Housing Scrutiny Commission

Commission Meeting 4th February 2016

Monitoring the Homelessness Strategy (18 months)

Assistant Mayor for Housing: Cllr Andy Connelly

Lead director: Ann Branson



Useful information

■ Ward(s) affected: ALL

■ Report author: Martin Clewlow, (Head of Service), Caroline Carpendale, (Service Manager).

■ Author contact details: 0116 454 (37) 5128

■ Report version number: V1.4

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 Executive seeks the comments of the Housing Scrutiny Commission on the first 18 months of the Homelessness Strategy being fully implemented.

2. Summary

2.1 In September the Scrutiny Commission considered a report on the impact of the Homelessness Strategy after 12 months. The report described progress with prevention work, a reduction in rough sleeping and some reduction in repeat homelessness. It confirmed that the closure of bed spaces did not mean that current demand could not be met.

2.2 This report considers

- 2.2.1 Operational data for the full 18 months since the implementation of the Single Access and Referral Service in April 2014.
- 2.2.2 Lessons learnt from the first 18 months since the implementation of the Single Access and Referral Service.
- 2.2.3 All data is now directly comparable with the previous year to enable us to monitor and compare trends and any emerging needs.
- 2.2.4 The overall demand for services from people facing homelessness has increased, however successful prevention work has increased in line with the additional demand. (see Appendices 1A & 1B)
- 2.2.5 The combination of more evictions within the Private Sector, less private sector accommodation being available as an alternative housing option and a reduced number of council lets against a rise in the numbers on the housing register is a cause for concern. (see paragraph 2.10)
- 2.2.6 The access to telephone advice for customers has improved following the integration of the Housing Options calls with Customer Services. There has been more calls handled and a 64% increase (19,535 to 32,081) in the numbers of calls received due to longer opening hours and a more dedicated call centre approach.
- 2.2.7 The need to use bed and breakfast for families peaked in Quarter 1 of this year but has now fallen to nearer the 2014/15 levels.
- 2.2.8 The first 6 months of this year has seen a reduction in singles and couples needing temporary accommodation (See Appendix 3B). However the numbers of single people and couples presenting for help and assistance when facing homelessness has increased by 10% from 339 to 373. (see Appendix 1B)
- 2.2.9 The number of very entrenched repeat homeless cases (four or more stays or rough sleeping) has reduced: 118 as at April 2012 and 58 as at

- end of September 2015.
- 2.2.10 Despite the increase in the number of those found rough sleeping over the summer months, the numbers that have met Category J, who were considered to be in immediate or a high risk of rough sleeping in the first two quarters of 2015/16 has reduced from 34% (194) for 2014/15 to 20% (78) of our hostel placements. (see Appendix 8)
- 2.2.11 Work continues in conjunction with the Police to manage the people who the public view as rough sleepers, but are actually beggars who do have somewhere to live or who have refused all offers of assistance (see paragraph 2.24)
- 2.2.12 The new initiatives of Housing First, an extended Revolving Door Service, changes to the Allocation Policy and having an officer at the Bradgate Mental Health Unit are all proving successful (see paragraph 2.29)
- 2.2.13 Occupancy levels across both internal and commissioned bed spaces remains high at 96% (see Appendices 9 and 10)

Conclusion

- 2.3 The overall conclusion is that the progress reported in September is being sustained and the reduction of bed spaces prior to the implementation of the current strategy has not meant that demand cannot be met.
- 2.4 If new initiatives further reduce repeat homelessness and average length of stay, less hostel spaces for single people may be needed.
- 2.5 Reducing the number of single hostel spaces before we are confident or not of the success of the new initiatives runs the risk of more rough sleeping

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- 2.6 There is no change to the current strategy at this time due to the continued increase of those requesting assistance when facing homelessness.
- 2.7 The Scrutiny Commission receives a further report in July 2016 after 2 full years of implementation including a review of whether a reduction in the number of hostel bed spaces is a viable option at that time.

3. Report

Housing Advice and Homelessness Prevention

- 3.1 Housing Options have two main functions. They manage and maintain the Housing Register and provide housing advice and assistance to anyone who may be facing homelessness with the aim of prevention.
- 3.2 As at 30 September 2015 there were 10486 applicants (11% increase) on the Housing Register (9461 as at 1 April 2015). The number of families on the Housing register has risen from 5280 to 5809 (10% increase) in the first two quarters of 2015/16. The number of families rehoused in the same period is 403 (1562 families rehoused in the past 18 months).

