

**AGENDA FOR
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**



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To: All Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillors : R Bernstein, C Birchmore, A Arif, N Bayley,
N Boroda, D Green, T Pilkington, D Vernon (Chair),
G Marsden, E Moss and M Rubinstein

Dear Member/Colleague

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

You are invited to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which will be held as follows:-

Date:	Tuesday, 9 January 2024
Place:	Council Chamber, Bury Town Hall
Time:	7.00 pm
Briefing Facilities:	If Opposition Members and Co-opted Members require briefing on any particular item on the Agenda, the appropriate Director/Senior Officer originating the related report should be contacted.
Notes:	

AGENDA

1 APOLOGIES

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider whether they have an interest in any matters on the agenda and, if so, to formally declare that interest.

3 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

A period of 30 minutes has been set aside for members of the public to ask questions on matters considered at the last meeting and set out in the minutes or on the agenda for tonight's meeting.

4 MEMBER QUESTION TIME

Questions are invited from Elected Members about items on the agenda. 15 minutes will be set aside for Member Question Time, if required.

5 MINUTES *(Pages 3 - 8)*

Minutes from the meeting held on 01st November 2023 are attached.

6 ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY *(Pages 9 - 20)*

Report attached from Councillor Gold, Cabinet Member for Finance and Communities.

7 HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY UPDATE *(Pages 21 - 60)*

Report attached from Councillor Cummins, Cabinet Member for Housing Services.

8 SIX TOWN HOUSING UPDATE *(Pages 61 - 68)*

Report from Councillor Cummins, Cabinet Member for Housing Services attached.

9 URGENT BUSINESS

Any other business which by reason of special circumstances the Chair agrees may be considered as a matter of urgency.

Minutes of: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 1 November 2023

Present: Councillor D Vernon (in the Chair)
Councillors R Bernstein, C Birchmore, A Arif, N Bayley,
N Boroda, T Pilkington, G Marsden, E Moss, M Rubinstein and
E FitzGerald

Also in attendance: Councillor C Morris, Councillor E O'Brien (Leader and Cabinet Member Strategic Growth) and Councillor A Quinn (Cabinet Member Environment, Climate Change and Operations)
Lynne Ridsdale, Chief Executive, Jacqui Dennis, Monitoring Officer, Chloe Ashworth, Democratic Services, Clare Williams, Interim Deputy Director of Finance, Donna Ball, Executive Director Operations and Cris Logue, Assistant Director of Strategy, Planning & Development.

Public Attendance: No members of the public were present at the meeting.

Apologies for Absence: Councillor D Green

OSC.1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Green, Councillor FitzGerald attended as substitute.

OSC.2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Pilkington declared a personal interest as a representative of Bury Autism Partnership.

OSC.3 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

OSC.4 MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were two Member questions received in advance of the meeting

The following question was submitted in advance of the meeting by Councillor Lancaster; I have been advised by the council in the attached that they will not be posting an online consultation for Ainsworth residents regarding the new proposed traffic calming measures. This plan is very important to our community in Ainsworth and the council have only consulted with a small number of residents by post. As this consultation period ends on 6th November, please could the council explain what will be done to ensure all residents voices are heard. And can the consultation period be extended until this issue has been rectified.

In response Donna Ball, Director of Operations advised that following discussions with the Communications Team, it has been agreed that the consultation will be uploaded onto an online consultation platform and the consultation period will be extended for a couple of weeks.

Councillor Quinn, Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member Environment, Climate Change and Operations advised consultations are taking place with members of the public and other partners to help a solution for members to slow down.

The following question was submitted in advance of the meeting by Councillor Rydeheard; "At full Council on Wednesday 13 September, I asked Cllr Gareth Staples-Jones a supplementary question, which attempted to elicit a cost for the rebranding of all of Greater Manchester's bus stops for the implementation of the Bee Network. He said that he would ensure that enquiries were made and that I would be provided with an answer, but over a month later I have heard nothing. Please can the cabinet member now confirm to me the cost of the yellow stickers to update all of the bus stops in Greater Manchester to the new Bee Network branding?"

In response the Committee is informed that Bury Council do not hold this information. Officers have contacted TfGM who have advised that they are looking into the rebranding costs. Officer's will circulate a response as soon as the information is received from TfGM.

OSC.5 MINUTES

That the minutes of the meeting held on 04th October 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

OSC.6 BURY MARKET

Further to the published agenda the Chair Councillor Vernon agreed an item of urgent business which is an update on Bury Market, it was also agreed this item will be taken first on the agenda.

Councillor Morris, Cabinet Member, Culture, Economy and Skills provided an update to members to provide reassurance and confidence to members. Councillor Morris Cabinet Member, Culture, Economy and Skills wished to place on record thanks for the hard work of Donna Ball, Executive Director of Operations, the Operations service, the Business Growth and Infrastructure service and Jacqui Dennis from a legal perspective.

Members were informed that Bury Council took the decision on Thursday evening to close the indoor market from Friday Morning with the primary concern being the safety of the traders, public and businesses. As soon as the decision was taken the team have worked to relocate and open traders for business. Bury Council recognise it is difficult for traders but the rest of market is open as usual as we still want people to visit and support those stalls still open.

Donna Ball, Executive Director of Operations informed committee that Bury Council was made aware on 26th November 2023 of the decision at 1:00pm that the structural engineer confirmed that the risk of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAK) will go to red when earlier it was anticipated it would be amber. Following review it was apparent some panels were in distress and according to the HSE guidance it is very clear what needs to be done. At 5:00pm the same day the market was sealed to all.

Within the market hall there are 62 units with 49 traders/businesses. Following closure of the market hall the experts were able to access the ceiling above the 16 units surrounding the market hall. Following further inspection of all 16 units they were able to open on the Saturday following the Friday closure. Currently 2 of the market hall traders have opted to trade outside on the open market and a further 2 are operating in pop-up stalls in the mill gate square. The market management team have worked with the Millgate to identify 15 vacant units and a further 6 vacant units owned by council. The remaining 21 trader requirements have been

collated and the market management team have worked out which will work collaboratively. Pleased that every trader who wishes to be relocated has been found an alternative location. A package of measures has been put in place immediately for the traders and at 4pm each evening a briefing note goes out to all traders. The briefing includes support available including access to a hardship fund, GM hub counselling support, GM hub provision providing cash flow support or debtors advice. Bury Council has reached an agreement that rent and utility bills stop so traders do not need to worry about these costs and further discussions are still on going.

Members were informed if they are contacted with Bury Market queries they should be directed to the Markets Team or Donna Ball, Executive Director of Operations.

Members sought assurances on when notification could be given. Members were informed that Thursday showed a potential of amber rating which quickly changed to red on the same day and so no earlier action could have been taken.

A member questioned about signage for trade relocation. Members were informed the market team will support this

Members were advised financial loss cannot be given as a figure currently. Rent and service charges, traders have been asked to go to their insurance companies regarding any loss of earnings. Members were advised that re-housed traders will not pay any more than currently paying now for the first 3 months.

Members sought assurances if we know if other buildings may be effected. Members were informed that the potential of RACC in buildings has been focused on school premises and these have shown to have no issues. We are now looking wider and this is how Bury Market has been identified. Procurement is currently taking place to ensure no further buildings have it. There is a 20 year time frame and we are also looking 5 years before and after.

Members made reference to the accelerated land disposal scheme and buildings that have been identified to be investigated.

It was agreed:

1. Councillor Morris, Cabinet Member, Culture, Economy and Skills and Donna Ball, Executive Director, Operations be thanked for their work and update.

OSC.7 BURY LOCAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY

Councillor O'Brien and Councillor Quinn presented a short overview of Bury Local Transport Strategy. Last month, Cabinet approved a final version of the Bury Local Transport Strategy. This followed a 3-month public consultation period over April to June on the draft Strategy on which Overview and Scrutiny had been consulted in March.

The final Strategy remains organised around six main objectives, with six key investment priorities for each type of transport but has been amended to take on board the consultation feedback.

The key messages from the consultation were that public transport is not good enough, bus services are unreliable, there's a lack of services in some parts of the borough, and people don't feel safe when using public transport, walking or cycling, with anti-social behaviour and fear of crime being big concerns. In addition there were differing views on whether we were doing enough for motorists, or enough for pedestrians and cyclists.

The Strategy aims to make it easier for everyone to get around and give people a real choice of how they travel. It is not anti-car and includes measures that will reduce congestion and make journey times more reliable for everyone, such as managing roadworks better and improving traffic signals. As public transport gets better and walking and cycling routes become safer and more joined up, we should see a gradual change in how people travel.

A member asked questions regarding the consultation response rate. Members were informed that the Bury Local Transport Strategy is not a statutory document and as such there was no legal requirement for consultation to take place, but rather consultation was something the Council chose to do in order to get feedback on the draft strategy and to hear from a cross section of the population. Numerous different consultation methods were used to engage with as many residents and stakeholders as possible. The survey was open to everyone, including all residents, visitors and commuters, and respondents were therefore self-selecting, rather than being a statistical sample. Responses were received from across all demographics and no real differences in opinion were found. Respondents weren't asked to sign in on arrival at the drop-in events and as such we don't have attendance figures.

Discussions took place regarding the importance of encouraging people to walk, and how improvement in the standard of pavements in the Borough would support this initiative.

Discussions took place regarding small bus routes and the vehicles used to support these short trips. Members were informed that a key part of Greater Manchester's bus reform plans is the introduction of many more high frequency 'turn up and go' services on main bus routes, including routes in Bury.

A member questioned if the Council held data that gives an indication of workplace final destination for residents in Bury MBC. Members were informed that according to census data (2021), around a third of Bury residents in employment commute out of the borough (figures are 31%, or 27,010 residents). By far the biggest flow is to Manchester (25.7% - 6932), followed by Rochdale, Bolton and Salford, each with outflows of between 13% and 15% (14.6%, 13.4% and 12.8% respectively).

It was agreed:

1. To thank the Leader and Councillor Quinn for their attendance
2. To circulate the data requested by Councillor Birchmore to all members
3. To share the strategy with another forum such as Greater Manchester Autism Consortium to provide some feedback regarding neurodiversity impacts to scrutinised and provide some feedback

OSC.8 QUARTER 2 FINANCE REPORT

Councillor Gold, Cabinet Member for Communities and Finance provided a brief overview of the reports relating to the Quarter 2 Finance report.

A member sought assurances regarding the Children and Young People department. In response members were advised that the budget set in February 2023 was based on information known at the time on the number of residential placements for children in care has experienced unprecedented growth during the year. At the beginning of the year there was 26 number of residential placements and as at the end of September this number had increased to 36 generating financial pressure.

Historically, the council has not budgeted for agency staff which is a significant part of the overspend and the current forecast outturn reflects this high level of spend in 2023/24. This has been resolved through a change in policy for 2024/25 through a zero-based budgeting exercise carried out over the summer. In addition, to address this high level of spend in agency

social workers for future years the council has recruited 24 permanent social workers from the international market. Home to School Transport is also contributing to the forecast overspend due to growth in demand for home to school transport particular for children and young people with Education and Health Care Plans and high inflationary costs for transport. The increase in demand for placements for children in care, agency staff and transport continue to reflect national and regional issues.

Discussions took place regarding delays to three regeneration schemes. Members were informed that the Capital budget is reviewed on a regular basis as part of budget monitoring and the quarter 2 review resulted in the re-phasing which is based on feedback received from programme managers on estimated scheme delivery plans.

Members sought assurances on the Councils ability to control saving. In response members were informed that the capital programme has been rephased as previously it had not been achievable. In addition there is a Financial Improvement Panel (FIP) and Financial Improvement Plan to manage the delivery of savings. Members were assured each Cabinet Member was responsible for each of the departmental savings so this did not need to be in the Corporate Plan.

Discussions took place around the progress of deliver. Members were informed that Children and Young People placements are a large proportion of the departmental over spend and this is similar to other councils. Members were informed that the issue in the Children and Young People department is the scale of the demand.

Members discussed lobbying for more funding. Members were informed that the final draft of the 'Lets fix it together' campaign will launch petition and write to Members of Parliament to call for fairer funding.

Members discussed progress of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and were informed it is set for December Cabinet.

It was agreed:

1. Officers and Councillor Gold be thanked for the update and reports.

COUNCILLOR D VERNON
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.02 pm and ended at 10.20 pm)

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SCRUTINY REPORT

Agenda Item	
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MEETING: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

DATE: Tuesday 9th January 2024

SUBJECT: Anti Poverty Strategy update

REPORT FROM: Councillor Richard Gold, Cabinet Member for Communities and Finance

**CONTACT OFFICER: Jon Hobday, Director of Public Health/
Chris Brown, Head of Revenues and Benefits/ Chris
Woodhouse, Strategic Partnerships Manager**

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Over the past eighteen months activity has been taking place to deliver Bury's Cost of Living and Anti Poverty Strategy. Whilst approved in July 2022, this built upon and significantly strengthened the focus undertaken by the Council on the preceding 18 months of proactive targeted approaches to support our residents.
- 1.2 Through a multi-agency partnership of Council colleagues working alongside partners across the Team Bury system, focus has been on delivery against the pillars of poverty identified in the strategy and maximising opportunities to identify, target support and build resilience in our communities.
- 1.3 This paper is the latest update on the delivery of activities against the strategy and priorities with this, which collectively support the wider delivery of Bury's *LET'S Do It!* ambitions.
- 1.4 It should be noted that this work has taken place in continually challenging conditions. Over the last 12 months there have been a range of factors in the wider economy which have resulted in further increases in cost-of-living pressures for local people in Bury. These factors continue to push more local people into poverty and reduce residents ability to meet their basic needs.
 - Interest rates have continued to rise further, from 3.5% in January 2023 to 5.25% in December 2023.
 - Inflation levels have remained stubbornly high with levels as high as 10.1% in January 2023 slowly declining to 4.6% in October 2023 (still significantly higher than the turn of the decade).
 - Fuel prices have also continued to increase, starting 2023 at £1.50 per litre with most recent costs being £1.55 per litre in October 2023.

- There is an expectation that the price energy cap will increase in January 2024 to £1,928 from £1,834.

2. DELIVERY OF THE PLAN

- 2.1 Bury Anti Poverty Steering Group meets monthly and is chaired by Bury's Director of Public Health, recognising the impact of poverty as a wider determinant of health. As such the work has been overseen by the Bury's Health and Wellbeing Board given a focus to tackle the root causes as the Borough's standing commissioning on reducing inequalities. The Steering Group includes the Chairs of the Bury Community Support Network; Citizens Advice Bury & Bolton; representation from Bury Voluntary & Community Faith Alliance; and public service colleagues from across public health, children's services, welfare support and communications. Priority leads are identified from across this partnership to drive forward the workplan.
- 2.2 The priorities within the strategy have been built around a local interpretation of the pillars of poverty identified by Greater Manchester Poverty Action, shaped through engagement with community sector networks and partners. These pillars are:
- Tackling Food Poverty
 - Wellbeing and Poverty
 - Finance and Debt
 - Work and wages
 - Childhood poverty
 - Housing related poverty including fuel poverty.

