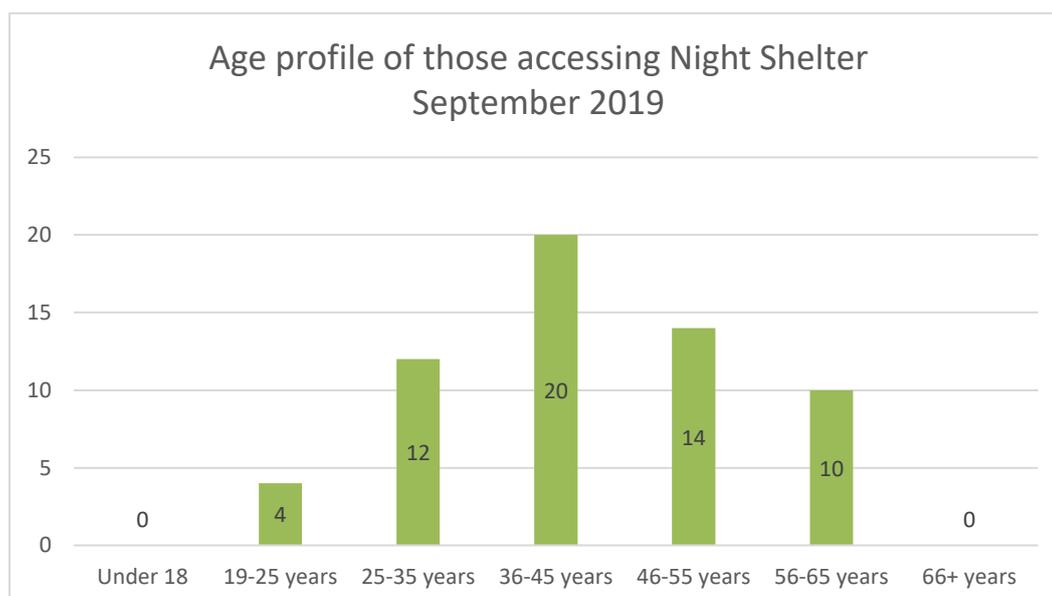
8.21 Other outreach services operating locally include:

- Wirral Ways to Recovery provides a daytime outreach service to rough sleepers with drug or alcohol issues.
- The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority has received time limited funding for 2 years for an Assertive Outreach Service to work across the region. The service will be delivered by Whitechapel and is due to commence in October/November 2019. The Council will work closely with Whitechapel to agree what service is required on the Wirral to avoid duplicating with other existing services. This will enhance the support available for Wirral rough sleepers, although there may still remain some gaps in provision.

Emergency Accommodation

YMCA Night Shelter

- 8.22 YMCA provide a Night Shelter which accommodates up to 15 individuals at any one time aged over 25 years. There is a separate area for women. This service is commissioned by the Council.
- 8.23 The project aims to create a place of safety overnight and prevent loss of life and the suffering associated with sleeping rough. The secondary aim is to enable partner organisations to make best use of opportunities to engage with long-term rough sleepers, who are normally resistant to coming indoors.
- 8.24 The night shelter operates in a communal area within the YMCA's main hostel and is made up of pull out beds. The service is available between 22.00 and 07.00 seven days a week. Beds are allocated on a nightly basis, for one night at a time only. Clients are asked to leave at by 7am in the morning.
- 8.25 Any client accessing the service is able to gain warm overnight shelter, warm food and drinks, re-cycled clothes and toilet and shower facilities along with guidance, advice and support from a dedicated Night Duty Staff. The over-night provision is designed to fit into the provision of other services on Wirral and clients are signposted to follow on services, e.g Charles Thompson Mission, Complex Needs Worker, Hostel Drug & Alcohol Nurse, Mental Health Nurse, Outreach GP's surgery etc.
- 8.26 In September 2019 60 individuals slept in the night shelter for at least one night. 47 of these individuals were male and 13 were female. Where ethnicity was recorded, all of the clients were White British, apart from 2 individuals who were White Irish.
- 8.27 The age profile of these clients is shown on the graph below and illustrates that the majority of clients are aged between 36-45 years.

Figure 8.5 Age profile of those access night shelter support – September 2019

Source: Wirral Council MainStay Data

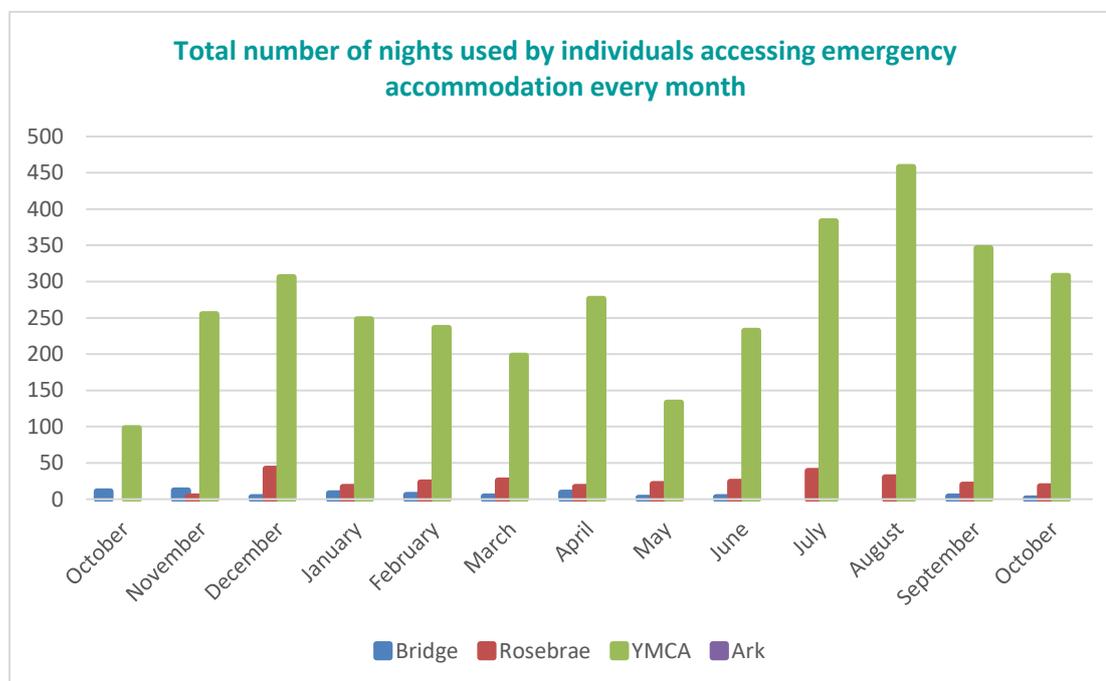
- 8.28 The total number of nights that the client generally accessed the night shelter was under 10. It is noted that after 7 nights in the night shelter the clients Mainstay priority is increased to level 3 in order to move them up the waiting list for supported housing services. Any clients who access accommodation are recorded on Mainstay, however, some clients only access the night shelter for 1 night. For these clients the Council does not have data to identify where they went, this can only be captured if they subsequently re-present to services or they advise the night shelter of their intentions either whilst they are in the service or on exit.
- 8.29 The Council is reviewing performance and reporting mechanisms for night shelter provision to ensure improved data capture.

Other Accommodation Provision

- 8.30 Other emergency accommodation available to rough sleepers locally include:
- Manor Road – 6-bed unit for Homeless 16/17-year olds.
 - 3 x 'Safe Seats' in the Beacon for females aged 18-24
 - 5 x 'Safe Seats' in the Bridge for males aged 18-24
 - 2 x 'Safe-Seats' in Rosebrae for adults (Used as an overflow from the YMCA Night Shelter or when someone has been barred from the Night Shelter)
 - Wirral Churches Ark Project - offers 40 nights of night shelter provision to be called upon by the Council as required. In Winter 2018 it was activated during severe weather when the YMCA Night Shelter was operating at near capacity.
 - Local churches also provide night shelter provision, named "Ark Light", during the winter months. The service is staffed by volunteers and offers up to 10 bed per night

at various venues. Access to the service is coordinated by Wirral Churches Ark project.

Figure 8.6 Total number of number of nights used by individuals accessing emergency accommodation every month October 2018 to October 2019



Source: Mainstay data

- 8.31 The graph above shows the number of emergency beds accessed every month over the last 12 months. The data shows a clear spike over the summer months, the reasons for this are not clear.

Other Service Provision

Complex needs worker

- 8.32 A Complex Needs worker is employed by Whitechapel and funded through the Council. The post works with those most complex rough sleepers and those most resistant to accessing other services. The post has been very successful in engaging with some of the most entrenched and challenging individuals.
- 8.33 The post was originally developed following a successful bid for funding, made by Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, with a focus on reducing homelessness and rough sleeping. The funding was time-limited but due to the service demonstrating it had achieved positive and effective outcomes for clients and the Authority during its 2 years of operation Wirral Council continued to commission and fund the service when grant money ended.
- 8.34 The Complex Needs worker assists the most complex individuals, specifically those who have either failed to remain engaged with services or failed to maintain accommodation due to issues such as: substance misuse; history of offending/anti-social behavior;

- multiple exclusions from services; mental health issues; vulnerability to exploitation and abuse by others; etc. Those supported are trapped in the revolving door of accessing services for a short period and then either disengaging or being evicted due to their behavior and associated risks to other service users. They require an intensive intervention, and support from multiple services/agencies.
- 8.35 The worker provides a 'Navigator' role working holistically, identifying root causes of prolonged rough sleeping and working with clients and other agencies to develop creative, person-led, sustainable pathways to recovery. The worker is a single, consistent and trusted point of contact for the individual they are supporting, enabling them to successfully engage, or re-engage with services that they would otherwise be excluded from. The worker resolves homelessness, social exclusion and housing poverty by providing practical, intensive support and acting as liaison with Police, Social care, Health and Treatment Services, Criminal Justice System and other commissioned and voluntary sector services such as Charles Thompson Mission.
- 8.36 The service currently supports 7 clients: 1 has been housed and supported by 'Housing First' but they have requested that, due to risk management issues, the Complex Needs worker continues to provide support; 1 individual is due to be discharged as she is maintaining her tenancy, managing her finances and is abstinent of alcohol having been linked to Wirral Ways to Recovery and supported to maintain engagement with the service.

Client Case Study – KM:

KM is a 52-year-old male who has had many years of alcohol dependency whilst suffering complex mental health issues including emotional personality disorder, anxiety and depression, along with bouts of psychosis resulting in serious episodes of violent and extreme behaviours. KM is a prolific self-harmer and has been detained under the Mental Health Act numerous times. He has spent many years in and out of hostels and long periods of rough sleeping. KM has received an ASBO for his behaviour and several court appearances for D&D and assault on another person for which he received a custodial sentence.

When referred KM was living in shop doorways and abandoned cars. Initial contact proved difficult until after a short period of trust was gained and KM began to engage with our service. KM was supported to access recovery services and was assessed by the homeless Mental Health Nurse. This was instrumental in gaining a placement for KM at a hostel. This was achieved within the first 3 weeks of intervention by the Intensive Support worker.

Support was discussed at length with KM who agreed that accommodation was top of his priority list and that his pending ASBO was also worrying him. He was supported to access a hostel on the proviso that he engaged with the Intensive Support Service. This gave the hostel a point of contact should his behaviour become erratic. He was also supported with his court appearances and to access medical and recovery services. Unfortunately, this placement failed once again leaving KM homeless and living in a disused car. The Intensive Support Service continued to work with KM and sourced a tenancy and supplied a bond to secure the property. KM has coped well with this tenancy and has also reduced his alcohol intake. He is now registered with a new GP and is now medicated for his conditions. Self-harming has reduced, this had previously escalated. He would previously refuse hospital attendance preferring to see the homeless nurse at the mission. A&E attendances have reduced, and some stability has returned. He is currently receiving several hours of intensive support each week.

KM now feels more settled and having a secure tenancy has reduced his self-harming. Harm reduction is evidenced by his reduced alcohol intake and increased prescribed medication. Whilst KM is still drinking, however there are now several days of abstinence at a time. KM is now re connected with mental health services via his GP and is supported to attend appointments.

Charles Thompson Mission

- 8.37 The Charles Thompson Mission is a voluntary organisation and is not commissioned by the Authority. It provides hot food, clothing, toiletries, other basic essentials, to people in need. There are shower facilities on site that are available for use during opening hours.
- 8.38 The Mission is open seven days a week, for limited hours each day. The Mission provides a drop-in centre for the homeless and those in need, including access to Health surgeries delivered by the Homeless Drug and Alcohol and Mental Health Nurses, GP appointments and Chiroprody.
- 8.39 The Mission is open for 6 days per week for breakfast and many homeless and rough sleepers will access it when they leave the night shelter at 7 am. The Mission closes after lunch most days.

Other Satellite Services

- 8.40 The Salvation Army is also open at various times throughout the week but closed on Friday. They provide food on a Wednesday and Friday's. Chinese Church provides food and drink on a Wednesday, along with a number of satellite service provided by local churches.
- 8.41 Individual rough sleepers are able to access a range of commissioned, statutory organisations that provide both accommodation, food and access to health services. However, these are limited in resources. Currently there are no commissioned day services offering diversionary activities. However, the Council has worked closely with commissioned providers to support bids to secure funding for day-time services for rough sleepers. E.g. Wirral Churches Ark bid for resources from "Homeless Link" to provide a day-time HUB for rough sleepers. If successful this will address some of the gaps in current provision, by complementing the work at the Mission and other services and should reduce anti-social behaviour in the day. In addition, through the established Rough Sleeper Steering Group Meetings, the Council will continue to work with all providers to improve the level of activities available during the day.

Identified Issues

Prevention

- 8.42 During the Statutory Homeless Assessment undertaken by the Housing Options Team, there is no specific assessment of whether an applicant may be at risk or at greater risk of rough sleeping if their housing/homelessness situation is not resolved. However, the

Housing Options team does record if the person is currently rough sleeping or has a history of rough sleeping.

- 8.43 All applicants are advised of the services available to rough sleepers (or to prevent rough sleeping) during their assessment. Advice will be given regarding
- Night shelter – Emergency overnight provision
 - Safe seats - dedicated emergency provision for the Housing Options team
 - Mainstay Assessments – will be completed (or updated) by staff at the overnight provision to allow access to supported housing.
 - Additional services will be notified to the applicant as part of the overnight emergency services. E.g access to services provided during the day by commissioned (Health, addiction)
 - Additional community services available, e.g. Charles Thompson Mission, Food Bank.
- 8.44 Further targeted work may, however, prevent the flow of new rough sleepers on to the street, embedding a targeted prevention approach is essential. Such an approach would seek to identify a range of risk factors that would indicate that a person is at an increased risk of rough sleeping if their housing/homelessness situation is not resolved, and ensure that targeted interventions are then put in place to prevent the individual from rough sleeping. A number of prevention trailblazers have been operating across England and learning from these can be implemented locally.

Outreach

- 8.45 There would be value in further developing the Mainstay database to contain more information about (all) Wirral rough sleepers, including support needs (ideally primary and secondary needs) and which agencies/services people are involved with them, this would help to track individuals as they move between services.
- 8.46 In order to develop a better understanding of the profile of Wirral's rough sleeping population and develop (more) appropriate service responses the Council, together with the outreach service as part of the RSI programme requirements, has adopted the 'flow'/'stock'/'returner' model of recording rough sleepers. This has only recently been adopted and is being monitored by the Rough Sleeper Steering Group. This will help to enable different targeted responses based on client's needs. For example, those clients within the 'stock' profile should be the caseload of a multi-agency complex/entrenched rough sleepers' case management group. For those clients who are new to the street (flow) a rapid response into suitable emergency provision based upon their needs should be the response, alongside using the intelligence as to why they have ended up sleeping rough to develop targeted prevention interventions. For the returners a further different appropriate response will be required, but again intelligence should be used to understand why these clients are returning to the streets.
- 8.47 There is a need to secure longer term funding for the assertive outreach provision to engage with people arriving on the streets for the first time, together with a targeted and multi-agency approach to work with entrenched rough sleepers. This will be

addressed as part of a further bid to MHCLG for RSI funding to extend the service to March 2021.

Emergency Accommodation

- 8.48 An effective outreach service is dependent upon the ability to be able to access emergency or direct access accommodation to ensure that as soon as a client chooses to engage with services and come off the streets an offer of accommodation can be made available.
- 8.49 It is essential that commissioned direct access provision is used as emergency provision for short periods of time and that it is linked to more settled solutions. There are currently 15-night shelter beds, which are allocated on a nightly basis. This provides no stability for services users and no opportunity for services to begin to effectively engage with individuals. Consideration may need to be given to the configuration of these beds and their use. In order to develop a clear pathway off the streets there needs to be both emergency beds for short term use (a matter of days) and longer terms beds (a number of weeks). This needs to be complemented by a range of other supported housing solutions (longer term supported accommodation, Housing First etc.).
- 8.50 The current night shelter does not turn anyone away, unless they are excluded due to behavioural/high risk issues. The Council Housing Options Team will work with the service to secure alternative emergency provision through overflow beds, should the need arise. The Council should consider that it is important that the emergency/night shelter beds are allocated for more than just a night at a time, to ensure service users are given a longer period of time (at least 3 nights) in which to begin to access services and engage with support. The current system therefore may inhibit service users to begin to engage with services, as it provides no certainty or consistency. The Council is reviewing the staffing levels within the night shelter provision with a view to increase the resource available to improve the assessment and engagement of rough sleepers.
- 8.51 In the longer term, the Council should consider options for more suitable alternatives to the current offer available, with the provision of self-contained emergency beds/pods providing clients with a safe and private space.

