

Oldham Homelessness Review

2016-2020

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Legislative and strategic context
3. Working together to prevent homelessness in Oldham 2016-21: Highlights
4. Homelessness: analysis and trends
5. Temporary accommodation
6. Duty to refer
7. Reviews
8. Economic factors and housing market data
9. Service mapping
10. Consultation
11. Emerging themes
12. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
13. Resources
14. Next steps
15. Appendix A: List of tables and figures

1. Introduction

Oldham's current homelessness strategy – Working Together to Prevent Homelessness in Oldham – was introduced in 2016. Local authorities in England have a duty to undertake a review of homelessness in their borough at least every five years and produce a homelessness strategy based on the findings of that review.

This Oldham Homelessness Review covers the period 2016-2020, and mainly focuses on the two years since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) in April 2018. The HRA not only changed the way local authorities administer homelessness applications, but introduced much more comprehensive data gathering which, based on this review, will support the development of an insightful and responsive new homelessness strategy for Oldham.

The Review considers not only local homelessness data, but also Oldham's economical and housing market data which may influence people seeking housing advice from the local authority. It also takes into account developments across Greater Manchester and the wider country, and the impact these have had in relation to homelessness in Oldham.

2. Legislative and strategic context

The HRA was arguably the biggest change in homelessness legislation since the introduction of the 2002 Homelessness Act. It introduced new duties on local authorities to prevent and relieve homelessness, as well as reinforcing duties to provide universal and targeted advice.

The following timeline gives an overview of the progress of the HRA, and other developments in homelessness legislation, case law and related statutory guidance and provisions since 2016.

Table 1: Timeline of legal developments

Year	Development	Implications
2017	Children and Social Care Act 2017	Entitlement to Personal Advisor support for Care Leavers extended to age 25, but homelessness legislation was not extended in line with this. However, in Oldham a decision was later taken to apply automatic priority need to all Oldham care leavers until age 25
2018	Implementation of HRA 3 rd April 2018, accompanied by revised Code of Guidance	New duties on local authorities to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide advice to anyone in the district - Assess the circumstances, housing and support needs of homeless applicants and agree a Personal Housing Plan - Take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for those at risk within 56 days - Take reasonable steps to relieve homelessness for eligible applicants for 56 days
	Data Protection Act May 2018	Data protection laws updated to include informed consent and the right to erasure
	Implementation of Duty to Refer 1 st October 2018	Legal duty placed upon specified public bodies – such as Social Care, hospitals, Jobcentres and Probation – to refer anyone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness to the local housing authority
	Implementation of retaliatory eviction provisions contained within Deregulation Act 2015 1 st October 2018	Provisions made preventing landlords from progressing eviction in circumstances where the tenant has unresolved complaints such as disrepair. Expectation on local authorities to provide advice and take enforcement action in line with this legislation
2019	Tenant Fees Act June 2019	Ban on tenant fees for new or renewed tenancy agreements on or after 1st June 2019
	Samuels v Birmingham City Council June 2019	Supreme Court ruling on criteria for affordability and intentional homelessness
	Haringey XY v London Borough of Haringey July 2019	Reinforcement of requirement to keep Personal Housing Plans under review in line with notifications issued to the applicant such as changes in decision or circumstances

2020	Coronavirus Act March 2020	Protection from eviction for residential tenants, and introduction of mortgage holidays for homeowners
------	----------------------------	--

Alongside developments in legislation there have been several local, regional and national strategies and frameworks introduced and updated which have wide ranging impacts on homelessness in the borough.

Table 2: Timeline of Local, Regional and National Strategies

Year	Strategy / Framework	Implications
2016	Ending violence against women and girls Strategy	Aims to increase reporting of often hidden crimes, to overhaul the criminal justice response to vulnerable victims and to bring more perpetrators to justice – complements, and will be supported by, wider Government work to tackle modern slavery, prevent child sexual abuse and protect girls from exploitation by gangs.
2016	Oldham Work & Skills Strategy	Sets out plans to work with local employers, training providers, schools, residents and other partners to improve the prospects of our residents and provide them with high quality and relevant skills training.
2017	The Oldham Plan	Empowering people and communities: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inclusive Economy 2. Cooperative Services 3. Thriving Communities
2017	Oldham Domestic Violence Strategy	Tackling domestic violence is a priority for Oldham Community Safety Partnership. This strategy is currently under review considering the new Domestic Abuse Act due to come into place in 2021
2018	GM Serious & Organised Crime Strategy	Sets out how, through the ground-breaking Programme Challenger, GM intend to tackle serious and organised crime in all its forms in Greater Manchester.
2018	UK Strategy for our Veterans	Sets the intent for the delivery of public services to veterans across the UK so that by 2028 every veteran feels even more valued, supported and empowered and will never be disadvantaged as a result of their service
2019	Oldham Allocations Scheme	Introduced reasonable preference applicable to prevention, relief and other homelessness duties in line with changes

		brought about by the Homelessness Reduction Act
2019	Oldham Housing Strategy	Commitment to meet Greater Manchester Housing Provider Homelessness Pledges and develop a Temporary Accommodation Strategy
2019	Oldham's Corporate Parenting Strategy	Sets out a vision for improving the life chances of children looked after and care leavers, our shared approach for making this happen, and how we will know we are getting it right.
2019	GM Housing & Mental Health Strategy	Introduced a commitment to supporting the role housing, health and social care provision has in addressing the needs of service users.
2019	GM Drug & Alcohol Strategy	Introduced a vision is to make Greater Manchester a place where everyone can have the best start in life, live well and age well, safe from the harms caused by drugs and alcohol.
2020	Oldham Local Offer for Care Leavers	Accommodation pathways reviewed between Aftercare and Housing services, including introduction of joint housing assessments and literature for care leavers, and 'fast track' processing of housing register applications with reasonable preference awarded
2020	National Mental Health Foundation Strategy: Making Prevention Happen	Affirms a commitment to making prevention of poor mental health happen so that people across the UK can live mentally healthier lives.
2020	GM Integrated Health & Justice Strategy	Introduced to address the typically very poor physical and mental health of people, both victims and offenders, who come through the criminal justice system. Including a focus on earlier identification of health and support needs, more responsive interventions, and providing health and care services, which are equal to those available to people living in the wider community.
2021	Greater Manchester Homelessness Prevention Strategy	Continued joint working across the 10 Greater Manchester local authorities and wider Homelessness Action Network to develop and support initiatives to prevent and relieve homelessness

