

Equalities Monitoring – Services Appendix G - Housing Services, Benefits and Forestcare Lifelines

Annual Report – 2014-15



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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.

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

- The Council's Housing & Homeless databases (Abitas) as at 1st April 2015
- Lettings completed between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015

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 2015)

Age group	Housing register (number) (aged 18 or over)	Housing register % (aged 18 or over)	Homeless applications	Homeless apps %	Bracknell Forest ONS mid-year estimates 2014 (aged 18 or over)	Bracknell Forest Population mid year estimates 2014 % (aged 18 or over)
18-39	1504	66%	161	74%	33913	38%
40-59	525	23%	48	22%	34,509	38%
60-79	173	8%	9	4%	17,635	20%
80-99	80	4%	0	0%	4145	4%
Total	2282	100%	218	100%	90202	100%

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

66% 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 which works with newly formed households and young families struggling to secure private rented accommodation.

Table 2: Housing Register & Homeless Applications by Race (31st March 2015)

Of the 2,282 Housing Register applicants, 2,213 answered the ethnicity question. Of the 218 Homeless applicants 204 answered the ethnicity question.

Race	Housing register	Housing Register	Homeless applications	Homeless apps %	Bracknell Forest ONS 2011 Census %
White	1972	89%	182	89%	91%
Mixed	51	2%	3	1%	2%
Asian	44	2%	4	2%	5%
Black	94	4%	7	3%	2%
Other	52	2%	8	4%	0%
Total	2213	100%	204	100%	

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

Table 3: Housing Register by Sex (31st March 2015)

Sex	Housing register	%	Homeless applications	Homeless apps %	Bracknell Forest ONS Mid-year estimates 2014 Aged 18+ (number)	%
Female	1410	62%	152	70%	45844	50%
Male	872	38%	66	30%	44358	50%
Total	2282	100%	218	100%	90202	100%

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 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 (31st March 2015)

Of the 2,282 Housing Register applicants, 2,190 answered the disability question. Of the 218 Homeless applicants 206 answered the disability question.

Disability	Housing register	Housing register %	Homeless applications	Homeless apps %
No	1864	85%	170	83%
Yes	326	15%	36	17%
Total	2190	100%	206	100%

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 (31st March 2015)

Of the 2282 Housing Register applicants, 1954 answered the religion question. Of the 218 Homeless applicants 168 answered the religion question.

Religion/ Belief	Housing register	Housing register %	Homeless applications	Homeless applications %	Bracknell Forest ONS Census 2011 %
Christian	967	49%	66	39%	65%
Buddhist	8	<1%	1	<1%	<1%
Hindu	15	<1%	1	<1%	1%
Jewish	3	<1%	0		<1%
Sikh	2	<1%	0		<1%

Muslim	31	2%	8	5%	1%
None	815	42%	83	49%	%
Other	113	6%	9	5%	<1%
Total	1954	100%	168	100%	100%

In terms of religion, there has been an increase in those stating a religion of “None” each year over the past five years. This is a reasonably high percentage however this dates back to 2011 data. 82% of this category falls into the 18-39 age group.

Table 6: Housing Register by Sexual Orientation (31st March 2015)

Of the 2282 Housing Register applicants, 1847 answered the sexual orientation question. Of the 218 Homeless applicants 154 answered the sexual orientation question.

Sexual Orientation	Housing register	Housing register %	Homeless applications	Homeless applications %
Heterosexual	1757	95%	142	92%
Bisexual	21	1%	7	5%
Gay	12	1%	0	0
Lesbian	13	1%	2	1%
Other	44	2%	3	2%
Total	1847	100%	154	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.

3. Outcomes

To assess whether the protected groups on the housing register achieve similar outcomes, data from housing lets in 2014/15 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. There has also been an increase in availability of housing for age 60 or over with the opening of a new sheltered scheme.