- 3.3 The number of single people and couples on the Housing Register has also risen from 4181 to 4677 (12% increase). The number of singles rehoused in the period April September 2015 is 391 (1411 singles rehoused in the past 18 months.
- 3.4 Comparing the number of lettings from the Housing Register for the six months (01/04/2015 30/09/2015) against the same period last year, there has been a 16% decrease, from 940 to 794 people rehoused.
- 3.5 The number of families rehoused in the period April September 2015 is 403 (1562 families rehoused in the past 18 months). The number of singles rehoused in the same period is 391 (1411 singles rehoused in the past 18 months).
- 3.6 249 (31%) of all lettings were for the prevention of homelessness or to households who became homeless. Over the 18 month period there has been 833 lettings (28%) for the prevention of homelessness.
- 3.7 The Housing Options Service is now established in York House. The Customer Service Centre provides a triage service for those making an initial contact wanting to see Housing Options. All crisis presentations (those who are saying they are homeless on the day) are referred to the Housing Options Service to be seen for immediate, specialist advice and assistance. Customer Services also refer anyone who may be facing homelessness for early intervention and the more complex issues arising from Housing Register enquiries. A further initiative has been introduced whereby Housing Options surgeries are now held at the Dawn Centre Drop In Service to meet with the most chaotic service users to provide homelessness, housing advice and assistance.
- 3.8 The number of calls handled from the 1st April 2015 to 30th September 2015 for the Housing Options Service was 32,081. 22,604 were basic housing register enquiries, with a further 9477 calls where the customer required more detailed advice and assistance. 4497 calls needed to be transferred to the Emergency On-Call Team in Housing Options as they needed urgent specialist advice.
- 3.9 The demand for the homelessness services provided by Housing Options in the period April September 2015 saw 1301 households (572 families, 729 singles and couples) asking for help saying that they were facing homelessness. The figures for the 18 month period are 3464 households (1546 families, and 1918 singles and couples). Comparing the first 6 months of 2014/15 to the first 6 months of 2015/16, there was 893 in 2014/15 compared to 1301 (46% increase) in 2015/16. (See Appendices 1A and 1B)
- 3.10 The main reason for the increase in demand has been due to more evictions within the Private Sector. Landlords can achieve higher rental income than what is covered by the local housing allowance rates (housing benefit). This is achieved by landlords not renewing existing tenancy agreements and evicting their tenants. We have also had a significant drop in the number of properties that we have been able to secure under rent deposit initiatives due to the same reason. This coupled with the reduced number of council lets against a rise in the numbers on the housing register is forcing households into homelessness and placing increased pressure on homelessness services. (see Appendix 5)

- 3.11 The prevention of homelessness remains the main aim and objective for the Service and despite the increase in numbers presenting for help the success rate for prevention has remained the same. We prevent homelessness by either sustaining the present accommodation (see Appendix 4) or by providing an alternative housing option (see Appendix 5). The reasons for customers seeking assistance remain consistent. They include termination of assured shorthold tenancies, fleeing domestic violence, required to leave National Asylum Support Service accommodation following a positive decision on their asylum application, and asked to leave by friends and relatives.
- 3.12 We are starting to feel the impact of welfare reform changes with more customers seeking help for affordability issues specifically in the private rented sector.
- 3.13 The most successful means of prevention remain:
 - Resolving Housing Benefit problems
 - Resolving rent or service charge arrears in the social or private rented sector
 - Providing initial advice and assistance to enable someone to remain in accommodation in the private or social rented sector.
 - Mediation using external or internal family mediators
 - Negotiation or legal advocacy to ensure that someone can remain in accommodation in the private rented sector
 - Conciliation including home visits for family/friend threatened exclusions
 - Debt Advice

Family homelessness

- 3.14 In the period April September 2015, 572 families sought assistance when facing homelessness compared with 406 families for the same period last year, this is a 40% increase. For the 18 month period there were 1546 families.(see Appendix 1A)
- 3.15 142 families needed to go into temporary accommodation (through the Single Access and Referral Service, in Housing Options) in the period April September 2015 compared to 113 families for the same period last year, this is a 25% increase. For the 18 month period there have been 383 families needing temporary accommodation. The emphasis on prevention of family homelessness continues with admissions to a hostel or bed and breakfast being a last resort. (see Appendix 2).
- 3.16 Unfortunately the prevention of homelessness is not possible in all cases due to the presenting problem and the Housing Options Service is the safety net for cases such as those fleeing domestic violence or other forms of harassment and unlawful evictions. Early interventions are key in managing this process and reduces the need for families having to enter temporary accommodation.
- 3.17 The rise in the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families highlighted in the 12 month report continued into quarter 1 of this year with a peak of 44 families needing to be accommodated. This provoked contingency arrangements

- to manage this which has successfully seen the number reduced to 19 in quarter 2. This represents a 57% reduction and is nearer to the 2014/15 levels.
- 3.18 This was primarily achieved by the use of Housing First to place those families who have no support needs and were homeless through no fault of their own directly into accommodation either in the private sector or a social housing let. This has been positively received as it helps the family return to a settled lifestyle without the need to enter temporary accommodation.
- 3.19 There is no repeat family homelessness as all who are rehoused as a result of being homeless are offered floating support to help them sustain their new accommodation, and the Family Support Service continues to work with those most in need.

Working with repeat single homeless and rough sleepers

- 3.20 In the period April September 2015, 729 single people or couples sought assistance when facing homelessness compared to 487 for the same period last year, this is a 49% increase. For the 18 month period there were 1918 singles and couples. (See Appendix 1B)
- 3.21 There continues to be a number of people in the city at any one time whose lifestyle has led to them finding it very hard and sometimes impossible to manage and sustain a home. They become entrenched in a cycle of sleeping on friend's sofas, returning to family who then cannot cope, going into prison or mental health hospitals, coming in and out of homeless hostels and sometimes, but by no means in all cases, rough sleeping.
- 3.22 The homelessness services do not believe anyone's behaviour is completely intractable, but it can become entrenched and difficult to address.
- 3.23 In recognition of this the Strategy includes
 - Monitoring of all repeat homelessness.