3. Working Together to Prevent Homelessness in Oldham 2016-21: Highlights

The 2016 Homelessness Strategy was reviewed annually with an action plan created each year based on its priorities and trends emerging within each year. The following table provides some highlights of developments which have taken place over the past 5 years.

Table 3: Highlights from previous Strategy

July 2016	Training was provided to staff and partner agencies in respect of debt advice, support and welfare reform - conditionality, sanctions, processes for alternative payments and advance payments of benefits so that they can support customers in navigating the changes to the welfare benefits system.
April 2017	A review of the Councils Allocations Scheme was commenced to ensure it meets the borough's housing needs
June 2017	The number of dispersed temporary accommodation units was increased in order to attempt to meet growing demand and minimise the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation
December 2017	GM Entrenched Rough Sleeper SIB launched for referrals
March 2018	Joint training events with colleagues from Offending and Substance Misuse services were held to improve access to services and promote better joint working arrangements
October 2018	Phase 1 of 'A Bed Every Night' (ABEN), a GM-wide rough sleeping accommodation project, launches with 177 people accommodated. This was the first time Oldham had an ongoing dedicated winter shelter provision
April 2019	'Supporting Homeless People Better' training launched by the Housing Strategy Team, offering a half day overview of homelessness processes and legislation to partner agencies across all sectors
	Housing First launched across Greater Manchester, offering intensive support to a number of individuals experiencing multiple disadvantage including homelessness
July 2019	The Oldham Housing Advice Service – renamed Housing Options Oldham – was re-located back in house to the Council following a number of years being delivered by an external provider. This service comprised both the statutory

	homelessness and allocations functions of the Council
	The Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) was launched, which saw a team comprised of a Coordinator and Outreach Workers provided dedicated support to rough sleepers
	Oldham's Councils new Allocations Policy was launched on 1 st July 2019
October 2019	Phase 2 of ABEN launched working in partnership with Oldham Community Night Shelter. The provision included dedicated spaces for women / couples
	Real Change Oldham was launched by Oldham Council Leader Councillor Fielding and Lead member for Housing Councillor Roberts on World Homelessness Day. Real Change Oldham raises funds via donations from local businesses and the public to support people in the local area who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
November 2019	Commitment made at Cabinet that Oldham Council would become a 'Homeless Friendly' Council, pledging to meet commitments around ensuring services are accessible to the needs of people experiencing homelessness
December 2019	Commitment made at Cabinet that all Oldham care leavers under the age of 25 would be considered in priority need and unintentionally homeless
March 2020	'Everyone In' response initiated following outbreak of COVID-19, offering accommodation to any known rough sleepers

4. Homelessness: analysis and trends

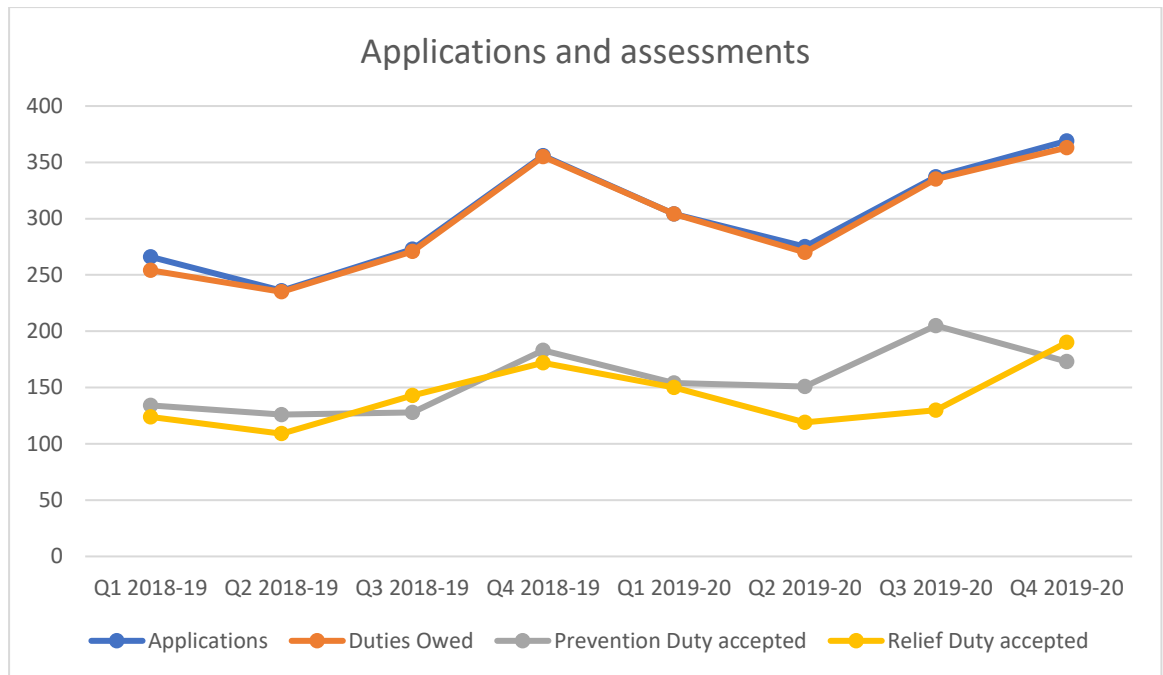
4.1 Applications and assessments

There has been a steady increase in the number of households making homeless applications over the past two years since the Homelessness Reduction Act was introduced. This trend is not exclusive to Oldham, with homelessness increasing across the country – Relief duties increased by 15% in 2019-20.

