

Equalities Monitoring – Services

Appendix G – Welfare & Housing Service and Forestcare

Annual Report – 2015-16



Published: January 2017

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Preface

The new council plan 2015-19 is centred on a new narrative supported by six strategic themes. One of those themes is 'Strong, safe, supportive and self-reliant communities' and good quality, affordable housing is a crucial element of this theme.

The Housing service within Bracknell Forest Council covers the following areas of service delivery:

- Forestcare, which provides a community alarm service and other vital out-of-hours services
- Homelessness
- Advice and assistance with housing options
- Housing and Council tax benefits administration
- Housing register
- Advertising housing association properties and nominations for vacancies
- Housing strategy and enabling the delivery of more affordable homes
- Supporting People
- Provision of performance information

The purpose of equalities monitoring is to ensure the Council is providing a fair and equitable service to all residents.

To ensure the service is fair and equitable, monitoring has been undertaken in terms of:

- Access to the service
- Outcomes

It has been analysed by the following equality groups:

- Age
- Race
- Sex
- Disability
- Religion
- Sexual Orientation

The three remaining protected groups, marriage and civil partnerships, gender reassignment and pregnancy/maternity will be considered for future reports when data is available.

Welfare & Housing Service

1. Introduction

The Housing Service deals with all aspects of housing need, but in particular:

- Homelessness and Homeless Prevention
- Housing Register - BFCMyChoice
- Shared Ownership (Homebuy)
- Nominations to Housing Associations
- Assistance with securing private sector tenancies
- Management of temporary accommodation for homeless households

We give housing advice and assistance in confidence on a wide range of issues including homelessness prevention, tenancy rights, domestic violence and so on.

We work closely with colleagues in other teams and agencies such as the Community Mental Health Team, the Community Team for People with Learning Disabilities, Occupational Therapists, Children Services, and so on (particularly when dealing with vulnerable applicants).

Those that access our services are recorded on the Housing & Homeless Registers.

All the Housing Register, Homeless Register & Lets data below has been taken from the Housing IT system, Abrisas:

- Housing Register Active Applicants as of 01/04/2016
- Lettings from 01/04/2015 to 31/03/2016
- Homeless Applications taken 01/04/2015 to 31/03/2016
- Homeless Acceptances made 01/04/2015 to 31/03/2016
- Homeless prevention cases 01/04/2015 to 31/03/2016

2. Access

To assess whether people have equal access to housing services, the profile of people on the housing registers has been compared against the population of Bracknell Forest.

The tables below are based on 2272 Active applications on the Housing Register as of 1st April 2016 and 226 Homeless applications taken 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016. The Bracknell Forest data is taken from ONS mid year estimates 2015 of 90202 residents aged 18 and over and also the 2011 census.

Table 1: Housing Register & Homeless Applications by Age

Age group	Housing register %	Homeless apps %	Bracknell Forest ONS %s
18-39	67%	68%	43%
40-59	24%	30%	39%
60-79	7%	3%	20%
80-99	3%	0%	5%

N.B. Percentages may not sum due to rounding.

67% of people on the housing register are aged 18 to 39 compared to 43% in the Bracknell Forest population. However, this is expected due to the nature of the service which works with newly formed households and young families struggling to secure private rented accommodation.

Table 2: Housing Register & Homeless Applications by Race

Race	Housing Register %	Homeless apps %	Bracknell Forest ONS 2011 Census %
White	86%	83%	91%
Mixed	2%	2%	2%
Asian	2%	3%	5%
Black	4%	9%	2%
Other	3%	3%	0%
Unknown	2%		

Table 3: Housing Register by Sex

Sex	Housing Register %	Homeless apps %	Bracknell Forest ONS 2011 Census %
Female	62%	69%	51%
Male	38%	31%	49%

The sex is that of the primary applicant who completes the application. Therefore if a couple apply, the sex recorded is that of the primary applicant actually completing the form. This suggests more women take the lead in completing the application forms rather than a reflection of the family composition of those on the housing register. The percentages of Homeless applications are taken from women as they tend to be the carers of children, which would be the basis of their homeless application.