Structured Day Activities

- 8.52 There is also potentially a need to strengthen formal and structured day service provision to engage with rough sleepers throughout the day offering a range of services and activities under one roof.

Partnership Working

- 8.53 There is a need for a multi-agency strategic approach to tackle rough sleeping to ensure that effective services are in place, and that all organisations including commissioned services and the voluntary sector, are working together to meet this aim. The Rough Sleeper Steering Group has been established to act as the vehicle to ensure that this happens. Whilst individual cases have been discussed at this meeting, they have recommended that there needs to be a more frequent operational meeting to discuss individuals.

- 8.54 An operational action focused group that meets more regularly to discuss the most entrenched rough sleepers, while jointly plans interventions to get them off of the streets will be developed moving forward.
- 8.55 Alongside this it will be essential to work with a range of agencies, including the voluntary sector and faith groups, to ensure that all organisations are working to reduce rough sleeping, rather than inadvertently offering services and practical assistance (sleeping bags, food etc.) that will sustain a rough sleeping lifestyle.

Health

- 8.56 There is also the need to ensure that effective health provision is available for rough sleepers, including in the longer-term appropriate step up and down respite provision. Rough sleepers who access and engage with commissioned services benefit from access to a dedicated drug and alcohol nurse and dedicated mental health nurse and GP outreach service. They can also be referred into the commissioned mental health floating support service. However, given that the average life expectancy of rough sleepers is much lower than for the average member of the population, consideration should also be given to end of life care for rough sleepers.
- 8.57 In order to have an accurate understanding of the health needs, and specifically the mental health needs of Wirral's Homeless population, and to improve the health outcomes for this client group the Council together with its lead partners should undertake a further Health Needs Audit. The Audit would assess, evaluate and improve care of the homeless population in a systematic way. It would increase the available evidence about the health needs and wider determinants of those sleeping rough.

Key Findings

Levels of Rough Sleeping

- 8.58 There was a significant increase in rough sleeping from 2014 to 2018. This mirrored the national increase in rough sleeping.
- 8.59 In 2018 Wirral had the highest level of rough sleeping across the City Region. However, during 2019 Wirral Council made a successful bid for RSI funding for an assertive outreach service This has resulted in a 62.5% decrease in levels according to the official annual count.
- 8.60 The Assertive Outreach Service has been successful in reducing the number of individuals sleeping rough and increasing access to the emergency accommodation.
- 8.61 In October 2019, 5 rough sleepers were found, and 20 individuals were accessing emergency accommodation on any given night. It should be noted that some of these may have accessed the accommodation directly.
- 8.62 There is a need to develop a continued service that prevents clients from rough sleeping, reducing the flow of new rough sleepers onto the street, and to secure longer term funding for the assertive outreach service.

Understanding of the nature of rough sleeping

- 8.63 There is no centralised database to capture details about rough sleeping. Having adopted the stock/flow/returner intelligence the Council will have a better understanding of the level and nature of rough sleeping across the Wirral
- 8.64 There is a need to better understand the health needs of this client group to address both immediate and longer-term needs and, in the longer term, develop options for respite and end of life care.
- 8.65 The Streetlink number should be more widely promoted to ensure that both agencies and the public know how to report rough sleepers, so that targeted help can be offered.

Alternative accommodation options

- 8.66 There is a need to ensure that emergency accommodation provision makes the best use of the available beds, helping to create a clear pathway off the streets and into services, and including a review of how beds are allocated (and for how long).
- 8.67 Alternative, private accommodation should be procured to provide a safe private space for clients requiring an emergency bed. Funding opportunities should be explored.

Day service provision

- 8.68 There is also potentially a need to strengthen formal and structured day service provision to engage with rough sleepers throughout the day offering a range of services and activities under one roof.

A collaborative approach

- 8.69 It is important to continue to harness the goodwill of volunteers, Faith community and providers, and the delivery of actions within the Homelessness Strategy may provide a co-ordination vehicle for doing this.

9. Housing Related Support Services

Housing authorities should review the existing supply of accommodation available to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and identify where there are gaps, or where existing resources do not match the most pressing needs.

This might include reviewing supply and demand for:

supported accommodation available for particular cohorts of people in need of accommodation with support

Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018, MHCLG

Commissioned Housing Related Support

- 9.1 Wirral Council has continued to commission a good amount of Housing Related Support Services for socially excluded groups including for clients who are homeless. There is a total of 155 floating support units and 406 accommodation- based units for homeless and socially excluded clients.
- 9.2 The current accommodation and support model for homeless people and rough sleepers had been in place since 2010 with the introduction of the 'Pathways' Model. However, the needs of homeless people in the Borough have changed significantly over the last 7 years, with an increased number of rough sleepers; an increased demand for supported housing services and increasing numbers of homeless people presenting with multiple and complex support needs being encountered. This resulted in the reconfiguration of Wirral's supported housing provision in order to ensure its continued relevance in meeting the support needs of people experiencing, or at risk of social exclusion, going forward.
- 9.3 The following table provides further detail on current provision by provider.

Table 9.1 Homeless accommodation service providers					
Provider Name	Service Name	Units Available	Age Group	Client Group	Staffing
Excel Housing Solutions	Ashville Floating Support Service	80	18+	Single Homeless with Support Needs	Day time, visiting
Forum Housing Association	Bridge Project	26 + 5 Emergency beds	18-24	Young People at Risk	24/7 inc. waking night
	Market Wells	40	18-24	Young People at Risk	24/7 inc. waking night
	The Beacon	62 + 3 emergency beds	18-24	Young People at Risk	24/7 inc. waking night
	The LINKS	25	16-21	Young People at Risk	24/7 inc. waking night
Local Solutions	Wirral Supported Lodgings	23	16-21	Young People at Risk	Day time with emergency out of hours support.
Magenta Living	Manor Road Service	6	16-17	Young People at Risk	24/7 inc. waking night
	Our House Trio of Services	16	18-25	Teenage Parents	24 - 7 in Our House. Day time in rest
Regenda Homes	Greenbank Road	3	16-21	Young People Leaving Care	24/7 inc. waking night
Riverside Group Ltd	Rosebrae	21 + 2 Emergency beds	25+	Single Homeless with Support Needs	24/7 inc. waking night
	Rose Brae Dispersed (2019)	50	25+	Single Homeless with Support Needs	Day time, visiting
Whitechapel Centre	MH Floating Support Service	75	18+	Homeless People with Mental Health Problems	Day time, visiting
Wirral Churches Ark Project	Arkangel	14	25+	Single Homeless with Support Needs	Day time, visiting
	Mary Cole House	27	25+	Single Homeless with Support Needs	24/7 inc. waking night
Wirral Women & Children's Aid	Wirral Women & Children's Aid	12	18+	Women at Risk of Domestic Violence	24/7 inc. waking night
YMCA	Rough Sleeper Outreach Service		16+	Rough Sleeper	Overnight
	YMCA Wirral	56	25+	Single Homeless with Support Needs	24/7 inc. waking night
	Night Shelter	15	*25+	Single Homeless with Support Needs	Overnight

Source: Wirral Council

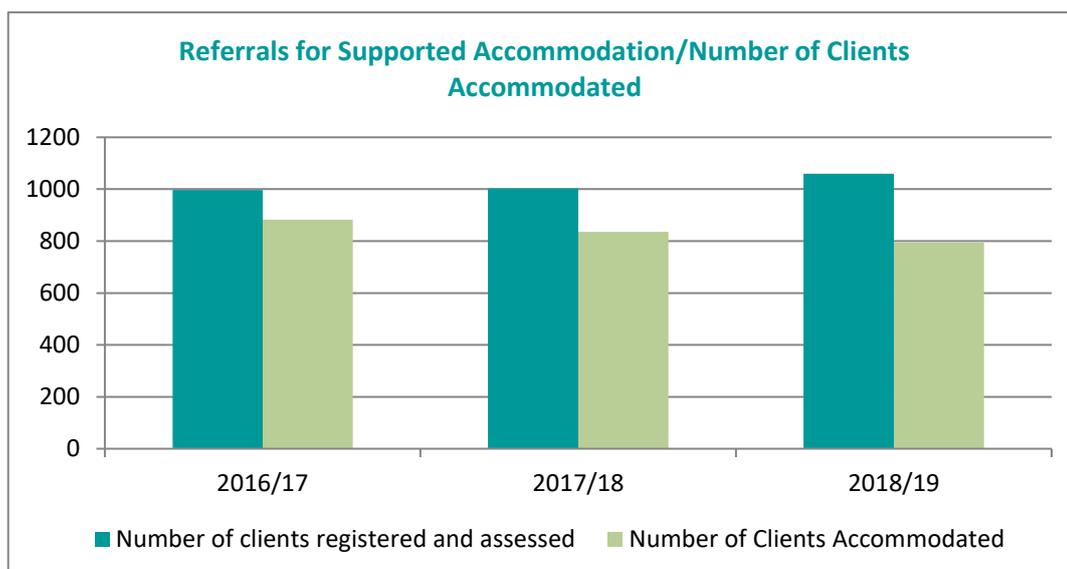
Housing First for the Liverpool City Region

- 9.4 The delivery of the Housing First Model in the Liverpool City Region has begun its initial ‘Test & Learn’ phase. The Staff Team which is directly employed by the Combined Authority is now all in place.
- 9.5 The delivery of the Housing First Model in the Liverpool City Region has begun its initial ‘Test & Learn’ phase. The Staff Team which is directly employed by the Combined Authority is now all in place. The 16 delivery staff from the Liverpool City Region’s Housing First programme are currently working with 60 homeless people in the first phase, and more teams will be established over the coming months to support approx. 350 people.
- 9.6 The Wirral Council has referred 23 individuals to Housing First. The table below shows the current status of the referred clients as at the beginning of November 2019.

Client engaged with support and being assisted to submit a property request	5
Client engaged with Support and property request submitted and sent to HA partners	0
Client engaged with Support and property request returned, and suitable property identified.	1
Housed	3
Not eligible	5
Watch and Wait <i>(Clients are eligible for HF and already engaged with services - ‘watch and wait’ approach in order not to undermine current support plans and to continue assertive approaches to encourage clients to engage with Housing First.)</i>	3
Exhausted all options	5
Deceased	1

Mainstay Assessments 2018-19

- 9.7 Mainstay provides a Gateway to Housing and Support services across the Liverpool City Region. It was created to improve access to short-term Housing Related Support services for single persons *(and couples in some circumstances)* within the region. The main benefit is one comprehensive assessment for access to all services linked via an IT System that reduces the need for homeless people to repeat their histories on each occasion that they present at a MainStay service and is able to document the ongoing accommodation and support needs of clients.

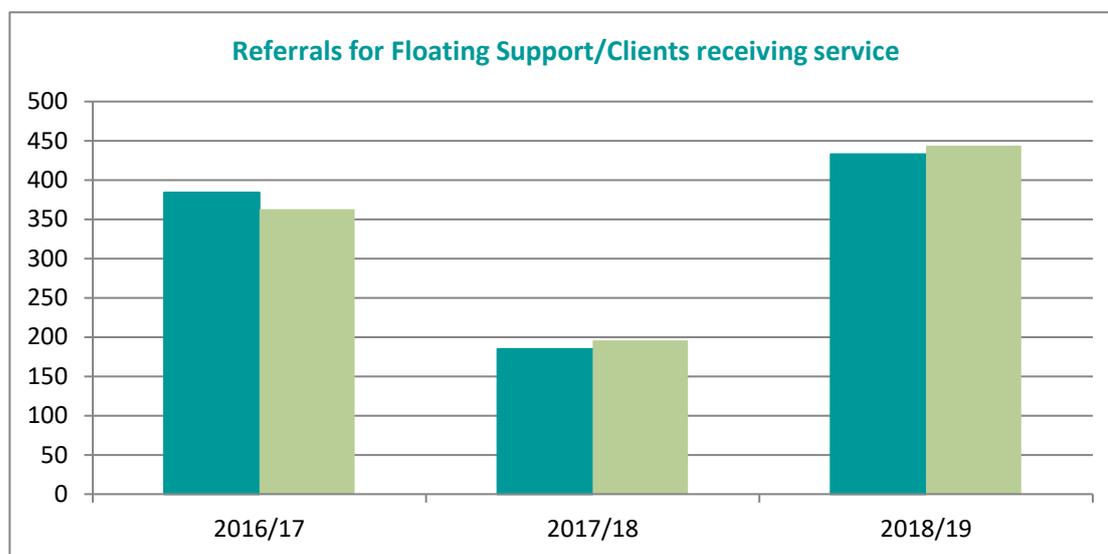
Figure 9.1 Referrals for supported accommodation 2016-2019

Source: MainStay Data

- 9.8 The graph above demonstrates an annual increase in the number of clients registered and assessed by Mainstay services for accommodation, there has been an increase of 6% in assessments completed over this three-year period.
- 9.9 Conversely, the number of clients accommodated within supported housing projects has decreased over the last three years. The capacity has reduced slightly over this period, so the decrease in placements may have contributed to this. However, it is considered that this reduction is likely to be down to a number of factors including the increasing complexity of need amongst single homeless people in recent years, leading to more people requiring longer periods of stay combined with the problems associated with securing move-on accommodation.
- 9.10 Demand for supported accommodation outstrips supply, and this gap between demand and supply is increasing on an annual basis. In 2018/19, 1060 unique individuals were referred for supported accommodation and only 794 were successfully accommodated, indicating an annual shortfall for that year of 266.
- 9.11 During the first two quarters of 2019/20, 1876 referrals were made to MainStay accommodation services, 620 people were assessed for these services and 394 people were placed within them. At the time of drafting, there were a total of 171 clients on the waiting list to access supported housing, at the beginning of October 2019 it peaked at 196 which is the highest the waiting list has ever been.

Floating Support

Figure 9.2 Floating support referrals



Source: MainStay Data

- 9.12 The reason for the reduction in the number of referrals in 2017/18 was that during this time period the floating service contracts were going through a tendering exercise and it was agreed that the incumbent service providers did not accept referrals during this time period. Between 2016/17 and 2018/19 there was an increase of 13% in the number of clients registered and assessed for floating support services.
- 9.13 The number of annual referrals is broadly similar to the total number of clients supported. Prior to the tendering exercise floating support services could be provided for up to 2 years, leading to some providers keeping clients for the full two years irrespective of whether they actually needed that length of support. The new contracts have reduced the timeframe to 3 months. This has had the effect of ensuring that there is a greater flow of clients through the service, however, providers are able to request extensions to this where it is felt clients need to receive support for a longer period of time.
- 9.14 Following the tendering exercise, the capacity for floating support has decreased but the new contracts have reduced the maximum duration of service meaning that services now have a greater throughput, thereby enabling a higher number of clients to be supported over the period of a year.

Household Characteristics for Supported Accommodation Based Schemes

Age	Female		Male	
	Assessed	Placed	Assessed	Placed
16-17	24	14	23	24
18-24	145	161	257	233
26-40	80	60	229	108
41-60	61	50	214	132
61+	6	1	21	11

Source: MainStay Data

- 9.15 Across all age ranges, 70% of assessments undertaken were for males and 63% of all placements were for males. Across all age ranges 38% of all assessments were undertaken for clients aged 18-25 years followed by 29% aged 26-40 years.
- 9.16 In the 16-17 age range, 51% of assessments undertaken were for females and 63% of all placements made were for males. In the 18-25 age range, 63% of assessments undertaken were for males and 59% of all placements made were for males.
- 9.17 In the 26-40 age range, 74% of assessments undertaken were for males. and, 64% of all placements made were for males. In the 41-60 age range, 77% of all assessments undertaken were for males and 72% of all placements made were for females.
- 9.18 In terms of assessments undertaken during 2018/19, 93% were people identifying as White British. Less than 0.1% assessments were for people identifying as Irish Travellers.

Ethnic Origin	Number
White British	985
Asian or Asian British	9
Black or Black British	6
Irish Traveller	1
Mixed other	5
Mixed White & Asian	2
Mixed White & Black	
Romany	2
White Irish	6
White Other	11
Other Ethnic Group	8
Unknown	14

Source: MainStay Data

Economic Status

- 9.19 The MainStay assessment process requires applicants to identify their economic status and, from the chart below, it can be seen that 45% of people assessed stated that they were unable to work as a consequence of illness, and 30% of assessments were for 'Job Seekers'.

Economic Status	Number
Unable to work (sickness)	479
Retired	10
Part time work	19
Other adult	62
Not seeking work	13
Job seeker	320
Government training	13
Full time work	14
Full time student	67
Carer	8
Unknown	55

Source: MainStay Data

Housing Status

- 9.20 When undertaking a MainStay assessment for a homeless applicant, Hostel Support Staff are required to select the most appropriate Housing Status that reflects the applicant's situation at the time of presentation. From the chart below, it can be seen that 53% of all applicants were described by Hostel Staff as being "in danger of rough sleeping" (*This category is used to describe a number of different homeless situation, including Sofa-surfing, staying with friends etc*) followed by 20.9% of applicants as having "No settled accommodation".

