

**AGENDA FOR
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**



Contact: Chloe Ashworth
Direct Line: 0161 253 5132
E-mail: C.Ashworth@bury.gov.uk
Web Site: www.bury.gov.uk

To: All Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillors : R Bernstein, C Birchmore, A Arif, N Bayley,
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:	Thursday, 14 March 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 06th February 2024 are attached.

6 HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY UPDATE *(Pages 9 - 48)*

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

7 SIX TOWN HOUSING UPDATE *(Pages 49 - 56)*

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

8 PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE SUB-GROUP HIGHLIGHT REPORT *(Pages 57 - 60)*

Report from Councillor Vernon, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny 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: 6 February 2024

Present: Councillor D Vernon (in the Chair)
Councillors R Bernstein, C Birchmore, N Bayley, D Green,
T Pilkington, G Marsden, E Moss, M Rubinstein and S Haroon

Also in attendance: Councillor R Gold (Cabinet Member for Finance and Communities) and Councillor E O'Brien (Leader and Cabinet Member Strategic Growth) Lynne Ridsdale, Chief Executive, Kate Waterhouse, Executive Director, Jacqui Dennis, Monitoring Officer and Chloe Ashworth, Democratic Services.

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillor A Arif

OSC.1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Arif, Councillor Haroon attended as a substitute.

OSC.2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

OSC.3 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

OSC.4 MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

OSC.5 MINUTES

That the minutes of the meeting held on 09.01.2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

OSC.6 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET REPORT

Councillor Gold Cabinet Member for Finance and Communities attended the meeting supported by Officers, to provide an update on the Council's Housing Revenue Account Budget Report. An accompanying report had been circulated in advance of the meeting and provided the following information:

- The budget for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for 2024/25 and forms part of the Council's budget setting process for 2024/25.

- It proposed the rent level and proposed increase for Council Housing, Dwelling and Garage rents, Sheltered Support, Management, Service and Heating charges and Furnished Tenancy charges.
- The HRA will transfer back to the Council management with effect from 1st February 2024. The report set out the budget assumptions and has been prepared based on the management costs being the same as the fee paid to Six Town Housing.

In discussing the report the following issues and questions were raised:

Members discussed the increase in rent increases and the effects this could have on individuals and Council arrears. Members were informed that Social housing rents are not pegged to the Local Housing Allowance and there is no requirement to do so as LHA is for private renters.

Social Rents are calculated by reference to a formula rent for each property as set out in the RSH Rent Std in accordance with the Government's Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing 2022. The average 50- week rent in 23/24 is £86.95 (£83.60 for a 52-week equivalent) across all property groupings. For 24/25 that will increase to £90.04 (52 week).

Members requested a breakdown of type of property and what the increase in rent will be to be circulated following the meeting.

Members raised concerns regarding any impacts the raise may have on vulnerable residents and the impact of the debt that may be incurred. Members were advised the Council is mindful of the impact on residents, provision has been increased for bad debt, rent arrears are tracked to monitor impact and we aim to work closely with residents to provide support.

Discussions took place regarding the rent increase for residents in social housing. Members were informed that around one third of the claimants would have their rent covered by housing benefit.

Members requested that the local housing allowance indicative figure is circulated following the meeting.

Members requester further information be provided following the meeting regarding more properties being returned to the Council needing work following tenants leaving and if the 1% target is from Six Town Housing or set by the Council.

Kate Waterhouse, Executive Director advised that there is a current stock condition survey of council housing taking place and due to be complete by the end of March 2024.

Members sought assurances that the rent increase will provide improved repairs and services for residents.

It was agreed:

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report.
2. Members note the rent increase proposed.

OSC.7 THE COUNCIL'S REVENUE BUDGET AND THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Councillor Gold Cabinet Member for Finance and Communities attended the meeting supported by Officers, to provide an update on the Council's revenue budget and the medium term financial strategy. An accompanying report had been circulated in advance of the meeting and provided details of the following:

1. The key elements of the 2024/25 budget proposals and the framework for the longer-term Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2024/2027
2. The latest financial information that will underpin the 2024/25 budget and the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
3. The process that will lead to the agreement of the budget and the setting of the 2024/25 Council Tax at Full Council on the 21 February 2024.

The report is part of a suite of financial reports including:

- Council Tax Setting
- Capital strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27
- Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25
- The Dedicated Schools Grant and the schools' budget 2024/25

Members were informed that on the 05th February 2024 more funds were announced by the government but the council is awaiting formal notification and the terms of the funding.

In discussing the report the following issues and questions were raised:

Members raised questions regarding the justification of some of the key assumptions within the report. In response members were advised that the assumptions are based on inflation projections based on information provided by our financial advisors. The Childrens budget has been constructed this year using a zero based budgeting approach and reflects the spend profile of the Directorate. A brief discussion took place regarding the Children and Young People pressures and plans to support the directorate with the budget.

Discussions took place regarding the NHS deficit and impacts this could have on the Councils budget. Members were informed that we are operating as a system and connect NHS pressures with the Councils budget. Work to support the system is surrounding innovation, reform and the transformation of elective care. Members also discussed the impact of budget deficits with relation to children and adolescent mental health services.

Discussions took place regarding Project Safety Valve monies, members noted that this runs out in 2025. Members were informed that we have placed a submission for the funds to be renewed and the budget is based on this being accepted. If the submission is not accepted it will be a financial risk for the Council.