Table 4: Housing Register by Disability.

Disability	Housing Register %	Homeless apps %
No	85%	81%
Yes	15%	19%
Total		

The disability question on the Housing & Homeless Register asks if the applicant has a disability and does not require any proof. There is no direct meaningful comparable datasets. However the 2011 census, shows that 14.6% of the Bracknell Forest population aged 16 or over had a limited long term illness.

Table 5: Housing Register by Religion.

Religion/ Belief	Housing Register %	Homeless apps %	Bracknell Forest ONS 2011 Census %
Christian	50%	49%	65%
Buddhist	0%	1%	<1%
Hindu	1%	1%	1%
Jewish	0%	1%	<1%
Sikh	0%	0%	<1%
Muslim	2%	2%	1%
None	41%	41%	30%
Other	6%	5%	<1%
Total	100%	100%	100%

In terms of religion, there has been a increase in those stating a religion of “None” each year over the past five years, which accounts for the higher percentage of 41% compared to the 2011 census figure of 30%.

Table 6: Housing Register by Sexual Orientation

Sexual Orientation	Housing Register %	Homeless apps %
Heterosexual	95%	92%
Bisexual	1%	2%
Gay	1%	1%
Lesbian	0%	1%
Other	2%	5%
Total	100%	100%

Nationally there are conflicting figures for sexual orientation. The Office for National Statistics estimate is that 1.5% of the population are lesbian, gay or bisexual.¹ Stonewall, a charitable organisation that lobbies on behalf of the lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) population, states that no-one knows how many LGB people there are but that government actuaries estimate it to be around 6% of the population. It is therefore not possible to assess whether the housing register reflects the population in terms of sexual orientation until more reliable data is available. However, the figures above will be used to determine whether outcomes are equal – see below.

¹ Measuring Sexual Identity: An Evaluation Report, Theodore Joloza, Joanne Evans, Rachel O'Brien, Office for National Statistics, Sept. 2010

3. Outcomes (Social Housing Lets)

During 2015/16, 422 Households from the Housing Register were nominated by the council and took up tenancies within social housing. These are referred to as Lets. The equality strands have been compared to those on the overall Housing Register. It should be noted that in some cases the where numbers are extremely small the percentages should be interpreted with caution.

Table 7: Housing Lets by Age

Age group	Housing Lets	Housing Lets %	Housing register %
18-39	200	47%	67%
40-59	94	22%	24%
60-79	77	18%	7%
80-100	51	12%	3%
Total	422	100%	100%

N.B. Percentages do not sum due to rounding.

There is a smaller percentage of lets in the 18-39 age group. This age group includes new families who mainly require family size accommodation for which there is less availability. There has also been an increase in availability of housing for age 60 or over with the opening of a new sheltered scheme.

Table 8: Housing Lets by Sex

Sex	Housing Lets	Housing Lets %	Housing register %
Female	254	60%	62%
Male	168	40%	38%

The table above shows that lets are broadly in line with the sex of the applicant. As more main applicants are female they have a higher proportion of lets. As stated previously, the higher proportion of female main applicants is merely a reflection of who takes the lead in completing the application form.

Table 9: Housing Lets by Disability

Disability	Housing Lets	Housing Lets %	Housing register %
No	304	75%	85%
Yes	99	25%	15%

Households with a disability will often get medical priority resulting in a higher band on the Housing Register and thus greater opportunities of being housed.

Table 10: Housing Lets by Race

Race	Housing Lets	Housing Lets %	Housing Register %
White	374	88%	86%
Mixed	2	1%	2%
Asian	8	2%	2%
Black	19	4%	4%
Other	4	1%	3%
Unknown	18	4%	2%

N.B. Percentages do not sum due to rounding.