The chart below shows the total number of homeless applications made and, of those:

- The number that were owed a subsequent duty – where they were not, this was due to the household either being found not homeless or not eligible for assistance
- The number of those owed a duty where this was a ‘Prevention Duty’ – to take steps to prevent the applicant from becoming homeless
- The number of those owed a duty where this was a ‘Relief Duty’ – to take steps to relieve the applicant’s homelessness where this had already occurred.

Figure 1: Applications and Assessments



Oldham opened a comparative number of Relief duties to the national average in 2019/20, and a higher number of prevention duties – demonstrating a commitment to early intervention.

Table 4: Applications and Assessments: National comparison

	2018/19		2019/20	
	Oldham	National	Oldham	National
Applications taken	1131	287,880	1,285	304,290
Duties owed	99%	92%	99%	94.8%
Prevention duties accepted	51%	55%	54%	43.3%
Relief duties accepted	49%	45%	46%	45.3%

4.2 Homelessness prevention

Homelessness prevention is often the most positive course of action for applicants and is also the most cost effective for the Council. Prevention activity to involve helping a household to remain in their existing home or securing new accommodation for them to move to.

However, prevention activity is also resource intensive in terms of staff time and available housing options. Since the service has come back in-house to the Council it has been gradually building and

strengthening its staffing and other resources in an environment of increasing demand, so prevention performance has seen a decline. A review of the Housing Options service and its prevention options will be key in developing the 2021 Homelessness Strategy.

Table 5: Prevention Duties

	Closed prevention duties	% Successfully prevented
Q1 2018-19	32	53%
Q2 2018-19	95	49%
Q3 2018-19	141	46%
Q4 2018-19	132	48%
Q1 2019-20	138	32%
Q2 2019-20	197	40%
Q3 2019-20	179	34%
Q4 2019-20	179	34%

4.3 Homelessness relief

When households due become homeless Oldham Council acts appropriately and has historically had good performance in securing alternative accommodation for these households. However, the figures below clearly show that with the disruption caused by the service returning in house, relief activity has begun to reduce. Measures to address this will also need to be considered as part of the 2021 Homelessness Strategy.

Table 6: Relief Duties

	Closed relief duties	% Successfully relieved
Q1 2018-19	44	39%
Q2 2018-19	104	63%
Q3 2018-19	140	54%
Q4 2018-19	151	52%
Q1 2019-20	118	51%
Q2 2019-20	281	41%
Q3 2019-20	179	35%
Q4 2019-20	200	24%

Learning Point:

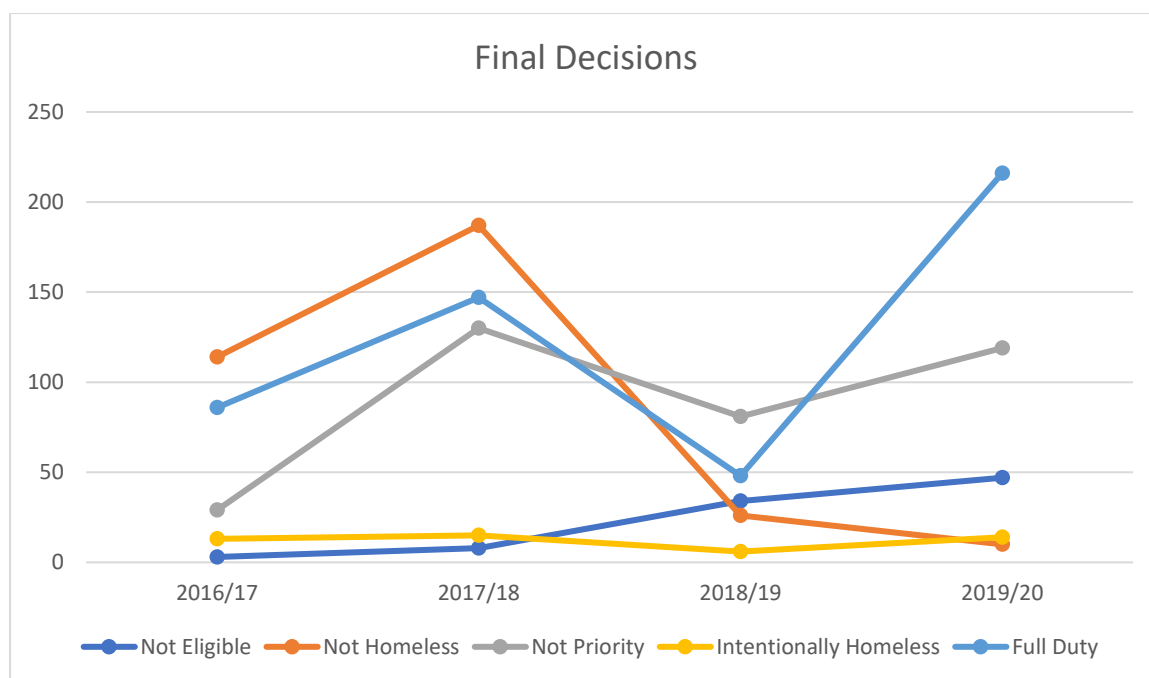
- As approaches and demand upon resources have increased, successful prevention and relief outcomes within 56 days have reduced. There needs to be greater focus on where resources are targeted – such as ensuring Prevention Duties are opened and monitored to the same level as more visible households living in temporary accommodation

4.4 Final decisions

Prior to the HRA a decision would have been reached on a homeless application almost immediately; now it is usually reached – or at least only enacted – if the Relief Duty has been ongoing for 56 days the local authority has not been able to help the applicant successfully resolve their homelessness.