¹ 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 (01/04/14 to 31/3/15)

Age group	Housing Lets	Housing Lets %	Housing register %
18-39	183	58%	66%
40-59	80	25%	23%
60-79	45	14%	8%
80-100	10	3%	4%
Total	318	100%	100%

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

Table 8: Housing Lets by Race (01/04/14 to 31/3/15)

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

Of 318 lets, the ethnicity is known for 311.

Race	Lets	% Lets	Housing Register %
White	286	92%	89%
Mixed	6	2%	2%
Asian	1	<1%	2%
Black	11	4%	4%
Chinese/Other	7	2%	2%
Total	311	100%	100%

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

The table below 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 Sex (01/04/14 to 31/3/15)

Sex	Housing register	Housing register %	Lets	Lets %
Female	1410	62%	209	66%
Male	872	38%	109	34%
Total	2282	100%	318	100%

Table 10: Housing Lets by Disability (01/04/14 to 31/3/15)

Of 318 lets, disability data is known for 303

Disability	Housing register	Housing register %	Lets	Lets %
No	1864	85%	245	81%
Yes	326	15%	58	19%
Total	2190	100%	303	100%

Table 11: Housing Lets by Religion (01/04/14 to 01/04/15)

Of 318 lets, religion data is known for 265.

% Housing Lettings (2014/15) by religion compared against % on housing register as at 31 March 2015			
Religion/ Belief	Lets	Lets %	Housing register %
Christian	139	52%	49%
Buddhist	2	1%	<1%
Hindu	2	<1%	<1%
Jewish	0	<1%	<1%
Sikh	0	0	<1%
Muslim	3	<1%	2%
None	108	41%	42%
Other	11	4%	6%
Total	265	100%	100%

Table 12: Housing Lets by Sexual Orientation (01/04/14 to 01/04/15)

Of 318 lets, sexual orientation data is known for 260.

Sexual Orientation	Lets	Lets %	Housing register %
Heterosexual	243	93%	92%
Bisexual	5	2%	5%
Gay	3	1%	
Lesbian	1	<1%	1%
Other	8	3%	2%
Total	260	100%	100%

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 1st 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 assessments, collection of overpayments and fraud investigation.

Over the last couple of years, in addition to changes to council tax benefit, the Government's Welfare Reform Act 2012 has continued to introduce several changes which have affected customers' entitlement to Housing Benefit as well as other welfare benefits.

One change due to the welfare reforms is that government payments for Social Funds used to help a customer in an emergency or to help people stay out of care, move into the community or stay into the community have been abolished. Instead it is for local councils to decide on running their own schemes. At Bracknell Forest Council two Social Fund schemes are run, Crisis grants and Home Emergency grants. Awards are discretionary and 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

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 and we encourage face to face contact with customers 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.

Since April 2014 customers are able to notify the service of changes in their circumstances over the telephone. We also accept evidence to support a person's claim to be sent electronically via email or smart phone.

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 2014-2015 and on Social Fund applications made during 2014-2015 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 (2014/15)

Race	No. of equal opportunity forms completed*	%	Social fund applications**	%	Bracknell Forest ONS Census 2011 %***
White	818	91.5%	566	96.4%	90.6%
Mixed	13	1.5%	7	1.2%	2.0%
Asian	34	3.8%	6	1.0%	4.5%
Black	29	3.2%	7	1.2%	1.9%
Other	0	0%	1	0.2%	<1%
Total	894	100%	587	100%	100%

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

*** Based on Office for National Statistics Census 2011

During 2014-2015, 2148 new Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Reduction application forms were received, of which 894 customers completed the equal opportunities section on ethnicity and so the data above represents approximately 41.6% of the total number of customers making a claim for benefit during the financial year.

The combined percentage of customers making a benefit claim from an Asian background and Black background has increased to 7% compared to the Benefits Service data for 2013/14 (3.7%). Due to the small numbers involved this can often lead to large changes in percentages and so no firm conclusions can be made. However, the data indicates that we continue to ensure that access to our service is available to all ethnic minority groups and we will continue to monitor this. There were 622 Social Fund applications made and equal opportunities data was recorded for 587 applications, representing 94.4% of the total number of applications.

