



Working together to Prevent Homelessness in Oldham

2016-2021

Contents	Page
1.0 Foreword by Councillor Dave Hibbert – Portfolio Holder for Housing, Planning and Transport	3
2.0 Executive Summary	4
3.0 Our Vision	4
4.0 Our Partners	6
5.0 Building on our successes	7
6.0 The National, Greater Manchester and Oldham Context	8
7.0 Homelessness in Oldham	18
8.0 Consultation	22
9.0 Our Priorities	22
10.0 Next Steps	23
11.0 Contacts	24
12.0 Partners and Agency Websites	24
13.0 Glossary	24

1 Foreword by Councillor Dave Hibbert – Portfolio Holder for Housing, Planning and Transport

I am very pleased to introduce Oldham's fifth homelessness strategy '**Working together to Prevent Homelessness in Oldham 2016-21**', which has been developed in partnership with a wide range of service users, stakeholders and local agencies.

Since Oldham's first homelessness strategy was published in 2003, there have been significant changes to the way that homelessness is tackled at a national level and in the borough. As a result, the number of people that have been rehoused as homeless in Oldham has fallen by 95% since 2003.

Partners in Oldham have a strong record of working together to prevent homelessness and given new challenges such as those posed by welfare reform and public sector funding reductions and the economy, a commitment to work together will be increasingly required.

It is anticipated that demand on our services will increase over the next five years. Public sector funding cuts mean that we will be required to continually review how we deliver services to ensure that services are tailored to meet need but do not create over reliance.

To reflect this our strategy will be developed across the following themes:

- Access to information and accommodation
- Early intervention and prevention
- Targeted support to those most in need

Working together is key to Oldham's co-operative approach. We want to build on this partnership working to continually improve our understanding of the causes of homelessness in line with the Government's homelessness prevention strategy, 'Making every contact count'.

Councillor Dave Hibbert
Portfolio Holder for Housing, Planning and
Transport



2 Executive Summary

Our Homelessness Strategy

Our new 2016 -2021 Homelessness Strategy supports the over-arching **Oldham Housing Strategy 2015-18** and outlines the proposals for continuing to prevent homelessness and supporting households at risk of becoming homeless. In Oldham, the Housing Strategy focuses on four key themes:

- Residential growth
- Healthy homes
- Improving neighbourhoods
- Building stronger communities

This Preventing Homelessness Strategy sets out:

- Our Vision
- Our Challenges
- What we have done to address them and
- Our priorities for the next 5 years

Our 5 year strategy will be reinforced by an annual delivery plan. This will set out and monitor how we will work with partners to ensure that our key priorities are delivered. The delivery plan will be reviewed quarterly and refreshed annually to ensure that it reflects changing needs, legislation and guidance from central Government.

3 Our Vision

The Oldham Partnership brings together proactive and engaged public, private, voluntary and community organisations in Oldham. All of these partners share the common vision 'to make Oldham a place of ambition where people and communities flourish' and are committed to working with each other and with the people of Oldham to create a productive place with healthy, aspirational and sustainable communities.

Our ambition is to establish a co-operative future for Oldham. We want to create a borough where everyone does their bit and everyone shares the benefit. We want to support people to help themselves where they are able to do so and develop services that are tailored to meet the needs of the people that need them, but do not create reliance.

We recognise that preventing homelessness is far more effective than dealing with its consequences and that there are social and financial costs to households becoming homeless. This new strategy will continue to focus on prevention and early intervention to address the issues that make some households more at risk of homelessness.

On a national level, homelessness figures are increasing and there are concerns that locally we will be unable to maintain our performance. There are an increasing number of households who are approaching services who may have barriers to accessing accommodation or who may have complex needs. We want to continue to ensure that

partner agencies are engaged in the homelessness prevention agenda and recognize their role within this.

3.1 The Oldham Plan

The Oldham Plan 2015–18 has been developed by members of the Oldham Partnership and creates a shared vision, which goes beyond individual organizations or institutions, and a plan for achieving this.

The partnership will focus on pooling and aligning resources where possible and developing investment models and jointly commissioning services that deliver better outcomes, avoid duplication and reduce costs. In order to deliver these 'commissioning clusters' have been developed.

In view of the cross cutting nature of homelessness we need to continue to work with partners to break the cycle of homelessness. In particular, the actions included within this strategy link in to the clusters as below:

- **Co-operatives and Neighbourhoods cluster**
 - Support vulnerable people to overcome challenge
 - Reward positive contribution and support residents to do better for themselves

- **Health and Wellbeing cluster**
 - Keep vulnerable people and adults safe
 - Develop a more joined up and effective health and social care system
 - Invest in preventative services to help people earlier

3.2 Links with other strategies and plans

3.21 Oldham Tenancy Strategy

Oldham Council's Tenancy Strategy seeks to:

- Contribute to sustainable communities
- Make best use of housing stock in the borough
- Provide protection to vulnerable people who may be disadvantaged by tenure reforms
- Help shape the tenancy policies of registered providers (RPs)

The Council therefore supports RPs operating within the borough, continuing to issue one year starter or introductory tenancies for all new tenancies and continuing to let their homes on permanent or longer term tenancies where this is appropriate.

The strategy outlines circumstances in which it suggests that registered providers may issue fixed term tenancies and recommends that the minimum terms of any fixed term tenancies would be 5 years.

In terms of homelessness, the Strategy confirms that the council may exercise powers to discharge the homelessness duty into the private rented sector and would seek to ensure that the offer is appropriate to the needs of the household and the minimum length of any tenancy would be 12 months.

3.22 Oldham Allocations Policy

The Council's Allocations Policy was reviewed in 2016 and seeks to make best use of stock available. This includes:

- Giving priority to households within reasonable preference groups, including homeless households and young people leaving care
- Giving additional support to households who are working or making a positive contribution
- Giving additional support to households where someone is leaving the armed forces

4 Our Partners

Since the implementation of the Homelessness Act 2002, Oldham Council and its partners have made substantial improvements in how homelessness is tackled in the borough. At the heart of our approach has been working with partners to provide effective support to households who are at risk of homelessness. This includes:

- First Choice Homes Oldham (FCHO) who deliver the statutory homelessness, and housing advice service (Oldham Housing and Advice Service) on behalf of the council
- Other Registered Providers (RPs) of housing
- Supported accommodation and support providers
- Voluntary and charitable sector agencies
- Private landlords
- Faith sector
- The Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA)
- Other statutory/public sector agencies

There is a strong and active Homelessness Forum within Oldham which meets quarterly and is attended by people from a diverse range of agencies. There are also a number of other multi-agency groups which meet regularly and link in to the homelessness prevention agenda. These include:

- Housing Benefit and RPs Liaison Meeting
- Move On Planned Protocol (MOPP)
- OHIP Financial Inclusion Group

We want to ensure that partners remain engaged in the homelessness prevention agenda, in recognition that homelessness is often about much more than housing provision.

5 Building on our successes

Oldham's previous Homelessness Strategy covered the period 2013 – 2016 and identified early intervention and partnership working as essential to our approach to prevent homelessness. It was based around four key priorities and our successes included:

5.1 Keep levels of homelessness low and minimise the need for temporary accommodation.

Since 2013, we have:

- Increased the number of households where homelessness has been prevented (2,659 in 2014/15) and maintained low levels of homelessness acceptances (49 in 2014/15)
- Modernised our temporary accommodation provision, moving to a wholly dispersed model with support provided as required
- Delivered a range of multi-agency training to promote awareness and support the homelessness prevention agenda

5.2 Provide support for vulnerable and low income groups

Since 2013, we have:

- Worked in partnership with a range of agencies that support people at risk of homelessness
- Developed an Oldham Offender Accommodation Protocol
- Aligned Floating Support services to All Age Early Help
- Secured additional resources– Help for Single Homeless and Fair Chance Fund
- Developed supported accommodation pathways and a Central Access Point for supported accommodation which has increased diversion from supported accommodation services. This ensures that scarce supported accommodation is targeted to those most in need.
- Commissioned services which prevent homelessness amongst young people
- Reviewed our joint protocol with Children's Services in respect of young people

5.3 Work with partners to mitigate the impact of welfare benefit reform

Since 2013, we have:

- Ensured that staff delivering housing advice services are knowledgeable about welfare reform and the impact on housing options
- 'Rescued' 71 households through the Government's Mortgage Rescue Scheme
- Engaged registered providers in the homelessness prevention agenda
- Reviewed our Pre Eviction Protocol
- Worked with registered providers to understand and mitigate the impact of welfare reform

5.4 Continue to improve housing advice services for our residents

Since 2013, we have:

- Commissioned a new Integrated Housing and Advice Service

- Simplified access to the housing register
- Agreed a Common Allocations Framework across most registered providers
- Increased access to the private rented sector

6 The National, Greater Manchester and Oldham Context

6.10 National Context

The requirement to develop a homelessness strategy is contained within the Homelessness Act 2002. This act began the shift away from responding to homelessness in crisis and placed a requirement on local authorities to focus on the prevention of homelessness.

At a national level, statistics on homelessness are showing an increase across all indicators and there are real concerns that this will continue.

Tackling homelessness was identified as a key priority in the Government's Housing Strategy. **Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England** was published in November 2011. The Government's view is that the causes of homelessness are complex and as such require a multi-agency response. To address this they brought together eight departments in a joint Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness.

In July 2011, a **Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out** was published. This set out six priority areas where Government departments and partners committed to work together to end rough sleeping. This report focuses on ensuring that those single homeless people who are not in 'priority need', including those living on the streets or are at risk of rough sleeping, are assisted to address social and economic barriers to ensure that they do not have to spend a second night without shelter.

A second report: **Making every contact count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness** was published in August 2012. The report focuses on the prevention of homelessness through joined up working between services at every level in areas such as health, justice and benefits. It provides guidance on how services can be managed in a way that prevents all households from reaching a crisis point where they are faced with homelessness. Ten challenges were set for local government which would lead to the development of a 'gold standard' of service:

- adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
- actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
- offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
- adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative
- have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
- develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
- actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme

- have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs
- not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
- not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks

Our new strategy will seek to ensure that services in Oldham achieve this gold standard.

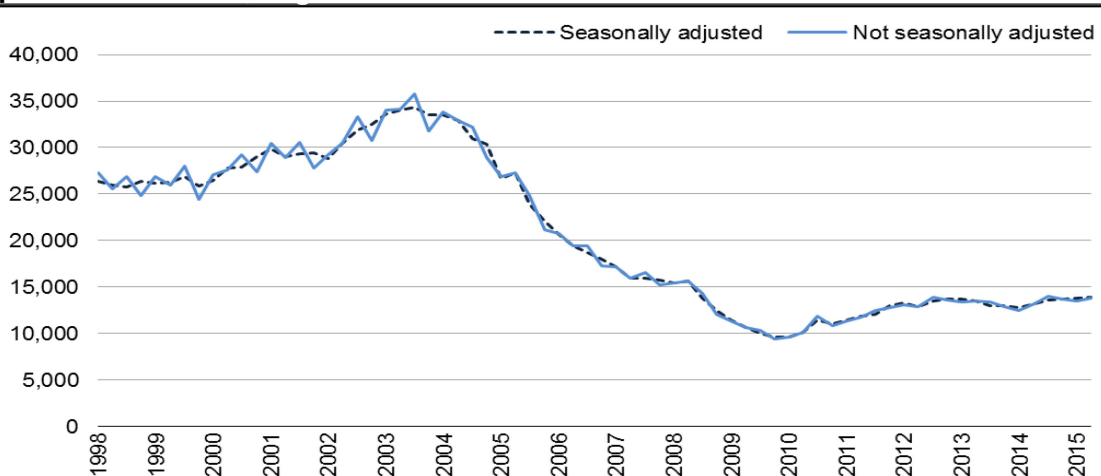
In March 2015, the Government published the report **Addressing complex needs: Improving services for vulnerable homeless people**. This report summarises the work of the joint Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness since its inception in 2010. It draws together a range of information in terms of the most excluded groups and their risk of homelessness and impacts on other services. It highlights that for some people the combination of over-lapping needs compound each other, making it very challenging to address completely within traditional services and that there is a need for a different approach. The report also recognises that some people with complex issues ricochet between services and whilst there is a moral or ethical obligation to support people to address their issues, this is also reinforced by the financial cost to all services of responding to these households in crisis.

The report suggests that services to support these households could be jointly commissioned at a local level, testing new approaches such as payment by results or Housing First models.

6.11 National Homelessness Statistics

Government figures highlight that the number of statutory homelessness acceptances peaked in 2003 at 135,590 before falling to a low of 41,780 in 2009¹.

Table 1: Households accepted by local authorities as owed a main duty each quarter



Source: Homelessness Statistical Release - DCLG August 2015¹

¹ Source: DCLG Statutory Homelessness: July to September Quarter 2015 England

In 2014 the annual number of acceptances at 53,410 was 60 per cent below the 2003 peak, and 25 per cent higher than the 2009 low. The most recent statistics on statutory homelessness published in December 2015¹ continue to show an upward trend¹.

The number of households in temporary accommodation is measured on the last day of each quarter and has also been on an upward trajectory since 2010. On 30 September 2015 there were 68,560 households in temporary accommodation, 13% higher than at the same date in 2014¹.

6.12 The UK Economy

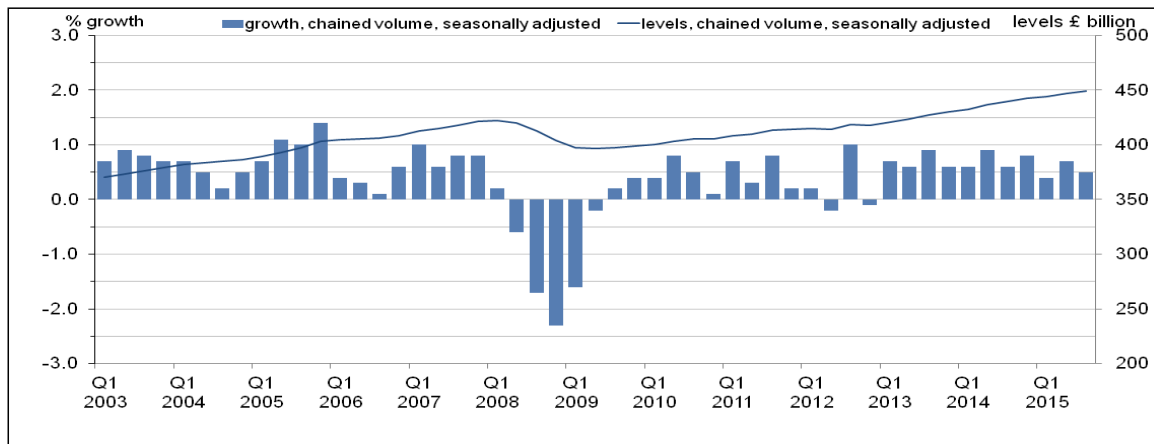
The economy in the UK grew steadily during the 2000s until a financial market shock affected UK and global economic growth in 2008 and 2009. Economic growth resumed towards the end of 2009, but generally at a slower rate than the period prior to 2008².

In 2015-16, the UK deficit remains one of the highest among advanced economies. The Chancellor's Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015 sets out the action required to return the country to surplus by the end of this Parliament in 2019/20³.

The effects of the downturn are still being felt throughout the UK. In particular, the instability of the housing market has put additional pressures on homelessness services and could lead to increasing numbers of households becoming at risk of homelessness. The Bank of England base rate has been maintained at an all-time low (0.5%) since March 2009. As a result, mortgage lending rates for many households have also reduced. There is concern that any increase in this rate, and subsequent increases in mortgage interest, could push more households towards repossession.

Table 2: Quarterly growth and levels of UK GDP

Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2003 to Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2015



Source: Office of National Statistics: Second Estimate of GDP, Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2015²

² Office of National Statistics: Second Estimate of GDP, Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2015

³ HM Treasury: Spending review and autumn statement 2015

6.13 Government Policy

The main Government priority since 2010 has been to reduce the national deficit. Many of the measures introduced to achieve this have placed increased pressure on vulnerable households at risk of homelessness.

The Conservative Government was elected in May 2015 for a 5 year term. As part of their manifesto they confirmed their commitment to continuing to reduce the deficit. In his Autumn Spending Review in November 2015 the Chancellor set out how £4 trillion of Government money will be allocated over the next five years, so the Government can invest in priorities like the National Health Service, defence and housing. As part of this spending review, he announced that there would be further reforms to the welfare system which would seek to save £12 billion a year by 2019/20³.

6.14 Public Sector Spending Cuts

In his October 2010 Spending Review, Chancellor George Osborne announced the biggest cuts to the public sector for decades. Most government departments had to cut an average of 25% from their annual budgets, which would deliver savings of £85 billion by 2014/15⁴. Further savings of £11 billion were announced as part of the Spending Review in 2013⁵. The shape of many parts of the public sector is being transformed to cope with the scale of these changes.

There are significant changes planned to the justice system, in particular the court system. Currently 91 local courts have been identified for potential closure. The Law Society has stated that closures will make it more difficult for a significant number of people to get to court and more adversely impact people living in rural areas, those with disabilities and lower income families. Oldham County Court is one of the courts currently identified. This would mean that hearings in respect of housing repossession would not be available within the Oldham borough and vulnerable households may struggle to access courts in another area.

The Law Society has also said that when this is combined with planned increases in civil court fees and reductions in eligibility for legal aid the closures would serve to 'deepen the inequalities' between those who can and cannot afford to pay.

6.15 Welfare Benefit Reform

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 brought about the biggest changes to the welfare system in over 60 years. Its stated aim was to improve the incentive to work by making it easier for people who have temporary, low-paid work to move in and out of employment without

⁴ Guardian, 22 June 2010 - Budget 2010: Public sector faces deepest ever spending cuts

⁵ BBC News 26 June 2013 - Spending Review: An at-a-glance summary of the key points

losing benefits, and to simplify the benefits system by bringing together several benefits into a single payment. It was also intended to cut increasing expenditure on benefits and reduce benefit dependency.

In Oldham.....it is anticipated that the worst affected families stand to lose, on average, more than £3,800 per year as a result of all the welfare benefit reforms once implemented.

Source: Welfare Reform – Cost of the Cuts 2015, Oldham Council

- **Universal Credit**

Many of the risks and challenges posed by welfare reform were outlined within the last strategy. Given delays in the rollout of Universal Credit the anticipated impact has not yet been realised but there are concerns that a high number of households who are receiving Universal Credit at a local and national level are in arrears. A report by the National Federation of ALMOs (NFA) and the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) suggested that 89% of new Universal Credit claimants were in arrears with the landlord⁶.

This obviously has significant impact for landlords and tenants. In particular, changes in respect of housing payments including the direct payment of housing costs to customers and monthly assessment of circumstances pose challenges for landlords across all sectors

- **Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)**

DHP is paid to local councils by DWP and is intended to support households who need additional assistance with their housing costs over the short term. The award to local authorities was increased in 2012/13 in recognition of the additional pressures as a result of welfare reform. However the award to Oldham was reduced in 2015/16 by 25% to £377,386 (from £500,082 in 2014/15).

In Oldham.....1779 households had their homelessness prevented during 2014/15 through the use of Discretionary Housing Payment

Source: Oldham Council

- **Benefit Freeze**

Working-age benefits, including Tax Credits, Local Housing Allowance levels and HB applicable amounts, will be frozen for 4 years from 2016-17 (this doesn't include Maternity Allowance, Maternity Pay, Paternity Pay and Sick Pay).

In Oldham.....it is anticipated that there will be a loss of income of £52.8 million as a result of benefit freezes by 2019/20.

Source: Welfare Reform – Cost of the Cuts 2015, Oldham Council

⁶ Inside Housing – 17 December 2015 - Nine in 10 Universal Credit tenants in arrears

The household benefit cap for couples and those with children will be reduced from £26,000 per year to £20,000 per year (£23,000 in London) from April 2016. The benefit cap for single people will reduce from £18,200 per year to £13,400 per year at the same time.

In Oldham.....there were 84 households affected by the benefit cap in August 2015
Source: Unity Partnership

- **Young People**

A new Youth Obligation will be introduced in April 2017 for 18-21 year olds in receipt of Universal Credit. They will be required to participate in an intensive regime of support from day one of their benefit claim, and after 6 months they will be expected to apply for an apprenticeship or traineeship, gain work-based skills, or go on a mandatory work placement to give them the skills they need to move into sustainable employment. Failure to do so will result in benefits not being paid.

From April 2017 Housing Benefit entitlement to out of work young people, aged between 18 and 21 claiming Universal Credit, will be restricted. Young people making new claims to Universal Credit will no longer be automatically entitled to the housing element. Parents whose children live with them, vulnerable groups, and those who were living independently and working continuously for the preceding 6 months will be exempt from this measure.

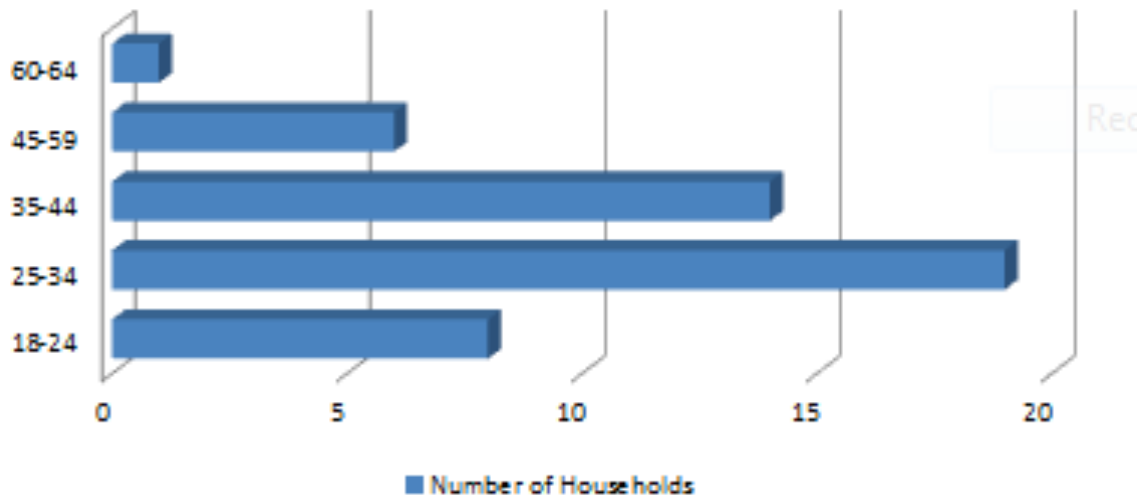
In Oldham.....129 households were in receipt of housing benefit in November 2015 where the main applicant was aged between 18-21 years.
Source: Unity Partnership

- **Shared Accommodation Rate for Under 35's**

The Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) currently applies to most single people under 35 renting from a private landlord. With the SAR, the maximum benefit payable in respect of housing is the rate for renting a single room in a shared house. This is currently set at £57.73 per week for most of the Oldham area.

In the Autumn Spending Review 2015 the Chancellor announced that this would be extended to include young people renting from a social landlord. This will have significant implications for landlords and potentially make it more difficult for under 35s to access accommodation. During 2014/15 more than 50% of households who were accepted as homeless and owed the full duty were under 35 years old.

Table 3: Age profile of households accepted as homeless and owed the full duty in Oldham 2014/15



Source: Oldham Council

In Oldham.....registered providers let 500+ properties with one bedroom during 2015. Over 50% of these were allocated to people under the age of 35. The council and RPs will need to work together to quantify the impact of this change and identify measures to address this going forward.
Source: Oldham Council Housing Register

6.16 Legislative Framework

The legislative framework detailing local authorities duties in respect of homelessness are contained within Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, amended by the Homelessness Act 2002.

The Localism Act 2011 gave Councils greater flexibility and choice over how they deal with homelessness and housing need, particularly in respect of being able to discharge the homelessness duty into the private rented sector.

Two recent case law judgements were handed down by the Supreme Court during 2015 which are arguably the most significant developments in homelessness case law in recent years.

These judgements have raised a number of issues in terms of:

- 1) The requirements when determining the suitability of temporary accommodation in the case of *Nzolameso v Westminster City Council* on 2 April 2015
- 2) Clarification of the test of vulnerability to decide if an applicant qualifies for being in priority need in the cases of *Hotak v London Borough of Southwark*; *Kanu v London*

Borough of Southwark; Johnson v Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council on 13 May 2015

It is anticipated that as a result of both these decisions, local authorities will experience an increase in applications from households who state that they are homeless and a subsequent increase in the number of applicants owed both the interim and main duties. One significant consequence of this is likely to be a rise in the number of households living in temporary accommodation.

6.20 Greater Manchester Context

6.21 The Greater Manchester Combined Authority

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) was established on the 1 April 2011 and consists of eleven members; one directly elected councillor from each of the ten local authorities and the interim Mayor of Greater Manchester.

The agreement between the Government and Greater Manchester in November 2014 announced the creation of the first directly elected metro-wide Mayor outside of London, with powers over transport, housing, planning and policing. The agreement also announced the conferral of powers on GMCA in relation to business support, skills and employment support, and invited the GMCA and Greater Manchester Clinical Commissioning Groups to develop a business plan for the integration of health and social care provision across Greater Manchester. This was the first agreement of its kind, breaking new ground in devolution to city regions in England.

In July 2015, the Government and GMCA agreed further devolution of powers in terms of responsibility for the Greater Manchester Fire Services and transport, and the power to establish a Greater Manchester Land Commission to help Manchester meet its goal of delivering more than 10,000 new homes per annum.

6.22 Greater Manchester Housing Needs Group

Oldham Council works collaboratively with the other Greater Manchester (GM) authorities in respect of housing, homelessness and housing need. The GM Housing Needs Group meets regularly to consider policy and to deliver the objectives contained within the GM Housing Needs Action Plan. Historically, funding was made available through this group to fund initiatives to tackle homelessness across GM. This included a GM No Second Night Out initiative. More recently cluster groups have worked together to secure funding for particular initiatives across smaller areas. This has included Help for Single Homelessness and Fair Chance Funding. Given the devolution agenda it is anticipated that this funding model will be replicated going forward.

6.23 Asylum Dispersal (COMPASS contract)

Since December 2012 Serco delivers the (COMPASS) asylum dispersal contract for the Home Office in the North West of England. Potentially Serco are able to procure accommodation anywhere within the region for the dispersal of asylum seekers, but primarily this has been within the ten boroughs of Greater Manchester, Liverpool and Blackburn with Darwen. Concerns have been raised that the procurement of

accommodation has been disproportionately focused on areas where property prices are lower and where there is already some deprivation and pressure on local services. This has an impact on levels of homelessness in these areas when households are given positive decisions and need to move on from accommodation provided by Serco.

There are changes taking place as part of the Immigration Bill which are likely to lead to an increase in destitution including rough sleeping as more households may be left without recourse to any support following negative decisions.

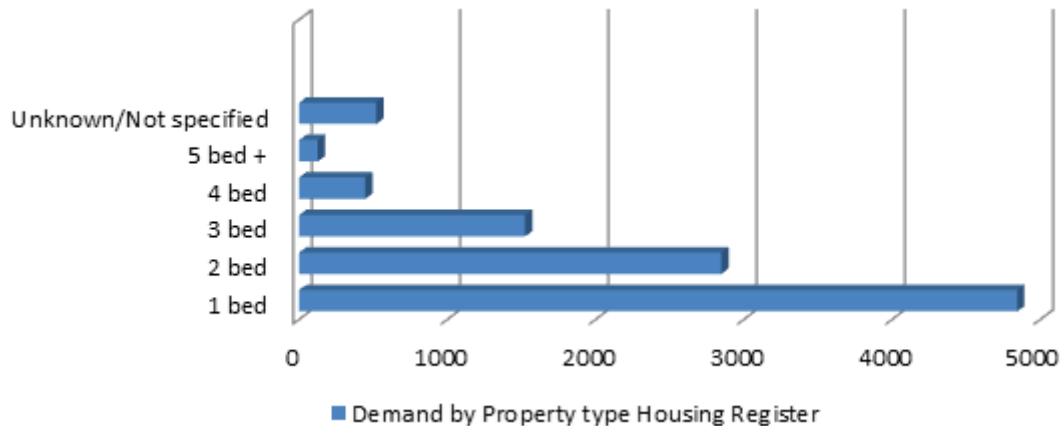
The Council is working with other local authorities in partnership with Serco to mitigate this and retain an influence over the levels of asylum dispersal occurring across the region.

6.3 Oldham Context

There are several local factors which may exacerbate current numbers of homelessness presentations, homeless acceptances and the numbers living in temporary accommodation.

- Oldham has a younger than average age structure. Based on the 2011 Census information 23.8% of people in Oldham were aged 0-16 years old compared to 20.1% of the general population in England and Wales.
- Income levels in the borough are 6% lower in comparison with Greater Manchester and 12% lower than the national average
- The demand for certain property types exceeds the supply of social housing

Table 4: Households on the Oldham housing register and number of bedrooms required



Source: Oldham Housing Register - August 2015

6.31 Reduced Funding – Public Sector Funding Cuts

By 2017 the Government will have cut more than £205m from Oldham Council’s budget. These funding cuts are replicated across other public sector bodies such as the Police and Fire Service.

The council is looking at different ways to make the savings needed including:

- Delivering more services in partnership with other organizations like the NHS, the police and the voluntary sector
- Helping residents to do more for themselves and others
- Reducing some services and in some cases stopping services altogether

6.32 Preventing Homelessness Grant

The Government confirmed its commitment to the prevention of homelessness by continuing to specify Preventing Homelessness Grant as a named grant within the council funding allocation. The amount for Oldham has been confirmed at a constant level of approximately £80,000 per year until 2019/20. Whilst this confirmation and commitment is welcomed there is concern that given current pressures on some of the most vulnerable households this amount does not meet need and this allocation should be increased to support the commissioning of preventative services.

6.33 Rough Sleeping

In Autumn 2014 the total of rough sleeping counts and estimates in England was 2,744. This is an increase of 330 (14%) from the previous year total of 2,414⁷.

Traditionally, Oldham has had low levels of rough sleeping. In common with all local authorities we are required, on an annual basis, to provide a return to government indicating the estimated number of rough sleepers within the borough. This is a snapshot figure and may be provided following an actual 'count' or an 'estimate' following consultation with partner agencies. All of the Greater Manchester authorities use the same night to undertake a count or to estimate numbers to prevent double counting of people who may move across borough boundaries. The most recent figure provided in November 2015 suggested that 2 people were rough sleeping in Oldham.

There does, however, appear to be an increase in the incidence of rough sleeping within Oldham. Although still low in numbers, with 1 or 2 people reported at any one time, there has been an increase in the number of reports and this is something that will continue to be monitored during the life of this strategy.

6.34 Cold Weather Policy

The Council has a Cold Weather Policy in place from 1st November until 31st March each year and works with partner agencies to deliver this. Shelter will be provided on any night where the temperature is anticipated to be below zero degrees. Any increase in rough sleeping will impact on the resources required to provide a response during periods of cold weather.

6.35 Private Rented Sector

⁷ DCLG - Rough Sleeping Statistics England - Autumn 2014 Official Statistics

The private rented sector has doubled in Oldham between 2010 and 2015, increasing from 11.2% (8,923 dwellings) to 20.3% (15,185 dwellings). This increase is in line with national trends where 21.8% of dwellings are rented privately.

This sector already makes an important contribution towards meeting housing need in Oldham and a number of initiatives are in place to support this. This includes introducing a number of 'selective licensing' areas within Oldham. Currently eight areas have been designated for selective licensing of private landlords on the grounds of low housing demand. The scheme seeks to improve the management of private rented properties within these areas.

Linking in with this, the council also supports work to bring empty properties back in to use, including advice and support regarding renting any property privately.

A Private Sector Offer Policy was introduced in 2013 to enable the council to discharge the homelessness duty into the private rented sector, although limited use has been made of this to date. One of the challenges within this strategy will be to increase the role of the private sector in preventing homelessness and in further meeting housing need.

6.36 Care Leavers

Oldham has successfully increased the proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation from 87.5% in 2009/10 to 95% in 2014/15. Priority is given for young people leaving care on the council's housing register and for access to general supported accommodation.

The majority of Oldham's children in care are in foster placements and a key feature of Oldham's approach is to build on this going forward. A Staying Put policy is in place and there are plans to increase the number of Care Leavers accommodated in these placements.

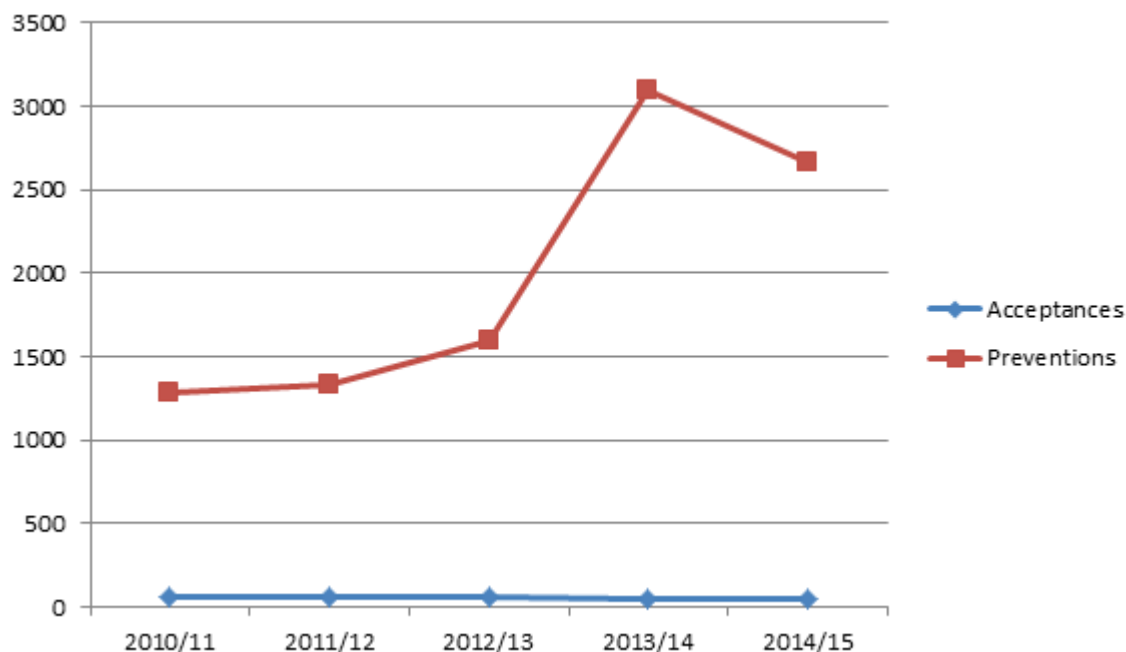
A practitioner group from across After Care, housing and Youth Justice services meet regularly to consider the needs of Care Leavers or Young Offenders requiring accommodation. A joint housing protocol has been developed to clarify statutory duties and establish a seamless service for vulnerable young people. This will need to be reviewed going forward.

7 Homelessness in Oldham

In Oldham, the number of homelessness acceptances (households accepted by local authorities as owed the main homelessness duty) peaked in 2003/4 when 961 households were accepted as homeless and owed the main homelessness duty. This has reduced to 49 during the year 2014/15, a reduction of 95%. This reduction is evident of the changed focus towards prevention.

During 2014/15, 2659 households had their homelessness prevented and during the period of the last strategy over 5000 households. These figures highlight that there are still a significant number of households within the borough who are at risk of homelessness.

Table 5: Profile of homelessness acceptance and homelessness preventions in Oldham 2010/11 – 2014/15



Source: Oldham Council

7.1 Main Causes of Homelessness within Oldham

Taking into account those households who have been accepted as homeless, and owed the full duty and those households whose homelessness has been prevented, the main causes of homelessness within Oldham broadly reflect national trends and have remained consistent over a number of years. These include:

7.11 Termination of assured short-hold tenancy

It is anticipated that this will continue to be a major reason for homelessness in Oldham particularly given changes to the benefits system under welfare reform. We will ensure that all registered providers are linked in to the Pre Eviction Protocol and that they are aware of the support services available to tenants who may be struggling with maintaining their tenancy. We will also ensure that links are established with the council, Unity Partnership and Job Centre Plus/Department for Work and Pensions (JCP/DWP) to mitigate risks in terms of rent payment and maximize use of Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) to prevent homelessness.

7.12 Loss of Lodgings

The council has commissioned a number of services to help prevent this cause of homelessness. This has included commissioning services to support families and young people at risk of parental or other exclusion: Oldham Reconnect (Young Persons Mediation Scheme) and also Oldham Nightstop. The work of Oldham Reconnect has been extended to include people who are in shared accommodation.

A Young Persons Housing Protocol was jointly developed by a range of agencies working with young people in Oldham, including Children's Social Care, Positive Steps Oldham, Youth Offending Service, FCHO and Depaul UK. The protocol is currently under review and it is anticipated that a new protocol will be launched during the first year of the new strategy.

Focused action is required in this area given the barriers that will be in place to young people accessing accommodation associated with changes introduced as part of welfare reform.

7.13 Domestic Violence

During 2014/15, there were 97 cases where households sought assistance or support in terms of homelessness due to domestic violence. Most of these cases were prevented from becoming homeless by accessing the 'Sanctuary Scheme', whereby additional security measures are provided to prevent the household having to leave their home. A large number of households were also provided with refuge accommodation as a short or medium term measure and supported to access alternative accommodation.

The council has been successful in securing funding from Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in respect of 'target hardening' an additional number of properties that provide temporary accommodation for households who are at risk of domestic violence which will ensure that this funding is utilized to support the maximum number of households.

7.14 Mortgage or rent arrears

Oldham was identified by Shelter as a repossession hotspot in 2012 and ranked 16th out of 324 local authorities. The same report in 2014 indicated that the ranking had reduced to 73rd⁸. At a regional level, Oldham was ranked as 11th out of 39 local authorities. This highlights that there are a significant number of households who are at risk and this risk will increase if there is a change in mortgage interest rates.

The council and partner agencies, will continue to raise awareness regarding services available to people who are struggling in the current economic situation. This will include increasing the use of social media to reach households who do not usually access advice services.

7.15 Required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office as NASS support

⁸ Shelter - Repossession and Eviction Hotspots – September 2014

Serco are now the primary contractor in respect of accommodation and support for asylum seekers dispersed to the North West region. We intend to work with Serco to ensure that homelessness is prevented for households who are dispersed to the Oldham area.

7.2 Temporary and Supported Accommodation

7.21 Temporary Accommodation

Oldham Council moved to a full dispersed model of temporary accommodation provision in 2013. Currently 26 properties of varying sizes are provided throughout Oldham, with visiting support provided to households within these units as required. Demand for and utilization of temporary accommodation has increased since 2013. During 2013/14 utilization of temporary accommodation provision was 60% and there were 94 departures. At the end of quarter 3 2015/16, utilization had increased to 96% and there had been 97 departures. There has also been an increase in the length of time that some households are in temporary accommodation due to barriers to accessing move on accommodation including supported accommodation. These may include historical issues in terms of tenancy management or rent arrears.