Some decisions can be reached sooner; for example, a decision that the applicant is not eligible for assistance due to immigration status or is not homeless. There has been an increase in the former decisions during this review period and a decrease in the latter – potentially because of the increased assistance available through the Prevention Duty and general advice services.

Figure 2: Final Decisions



As discussed, unfortunately not all Relief Duties end with a positive outcome:

- Some households withdraw their application or lose contact with the Council during this period
- The Relief Duty only lasts for 56 days, after which the Council does not have an ongoing duty to keep taking reasonable steps for some households, e.g. those not in priority need or intentionally homeless.

After this 56-day period some of these households will still be owed an ongoing accommodation duty by the Council – the ‘full’ housing duty. The Homelessness Reduction Act was introduced in part to try and reduce the number of households moving into this duty, by focusing on earlier prevention and relief.

Table 7: Full Housing Duties Owed

	Closed relief duties	Full Duty owed	% Owed a full duty
Q1 2018-19	44	13	30%
Q2 2018-19	104	10	10%
Q3 2018-19	140	10	7%
Q4 2018-19	151	15	10%
Q1 2019-20	118	12	9%
Q2 2019-20	281	65	23%
Q3 2019-20	179	59	33%

Q4 2019-20	200	80	40%
------------	-----	----	-----

This therefore leaves the following proportion of households for whom no accommodation was secured within 56 days, and no ongoing duty owed; these are the households outlined in the bullet points above. This is a significant proportion of Oldham's homelessness cohort, suggesting where resources may need to be directed by the 2021 Homelessness Strategy.

Table 8: Households not successfully relieved or owed a full housing duty

	% Not successfully relieved or owed a full housing duty
Q1 2018-19	31%
Q2 2018-19	27%
Q3 2018-19	39%
Q4 2018-19	38%
Q1 2019-20	40%
Q2 2019-20	36%
Q3 2019-20	32%
Q4 2019-20	36%

4.5 Reasons for homelessness

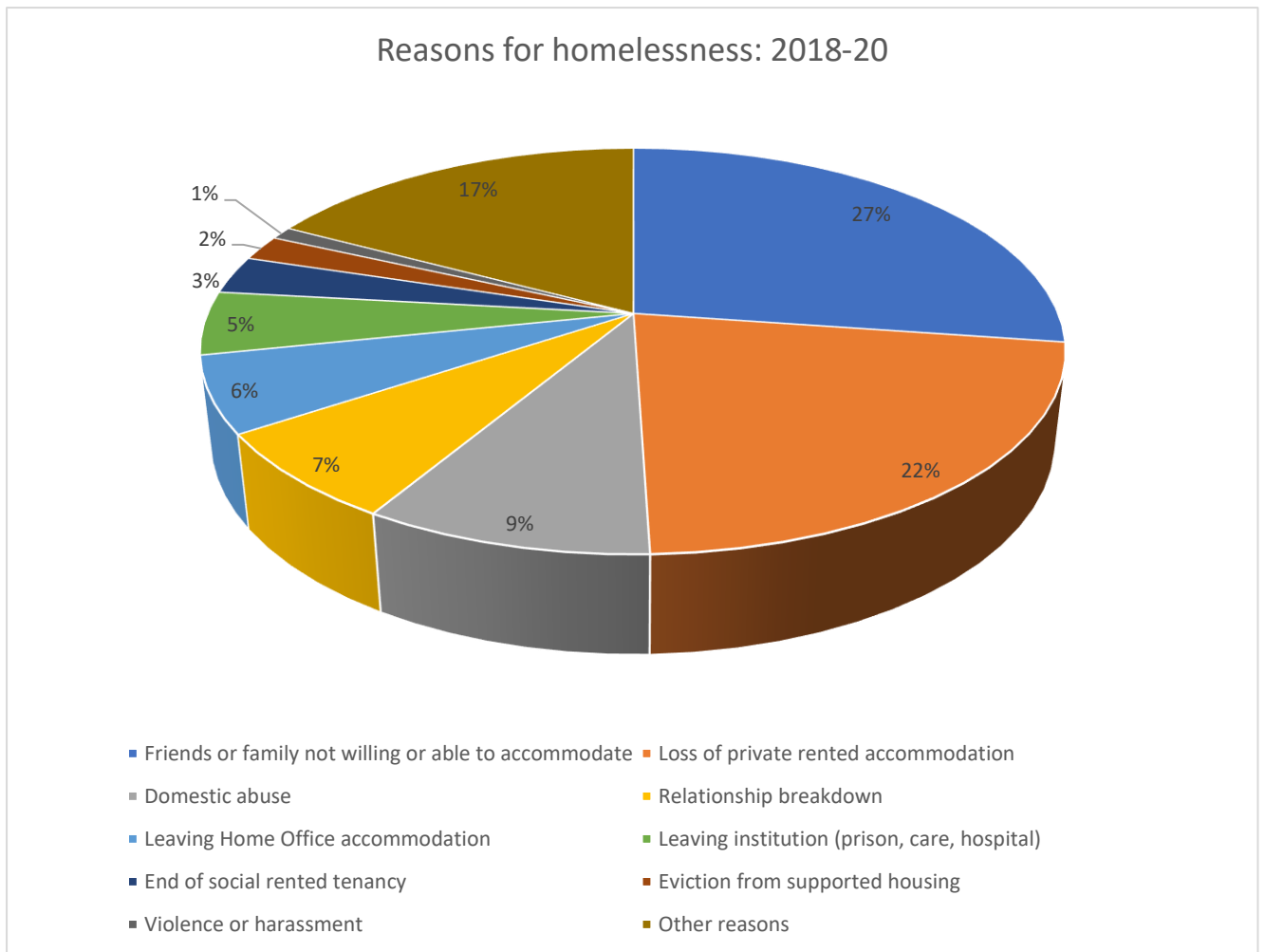
Understanding the main reasons why people present as homeless or threatened with homelessness gives the Council a better idea of how to target its resources in the 2021 Homelessness Strategy. For example, the main reason for homelessness – which continues to rise – is applicants being asked to leave by friends or family. This is an area where the Council needs to strengthen and target its prevention activity; however, it is also indicative of the issues faced across the borough in terms of affordable housing supply and demand.