Discussions took place regarding the allocation of funds towards road improvements. Members were advised that this is made up within the capital programme and there will be an increase on last year's figure. This figure will be for road improvements and highway maintenance such as active travel, additional highways resurfacing and micro asphalt surfacing.

Members requested confirmation following the meeting of the figure for energy assumptions.

Members held discussions regarding council tax banding and the addition of large extensions. Members were advised that council tax of enhanced properties is not reviewed until if/when the property is sold. If a property makes significant changes to the dwelling such as a complete rebuild or split into multiple units it can be reviewed. Members wished for information regarding the methodology for payment of Council Tax on Houses of Multiple Occupants to be circulated following the meeting.

The Committee sought assurance regarding the reliability of external funding. In response members were advised over £75million of the external funding is coming from the government or government backed organisations; £27m from Department for Education, £17m Levelling Up and £19m from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. So the council is confident, if funding is delayed then we would delay the schemes therefore financial risk is low.

Members welcomed the approach taken in the budget setting report but sought assurances on changes required to deliver the savings. These approaches are in line with our corporate strategy and strategic use of financing, treasury management and strategic application of grants and funding.

Members requested the figure for the all-weather pitch be circulated to members following the meeting.

Members sought confirmation that the council is confident that a section 114 notice is not required. Members were advised that work took place over summer 2023 and investments were made to bring in expertise to undertake a fundamental review of financial management procedures and the reserves strategy. During the last year work on treasury management and updates presented throughout the last year have shown improvements and provided confidence to set the current budget.

Discussions took place regarding the Financial Improvement Panel. Members were informed that if the Council can achieve an improved position by Quarter 1 2024/25 the panel could be stood down.

Members discussed the borrowing strategy and changes to interest rates. Members were advised of planned borrowing and how this will be aligned with planned interest rates. Members were advised that the council borrows from the public works lend board which allows the Council to borrow at a slightly lower rate than the bank rate.

Committee members wished to place on record thanks to officers for the work conducted to produce the budget.

It was agreed:

1. The reports be noted

OSC.8 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

COUNCILLOR D VERNON
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 8.46 pm)

This page is intentionally left blank

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 system 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).

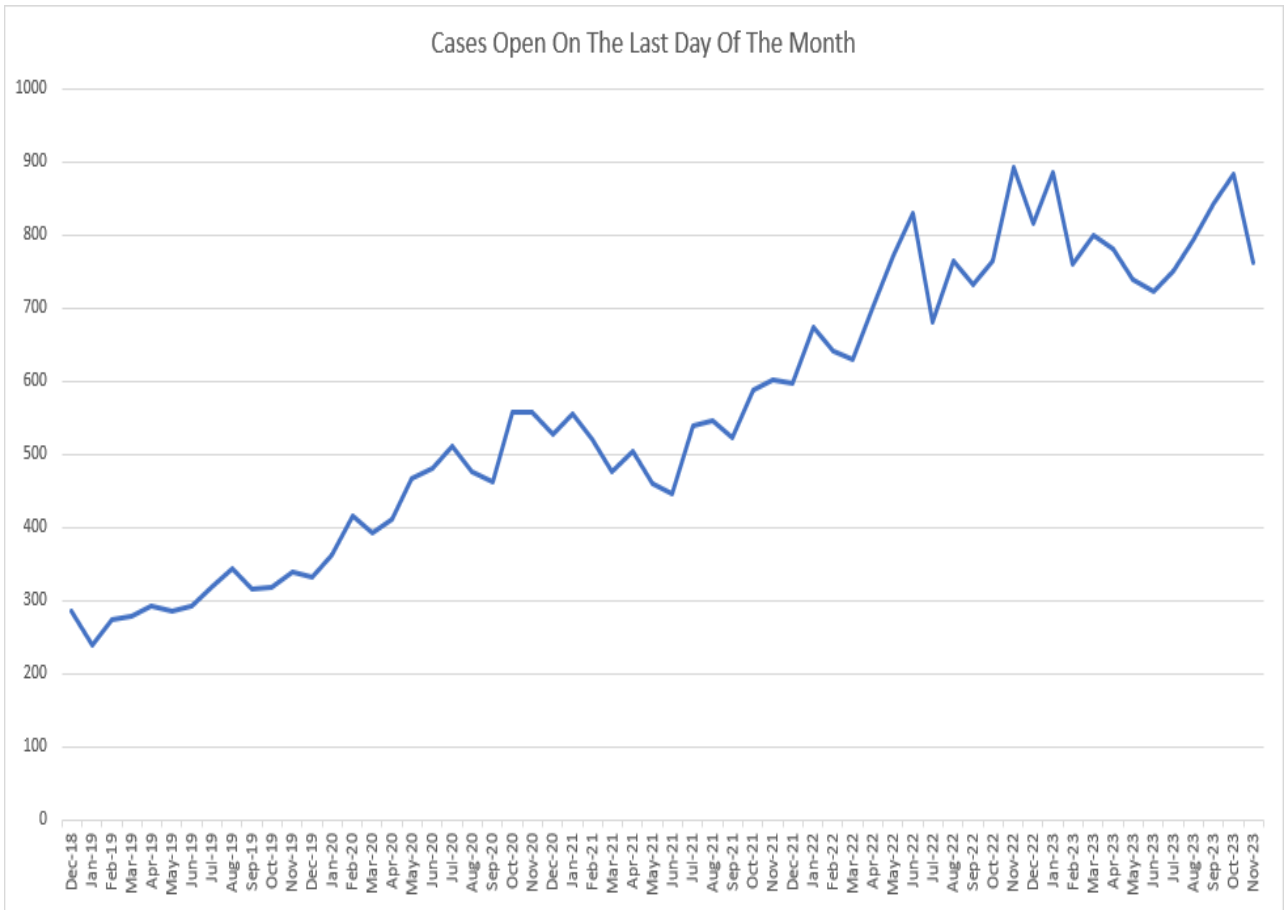


Figure 2. Households in Temporary Accommodation (Dec 2018 to Nov 2023)