Underpinning these are a series of enablers including challenging stigma and bias in relation to poverty, digital inclusion, and engagement.

- 2.3 The group oversee a detailed action plan to oversee delivery of activity. The plan is kept live to respond to new risks (such as worsening macro-economic factors or newly identified vulnerabilities) and new opportunities (such as funding or identified best practice).
- 2.4 This has been supported by a series of Cost of Living and Anti Poverty summits held by the Council, bringing community leads together to share insight on how poverty is specifically being experienced in the Borough and to co-develop interventions and communications approaches. This has included one in May 2023 which shaped Bury's submission for the 2023/24 Household Support Fund (see section 10 below)
- 2.5 Bury's approach to tackling the impact and causes of poverty has our LETS principles at its heart – targeting provision to those communities that have experienced the greatest inequality; working collaboratively to identify and coordinate support to households; building on our strengths in local communities and linking people to these. The tailoring and targeting of support has been focused on communities of place – notably the lower super output areas referenced within Bury's Anti Poverty Strategy – communities of identity, including those who haven't traditionally connected into support, and communities of experience, e.g. those leaving care.

PILLAR ONE: TACKLING FOOD POVERTY

- 3.1 Food and poverty are intricately linked, forming a complex relationship that impacts many residents. Poverty, characterised by a lack of financial resources, often leads to food insecurity, making it difficult for individuals and families to access an adequate and nutritious diet. Conversely, inadequate nutrition can perpetuate the cycle of poverty by affecting health, cognitive development, and overall productivity.
- 3.2 Work has continued with the Bury Community Support Network (BCSN) – a collection of foodbanks, food pantries and food clubs in the Borough (along with the voluntary and community faith alliance to work with those not part of the network). This has included group development support through the VCFA, both as a collective but also with members looking to develop sustainable models, including visiting a model of delivery in Liverpool and a workshop on Sustain principles.
- 3.3 Early this year, as part of sustained push to increase the uptake and use of Healthy Start vouchers, steps were taken to allow Healthy Start cards to be used on Bury Market to provide families with nutritious and affordable food. The NHS Healthy Start scheme is for eligible people who are pregnant or have children under the age of 4, offering help towards milk, fruit, vegetables, pulses and formula. Healthy Start cards are worth £442 per year to the average family in Greater Manchester. Healthy Start at Bury Market is administered locally by Bury Food Partnership, following a successful funding application to Sustainable Food Places, building on the Bury Food Partnership's bronze award as a Sustainable Food Place.
- 3.4 Healthy Start awareness and training has been provided by Bury Council's Children's Services Early Help Team, including to community childcare settings, Six Town Housing and with DWP.
- 3.5 Young people in the Borough eligible for Free School Meals have had holiday food provision extended, benefiting over 6,900 individuals. This has now continued since the Covid-19 pandemic and is currently up-to-and-including the Easter 2024 holiday. Over the school summer holiday this was complimented by Holiday Activities and Food programme which also takes place over the Christmas 2023 holiday period. Over the summer 1,636 young people accessed a total of 41 different types of provision which were offered from 28 providers.
- 3.6 For Eid-ul-Adha there was promotion of the 'Share My Qurbani' initiative locally, including through local mosques and community groups, to provide support to those struggling financially to partake in celebrations of a major faith date.
- 3.7 Cost of Living community grants have supported voluntary and community groups in the Borough to deliver targeted interventions to support with addressing food related concerns. Examples from recent months include the
 - Friends of Clarence Park partnered with a social enterprise, Cracking Good Food, to hold a Kitchen Kit Giveaway and cooking activity fun day. Residents and community groups were able to come along and pick up pre-loved kitchen equipment to enable them to cook their favourite meals at home. They also took part in cooking demonstrations for healthy meals on a

budget, shared a delicious meal, along with information about Healthy Start cards from the council's Public Health team. Friends of Clarence Park have also made a fantastic community recipe book.

- Phoenix Centre in Prestwich delivering structure sessions on cooking healthy meals on a budget particularly for teenagers and young adults. This builds on sessions Bury Adult Learning Centre have supported with Radcliffe Food Club.
- The Friendship Circle has collaborated with Jewish Action for Mental Health demonstrating cookery skills (as a conduit to broader support)

3.8 Residents' struggling with urgent and priority costs such as food, fuel, rent and resettlement costs for those fleeing domestic violence have been provided with immediate support through the Council's Welfare Support offer, with direct financial assistance dispersed through Household Support Fund, Bury Support Fund, Council Tax Support Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments.

PILLAR TWO: WELLBEING AND POVERTY

- 4.1 Wellbeing and poverty are interconnected concepts that reflect the overall quality of life for individuals and communities. Poverty can have a significant impact on wellbeing, as it often restricts access to fundamental resources and opportunities. Wellbeing improvements, on the other hand, can contribute to poverty reduction by enhancing education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Policies and interventions aimed at improving wellbeing contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty and fostering sustainable development.
- 4.2 Social Prescribing link workers from the Beacon Service continue to work across the neighbourhoods, monitoring specific cost of living pressures on health and wellbeing and signposting residents when required.
- 4.3 As part of this a self-care strategy is being developed for professionals alongside a toolkit which will offer a consistent message and pathway of services that can support residents, including prevention opportunities. This includes information on the Getting Help Helpline to support emotional mental wellbeing and non-clinical support available to residents in the Borough.
- 4.4 Winter wellbeing guidance has been prepared and disseminated in partnership with the Anti Poverty Steering Group. Weekly events have been provided to raise awareness and offer advice, winter well packs have also been provided to those most vulnerable this winter to help residents keep warm and offer information of where to get help. 400 of these packs have been distributed via food banks/pantries, Live Well Service, Bury Library services and via the Staying Well team.
- 4.5 Cost of Living community grants are facilitating neighbourhood-based support, such as through Trust House who have added wellbeing sessions to their programme of support linked to their food pantry, which has included tailored support to an individual's wellbeing, exercise sessions and mindfulness.

PILLAR THREE: FINANCE AND DEBT

- 5.1 Finance and poverty are interconnected aspects of economic development, and understanding their relationship is crucial for addressing challenges related to income inequality and social wellbeing.
- 5.2 Information to support with debt advice has been strengthened, both in terms of the tools to help practitioners lead conversations with residents (and for residents to be able to self-guide through this) and the availability of face-to-face contact points within the Borough.
- 5.3 The Money Advice Referral Tool, developed in conjunction with Greater Manchester Poverty Action, provides a handy online or paper based tool to signpost people to monetary advice and support based on specific circumstances. This has evolved through discussions with local groups, with Citizens Advice, and tested with Community Support Network. The tool is available through The Bury Directory and has been shared with front-line staff.
- 5.4 Citizens Advice Bury & Bolton (CABB) took up a temporary presence in Bury Town Hall following their previous base being no longer available. In recent months they have now moved into Castle Buildings and their face-to-face drop in has resumed there. To compliment this has been a neighbourhood engagement post who acts as a CABB triage worker in community settings which have included Veterans Breakfast Club; Tenants and Residents Associations; Foodbanks including Trinity Foodbank and Brandlesholme Community Centre; Red Door Caritas drop-in. Bury Council has worked with CABB to target this engagement to settings within or close to the Lower Super Output Areas recognised in the strategy where communities are most acutely impacted by poverty. This role allows for people to have a face-to-face discussion, in some cases provided with immediate support, in more complex cases supported to book in for a more in-depth appointment.
- 5.5 Bury Council has continued to invest in a CABB presence in the Borough. During quarter 2 of 2023/24 CABB had direct contact with 635 local residents, with each client on average having 4 issues per enquiry, including debt assessment, council tax arrears, fuel debts and personal independent payments. The income gain from Bury clients accessing CABB provision relating to the quarter is £773k. Whilst some increases are temporary, the majority of this is sustainable income increases. Of the 635 Bury clients engaged with during Q2, 11% categorised themselves as having a disability. 42% self-reported as having a long-term health condition, with CABB increasing links with the GP Federation to increase the identification of support across primary care.
- 5.6 There has been promotion of money advice guidance, both from the perspective of increasing income, such as Pension Credit awareness (including work with the Bury Older People's Network on support to overcome stigma associated with benefits) and to protect people's income, such as through loan shark awareness delivered by Six Town Housing and shared through a social media campaign.
- 5.7 It is recognised that community groups themselves have faced increased financial pressures in recent years and 36 voluntary groups applications supported through Cost-of-Living resilience payments with a value of over £80k.

- 5.8 To enable the Council to meet the challenges both we and our residents face, a new Supportive Collection Pathway has been created for Council Tax – based on the tenets Let’s Engage, Let’s Enable, Let’s Support. This has aligned the Welfare and Collection/Recovery teams within Revenues and Benefits to provide a joined-up and holistic approach to collection and welfare, embedding a pro-active and preventative approach to collection as the cornerstone of the Revenues service.
- 5.9 To provide additional support at the hardest time of year for many families, there are now repeat payments in place for Food and Fuel, whereby eligible residents will receive 3 x £300 monthly payments over the winter period. Software (Ascendant) purchased as part of this year’s HSF allocation, is being utilised to identify and target residents who are either in acute need of support or indicating that they are beginning to struggle, thus enabling support to be directed to them through HSF and the wider Bury Welfare offer.
- 5.10 The financial value of these monthly payments is larger than previously, based on strong feedback, particularly from community partners, confirmed at the Cost of Living summit held on May 2023.
- 5.11 Data sets identifying residents struggling to maintain their Council Tax payments for the first time have been pushed through the Ascendant product, who’s software provides results demonstrating whether a resident is in hardship. This has resulted in 462 residents being contacted to advise them of the award – and potentially £415,800 in support being allocated via this method over the winter period.
- 5.12 This work will be sustained over the remainder of the year to ensure that maximisation of support is safeguarded as well as being allied with a preventative approach towards helping struggling residents. At the end of Quarter 3 a review of allocated funds will be carried out to confirm spend to date and identify any areas of slow allocation. Any remaining funds will then be allocated using existing data sources and Ascendant in a targeted approach, with households in the 10% most deprived Medium Super Output Areas (MSOAs) amongst prioritised recipients.

PILLAR FOUR: WORK AND WAGES

- 6.1 The *LET’S Do It!* strategy sets out the vision to reduce inequality through inclusive growth and Bury’s Anti Poverty Strategy recognises that sustainability and resilience in income is driven by good quality work that pays well.
- 6.2 This pillar recognises that cost of living pressures apply to those not in work (where benefits have not kept pace with inflation) and those in work (where wages have similarly not increased at a significant rate). Therefore, the focus is not just on getting people into work but to be able to progress in careers and for work to be financially rewarding.
- 6.3 This is underpinned by the development of a new economic strategy for Bury which will support the Council’s approach to reducing economic inactivity, inequality and poverty, over the next decade and beyond, to ensure that we

can deliver our ambitions for sustainable and inclusive growth. In particular, the draft Economic Strategy sets out a series of Ambitions, including the *People Ambition: To build the capabilities of people to find, sustain and progress in employment and achieve economic security*. So, alongside masterplanning work for town centres in the Borough and the development of proposals for the Atom Valley which will bring significant employment opportunities to the Borough is ensuring that local individuals have the aspiration, confidence, skills and experience to connect into these opportunities as they arise.

- 6.4 Building on Bury Council's Living Wage commitment, set out in the Anti Poverty Strategy, the Council ran a session in November 2023 to promote similar commitments from partners in the Borough. The Council teamed up with the Real Living Wage Foundation, Good Employment Charter and Unison for a business breakfast to make the Real Living Wage week.
- 6.5 A Radcliffe Works Lift Off event took place in October 2023 at Radcliffe Football Club. The session showcased local skills opportunities and live vacancies. This principle is being followed up to develop further hyper-local employment and skills events, tailored to local communities. Job Centre Plus job fairs at the Elizabethan Suite have included wrap around and skills support to the events, to support upskilling as well as work opportunities directly.
- 6.6 This links to the sentiment of breaking the cycle of poverty requiring a comprehensive approach that recognizes the symbiotic relationship between education, skills and economic wellbeing. Work is taking place with primary schools to inspire young people on career opportunities and pathways into employment, including into further learning through Bury Adult Learning. The Adult Learning team have been working to engage groups typically less-represented within their learning cohort and increasingly engaging within the communities where people live, 'going to' communities rather than everyone having to attend the Learning Centre in Bury Town Centre. Further promotion has taken place of WEA (Adult Learning Within Reach) grants to help disadvantaged, excluded unemployed and economically inactive people to take the next steps towards further education.
- 6.7 Community cost of living funding is supporting tailored support in such upskilling/ reskilling, such as new technical and digital skills through Safetynet in Prestwich, whilst a further example of other activity to support people into employment includes work with Bury Hospice to deliver an element of *Working Wardrobe* for those individuals attending interviews or who need a capsule working wardrobe.
- 6.8 On 8th January 2024 the 'Bury Works' neighbourhood hub commences in the Millgate. Hosted by Ingeus, the Working Well Work & Health programme delivery partner in Bury, this will provide a shared workspace for partners who support residents with wrap around support including Citizens Advice, Bury Adult Learning, National Careers Service, local and regional mental wellbeing and healthy lifestyle support, in addition to local and regional skills provision.

PILLAR FIVE: CHILDHOOD POVERTY

- 7.1 Childhood poverty can have a profound impact on education and can create significant barriers to academic success. Limited access to resources, Nutritional challenges, health issues, stress and mental health, limited educational opportunities are some ways in which childhood poverty can affect education.

- 7.2 In October the East Family Hub opened as the pilot Family Hub in the Borough, with anti poverty principles embedded as part of the neighbourhood priorities and offer to families. This includes the ongoing promotion of Healthy Start where the uptake rate in Bury has increased from 62% in January 2023 to 73% in November 2023.
- 7.3 Bury based staff from the Department for Work and Pensions have embedded Healthy Start into the questions that are asked when carrying out universal credit initial claimant meetings. This is a potentially groundbreaking step forward and is being implemented across all the job centres in Bury to ensure consistency and being promoted to Great Manchester DWP partners. The Bury Registry Office has agreed to promote Healthy Start to families when they register births (with printed promotional materials in their office to give out, and as an electronic attachment to their forms and on their electronic screens). In addition, the School Meals Service have agreed to add Healthy Start info onto their printed menus.
- 7.4 Cost of living community grants have included projects focusing on access to activities and support for families, such as Twinkleboost that provide warm and nurturing spaces and outreach provision to break the cycle of poverty by working to close the current vocabulary gap that exists on school entry.
- 7.5 The Children's Strategic Partnership Board have continued to promote targeted anti-poverty activities for families and young people, including through their weekly partnership newsletter. This has detailed free online inclusive family financial education workshops on how to help children with neurodiversity and additional learning and support needs learn about money; promotion of initiatives where young people can eat from free/for £1; local and regional free digital skills sessions for families and broader support messages through Children's Partnership Lunchtime learn sessions.