In the 18 months period (April 2014 – September 2015) 308 (29%) of the single people who came into Council hostels had experienced at least two previous stays in hostel accommodation. In contrast the Council sees no repeat family homelessness. This is a reduction (from 37%) of the proportion identified prior to adopting the new Homelessness Strategy (See Appendix 3A)

There have been 27 evictions from council accommodation in the in the first two quarters of 2015/16 (19 singles/childless couples and 8 families). Only 2 of the single people sought assistance after eviction (repeats) and were subsequently placed in a hostel. None of the families have approached the Options Service for further help yet.

The Repeat Homeless list is used to target multi-agency work with those
with the most entrenched homelessness lifestyle. It lists as a snapshot, those
people receiving Council funded homelessness services that have been in
hostels four or more times in the last two years or who repeatedly sleep rough.

Since the list was compiled in April 2012 there have been 256 individuals who met this criterion. The number fluctuates as people join and leave the list.

From April 2012 to Sept 30th 2015 111 individuals have been helped into a settled lifestyle. At the end of September 2015 the number on the list was 58. Multi-agency casework with the people on the list is discussed at meetings chaired by the City Council's Revolving Door Team and supported by the City Council's Rough Sleepers Outreach Team, The Dawn Centre, Housing Options and external services. Support is focused on trying to secure long term sustainable housing for these individuals.

- The realignment of staffing resources means we can now provide more intensive support and work with people who have had 3 or more stays in hostels to further break the cycle of repeat homelessness.
- In 2015/16 for the first 2 quarters, the Outreach Team has recorded 103 individuals as rough sleeping. This was due to a significant increase over the summer months for which there was no single reason attributed to the rise in numbers. The numbers have now reduced and are more in line with 2014/15 levels. We believe that there is no one who rough sleeps because we do not have a bed space to offer with the exception of those persons form abroad that are ineligible for housing assistance and refuse to be reconnected to their country of origin. (See Appendix 6)
- 3.24 Ongoing work with the Police and the Drug and Alcohol Team continues to highlight again that many people who the public view as rough sleepers are actually beggars who do have somewhere to live. At the end of September 2015 there were 15 individuals identified as prolific beggars, out of which 12 had somewhere to stay: one was in a hostel, four in supported housing, four had tenancies, and three were living with family and friends. The Police are actively targeting beggars, where appropriate issuing warning letters and Community Protection Notices.
- 3.25 Work continues to reduce those that have repeat stays in hostels by looking at alternative solutions and providing the intensive support to a wider number of individuals who represent to services.

Adopting new ways of working within the current Strategy

- 3.26 The implementation of some of the principles of the 'Housing First' model as described in the previous report are already proving to be an effective tool to prevent homelessness for those cases who are facing homelessness but their only need is accommodation (no support needs identified) or to provide other alternative solutions for the most entrenched cases where the hostel environment is not conducive with addressing lifestyle issues to break the cycle of homelessness.
- 3.27 To date 32 families have been assisted using this model and 16 singles. All of these cases would have been placed in temporary accommodation if this initiative had not been used.

- 3.28 The success of this pilot has been a major contributory factor to the significant reduction in the use of bed and breakfast for family cases.
- 3.29 The following changes have now been made within our internal processes
 - Working more intensively with all service users who return to the hostels after a previous stay.
 - The "Revolving Door" Service now works with all service users who return for a 3rd time.
 - Analysing the reasons why single people who come into hostels do not resolve their underlying housing problems and return. This includes looking at how we keep in touch with those most likely to return and encouraging people not to leave their temporary accommodation abruptly with no clear plan and if they return focussing on their previous stay and what and why it went wrong. This is part of meeting the Strategy's aim to avoid crisis and reduce repeat homelessness presentations.
 - The change to the Allocation Policy for the rehousing with rent arrears was fully implemented on 10th August 2015. This has removed the most significant barrier for people in temporary accommodation who are ready and need to move on into an independent tenancy.
 - The average wait to achieve an offer of 2 bed accommodation from the Housing Register has increased to 11 months. Therefore households who are threatened with homelessness who are awarded priority to reflect their insecure accommodation have little chance of achieving an offer to prevent them becoming homeless. Due to this shortage, it has been agreed with Housing Benefits and endorsed by the Assistant Mayor for Housing that Discretionary Hardship Payments are used to support the shortfall in rents due to bedroom tax rules. This means that any case that is benefit dependent who have 2 children of the opposite sex, 8 years and over can be rehoused into 3 bedroom houses to relieve the demand for two bedroom accommodation
 - Implementation of a revised and improved joint assessment between Housing and Children's Services to provide protection for any 16/17 year old faced with homelessness.
 - Reviewing the co-ordination and joint working with mental health and drug and alcohol services with the Directors of Public Health & Adult Social Care and working collaboratively with partners across the city to implement and embrace the theme of 'Making Every Adult Matter'.
 - The successful pilot of a Housing Options Officer being based at the Bradgate Mental Health Unit to work with patients who are well enough to leave hospital and to prevent any delayed transfer of care. This is a joint initiative between the City and County to manage discharges from hospital for those who have no accommodation to return to or their current accommodation is no longer suitable. This has now been extended to a full-time post and funded by the NHS with the likely outcome that it will be mainstreamed. This initiative is also now being piloted at the Leicester Royal Infirmary.