Housing Status	Number
Statutory Homeless	64
Entrenched Rough Sleeper	7
Rough Sleeper	47
In danger of Rough Sleeping	425
No settled accommodation	166
No permanent accommodation	59
Unknown	26

Source: MainStay Data

Support Needs

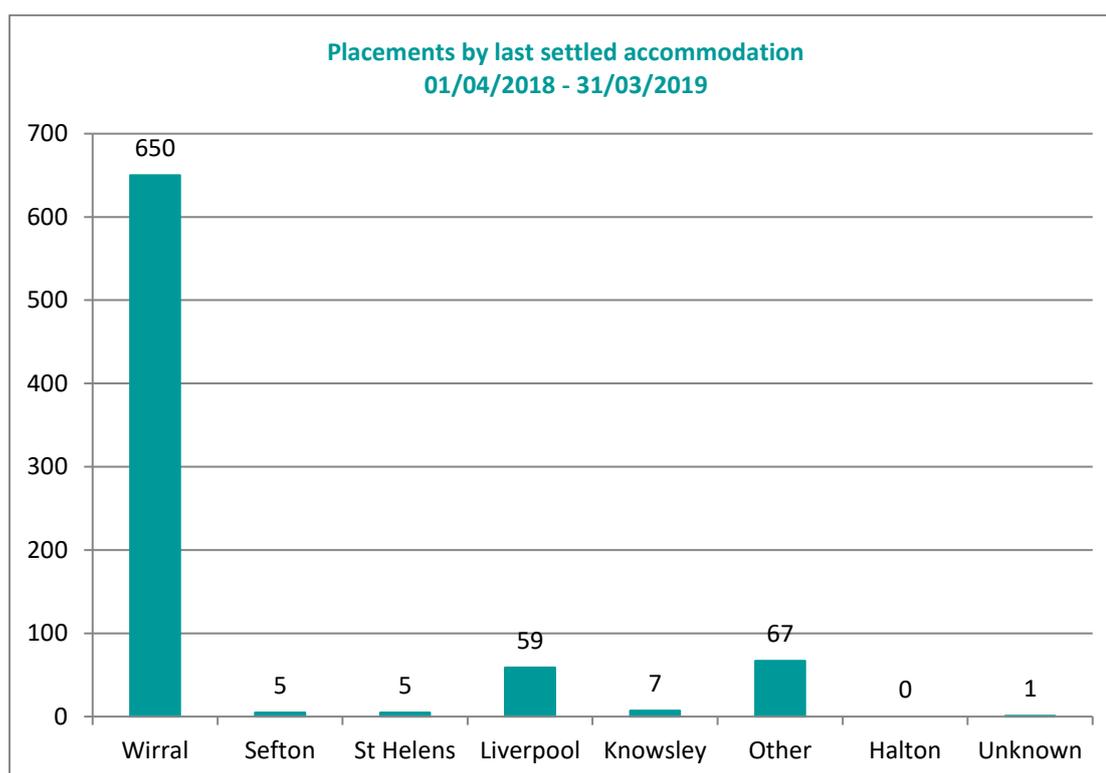
- 9.21 The table below details the (*self-reported*) needs of clients assessed by Mainstay Services in 2018/19 from the 1060 assessments undertaken. The most prevalent identified need was in relation to poor mental health followed by current or former drug use. Also, of note is the high prevalence of history of suicide attempts and history of self-harm.

Identified Need	Number	Percentage
Health issues	482	45%
Current mental health issues	764	72%
Previous mental health issues	74	7%
History of suicide attempts	464	44%
History of self-harm	383	36%
Problems with alcohol	312	29%
Current of former drug use	748	71%
Criminal convictions	548	52%
Rent arrears of debt	380	36%
Fleeing domestic abuse	98	9%

Source: MainStay Data

Location of last settled accommodation

- 9.22 The graph below shows the number of placements by location of last settled accommodation. The majority of those placed in supported accommodation are from the Wirral, 7% were from Liverpool and 8% were from outside of Merseyside. Of those from other areas, the highest number (14 clients) were from Cheshire.

Figure 9.3 Placements by last settled accommodation

Source: MainStay Data

MainStay Placements Made During 2018/19

9.23 During 2018/19, MainStay services received a combined total of 3995 referrals. Please note that multiple referrals can be made for persons based on their housing status. Referrals may also be made on behalf of persons already accommodated by MainStay services.

Provider Refusal Reasons

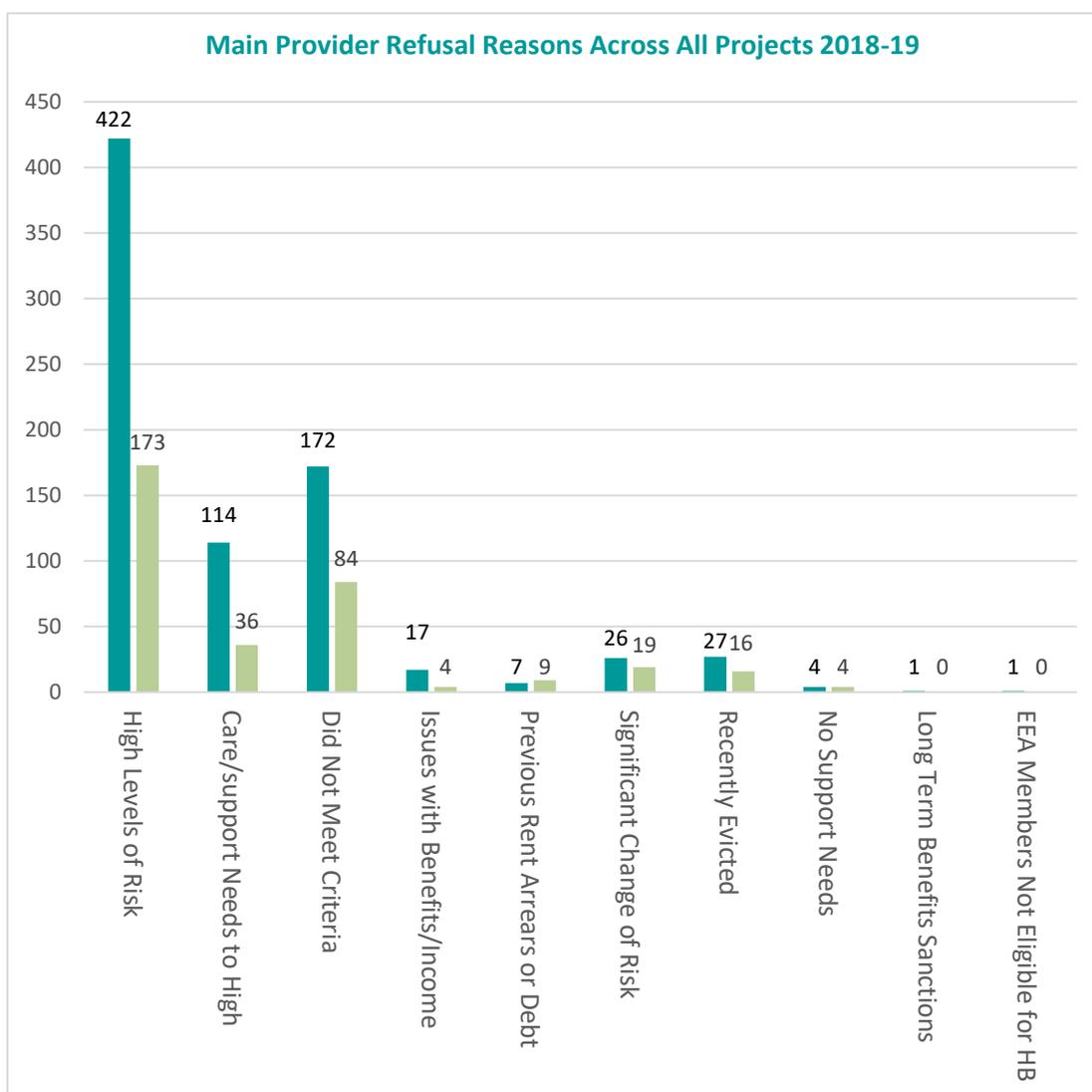
9.24 Via MainStay, providers are required to make a decision against each referral received, with the choices being either acceptance or refusal.

9.25 Generally speaking, providers of homeless accommodation services will accept the significant majority of the referrals they receive, however there are occasions where it is necessary for a provider to refuse a referral. A refusal can occur for a number of reasons, including:

- Many homeless people present with multiple and complex needs and, consequently, the behaviours of some of this cohort can be extremely challenging and will frequently manifest in violent and/or abusive conduct to other homeless people and/or homeless professionals. On occasion, it is necessary for services to refuse someone if their behaviour cannot be safely managed, or if it is felt that the inherent risks in accommodating someone cannot be safely managed. In this context, the 'refusal' does not stand indefinitely but rather it will be reviewed after a period of time (usually 3 months) to see if the assessment of risk has changed.

- Linked to the point above, there may be occasions when a supported housing service is already accommodating multiple people that display challenging behaviour, but may refuse a new referral out of concern that another resident with similar issues, in that moment of time, may 'tip the balance' within the scheme and lead to an unmanageable risk.
 - Although all commissioned to provide low-level housing-related support, the Homeless accommodation services in Wirral are not all the same. Some of these services provide an intensive level of support, whereas others are less intensive (often referred to as semi-independent). A provider may refuse a referral if it is felt that the applicant has support needs that are over and above that which the service can adequately respond to.
 - Related to the point above, some homeless people will, after years of chaotic behaviour, meet the thresholds for other statutory services (i.e. Social Care/Health). For individuals with this level of need, a homeless hostel is not an appropriate environment and, consequently, a provider may refuse a referral if it is felt that the applicant's needs are too high.
 - A referral may also be refused for matters of eligibility; for example, an adult that is referred to a young person's service; a male applicant being referred to a female-only service.
- 9.26 When an applicant who is engaged with the Housing Options Team is refused access to a service, the Housing Options Team will work to identify alternate accommodation which may involve referring the individual to the Night Shelter, or facilitating access to Temporary Accommodation or a Bed & Breakfast. The Council monitors all service refusals on an ongoing basis and meets monthly with all providers of homeless accommodation services to discuss levels of refusals.
- 9.27 In 2018/19, 80% of all MainStay referrals made were accepted, with individual provider refusal rates ranging from 58% to 100%. It should be noted that, during this period, the Supported Housing tendering exercise was still ongoing and, consequently, organisations whose services were being tendered ceased accepting referrals for a short time. Inevitably, this will have an impact on individual and collective refusal rates. In 2019/20, since the tendering exercise has concluded, MainStay acceptances have increased with Q1 showing an 86% acceptance rate, and in Q2 a 95% acceptance rate. This would indicate that Service Providers are endeavouring to work constructively with risk and to accommodate those individuals that do present with challenging behaviour.
- 9.28 There were a total of 667 refusals by providers in 2018/19, although it should be noted that these figures include the same individuals being refused by more than one provider. In 2018/19 a total of 325 individuals had their referrals refused by at least one project. This means that of the 1060 referrals made in 2018/19 31% of all referrals were refused by at least one project. During the first two quarters of 2019/20, there were a total of 178 refusals (8.2% of total referrals made) of which 82 people were refused by two services or more.

Figure 9.4 Reasons for provider refusal of placement



Source: MainStay

9.29 As can be seen, the most common reason given for service refusal relates to high level of risk (*i.e. to themselves and/or others*). In 2018/19, this reason accounted for 53% of all refusals and, at the end of Quarter 2 of 2019/20 represented 50% of all refusals, to date. The second most common refusal reason given relates to applicants not meeting the service criteria (*this relates to eligibility so, for example, would include a male being referred to an all-female service, or an adult being referred to a young person’s scheme*) at 22% in 2018/19, and 24% to date in 2019/20. There are a high number of refusals by providers due to high levels of risk and the needs of the applicant being too high, which supports the perception of an increasing complexity of need amongst MainStay applicants.

9.30 When considering the chart above, it is important to note that of the 422 refusals relating to high levels of risk, over 46% of these (198) were made by the two commissioned “semi-independent” move-on accommodation services. Generally, these services provide a lower level of support as they are targeted at people that already hold some independent living skills. Due to this, they are not appropriate services for those

people that present with complex or chaotic needs. However, some agencies that work with vulnerable homeless people will refer their client into all supported housing services, not necessarily only into the service that are most relevant to their individual level of need. This can result in a skewed picture of refusals, as the MainStay system is unable to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate referrals.

Reasons for Leaving the Service (2018/19)

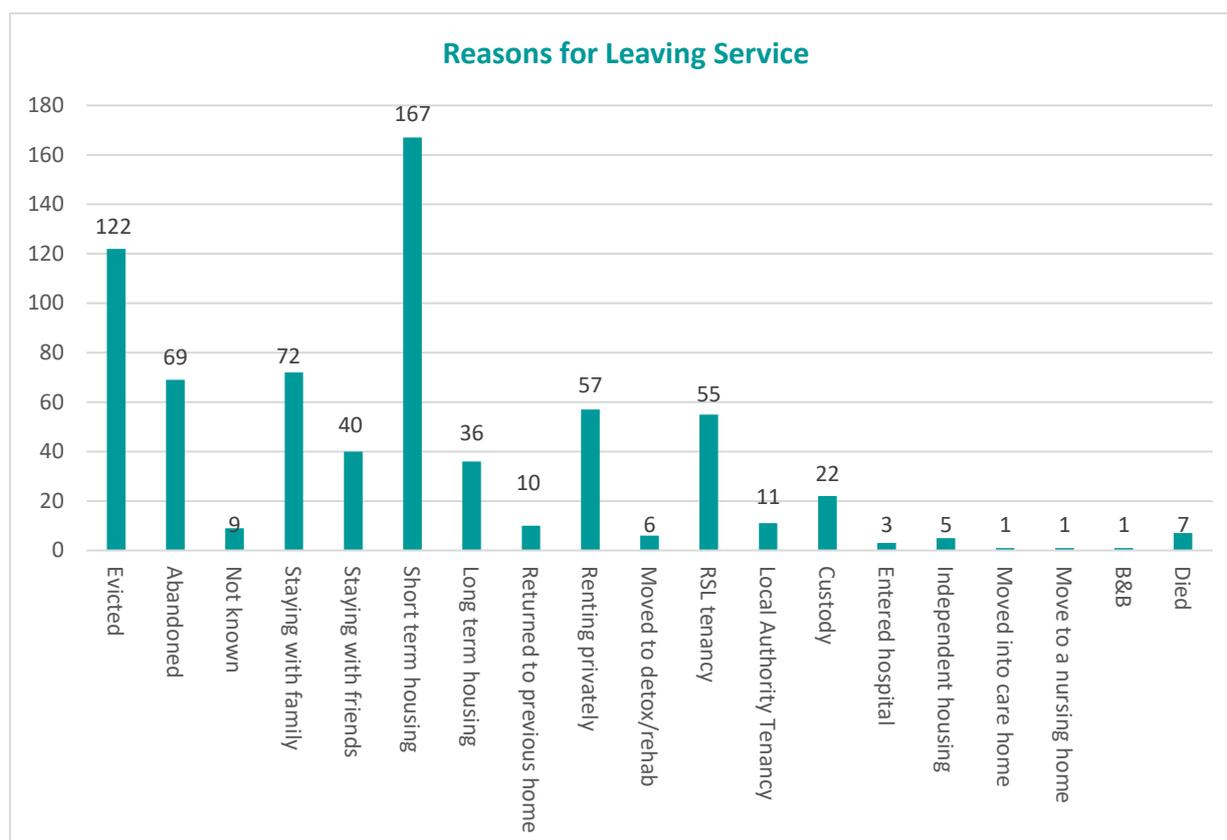
9.31 A total of 440 (56%) moves from supported accommodation were planned.

Move Reason	Number
Planned within MainStay	182
Planned outside of MainStay	258
Unplanned within MainStay	26
Unplanned outside of MainStay	140
Deceased	6
Unplanned whereabouts unknown	167

Source: MainStay Data

9.32 Of the 694 individuals leaving supported accommodation during 2018/19 the majority of cases have moved on in a planned way, 66.5%. Eviction is the second highest single reason for leaving supported housing and accounts for 18% of all moves. This may link to the higher and more complex support needs that clients are presenting with, leading to a rise in challenging behaviour and a lack of engagement. A further 10% of all moves were due to abandonment.

Figure 9.5 Reasons for leaving MainStay service



Source: MainStay Data

- 9.33 Eviction from supported housing projects was also an issue identified by Stakeholders through the consultation undertaken as part of the Homelessness Review. The Council records the number of evictions/abandonments and meeting monthly with providers to discuss and challenge these if required, as part of their contract monitoring process, however they do not generate more detailed reports regarding the reasons for evictions and abandonments but may wish to do so moving forward.

Observations on Supported Accommodation Provision

Move On

- 9.34 The Housing Priority Panel (HPP) was established in 2007 to respond to the issue of 'bed-blocking' within homeless hostel accommodation. Initially, it was a multi-agency group comprising representatives from local support providers, Registered Providers and statutory services (NHS, DASS) that met on a monthly basis to consider referrals from homeless accommodation services for people that were identified as ready to live independently but who were likely to experience problems/barriers in securing permanent accommodation. A successful application to the Panel results in the award of a 'Band B' priority on Property Pool Plus, fast-tracked access to the Council's Local Welfare Assistance Scheme (LWAS), and access to appropriate floating support services.
- 9.35 In recent years, the Panel has moved from a 'physical' meeting, to a 'virtual' meeting which is done over email. As at October 2019, HPP arrangements are currently being

reviewed, possibly with a view to bringing hostel move-on arrangements more in sync with the Liverpool City Region.

- 9.36 The issue of move on from supported accommodation has been identified throughout the review. The high number of people waiting to access supported accommodation is in part due to the lack of move on options for individuals leaving supported accommodation including those under 35 who are only eligible for the shared room rate.
- 9.37 Reviewing the Priority Panel may help to address the issue of move on. To fully understand the scale and issues surrounding move on, there may be value in using Homeless Link's Move On Plans Protocol.
- 9.38 Alongside reviewing the priority given for accessing social housing, better use of the private rented sector may also improve move on. Developing a co-ordinated approach to moving on from supported accommodation into the private rented sector, with competitive landlord offer and support would help to resolve the move on issue. This should be developed in line with the Council's own landlord offer.