PILLAR SIX: HOUSING RELATED POVERTY INCLUDING FUEL POVERTY

- 8.1 The relationship between housing and poverty is complex, with affordability, stability, and neighbourhood quality playing significant roles. Addressing housing issues is a key component of broader efforts to reduce poverty and promote social and economic equity.
- 8.2 The Citizens Advice Bury & Bolton Energy redress project has been providing energy information, guidance and support in conjunction with Age UK. The project is designed to build household resilience and confidence in managing energy concerns, with tailored advice as part of a holistic approach where other areas of spend reduction or income maximisation can be explored. The project includes:
 - Changing suppliers where there is a possibility of better tariffs
 - Information and advice on making your homes more energy efficient
 - Tips for budgeting and explore options to obtain additional funding, such as Warm Home Discount

- Vulnerable (for example, low incomes, elderly, single parents and those living with disabilities) clients may be entered onto a Priority Register with their energy supplier which may see them eligible for free gas checks, priority repairs and other benefits.
 - Provision of advice on Smart Meters and the benefits that they can bring.
- 8.3 Six Town Housing have had an Energy efficiency offer in place for their tenants. This includes risk assessments in place and long-term support being completed with tenants who have no access to utilities, with broader energy advice targeted and promoted through community days including in Chesham, Topping Fold, Besses, Radcliffe and Rainsough. Work for wave 2 on Chesham properties having solar panels windows and doors to improve energy performance in ongoing and will be completed by April 2025.

ENABLERS

- 9.1 Digital wellbeing and poverty are interconnected in various ways, influencing individuals and communities' access to resources, opportunities, and overall quality of life. Empowering individuals with the skills and tools to navigate the digital landscape can enhance educational opportunities, facilitate remote work, and improve access to healthcare and other essential services.
- 9.2 Six Town Housing have expanded the Digital Eagles project and the digital offer to their tenants to ensure they are able to access services and support. Free sims and data have been provided when required and exploring free WiFi within sheltered provision has been completed.
- 9.3 Six Town Housing have produced an online poverty campaign including promotion of how to save money. This includes quick tips to save energy and how to access financial support service produced and information on standing charges. There have also been campaigns to promote downsizing/mutual exchanges to support tenants to move to smaller/more suitably sized accommodation.
- 9.4 Digital wellbeing courses have been delivered by libraries, Age UK and Bury Circle. Meanwhile, Healthwatch are continuing with drop-in sessions for supporting asylum seekers, refugees and people who don't have English as a first language. They have also been working on prescriptions, looking at difficulties and issues people have with them.
- 9.5 There have been many communications provided to staff and residents, raising awareness of where and how they can access financial support on the current cost of living. Also, many specific cost of living events have been delivered to raise awareness of what support is available, how you can reduce costs on energy and food. Targeted sessions have been curated, tailored to specific communities, both of place and identity, where there are specific pressures or barriers to access. This has included a session with Jewel tailored for the Charedi community in Sedgley in September 2023. More recently a Cost of Living Showcase with ADAB took place in December 2023 in which 150 people attended and received support including through the Household Support Fund and energy advice. Tailored sessions are also planned for Radcliffe, Besses and

Rainsough early in the new year, as targeted areas in line with the Anti Poverty Strategy.

- 9.6 Press releases, photos, specific campaigns and flyers have been produced and disseminated each quarter. This has included showcasing initiatives funded through Cost of Living Community grants; means of accessing support through the collated information on www.bury.gov.uk/hardshiphelp , tailored local information on the Bury Directory and provision of a Cost of Living helpline, separate from the main Council switchboard number to access support. This blend of approaches has been supplemented by information and guidance to front line practitioners across the Team Bury system. This ensures staff are well equipped to identify households who could benefit from additional support and effectively signpost/support such individuals and families into income maximisation/ expenditure reduction approaches.
- 9.7 Opportunities continue to be sought to weave and embed anti-poverty messaging into broader events in neighbourhoods where the experience of poverty is particularly acute. This includes links to pop-up vaccination clinics in neighbourhoods; as part of joint work with Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service on fire safety; links to bowel cancer screening uptake in East Bury; and Anti Poverty information provided at weekly sessions run by Live Well Team throughout December as part of the winter well programme

RESOURCES

- 10.1 Support funds can include financial assistance, food aid, housing support, and other resources to help households meet their basic needs. Below are some key successes that have happened.

- Proposals have been agreed and vulnerable individuals and families have been identified and supported through trusted referrer pathways.
- Strong engagement with Revenues and Benefits colleagues and demonstrable impact of their support
- Significant roll out of Household Support Fund (HSF) plans alongside core Welfare Support supportive measures:

Support Measure	Reach	Value
Free School Meals	13,500	£734k / £1.5m inc. committed
Food and Fuel	2,676	£394k / £616k inc. repeat awards
COL Community Grants	c3,500	£49,000
CTAX Support Fund	480	£48,000
Bury Support Fund (Resettlement Fund)	155	£92,000
Discretionary Housing Payments	220	£181,000
Total	34,031	£2,486,000

NEXT STEPS

11.1 Delivery against the pillars within the Bury Cost of Living and Anti Poverty Strategy continues at pace across the partnership, against the backdrop of embedding the Let's Do It strategy and principles locally and ongoing socio-economic pressures.

11.2 Over the coming months there are key actions for the partnership which principally include:

- Further work utilising Ascendent and other key data sets to ensure effective targeting of resources to those residents requiring most support
- Continued roll out of the Family Hub model – which will act as a vehicle to support children and families experiencing hardship within their communities
- Further proposal to utilise Household Support Fund to provide eligible residents in need with Air Fryers / Microwaves – therefore providing more

focus on lowering their energy costs alongside financial support towards payments.

- Continued activity to promote work and training opportunities in place, to support residents back to work and help them achieve financial resilience – including the launch of new UKSPF Working Well – Steps to Succeed Programme in January 2024. Which consists of short and intensive interventions to support those at a significant distance from the labour market to approach their barriers to work. A specific offer to those aged over 50, that will unlock their potential and approach age specific barriers and the inequalities they experience.
- Meet the Provider event planned for February 24 and large-scale work and skills event in 2024.
- Completion of retrofitting the final 118 properties on Chesham. We forecast these to be complete by end of April 2025.
- Finalising the planning for 30 properties on Unsworth/Hunters Hill which we are due to commence summer 25 (depending on deep dive/intrusive surveys and designs)

RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 This report provides an overview of the recent, current and planned activities taking place across the priorities of Bury's Anti Poverty Strategy

12.2 The Committee is asked to note the report and outline any areas of further interest.

ACRONYMS

BCSN - Bury Community Support Network

CABB – Citizens Advice Bury and Bolton

DWP – Department for Work and Pensions

HSF – Household Support Fund

UKSPF – United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund

VCFA – Bury Voluntary and Community Faith Alliance

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SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 9th January 2024

SUBJECT: Homelessness strategy update

REPORT FROM: Councillor Cummins, Cabinet Member for Housing Services

1.0 Background / update

The Council has a statutory duty to support people that are homeless in the Borough and the Council must have an updated and robust Homelessness Strategy to clearly demonstrate how we will meet the required statutory duties and obligations for homelessness in the Borough.

Over the past decade Bury has seen a gradual increase in homeless cases within the Borough with greater increases over the past 5 years.

In 2020 a new Housing Strategy was agreed for the Borough of Bury which included a commitment to end rough sleeping by 2025. The new Homelessness Strategy has been co-produced with the Bury Homelessness Partnership to deliver this, by applying the Borough-Wide 'Lets Do it' ethos of prevention, early intervention and the targeting of public service resources.

The strategy continues to build and expands on the wonderful work since last year's update. Homelessness is an issue and continues to be high on the national agenda since the new homelessness strategy was approved in April 2022 and the increasing evidence of a Housing crisis during 2023.

The 'Everyone In' response to the COVID-19 pandemic has shown what can be achieved in addressing rough sleeping with a joined-up response, whilst helping people in transformative ways with sufficient funding. We need to continue to build on this progress and the commitments in this strategy reflects this.

The strategy continues to be a wide-ranging and proactive response with the community and all stakeholders playing a vital part in helping to deliver. Integral to our response is involving those individuals who have lived experience or who have been disproportionately affected by homelessness in shaping our services and delivery so that they best meet the needs of those people that need them most with the focus of delivery through the Homelessness partnership, lived experience and all stakeholders and partners in the Borough.

A key issue since the last update in 2023 is the increasing migration pressures to support asylum seekers and refugees in the Borough due to existing and changing

policy by the Government and the Home office and an increasing shift in duty towards Local Authorities for this co-hort especially for the provision of temporary and permanent accommodation. Therefore, we are seeing significantly more asylum seekers accessing statutory and non-statutory housing and homeless services. There have also been significant increases in rough sleepers from migration, some with no recourse to public funds because the Home office do not manage their negative decision cases and evict into Communities with no access to support or funding. Many of this co-hort disappear into the 'black economy' but others are picked up by Local Authorities when destitute with no accommodation or support with no access to public funding. The continuing Ukrainian war is also now impacting on statutory services more due to the host arrangements with residents ending and becoming unsustainable via the Governments Homes for Ukrainian scheme. It is projected that if the conflict continues we will be greater numbers of host arrangements ending in 2024.

The cost-of-living crisis is also impacting, with increased cases further affecting service demands and pressures to provide temporary and permanent accommodation to levels not seen before within the Borough. A compounding issue has been the reduction in social housing becoming available from our stock and other registered providers in the Borough as people are now less transient and likely to move due to their limited options to get onto the housing ladder which is also further compounded by the fact that the private rented sector in Bury is small and very expensive and unaffordable to access for many of our residents. The recent Autumn statement did announce that from 1st April 2024 the Local Housing Allowance Rates (LHA) would be unfrozen from 2020 and would be back to the 30th percentile of private rents, this will increase the number of affordable properties in the private rented sector to people on benefits.

Due to the increasing pressures, our temporary accommodation is now always at capacity and we are now having to use hotel provision for our temporary accommodation placements to meet our statutory homelessness duty which is not ideal and very expensive. Due to the lack of suitable move on accommodation we are also seeing longer placements within our temporary dispersed accommodation portfolio with some families placed in our temporary accommodation in excess of 12 months. We also have a waiting list now for our non-statutory provision, ABEN which provides accommodation for our rough sleepers and is always at capacity due to the continued increase in numbers. The last official rough sleeper count in November 23 saw an increase in rough sleepers across the Borough to 16 from 3 at the same count in 2022.

GMCA recently produced data and information to clearly show this is a Greater Manchester, Region and National crisis (see appendices 1)



GM Homelessness
and Asylum Pressures

There has also been numerous articles recently highlighting the increasing pressures on homelessness services and particularly from migration due to the changing Government policies to fast track asylum decisions, increase dispersal in the Borough and empty their bridging hotels, all adding further pressure on our services. (See appendices 2 – Big Issue). This crisis is not local to Bury but a Greater Manchester, regional and national problem.



All options are being explored and considered to increase our accommodation and stock to be able to access more affordable and social housing within the Borough working in partnership with all stakeholders and registered providers and we are working on a new general needs and social housing strategy to help set clear targets and outcomes even though we would never be able to meet full demands for social and affordable housing in the Borough with the available funding and capacity.

Therefore the priorities and principles remain :-

- The Homelessness strategy from 2022 to 2025 continues to set out how we will strategically deliver services and meet homeless and rough sleeping demands over the next 2 years to provide the best support and accommodation within the Borough from both a statutory and non-statutory perspective.
- At the heart of this strategy continues to be the commitment to prevention, early intervention, sustainment both support and accommodation and the co-design of solutions with communities aligned with the Councils corporate 'Let's Do It !' and Housing Strategies.
- The strategy continues to be co-delivered by the Homeless partnership and key stakeholders and continues to deliver the vision for how the strategic objective to eliminate rough sleeping and prevent homelessness will be achieved and how outcomes for these vulnerable people will be secured through a proactive, multi-agency approach.
- The focus continues to be prevention and sustainment of accommodation but importantly support despite the challenges and increasing demands over the past 12 months.
- To explore all options to maximise opportunities to increase temporary and permanent affordable accommodation within the Borough.
- The strategy is continually being refreshed and reviewed due to the changing landscape of homelessness and new challenges such as the cost-of-living crisis and the ever-increasing refugee and asylum seeker demands within the Borough that impact on Statutory and non-statutory services.

2.0 Context

Demand on Council housing services including statutory homelessness and rough sleeping has continue to increase since the strategy approval and since the Homeless Reduction Act 2017. Over the last 36 months demand for statutory services in Bury has increased by over 49% and expected to continue to increase further and the number of rough sleepers and non-statutory customers has more than doubled and continues to increase and is becoming more challenging to accommodate and support due to the increasing complexities and with the resources and suitable accommodation available.

The increase in demand in Bury continues to align with GM, regional and national trends and the proportion of pressure experienced locally remains consistent with other boroughs. The reason for this increase includes:

- The impact of complex lives which can result in an inability to sustain mortgage payments or a rented tenancy and subsequent evictions. The

majority of homeless people have experienced some combination of financial, emotional, health or substance abuse.

- Mortgage repossessions and the cost of living crisis – even though we haven't seen the full impact of the crisis, the expectation over the next 12 months will see numbers increasing further, particularly working families and people due to their ability to pay their mortgages and rent with the associated housing and general costs. This is a new co-hort accessing the service as most people at present are reliant on the benefit system.
- PRS – Increase in evictions and Section 21 notices – mainly affordability issues but also landlords looking at other options due to the Government initiatives / intervention that now make it more difficult for landlords in the PRS to operate and is now less attractive to rent properties.
- Migration and change of Govt / Home office policy - Asylum seekers and refugees that have had an impact on both statutory and non-statutory services and the impact of the new Home Office dispersal and resettlement scheme introduced last year, fast track system and closure of the Afghan bridging hotels.
- The lack of available and affordable move-on property because of the short housing supply in Bury means people are staying longer in emergency accommodation, which limits availability for others. The average length of stay in emergency accommodation is currently 169 days.

The Council continues to deliver the significant work across all housing and homeless partners to respond to this context, which is described within this report.

3.0 Headline Data / statistics

Table 1. Open homelessness statutory cases monthly (Dec 2018-Nov 2023).

Open Homeless statutory cases each month						
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
April	Not collected	293	412	505	701	782
May		285	467	460	772	739
June		293	481	446	829	724
July		318	511	540	682	752
August		344	476	547	766	793
September		316	462	523	732	845
October		319	559	588	765	884
November		340	557	603	892	763
December	287	333	527	597	816	
January	239	363	556	674	887	
February	274	417	521	642	761	
March	278	394	476	630	801	

Source: Bury Council, 2023

Figure 1. Open homeless statutory cases monthly (Dec 2018-Nov 2023).