The following table does not include information pre-HRA because the statistical returns at the time did not record reasons for homelessness amongst 'non-priority' households, which would therefore lead to heavily skewed information e.g. towards families rather than single person households. As can be seen from below however, trends remain broadly the same for the past two years.

Table 9: Main reasons for homelessness

	2018/19	2019/20
Asked to leave by friends or family	25%	29%
Loss of private sector accommodation	23%	21%
Domestic abuse	8%	10%
Relationship breakdown	7%	8%
Required to leave accommodation provided by the Home Office as asylum support	5%	8%
Left an institution e.g. prison, hospital, care	4%	6%
Eviction from social rented accommodation	2%	3%
Eviction from supported accommodation	1%	3%
Other forms of violence or harassment	1%	2%
All other reasons	24%	10%

Figure 3: Main reasons for homelessness



Learning Points:

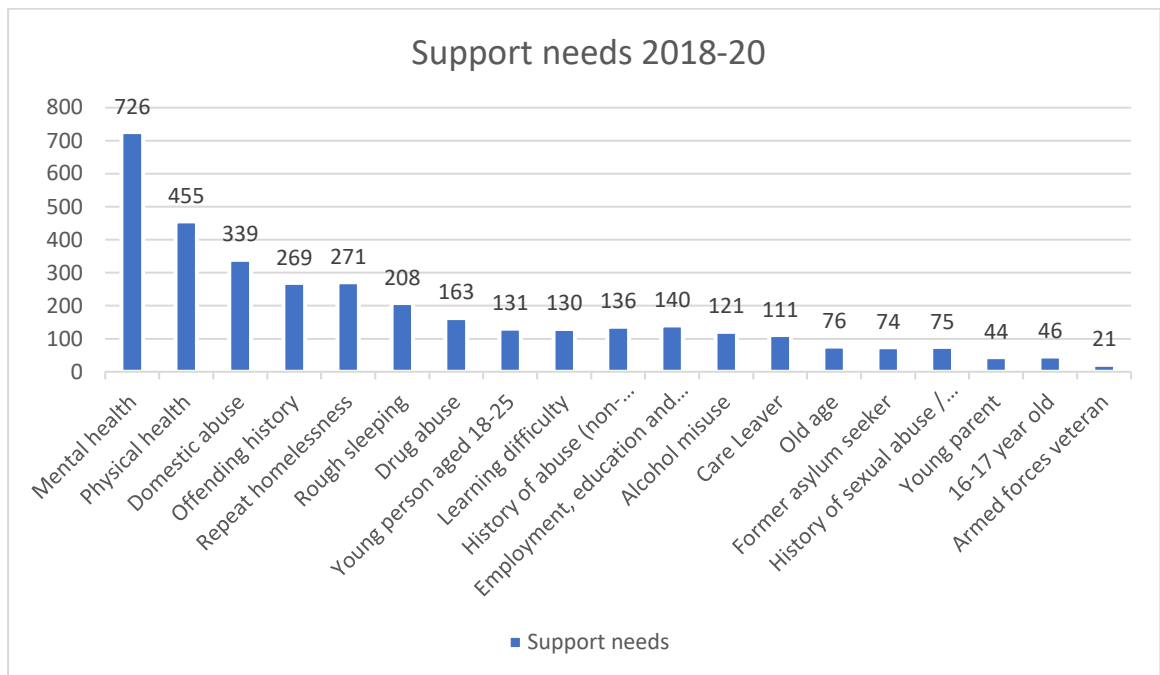
- Exclusions by friends and family are increasing; are enough resources being committed to preventing this, for example mediation and early intervention
- Domestic abuse continues to rise – how will the new Domestic Abuse Bill affect this, and how can we improve prevention options
- Loss of private rented sector accommodation remains a leading cause of homelessness nationally, but also remains a much-needed source of prevention on relief. How do we grow and retain good landlords and improve tenancy relations
- Relationship breakdowns are increasing as a cause of homelessness; how can we improve the advice and options available to departing partners prior to homelessness occurring, including education and support

4.6 Support needs

As well as understanding why applicants present as homeless, it is also important to understand what needs they have other than housing to plan responses accordingly.