The table does show that for social fund applications the proportion of claims from a minority group is low compared to that of Bracknell Forest and those that have made a benefit claim. However again the numbers are very low and as this is the first year this data has been analysed at this stage no firm conclusions can be made but will be monitored in future reports.

Table 2: Housing Benefit and Local Council Tax Reduction claims by Sexual Orientation (2014/15)

Information received from benefit application forms during 2014/15			
Sexual orientation	No. of forms completed*	%	Bracknell Forest estimated population %**
Heterosexual	343	95%	98.3%
Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual	18	5%	1.7%
Total	361	100%	100%

Source: * Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction application forms. * based on Office for National Statistics: *The Integrated Household Survey (IHS) 2013 and Mid-year population estimates for Bracknell Forest*

From the 2148 application forms received during 2014-2015 the number of benefit customers who recorded their sexual orientation represents 16.8% 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 percentage 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.

Data for sexual orientation is not recorded for Social Fund applications.

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 20/4/15)

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 2014 %***
18-39	2057	29.8%	329	53.0%	37.6%
40-59	2000	29.0%	276	44.4%	38.3%
60-79	1921	27.8%	16	2.6%	19.6%
80+	928	13.4%	0	0%	4.6%
Total	6906	100%	621	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 Government's Welfare Reform and the slight 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 or over compared to the Bracknell Forest estimates is higher but this is expected due to those customers being more likely to have a lower income.

The number of social fund applications from those aged 60 is 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 and more likely to be in long term housing, compared to the majority of social fund applicants seen who may be in and out of out of work benefits which in turn can cause benefit delays and therefore requiring short term assistance from the social fund.

Table 4: Housing Benefit and Local Council Tax Reduction claims and social fund applications by disability (at 20/4/15)

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	5063	73.4%	442	73.2%	85.4%
Yes	1832	26.6%	162	26.8%	14.6%
Total	6895	100%	604	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.

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. Actions from last year's equalities monitoring

Due to the fall in the number of claims recorded at the end of 2013/14 compared with those recorded for 2012/13 for those classed as having a disability or long term illness the Benefits Service recommendation was to monitor this and to investigate any data when available from the Department for Work and Pensions.

The Government's Welfare Reform has seen significant changes to disability benefits which may have affected people's entitlement and the Department for Work and Pensions National Statistics state that 'the number of people on Disability Living Allowance continues to fall', and that 'the number of people on Attendance Allowance is falling'.

In June 2013 Disability Living Allowance was replaced by Personal Independence Payment and due to a backlog of cases some customers had to wait up to nine months to find out if they were eligible for benefit. This may have contributed to the decrease in the number recorded in 2013/14. However, this year's report shows that the number has increased and is again in line with 2012/13 data. We will continue to monitor this and keep staff updated with benefit changes to ensure they are able to identify customers who may be entitled to a disability benefit in order to promote these benefits. The report this year does not contain any recommendations since the findings did not support any.

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	1294	33%
Female	2619	67%
Total	3913	

2. Disability

Of the Households that completed the equalities forms, 1067 stated they have a 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	2102	98%	91%
Mixed	9	<1%	2%
Asian	17	1%	5%
Black	13	1%	2%
Chinese/Other	2	<1%	<1%
Not Known	85		
Total	2228	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	1167	87%	65%
Buddhist	2	<1%	<1%
Hindu	12	<1%	2%
Jewish	0	<1%	<1%
Sikh	3	<1%	<1%
Muslim	7	<1%	1%
None	124	9%	30%
No answer	23	2%	<1%
Total	1338	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.

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 three remaining protected groups, marriage and civil partnerships, sex reassignment and pregnancy/maternity will be considered for future reports when more data is available. However, at this current stage, data on these three equality groups is not available in sufficient numbers to allow meaningful analysis.

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 2015/16.