Table 11: Housing Lets by Sexual Orientation

Sexual Orientation	Housing Lets	Housing Lets %	Housing register %
Heterosexual	328	95%	95%
Bisexual	6	2%	1%
Gay	2	1%	1%
Lesbian	0	0%	0%
Other	10	3%	2%
Total	346	100%	100%

Lettings, in terms of race and sexual orientation were broadly in line with those on the housing register.

Table 12: Housing Lets by Religion

Religion/ Belief	Housing Lets	Housing Lets %	Housing register %
Christian	192	55%	50%
Buddhist	3	1%	0%
Hindu	0	0%	1%
Jewish	0	0%	0%
Sikh	0	0%	0%
Muslim	3	1%	2%
None	129	37%	41%
Other	20	6%	6%
Total	347	100%	100%

As lets are partially based on length of time on the Register, it could be expected that the Christian percentage would be higher as the increase in “None” religion has been a more recent trend. Also a large number of lets have gone to older people who have a higher Christian percentage.

4. Statutory homelessness and homeless prevention and relief

A household will be considered as statutorily homeless by their local authority if they meet specific criteria set out in legislation. In cases where an authority is satisfied that an applicant is eligible for assistance, is in priority need, and has become homeless through no fault of their own; the authority will owe a main homelessness duty to secure settled accommodation for that household. Such households are referred to as acceptances. Priority need groups include households with dependent children and/or a pregnant woman and individuals who are vulnerable in some way.

From 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016, Bracknell Forest Council made 212 homeless decisions. Homeless duty was accepted for 150 of these 212 cases.

Homelessness prevention and relief activity may be carried out by local authorities on behalf of households whether they are in priority need or not..Prevention refers to positive actions taken by local authorities to provide assistance to households who consider themselves to be at risk of homeless, which enable them to remain in their existing accommodation or obtain an alternative for at least the next 6 months.

From 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016, Bracknell Forest Council successfully prevented homelessness in 196 cases.

The Department for Communities & Local Government publishes quarterly statistics on homeless data for England. This data includes the ethnicity and age of homeless acceptances. Other equality strands are not included and no equality data is published for Homeless preventions.

The equality tables below are based on Bracknell Forest data for the period, 150 homeless acceptances and 196 successful homeless prevention cases. Percentages are shown along with actual numbers, though these should be treated with caution due to the low numbers. Data on sexual orientation was not available for this report.

Table 13: Age

83% of homeless acceptances during the period were for applicants aged under 45. This is similar to that for all of England at 81% from Jan to March 2016*.

*DCLG Statutory Homeless Statistical Release 30 June 2016

	Homeless acceptances No.s	Homeless acceptances %	Homeless preventions No.s	Homeless Preventions %
0-44	125	83%	144	73%
45-100	25	17%	52	27%

Table 14: Sex

	Homeless acceptances Nos	Homeless acceptances %	Homeless preventions Nos	Homeless Preventions %
Female	152	76%	125	64%
Male	60	24%	71	36%

The sex represents the primary applicant. Often the female is the primary carer if there are dependent children.

According to the National Statistics “Statutory homelessness in England: July to September 2015” publication, the presence of dependent children in the household was the primary reason for priority need in 67 per cent of acceptances. This was consistent across all the quarters in 2015/16.

Table 15: Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Homeless acceptances Nos	Homeless acceptances %	Homeless preventions No.s	Homeless Preventions %
White	170	78%	155	79%
Mixed	4	1%	5	3%
Asian	3	2%	1	1%
Black	21	11%	8	4%
Other Ethnic	5	3%	5	3%
Unknown	9	5%	22	11%

Table 16: Religion

Religion	Homeless acceptances Nos	Homeless acceptances %	Homeless preventions Nos	Homeless Preventions %
Buddhist	3	2%	0	
Christian	84	39%	61	31%
Hindu	1	1%	1	1%
Jewish	1	1%	0	
Muslim	3	2%	0	
None	67	31%	69	35%
Other	8	3%	17	9%
(blank)	20	9%	33	17%
Do not want to answer	25	13%	15	8%

Table 17: Disability

Disability	Homeless acceptances No.s	Homeless acceptances %	Homeless preventions No.s	Homeless Preventions %
No	167	79%	152	78%
Yes	33	14%	24	12%
(blank)	12	7%	20	10%

Forestcare Lifelines

Please note that in one household there may be two people assigned to a unit and so the total number of clients varies over the following data.