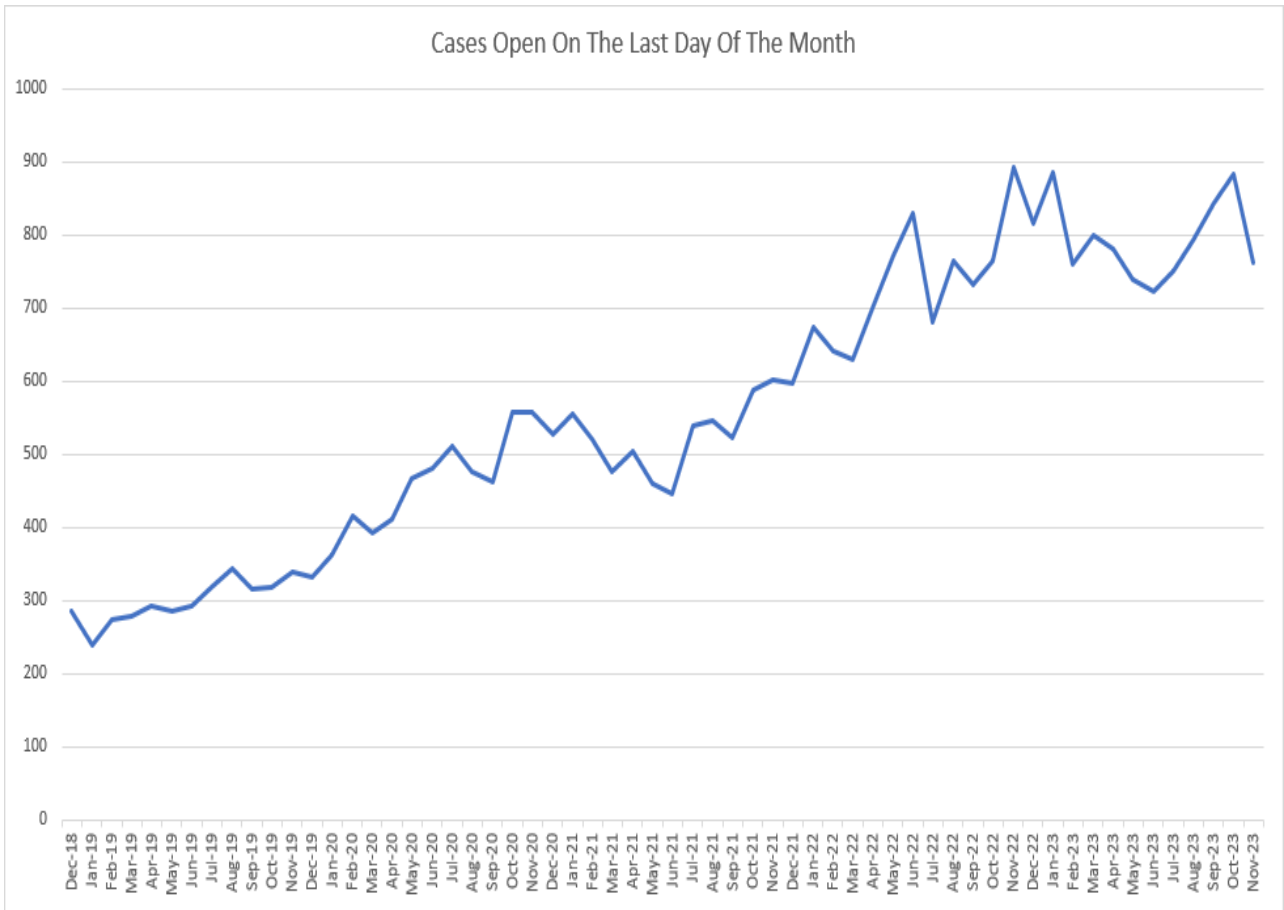


Figure 2. Households in Temporary Accommodation (Dec 2018 to Nov 2023)

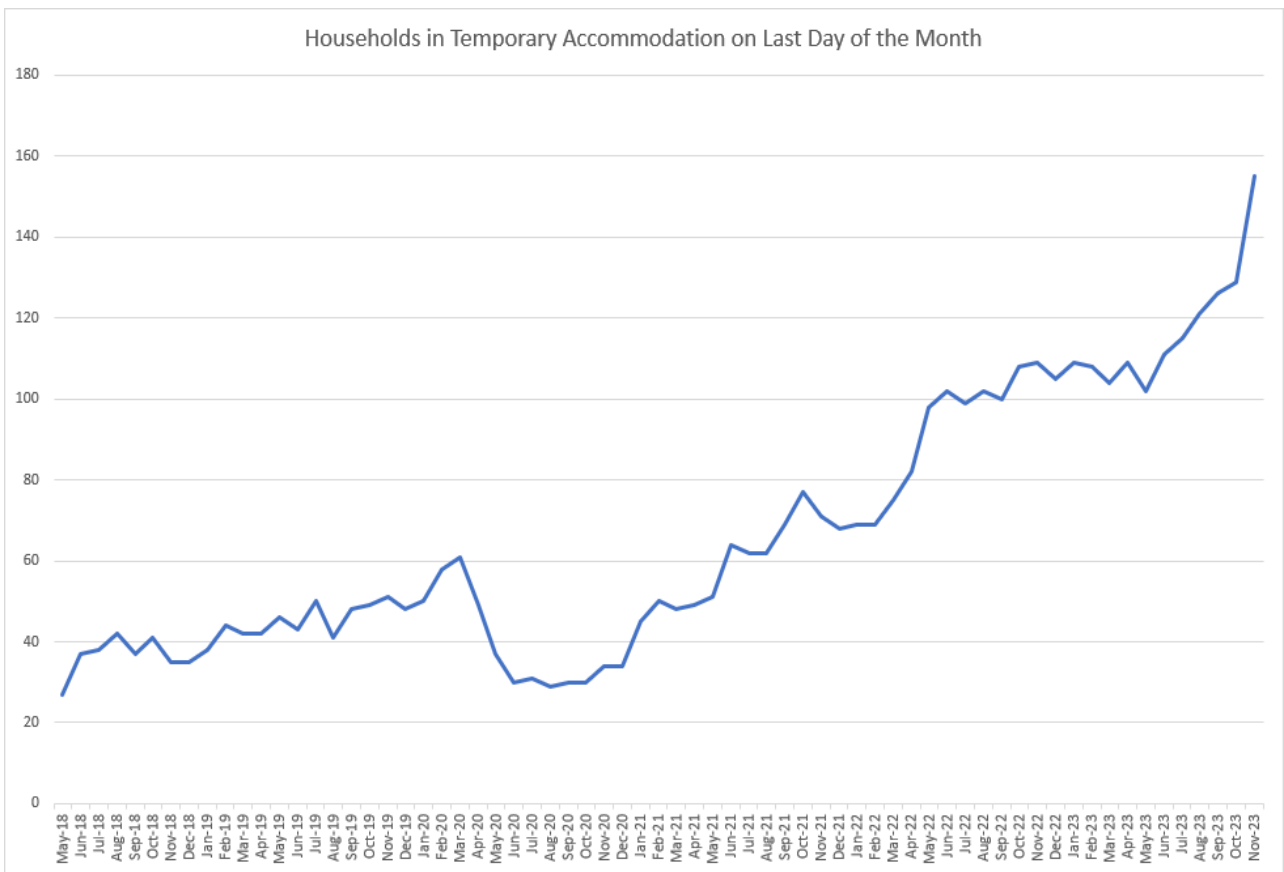


Table 2. Numbers of rough sleepers from 2018/19-2023/24.

		2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Rough Sleepers	Single Male	7	16	75	77	112	66
	Single Female		4	17	21	28	54
	Single Transgender				1		
Total		7	20	92	99	140	120*

Source: Bury Council, 2023. * As at 30/11/2023

Migration

Based on projections we are expecting a 100%+ increase in dispersal numbers in the Borough by the Home Office and Serco from 435 to 970 in the next 6 to 12 months. We have seen increases of unplanned referrals due to the closure of the Afghan Bridging hotels by the Home office with referrals to Bury from southern Local Authorities. The fast track programme and data also shows an extra 60 asylum seekers via this pathway.

From Nov 22 to Nov 23 we have had an additional 55 rough sleepers via the migration pathways. We have had 38 asylum seekers via Serco placed in our ABEN provision from Nov 22 to Nov 23 with a further 12 placed into our supported housing provision and 1 into our Rough sleeper accommodation programme. As of November 23 there were 18 ABEN placements associated with migration out of a total 25 bed spaces, taking 72% capacity. This is a significant increase from the past 12 months. Actual people rough sleeping at Dec 23 was 19 with 15 being from migration – 80%.

From Aug 2023 to August 24 it has been projected there will be 200 customers through migration that will trigger priority need, in terms of cost if our existing temporary accommodation remains at capacity and we have to place into hotels, the projected cost to accommodate would be significant.

4.0 The Homeless Strategy – Themes and prevention

The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 requires local authorities to take a preventative approach to homelessness through a multi-agency approach; this is delivered in Bury through an independent Homelessness partnership comprised of community leaders; service users; the Council, commissioned providers and partners, Housing Associations, charities, voluntary sector and registered providers to name a few.

Preventing Homelessness is the key objective. Homeless prevention and meaningful response can only be achieved on a system-wide, multi-agency basis.

The Homeless partnership has therefore continued to work as a collective and continues to comprise and be delivered on the seven key priorities and themes:

- Prevention
- Person
- Property
- Promote
- Purpose

- Place
- Partnership

The underpinning action plan, key activities within continue to include:

- Specific awareness raising for young people around homelessness
- Promoting life skills and managing debt in all situations.
- Early interventions in all aspects and not just housing but Health, Childrens & Adults services including external agencies and partners.
- Early tenancy sustainment support for tenants and people at risk of homelessness.
- Performance and data measured correctly for local needs, as well as national and regional insight to align resources and react positively to increasing trends and demands. Proactive approach rather than reactive which provides better outcomes.
- Prevent people being discharged from hospital before housing options in place.
- Resolutions to the challenges created by welfare reform.
- Strengthening Private Rented Sector (PRS) landlord support, advice and assistance to avoid S21 notices and evictions
- A clear plan to be ready for people - 'in-reach'" prevention work (how to manage a tenancy) with prisons / prison liaison with operational pathways
- Training offers for all frontline staff to address barriers to housing, including debt management.
- Ensuring that the Asylum and Refugee community are given early housing options and support.
- Partnership approach with all stakeholders to help prevent homelessness and improve resources and capacity.
- Promotion of the positive work within the Borough with a partnership webpage developed with all stakeholder with regular updates on services for our customers.

The recent Council decision to transfer STH back into full Council control in January 2024 will provide greater opportunity to maximise the delivery of sustainment with better governance and control to ultimately reduce failed tenancies that impact on our statutory and homeless services. The Council and Six Town Housing (STH) continue to work together to ensure we have a robust and deliverable tenancy sustainment strategy for all our social tenants and tenancies that form the majority of our homelessness move on accommodation. Their sustainment strategy will need reviewing on transfer as part of the transition back to the Council to achieve better outcomes for our tenants and residents but better aligned to public sector reform principles and tenure neutral support services with engagement with landlords and tenants in the private rented sector also to broaden its potential application to help reduce failed tenancies and demands on our 'front door' and Council duty across all sectors both the social and private.

The sustainment strategy once reviewed in 2024 will define partnership arrangements for identifying and supporting people at risk of eviction and the eviction process itself, should that ultimately occur. More fundamentally, however, it will seek to define how public services identify and proactively support people with complex lives who, as a result, may be at risk of tenancy failure. This includes residents experiencing domestic abuse, for example, or affected by anti-social behaviour; financial deprivation or substance misuse.

The Homeless and Housing options service will need greater capacity to align with better prevention work but also the sustainment of accommodation linked with the Councils Neighbourhood model and the Lets Do It! Strategy. This approach is also vital to supporting and linking in with other community resources such as our new Neighbourhood housing services post transfer in January 2024 and our Housing officer capacity and fully generic role and the 'anchor' of services and but also other registered social housing providers in the Borough to work across our most deprived neighbourhoods to prevent homelessness and sustain communities.

The reviewed sustainment strategy will focus on supporting the 'person' not the 'property' to break the cycle of homelessness for many complex and high need residents. The intention is to use the neighbourhood model to bring together all public services in a place to share insight; stratify risk and proactively intervene in high-risk situations. This strategy will be led and delivered by the Councils new Neighbourhood housing service and its resource involving a partnership working approach with key partners including the Council's Adult and children Services, GMCA, DWP, Health services, Housing Associations and GMP to name a few.

4.1 Statutory homeless response

The Councils homelessness services are now more focussed and efficient with clarity around our statutory and non-statutory services based and evidenced on demands. Since the restructure of the service in 2021, numbers have continued to increase as shown in this report and the service is now becoming increasingly under resourced to meet current and future demand. The Homeless assessment service was also redesigned from a staffing perspective in January 2023 to be more focused on preventative work and which we are now seeing the benefits of increased prevention cases and numbers.

The service is currently supporting and assisting 845 homeless cases and on average the Council receives around 250 homeless self-referrals / new cases per month (a 300% increase from before Covid 19) and 60+ "duty to refer" cases each month. We are also seeing an increase of complex cases that are more time consuming to support and assess.

In response, the Homelessness and Housing Options team:

- manages 115 properties to meet the statutory duty which is a mix of dispersed houses, maisonettes and flats. This portfolio provides a total of 364 bed spaces when at full capacity.
- provides wider, personal support and facilitates outreach to people who need to access emergency accommodation.
- seeks to move people into more sustainable accommodation as quickly as possible.
- Proactive work with PRS Landlords to avoid Evictions.
- Robust partnership and multi-agency working across all sectors and stakeholders.
- Council approval to use Hotel / B&B provision to meet homeless statutory duty – currently 24 rooms being used at the 8th December 23.

In addition to fulfilling the Council's statutory duties in relation to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, the team also provide specialist support to particular vulnerable cohorts including:

- Victims of domestic abuse (DA). As part of a recent review of DA arrangements and the development of a new strategy, the provision of specialist housing for singles of both genders and families has now been implemented through a commissioned service with Safenet within the Borough with floating support when appropriate.
- Council Care Leavers - As part of the Childrens and Young Persons improvement plan, arrangements for care leavers are currently under review to ensure all services support and meet the Councils corporate parenting responsibilities.
- Asylum and Immigration support services to refugees and asylum seekers through pathways with new commissioned services, Serco and the Home Office. Recent approval to recruit to 3 new migration staff to specifically support migration within the Borough.
- Prison release protocols and pathways with the Prison Service (HMPS) and Probation to ensure support and accommodation is provided on release.