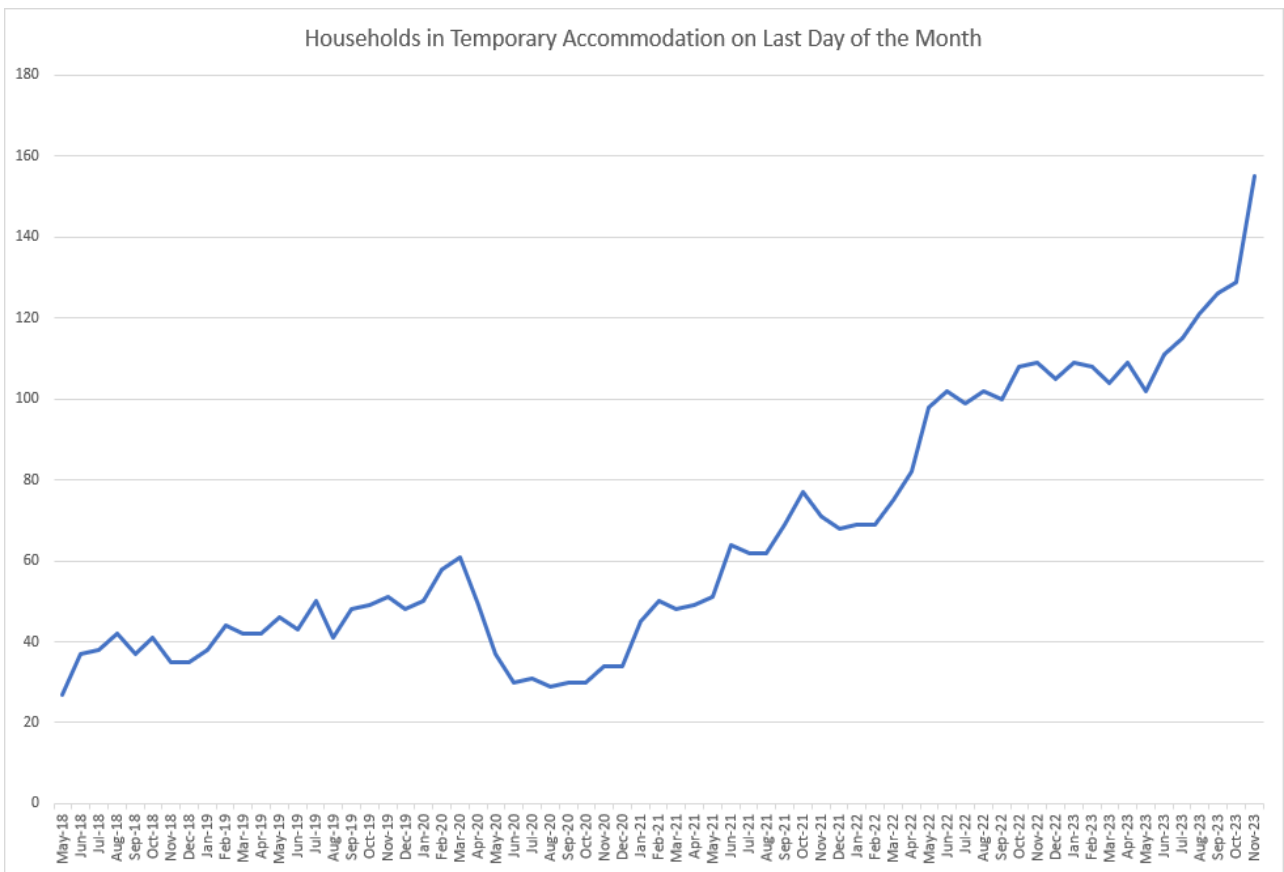


Table 2. Numbers of rough sleepers from 2018/19-2023/24.

		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

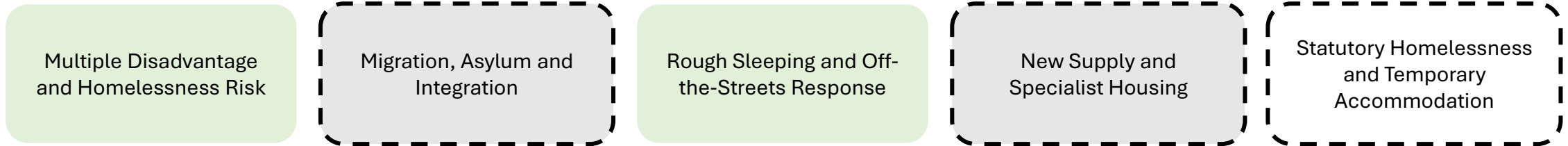
This page is intentionally left blank

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

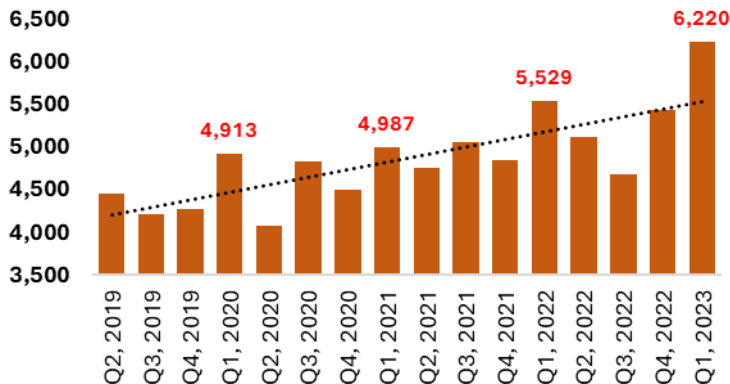
Most services start from an all-time high in terms of demand – even before short-term policy conditions and impending socioeconomic shocks are considered