1. Sex

Sex	No's	%
Male	1447	34%
Female	2867	66%
Total	4314	

2. Disability

Of the Households that completed the equalities forms, 1067 stated they have at least one resident with a disability. However because of the nature of the service and the age of the customer base it would be expected that a large number would have a disability.

3. Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Forestcare	Forestcare (of known) %	Bracknell Forest ONS Census 2011 (of known) %
White	2314	97%	91%
Mixed	10	0%	2%
Asian	23	1%	5%
Black	18	1%	2%
Chinese/Other	3	0%	<1%
Not Known	15	1%	
Total	2383	100%	100%

The higher percentage of white compared to the population is reflective of the age group of Forestcare customers being older in which there is a much higher percentage of white.

4. Religion

Religion/ Belief	Forestcare	Forestcare %	Bracknell Forest ONS Mid-year estimates 2011 %
Christian	1435	85%	65%
Buddhist	2	0%	<1%
Hindu	14	1%	2%
Jewish	1	0%	<1%
Sikh	3	0%	<1%
Muslim	7	0%	1%
None	168	10%	30%
No answer	54	3%	<1%
Total	1684	100%	100%

Again, the higher percentage of Christian and stated religions compared to the population is reflective of the age group of Forestcare customers being older in which older generations have greater affiliation to Christianity. “More people aged 50 and over considered themselves to be Christian than in the overall population of England and Wales, 82.9 per cent compared with 71.7 per cent.” ONS Focus on Older People 2005 publication.

Welfare Service

1. Introduction

The Welfare Service administers Housing Benefit on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions, the Bracknell Council Tax Reduction local scheme, and discretionary welfare payments of crisis grants, home emergency grants, discretionary housing payments and Council tax hardship. Both Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction are means tested benefits requiring the collection of information about people's financial and household circumstances. The service undertakes benefit assessment, collection of overpayments and works with the Department for Work and Pensions by referring cases for fraud investigation.

The last few years have seen several changes introduced from the Government's Welfare Reform Act 2012 which have affected customer's entitlement to Housing Benefit as well as other welfare benefits. The introduction of Universal Credit has meant that since 28 September 2015 single people who are available for work now claim their housing costs through Universal Credit via the Department for Work and Pensions instead of Housing Benefit

At Bracknell Forest Council two emergency discretionary welfare schemes are administered - crisis grants and home emergency grants. The purpose of these schemes is to help people who have an unforeseen financial crisis. As the awards are discretionary' the council has to consider each application carefully based on the circumstances of each individual.

The purpose of equalities monitoring is to ensure the council is providing a fair and equitable service to all residents. Monitoring has been undertaken in terms of:

- Access to the service

It has been analysed by the following equalities groups:

- Race
- Sexual Orientation
- Age
- Disability

Sex has not been analysed as this is just the sex of the person completing the application form rather than the household receiving the benefit. Women tend to fill in the application more often than men.

We are not currently able to analyse the remaining protected groups however this can be considered for future reports when data is available.

2. Access to the service

Customers are able to access the Welfare Service by various means. The service is open to all members of the public via calling in person to our reception and we encourage face to face contact with customers where possible to enable us to look at ways to maximise their income where possible. However we appreciate that not all

customers wish to or are able to access our service via this route and so customers can contact us by telephone and email. We also offer home visits for customers who are not able to come into our offices due to ill-health or disability.

We work closely with stakeholders and access can be via referrals to stakeholders who are able to visit on our behalf. Access could also be via signposting from stakeholders or other organisations; or by claims made via the Department for Work and Pensions.

To assess whether people have equal access to the Benefits Service in terms of race and sexual orientation we have looked at the equal opportunities section completed on our benefit applications forms received during 2015-2016 and on social fund applications made during 2015-2016 and compared the data provided against the population of Bracknell Forest.

