

Housing Select Committee		
Title	Update on homelessness acceptances and performance	
Contributor	Executive Director for Customer Services	Item 5
Class	Part 1 (open)	22 July 2014

1 Summary

- 1.1 This report updates Housing Select Committee on homelessness acceptances and related performance, following on from the February 2014 committee.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the contents of the report.

3 Background

- 3.1 In February 2014 officers reported an increase in homeless approaches and acceptances of homeless applications made to the authority, along with a decrease in the new supply available.

- 3.2 The earlier report covered:

- Developing the Lewisham Landlord Letting Scheme to increase the supply of property
- Hostel improvements and ways to reconfigure and resize units to better fit the hostel sizes by acceptances as homeless.
- A B&B audit to make sure all paid for accommodation was being used
- Increased and more proactive homeless preventative work to manage demand
- Property procurement to increase supply (including former care homes and possibly sheltered accommodation).

- 3.3 This report will present on an update of the number of homeless approaches, and the strategies that are being deployed to both respond to and manage the increasing demand.

4 Supply and demand

- 4.1 The number of households accepted as homeless has risen by 28% over the past four years, as set out in the table below.

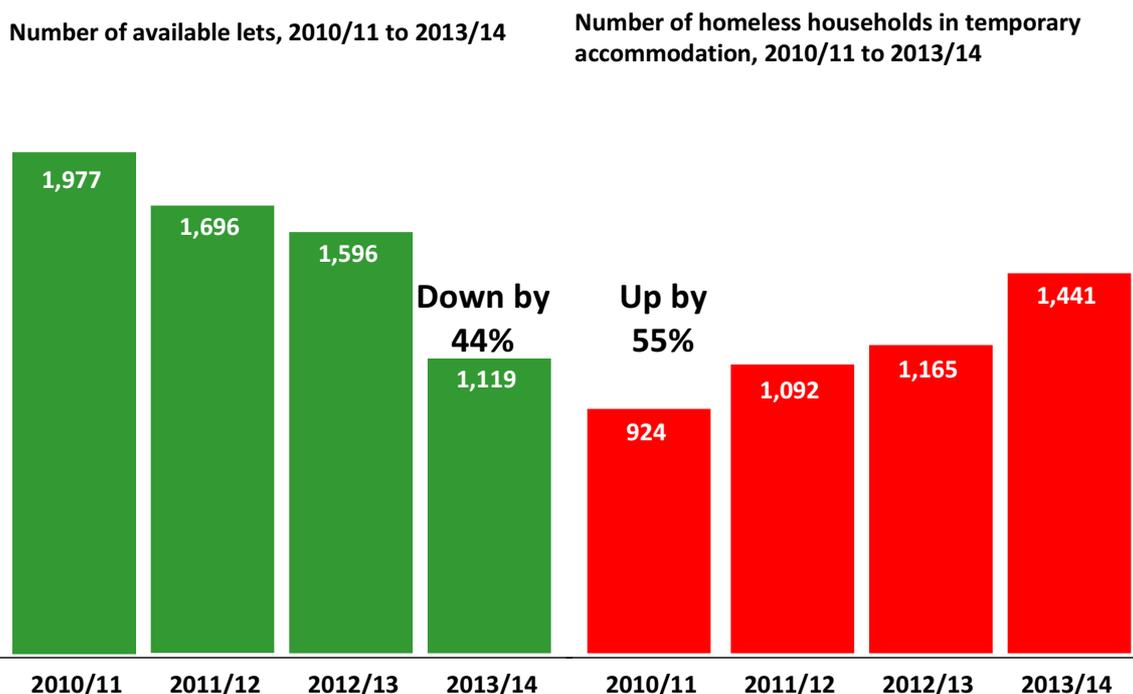
Table 1: Number of households accepted as homeless, Lewisham, 2011/12 to 2013/14

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	% Change 10/11 to 13/14
Lewisham	553	567	588	710	+ 28%

4.2 At the same time as this rising demand, the amount of supply, in terms of available lets has fallen. Chart 1 below sets out this decrease, and also the implication of falling supply and rising demand, which is an increase of 50 per cent in the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation.

4.3 To summarise Table 1 and Chart 1, the Council has faced year-on-year growth in demand, from the number of households who were accepted as homeless, from 2011/12 to 2013/14. Over this period demand increased by 25 per cent. Over the same period the level of supply, from available new lets, decreased by 44 per cent, with the consequence that the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation has increased by 55 per cent.

Chart 1: Number of new available lets and number of homeless households in temporary accommodation 2011/12 to 2013/14



4.4 The rise in demand has been generated by a combination of factors, including the effects of welfare reform, rising property prices and rising rents. In both the last and current financial years the main cause of homelessness in Lewisham has been households losing accommodation in the private rented sector, with 40 per cent of homeless applications presenting for this reason. Exclusion by parents and relatives makes up a further 30% of the demand.

4.5 The current estimates for this year show a falling off in demand, with the number of acceptances expected to fall, from 710 last year to 680 this year, in part due to

an increased focus on homeless prevention, and more information about this is set out below. In addition the current projection is for the number of available lets to increase again this year, from 1,119 last year to 1,712 this year. This is also in part due to the interventions that the Council has been undertaking, and again more detail on these is set out below.