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:

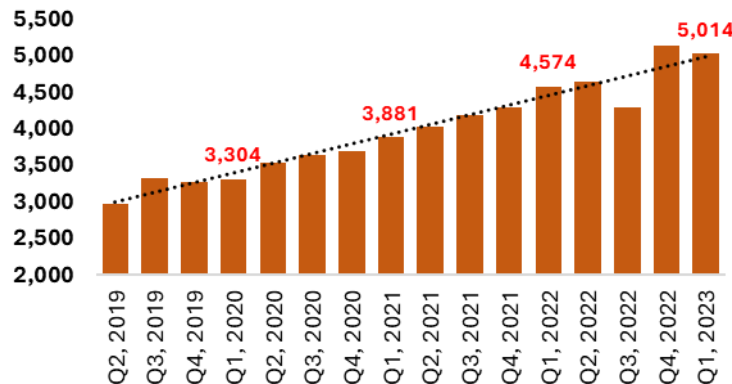
- 2,617 prevention duties were owed; the highest level on record, and 26% higher than the most recent equivalent pre-pandemic period;
- 3,603 relief duties were owed, the highest level on record, and 27% higher than the most recent equivalent pre-pandemic period;
- 5,014 households were resident in temporary 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.

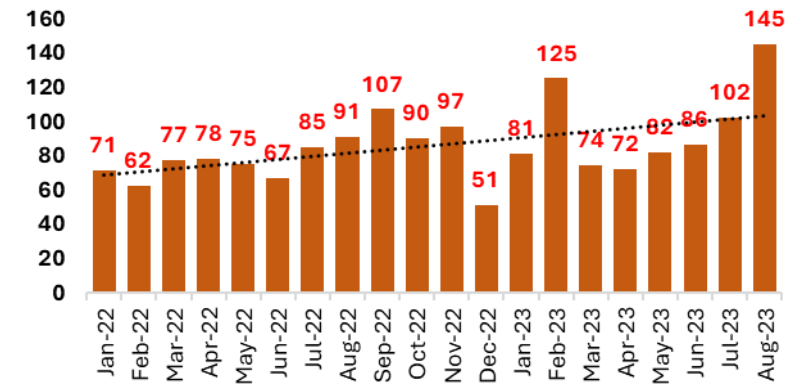
Number of households owed a prevention or relief duty in GM, quarterly, last four years



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





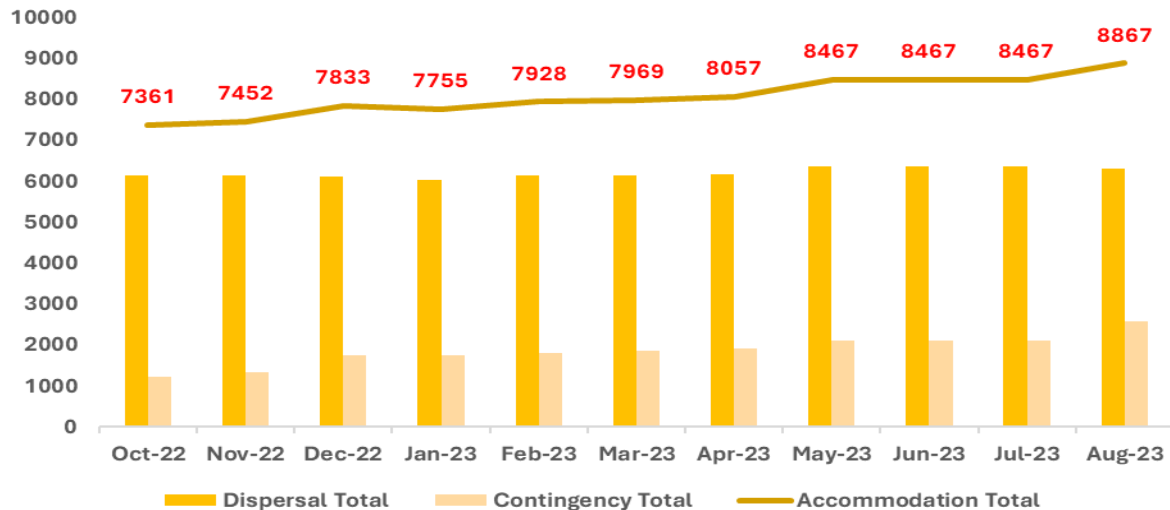
The decision to clear the 'asylum backlog' over a short window

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.