4.2 Support to rough sleepers

The Council continues to see increases in rough sleeper numbers over the past 12 months with a 1400% increase since 2018/19. The current number of recorded rough sleepers was 140 in 2022/23 from 7 in 2018/19. A Bed for Every Night (ABEN) and other commissioned emergency accommodation support rough sleepers into longer term move on accommodation. We have recently implemented our additional cold weather provision when temperatures go below zero degrees to ensure all rough sleepers are supported and accommodated during the cold weather. Due to the success of the above provision and funding we have help keep rough sleeper numbers manageable, but we currently have a waiting list for our ABEN provision with 19 known rough sleeper actually on the streets (@ 8/12/23), with whom the outreach service is working closely with to engage and move into appropriate supported accommodation as soon as available. This number would have been significantly more if this non-statutory provision had not been developed and available aligned to best practice and operational procedures since the inception of this service in 2019/20.

The Council continues to receive additional external funding from GMCA for ABEN and DLUHC via RSi (Rough sleeper initiative) and RSAP (Rough sleeper accommodation programme) and over the past 12 month this has amounted to circa £1m of additional ring-fenced funding in addition to the Homeless Prevention Grant that all Councils receive to meet their statutory duties. Unfortunately, this temporary funding is due to end in March 2025.

This funding continues to be invested in commissioned provision through independent partners and funds the staffing for the rough sleeper service.

It is a Government and Bury target is to end rough sleeping by 2025 but due to unexpected demand particularly from migration, controlled and managed by centralised Home Office but impacts on local people, communities and services. Unfortunately, its likely this target will be unachievable unless there is a change in policy and approach by the Government and the Home office. Without the circa 70 to 80% of current rough sleepers from migration our target to end rough sleeping and to keep all people off the streets in Bury was on target to be achieved by 2025 with our existing staffing capacity and accommodation resources.

The team with our partners continues to have success in moving rough sleepers into more secure, longer-term accommodation, despite the increase in caseloads and challenges in finding suitable move on accommodation and we will continue to work

closely with GMCA, RSMP and all stakeholders to support and proactively find solutions.

4.3 Asylum dispersal, including refugee crisis (Afghan & Ukrainian).

Over the past 12 months demand continues to increase. Historically the Council typically supported the dispersal of around 40 families each year, through the Home Office and Serco. In Bury this is a challenge in the context of the scale of statutory demand as described and the shortage of housing supply which means the private rented sector is similarly at full capacity.

The current provision and capacity in supporting refugees and asylum seekers in the Borough has increased aligned to funding and good practice with a more joined up and robust response to meet current and future demands and comprises of:-

- ARAP supported accommodation for the Afghan refugee crisis – 10 family properties dispersed across the Borough and supported via a commissioned partner to approximately 40 people.
- Ukrainian refugee crisis – Supported through two home office schemes – Homes for Ukraine and the Family visa scheme. At November 23 we had 62 hosts and 107 refugees and 4 families via the family visa route with two already placed into permanent housing.
- Statutory homeless services – Pathways into Council accommodation once the Home office determine the immigration status of asylum seekers in their dispersed accommodation in Bury and then duty passes to the Council.
- Multi agency approach with all stakeholders across all sectors, voluntary, faith and public. Recent Strategic Migration partnership group has been set up.
- New migration team of 4 officers to maximise external funding and better support migration within the Borough and all sectors.

The Home office introduced a new dispersal and resettlement scheme during 2022. Bury continues to work collectively and in partnership with GMCA and the NW RSMP (Regional Strategic Migration Partnership). There is a clear desire to continue to support asylum seekers across Greater Manchester but the lack of affordable and suitable accommodation is now becoming saturated within all 10 LA's and the current number of placements across GM and the NW is disproportionately high when compared to the rest of the UK and other regions.

The new compulsory dispersal and resettlement programme should balance out asylum numbers fairly and equitably across all regions of the UK to ensure the right support and outcomes are achieved. Despite the new dispersal scheme and remit, the expectation and impact over the next 12 months of increased numbers of asylum seekers and refugees will still be significant and the projected numbers, therefore demand and numbers will continue to increase in Bury. The Home Office and Serco continue to procure properties in the Borough to meet their dispersal demands but are generally procuring in post code areas that have high ASB, hate crime and concentration numbers for complex people due to their model of funding and approach despite recommendation from the Council not to do so.

The current number of asylum seekers in temporary Home Office accommodation within the Borough is 435 at November 23. The proposed number for Bury through the consultation would increase to 567 by December 2023, the Home office have been unable to achieve these numbers and the challenges of procuring sufficient properties to increase the numbers in the private sector. The Home office is still working to a cluster limit of 1:200 residents which could mean an actual increase to 970 based on current population levels within the Borough with a 100%+ increase.

This worse case scenario would mean an increase of Home office and Serco accommodation of over 100% from circa 150 to 300 properties in the PRS. Even the lowest number stated would be extremely challenging in the short and medium term due to the continued lack of suitable and affordable accommodation within the Borough. The cost-of-living crisis and the general increases in homelessness make the impact of these numbers more significant.

The Home office when factoring in their dispersal and cluster ratios to determine asylum numbers continue to not include the additionality of the refugee co-hort and their other existing pathways such as ARAP (Afghan) and Homes for Ukrainian and the family visa schemes, in Bury this adds a further circa 100 refugees within the Borough that we are already accommodating and supporting in either permanent or temporary housing or via hosts. We are supporting 58 hosts with five placements into hotels, moved 5 into permanent accommodation and two into the private rented sector. Due to the Ukrainian conflict continuing it is expected that more host arrangements will fail significantly during 2024 and add further pressure on statutory services. The current conflict in the middle east and Gaza may also add further numbers and risks especially if this situation escalates or continues.

The wider impact is on the Private rented sector which in Bury is already small and expensive, an objective for the Council is to supplement our social housing stock to meet demands by accessing and incentivising PRS landlords to increase access to properties in the PRS for homelessness and people on our housing register and robustly access the 1000+ long terms voids in the PRS, this continues but with slow progress. Its likely that we will be competing with Serco for these properties and market forces are likely to increase private rents further, make the properties less affordable which would be counter productive and have a negative impact on expected outcomes. We are seeing some success for out of borough placements, particularly East Lancashire where rents are cheaper and more affordable to be able to discharge our homeless duty.

The Government freezing the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) since 2020 is also having a significant impact in affordability because the gap between market rents increasing over this period and HB rates being static is widening and becoming unaffordable for most people on benefits. The Autumn statement brought some positive news in that the LHA rates would be unfrozen from 1st April 2024. This should help make more properties affordable to people on benefits.

5.0 Future strategy and innovation

The Homeless and Housing Options service continue to be active in identifying and securing funding to explore new delivery models and maximise support for vulnerable people.

At present, over the past 12 months a total of approximately £1m+ of extra short-term ring-fenced homeless funding has been secured via successful bids and additional DLUHC and home office funding and through positive partnership working.

The wider Housing department needs to be innovative and flex to meet the increasing demands for social and affordable housing over the next 12 months and beyond with the new general needs housing strategy that will complement the wider Housing strategy.

Building more social and affordable housing in partnership is key in the longer term but short term objectives and strategies are currently being developed to meet the increasing demands for our people that need it the most.

A key strategy in meeting these demands in the short term to medium term will continue to be the empty homes strategy and accessing the 1000+ long term voids in the private rented sector and exploring other sites that may create new affordable and social housing in the short term for our most vulnerable families and people.

Stop or reduce the reliance on hotel and B&B provision to meet our statutory homelessness demands for temporary accommodation which is not good for our residents but also expensive.

Increased and better partnerships and engagement with the VCFA in Bury to support the delivery of meeting the challenges of the increasing migration pressures in the Borough.

The development and delivery of a Bury Homeless Hub has continued over the past 12 months and is becoming increasingly important to support our more complex and high need single people and rough sleepers and would provide a hub of 30 / 35 temporary supported self-contained units. A robust business case has been further developed with a feasibility study and this option is under active consideration.

6.0 Conclusion / Summary

There is no doubt that the next 12 months will continue to be extremely challenging for the Council in ensuring we meet our statutory duties and obligations but despite these challenges and demands our strategy and robust delivery will continue and there is confidence we will meet the challenges head on for the benefit of our most vulnerable families and people. Partners must remain focussed around prevention and sustainment activity, to ensure the whole system is robustly supporting all homeless people from rough sleepers to statutory homeless families and single people.

A key issue within Bury is limited access to affordable housing and the small and high-cost private rented sector. Housing supply issues constrain both move-on options for people in emergency accommodation and the opportunities for people to access and maintain independent affordable housing.

Unfortunately, we have had to change policy and start to use B&B provision to meet our statutory obligations and duty to accommodate our homeless which is not good practice, expensive or good for our customers. Every effort will be made over the next 12 months to reverse this decision but will be subject to our success in increasing our affordable accommodation objectives and opportunities, realistically though it is unlikely that we will meet the projected demands in the short to medium term. The service is now operating outside ring fenced and our statutory homeless funding stream for our core provision and currently projected to overspend by year end on current revenue service income.

The Council continues to robustly deliver the homeless strategy with all stakeholders and the homeless partnership. A partnership steering group continues to review and help deliver the action plan objectives and targets and reflect on the past 12 months to re-priorities as needed. A recent review of the plan objectives show that we are successfully continuing to deliver over 80% of the expected outcomes and on track to deliver all objectives over the next 2 years in a collaborative and partnership approach.

We will continue to proactively engagement with GMCA, RSMP and all GM Local Authorities to seek a more proactive model and solution to the impacts of asylum and migration with government to reduce demands and help achieve the targets and outcomes of our strategy and benefit our communities.

A key objective within the homelessness strategy and for the Government Nationally is to end rough sleeping by 2025, unfortunately due to new and increasing demands particularly due to migration within the Borough its unlikely that this objective will be met, current data shows the opposite with an upward trend across Bury, GM, Regionally and Nationally in the last 12 months.

Feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny committee is welcome including, for example, how:

- homeless prevention is aligned to the principles and priorities within the borough strategy, *Let's do it*.
- The significant increases and challenges of migration in the Borough.
- The challenges of the cost of living and the general increases in Homelessness
- The challenges to increase our stock of affordable and social housing.

List of Background Papers:- None.

Contact Details:- Phil Cole, Head of Homelessness & Housing Options

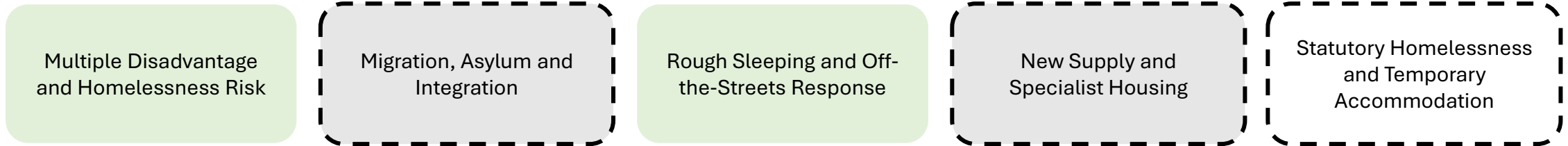
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Homelessness, Asylum and Migration

Understanding the challenges and opportunities for GM.

November 2023

Team Focus and Evolution



- £17m+ of GMCA-commissioned programmes to support efforts to end and prevent homelessness and rough sleeping.
- Almost all of this activity is focused on non-statutory homelessness, from accommodation-based services like ABEN (non-priority need) and those which go beyond the statutory minimum e.g. Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathfinder.
- Growing recognition of areas in which we GMCA can add value to Localities.
- Includes: a growing workforce development offer, integrating Asylum & Migration work and developing capacity to drive new supply of accommodation.
- In these newer areas, we have ideas but lack a clear strategic framework.
- The most pressing example is our work in Asylum and Migration.

Diagnosis: Defining the extent and nature of the problem

1. The homelessness system is already overwhelmed.
2. Home Office policy is putting additional, unprecedented strain on Localities and communities.
3. This is not just a short term issue; we're in for sustained, long term pain.



Existing and historic demand pressures across all parts of the homelessness system

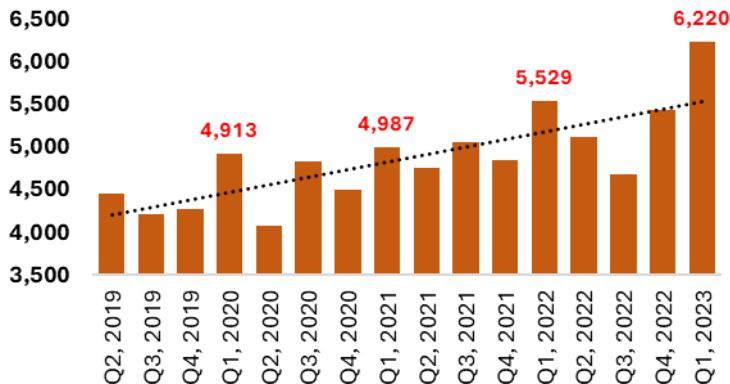
Most services start from an all-time high in terms of demand – even before short-term policy conditions and impending socioeconomic shocks are considered

Services enter the winter of 2023-24 confronted with the greatest baseline demand volumes they have experienced in several years. As of the most recently available published data (Jan-March 2023), across GM:

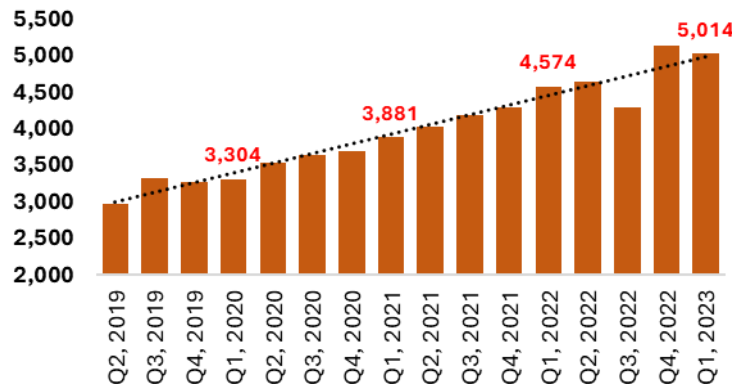
- 2,617 prevention duties were owed; the highest level on record, and 26% higher than the most recent equivalent pre-pandemic period;
- 3,603 relief duties were owed, the highest level on record, and 27% higher than the most recent equivalent pre-pandemic period;
- 5,014 households were resident in temporary accommodation – the highest level on record, and 51% higher than the equivalent pre-pandemic period. This includes 6,468 children.
- 145 people sleeping rough on a single night (in August 2023) – a 59% increase on the same month last year.

There is a considerable lag on published data used for this analysis – these datapoints are reflective of the pressure which the homelessness support system was under before the other pressures which have built up over 2023, expressed further into this analysis, are taken into account.