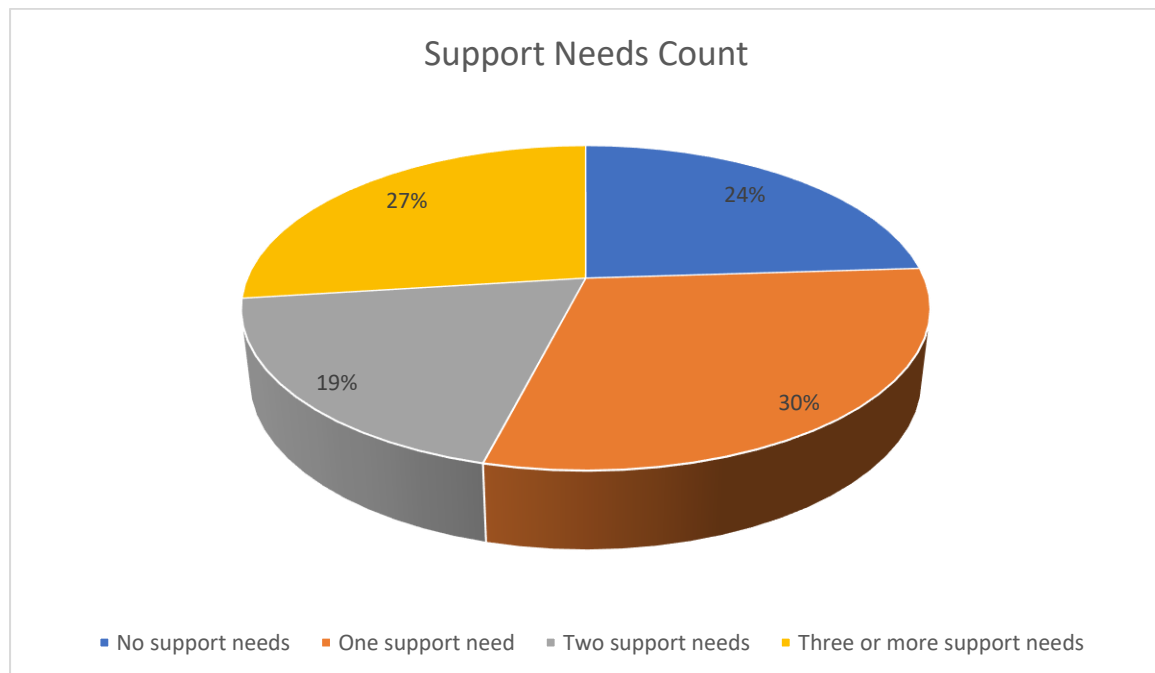
Over the past two years applicants who were homeless or threatened with homelessness were identified as having the following support needs.

Figure 4: Support Needs



Applicants often had multiple and complex needs, as is evident from the chart below. Less than a quarter of homeless applicants stated to have no support needs at all in their household:

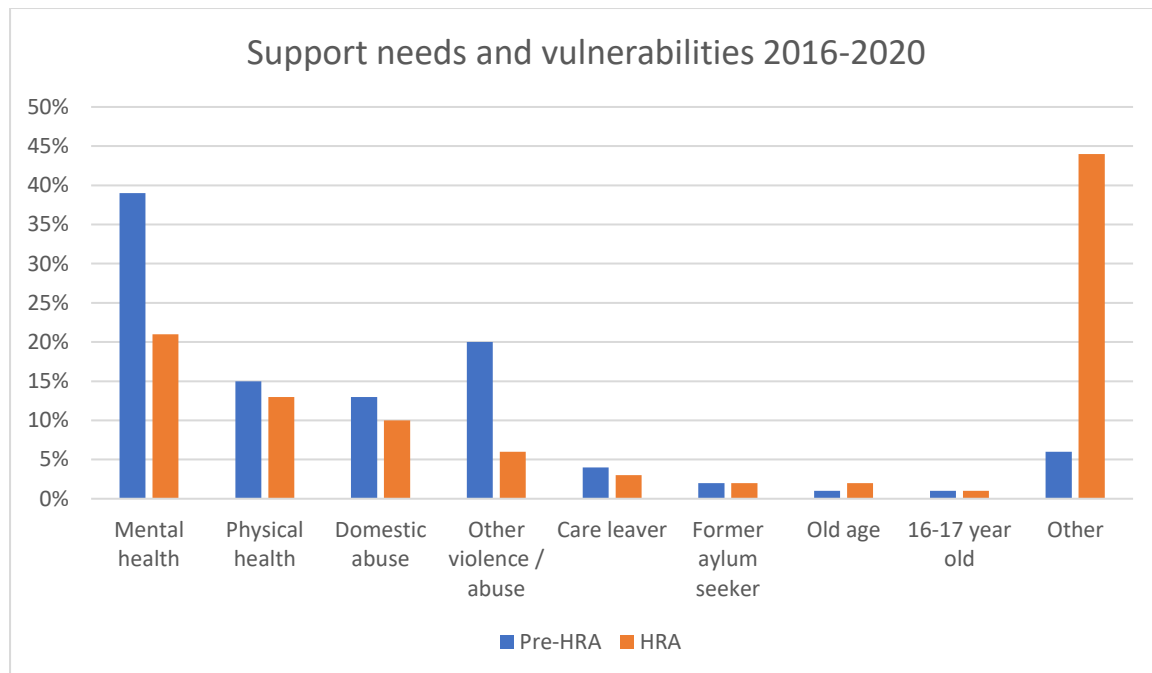
Figure 5: Count of support needs



Prior to the introduction of the HRA Councils did not record the support needs of applicants, although it was used to determine whether single applicants were 'vulnerable' under homelessness legislation where they did not meet these criteria under other categories e.g. dependent children.

The following chart gives the percentage of applicants who declared to have the following support needs across the full period. The 'other' category increased with the introduction of more detailed information collection under the HRA, whilst some other categories such as mental health have reduced because information collected is spread across all applicants, not just those found to be 'vulnerable' / in priority need.