Floating Support

- 9.39 A number of stakeholders raised some concerns into the reduced length of time that the newly commissioned floating support services can work with clients for, with a view that three months was often not long enough, especially for clients with multiple and complex needs.
- 9.40 The Council does provide flexibility for this length of time to be extended on a case by case basis, however it would be sensible to continue to review the success of this approach moving forward.

Evictions

- 9.41 Consultation with stakeholders indicates that projects evict residents who have been involved in threatening or violent behaviour at their project. This is viewed as being unavoidable as the project is unable to manage the risks presented by this behaviour and there are safety concerns for staff and/or residents. A number of projects will also evict for service charge arrears, although this is usually done as a last resort.
- 9.42 The Council should work further with providers to discuss how practice around evictions can change moving forward to help to change the conversation with providers to one which is more based around the reasons why a project is unable to manage an individual resident's behaviour. This should promote reflective practice and lead to service improvements and fewer evictions.
- 9.43 Accepting that the reasons for abandoning a hostel placement may not be easy to determine, the Council should work with providers to review recent abandonments from their projects to increase understanding of main causes and inform development of targeted interventions to reduce abandonments in future.

- 9.44 The Council can also work with providers to ensure that needs and risk assessment at move-in considers eviction/abandonment history and uses this information to develop support strategies to prevent this re-occurring.
- 9.45 There may also be value in commissioning training for providers around minimising evictions and abandonments and on managing arrears.
- 9.46 Other approaches to reducing evictions could include:
- Use of temporary exclusions
 - Reducing service charges
 - Using a trauma-informed approach to dealing with violent incidents which focuses on understanding the causes and impacts of residents' behaviour, uses restorative justice techniques and reflective practice for staff.
 - Empowering staff to make decisions around evictions, i.e.: without the need for manager input. This also helps strengthen staff relationships with residents
- 9.47 This levels of evictions and abandonments may indicate that some of the current supported housing provision may not be able to meet the increasing complexity of need and challenging behaviours that clients are presenting with, which could be linked to some of the physical limitation of the buildings.

Physical Environment of Provision

- 9.48 Consultation with stakeholders also identified issues with the size of some of the supported housing projects. It was felt that large buildings with a high number of residents did not provide the most conducive environment from which to effectively deliver a supported housing environment that was psychologically informed and person-centred, particularly in relation to accommodation for younger people. Accommodating large numbers of residents with very high and often complex needs together can impact upon a client's recovery and journey out of homelessness. Large units of accommodation often mean bringing large numbers of individuals with high and complex needs together, often creating an unhomely and at times chaotic environment, which has the potential to be de-personalised and institutionalised. However, interestingly, the Council reports that ongoing stakeholder feedback has also identified issues within the smaller supported housing schemes in relation to the disruptive impact that a small number of residents can have on the wider scheme.
- 9.49 It is recognised that the availability of appropriate, smaller, units of accommodation is limited, as such the Council, together with providers needs to consider how the existing buildings might be used differently, taking a flexible approach to the provision currently in place. For example, there may be opportunities within the larger projects to designate certain wings of the building a certain role in terms of the clients and support needs, to move away from a large number of very high and complex support needs all being placed together.

Lack of Female Specific Provision

- 9.50 Although the Council commissions a female-specific service in the form of a refuge, and a non-commissioned accommodation service for vulnerable women, based in New Brighton, has recently been developed arising from a partnership between WWACA and WCAP, the lack of a commissioned supported accommodation provision specifically for vulnerable women (*who don't, necessarily, present with issues relating to domestic abuse*) was identified in the consultation exercise, as an unmet need. A detailed needs assessment and consultation with service users would help to understand this issue in more detail.

Needs Analysis and Review of Housing Related Support

- 9.51 The level of refusals due to the high risk and/or high support need that clients are presenting with, combined with the level of evictions and abandonments from supported housing reinforces the perception that the presenting issues of homeless people have grown increasingly challenging over recent years, which could be linked to the reduction in other statutory budget in Social Care and Health.
- 9.52 It is essential that the commissioned support services are able to respond to the current need. The needs of the customer group have changed significantly, becoming increasingly more complex, with high levels of poor mental health and substance misuse. The Council acknowledges that future service design needs to respond to the current identified need and a robust gap analysis should be conducted to identify what these services should look like. This analysis of unmet need will be critical in shaping future provision
- 9.53 There is a need to undertake a review of Housing Related Support services moving forward. This would need to include a formal needs assessment using MainStay data, a review of existing provision both in relation to support and physical provision, extensive consultation with service users, a review of best practice, and recommendations for future provision to inform a robust commissioning strategy/plan. This should also consider whether provision should continue to be generic moving forward, or if there is a need for more specialist provision.
- 9.54 The review will also need to consider whether the current number of units for young people's services compared with adult provision is the right mix in relation to need and demand. There is currently slightly more provision for young people than for adults and, at the time of undertaking the review, some of the services available to young people were carrying a small number of voids (*i.e. unoccupied rooms*).

Key Findings

High demand

- 9.55 Despite significant levels of housing-related support provision across the Wirral for homeless and socially excluded clients, demand for this accommodation outstrips supply. The gap between demand and supply is increasing on an annual basis.

- 9.56 The waiting list for accessing supported housing peaked at its highest level in October 2019 with 196 people waiting to access supported housing. This is linked to the lack of move-on options for people in supported provision.

Increasingly complex needs

- 9.57 The most frequently occurring support need is mental health, followed by physical health and disability, and domestic abuse. 72% of all MainStay assessments identified poor mental health as a current issue.
- 9.58 There are a number of refusals by providers due to high levels of risk and clients needs being too high. This may indicate that some provision may require reconfiguration to fully meet the increasing complexity of need that clients are presenting with.
- 9.59 During 2018/19 the majority of cases have moved on in a planned way, 66.5%.
- 9.60 Eviction is the second highest single reason for leaving supported housing and accounts for 18% of all moves. This may link to the higher and more complex support needs that clients are presenting with, leading to a rise in challenging behaviour and a lack of engagement.

Suitability and gaps in provision

- 9.61 Some issues have been identified concerning the physical nature of some of the supported housing projects, with concerns that these may not provide the best environment for recovery out of homelessness. The lack of provision of supported accommodation specifically for women was also identified.
- 9.62 There is a need to undertake a detailed needs assessment and review of housing-related support services, in order to respond to the current identified need and shape what future provision should look like. The findings from this should be used to inform a robust commissioning plan.

Move-on

- 9.63 There is a significant issue concerning a lack of move-on from supported accommodation. Undertaking Homeless Link's MOPP may provide a better understanding of the issue. Progressing the existing review of the current 'virtual' Move on Priority Panel and developing a coordinated private landlord offer could help improve move-on options.

10. Settled Accommodation

Housing authorities should review the existing supply of accommodation available to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and identify where there are gaps, or where existing resources do not match the most pressing needs.

This might include reviewing supply and demand for:

- social and affordable housing held by the housing authority and private registered providers;
- private rented accommodation, including shared housing options for young single people
- low cost home ownership schemes.

Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018, MHCLG

- 10.1 This section of the review relies on some analysis conducted by arc4 for Wirral Council to inform the emerging Strategic Housing Market Assessment. It begins by examining the housing market of the local authority area before considering the social/affordable housing sector and private rented sector specifically.

Wirral's Housing Stock

- 10.2 Census 2011 data provides the following tenure breakdown for the Borough.
- 67.5% owner occupied;
 - 15.7% affordable (15.2% rented from a social landlord and 0.5% and shared ownership); and
 - 16.8% private rented/living rent free.

Tenure (Households)	Number	%
Owned outright	46,806	33.3%
Owned with a mortgage or loan	48,037	34.2%
Shared ownership	713	0.5%
Social rented	21,329	15.2%
Private rented	22,275	15.8%
Living rent free	1,423	1.0%

Source: Census 2011 NOMIS

- 10.3 The emerging SHMA allows some greater analysis at a sub area through the results of a household survey. To inform the emerging SHMA, a specific sample survey of households across the Borough was undertaken during in August and September 2019.

A total of 2,586 questionnaires were completed and returned (representing a 14.9% response rate overall and a sample error of +/-1.9% at Borough level) and used in data analysis.

- 10.4 The table below shows the tenure profile provided by the household survey for occupied dwellings on a sub-area basis. SA7 (Heswall) contains the highest proportions of owner-occupation in the Borough; 86.5%. Private rented makes up almost one in four of households in SA1 (Wallasey), 24.9% compared to 16.9% for Wirral Borough as a whole. The two sub-areas with the lowest proportions of owner-occupied tenure have the highest proportions of households living in affordable housing; SA2/3 (Commercial Core & Suburban Birkenhead) at 25.7% and SA5 (Mid-Wirral) at 18.9%.

NB. A map of how the Borough divides into sub-areas can be found in section 2. (Map 2.1).

Sub-area	Tenure (%)				
	Owner occupied	Private rented	Affordable	Total	Base
SA1 Wallasey	63.1	24.9	12.0	100.0	27,945
SA2 Commercial Core/SA3 Suburban Birkenhead	52.7	21.6	25.7	100.0	42,601
SA4 Bromborough & Eastham	76.8	11.6	11.5	100.0	24,792
SA5 Mid-Wirral	69.8	11.3	18.9	100.0	23,711
SA6 Hoylake and West Kirby	81.7	13.6	4.8	100.0	11,391
SA7 Heswall	86.5	7.9	5.6	100.0	12,630
SA8 Rural Areas	79.3	15.4	5.3	100.0	3,061
Wirral Borough (Household Survey)	67.3	16.9	15.8	100.0	146,131
Wirral Borough (Census 2011)	67.5	15.8	15.7		
North West (Census 2011)	64.5	15.4	18.8		

Source: 2019 household survey / Census 2011

Social and Affordable Housing

- 10.5 The 2018 Statistical Data Return (SDR) reports a total of 21,809 affordable dwellings across Wirral Borough (21,395 affordable/social rented and 414 intermediate tenure).
- 10.6 According to the household survey, undertaken to inform the emerging SHMA findings, households in Birkenhead are more likely to live in social and affordable housing (25.7% of households) followed by the Mid-Wirral area (18.9%). The data indicates that rural areas and those to the west of the Borough have the lowest levels of affordable accommodation.
- 10.7 All social properties in the Borough are owned by Registered Providers/Housing Associations with the exception of 23 homes which were built in 2011 as part of the Governments Local Authority New Build programme. Wirral Council transferred its

remaining stock to Wirral Partnership Homes (now known as Magenta Living) and Beechwood and Ballantyne Community Housing Association (now Onward) in 2005.

RP Name	General Needs	Older Persons	Low Cost Home Ownership	Total
Alpha (R.S.L.) Limited	0	453	0	453
Anchor Hanover Group	0	225	24	249
Contour Homes Limited	0	32	0	32
Equity Housing Group Limited	0	0	18	18
Family Housing Association (Birkenhead and Wirral) Ltd	326	57	0	383
Heylo Housing Registered Provider Limited	0	0	9	9
Housing 21	0	243	31	274
Leasowe Community Homes*	951	0	0	951
One Vision Housing Limited	409	0	0	409
Onward Homes Limited	982	132	31	1,145
Pierhead Housing Association Limited	113	0	13	126
Pine Court Housing Association Limited	82	0	0	82
Plus Dane Housing Limited	203	0	0	203
Redwing Living Limited	10	0	0	10
Regenda Limited	1,276	233	62	1,571
Sanctuary Affordable Housing Limited	58	0	0	58
Sanctuary Housing Association	269	187	29	485
The Abbeyfield Hoylake and West Kirby Society Ltd	0	10	0	10
The Riverside Group Limited	1,594	367	152	2,113
Torus62 Limited	54	0	31	85
Wirral Methodist Housing Association Limited	578	113	0	691
Magenta Living	10,797	1,641	14	12,452
Total	17,702	3,693	414	21,809

Source: Regulator of Social Housing Statistical Data Return 2018/19

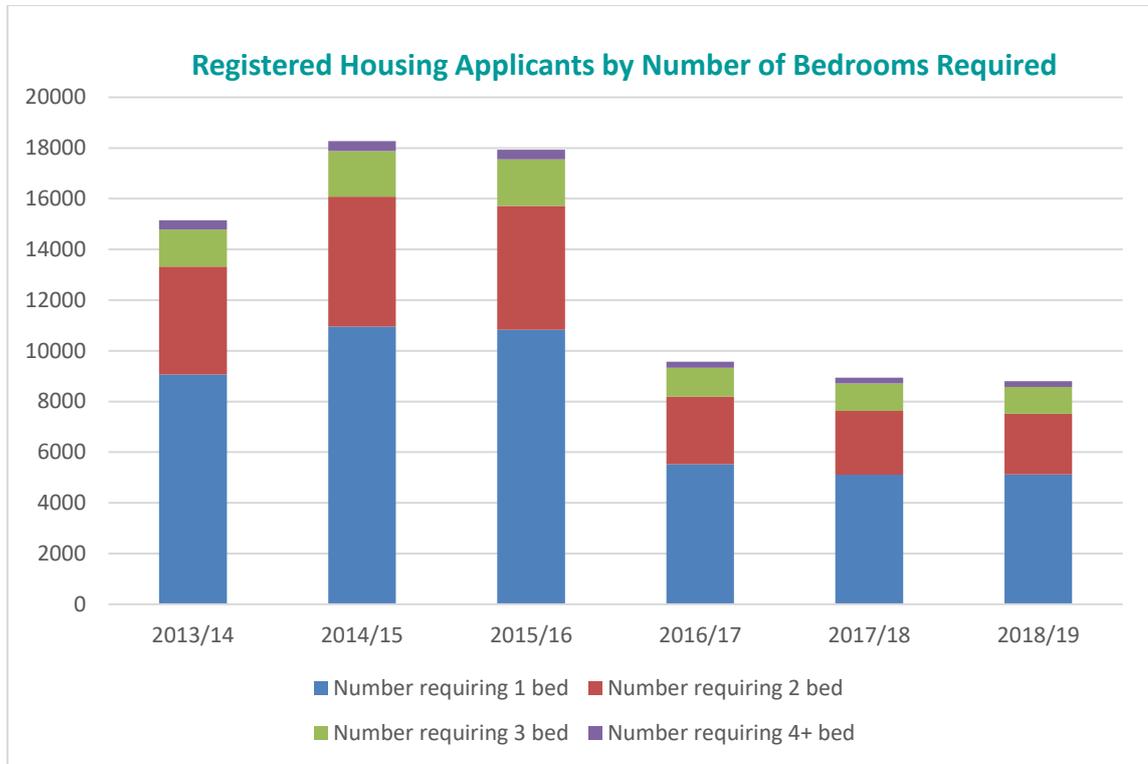
*Leasowe Community Homes is now part of the Prima Group

Housing Register Demand

- 10.8 Wirral Council is a member of the Sub Regional Property Pool Plus Choice Based Lettings scheme. The partnership has a common housing register and a common allocations policy which is currently being reviewed.
- 10.9 The graph below illustrates the number of households on the Housing Register over the last six years at the end of each financial year. A decrease from 17,937 to 9,571 applicants between 2015/16 and 2016/17 was as a result of the implementation of a renewal process to cleanse the register. This is a continual process undertaken by the local team). Since then the figure has remain fairly steady at around 9,000 although there has been a small decrease in recent years. At 31st March 2019 there were 8,797 registered households.
- 10.10 The register continues to be dominated by applicants requiring 1 bed homes, representing 58% of the register. The draft Housing section of the 'This is Wirral'

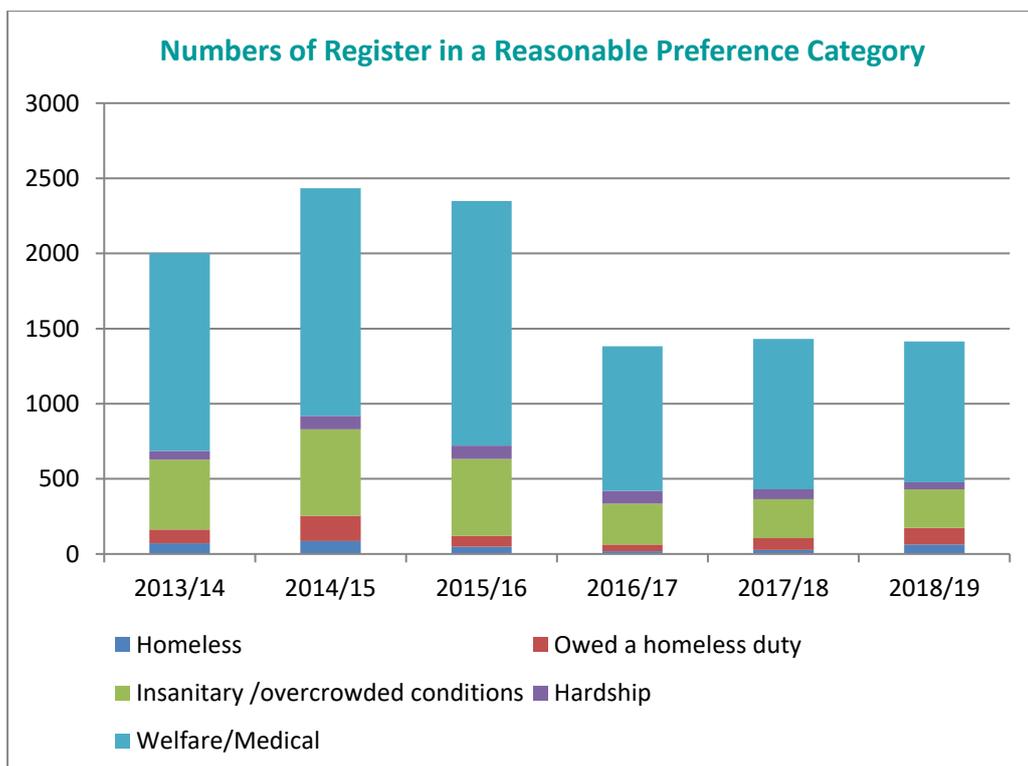
evidence base notes that many of those with a need for one-bedroom accommodation have a preference for a property with two bedrooms to allow more flexibility in terms of lifestyle and suitability of accommodation for future needs.