- 4.6 Notwithstanding these improved projections, the impact of three years of increasing demand and falling supply has been significant. The natural consequence of a lack of sufficient available permanent accommodation to meet the level of homeless demand is an increase in the use of temporary accommodation as a “stop-gap” while more secure permanent accommodation is found. This has been the case in Lewisham, and in London more generally, and is exemplified in the chart below.

Table 1: Number of households in temporary accommodation in Lewisham and in London overall, 2011/12 to 2013/14

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	% Change 10/11 to 13/14
Lewisham	924	1,089	1,165	1,441	+ 55%
London	35,850	36,740	40,230	43,460	+ 21%

- 4.7 A range of temporary accommodation options are available to the Council to house homeless households while longer term solutions are sought. The mismatch between demand and supply over the past three years has led to an increase in the use of temporary accommodation generally, and also, because of the scale of the demand, to an increase in the use of bed and breakfast specifically. This is exemplified in the table below:

Table 2: Number of households in temporary accommodation in Lewisham overall and by type, 2010/11 to 2013/14

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Bed and breakfast including shared annexes	51	20	89	282
Hostels including women's refuges	238	266	256	321
Council temporary stock	120	106	96	96
Private sector leased	475	580	618	676
Registered Provider stock	40	117	106	66
Total in TA	924	1,089	1,165	1,441

- 4.8 Accommodation costs in most types of temporary accommodation are fully covered by rental income. This is not the case for the costs of households in bed and breakfast accommodation. Government set limits on the levels of benefit that can be claimed against nightly paid accommodation costs mean that the council cannot recover the full costs charged by providers for in respect of those households. The current projected effect on the Council's budget in 2014/15 is an overspend of around £2m.

5 Initiatives to manage demand and increase supply

- 5.1 A wide range of initiatives are being pursued to address the three issues at hand, namely to increase permanent supply, to manage demand and also to increase temporary supply to provide better options for the Council than bed and breakfast accommodation. Officers are also developing self-help mechanisms through the use of IT and on-line housing register and Housing Options Twitter.

1. Increasing permanent and temporary supply

New build, acquisition and conversion

- 5.2 The Housing Matters programme, launched in July 2012 is responding to housing challenges both in Lewisham and across London generally. There is a report elsewhere on the agenda for this committee meeting setting out progress in delivering new Council homes, and this shows that the first six homes are on site now, and the next 98 homes are expected to be approved in September.
- 5.3 The long lead-times for the delivery of new homes mean that this is a long term solution to the problem. The hope is that over time greater provision of new homes will help provide a more permanent solution to the problem. The continuous challenge of undersupply generally was mentioned in the Baker report which indicated that around 260,000 new homes would be required each year, but less than half of this was delivered. London needs 82,000 new homes. The SHMA indicated that Lewisham would require 1,141 and we have progressed 500 per annum. Lewisham has recently been a top performer in the delivery of new housing. However there will be an ongoing gap in supply to meet demand which means the Council will need to continue to make better use of the PRS. In the short term however other measures are required to increase supply on a quicker, and potentially more temporary basis, and the initiatives that are being pursued in that regard are set out below.
- 5.4 In February 2014 Mayor and Cabinet approved the purchased of two large properties which could function as hostel accommodation and provide a better, and cheaper, temporary alternative for homeless households than bed and breakfast accommodation. Between them these two properties had the capacity to provide a further 50 units, and officers are currently implementing works to make those suitable for hostel use. It is anticipated that the first new units will be available by the end of the year. Many London boroughs are increasing hostel provision.
- 5.5 Following these purchases, in April 2014, Mayor and Cabinet approved a more general programme to invest £4.5m to increase the Council's hostel capacity by a further 50 new units. Officers are currently pursuing a range of potential opportunities in that regard, and further updates will be provided in due course, pending successful commercial negotiations.
- 5.6 In addition to acquisition, the Council's capital programme has recently delivered significant improvements to a considerable number of hostel units, both self contained and where kitchen and bathroom facilities are shared. The overall standard of the units is now much higher and the layout more customer friendly. The programme has ensured that the Council makes savings on day to day repair

costs, achieving value for money through this 'spend to save' initiative. Also as a result of the programme, the Council now has a number of large family sized units in its hostels which did not exist before. This will enable large families to be housed in the reconfigured units.

- 5.7 Finally a range of opportunities are being pursued to convert non-housing assets into residential accommodation to help meet demand. The types of properties currently being evaluated include former community centres that have been deemed surplus to requirements in their previous use, and office accommodation that is no longer required, and further updates will be available in due course.

Private Sector Housing Options

- 5.8 The Lewisham Landlord Letting Scheme is a comprehensive tenant finding service where Lewisham Council acquires properties from private landlords who are interested in letting their properties on an Assured Shorthold Tenancy and directly managing the properties themselves. The Council refers households to these properties to prevent them from becoming homeless. The households referred to this scheme tend to be living in the private rented sector already and their tenancy is due to come to an end in the near future. Moving into another rented property before the tenancy comes to an end is a more sustainable and less disruptive solution rather than going through the homeless process and temporary accommodation for years.
- 5.9 This scheme offers attractive incentives including a bond and one off cash incentive and the tenancies are for 12 months. Each property that is procured will have an individual lease. There are no over arching contracts. The Procurement Team have a rental framework which they must work within, but within this there is flexibility for them to negotiate the best possible deal.