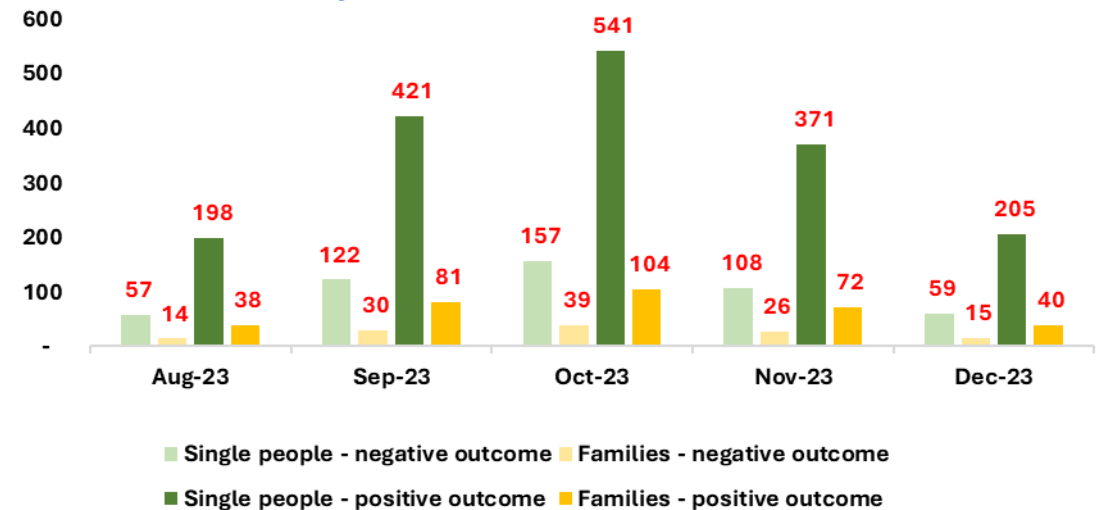
Greater Manchester's received a disproportionate share of asylum dispersal for many years and our asylum population continues to increase. Government's commitment to clear the 'asylum backlog' by the end of 2023 has meant an acute increase in the pace of decisions, and has driven a notable surge in Home 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

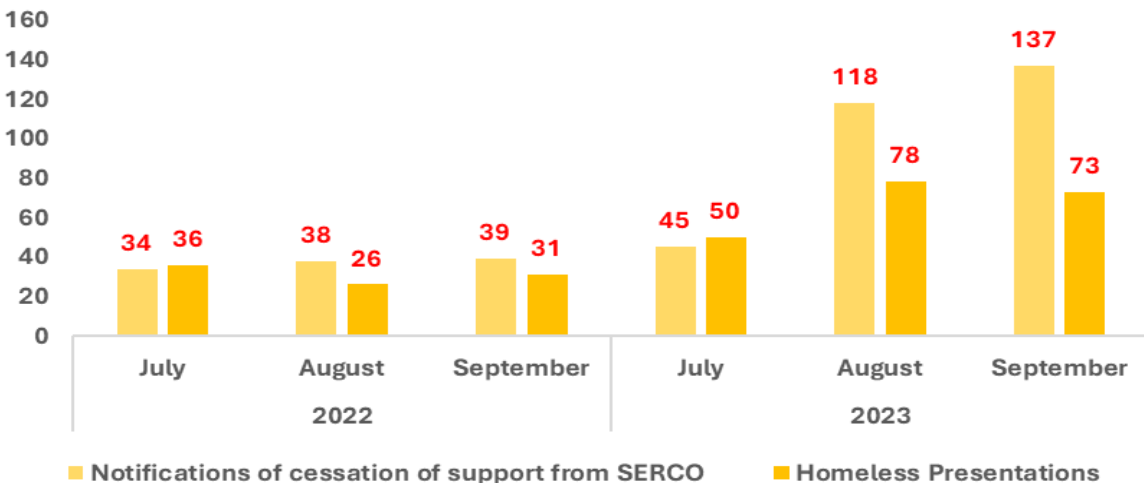
The clearance of the asylum backlog is creating an additional shock to homelessness support services – for both statutory and emergency support.

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:

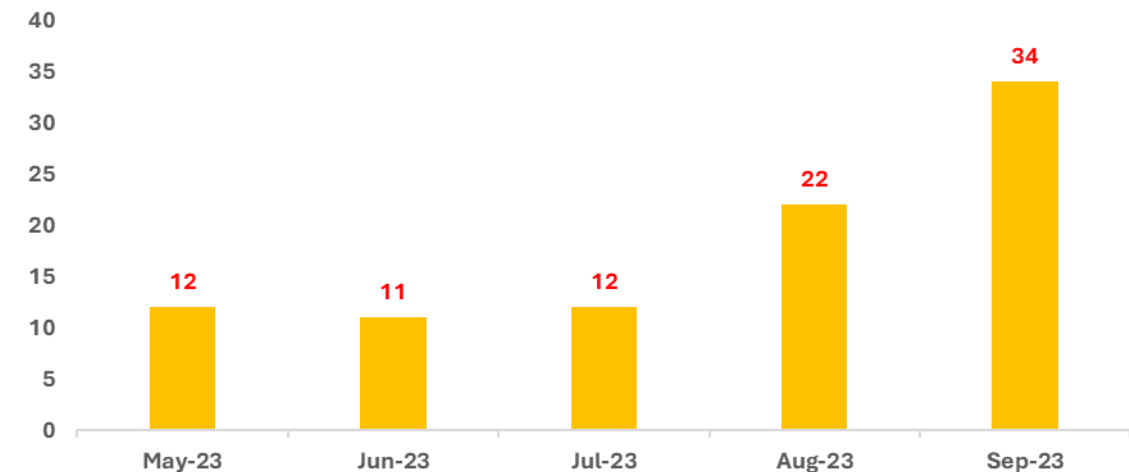
- **116% increase in the number of Homelessness presentations** from Households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness as a result of leaving Home Office accommodation;
- **52% increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation** as a result of needing to leave Home Office accommodation;
- **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

People seeking asylum
11,180

Contingency hotels
Dispersed accommodation

28-day eviction notice
Phone support

21-day eviction notice

Positive decision – limited leave & public funds

Negative decision – no entitlements

Route to indefinite leave. **Likely to settle** in region, with draw to urban areas or national communities.