Figure 6: Support needs and vulnerabilities 2016-20



Oldham Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) found that levels of people living with depression were above the national average – 12% to 10.7% - so to find high levels of applicants self-declaring mental ill-health is in line with this data.

Learning points:

- One fifth of homeless applicants state to have mental health issues, with a significant proportion having co-morbidities such as substance misuse and a history of rough sleeping in the 'other' category
- Almost 15% of homeless applicants state to have physical health issues, in line with the national average. The Covid-19 has particularly brought to light 'hidden' conditions such as asthma, COPD and diabetes, and the need for effective treatment, testing and vaccination pathways for groups such as rough sleepers
- The Domestic Abuse Bill will in effect treat all people fleeing domestic abuse as being in priority need; however, in Oldham the evidence suggests that the majority of applicants already are. The Bill may however have implications for demand upon services, especially because there does appear to be evidence of repeat homelessness presentations amongst applicants who have experienced domestic abuse

- Offending history is the fourth highest identified support need amongst homeless applicants in Oldham. This could be in part because Probation and Prisons make the highest number of referrals under the Duty to Refer, but this group also appear to be over-represented in programmes such as A Bed Every Night (ABEN) and supported accommodation. Access to suitable and sustainable accommodation and support for ex-offenders therefore needs further exploration in the 2021 homelessness strategy
- Repeat homelessness and rough sleeping is a concerningly prevalent support need and has a significant rate of co-morbidity amongst other support needs such as domestic abuse, offending history and substance misuse. This points towards a need for further investigation into what will work to stop tenancies breaking down – is it pre-tenancy training, loneliness, the type of accommodation, the area, the support or something else?
- Care leavers unfortunately continue to feature amongst homeless applicants, although numbers are decreasing as measures are put in place to prepare them for adulthood at an earlier stage. The 2021 Strategy needs to consider what further steps can be taken between Aftercare, housing and support services to put in place resources to support young people in Oldham to keep reducing this number further
- Former asylum seeker numbers continue to be stubbornly high, and to a certain extent something outside of the local authority’s control. Oldham benefits from a strong third sector which is committed to supporting the integration of people who have been granted refugee status, but the backlog of households waiting to move on following the suspension of evictions during the Covid-19 pandemic will continue to present challenges into 2021 and beyond
- Old age is presenting a new challenge in homelessness, with numbers in this age group increasing from the time of the last homelessness strategy. Oldham does benefit from a range of sheltered and extra care accommodation – but is it sufficient to meet the needs of some of the older population, such as rough sleepers and ex-offenders?

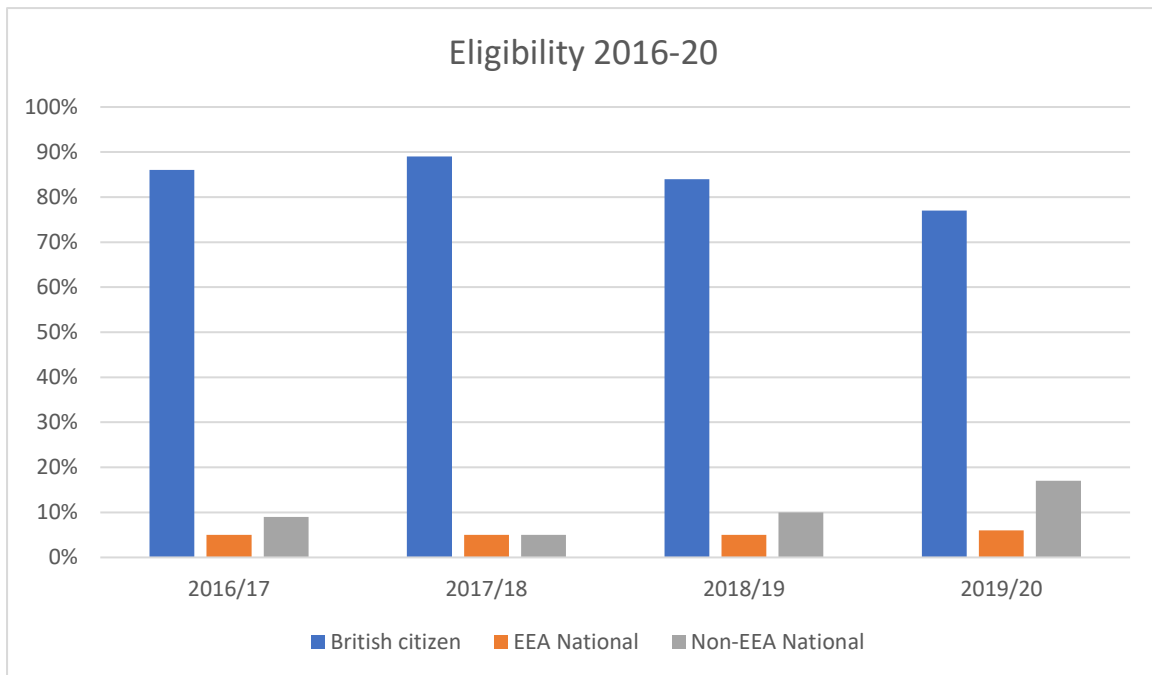
4.7 Eligibility

Local authorities must make housing advice available free of charge to anyone in the district but can only provide homelessness assistance – such as accepting prevention and relief duties – to eligible groups. These are set out in homelessness legislation and exclude households such as those who have no recourse to public funds conditions applied to their visas.

Habitually resident British or Irish citizens are the main eligible group who apply for homelessness assistance in Oldham, but there has been an increase in applications from other groups in recent years. The increase is biggest amongst EEA workers and people granted refugee status – correlating with an increase in applications from people becoming homeless after being asked to leave accommodation provided by the Home Office as asylum support.

