

# Equalities Monitoring – Services

## Appendix G - Housing Services, Benefits and Forestcare Lifelines

**Annual Report – 2013-14**



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# Housing Department

## 1. Introduction

The Council aims 'To make Bracknell Forest a place where all people can thrive; living, learning and working in a clean, safe and healthy environment'. Good quality, affordable housing is a crucial element of this commitment to local people.

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, sex reassignment and pregnancy/maternity will be considered for future reports when data is available.

# Housing Services

## 1. Introduction

The Housing Options 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

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.

The data below has been taken from:

- The housing register as at 31/03/14
- Lettings completed between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014

## 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.

**Table 1: Housing Register & Homeless Applications by Age (31st March 2014)**

Age group	Housing register* (aged 18 or over)	Housing register* % (aged 18 or over)	Homeless applications*	Homeless apps* %	Bracknell Forest ONS ** Mid-year estimates 2013 (number) (aged 18 or over)	Bracknell Forest Population % (aged 18 or over)
18-39	1,456	69%	125	63%	33,943	38%
40-59	466	20%	67	34%	34,001	38%
60-79	144	7%	8	4%	17,237	19%
80+	51	3%	0	0%	3,997	4%
Total	2,117	100%	200	100%	89,178	100%

Source:\* Abrisas. \*\*Office of National Statistics (ONS)

*N.B. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.*

69% of people on the housing register are aged 18 to 39 compared to 38% in the Bracknell Forest population. However, this is expected due to the nature of the service with people needing housing services as they leave parental homes, set up home independently and start families of their own.

**Table 2: Housing Register & Homeless Applications by Race (31st March 2014)**

Of the 2,117 Housing Register applicants, 2,070 answered the ethnicity question. Of the 200 Homeless applicants 189 answered the ethnicity question.

	Housing register*	Housing register*	Homeless applications*	Homeless apps %	Bracknell Forest ONS Census 2011** %
White	1843	89%	156	83%	91%
Mixed	55	3%	2	1%	2%
Asian	38	2%	5	3%	5%
Black	84	4%	18	10%	2%
Other	50	2%	8	4%	0%
Total	2070	100%	189	100%	

Source: \* Abrisas. \*\*Office of National Statistics (ONS)

In terms of ethnicity, the mix of White and Ethnic minorities on the Housing Register reflects that of Bracknell Forest Borough.

The higher percentage of Black origin Households from homeless applications has led to a detailed analysis of the data. The historic trend over the past three years shows an increase of black applicants during 2013/14. This then drops back down in quarters 2 and 3 in 2014. The homelessness reason, Nationality and homeless application decisions were explored. No trends were found. Therefore at this stage no reason can be given for this unusual temporary increase and it will be continued to be monitored.

**Table 3: Housing Register by Sex (31st March 2014)**

Sex	Housing register*	%	Homeless applications*	Homeless apps %	Bracknell Forest ONS** Mid-year estimates 2013	%
Female	1,713	60%	99	80%	58,710	50%
Male	1,116	40%	25	20%	57,828	50%
Total	2,829	100%	124	100%	116,538	100%

Source: \* Abrisas. \*\*Office of National Statistics (ONS)

There are a higher proportion of female applicants than in the Bracknell Forest population. 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 females as they tend to be the carers of children, which would be the basis of their homeless application.

**Table 4: Housing Register by Disability (31st March 2014)**

Of the 2,829 Housing Register applicants, 2,662 answered the disability question. Of the 124 Homeless applicants 117 answered the disability question.

Disability	Housing register*	Housing register %	Homeless applications*	Homeless apps %	Bracknell Forest population with a disability**
No	2,337	83%	108	92%	89%
Yes	325	17%	9	8%	11%
Total	2,662	100%	115	100%	100%

Source: \*Abritas. \*\*Based on Census 2011, proportion of people who said they had a limiting long term illness, (all age groups)

In terms of disability there are a slightly higher proportion of people with a disability on the housing register which is to be expected. Research from the Health Survey for England (2001) states:

“People with a disability were twice as likely as people with no disabilities to be local authority ('council') or housing association tenants.”

**Table 5: Housing Register by Religion (31st March 2014)**

Of the 2,829 Housing Register applicants, 2,292 answered the religion question. Of the 124 Homeless applicants 104 answered the religion question.

Religion/ Belief	Housing register*	Housing register %	Homeless applications*	Homeless applications %	Bracknell Forest ONS Census 2011** %
Christian	1,176	51%	59	57%	65%
Buddhist	13	<1%	2	<1%	<1%
Hindu	15	<1%	1	<1%	2%
Jewish	8	<1%	0	0	<1%
Sikh	1	<1%	0	0	<1%
Muslim	32	1%	0	0	1%
None	924	40%	35	34%	30%
Other	123	5%	7	7%	<1%
Total	2,292	100%	104	100%	100%

Source: \*Abritas. \*\*Office of National Statistics (ONS)

In terms of religion, the register shows a lower Christian % than that of the population. This is explained by there being a higher percentage of 18-39 year old on the Register and within this age group the Christian population is 51% also. The lower Christian percentage within the homeless applications is in line with the higher ethnic minority percentage.