Require legal support to regularise/appeal. **High risk** of exploitation.

Mental health & isolation

Far-right harassment

Poor nutrition

Lack of face-to-face support

Lack of understanding of rights and systems

Homelessness risk

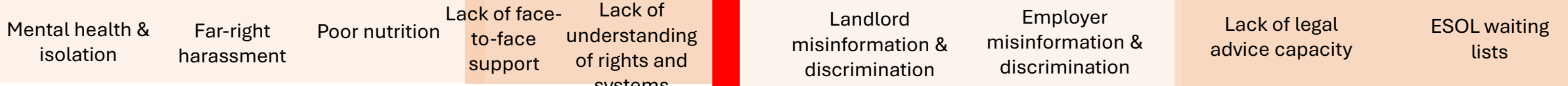
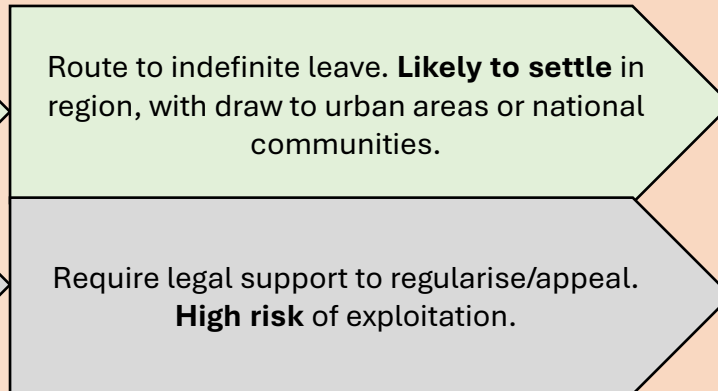
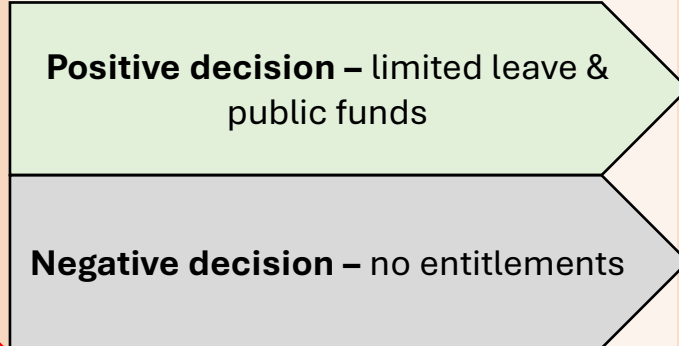
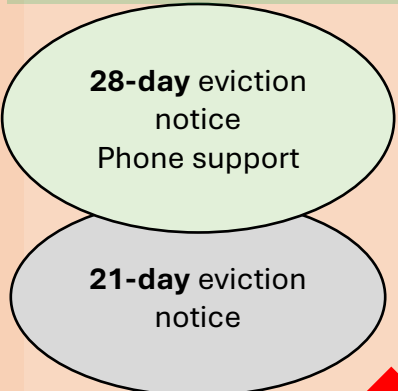
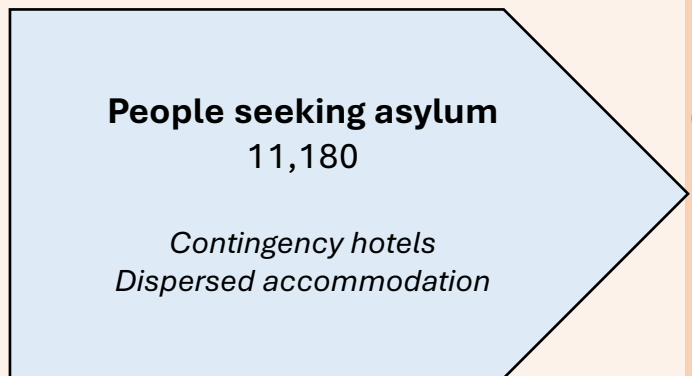
Landlord misinformation & discrimination

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.