Table 1: Housing Benefit and Local Council Tax Reduction claims, and Social Fund applications by Race (2015/16)

Race	No. of equal opportunity forms completed*	%	Social fund applications**	%	Bracknell Forest ONS Census 2011 %***
White	780	89.2%	453	96.0%	90.6%
Mixed	20	2.3%	5	1.1%	2.0%
Asian	37	4.2%	3	0.6%	5.0%
Black	32	3.7%	9	1.9%	2.1%
Other	5	0.6%	2	0.6%	0.3%
Total	874	100%	472	100%	100%

Source:* Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction application forms. ** RB Solutions Social Fund.

*** Based on Office for National Statistics Census 2011

1983 new Housing benefit and/or Council Tax Reduction application forms were received during 2015-2016 of which 874 customers completed the equal opportunities section on ethnicity and so the data above represents approximately 44.1% of the total number of customers making a claim for benefit during the financial year.

The proportion of customers making a benefit claim from an Asian background and Black background is steadily increasing compared to the Welfare Service data for previous years and the current data is comparable with Bracknell Forest census information indicating that the service is accessible in terms of race. We continue to ensure that access to our service is available to all ethnic minority groups.

542 Social Fund applications were made and equal opportunities data was recorded for 472 applications representing 87.7% of the total number of applications. The table does show that for social fund applications the proportion of claims from a minority group is again low this year compared to that of Bracknell Forest and those that have made a benefit claim. Although the percentage of applications from a minority group has increased slightly by 0.6%, the numbers are very low so this can lead to large swings in percentages. As this is the second year that we have reported on this equality group for social fund applications then the service needs to ensure there are no barriers in accessing this service.

Table 2: Housing Benefit and Local Council Tax Reduction claims by Sexual Orientation (2015/16)

Information received from benefit application forms during 2015/16			
Sexual orientation	No. of forms completed*	%	Bracknell Forest estimated population %**
Heterosexual	413	97.2%	98.4%
Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual	12	2.8%	1.6%
Total	425	100%	100%

Source: * Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction application forms. * based on Office for National Statistics: The Integrated Household Survey (IHS) 2014 and Mid-year population estimates for Bracknell Forest

From the 1983 application forms received during 2015-2016 the number of benefit customers who recorded their sexual orientation represents 21.4% of the total customers who made an application during the financial year. Although the numbers are small and so no firm conclusions can be drawn from the data, the % of gay, lesbian and bisexual customers claiming benefit continues to be higher than the Bracknell Forest estimates. This indicates that there are no barriers in these cases when accessing our services.

For Social Fund applications although the data for sexual orientation is now recorded, out of the 430 responses 26.7% have been recorded as 'prefer not to say' and the remaining 73.3% as heterosexual/straight. Due the number recorded as 'prefer not to say' the data has been inconclusive in this years report. We will continue to monitor this in future reports.

To assess whether people have equal access to the Benefits Service in terms of age and disability we have analysed our caseload data taken from our Northgate Benefits System for those making a claim for Housing Benefit and Local Council Tax Reduction, and from our RB Solutions Social Fund system for those making a social fund application.

A breakdown of our caseload by age is as follows:

Table 3: Housing Benefit and Local Council Tax Reduction claims, and Social Fund applications by age (at 18/4/16)

Age group	No. of benefit claims* (excluding people aged under 18)	% of claims	No. of social fund applications** (excluding people aged under 18)	% of claims	Bracknell Forest population mid year estimates 2015 %***
18-39	1878	28.6%	279	51.5%	37.3%
40-59	1892	28.9%	240	44.3%	38.3%
60-79	1841	28.1%	23	4.2%	19.7%
80+	947	14.4%	0	0%	4.6%
Total	6558	100%	542	100%	100%

Where there is a joint claim the age is taken from the primary claimant
Source: *Single Housing Benefit Extract. **RB Solutions Social Fund. ***Population Estimates Unit, Office for National Statistics

Despite the ongoing changes to welfare benefits due to the Governments Welfare Reform and the decrease in our benefit caseload, our working age/pension age caseload split continues to remain static with only slight differences compared to previous year's reports. The number of benefit customers aged 60+ compared to the Bracknell Forest estimates is considerably higher and has historically been higher than Bracknell Forest on previous reports. This is expected due to those customers being more likely to not be in employment and therefore have a lower income.