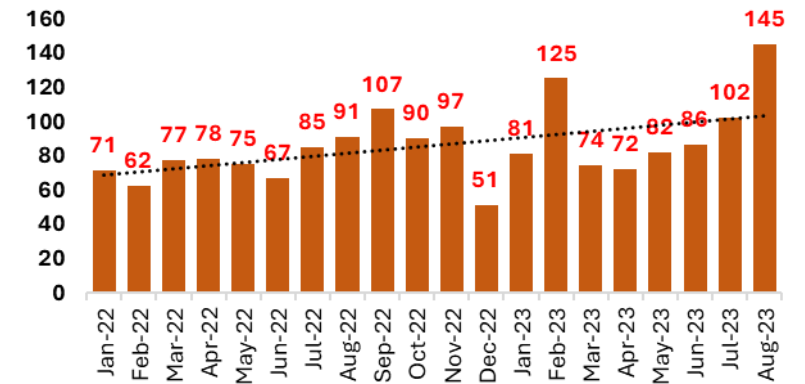
Number of households owed a prevention or relief duty in GM, quarterly, last four years



Number of households in GM in temporary accommodation, quarterly, last four years



Number of rough sleepers identified in the monthly count, monthly, since start of 2022





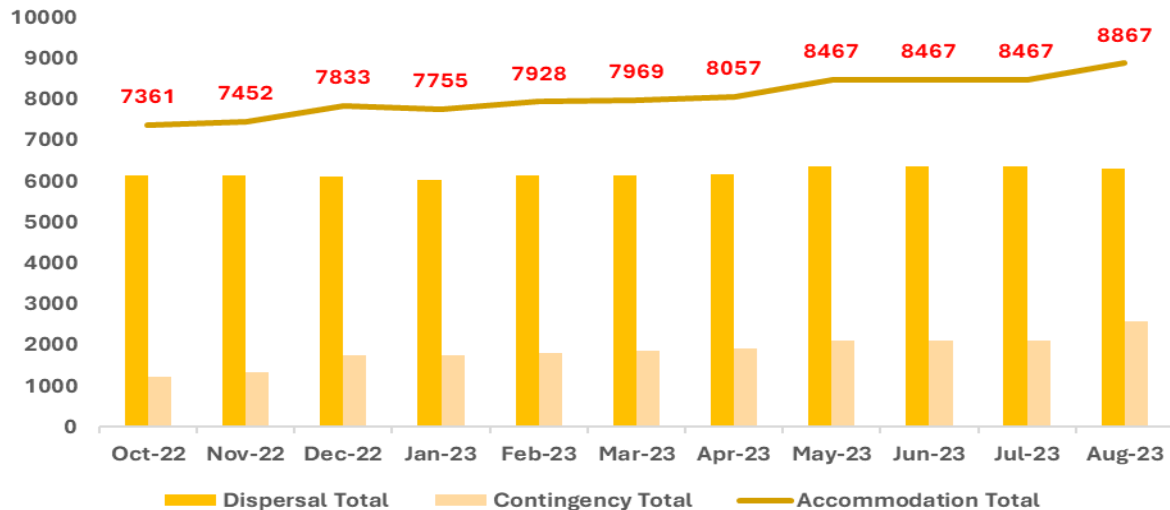
The decision to clear the 'asylum backlog' over a short window

Asylum populations have continued to increase over the last 12 months, and recent acute rises in decisions are putting people at risk of homelessness and exploitation.

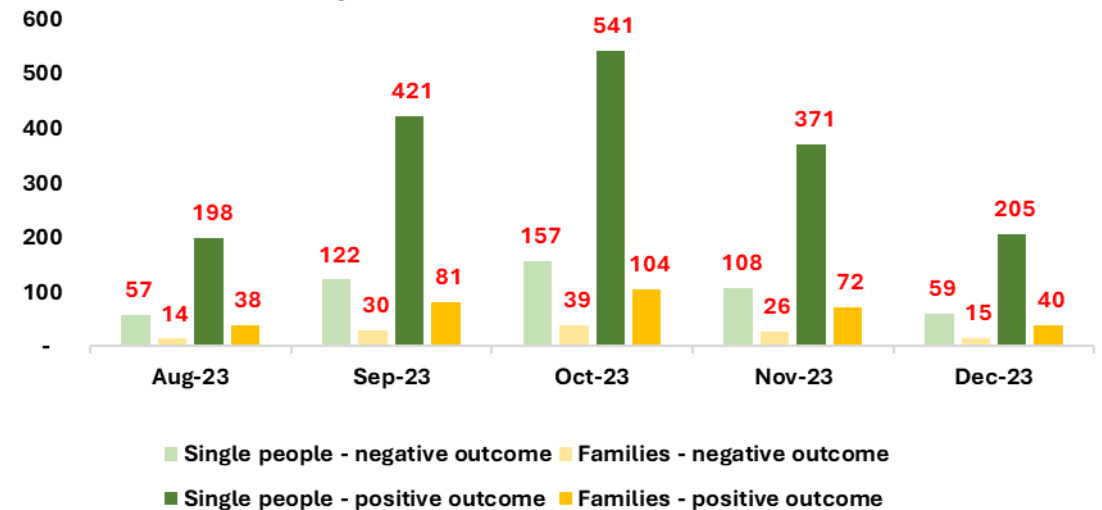
Greater Manchester's received a disproportionate share of asylum dispersal for many years and our asylum population continues to increase. Government's commitment to clear the 'asylum backlog' by the end of 2023 has meant an acute increase in the pace of decisions, and has driven a notable surge in Home Office evictions since August. Due to the way in which people seek support after receiving a decision from the Home Office, these decisions may not be immediately felt as a short-sharp shock by Homelessness services and impacts are likely to occur over the longer-term.

- People seeking asylum often have a **limited understanding** of the system, and what they should do when they get their decision. The Home Office only provides **limited phone-based support** via Migrant Help for positive decisions, except in exceptional cases.
- People who get **positive decisions** have full recourse to public funds but may not be deemed priority need as most asylum households are singles.
- Those with a **negative decision** will not be owed a duty by local authorities and are therefore at heightened risk of rough sleeping and/or Modern Slavery. They may need assistance from a **Legal Aid** solicitor to make an appeal within 14 days to allow them to remain in accommodation. If they do not appeal then, they will be evicted, but may be able to appeal or make a 'fresh claim' later with legal aid support.

Increase in the population resident in Asylum dispersal accommodation in Greater Manchester



Projected number of asylum claims likely to be processed in GM in the last five months of the year





The decision to clear the ‘asylum backlog’ over a short window

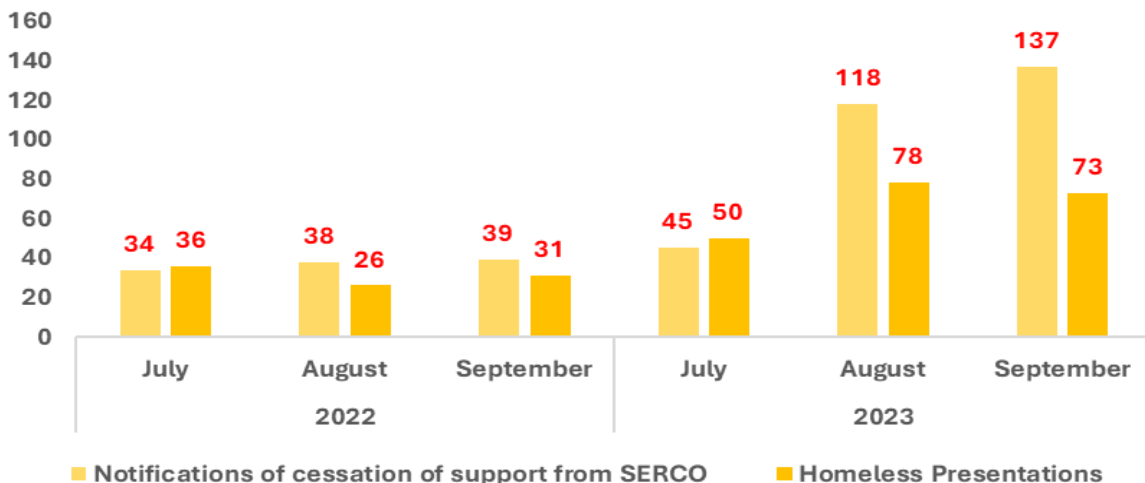
The clearance of the asylum backlog is creating an additional shock to homelessness support services – for both statutory and emergency support.

A stock take of the pressure created by the current clearing of the Asylum decisions backlog has been undertaken across several GM LA’s, namely Bolton, Bury, Rochdale, Trafford and Wigan. This has shown that the pressure on the Homelessness system is rising, as a result of the increase in asylum decisions. From July – September 2023, when compared with the same period in 2022, analysis shows a:

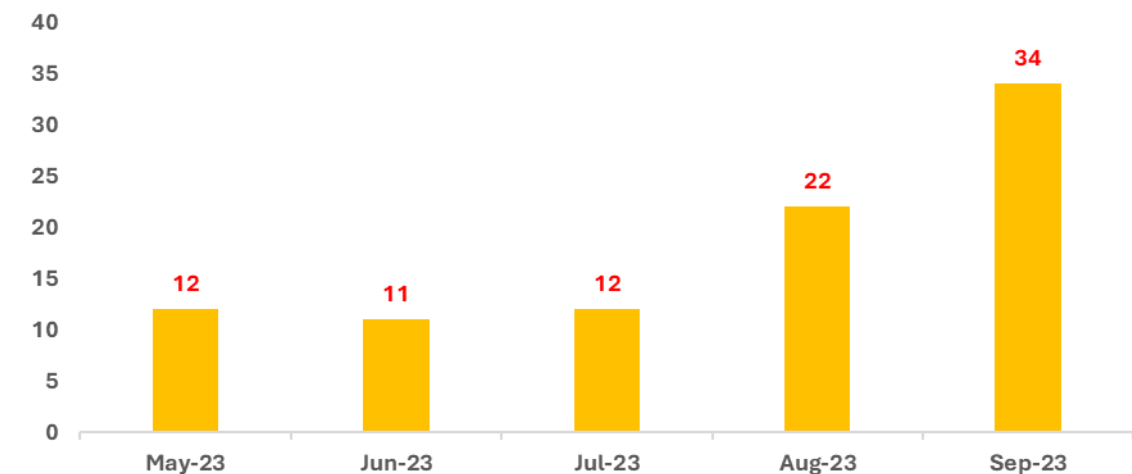
- **116% increase in the number of Homelessness presentations** from Households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness as a result of leaving Home Office accommodation;
- **52% increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation** as a result of needing to leave Home Office accommodation;
- **170% rise in the number of notifications** received from SERCO to inform a Local Authority of a household’s impending eviction due to Home Office support cessation.

The number of individuals who have been seen sleeping rough in-month who have left Home Office accommodation is steadily rising, and September saw a **55% increase** from August.

Notifications of cessation of support from SERCO and Homeless Presentations received due to the household being required to leave Home Office accommodation



Rough sleepers seen in-month across GM, who left HO accommodation in last 86 days



Response: Strategic, Preventative and Progressive.

1. We need to resist knee-jerk responses to what is a long-term policy direction and inevitable international phenomenon.
2. We are unlikely to see progressive national policy shifts any time soon.
3. GM already leads the way nationally on to migration responses (e.g. RESS).

Response: Strategic, Preventative and Progressive.

1. On asylum, we are almost stepping into a vacuum.
2. Solutions and assets exist within the VCSE sector, and there is no bad time to invest in upstream prevention.
3. The rising far-right threat highlights the need to lead from the front on integration and harnessing the potential of diversity.

We need to assume that help isn't coming.

- We face medium-long term pressures, in a single-minded policy environment, and hamstrung civil service
- We're getting warm words and keen interest from government, but no funding or sense of direction.
- No obvious local funding mechanism for a GM asylum homelessness prevention response (Dispersal Grant only option, generally covering LA staffing)
- There is limited capacity or benefit to expanding ABEN to meet the overwhelming demand.
- Meanwhile, pressures continue to build on Homelessness Teams from all factors – Section 21, increased presentations, LHA affordability issues.
- We need to...

Find a way to fund an asylum homelessness prevention response which mitigates the worst of the risk

Help ease as much pressure as we can on the homelessness 'front door'.

Develop a sustainable system that is resilient to future demographic change and crisis.

Team Focus and Evolution

Multiple Disadvantage
and Homelessness Risk

Migration, Asylum and
Integration

Statutory Homelessness
and Temporary
Accommodation

Rough Sleeping and Off-
the-Streets Response

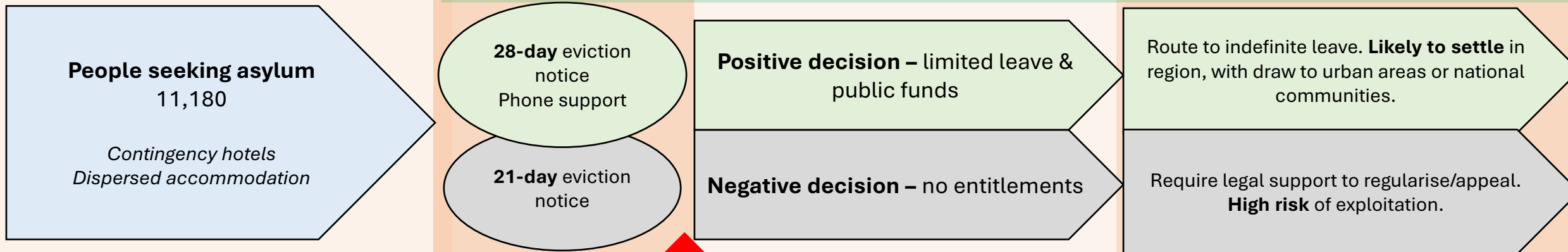
New Supply and
Specialist Housing

GM Refugee Homelessness Prevention Model

Interventions

Early prevention - universal	Crisis prevention	Crisis support	Move-on and integration
GM strategic coordination and collaboration – LAs, VCFSE, NHS GM and partners			
Asylum crisis support – asylum system-facing challenges and appeals			
'Life in the UK/GM' learning sessions	Destitution funds/personal budgets		
Holistic face-to-face support work – VCFSE with LA navigator links			
Employability support (volunteering)	PRS navigation support		Immigration advice
English language education – ESOL and informal integration-focused classes			
Employment support – VCFSE with formal LA links			

Asylum journey



Mental health & isolation Far-right harassment Poor nutrition

Lack of face-to-face support Lack of understanding of rights and systems



Homelessness risk

Landlord misinformation & discrimination Employer misinformation & discrimination

Lack of legal advice capacity ESOL waiting lists

Cohort-specific risk drivers

GM Asylum Homelessness Prevention Response

Strategic Oversight and Development

GMCA Coordination resource and small innovation grants fund.

Migrant Skills Programme

Early language and employability support service, including ESOL.

PRS Navigation Service

Including tenancy support and financial support.