**Table 6: Housing Register by Sexual Orientation (31st March 2014)**

Of the 2,829 Housing Register applicants, 2,202 answered the sexual orientation question. Of the 124 Homeless applicants 92 answered the sexual orientation question.

<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>Housing register*</b>	<b>Housing register %</b>	<b>Homeless applications**</b>	<b>Homeless applications %</b>
Heterosexual	2,093	95%	85	92%
Bisexual	34	2%	3	3%
Gay	11	1%	1	1%
Lesbian	14	1%	1	1%
Other	50	2%	2	2%
Total	2,202	100%	92	100%

Source: \* *Abritas*

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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

### **3. Outcomes**

To assess whether the protected groups on the housing register achieve similar outcomes, data from housing lets in 2013/14 have been compared against the people on the register.

#### **Age**

The table below shows that lets are broadly in line with the age group of people on the register. The reason why there is less percentage lets in the 30-39 age group is that this age group mainly require larger family size accommodation for which there is less availability.

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



**Table 7: Housing Lets by Age (01/04/13 to 31/03/14)**

<b>Age group</b>	<b>Housing Lets*</b>	<b>Housing Lets %</b>	<b>Housing register %</b>
18-39	277	62%	70%
40-49	76	17%	13%
50-59	29	7%	7%
60-69	27	6%	4%
70-79	20	4%	3%
80-100	17	4%	3%
Total	489	100%	100%

Source:\* Abrisas.

*N.B. Percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding.*

**Table 8: Housing Lets by Race (01/04/13 to 31/03/14)**

The table below shows that lettings to White groups and Black and Minority Ethnic groups were broadly in line with the housing register and therefore the outcomes were the same regardless of ethnicity.

Of 446 lets, the ethnicity is known for 435.

	<b>Lets*</b>	<b>% Lets</b>	<b>Housing Register %</b>
White	394	91%	91%
Mixed	6	1%	2%
Asian	7	2%	2%
Black	10	2%	3%
Chinese/Other	18	4%	3%
Total	435	100%	100%

Source:\* Abrisas.

*N.B. Percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding.*

The table below shows that lets are broadly in line with the sex of the applicant. As more main applicants were 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 Sex (01/04/13 to 31/03/14)**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Housing register*</b>	<b>Housing register %</b>	<b>Lets*</b>	<b>Lets %</b>
Female	1713	60%	272	61%
Male	1116	40%	174	39%
Total	2829	100%	446	100%

Source:\* Abrisas

**Table 10: Housing Lets by Disability (01/04/13 to 31/03/14)**

Of 446 lets, disability data is known for 424

<b>Disability?</b>	<b>Housing register*</b>	<b>Housing register %</b>	<b>Lets*</b>	<b>Lets %</b>
No	2,337	83%	361	85%
Yes	325	17%	63	15%
Total	2,829	100%	471	100%

Source:\* Abrisas

**Table 11: Housing Lets by Religion (01/04/13 to 31/03/14)**

Of 446 lets, religion data is known for 369.

<b>% Housing Lettings (2013/14) by religion compared against % on housing register as at 31 March 2014</b>			
<b>Religion/ Belief</b>	<b>Lets*</b>	<b>Lets %</b>	<b>Housing register %</b>
Christian	176	48%	51%
Buddhist	3	1%	<1%
Hindu	2	<1%	<1%
Jewish	0	<1%	<1%
Sikh	0	0	<1%
Muslim	2	<1%	1%
Other	27	7%	5%
None	159	43%	40%
Total	369	100%	100%

Source:\* Abrisas

**Table 12: Housing Lets by Sexual Orientation (01/04/13 to 31/03/14)**

Of 446 lets, sexual orientation data is known for 353.

<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>Lets*</b>	<b>Lets %</b>	<b>Housing register %</b>
Heterosexual	353	94%	95%
Bisexual	6	1%	2%
Gay	1	1%	1%
Lesbian	1	1%	1%
Other	12	3%	2%
Total	353	100%	100%

Source:\* Abrisas

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

# Benefits Service

## 1. Introduction

The Benefits Service administers Housing Benefit on behalf of the Department for Works and Pensions. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 the National council tax benefit scheme ended and councils were required to set up a local scheme which has resulted in Bracknell Forest Council Local Council Tax Reduction scheme. Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction are both means tested benefits so we have to collect information about people's financial and household circumstances. The service undertakes benefit assessment, collection of overpayments and fraud investigation.

In addition to changes to council tax benefit the Government's Welfare Reform Act 2012 has introduced several changes which have affected customer's entitlement to Housing Benefit as well as other welfare benefits.

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

We have not been able to monitor satisfaction in this report as a customer satisfaction survey has not been carried out since the last report.

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 Benefits Service by various means. The service is open to all members of the public via calling in person to our reception, by telephone and email, and 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 applications forms received during 2013-2014 and compared the data provided against the population of Bracknell Forest.

**Table 1: Housing Benefit and Local Council Tax Reduction claims by Race (2013/14)**

<b>Information received from benefit application forms during 2013/14</b>			
<b>Race</b>	<b>No. of equal opportunity forms completed</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Bracknell Forest ONS Census 2011 %</b>
White	994	93.8%	90.6%
Mixed	24	2.3%	2.0%
Asian	16	1.5%	4.5%
Black	23	2.2%	1.9%
Other	2	0.3%	<1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1060</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

2,503 new application forms were received during 2013-2014, of which 1,060 customers completed the equal opportunities section and so the data above represents approx 42.4% of the total number of customers making a claim for benefit during the financial year. The percentage of customers making a claim from an Asian background is low compared to Bracknell Forest data however due to the small numbers this can lead to large changes in percentages and so no firm conclusions can be made. The Government's Welfare Reform could be influencing trends however we will continue to monitor this and ensure that access to our service is available to all ethnic minority groups.

**Table 2: Housing Benefit and Local Council Tax Reduction claims by Sexual Orientation (2013/14)**

Information received from benefit application forms during 2013/14			
Sexual orientation	No. of forms completed	%	Bracknell Forest estimated population %*
Heterosexual	456	96.4%	98.4%
Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual	17	3.6%	1.6%
Total	473	100%	100%

\* based on Office for National Statistics: *The Integrated Household Survey (IHS) 2012 and Mid-year population estimates for Bracknell Forest*

From the 2503 application forms received during 2013-2014 the number of customers who recorded their sexual orientation represents 18.9% 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.

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.

Our caseload data of our live claims as at the end of the financial year totalled 7,219 households in receipt of Housing and/or Local Council Tax Reduction. A breakdown of our caseload by age is as follows:

**Table 3: Housing Benefit and Local Council Tax Reduction claims by age (at 15/3/14)**

* Age group	** No. of claims (excluding people aged under 18)	% of claims	Bracknell Forest population mid year estimates 2013 %
18-39	2158	29.9%	38.1%
40-59	2089	28.9%	38.1%
60-79	1976	27.4%	19.3%
80+	995	13.8%	4.5%
Total	7218	100%	100%

\*Where there is a joint claim the age is taken from the primary claimant

\*\* Source: Northgate Benefits System

Despite the Government's Welfare Reform which has affected mainly customers of working age, our working age/pension age caseload split has continued to remain static over the last few years with a higher percentage of working age customers. We do have a higher percentage of pension age customers compared to the

Bracknell Forest estimates but this is expected due to those customers being more likely to have a lower income.

**Table 4: Housing Benefit and Local Council Tax Reduction claims by disability (at 15/4/14)**

Disability	No. of benefit claims*	% of claims	Bracknell Forest population with a disability (excluding those aged under 16)**
No	5813	80.5%	85.4%
Yes	1406	19.5%	14.6%
Total	7219	100%	100%

\*Source: Northgate Benefits System - 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 we 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. 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. However it is noted that compared to previous years the % of our benefit customers recorded as having a disability has reduced quite considerably from 26.6% to 19.5%. As part of the Government's Welfare Reform there have been significant changes to disability and sickness benefits to those aged 16 to 65 which is likely to be influencing the outcome.

### 3. Recommendations

The report this year shows that the number of claims with those classed as having a disability or long term illness has reduced compared with previous years. As an action point for this coming year we will monitor this and ensure staff are able to identify customers who may be entitled to a disability benefit in order to promote the take up of these benefits. We will also investigate any data when available from the Department from Work and Pensions to compare the take up of disability benefits from current year to previous years data.

# Forestcare Lifelines

**Total number of Forestcare Lifelines** **2223**

Please note that there are only 1,702 Forestcare lifeline units assigned but in one household there may be two people assigned to a unit and so the total number of clients varies over the following data.

\*As the sex field on the system is not mandatory, it is not always recorded

## 1. Sex

Sex	No.	%
Male	569	30.8%
Female	1276	69.2%
Unknown*	378	
Total	2223	

Source: Piper Network Communications (PNC) Forestcare IT system.

\*As the sex field on the system is not mandatory, it is not always recorded.

## 2. Disability

576 Households have explicitly stated they have 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 %	Bracknell Forest ONS 2011 census %
White	1628	98%	90%
Mixed	9	<1%	2%
Asian	10	<1%	4%
Black	10	<1%	2%
Chinese/Other	2	<1%	2%
Total	1659	100%	100%

Source: Piper Network Communications (PNC) Forestcare IT system.

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.



## **Conclusion**

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

The report this year does not contain any recommendations since the findings did not support any.

The next Equalities Monitoring Report for Housing Services, Housing Benefits and Benefit Lifelines will be for the period 2014/15.