Figure 10.1 Housing applicants by number of bedrooms required



Source : Wirral Council – Property Pool Plus Housing register

Figure 10.2 Number of applicants in a Reasonable Preference category



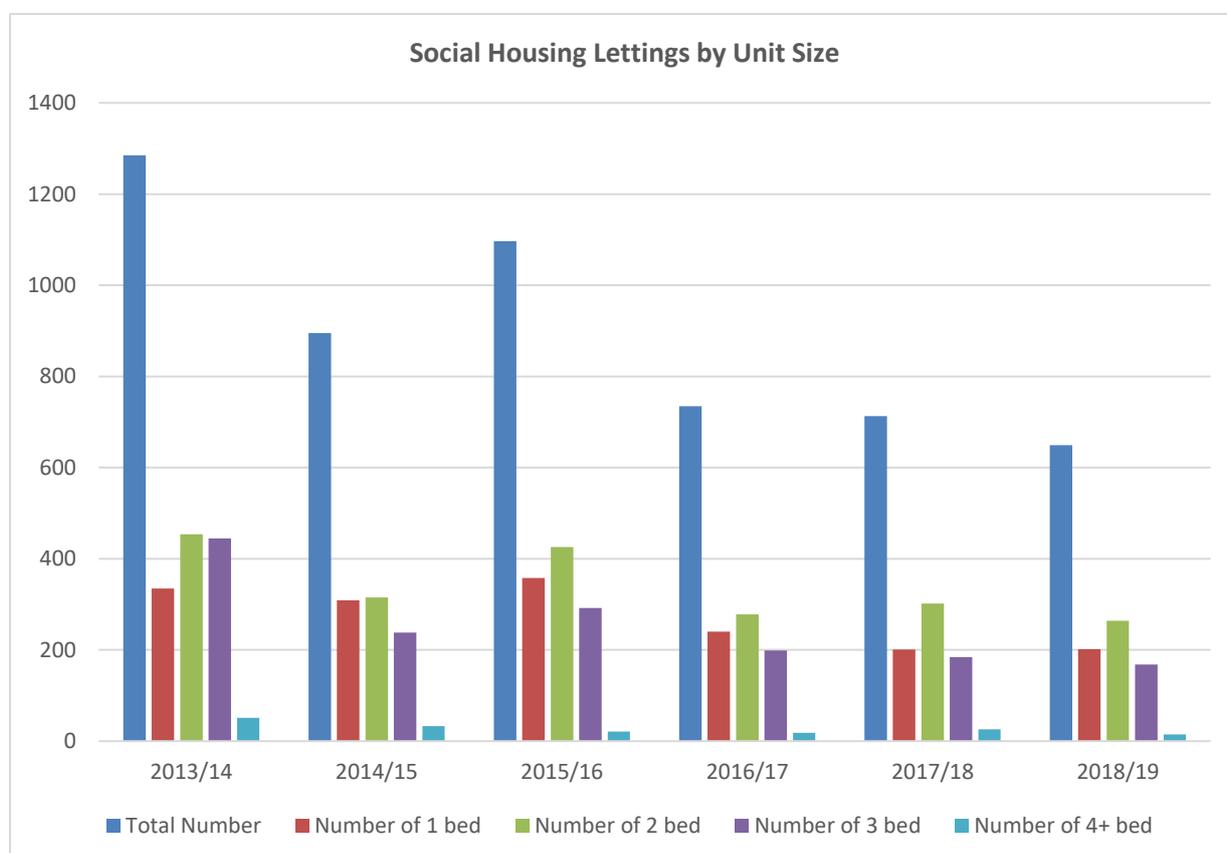
Source : Wirral Council – Property Pool Plus Housing Register

- 10.11 The graph above details the number of households in a reasonable preference category. NB – There is some duplication as some households fall into more than one reasonable preference group.
- 10.12 In 2018/19 households in a reasonable preference category make up 15% of the housing register. The most common reason for being in a reasonable preference category was due to medical or welfare reasons, accounting for 71% of all households in a reasonable preference category. A total of 173 (2% of Housing Register applicants) households were in a reasonable preference category due to homelessness, including those owed a duty.

Lettings

- 10.13 During the financial year 2018/19 there were 649 properties allocated to people on the Wirral Housing Register via Choice Based Lettings or via direct Council nomination of urgent cases. This figure has fallen by 49% since 2013/14 when there were a total of 1,285 lettings made during the year. The number of 4-bedroom properties being let has seen the largest decrease over this time at 71%. 1 bed property lettings have declined by 40%.
- 10.14 The reason for this reduction is partly linked to a low turnover of social housing provision, and limited provision of certain property types (i.e. one bed and four bed accommodation).

Figure 10.3 Social Housing lettings by unit size



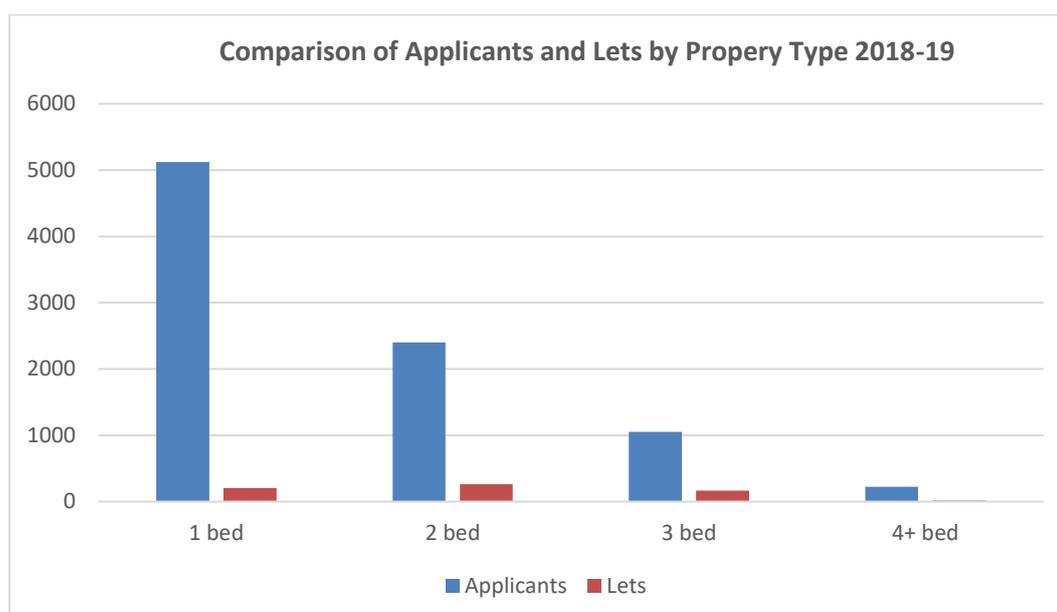
Source : Wirral Council – Property Pool Plus Housing Register

	Total Number	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4+ bed
2013/14	1,285	335	454	445	51
2014/15	895	309	315	238	33
2015/16	1,097	358	426	292	21
2016/17	735	240	278	199	18
2017/18	713	201	302	184	26
2018/19	649	202	264	168	15

Source: Wirral Council – Property Pool Plus Housing Register

- 10.15 It is clear that demand for social rented housing far outweighs the supply available. The graph below illustrates the position for different property sizes in 2018/19. Most noticeable is the 5,119 applicants in priority bands A-C waiting to be considered for only 202 relets, representing 25 applicants per letting.

Figure 10.4 Applicants versus available lets by property type



Source: Wirral Council – Property Pool Plus Housing Register

Future Affordable Housing Need

- 10.16 The early data emerging from the 2019 Strategic Housing Market Assessment suggests that there is a net shortfall of 705 affordable homes each year however this has to be placed in the context of the overall housing requirement figures being developed as part of the Local Plan.
- 10.17 The emerging data also suggests that across the Borough it is recommended that 17.2% of new affordable dwellings have one-bedroom, 46.8% two-bedrooms, 29.7% three-bedrooms and 6.3% four +bedrooms.

Table 10.5 Affordable housing net annual imbalance

Number of bedrooms	Settlement area (%)							Wirral Total (%)
	SA1 Wallasey	SA2 Commercial Core/SA3 Suburban Birkenhead	SA4 Bromborough & Eastham	SA5 Mid-Wirral	SA6 Hoylake and West Kirby	SA7 Heswall	SA8 Rural Areas	
One	24.1	15.4	19.3	16.3	16.1	7.4	21.0	17.2
Two	62.2	44.5	39.8	46.7	44.4	45.7	36.8	46.8
Three	5.6	33.3	39.8	29.3	21.9	43.8	30.5	29.7
Four	8.1	6.5	1.1	7.8	13.1	2.3	10.8	5.9
Five or more	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	4.3	0.8	0.9	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.1	99.7	100.0	100.0	100.0
Gross need	289	428	204	222	116	199	31	1,489
Net need	139	199	71	95	55	131	14	705

Source: 2019 household survey table may have minor rounding errors

Private Rented Sector

- 10.18 Census figures reveal that from 2001 to 2011 Wirral's private rented sector grew from 8.8% to 15.8%. This is reflective of the picture across the North West of England as a whole.

Table 10.6 Growth in PRS 2001 to 2011

Year	Wirral	North West
2001	8.8%	8.5%
2011	15.8%	15.4%

Source Census 2001 & 2011 NOMIS

- 10.19 Further analysis of the data derived from the emerging 2019 SHMA household survey (table 10.2) provides an indication of the proportion of households living in the private rented sector by sub-area. This shows that SA1 (Wallasey) contains 24.9% private rented households compared to an average of 16.9% across Wirral as a whole. In the Borough there are almost 25,000 households living in the private rented sector, almost two-thirds of these live in two sub-areas, SA2/3 (37.2%) and SA1 (28.1%).

Rent Levels

- 10.20 In terms of the cost of renting, Tables 10.7 and 10.8 set out the comparative median and lower quartile rents for Wirral Borough, the North West and England as a whole.

- 10.21 The tables indicate that 2018 median (£550 pcm) and lower quartile (£451 pcm) rental prices in the Borough are below national and regional levels. The lower quartile price is similar to the region however the gap compared with England is larger, particularly for median prices; £550 compared to £1,075.
- 10.22 Comparing the rental price in 2018 with that in 2010 indicates that there has been around a 5% increase in median rental prices locally. The increase in lower quartile prices in the Borough (+6.1%) is greater than that experienced by the region (1.1%). The local price increases are not comparable to those seen in England as a whole, at either median or lower quartile levels.

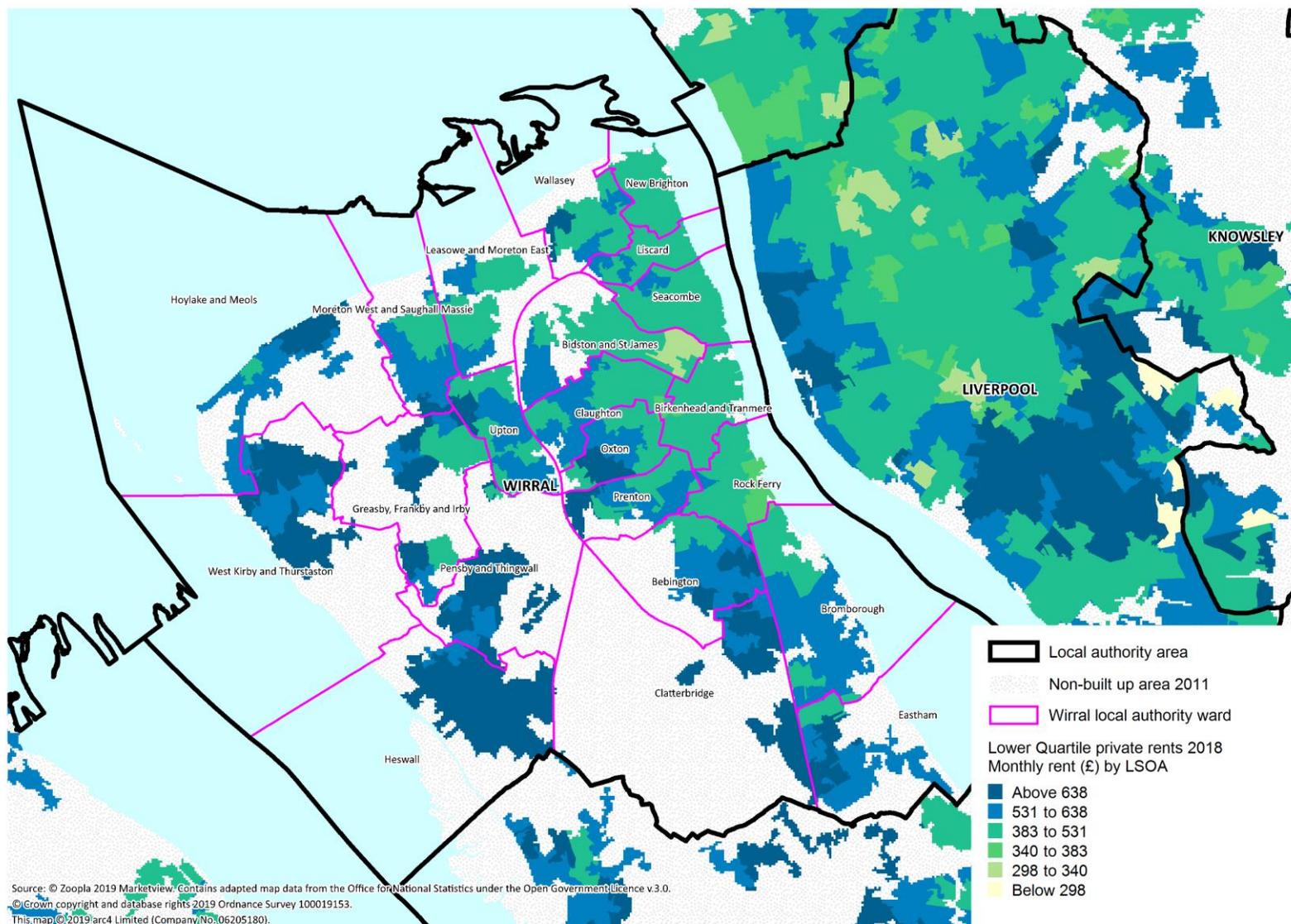
Table 10.7 Comparative median rental price 2010-2018			
Location	Median price by year (£)		% change 2010-2018
	2010	2018	
Wirral	524	550	+5.0
North West	546	594	+8.8
England	893	1,075	+20.4

Source: Zoopla PPD 2019

Table 10.8 Comparative lower quartile rental price 2010-2018			
Location	Lower quartile price by year (£)		% change 2010-2018
	2010	2018	
Wirral	425	451	+6.1
North West	472	477	+1.1
England	598	676	+13.0

Source: Zoopla PPD 2019

Map 10.1 2018 lower quartile rents across Wirral and adjacent authorities by built up areas within LSOAs



Ward	1 Bed Rent PCM	LHA Shared Shortfall/ Excess	LHA 1 bed Shortfall/ Excess	2 Bed Rent PCM	LHA 2 bed Shortfall/ Excess	3 Bed Rent PCM	LHA 3 bed Shortfall/ Excess	4 Bed Rent PCM	LHA 4 bed Shortfall/ Excess
Bebington	£522	-£318	-£148	£597	-£152	£690	-£141	£954	-£345
Bidston and St James	£324	-£120	£50	£452	-£7	£569	-£20	£806	-£197
Birkenhead and Tranmere	£398	-£194	-£24	£474	-£28	£540	£8	£584	£25
Bromborough	£452	-£248	-£78	£556	-£110	£646	-£97	£802	-£193
Clatterbridge	£561	-£357	-£187	£625	-£180	£782	-£233	£1,301	-£692
Cloughton	£435	-£231	-£61	£518	-£73	£685	-£136	£936	-£327
Eastham	£484	-£279	-£110	£596	-£151	£773	-£225	£1,156	-£547
Greasby, Frankby and Irby	£445	-£240	-£71	£606	-£161	£881	-£333	£1,088	-£478
Heswall	£613	-£408	-£239	£718	-£273	£909	-£361	£1,576	-£967
Hoyle and Meols	£482	-£278	-£108	£670	-£225	£808	-£260	£1,574	-£964
Leasowe and Moreton East	£410	-£206	-£36	£531	-£86	£627	-£78	£949	-£340
Liscard	£379	-£174	-£5	£489	-£44	£574	-£25	£669	-£60
Moreton West and Saughall Massie	£425	-£221	-£51	£587	-£142	£704	-£155	£812	-£202
New Brighton	£431	-£227	-£57	£516	-£71	£617	-£69	£871	-£262
Oxton	£440	-£235	-£66	£547	-£102	£650	-£101	£900	-£291
Pensby and Thingwall	n/a	n/a	n/a	£614	-£168	£812	-£264	£1,006	-£397
Prenton	£439	-£235	-£65	£514	-£69	£612	-£64	£747	-£137
Rock Ferry	£405	-£201	-£31	£463	-£17	£568	-£20	£696	-£86
Seacombe	£409	-£204	-£35	£490	-£45	£542	£6	£644	-£35
Upton	£470	-£266	-£96	£531	-£86	£625	-£77	£938	-£329
Wallasey	£452	-£247	-£78	£555	-£110	£695	-£147	£1,007	-£398
West Kirby and Thurstaston	£496	-£292	-£122	£704	-£259	£828	-£280	£1,511	-£902
Grand Total	£430	-£226	-£56	£526	-£81	£640	-£91	£948	-£338

Source: Zoopla PPD 2019

Affordability

- 10.23 For those in receipt of housing related benefit support, assistance is provided at the following Local Housing Allowance Rates (LHA) for the Wirral Broad Rental Market Area (April 2019):
- Shared accommodation rate (single persons aged under 35) - £55.02 per week
 - 1-bedroom rate - £86.30 per week
 - 2-bedroom rate - £102.73 per week
 - 3-bedroom rate - £126.58 per week
 - 4-bedroom rate - £140.62 per week
- 10.24 Table 10.9 considers average Zoopla rent listings per calendar month for 2018 against LHA levels at a ward level and the potential shortfalls between the two. One-bedroom listing average are compared against both the shared accommodation and 1-bedroom LHA rates.
- 10.25 In some areas of the Borough, private rents are within or close to LHA rates. This is particularly the case for Bidston and Birkenhead wards where LHA would cover or be within £50 PCM of average rental levels for most the corresponding property types.
- 10.26 In some wards however, there are greater gaps between LHA rates and private rent levels, for example in the Heswall ward there is a £361 pcm shortfall in LHA for a 3-bedroom property.
- 10.27 Analysis indicates that the shared room rate fails to cover rental levels for 1-bedroom properties in all of the ward areas.