Supply and demand for temporary accommodation for single people and childless couples

- 3.30 In confirmation of what was reported after 12 months data, the 18 months data shows that the level of temporary accommodation, under the current eligibility criteria is still felt to be broadly sufficient to meet demand. Work continues to assess the balance of provision between specialist and general provision for single people. (See Appendix 3A)
- 3.31 Officers believe that due to the significant increase in both families and singles approaching for help when facing homelessness any further reduction in provision would mean greater use of bed and breakfast for cases where the Council has a duty to the person (all families, some singles) and the risk of more rough sleeping.
- 3.32 Category J is for those "rough sleeping or considered to be in immediate and high risk of rough sleeping" (see Appendix 8). This is the most difficult category for Housing Option Officers to assess at the point of request. The numbers that have met Category J in the first two quarters of 2015/16 has reduced from 34% (194) for 2014/15 to 20% (78) of our hostel placements. Officers are starting to use Housing First and have received further training to enable better and more detailed assessments on the day.
- 3.33 Out of the 94 people assessed as at risk of rough sleeping in the first two quarters of 2015/16, we were unable to accommodate 16. Of these only 3 went on to rough sleep and one refused the temporary accommodation offered. (see Appendix 8).
- 3.34 Occupancy rates across all internal and externally commissioned bed spaces remains high at 96% (see Appendices 9 and 10). This is calculated on a nightly basis across each quarter and broken down by client group.

Day Centres (The Y Support Service and Centre Project)

- 3.35 The Y Support Service which is based within the Dawn Centre is grant funded to see up to 60 clients a day on a drop in basis. For those people identified as being in need of support, but not receiving this from other agencies, the service will produce personal development plans with them. Between April 2014 and September 2015 the Y Support Service worked with 90 people to develop such plans of which 88 cases resulted in greater independence for the client. The Y Support Service is regularly reviewed and is achieving good outputs
- 3.36 The Centre Project is less formal, but is felt to be a useful project for working with those at risk of homelessness.

Employment Project (LeicestershireCares)

3.37 Leicestershire Care is grant funded to deliver a support programme to 40 people per year which aims to strengthen employment opportunities for those who are in temporary accommodation or those in the process of resettlement with a history of, or at greater risk of homelessness.

3.38 Between April 2014 and September 2015 83 referrals were made to the project of which 7 people failed to engage with the support offered. Of the 76 engaging with the project, 49 finished the programme during the period, all having completed an initial interview, support plan and/or needs assessment associated with their employment skills and work readiness. Almost all engaged in further activities, including training, education, work placements and/or paid employment. At the end of September 2015, 27 continued to receive ongoing support.

Befriending Project

3.39 This is a new voluntary sector project created in recognition of the need to address loneliness and isolation. One Roof, Leicester, which is a consortium of faith groups from across the City is the provider of the service in Leicester. The Project has only just been established therefore it is too early to report on outcomes.

4. Financial, legal and other implications

- 4.1 Financial implications Peter Coles Principal Accountant Ext 374077
 - 4.1.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.
- 4.2 Legal implications Jeremy Rainbow Principal Lawyer (Litigation) Ext 371435
 - 4.2.1 There are no specific legal obligations arising from this report.

4.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

4.3.1 None at present

4.4 Equalities Implications

4.4.1 This report is not proposing any changes in Strategy or policy. All changes are designed to better help those who face homelessness, which include many with protected characteristics.

5. Background information and other papers:

Monitoring Homeless Strategy (12 months) Report to Executive – 13th August 2015 Monitoring Homeless Strategy (9 months) Report to Executive – 10th March 2015 University of York Centre for Housing Policy – Housing First in England:

An evaluation of nine services. February 2015

Homeless Spending Review Report to Executive 30 September 2014

6. Summary of appendices: titles and numbering to be updated.

Appendix 1A: Numbers of Families requesting Assistance and numbers where

homelessness prevented.

Appendix 1B: Numbers of Singles and Couples requesting Assistance and

numbers where homelessness prevented Homelessness

Appendix 2: Homeless Family Households needing Temporary Accommodation

01/04/14 - 30/09/15.

Appendix 3A: Singles, Couples & Others requesting Temporary Accommodation

from 01/04/14 to 30/09/15 (Pie Chart)

Appendix 3B: Homelessness: Singles & Couples 01/04/14 – 30/09/15.

Appendix 4: Prevention (ALL households) by Sustainment. Appendix 5: Prevention (ALL households) by Rehousing.

Appendix 6: Number of Individual Rough Sleepers

Appendix 7: Current eligibility criteria for offer of emergency or temporary

accommodation

Appendix 8: Supply and demand for temporary accommodation for single

people meeting Category J criteria (rough sleeping or risk of rough

sleeping) 01/04/14 - 30/09/15 (18 months).