Migrant Homelessness Prevention

15x Local Authority Keyworkers

Immigration Literacy

Training, development and best practice for Local Authority staff

01 Wellbeing and Integration: Universal

- Development and oversight of a cohesive integration strategy across GM.
- VCFSE sector-led offer to promote individual wellbeing and community cohesion.

02 Employment and Skills: Targeted

- Coordinated and expanded ESOL & pre-ESOL pathways
- Volunteering & work experience network for community participation and skills
- Specialist Employment & training support aligned to local need and complements Refugee Employability Programme

03 Safety Net: Crisis and Emergency

- Dedicated keyworkers in Local Authorities working with people at the point of transition (+ve or -ve) from the asylum process
- Specialist immigration advice for non-UK nationals who find themselves at risk of homelessness.
- An immigration-literate mainstream homelessness prevention and relief support offer.
- Support and resources to facilitate access to the Private Rental Sector.

Towards a GM Migration and Integration Strategy

Overarching
Vision

A Greater Manchester in which everyone, no matter their immigration status, can access a **basic safety net** and the support of **effective, appropriate** services to keep them **safe and well**.

A Greater Manchester that harnesses the **diversity** of our communities and supports non-UK national residents to **settle, connect and thrive**.

Welcome

All non-UK nationals can thrive and connect in safe, welcoming and cohesive communities.

Services

All NUKN can access well-coordinated, appropriate services that meet their needs.

Homelessness

Homelessness is designed out of the migration and asylum journey in GM.

Self-advocacy

Understanding & exercising rights, entitlements and responsibilities.

National change

GM speaks with a shared, evidence-based voice for wider change.

Likely next steps

- Continue DLUHC and Home Office **lobbying** on funding ask (without expecting much)
- Explore all avenues to secure GM funds for a **GM Refugee Homelessness Prevention Model** that enhances and builds on existing local VCSE responses.
- Continue scoping & building cross-sector support for the GM **Migration and Integration Strategy**
- Development of frontline LA asylum worker **Community of Practice** to support workforce development
- Continue supporting **statutory services** with improved asylum-migration responses via RESS training and guidance.

Easing Pressure on the 'front door'

VFM Exercise



Likely next steps

Temporary Accommodation

- Establish Temporary Accommodation policy lead within Homelessness and Migration Team.
- Digest VFM report and socialise amongst homelessness leads
- Develop an action plan based on the outputs of this and the APPG report on TA.
- Get lead officer and portfolio leads buy-in to progress this action plan.
- Scope Project Management resource to drive this work forward.
- Utilise GMHAN to coordinate voluntary sector input.
- **Explore opportunities for immediate and long term supply.**

Likely next steps

Housing Options

- Sessions on immigration literacy by GMIAU in December and January.
- Establishing regular seminar/workshops for Housing Options staff in 2024.
- Exploring opportunities to invest in training and development across GM teams.
- Improving linkages between RESS and Housing Options.

Number of refugees evicted into homelessness triples in wake of Home Office asylum change

At least 1,500 people became homeless in less than three months, as new Big Issue figures reveal scale of refugee homelessness crisis

GREG BARRADALE

23 Nov 2023



Mandatory Credit: Photo by TOLGA AKMEN/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

The number of refugees becoming homeless after leaving asylum accommodation has tripled after controversial changes to Home Office policy, The Big Issue can reveal, as fears that thousands will be forced onto the streets by Christmas appear to be coming true.

Almost 1,500 refugees were assessed as homeless between August and October, up from 450 in the same period last year.

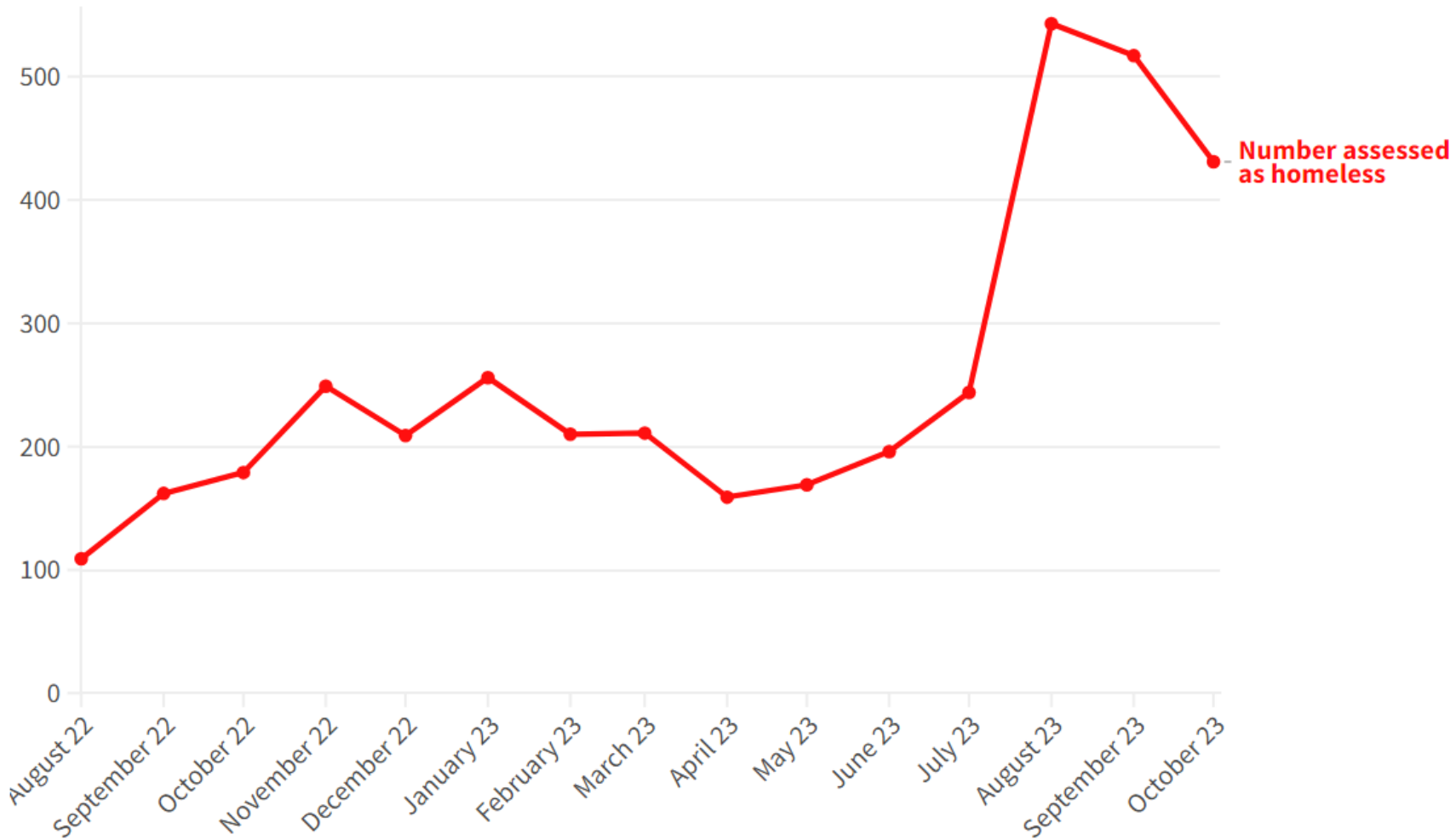
The spike is thanks to changes to the way the move-on period – a “grace period” given for newly-recognised refugees to leave Home Office accommodation – is handled, as well as an influx of decisions as the government tries to clear the backlog.

The Big Issue has been investigating the impact and extent of the crisis. Read more of our reporting here:

- ['We're living in a nightmare': Iraqi refugee family evicted into homelessness has lost 'all sense of safety' in UK](#)
- [Shadow minister slams 'chaotic and incompetent' Home Office over refugee homelessness crisis](#)
- [Allowing asylum seekers to work will help tackle growing refugee homelessness crisis, says Scottish government minister](#)

Refugee homelessness has skyrocketed after Home Office changes

Number of households homeless after leaving Home Office accommodation



Source: Big Issue Freedom of Information requests • Figures for October 2023 do not cover whole month, and so true figure is likely to be higher



[A Flourish chart](#)

Already-stretched councils are being hit hard. Bradford saw a sevenfold increase. Leicester almost tripled. There was a fivefold increase in Coventry.

Manchester saw 80 become homeless in this period, Leeds 70, Sheffield 85, Blackburn 83, and Sandwell 85.

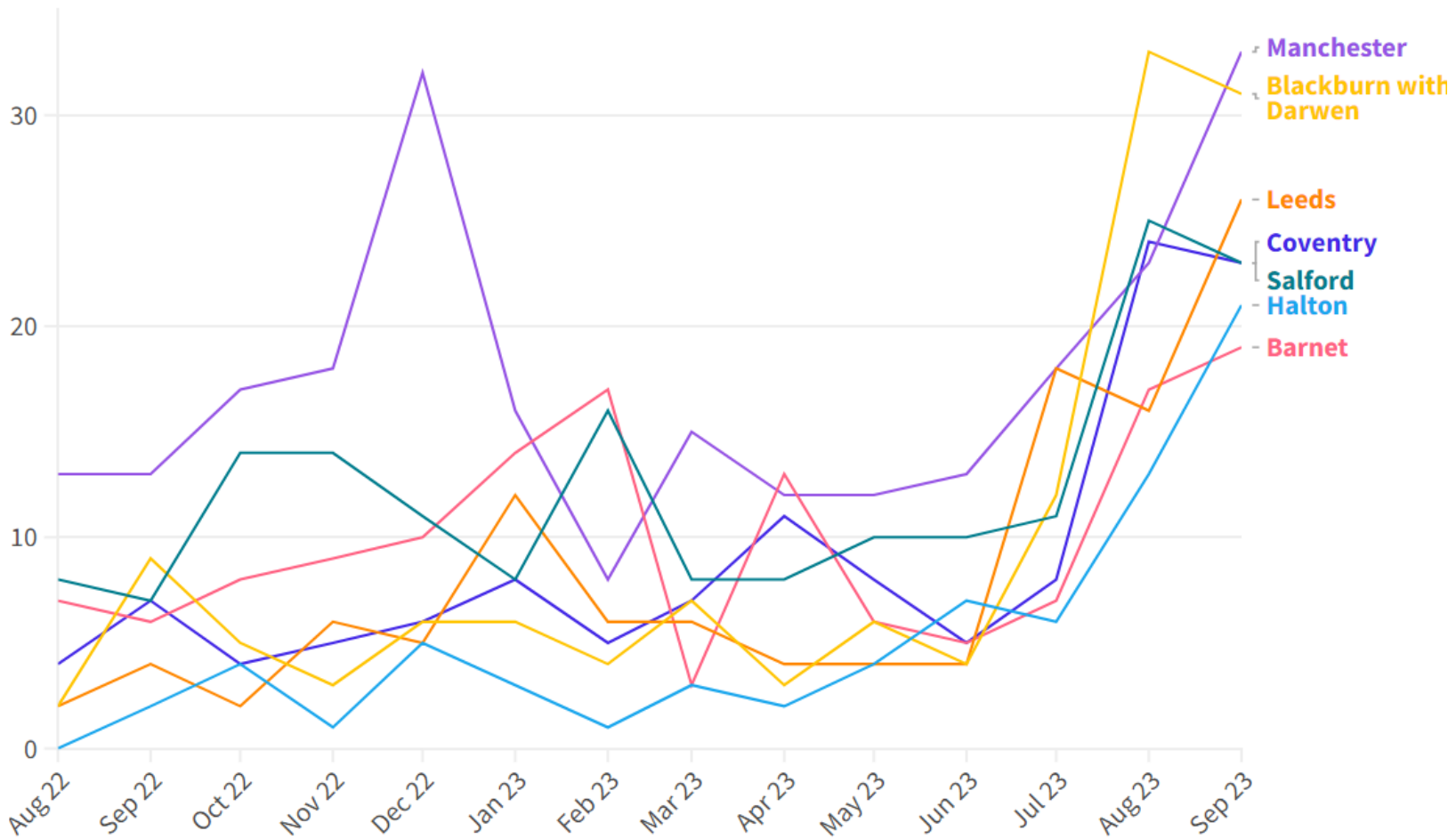
Kama Petruczenko, senior policy analyst at the Refugee Council, said the figures showed an asylum system forcing people into poverty.

“It’s worrying to see such a sharp increase in the number of refugees presenting as homeless after leaving their asylum accommodation, and estimates have shown that the issue is likely to become much worse in the coming months,” Petruczenko told The Big Issue.

“These are people whose lives have been on hold for years, who have been unable to work and accumulate savings, and who often lack proper networks of support as they leave the asylum system and start their new lives in the UK.”

Charities have been sounding the alarm over the influx, and The Big Issue has been reporting fears from councils that thousands would be homeless by Christmas. These numbers provide a sign this is playing out – and that the crisis is having an impact across the country.

Councils are seeing demand skyrocket as refugees are evicted into homelessness



Source: Big Issue FOI requests • Households assessed as homeless after leaving Home Office accommodation, selected councils



[A Flourish chart](#)

Using Freedom of Information laws, we asked 100 councils with the most supported asylum seekers, how many households were assessed as homeless (in technical terms, owed the relief duty under the housing act) after leaving Home Office asylum accommodation.

A total of 52 local authorities supplied data, which covers the period up to mid-October. Many provided data on households – which may contain more than one person – while the figures do not cover those who simply dropped out of the system.

By contrast, across the whole of England, 3,830 households were assessed as homeless after leaving asylum accommodation in the year to March 2023. At this rate, a figure of 1,491 is what the whole country – made up of 333 local authorities – could expect to see in around four and a half months. Instead, just 50 councils have had to deal with this level of need in under three months.

Bridget Young, director of NACCOM, a network of frontline charities that offer support and accommodation to refugees and people in the asylum system, said: “The alarming spike in homeless refugees since August 2023 is now turning an already challenging situation into a full-blown homelessness crisis in our cities and communities.

“This is in the midst of a wider housing crisis, when levels of homelessness and destitution are on the rise across the board”, said Young, who said NACCOM’s members have seen a 50% increase in demand.

“While it’s essential for people to move on from asylum hotel accommodation into more appropriate, community-based housing, this can only be done with time, consideration and the right support – not by evicting people into homelessness.”

The Home Office says it has reduced the backlog of legacy cases by 59,000 from November 2022 to October 2023. As these decisions are made, refugees living in asylum accommodation provided by the Home Office are told to leave.

Local authorities, already facing a severe shortage of temporary accommodation, are finding it impossible to provide them with somewhere to live. It's creating tension, as councils complain of a lack of support and information. MPs on the Public Accounts Committee found the Home Office "is failing to engage meaningfully with local authorities on decisions that affect their residents and already strained public services".

They added: "Worryingly, the lack of coordination between the Home Office and local government means the Home Office is competing with councils and their partners to secure accommodation, driving up prices and exacerbating the homelessness challenges that local authorities already face."