Shared Accommodation / Houses in Multiple Occupation

- 10.28 The draft Housing section of the 'This is Wirral' evidence base estimates that there are approximately 1,850 houses in multiple occupation (HMO) with the majority of these being licensed HMOs. The evidence base also indicates that in recent years there has been an increase in shared and bedsit accommodation.
- 10.29 Analysis of listings on spare room.com indicates that there is potentially a bigger pool of house sharing options available in Birkenhead, Prenton and Wallasey areas. However, even the single rooms advertised generally appears to be above the per calendar month LHA shared room of rate of £238. Only 15 of the 125 listing on the 1st December 2019 stated that they would consider HB dependent households.
- 10.30 Whilst HMO's can provide an affordable private rented housing option for many residents, they can also have inadequate fire safety measures, lack of basic amenities and unsatisfactory management standards. Vulnerable occupiers and those on low incomes are more likely to occupy these types of accommodation due to its affordability.

Table 10.10 Sharedroom.com listings for Wirral Borough 01/12/19

Post Code Area	Single Room	Double Room
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	Number of listings	Average rent pcm inc bills	Number considering HB	Number of listings	Average rent pcm inc bills	Number considering HB
Birkenhead - CH42	3	£302	1	25	£393	4
Prenton - CH43	1	£400	0	13	£417	1
Wallasey - CH44	7	£303	0	28	£378	4
Wallasey - CH45	6	£398	0	14	£391	2
Wirral - CH46				4	£438	1
Wirral - CH47				3	£404	
Wirral - CH48				3	£384	
Wirral - CH60	1	£300	0	1	£607	
Wirral - CH60				1	£480	
Wirral - CH61				13	£411	
Wirral - CH62				2	£438	2
Wirral - CH63				25	£393	
Borough	18	£340	1	107	£399	14

Source: spareroom.com

Wirral's Private Sector Landlords

10.31 Recognising the role of the private rented sector in providing accommodation options, an online survey was used to ask landlords about their properties and whether they would consider working with the Council to provide accommodation for homeless households. Responses were received from 23 landlords:

Their rental portfolio

- Generally, landlords managed their properties themselves or with their spouse or partner having an average portfolio of 5.5 properties.
- Ten had properties accredited with the local authority or national accreditation schemes.
- One indicated that they were likely to buy more properties in the local area.
- Two indicated that they were likely to sell their properties which were located in the LA area.
- Nine had properties empty with the most frequent reason being because they were trying to re-let.
- Fifteen (65%) were aware of the help available from the Council to bring empty property back into use.

Their tenancies

- Generally, tenants stay in their properties for more than 3 years and the average length of tenancy is increasing.
- 33% did not ask for rent advances or bonds, 48% asked for a month or weeks rent.

Advertising

- For most, word of mouth was their preferred method of finding a new tenant.
- Only 48% were aware that accredited landlords could advertise their homes through PPP.

Who they let to

- 70% let to tenants in receipt of benefits.
- 44% said that they would consider shared tenancies and 22% were not sure.
- 50% would be willing to consider tenancy referrals from the local authority.
- Generally, there was a lack of awareness of incentives such as the payment of cash deposits, rent in advance and housing related support.
- Tenant history checks and a property cleansing service were the most popular incentives to encourage them to accept referrals from the Council.
- 78% believed that the private rented sector had a role to play in meeting the needs of homeless households.

Key findings

High demand for social housing

- 10.32 The 2018 Statistical Data Return (SDR) reports a total of 23,234 affordable dwellings across Wirral Borough (22,823 affordable/social rented and 471 intermediate tenure).
- 10.33 According to the emerging SHMA household survey 2019, households in Birkenhead are more likely to live in this type of accommodation (25.7% of households). Rural areas and those to the west of the Borough have the lowest levels of affordable accommodation.
- 10.34 Since 2016/17 the number of households on the Housing Register has remained relatively steady at around 9,000. As at 31st March 2019 there were 8,797 registered households. The register is dominated by applicants requiring one-bed homes, representing 58% of the register.

Reducing supply of social housing

- 10.35 During the financial year 2018/19, there were 649 properties allocated to people on the Wirral Housing register via Choice Based Lettings or via direct Council nomination of urgent cases. This figure has fallen by 49% since 2013/14.
- 10.36 The number of 4-bedroom properties being let has seen the most significant decrease over this time at 71%. One-bed property lettings have declined by 40%
- 10.37 Demand for social rented housing far outweighs the supply available, with 25 single person applicants for every one-bed property let. A shortfall of 705 affordable homes is estimated by the emerging strategic housing market assessment however it is important that this is considered further and placed in the context of viability in terms of developing supply further.

Affordability in the private rented sector

- 10.38 From 2001 to 2011, Wirral's private rented sector grew from 8.8% to 15.8%. This is reflective of the picture across the North West of England as a whole. Private rented accommodation makes up almost one in four (24.9%) of households in Wallasey, compared to 16.9% for Wirral Borough as a whole
- 10.39 Comparing the rental price in 2018 with that in 2010 indicates that there has been around a 5% increase in median and lower quartile rental prices locally, which is higher than that experienced regionally.
- 10.40 Further indicative data identified from web sites such as Zoopla suggests that in some areas of the Borough, private rents are within or close to Wirral's Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates. This is particularly the case for Bidston, Birkenhead wards where LHA would cover or be within £50 PCM of average rental levels for most the corresponding property types. In some wards however such as Heswall, there are greater gaps between LHA rates and private rent levels, for example, here there is a £361 pcm shortfall in LHA for a 3-bedroom property, illustrating the variety of conditions within Wirral's rental market.
- 10.41 The shared room rate fails to cover rental levels for 1-bedroom properties in all of the ward areas.
- 10.42 Landlords reported that generally, tenants stay in their properties for more than three years and the average length of tenancy is increasing.

Working with private sector landlords

- 10.43 The homelessness review identified that there was some potential to work more closely with private sector landlords, 78% of those who responded to our survey believing that the private rented sector has a role to play in meeting the needs of homeless households.
- 10.44 There was a lack of awareness of incentives such as the payment of cash deposits, rent in advance and housing-related support.

11. Resources

As part of their homelessness review, housing authorities should identify resources that are allocated to activities that prevent homelessness as well as those that respond to households becoming homeless and consider how these might be realigned.

Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018, MHCLG

- 11.1 This section of the review considers current funding arrangements for homelessness related activities in the Borough, spending trends and likely budget implications.

Homelessness Budget

- 11.2 Analysis of the Council Budgets provides us with the annual budget for the homelessness services. The budget has remained fairly static with the only changes being inflation on salaries and has therefore not increased with higher demand on services, homelessness and rough sleeping levels.

Financial Year	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Annual Budget	£966,900	£930,100	£949,100

Source: Wirral Council

NB. The net cost shown does not take into account income returned to the budget from government grants, bonds and rent in advance reimbursements

- 11.3 Wirral Audited Statement of Accounts 2018/19²⁴ highlights that the Council continues to face financial constraints and pressures. The medium-term financial planning period to 2023 will see continued grant funding reductions and increasing financial pressures.
- 11.4 The Council is continuing work commenced in 2018/19 to establish a sustainable and robust financial position for the period 2019/20 to 2022/23. Work is on-going to look at changing needs such as demands for services and rising costs- such as those for homelessness – and new ways to working to ensure that the forecasts remain robust and sustainable over the longer term.

Expenditure on temporary accommodation

- 11.5 The table below details the annual spend on temporary accommodation for the last three years. The significant increase from 2018/19 was expected given the changes arising from the

²⁴

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/About%20the%20council/Performance%20and%20spending/Accounts/Wirral%20Council%20Statement%20of%20Accounts%202018-19%20%28published%2031%20July%202019%2C%20subject%20to%20audit%29.pdf>

implementation of the HRA and the resultant increased demand for temporary accommodation. It should be noted that:

- The figures shown in the table are gross expenditure and the amount has been offset by payments received from Housing Benefit and/or individual applicant contributions. For example, the Council's spend on Temporary Accommodation in 2018/19 was £295,451.11 however, through reimbursement of Housing Benefit this amount was offset by over 70%.
- The Government has provided additional funding under the New Burdens Funding and Flexible Homeless Support Grant with the aim of financially supporting additional expenditure incurred by Local Authorities.
- There is current uncertainty regarding whether the additional funding will continue and at what level. This could lead to an increased burden on Council resources.

Year	Spend
2016/2017	£92,379.97
2017/2018	£99,915.04
2018/2019	£295,451.11

Source: Wirral Council

Government Funding

- 11.6 Government grants ringfenced to the provision of the statutory homelessness service are a key component of funding arrangements.

Flexible homelessness support grant

- 11.7 Flexible homelessness support grant came into effect from 1 April 2017, replacing the Department for Work and Pensions' temporary accommodation management fee paid to local authorities on a per household basis. The aim of this change was to allow for better management of temporary accommodation pressures.
- 11.8 Again, this funding stream has brought significant financial support to the service with an allocation of over £150,000 in 2018/19 and approximately £100K planned for 2019/20.

	Flexible homeless grant
2017/18	£82,480
2018/19	£153,361*
2019/20	£100,655

* The Council received an additional £61,538 as an 'in-year' award.

Source: Wirral Council

New Burdens Funding

- 11.9 New Burdens Funding was introduced in 2017 to assist local authorities to meet the new burdens associated with the additional duties contained within the Homelessness Reduction Act over the course of the Spending Review. It was anticipated that the new duties to prevent homelessness would “lead to savings for local authorities thereafter”. This perhaps gives some indication that the intention was for this funding to be short term in nature, although indication from Central Government suggests that there will be a further allocation of funding for the following financial year, amounts for which are yet to be confirmed
- 11.10 Over the last three financial years the Council has received over £200K through this funding programme and any reduction or removal in this funding will cause significant budgetary pressures.

Financial Year	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Allocation	£64,796	£59,353	£76,491

Source: Wirral Council

Trailblazer Funding

- 11.11 Liverpool City Region has been successful in receiving Trailblazer Funding (2 years 2019-21) to focus on early intervention and prevention. This funding is being used to fund three specialist posts within the Housing Options Team - Private Rented Sector Officer, Debt & Money Adviser and Early Intervention and Prevention Officer.

Discretionary Housing Payments

- 11.12 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) are another source of prevention funding as they are made available to households who need help with their housing costs. The Government Grant for this is supplemented by an annual allocation within the Council’s General Fund Reserves. In 2018/19 a total of £856,805 of funding was used against an allocation of £881,162.

Year	Total Allocation	Expenditure	Balance
2017/18	£872,473	£955,797	£-83,324
2018/19	£856,805	£881,162	-£24,357

Source: MHCLG

- 11.13 The following table details the how this funding was used over the last two years. Whilst 36% was used on supporting households following the removal of the spare room subsidy, a similar amount was also used for other-non welfare activities which we assume to be related to homeless prevention. In 2018/19 other activities received an increased share of the funding (41%) despite an

overall decrease in the budget. This suggests that the role of DHP in support homeless prevention activities is recognised by the authority.

Use	2017/18	%	2018/19	%
Benefit Cap	£174,654	18.3%	£105,309	12.0%
Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy	£345,309	36.2%	£322,921	36.6%
Local Housing Allowance (LHA) reforms	£88,369	9.3%	£54,374	6.2%
Combination of reforms	£18,692	2.0%	£30,243	3.4%
Other (non-welfare reform)	£326,703	34.3%	£368,316	41.8%
Total	£953,727	100%	£881,162	100%

Source: MHCLG

Local Welfare Assistance

- 11.14 In addition to the DHP, the Council also provides a Local Welfare Assistance scheme (LWA) which may be described as another source of prevention funding as it is made available to Wirral residents to meet a need, which if not met, would put at risk the health and wellbeing of a person and/or their immediate dependants. The scheme originally funded by direct DWP grant over a two year period is now reliant upon the remaining balance together with the Council's own Reserves.

	Balance at 31st March	Expenditure	Balance to carry over at 1st April
2016/17	-1,202,558.43	432,181.11	-770,377.32
2017/18	-770,377.32	267,763.76	-502,613.56
2018/19	-502,613.56	300,125.33	-202,488.23

Source: Wirral Council

- 11.15 Support is not available where the immediate need may be otherwise met, it is primarily intended, in the case of potential disaster or emergency to meet one-off needs as opposed to ongoing expenses.
- 11.16 The scheme is presently under review with specific regard to its application and scope.

Housing Related Support Budget

- 11.17 Analysis of the Council's Budgets also provides us with the annual budget for the support housing within the Borough., The following table below set the budget allocated to Homeless and Socially Excluded Groups.

Table 11.8 Supported Housing Budget for Socially Excluded Client Groups

Client Group	Funding 2019-2020	%
Single Homeless (aged 25+)	£1,255,947	43
Young People at Risk	£923,398	31
Domestic Abuse	£170,119	6
Young Parents	£157,146	5
Single Homeless aged 18-24	£152,000	5
People with Mental Health Problems	£143,012	5
Young People at risk (aged 16 & 17)	£94,889	3
Young People Leaving Care	46,500.00	2
Total	£2,943,011	100

Source: Wirral Council

- 11.18 The Housing Related Support budget for Socially Excluded client groups for the current financial year, 2019/20, is £2.9M. Services to support single homeless aged 25+ receive the largest proportion of funding (43%) followed by young people at risk (31%) and domestic abuse (6%). We understand that the funding split between client groups has remained fairly constant over the last few financial years and is consistent with the cohort of people presenting to the service albeit demands and pressure for those over-25 have been increasing

Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding

- 11.19 The Council also receives funding through the Rough Sleeper Initiative which funds the YMCA's Assertive Outreach Service. This was an allocation of £127,409 for 2019/20 and includes £30K to be used for personal budget activities. A further bid for funding to enable the continuation of the service will be made in December 2019.

Key Findings

Budget uncertainty against increased demand

- 11.20 The Council homelessness budget has remained fairly static and has therefore not increased with higher demand on services, homelessness and rough sleeping levels although the Council has been successful in securing grants to support wider activity. Work is on-going to look at changing needs - such as those for homelessness – and new ways of working.
- 11.21 Expenditure on temporary accommodation has increased significantly. Financial support from Government through New Burdens Funding and Flexible Homelessness Grant has an uncertain future and the potential for further pressure on Council budgets.
- 11.22 Short-term Trailblazer Funding for 2019-21 is being used to fund three specialist posts within the Housing Options Team - Private Rented Sector Officer, Debt & Money Adviser and Early Intervention and Prevention Officer.

- 11.23 The role of Discretionary Housing Payments in supporting homeless prevention activities is recognised by the authority with the Government funding supplemented by Council reserves.
- 11.24 The Local Welfare Assistance scheme, another source of prevention funding, is currently under review.
- 11.25 The Support Budget for socially excluded groups has reduced over the years as part of reviewing previous strategy commissioning. Funding split between client groups has however remained fairly constant over the last few years and is consistent with the cohort of people presenting to the service albeit demands and pressure for those over-25 have been increasing
- 11.26 A further bid to MCHLG's Rough Sleeper Initiative funding to enable the continuation of the service will be made in December 2019.
- 11.27 As a minimum it will be essential to safeguard the homelessness budget. Moving forward the budget should be increased to respond to the increasing demand on the service and the wider costs of homelessness to the public purse.

12. Details of Informal Consultation

12.1 Consultation has been central to the development of this homelessness review and strategy. A range of different methods were used, including:

- Focus group with services users/residents;
- Customer questionnaire;
- Individual discussions with selected stakeholders;
- Stakeholder questionnaire;
- Consultation with stakeholders at two Homelessness Forum meetings;
- Private sector landlord questionnaire; and
- Focus group with Housing Options Staff.

What do customers think of homelessness services?