The number of social fund applications from those aged 60 continues to remain significantly lower compared to Bracknell Forest data. However, this is to be expected as someone over the age of 60 is more likely to be in receipt of a regular income such as a pension. They are also more likely to be in long term housing compared to the majority of social fund applicants. These applicants may briefly be in receipt of out of work benefits which can cause benefit delays and therefore they require short term assistance from the social fund. Due to the introduction of Universal Credit for single people who are looking for work, this has meant an average of 6-7 weeks delay before receiving their first benefit payment.

Table 4: Housing Benefit and Local Council Tax Reduction claims and social fund applications by disability (at 18/4/16)

Disability	No. of benefit claims*	% of claims	No. of social fund claims	% of claims	Bracknell Forest population with a disability (excluding those aged under 16)**
No	4591	70.7%	425	80.5%	85.4%
Yes	1905	29.3%	103	19.5%	14.6%
Total	6895	100%	528	100%	100%

Source: *Single Housing Benefit Extract based on the claimant or partner in receipt of Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance (care or mobility), Personal Independence Payment (daily living or mobility) Severe Disablement Allowance or the Support group of Employment & Support Allowance

**Based on Census 2011, proportion of people who said they had a limiting long term illness (excluding those aged under 16)

The table shows that for both benefit claims and social fund claims we continue to have a higher proportion of customers with a disability compared with the Bracknell Forest population and so indicates there are no barriers when accessing our service. Due to the nature of the service this is to be expected because some with a disability are less likely to be able to work and therefore on a low income compared to someone without a disability and so more likely to need the financial assistance.

3. Outcomes

To assess whether the protected groups who make a social fund claim achieve similar outcomes, data has been compared against those making a claim to those successful in their application.

Table 5: Social Fund applications by Race (2015/16)

Race	Social fund applications	Successful social fund applications %
White	453	92.9%
Mixed	5	100%
Asian	3	100%
Black	9	100%
Other	2	100%
Total	472	n/a

The table above shows that for the ethnic minority groups the outcome of the applications were all successful.

Table 6: Social Fund applications by age

Age group	No. of social fund applications (excluding people aged under 18)	Successful social fund applications %
18-39	279	91.4%
40-59	240	93.8%
60-79	23	91.3%
80+	0	n/a
Total	542	n/a

Table 7: Social fund applications by disability

Disability	No. of social fund claims	Successful social fund applications %
No	425	92.7%
Yes	103	93.2%
Total	528	n/a

The tables above for age and disability show that the percentages of successful applications are very similar within each age group and whether or not the customer has a disability. This indicates that this does not determine whether a person is to be more successful or not.

Due to the how equality information is recorded we are unable to report on the outcomes for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction applications.

4. Recommendations

To review the way in which Social Fund applications are made accessible to all ethnic groups to ensure that there are no barriers when accessing this service.

To monitor claims that are refused for welfare payments.

To investigate ways in which the outcomes for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction applications against each equality group can be measured for future reports.

Conclusion

The Equalities Monitoring Report for Housing Services, Welfare Service and Benefit Lifelines has reported on the equality groups of race, sex, disability, religion and sexual orientation.

For the three remaining protected groups, marriage and civil partnerships, gender reassignment and pregnancy/maternity; data is not available in sufficient numbers to allow meaningful analysis.

A growth area in the Housing Service has been the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation. During 2016/17 it is planned to expand the equality monitoring across this area to be included in next year's report.

The next equalities monitoring report for Housing Services, Welfare Service and Benefit Lifelines will be for the period 2016/17.