The Home Office says refugees are still getting 28 days once their asylum claim is granted. But charities have warned that a change in August to the way this is handled means, in practice, just a week is often being afforded, increasing the risk of homelessness.

Our data shows the homelessness figure doubled from July to August.

In fact, even 28 days is not enough to prevent homelessness, say charities.

"Alongside other charities and organisations in the refugee sector, we have been calling for the move-on period for new refugees to be extended, to ensure that local authorities are given enough time to step in and provide the necessary support," said Petruczenko.

Lengthening the move-on period to at least 56 days would help setting new refugees up for success and allow them to thrive in their new communities."

Alongside this, NACCOM's Young wants people to receive all their papers at once – so all have at least 28 days to find somewhere.

“We urge the government to commit to ensuring that people leaving asylum support receive all their documentation at once, and to provide all refugees with at least 28-days from the date they receive their notice to quit before their asylum support ends,” she said. “It’s also essential that the government works with the voluntary sector and local authorities to ensure people can access adequate and timely support.

“Ultimately, only the introduction of a 56-day move-on period in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act, along with substantial investment in affordable housing and an immediate commitment to unfreeze the local housing allowance, will significantly mitigate the risks of homelessness that new refugees face when leaving the asylum system.”

A Home Office spokesperson said: “Once someone is informed that their asylum claim has been granted, they get at least 28 days’ notice to move on from their asylum accommodation.

“Support is offered to newly recognised refugees by Migrant Help and their partners, which includes advice on how to access Universal Credit, the labour market and where to get assistance with housing.

“We work with local authorities to help communities manage the impact of asylum decisions.”



Classification: Open	Decision Type: Key
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Report to:	Overview & Scrutiny Committee Cabinet	Date: 10 January 2024
Subject:	Strategic Housing Review – Management of Housing Stock	
Report of	Cabinet Member for Housing Services	

Summary

This report follows the earlier reports considered by Cabinet in June, October and November 2023. This report provides Members with an overview of the activity that has taken place following the November report. Members are asked to review the report and agree the following recommendations.

Recommendation(s)

- Note the work undertaken since the last update to Cabinet in November 2023.
- Note the outcomes of the staff consultation which took place between 13th November and 13th December 2023.
- Agree that, whilst in practical terms services will become integrated from 15th January as previously agreed, the legal transfer of housing management functions and TUPE of Six Town Housing staff will take effect from 1st February 2024 following TUPE consultation feedback from staff.
- Note the post transfer governance arrangements for housing management post 1st February 2024.
- Agree that, in the first instance, line management of all current Six Town Housing functions and staff will report to the new Director of Housing Operations post in the Council's Corporate Core under the leadership of the Executive Director (Strategy and Transformation). The five pillar delivery model described to Cabinet in November remains the overall aspiration for Housing Services, however, the revised proposal will ensure a 'safe landing' for housing functions and staff and a phased approach for transition to any future model.
- Agree that the company Six Town Housing will be retained with revised governance arrangements.

Reasons for recommendation(s)

The recommendations made reflect both staff feedback through the TUPE consultation process and the continued progress of both the Six Town Housing Improvement Programme and joint work in preparation for transfer.

Alternative options considered and rejected

Failure to make the changes set out would not show due regard for staff feedback through the consultation process and potentially would present risks to the effective delivery of housing functions post transfer.

Report Author and Contact Details:

Name: Kate Waterhouse
Position: Executive Director (Strategy & Transformation)
Department: Corporate Core
E-mail: Kate.waterhouse@bury.gov.uk

1. Background

- 1.1 Following approval by Cabinet in November to the transfer of the management and maintenance of Council housing to direct control by the local authority, work commenced to undertake the necessary TUPE consultation with Six Town Housing staff and plan for the organisational activity required to enable the transfer. Each strand of activity has been supported by a comprehensive programme management approach and has included a strong emphasis on communication and engagement with residents as well as both Six Town Housing and current Council staff.
- 1.2 Alongside this work, the work programme to drive the improvement of core housing services in Bury has continued, led by the Interim Chief Executive of Six Town Housing.
- 1.3 The TUPE consultation process, led by Six Town Housing, took place between 13th November and 13th December 2023. This process has included a range of engagement opportunities for staff including virtual and physical 'drop in' sessions. Staff briefings on key topics of interest, focus groups led by relevant Council managers and weekly FAQs. Trade Union colleagues have been engaged fully throughout this process. Alongside this, directly affected Council staff (those proposed to receive new responsibilities through the transfer) have been consulted on the potential impact for them.

2. Consultation Feedback and Proposed Changes

- 2.1 Whilst a wide range of feedback and comments were received through the TUPE consultation process, four specific areas were frequently mentioned and should therefore be noted by Cabinet. These are summarised below along with the Council's proposed response.
- 2.2 **The Date of Transfer:** Six Town Housing staff raised concern that a mid-month transfer date may see some people financially disadvantaged because of the potential to be charged 'emergency tax' on their January pay. Whilst any such over-payment would ultimately be re-payable it would present potential short-term financial detriment. This issue only came to light following detailed work through the Finance Workstream. There is a continued commitment to working together as one team from 15th January 2024, however, the revised proposal due to this feedback is that the date of legal transfer is moved to 1st February 2024.
- 2.3 **Maintaining an identity as a Housing Function and taking time to work through the detail of any potential structural changes:** Staff raised concern that transferring current Six Town Housing functions to a dispersed leadership model immediately post transfer would present a potential risk to both the pace of the ongoing improvement programme and the identity of a housing function. This is a particular risk in the context of the new regulatory framework for Social Housing which will be launched in 2024. The proposal is therefore for all current Six Town

Housing functions to transfer under the leadership of the new post of Director of Housing Operations in the Council's Corporate Core, with the Executive Director (Strategy & Transformation) providing leadership until the post is filled. There remains an aspiration to deliver against the model described and agreed by Members in November, however, to ensure any structural changes do not impede delivery and allow time to co-design this work with staff this transition will be progressed on a phased basis over the course of 2024.

- 2.4 **Clarity on tenant communications and the Six Town Housing Brand:** Through the consultation process officers have confirmed that the intention is that staff will post-transfer refer to themselves as Bury Council staff. ID badges and communications will reflect this from the 15th January 2024 however communications will confirm that the legal transfer of Six Town Housing staff to Bury Council will be the 1st February 2024. To make best use of tenants rents a phased approach to the transition of other branding (uniforms, vehicles, branded collateral etc) will be undertaken. Tenant communications have been drafted to confirm this, including neighbourhood roadshows which will commence from the 15th January 2024.
- 2.5 **Practical questions:** Six Town Housing staff raised a range of practical questions about what working for the Council be like and how systems, processes and procedures will change. A comprehensive organisational development plan has been developed to support the transfer and integration of functions. This work began with a post consultation event on 19th December 2023 attended by over 100 Six Town Housing staff with a follow-up induction and launch session planned for 15th January 2024.
- 2.6 Work is now progressing on the practical actions needed to facilitate the legal transfer of employment and ongoing support, engagement and development of current Six Town Housing colleagues post transfer.

3. Future Options for the Company

- 3.1 It is proposed that, subject to agreement by the Cabinet and the current Six Town Housing Board, the Six Town Housing company is retained. The termination agreement will set out that the direct management of all Housing Revenue Account (HRA) council housing stock will be resumed by the Council and all staff currently employed by the Company will transfer to the Council. The Company will remain to manage the small number of housing stock which it directly owns, and which sits outside the HRA.
- 3.2 As the Company's housing stock remains "social housing" the Company will maintain its registration and regulation under the Regulator of Social Housing. To ensure the Company's housing is properly and compliantly managed it is proposed that there will be a new management agreement between the Company and the Council whereupon the Council will take on the management of this stock. The new management agreement will form part of the termination agreement to ensure there is no actual or perceived break in the continuity of management of the Company's housing stock and services to its tenants.
- 3.3 The Company will still exist as a legal corporate entity, still own 104 houses, may continue to hold leases and contracts, and will remain a Private Registered Provider of Social Housing (PRPSH) regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing (RoSH). This is necessary because there will be insufficient time to make any other arrangements in the time available before transition is complete. These activities will

be undertaken by the Council under the new management agreement and overseen by the Company's new Board.

3.4 The Council will be the sole shareholder of the Company and the functions described above and arrangements in the new management agreement will continue. The potential matters for consideration include:

- allowing a wider range of tenures to be made available to local residents than simply those which the Council can use pursuant to its housing functions;
- to provide a stable entity for partnering with the Council in its discharging its homelessness functions;
- to develop more new build housing and/or acquire and improve existing housing from other entities as a high-quality responsible landlord promoted by the Council;
- to invest in new housing with any reserves retained within Six Town Housing that are agreed could be used for these purposes; and
- to partner with developers and builders for access to affordable homes provided under section 106 agreements.

3.5 Social housing includes low-cost rental (such as affordable rent properties) and low-cost home ownership. Registered providers include local authority landlords and private registered providers (such as not-for-profit housing associations and for-profit organisations).

3.6 This option will require the Council to ensure the Company is able to provide RoSH with the regulatory assurance and viability requirements on both the Council and Six Town Housing in retaining a sub-1,000 home private Registered Provider as a subsidiary of a local authority Registered Provider.

4. Current Board arrangements

4.1 Existing Board arrangements the Six Town Housing Board is led by the Chair. Board Members include the Interim Chief Executive, Elected Members appointed by the Council, Independent and Tenant Members.

4.2 The current Board configuration will not be required post transition to Council. Post transition, the Company will only retain circa 104 owned properties and management/leasing of a further 34 properties owned by Mosscaire St Vincent Housing and 12 Sherbourne House leases, it is therefore proposed that a smaller Board would be established in accordance with the Company articles and the current Board would resign their positions.

5. Post termination governance arrangements

5.1 Cabinet agreed to terminate the current management arrangement by mutual consent by way of a deed of termination in November 2023.

6. Future governance - Housing Advisory Board

- 6.1 It is recommended that a Housing Advisory Board would be established and constituted under s.102(4) of the LGA 1972 to advise the Executive on relevant matters relating to the housing services and stock.
- 6.2 The primary roles of the Board would be to inform policy strategy, operations, compliance and ensure a strong tenants voice. Advise the Cabinet on decisions that affect Tenants. The Board would consist of:
- 5 Elected Member appointments (to include 2 opposition members to sit on the Board)
 - Cabinet member for Housing to Chair the Board – this would ensure that the Board would be assured that there is a clear connection between it and Cabinet.
 - 3 Tenant advisory appointments
 - 2 Independent Members – To be determined
 - Officers attending on an ex officio basis (Director of Housing Operations, Finance and Legal advisors)
- 6.3 In order to ensure that there is continuity it is proposed the two existing Tenant Six Town Housing Board Members will be asked to join the Housing Advisory Board. Member nominations from party leaders will be subject to Cabinet approval to the Board, Leaders may wish to nominate those currently sitting as Six Town Housing Board Members.
- 6.4 The Board could exercise powers up to key decision level however all key decisions would be subject to Cabinet decision making. This would also allow for overview and scrutinise decisions and all for pre scrutiny of cabinet decisions. It is proposed the Board would:
- Review draft reports on significant decisions to the Council's Cabinet/Council and Scrutiny in relation to the housing functions.
 - Monitor performance and delivery of the consumer standard including Tenant satisfaction measures.
 - Set and monitor annual performance and satisfaction targets in accordance with the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.
 - Align the delivery of housing services to the neighbourhood hub model.
 - Monitor the impacts of investment in ensuring we maintain decent homes, fire and building safety (all compliance) and customer satisfaction.
 - Oversight of development arising from the capital programme.
 - Commission and receive service audits and reviews.
 - Receive updating report on the status of the HRA.
 - Receive and consider complaints data to inform service delivery changes and developments.
 - Monitor the debt management and financial inclusion services to ensure that tenancies are sustained whilst income is managed.
 - Oversight of the tenant management organisation.
 - Promote equalities and the diverse interest of tenants and leaseholders.
 - Act in accordance with the Council's constitution.
- 6.5 A terms of reference will be drafted to include the following:
- The Board would meet regularly throughout the year at least six meetings set to be included in the Council's annual timetable of meetings, all meetings will be in person.

- The Board would be serviced by the Director of Housing Operations, supported by Democratic Services. The Board’s role and purpose would be similar to that of the existing Board of Six Town Housing as currently as it relates to housing functions, delivery and performance.
- In order to streamline governance all audit reports would be received by the Council’s audit committee.
- Quarterly performance data on the housing function would be received by Cabinet as part of the Council’s quarterly performance reporting arrangements.
- Scrutiny oversight of the Board

6.6 Legal and financial due diligence is underway. This information is critical to the transfer of the service. Work carried out in relation to contractual due diligence has highlighted that work will be required between the transfer date and the new financial year to strengthen this area of activity. A workplan will be developed to ensure that this is prioritised.

Links with the Corporate Priorities:

An integrated approach to the management of council housing for tenants will help realise the Let’s do it Strategy of public service reform and the Housing Strategy objectives of safe, high quality and mixed tenure housing offer.

Successful delivery of these strategies relies upon new localised arrangements which draw upon the strengths of local communities and reflect the distinct identities of the six towns which make up the borough.

Equality Impact and Considerations:

Inclusion and equity must be at the heart of the Council’s approach to the management and maintenance of its housing. An EIA was provided to support the recommendation to return the housing stock to direct Council control.

Environmental Impact and Considerations:

The model for management and maintenance of council housing contributes to the achievement of a carbon neutral Borough by 2038. STH has made progress in establishing approaches and pilot schemes. Investment through the Housing Capital Programme to modernise and refurbish council housing provides the opportunity to enhance delivery and be cost effective within a fully scaled Council-wide programme.

Assessment and Mitigation of Risk:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Implementation of the agreed vision and service models	Communications Plan, Stakeholder engagement
Financial sustainability of the Housing Revenue Account – PEST environment –	Financial capacity Inflation, cost controls

within the context of the Council’s Financial pressures	Development of a robust HRA Business Plan
Operating within the Regulatory environment	Effective regulatory preparation. Performance management & continuation of the improvement journey

Legal Implications:

Cabinet provided the Director of Law and Governance a delegation to enter in to all legal arrangements to support to the return of management of the housing stock, this report sets out in the body the proposals for the retention of Six Town Housing as a company and future governance arrangements. The proposed governance arrangements are set out in the body of this report.

Financial Implications:

Any financial implications arising from this decision will be contained within the Housing Revenue Account and reflected in the February 2024 budget setting report.

Appendices:

None.

Background papers:

- Cabinet report, November 2023 - <https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/documents/s37681/Strategic%20Housing%20Review%20Future%20Management%20and%20Maintenance%20of%20Council%20Housing.pdf>
- Cabinet report, October 2023 - <https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/documents/s37282/Strategic%20Housing%20Review%20Part%20A.pdf>
- Cabinet report, June 2023 - <https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/documents/s35772/Strategic%20Housing%20Review.pdf>

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Term	Meaning

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