Appendix 9: Temporary Accommodation - Occupancy Rates as % Available

Units by Client Group, April 2014 - September 2015

Appendix 10: Temporary Accommodation - Total Cumulative Utilisation,

April 2014 - September 2015

7. Is this a private report (If so, please indicated the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

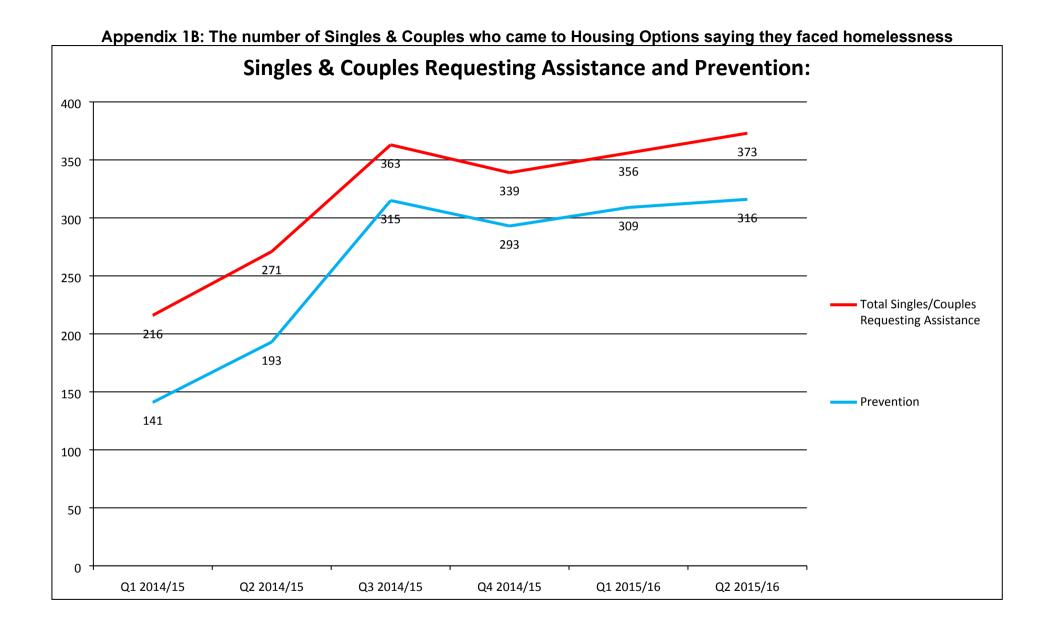
No

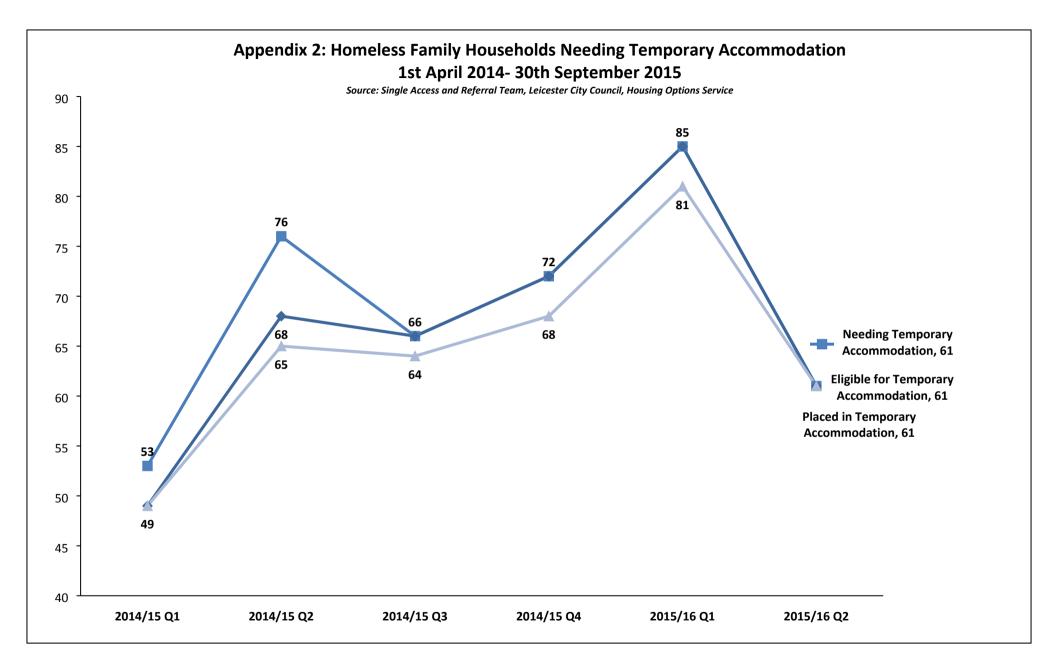
8. Is this a "key decision"?