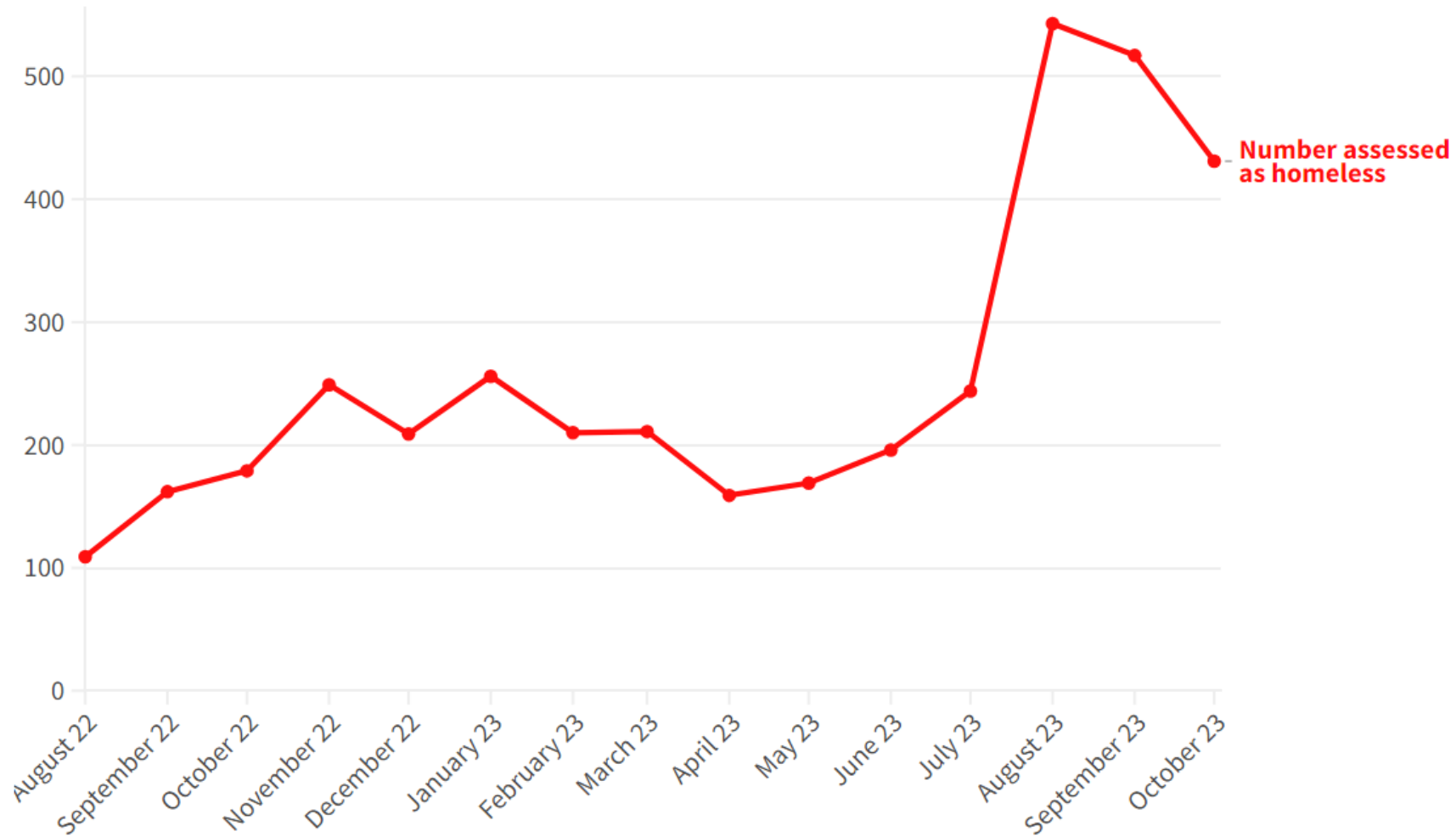
The spike is thanks to changes to the way the move-on period – a “grace period” given for newly-recognised refugees to leave Home Office accommodation – is handled, as well as an influx of decisions as the government tries to clear the backlog.

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



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.

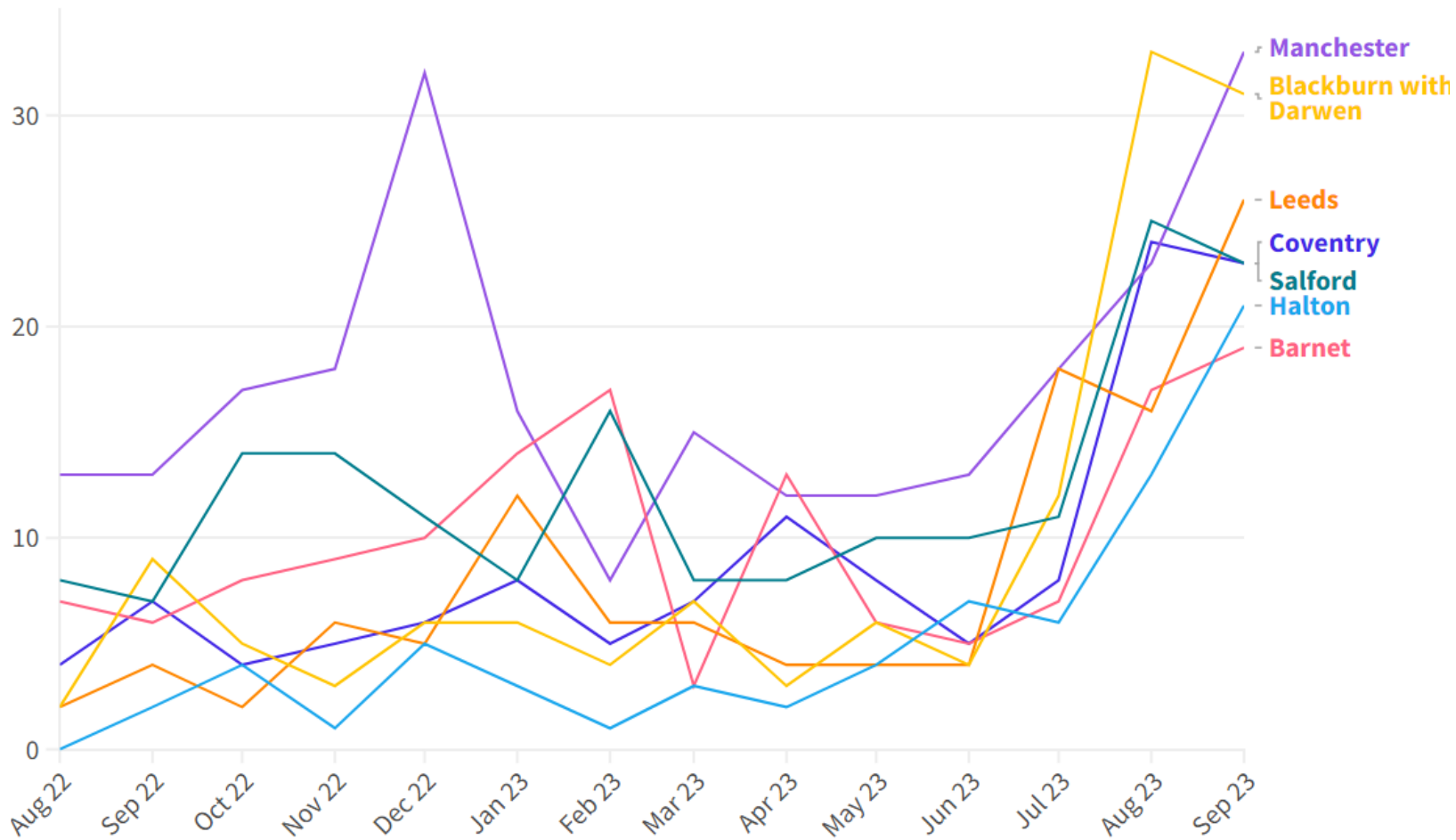
Kama Petruczenko, senior policy analyst at the Refugee Council, said the figures showed an asylum system forcing people into poverty.