2. Managing demand

Homelessness prevention and the Housing Options Centre

- 5.10 A small pilot team of three Housing Options Officers was established in January 2014 dedicated to full time homeless prevention work in order to identify and proactively work with households threatened with loss of their accommodation prior to them presenting to the authority as homeless to reduce the number of placements being made in to temporary accommodation and in particular into B & B establishments.
- 5.11 This pilot has proved successful in improving homeless prevention activity and will be expanded to include all the Housing Options Officers in August 2014 when the Housing Options Centre assessment and advice services relocate to Laurence House. This move will enable changes to be made in case management practices and provide more officers on the front line at any given time than is currently possible given the space restrictions in Eros House.
- 5.12 To assist this team additional homeless prevention tools have been developed with partner departments within the Council, most notably a fund of £50,000 from the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) budget to utilise in preventing the termination of private sector tenancies which is currently the single largest reason for homelessness in the borough.

- 5.13 The Procurement Team in the recently established Private Sector Housing Agency is working very closely with the Prevention Team in delivering this project and has secured twenty six privately rented properties that were offered as a housing option to households in the private rented sector who had been served with repossession notices, so homelessness and the long journey through B&B, hostel and PSL accommodation was successfully prevented for these families.

Audit

- 5.14 Officers undertook an audit of bed & breakfast accommodation used for homeless households. The purpose of the exercise was to check that occupants were still using the accommodation given the huge financial cost to the Council. A similar exercise was last undertaken in 2012 which identified a number of discrepancies, however, in this instance, all cases except one, were occupying the accommodation that they had been placed in.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 Over the past three years demand on the Council in the form of homelessness acceptances has increased by 56 per cent, while over the same period available supply in the form of new lets has fallen by 44 per cent. The effect of this has been an increase in the need to use temporary accommodation generally, and bed and breakfast specifically.
- 6.2 Officers are undertaking a wide range of interventions to manage demand and increase supply, and thereby reduce the scale of the challenge. Although projections for the coming year appear more positive the scale of the backlog means that active interventions will be required for some time to come.

7 Financial implications

- 7.1 This purpose of this report is to update members on the homelessness acceptances and related performance. As such, there are no direct financial implications resulting from the recommendation set out in section 2.1, although members should note the financial context of the current situation set out in paragraph 4.8.

8 Legal and human rights implications

- 8.1 There are no additional relevant legal implications to add, save for noting the following:
- 8.2 The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) introduced a new public sector equality duty (the equality duty or the duty). It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 8.3 In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

8.4 The duty continues to be a “have regard duty”, and the weight to be attached to it is a matter for the Mayor, bearing in mind the issues of relevance and proportionality. It is not an absolute requirement to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity or foster good relations.

8.5 The Equality and Human Rights Commission has recently issued Technical Guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty and statutory guidance entitled “Equality Act 2010 Services, Public Functions & Associations Statutory Code of Practice”. The Council must have regard to the statutory code in so far as it relates to the duty and attention is drawn to Chapter 11 which deals particularly with the equality duty. The Technical Guidance also covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty. This includes steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The guidance does not have statutory force but nonetheless regard should be had to it, as failure to do so without compelling reason would be of evidential value. The statutory code and the technical guidance can be found at: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/equality-act/equality-act-codes-of-practice-and-technical-guidance/>

8.6 The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has previously issued five guides for public authorities in England giving advice on the equality duty:

1. The essential guide to the public sector equality duty
2. Meeting the equality duty in policy and decision-making
3. Engagement and the equality duty
4. Equality objectives and the equality duty
5. Equality information and the equality duty

The essential guide provides an overview of the equality duty requirements including the general equality duty, the specific duties and who they apply to. It covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty including steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The other four documents provide more detailed guidance on key areas and advice on good practice. Further information and resources are available at:

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty/guidance-on-the-equality-duty/>

8.7 The European Convention on Human Rights states in Article 8 that “Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and correspondence”. The Human Rights Act 1998 incorporates the Convention. Whilst it does not, however, necessarily mean that everyone has an immediate *right* to a home, because Article 8 is a “qualified” right and therefore is capable in certain circumstances, of being lawfully and legitimately interfered with.

9 Equalities implications

9.1 As this is a general information report, there are no specific practical equalities implications to insert.

10 Crime and disorder implications

10.1 There are no specific crime and disorder implications.

11 Environmental implications

11.1 There are no specific environmental implications.

If you have any questions regarding this report please contact Mark Dow, Housing Needs Manager on x43650

Background reports

Hostel Expansion Programme(April 2014) -

<http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/ieIssueDetails.aspx?IId=11589&Opt=3>

Temporary Accommodation (February 2014) -

<http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s26939/05TemporaryAccommodation030214.pdf>