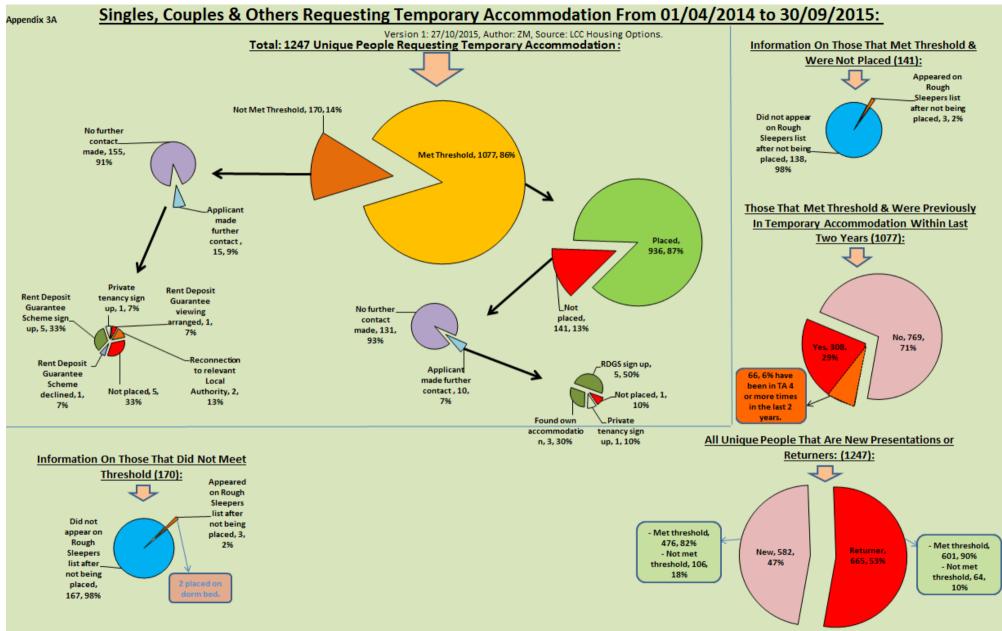
No

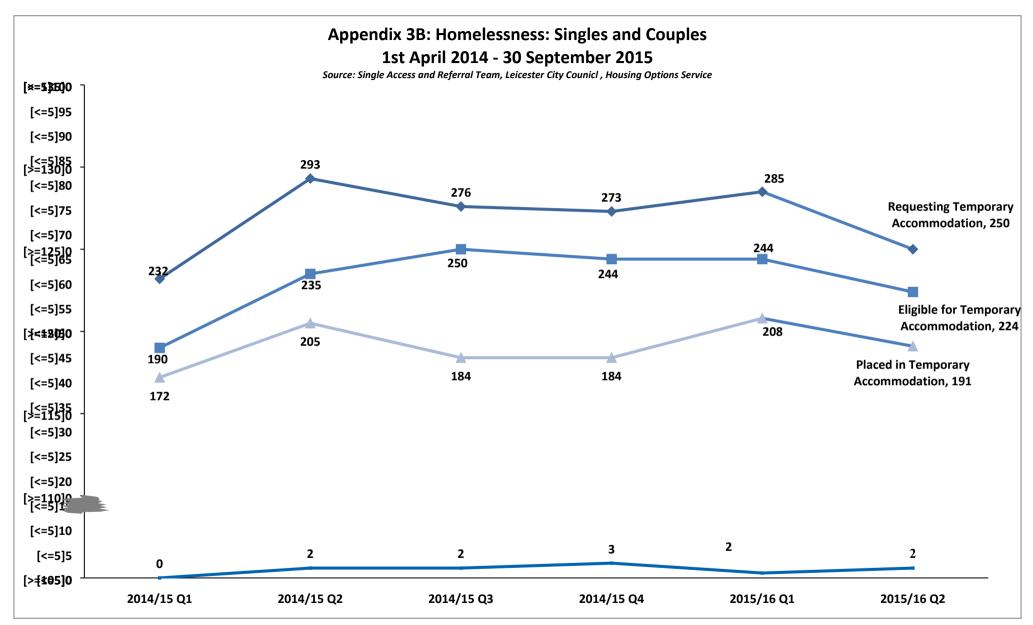
Families Requesting Assistance and Prevention: 350 300 273 250 259 258 241 239 Total Families Requesting 216 Assistance 200 196 187 150 Prevention 100 Q1 2014/15 Q2 2014/15 Q3 2014/15 Q4 2014/15 Q1 2015/16 Q2 2015/16

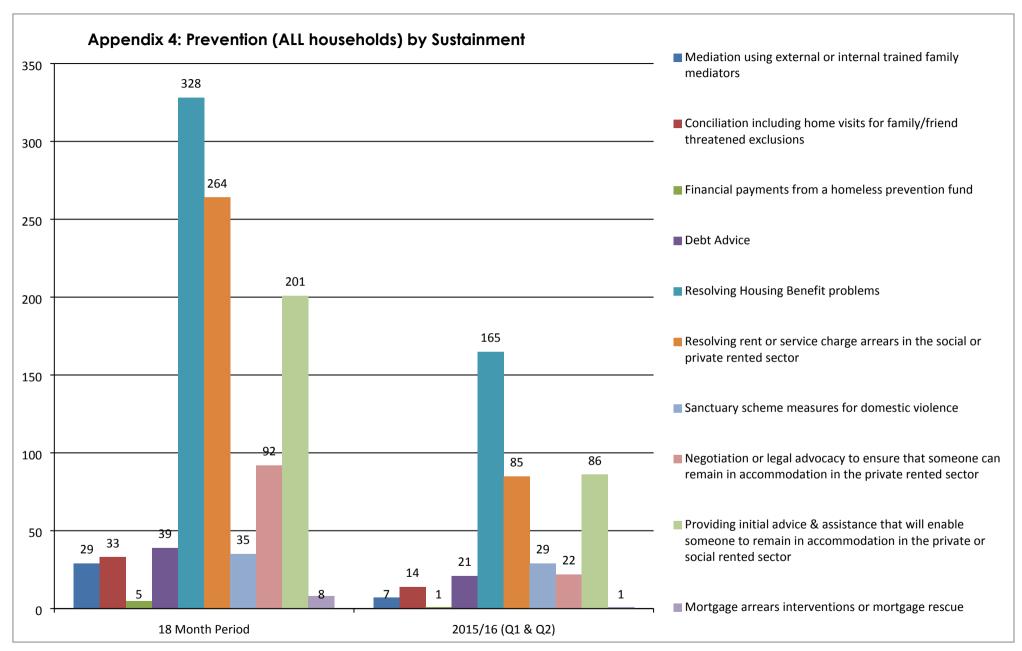
Appendix 1A: The number of Families who came to Housing Options saying they faced homelessness

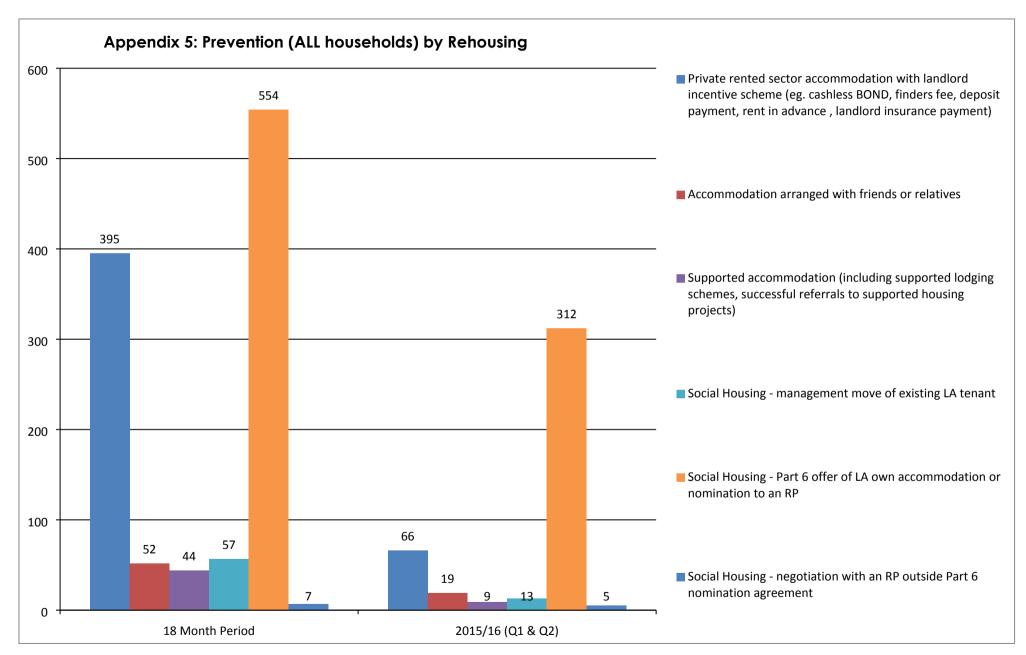




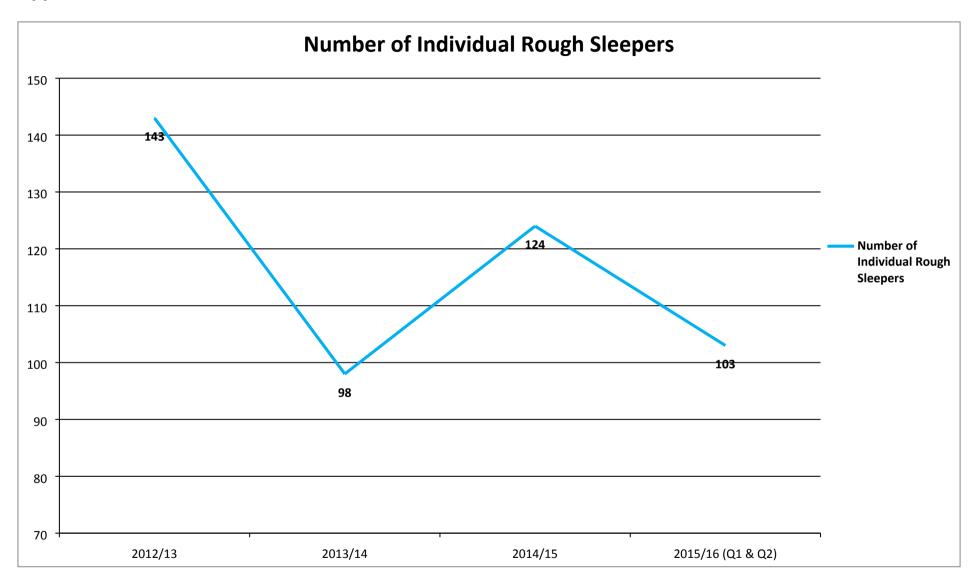








Appendix 6:



Appendix 7:

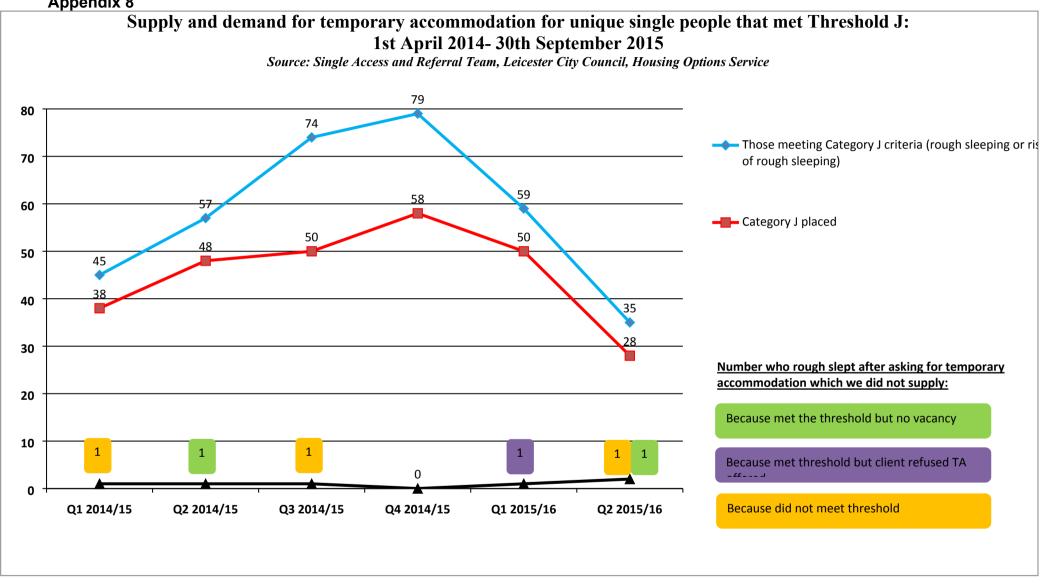
Current eligibility criteria for offer of emergency or temporary accommodation