“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
--------------------------------	------------------------------

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 Mosscafe 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

This page is intentionally left blank

SCRUTINY REPORT



MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
DATE:	14th March 2024
SUBJECT:	Performance and Finance Sub-Group Update Report
REPORT FROM:	Councillor D Vernon, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee
CONTACT OFFICER:	Chloe Ashworth, Senior Scrutiny Officer

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the work of the Performance and Finance Sub-Group over the last Municipal year.

2.0 BACKGROUND

Previously, Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolved that a Performance and Finance Sub-Group be established to provide oversight of the Council's Corporate Performance and Financial situation. The subgroup was established in 2021, with representatives from the Committee and chaired by Councillor Vernon.

The subgroup was supported in its work by the Cabinets Members with responsibility for performance and finance, as well as senior Officers across the Council.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

During this municipal year the Group has met on the following occasions:-

27.09.2023

11.01.2023

01.02.2023

The focus for this municipal year was as follows:

Corporate Performance – The Committee received regular updates from the Performance team as well as specific areas for greater focus/deep dives.

Council tax collection and arrears update – Members received an update on the Council's Council tax collection process, the management and collection of arrears and improvements the Council have instigated to support vulnerable residents.

Medium Term Financial Strategy- Updates were received on the Medium Term Financial Strategy refresh.

Corporate Core Data Analysis – The Committee received in depth analysis on Corporate Core performance data.

Members have continued to hold the Corporate Core and other Council Services to account by providing continued, effective, and constructive scrutiny of performance and finance within the Council.

4.0 WORK UNDERTAKEN BY THE GROUP

4.1 Corporate Performance

Members considered this item and representatives provided Members of the group with an update in respect of a deep dive into the Corporate key performance indicators in relation to staff turnover, sickness absence, complaints and Freedom of Information requests.

4.2 Deep dive into Council tax collection and arrears update

Members expressed particular interest and concerns in relation to historic debt and collection rates. Members receive assurance that to enable the Council to meet the challenges a new Supportive Collection Pathway is currently being created to address this and other issues. The aim is to align the Welfare and Collection/Recovery teams within Revenues and Benefits to provide a joined-up approach to collection and welfare.

4.3 Medium Term Financial Strategy

Member discussed changes to the Bury Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Members were reminded that the Council agreed at budget setting (2022) the 2.99% council tax uplift and the 2% Adult Social Care precept. In addition the Council considered any grant income coming through and what the Council Tax and Business Rates looked like to work out what the initial gap would be going forward. Members were also advised regarding the pay award. Members discussed that implementation of a focus on a zero based budgeting approach and considering service delivery differently.

4.4 Corporate Core Data Analysis

Members reviewed in depth the Corporate key performance indicators in relation to staff turnover, sickness absence, complaints and Freedom of Information requests. Members discussed Member Casework, Ombudsman matters, Freedom of Information requests and Subject Access requests. Discussions took place regarding the Council's pulse survey, sickness policy and departmental catch ups.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Members of the group supported by Strategic Leads within the Department have met on three occasions, interviewed 12 different Council Officers and two Cabinet Members.

Looking forward, it is proposed that the subgroup completes and information and monitoring of the performance and finance is incorporated into the Overview and Scrutiny forward planner for the new municipal year.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS 2024/2025

1. That, the sub-group concludes.
2. That regular updates be provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the work of the performance and finance of the Council.
3. That a sub-group is established in the new municipal year to look at Council housing governance and performance.

List of Background Papers:-

Scrutiny Annual Report

Contact Details:-

Chloe Ashworth Senior Scrutiny Officer
Telephone number: 0161 253 5130
E-mail address: C.Ashworth@bury.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank