

Equalities Monitoring – Services

G - Housing

Annual Report - 2020-21



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Introduction to Service Area

Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 sets out the duties owed by local housing authorities to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Local Authorities have a duty to provide housing advice and assistance to everyone in their local area but the type of advice and assistance depends on whether the person is eligible for assistance (i.e. not subject to immigration control), whether they are actually homeless, whether they are intentionally homeless (they did or did not do something which caused their homelessness i.e. not pay their rent), whether they have a priority need for accommodation and local connection.

In April 2018 the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) came into force. Prior to the HRA much of the assistance provided to homeless applicants was predicated on whether after assessment a priority need was identified. A priority need included having dependent children, a disability and/or other instances of vulnerability. Those assessed as not having a priority need were less likely to be assisted. Within the HRA the emphasis on priority need has now been removed and all local authorities are expected to provide assistance in the form of prevention or relief of homelessness irrespective of the applicant's priority needs, if they are facing homelessness within 56 days of approach. Prevention is where an applicant is prevented from becoming homeless, such as the Council mediating with the landlord to enable the applicant to retain their accommodation. Relief is where reasonable steps are taken to relieve the applicant of their homelessness such as by helping them secure suitable accommodation of at least 6 months.

The Domestic Abuse Bill which came into force in April 2021, creates a statutory definition of Domestic Abuse emphasising that domestic abuse is not just physical violence, but can also be emotional, controlling, or coercive, and economic abuse.

The new Act places a duty on local authorities in England to provide accommodation-based support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation.

It also provides that all eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse automatically have 'priority need' for homelessness assistance when making an approach for assistance.

To monitor homelessness approaches and also local authority performance, The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) have data requirements known as H-Clic. H-Clic covers all cases that the Council has dealt with and includes case-level details such as client name, gender, national insurance number etc. Such data is treated as mandatory within MHCLG's H-Clic Data Specification document.

Bracknell Forest also allocates social housing made available by Registered Providers (Registered Providers, commonly known as Housing Associations) through the Housing Allocations Scheme, in accordance with our duties under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996.

Reasonable preference is given to certain groups, in accordance with duties required by the Homelessness Act 2002.

- Applicants who are homeless within the meaning on part 6 of the Housing Act 1996. Note that any such offers made to applicants who are considered to be homeless under the Housing Act 1996 may include suitable Private Sector housing.
- Applicants who are owed a duty by any local authority under section 190(2), 193(2) or who are occupying accommodation secured by such an authority under section 192(3)
- Applicants occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory
- Applicants who need to move to a particular locality in the district of an authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or others)

Equality Duty

2.1 Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation

The service is aware of the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and this it is unlawful to discriminate, treat some people less fairly or put them at a disadvantage.

Staff have all attended internal and external training sessions to ensure that we meet the needs of all of our customers and attend refresher training as and when required. This improves equality of treatment by enhancing our ability to identify and respond to those with protected characteristics who encounter council services. We recognise that people have different needs and understand that treating people equally does not always involve treating them all exactly the same.

Equality Impact Assessments are used by the service to inform decisions on changes affecting the service. The service believes in providing support to anyone who needs it and who is eligible for support, regardless of their sex, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation or disability. Any potential impact to those with a lower income are considered to inform decisions as due to the nature of the service customers will more often be in low socio-economic groups.

Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

A specialist Rough Sleeper Team was formed in 2019 to proactively reach out to and support rough sleepers and break down barriers in accessing the service. Outcomes for these groups are access to healthcare, opportunities for employment and safe and sustainable accommodation and accessing welfare benefits.

Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it.

N/A

Equalities Monitoring

A range of information is collected by the Housing Service which helps to understand who is accessing our service and where available the outcomes for those who access the service compared to the Bracknell Forest population. For this report monitoring has been undertaken in terms of:

- Race
- Age
- Disability

In Bracknell Forest we know that some groups are more at risk of homelessness and actions should target these groups. For example, rough sleeping is most prevalent amongst single men and under 45 year olds.

Young people aged 18 – 24 are almost 3 times more likely to become homeless than those aged 45 – 54 in Bracknell Forest, as is the case nationally. This includes single people with no children and young families with dependent children. The 25 – 34 year old age group is also over-represented in terms of homelessness.

Black British, Caribbean and Black African people are at a higher risk of homelessness than other ethnicities. Lone parent households are significantly over-represented compared to couples with dependent children.

Other groups at risk are people on low incomes and in debt; people experiencing family or relationship breakdown; people –experiencing domestic abuse (who are mainly women), people leaving prison and people with a mental health illness.

Some people may have several risks - for example, a care leaver in prison who has a mental health problem, or a woman being a victim of domestic abuse and being in debt.

Homelessness Applications by Sex

Sex	Number of homelessness application	Percentage of homelessness applications %	Bracknell Forest population %*
Female	714	55.0%	51.00%
Male	584	45.0%	49.00%
TOTAL	1298	~	~

Sex	Housing lets	Housing lets%	Housing register %
Female	220	61.3%	68.9%
Male	139	38.7%	31.1%
TOTAL	359	~	~

As can be seen in the tables above, females are overrepresented in terms of homelessness applications and in the housing register. This may be due to a number of factors but as stated above, this does not necessarily demonstrate that more females become, or are at risk of homelessness, but could mean that more females seek to make an application on behalf of a family. However, there are around 2.9 million lone parents and around 90% of lone parents are female and data suggests that Lone parents have the highest poverty rates amongst working age adults with 43% living in poverty¹

¹ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2019-20>

Ethnicity

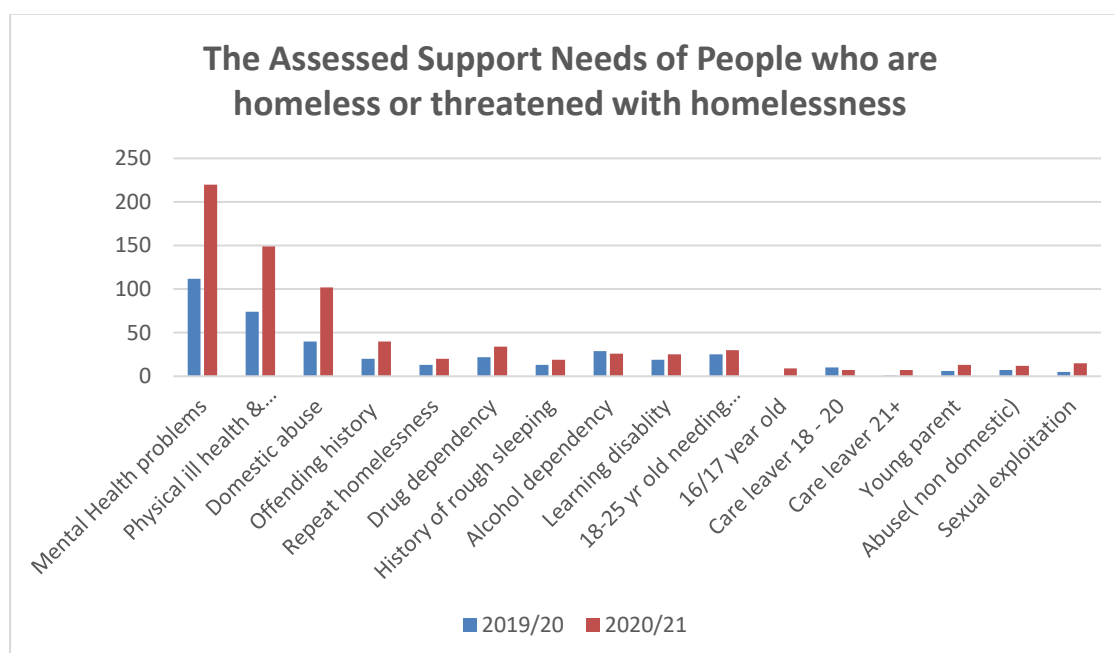
On analysing the data, there is an over representation of BAME households seeking homelessness assistance in the Borough (see table below).

There are likely to be a variety of reasons for this including income disparity across certain groups. As part of our developing homelessness strategy and the action plan which will follow we will seek to further understand this issue and consider options to prevent/reduce homelessness.

Homelessness Applications by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Number of homelessness application	Percentage of homelessness applications %	Bracknell Forest population %*
White	892	83.3%	91.8%
BAME	179	16.7%	8.2%
Sub Total	1071	~	~
Not recorded	227	~	~
TOTAL	1298	~	~

Support needs of those presenting as homeless or threatened with homelessness



As a group, around 17% of care leavers aged 18-20 were owed a homelessness duty in 2020/21 and are overrepresented compared to other 18–20-year-olds, in line with the national picture.

Conclusion

The key equality and diversity achievements in your service?

Work with internal and external partners has been key in the last 12 months, resulting in a more holistic service, focussed on putting the customer at the centre of the process. Key achievements have been;

- Introduction of a Hospital Discharge process pathway which remains in development but has already demonstrated improved outcomes for customers facing homelessness after a period in hospital
- The approval of funding to provide a new unit of emergency temporary accommodation which is fully wheelchair accessible with a commitment to looking to introduce additional units in the next 12-24 months
- The new strategy will also seek to offer support for those experiencing gender or sexuality-based abuse, such as members of the LGBTQ+ community

The key equality and diversity issues affecting your service?

- Care Leavers aged 18-20 are overrepresented in these groups as opposed to other early adults.
- Women experience higher rates of repeat victimisation than male victims of domestic abuse, including coercive and controlling behaviour. Key to this is an effective Domestic Abuse strategy
- As a proportion of the population, residents from BAME background, face higher rates of homelessness in Bracknell when compared against the population density. The Homelessness Strategy and Action plan arising out of it, will seek to further investigate and understand the causes of this, and how this can be addressed.

Your action to address equality and diversity issues mentioned in the report.

- A revised protocol for supporting 16/17-year-olds facing homelessness was launched clarifying the key role that partnership between Housing and Childrens Social Care in respect of those young people at risk of or already experiencing homelessness
- A new homelessness strategy and deep dive of data is in development and will be used to inform and deliver services for residents who are currently over or underrepresented in key areas such as homelessness applications
- A new Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy is also being developed which will plan to address gaps in safe accommodation and support identified for those experiencing domestic abuse, which national statistics demonstrate is an issue faced by more females than males.
- Additional work is underway to look at expanding the portfolio of accessible and adapted emergency accommodation
- Key actions in our Housing Strategy will be that we will:

- Develop a new joint protocol with Children's Services to reduce the risk of care leavers making homelessness applications and improve the 'Local Offer' to care leavers
- Establish closer partnership working with local Registered Providers to promote access to social housing for single homeless people, care leavers and people recovering from rough sleeping Provide information within Bracknell and Wokingham College and secondary schools, targeting Year 11, 12 and 13 learners working in partnership with relevant youth services
- Explore opportunities for working with partners to provide employment assistance and support to people at risk of homelessness who are not in employment.
- Review single homelessness accommodation pathways and protocols and specifically, work with the Probation Service and the Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust to improve referral pathways for people leaving either custody or hospital or where mental health is an issue