Whilst high levels of utilization are desired in order to maximize use of the accommodation there is a requirement to ensure that we have sufficient supply to minimize the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

There is not any direct access accommodation in Oldham for homeless households outside of office hours which means that households are placed in bed and breakfast accommodation. Figures for the use of bed and breakfast accommodation have historically been low in Oldham but are starting to increase. During 2015 the use of bed and breakfast increased particularly during periods of cold weather and there is a need to ensure that alternative options are developed where possible.

7.22 Supported Accommodation

There are a number of supported accommodation projects that support the prevention of homelessness in Oldham. These are provided by Threshold and Depaul UK and are split into 3 pathways:

- Women only services – including the refuge
- Young People's services – these are for people aged 16-19 years and some aged 20-23
- Generic services – for anyone over 16 although most 16-19 year olds will be assessed by the Young People's Services in the first instance

Each of the pathways contain a range of accommodation and support options, including accommodation which is staffed 24 hours a day for people with high level needs and accommodation with visiting support provided as required.

7.23 Central Access Point

Access to supported accommodation is via a Central Access Point (CAP) which is delivered as part of the statutory homelessness and housing advice service. A number of common processes are in place including in terms of assessment and move on.

Staff working within the CAP have developed links with a number of other providers to increase move on options for households and this will continue to be required going forward.

The CAP also provides strategic information to the Council about the profile of need/demand for supported accommodation and floating support. Most recent information provided by the CAP has highlighted that people being referred for supported accommodation during 2015 are being assessed as having a higher level of needs than those referred during 2014. Supported accommodation providers also report that there has been an increase in the number of people with multiple or complex needs. We need to develop increased links with partners to address this.

8 Consultation – What have people said to us?

During preparation of this strategy we have consulted with a number of individuals, organisations and obtained the views of customers, through a variety of methods including:

- Consultation with elected members November 2015 and January 2016
- Partner and stakeholder event December 2015
- Stakeholder questionnaire November 2015
- Customer telephone survey and email questionnaire November 2015

Speaking to customers, we have identified a number of issues and challenges and these have shaped our priorities for this strategy.

We are developing an annual action plan and it is anticipated that input will be ongoing through a range of mechanisms and multi-agency groups that our partners are involved in.

9 Our Priorities

This strategy highlights a number of key challenges in relation to continuing the prevention of homelessness in Oldham. All of these challenges require a co-ordinated multi-agency response. We have devised an action plan which will be reviewed annually to take into account changing needs and priorities.

9.1 Access to information and accommodation

Including:

- Increase publicity and information on homelessness prevention initiatives and housing options
- Make best use of all housing stock
- Increase the role of the private rented sector, including shared accommodation options

Examples of activity will include developing new channels of communication to ensure that residents are aware of how to access information regarding housing or services to prevent homelessness. This is likely to include increasing the use of social media to provide information regarding services.

9.2 Early intervention and prevention

Including:

- Prevent homelessness by its main causes in Oldham
- Work together with partners to mitigate the impact of welfare benefit reform

Examples of activity include developing relationships with new partners, for example Job Centre Plus, to support households who might be at risk of becoming homeless and increasing links with the Early Help Service.

9.3 Targeted support to those most in need

Including:

- Strengthen partnerships and work together to support customers with multiple needs and exclusions
- Seek to reduce the number of homelessness crisis situations arising from hospital discharge, prison release, residential detox
- Provide support to customers at risk of rough sleeping

Examples of activity include working with partner agencies to support households with complex needs including those at risk of losing their accommodation due to challenging behaviour or substance misuse issues.

10 Next Steps

10.1 Taking the Strategy forward

This is a strategy that the Council will lead, but is not one which it can deliver alone. The strategy highlights a number of key challenges in relation to continuing to prevent homelessness in Oldham. This requires a coordinated, multi-agency response. Partnership working has been identified as being integral to preventing homelessness within Oldham and a the continued commitment of a range of agencies will be required to drive this strategy forward.

10.2 How the Strategy will be monitored

This 5 year preventing homelessness strategy is backed up by an annual delivery plan. This will be reviewed annually to take into account changing needs and priorities, legislation and guidance from central government.

The Homelessness Forum will lead on monitoring this strategy and action plan. Performance reporting and monitoring takes place on a quarterly basis in respect of the various indicators and targets that relate to this area. Some of these are reported locally to Strategic Housing Board, others are reported quarterly to Central Government in the form of a statutory return.

11 Contacts

Oldham Council, Housing Strategy Team

T: 0161 770 5148 E: housingstrategy@oldham.gov.uk

12 Partners and Agency Websites

Citizens Advice Bureau www.oldhamcab.co.uk

Depaul UK www.depaul.uk.org

First Choice Homes Oldham www.fcho.co.uk

Oldham Council www.oldham.gov.uk

Oldham Credit Union www.oldhamcreditunion.co.uk

Oldham Housing Investment Partnership www.ohip.org.uk

Oldham Foodbank www.oldham.foodbank.org.uk

Oldham Partnership www.oldhampartnership.org.uk

Shelter www.shelter.org.uk

Threshold www.thp.org.uk

Voluntary Action Oldham www.vaoldham.org.uk

13 Glossary

AGMA - Association of Greater Manchester Authorities

ARCH – Association of Retained Council Housing

DCLG – Department for Communities and Local Government

COMPASS - Commercial and Operational Managers Procuring Asylum Support Services

DHP - Discretionary Housing Payment

DWP – Department of Work and Pensions

FCHO - First Choice Homes Oldham

GM - Greater Manchester

GMCA - Greater Manchester Combined Authority

GMP - Greater Manchester Police

JCP – Job Centre Plus

MOPP - Move On Planned Protocol

NASS – National Asylum Support Service

NFA – National Federation of ALMOs

CAB - Oldham Citizens Advice Bureau

OHIP - Oldham Housing Investment Partnership

RPs – Registered Providers of housing

SAR – Shared Accommodation Rate