12.2 Consultation with individuals who are either currently homeless or had experienced homelessness in the past is vital to the review, and the results will be used to improve existing services and develop new ones where appropriate.

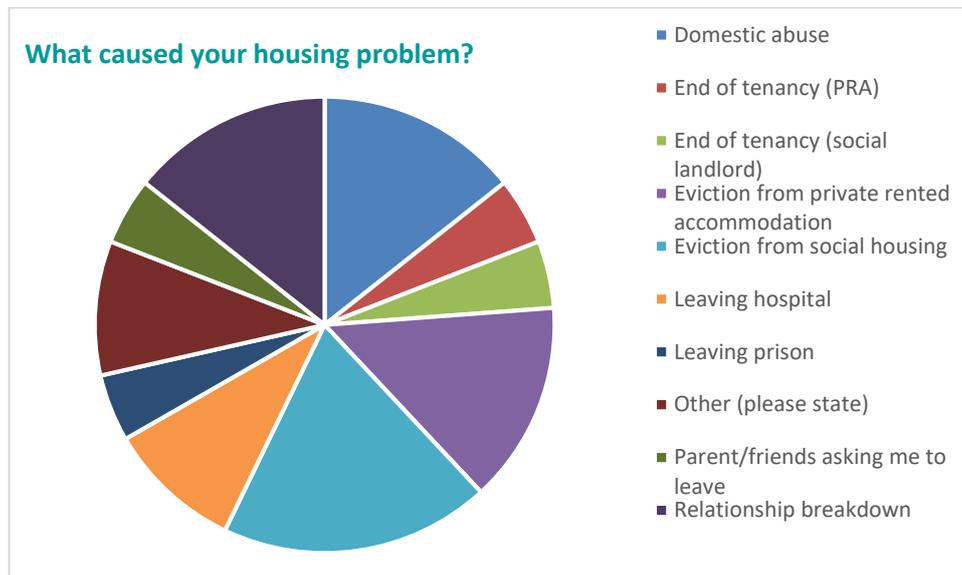
Customer Questionnaire

12.3 An online and paper questionnaire was made available to service users and a total of 21 responses were part or fully completed. The key findings are detailed below:

Profile of respondents:

- 67% declared that they were female;
 - 38% were aged 25-34, 19% 35-44 and 14% 54-54;
 - 57% were single parents and 19% were single;
 - 71% declared that their origin was White British; and
 - 80% had first approached the Housing Options team about their housing problem.
-

Figure 12.1 Cause of housing problem



- Only one respondent had slept rough and shared that this was in Birkenhead.

Opinion of the Housing Options Service:

- 90% had found the service easy to contact.
- 61% rated the service as very good, 23% as good.
- The majority of respondents agreed that they had received clear information and advice; that the staff were knowledgeable, helpful and understanding about their situation.
- 81% were provided with a full housing assessment and personal housing plan.
- Where suggestions were made for improving the service these included:
 - More knowledge of immigration issues; and
 - Having more temporary accommodation available.

Opinion of temporary accommodation

- 17 respondents confirmed that they had been placed on temporary accommodation, 7 in Bed & Breakfast and 10 in self-contained.
- Generally, for both, accommodation was seen to be of a good standard and suitable for their needs although there were some negative comments about not being able to bring personal belongings to the accommodation and there being no cooker or washing machine available for use.

Rough Sleeper and Single Person Questionnaire

- 12.4 Support providers were asked to complete a simplified questionnaire with rough sleepers and single persons who were accessing their services. 12 responses were received giving the following results:
- Two respondents were aged under 18 and the rest were 18 to 24 years of age.
 - All but one was White British.
 - The majority of respondents were homeless due to family or friends being no longer able or willing to accommodate them.
 - All respondents had accessed accommodation and support.
 - When asked what about the main problem causing them to remain homeless, 3 stated that they were waiting for an allocation through PPP, 7 were either too young to hold a tenancy or felt that they weren't ready to live independently.

Focus Groups

- 12.5 Three focus groups were held with service users who were currently homeless or had been homeless in the past.
- 12.6 The reasons for homelessness for service users who attended the focus group included domestic abuse, relationship breakdown, rent arrears linked to Universal Credit, leaving prison, mental health and drug addiction.
- 12.7 The following agencies were identified as helping the services users when they became homeless: the police, Wirral Ways to Recovery, Housing Options, Complex Needs Team, Charles Thompson Mission and Wirral Mind.
- 12.8 Key messages from the focus groups included:
- A number of service users reported that they did not know where to go for help when they became homeless.
 - "I didn't know what my options were, I'd never even be out of work before let alone homeless."*
 - "Council need to publicise the help that's available."*
 - In relation to service users' experience of living in supported accommodation a number of issues were identified in relation to it being a difficult environment to live in if you are a vulnerable person. A number of service users talked about reducing level of support available to residents, which was linked to reducing staff levels.
 - "I was in supported accommodation a long time ago and then more recently – it's gone downhill, the staff are stretched, everyone is on drugs, residents aren't getting the correct support, people aren't getting one to one support."*
 - "Staff are spread too thinly in hostels – not able to develop a relationship with support worker."*
 - Concern was also expressed in relation to the open use of drugs and not feeling safe.
 - "People use drugs in plain sight, it's a really hard place to be."*
 - "Don't feel safe in hostel accommodation."*

- The lack of move on from supported accommodation was also raised as an issue.
“Need to invest more in moving people on – too many people are there too long.”
- Service users talked about a lack of choice in relation to their housing options, both in relation to supported housing and social housing. Service users talked about a lack of person-centred options and for one service user this led to him sleeping rough.
“Felt forced into taking my flat as they said they wouldn’t continue to provide Bed & Breakfast, it felt like an ultimatum and I had to take a property that I didn’t want.”
“I was offered the YMCA but I have an adult son with special needs so it wouldn’t have been suitable for him, we ended up sofa surfing and sleeping rough.”
“I was on auto bid on PPP, I had no choice, I didn’t want the property that I was offered, as I didn’t want to live in that area due to an ex-partner, but I was given no choice.”
- Service users expressed a lack of clarity and understanding as to how Property Pool Plus works and identified the lack of internet access as a barrier to accessing social housing.
“Lots of us don’t understand how Property Pool Plus works.”
“You need a computer to access PPP – it’s difficult to access internet if you’re homeless or can’t afford to buy technology.”
- Service users spoke very positively about the support they were currently receiving, from practical support in relation to furniture, benefits, grants, mediating with landlords to feeling that there was someone there for them.
- Residents at the YMCA talked about access to training and having a safe drinking environment as beneficial.
“If I didn’t have the help through Excel, I’m not sure I’d still be here – I took 2 overdoses in the past.”
“I got an NVQ while at the YMCA – you have access to training.”
“I have someone to talk to, someone who cares about you.”
“The support has been excellent.”
“Someone to listen to me.”
- None of the service users felt that their homelessness could have been prevented.
- A number of service users had slept rough in the past. A number of comments were made in relation to the night shelter, in relation to a lack of privacy, finding it difficult sleeping closely to others with high needs and the need to have a break from the night shelter environment but this then adversely impacted upon their priority for hostel accommodation.
“I was on the streets for 2 ½ years – accessing the night shelter at times, I’d stay there for a few nights, but if you stayed out for 3 nights or more you lost your place for hostel accommodation, but I needed a break from the night shelter. It was just foam mats on the floor, and you have to be up at 6am and out at 7am. Some nights I couldn’t face going there.”
- Concern was raised in relation to safety and the lack of dignity afforded by having no private space.

“Night shelter is really horrible, you have no physical space, it’s not a safe environment. Its even worse for the girls, they have no room and no TV.”

- Service users talked about self-contained emergency provision as being a better option.

“Better alternative to the Night Shelter would be self-contained chalet type buildings to give privacy, at the Night shelter you can’t even get undressed, you end up sleeping in your clothes – need somewhere you can stay for longer.”

- Issues were also raised in relation to the lack of places to go during the day and the lack of diversionary activities.

“Because the Mission closes at a certain time you just find yourself wandering and you end up getting into trouble. From 7am you are just wishing it was 10.30pm so you could get back inside.”

- Service users’ experience of the Housing Options Service was mixed with some finding the service very helpful while others felt they were not given any meaningful help.

“Found Housing Options very helpful”

“They stayed in touch and rang me.”

“The Council were in no hurry to help”

“Everything takes such a long time – you’re waiting at every stage.”

“I didn’t have a positive experience with the Council, I was just told to go to YMCA for help.”

What are the views of stakeholders?

- 12.9 Consultation with partner agencies was seen as essential to the review process, particularly where there is a need to work more closely with other agencies to ensure a joined-up approach to homeless prevention.

Stakeholder Interviews

- 12.10 Telephone and face to face interviews were conducted with the following agencies to seek their views in relation to homelessness issues and the work of the Housing Options team.

- Shelter;
- Property Pool Plus;
- Cheshire & Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust;
- Public Health;
- Adult Social Care
- Children’s Services
- Probation; and
- Substance Misuse Specialist Nurse.

- 12.11 The following feedback was received:

- Partners spoke positively of the Council's Housing Options Service.
- The online referral system to access Housing Options can be a barrier for some clients, including prisoners.
- Sometimes the focus can be on the emergency – the need to find accommodation as quickly as possible, but after this there is no reflection on whether this is the right type of accommodation, there is a need to consider whether a move to a more suitable placement is necessary.
- There is good joined up working around tackling and responding to rough sleeping.
- The Housing Options post that sat within the hospital is now covered on a rota basis this has been detrimental. Having one dedicated post resulted in much better partnership working and positive outcomes for clients.
- More consistent and regular attendance from Housing Options at the Frequent Attenders meeting, the Crisis Care Meeting and the Complex Case Panel would be beneficial.
- Opportunities to improve the way MainStay works including how clients are prioritised.
- It would be good to have a Housing Options Officer based in probation giving housing advice.
- Adult social care doesn't always respond quickly enough or appropriately enough.
- There is a lack of any specialist supported housing provision for those who have addressed drug/alcohol use, being accommodated within existing provision is very detrimental to the client and is likely to result in them using again.
- Clients are often seen to have choice, but alcohol use is impacting upon peoples' cognition, they have brain damage, and this is affecting their behaviour and decisions, there is a need to think about things differently.
- There is a big cross over between drug and alcohol and homelessness – How do we engage people who are seemingly irrationally choosing to sleep rough rather than accessing accommodation – why are they declining the services that are there to get them off the streets?
- Need for end of life provision for homeless people on the Wirral.
- There is a need to create a bigger pool of accommodation for those with very complex needs – the right level of support is essential.
- There is a need for an accommodation project for domestic abuse perpetrators to reduce the risk to the survivors and other family members.
- Banning of applicants by SP providers is an issue – but do recognise that some people are very difficult to place. A more flexible approach is required in relation to banning applicants from hostels – need to give people a chance.
- People are being released from prison to the night shelter.
- Issues were raised in relation to the night shelter in relation to some people finding it a dangerous environment, and also the need to improve the provision moving forward to provide private safe areas for people.
- Limited provision especially for young clients who are excluded from services.
- There is a gap in the provision of affordable social housing provision.

- Issues around the allocations policy – and social landlords not wanting to take offenders – but it is very difficult to manage the risk to the public if the individual is not accommodated.
- Social landlords won't take clients with histories of offending – not giving an opportunity to demonstrate that they have changed.
- It can be difficult/impossible for offenders to access social housing due to PPP allocations policy.
- There is a need to improve access to the private rented sector.
- Need to improve severe weather arrangements to ensure that accommodation can be offered to everyone.
- There will be a need to resource the delivery of the homelessness strategy.
- From a social care perspective there is a gap in provision for clients who have no recourse to public funds
- There is a gap in provision for those who have high needs linked to substance misuse, in that their needs cannot be met by housing acting alone, but who don't meet the threshold for adult social care services
- There is an opportunity to strengthen partnership working at a strategic level with adult social care and housing
- Gaps were identified in being able to meet the needs of young people with complex and multiple needs
- There is a need to improve throughput in young people's accommodation projects by increasing the range and choice of move on options including house shares and a matching service

Stakeholder Questionnaires

12.12 19 completed questionnaires were received from key partner agencies throughout the area, seeking feedback on the Housing Options team, and suggestions for service improvement. As many of the respondents were free text, we have included example responses here which are reflective of the majority:

Housing Options Service strengths:

- *"Being empathic, considerate to people's needs."*
- *"the ability for them to give assistance to those who have been excluded from Social housing and who need financial help to access private housing"*
- *"Housing options is always open to looking at service delivery and changing process if indicated"*

Barriers to accessing the service:

- *"Some customers struggle with accessing the referral form online. Also, they report that the communication following a referral is often a long waiting period"*
- *"Location, being based in Wallasey stops a lot of people attending."*
- *"People not being aware of where the service is based, being unable to access phone or email to keep contact."*

What could be improved?

- *“Professionals to have a greater awareness about the service and how they can support adults with children who may become homeless or living in poor home conditions.”*
- *“More investment into suitable accommodation that can be made available to those that we work with; this is always the answer we get is that there just isn't anywhere for them to be placed. Simplified process with more timely assessments, access to appropriate accommodation and support”*

What more could be done to prevent homelessness?

- *“More early intervention via floating support and advice services.”*
- *“Secure more one bed flats for single people. Help with rent deposits”*
- *“More community support to enable people to maintain their tenancies”*
- *Wider access to appropriate property and support “*

Additional services/Gaps in provision:

- *“More support for people who are struggling with tenancies to be proactive in keeping them in place before eviction procedures come into play”*
- *“Advocacy services so that clients are supported to communicate their needs to officials and people who the client will see as 'in charge' or an authoritative figure.”*
- *“Break cycles of homelessness through the asset coaching and resilience training. “*
- *“more streamlined and tailor-made accommodations”*
- *“Better links with mental health services as some people fall through the cracks.”*

Homelessness Forums

- 12.13 Two homelessness forum meetings were held during the course of this review to enable a further wide range of partner organisations.

Forum Meeting 1 (17/9/19) – Key Themes and Challenges

Theme 1: Move on and Access to Accommodation

- 12.14 The barriers to be able to successfully move clients on from supported accommodation were identified as:
- rent arrears and service charge arrears – issues of non-payment not being addressed while in provision, and not focusing on setting up payments to address former arrears;
 - private rented accommodation – issue of deposits and lack of guarantors
 - very difficult to move clients on who have institutionalised background, substance misuse or high risk;
 - lack of suitable accommodation for people with complex/certain needs (adapted, previous ASB, rent arrears, offending);

- exclusion from PPP, housing providers reluctance to take on those with complex needs;
- shared accommodation has limitations with compatibility issues;
- lack of right type of accommodation, shortage of single bed accommodation; and
- lack of resettlement support and long-term support in the community.

12.15 In relation to what needs to be done to improve access to affordable and suitable accommodation, the following were identified:

- needs to be more options for young people who don't want to come into hostel accommodation;
- specialist, targeted smaller projects for people with complex needs;
- working to develop landlord packages to encourage landlords to take people with complex needs;
- PPP allocations policy to be reviewed; and
- increase in social/affordable housing – determine right type of accommodation and then build it.

12.16 The following was identified as being able to improve move on:

- improved communication between agencies;
- staff trained in trauma and breaking down the barriers/behaviours;
- coordinated landlord offer and on-going floating support;
- floating support available for longer than 12 weeks – need to recognise that some high needs/complex clients will need on-going longer support in order to be able to maintain a tenancy;
- 6-month target to move on from supported accommodation is not realistic – 6 months is not long enough to build the skills to support move on;
- Housing Priority Panel needs to be restructured; and
- more suitable/specialist longer term supported accommodation.

Theme 2: Rough Sleeping

12.17 In relation as to whether agencies understand the level and nature of rough sleeping on the Wirral the following responses were given:

- there is a need for monthly operational meetings to discuss individual cases; and
- transient rough sleeping population in and out of services/rough sleeping/sofa surfing/there is no way of tracking these individuals.

12.18 The following provision and service were identified as being needed locally to both prevent rough sleeping and to ensure a rapid response when people sleep rough for the first time:

- need multi-agency, action focused approach including police – all services working from one hub;

- outreach services – how do we complement existing services and avoid duplication – need coordinated and collaborative working;
- services that can manage substance misuse/alcohol levels;
- alternative response to YMCA night shelter;
- female only service; and
- reintroduce the No Second Night Out service.

12.19 It was identified that existing services and provision could be used to more effectively engage with rough sleepers and create a pathway for change in the following ways:

- regular meeting, sharing experiences – so all services are aware of vacancies;
- people need to get through the system more quickly; and
- look at something more purpose built i.e. pods.

Theme 3: Early Intervention and Prevention

12.20 In relation to how services can move to focus on early intervention and prevention, the following was identified:

- understand the problem and reasons prior to becoming homeless;
- knowing who to contact and being pro-active – need to raise awareness;
- multi-agency approach to support;
- easier accessibility, face to face contact, 24/7 access;
- lack of awareness of where to go; and
- better working relationships with private landlords and RPs.

12.21 The following things were identified as being able to prevent people losing their home in the first place:

- more mediation with landlords for people staying longer in their tenancies;
- social landlords should be more pro-active and stop arrears getting so high;
- Homeless Prevention Fund – is there one – can this be used to pay for DRO?; and
- not closing cases due to “did not attend”.