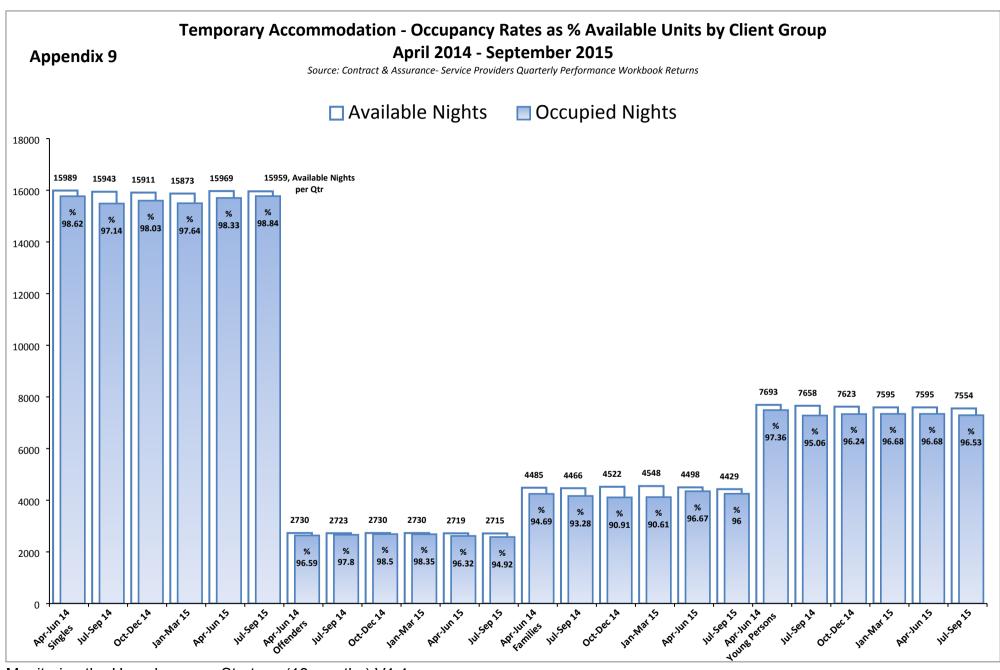
Category	Duty arises from
a) Family, pregnant woman	Housing Act 1996
b) Vulnerable Adult	Housing Act 1996
c) Children leaving care	Children Act 1989 Referrals from Children's Division and Housing Act 1986.
d) High risk offenders	Criminal Justice Act 2003 Duty to co-operate with Police, Probation and Prison Services under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)
e) Ex-offenders leaving approved premises.	Criminal Justice Act 2003 Referrals from Probation Service.
f) Vulnerable adults and families	National Assistance Act 1948 Referrals from Adult Social Care Division.
g) Young offenders and ex-offenders	Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 referrals from Youth Offending Service.
h) Council tenants in an emergency.	Identified within Housing Division (payment made by HRA, most council tenants would be rehoused within council house stock).
i) People over 60.	Who do not fall within above category, identified by Housing Division.
 j) People found rough sleeping or considered to be of immediate and high risk of rough sleeping. 	Who do not fall within any other categories, identified by Housing Division and in support of No Second Night Out principles. Dormitory accommodation may be offered to people who are in this category, particularly in an emergency or where the person is not connected to Leicester(see note 3) or is ineligible for public funds
k) Other ex-offenders	Crime and Disorder Act 1998 General duty to prevent Crime and Disorder. Usually people approaching us within one year of leaving custodial sentence who do not fall within above categories a to i. Identified by Housing Division with Probation Service
People on identified drug and alcohol programmes or eligible for them and on waiting list	Who do not fall within categories a to i. Referrals from agencies identified by ASC Drug and Alcohol Services

Notes

- Categories a: and b: are homelessness duties.
 Categories c: to g: may be regarded as arising directly from other council statutory duties.
 Categories h: to I: support other high council priorities.
- 2. Access to emergency or temporary single homeless accommodation is primarily for those applicants that have had a settled address in the City of Leicester for the last 6 out of 12 months immediately prior to presentation (rough sleeping will not count towards this connection) or if the applicant has always been connected to Leicester but has been in prison/institution away from the City and is now homeless immediately post release/discharge.(exceptions to this policy will apply where there is a statutory homeless duty.)
- 3. The Council may refuse to provide a bed space when there are no vacancies and there is no statutory duty to do so. Advice will be given. Where there is a duty and there are no suitable hostel bed spaces, other temporary accommodation will be offered.
- 4. The Council imposes sanctions on homelessness service users who fail to comply with accommodation and other agreements (e.g. failure to comply with rent payments or arrears agreements, threatening behaviour etc.) These sanctions can include the need to meet specified requirements to gain re-entry to hostels.







Monitoring the Homelessness Strategy (18 months) V1.4

Temporary Accommodation - Total Cumulative Utilisation April 2014 - September 2015

Appendix 10

Source: Contracts & Assurance-Service Providers Quarterly Performance Indicator Workbook Returns