12.22 The following opportunities were identified for partnership responses to prevention and early intervention:

- allocation of beds in hostels – holding a bed could prevent rough sleeping;
 - everyone understanding what everyone else does; and
 - complex case meetings attended by all agencies managing the client.
-

Theme 4: Complex needs

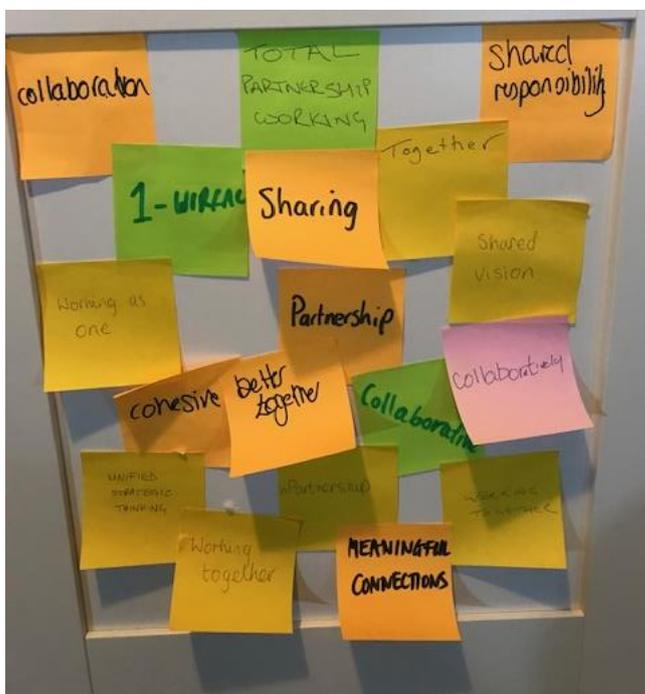
- 12.23 The following provision/services were identified as being currently available for homeless people with complex and multiple needs:
- hostel provision – but no specific complex needs services
 - Housing First;
 - complex needs worker;
 - floating support – but limited timescales; and
 - Stein – complex needs team.
- 12.24 The following gaps and barriers were identified:
- waiting list for support services and limited provision
 - earlier intervention of social care and mental health services for clients who don't meet their threshold. Lack of provision for those with no diagnosed mental health condition but who clearly have mental health issues/personality disorder traits
 - no specialist accommodation services;
 - staff not trained to manage and work with complex needs;
 - no dedicated team working prior to prison release or hospital discharge;
 - cases closed when client does not attend;
 - fear of going into larger hostels/night shelter;
 - previous exclusions/ASB/offending; and
 - leaving care – lack of joined up working with social care.
- 12.25 In response to how existing services and provision could be used to more effectively assist those with complex needs the following was identified:
- clear understanding of what different services/provision offer;
 - breaking down the fear of services around funding;
 - specific beds/services for high risk/complex needs;
 - training and understanding of client groups, trauma informed care, PIE, CAT training;
 - different approach to prevent evictions – immediate evictions due to violence and aggressive behaviour often leads to homelessness/rough sleeping;
 - multi-skilled officers;
 - more flexible hostel rules and approaches; and
 - better understanding of the cognitive impact of long term drinking i.e. memory and concentration – needs to inform service's understanding and expectation of what you can ask people to do/expect from them.
- 12.26 The following was identified in relation to improving joined up working to meet the needs of people with complex needs:
-

- wrap around service with specific services/agencies;
- simplify processes;
- extended time to work with more complex cases; and
- bring services into hostels i.e. health etc.

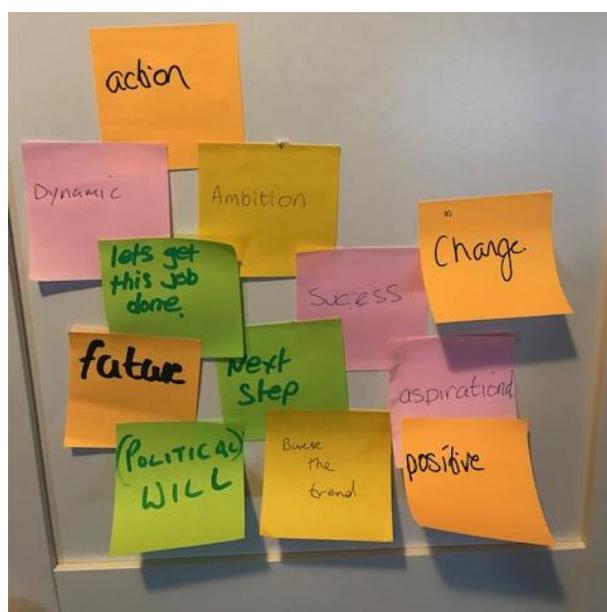
Forum Meeting 2 (17/10/19) – Visioning and priorities

12.27 A Post-It exercise with stakeholders aimed to capture key words which could form the vision of the next strategy. The meeting then went on to discuss what actions should be prioritised to achieve this vision.

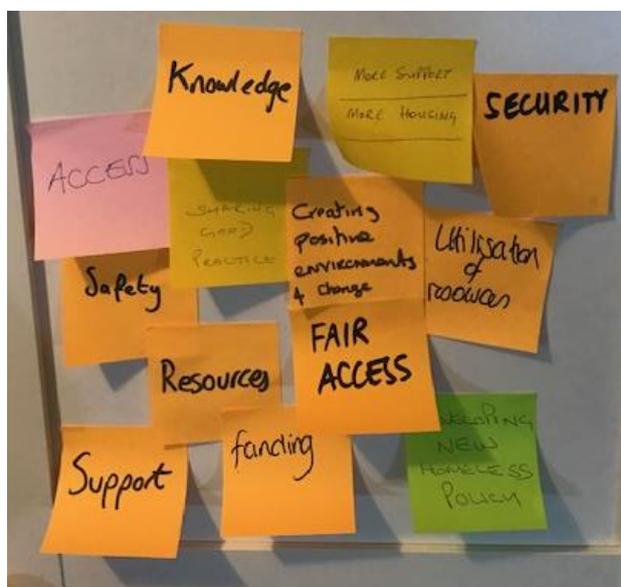
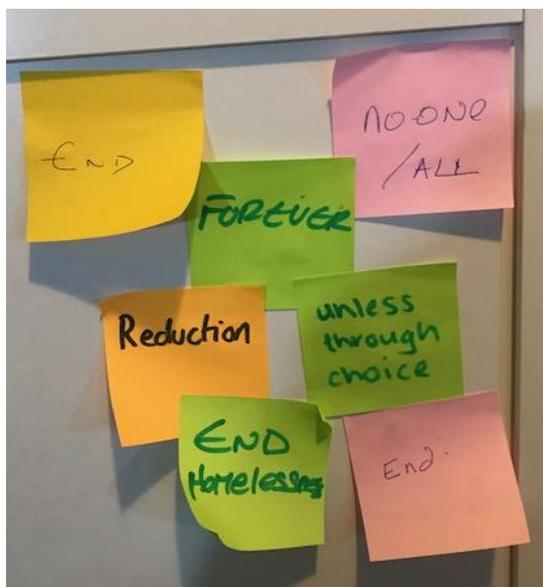
- a clear message that homelessness is a shared responsibility that can only be resolved through partnership and collaboration;



- a call for services to be more person-centred services;
- ambitions for dynamic action and change moving forward;



- discussion about whether the aspiration should be to “end” homelessness or whether in some cases it is through choice; and
- more practical messages about the resources and nature of service moving forward.



What do Housing Options staff think?

12.28 Front line staff were invited to join a focus group, with the aim of surveying staff’s opinion on current service provision, whilst also using their experiences to shape future services across the Wirral. The sessions were an unstructured discussion, allowing staff the opportunity to direct the session according to their main concerns and opinions. This was followed up with a questionnaire for staff who were unable to attend the focus group.

12.29 The key strengths of the Housing Options Service included:

- the team has faced unprecedented challenges and an increase in casework since the introduction of the HRA. This, however, has only brought the team closer today. They help and support each other, share knowledge, good practice and support one and another;
- very customer focused and have lots of options available to help resolve customer's situation;
- being able to access the Homeless Prevention Fund for deposits;
- strong emphasis on sustainability in Wirral Housing Options leading to better long-term outcome for customer;
- online referral process and how referrals are allocated makes it easier for HAPO's to prioritise their referrals and workload;
- staff feel listened to and there's a willingness to try different approaches. The management team is approachable and supportive;
- there are close working relationships with a number of partners: 16/17-year-old protocol with children's services; CAB; Magenta; hospital rota as part of the hospital discharge policy; and
- the Trailblazer Project and Private Sector Liaison Officer.

12.30 Areas for improvement were identified as:

- moving forward would like to review how they deliver the service with opportunities to streamline processes or explore a triage approach. Improving the prevention toolkit to increase number of preventions;
- need to raise awareness to get people to come in earlier and educate people about homelessness. More self-help tools could be developed for the website;
- there needs to be a better system for housing associations to notify the Council pre-eviction but GDPR is an issue;
- improved procedures of working between PPP and Housing Options. Some issues regarding housing associations not contacting Housing Options prior to offer via PPP, so unable to notify the applicant and make a final offer;
- move on is a big issue from the hostels and refuge;
- some teething issues with the 16/17-year-old protocol when some social workers are unaware, they need to make the accommodation placement;
- there is a need for more private sector properties to offer clients unable to access social housing. Wigan and Leigh Council are now taking a number of 5-year leases on private sector properties that meet standards. They pay landlords a slightly lower rate and do not pay rent in advance or a deposit, but the system guarantees the rental income, the carrying out of day to day repairs and that the property will be returned in the state it was let. This could be an idea for Wirral;
- training for other agencies and departments on what the service can provide; and
- duty to refer – ensuring appropriate referrals from agencies as many are closed as advice only or unable to contact.

12.31 The following barriers were identified in relation to customers accessing the service:

- some customers don't have a clear understanding of the role of housing options and what can be offered;
- online only referral system could be a barrier to customers who are not able to use IT, although support is offered at One Stop Shop. Some customers prefer face to face appointments. Telephone assessments are needed due to the sheer volume of cases, but they can be impersonal;
- the client provision of documents within 10 days or case is closed. This prevents a homeless application being taken in a significantly high number of cases. For some vulnerable clients, the telephone-based nature of the service however it is necessary to meet high demand/location of office; and
- financial. Restrictions within PPP. Societal attitudes. Landlord attitude. Benefit restrictions placed on under-35's.

12.32 The following issues were identified in relation to the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act:

- the positive is that it has increased the preventative work and gives more time for client situations to be fully assessed. However, it has also dramatically increased the volume of the work and referrals into the authority. This in turn increases the volume of administrative tasks when triaging the clients;
- paperwork is a burden – the increased paperwork can take time away from casework;
- sometimes it can be difficult to find the time to issue the legal duty;
- more customers come in at relief stage rather than prevention – have to weigh up how the team prioritises its time;
- increased demand through duty to refer and some issues – the same person can be referred multiple times so has to be taken up as a new case each time but doesn't result in outcomes. Under the Trailblazer programme the service plans to educate agencies about what true referrals should be, as currently agencies are referring anyone who mentions housing;
- people are spending longer in TA under the HRA i.e. household found to be IH would be in for 56 days and then issue decision, and then given reasonable notice. Impacting upon numbers in TA;
- improvements for customers in agreed planned/targeted solutions; and
- more time to work with customers to try to prevent homelessness. Use of PHP's give more clarity on what the customer can expect from us and also what we expect them to do. Initially working with more people who previously would not have been able to access assistance e.g. no local connection.

12.33 Staff felt that the following issues impeded their ability to successfully prevent homelessness:

- quality and range of prevention tools available;
- high caseloads and a majority of duties awarded in relief/TA take priority for officer attention;
- clients aren't coming in early enough;
- reluctance from private landlords to work with Housing Options;

- lack of alternative affordable accommodation is a major factor but often customers do have unrealistic expectations of the help available. There is a difficulty in accessing one-bedroom accommodation and larger properties;
- restrictive PPP policy and unwillingness of social landlords to take applicants with previous negative tenancy conduct or to management move if issues within the tenancy i.e. arrears;
- APA's under Universal Credit are time; and
- lots of social landlords are asking for up to 4 weeks rent in advance, the service will normally pay one week.

12.34 The following gaps were identified in service provision across the Wirral:

- need for more supported and temporary accommodation;
- need for more refuge accommodation – high number of domestic abuse referrals;
- more affordable provision for under 35s;
- mental health – more specialised provision for those with capacity who do not meet the criteria for social care. Often homeless without any support;
- lack of female only provision;
- mediation for families;
- repeat rough sleepers and complex cases with multiple drug, alcohol, mental and physical health needs who need specialist high end supported accommodation;
- need an effective private rented offer or possibly a tenure generic 'property finding service' for customers to support effective discharge;
- difficult for people who are working to access supported accommodation;
- prisoners often do not contact upon release;
- under 25's who have been excluded from Forum present a difficulty as other hostels will accept them, but service charge is not affordable;
- those with health needs – physical/ mental health who no longer meet revised health/social care service thresholds for care/support. These clients need significant support to leave homelessness and set up new tenancies; and
- living with family/friends – could better provision be made via PPP to alleviate the presentation who see a duty award as a way of increasing their banding.

Key Findings

Customers

12.35 Customers identified the need to raise awareness of services so that people know where to go for help when they become homeless.

- 12.36 Some users had mixed experience of the help that they had received from the Housing Options Service. Although, others spoke positively about the support they were receiving, providing both practical help but also someone that would listen to them.
- 12.37 Customers were very positive about the support they received in supported accommodation. A small number of people raised some concerns in relation to the quality of support provided within supported accommodation and also raised issues in relation to safety and lack of move on into more permanent accommodation was identified as an issue.
- 12.38 Those who had slept rough raised concerns in relation to the current Night Shelter provision, both in relation to priority for hostel beds, safety and the lack of personal space. They identified the need for self-contained emergency provision and somewhere for rough sleepers to go during the day.

Staff Consultation– Housing Options, Property Pool Plus and Housing Related Support Teams

- 12.39 There is a strong team approach to working to prevent and relieve homelessness. Although, following the implementation of the HRA, there is now a need to review service delivery and resources to ensure the team can achieve prevention and early intervention.
- 12.40 While the HRA has lead to an improved service for customers it has also lead to a significantly increased workload, with paperwork impacting upon casework. There is a need to review systems, processes and structures to deal more efficiently with triage/advice cases, ensuring the service is accessible to all customers and opportunities for prevention can be maximised
- 12.41 There is a need to raise awareness of what the service can offer with both customers and partner agencies and to improve joint working with Housing Associations to ensure homelessness can be prevented.
- 12.42 There is also a need to improve joint working and procedures between Housing Options and Property Pool Plus, alongside reviewing the policy. Improved working practices include integrated computer systems, notification protocols and arrangements for nominations.
- 12.43 The following gaps were highlighted:
- Improvements to website and development of self-help tools
 - A better offer to private sector landlords and ensure that the team has sufficient resources to deliver it
 - Raise awareness of the housing options and support available to people fleeing domestic abuse, including assessing if more refuge provision is required. More affordable provision for people under the age of 35.
 - Specialised provision for those who have poor mental health who are assessed as having capacity who do not meet the criteria for social care
 - Female specific provision
 - a need for specific supported housing provision that meets the needs of the most complex customers

Stakeholder Consultation

- 12.44 Partners spoke positively of the service delivered by the Council's Housing Options service with good joined up working although the online referral system to access Housing Options can be a barrier for some clients, including prisoners. Stakeholders (Public Health and Substance Misuse Specialist) would like to see a dedicated Housing Options Post within the hospital although numbers for discharge may not warrant a FTE post.
- 12.45 There is a lack of any specialist supported housing provision for those who have addressed drug/alcohol use, being accommodated within existing provision is very detrimental to the client and is likely to result in them using again.
- 12.46 It is difficult to find appropriate solutions for those with complex needs. Floating support needs to be available for longer than 12 weeks – need to recognise that some high needs/complex clients will need on-going longer support in order to be able to maintain a tenancy
- 12.47 There is a need for an accommodation project for domestic abuse perpetrators to reduce the risk to the survivors and other family members
- 12.48 A need for an increased range of move on options for young people was identified including house shares and a matching service
- 12.49 Barriers to move on were identified as rent arrears and service charge arrears, lack of effective private sector landlord offer, allocations policy and social landlord's position in relation to arrears and offending, lack of affordable accommodation, including single persons accommodation.
- 12.50 Issues were raised in relation to the allocations policy by a number of stakeholders especially in relation to accommodating offenders
- 12.51 There is a gap in the provision of affordable social housing provision and a need to improve access to the private rented sector
- 12.52 Issues were raised in relation to the Night Shelter in relation to some people finding it an unsafe environment, and also the need to improve the provision moving forward to provide private safe areas for people

13. Next Steps

Consultation

- 13.1 In order to ensure that the information contained within this review is a true reflection of homelessness across the Wirral the review will be made available to all stakeholders and the wider public for consultation.
- 13.2 The consultation process is an integral part of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy development process. Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council is required to give all partners who supply services and those who use them, the opportunity to discuss and agree what the future priorities that underpin the Homelessness Strategy should be.

Strategy Development

- 13.3 Following this review the Council will produce and publish a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. This will ensure a strategic approach to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping across the Wirral, ensuring that local solutions can be developed to meet the needs of its community.
- 13.4 Wirral's Homelessness Forum will be fundamental to the development of this strategy, and the implementation and monitoring of the targets agreed within the action plan.
- 13.5 The Strategy must reflect the joint approach by agencies to tackle and prevent homelessness in the Borough and therefore it is appropriate that a multi-agency approach is taken to:
 - Agreeing priorities.
 - Identifying key actions.
 - Agreeing an action plan.
 - Jointly delivering the action plan.
- 13.6 The Council is committed to working with its partners to preventing homelessness and ending rough sleeping in Wirral.