As with other figures below, the pre-HRA figures are not directly transferable as the Prevention Duty did not exist – the 2016-18 figures reflect only households who were found to be homeless, i.e. who would nowadays be owed the Relief Duty.

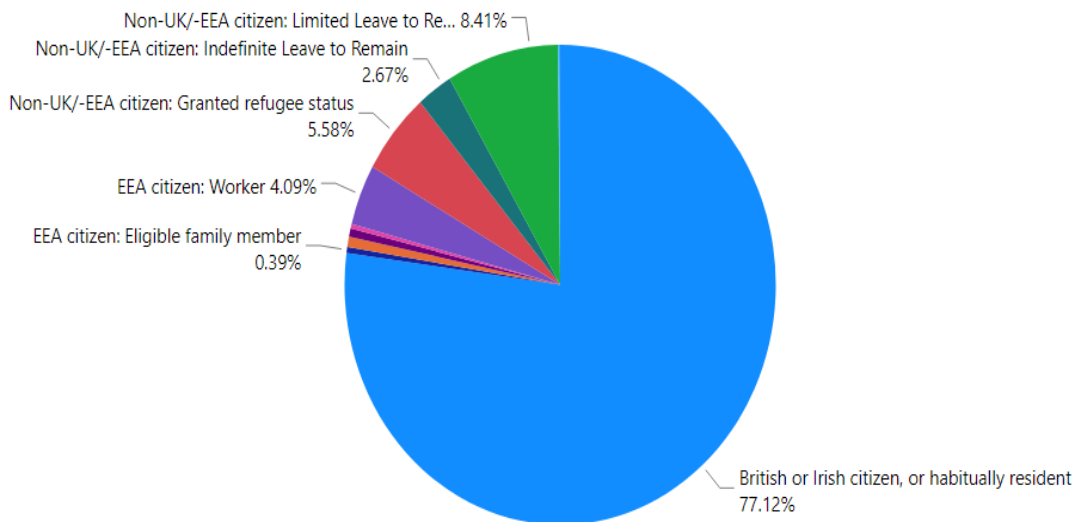
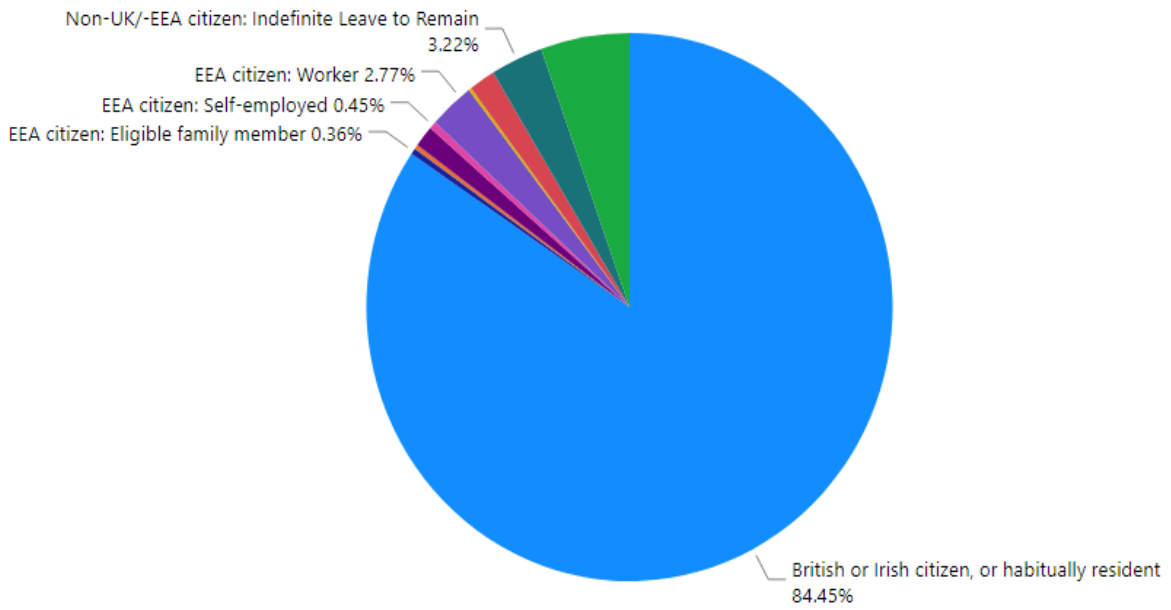
Figure 7: Eligibility 2016-20



The following charts show the change over the course of a year from 2018-19 to 2019-20 in the groups presenting as homeless – with a 5% increase in applications from those granted refugee status and 2% increase in EEA workers.

Figure 8: Eligibility breakdown 2018-20

British or Irish citizen, or habitually resident
Non-UK/-EEA citizen: Indefinite Leave to Remain
EEA citizen: Worker
Non-UK/-EEA citizen: Limited Leave to Remain
Non-UK/-EEA citizen: Granted refugee status
EEA citizen: Permanent right to reside
EEA citizen: Other
Non-UK/-EEA citizen: Other protection (e.g. humanitarian, discretionary)
EEA citizen: Eligible family member
Non-UK/-EEA citizen: Exceptional Leave to Remain
EEA citizen: Self-employed



Learning Points:

- Continue to develop the role of the Local Authority Asylum Support Officers (LAASLOs) – a time-limited service – to support the integration of refugees and deliver early intervention to prevent homelessness amongst those given leave to remain
- Ensure housing advice is promoted to emerging communities to ensure awareness of housing rights and prevent crisis situations

4.8 Demographics

4.8.1 Ethnicity

Homeless applicants are asked to provide information on their ethnicity on a voluntary basis, which can be used to establish whether any groups are disproportionately affected or not being reached by services despite being represented in Oldham.

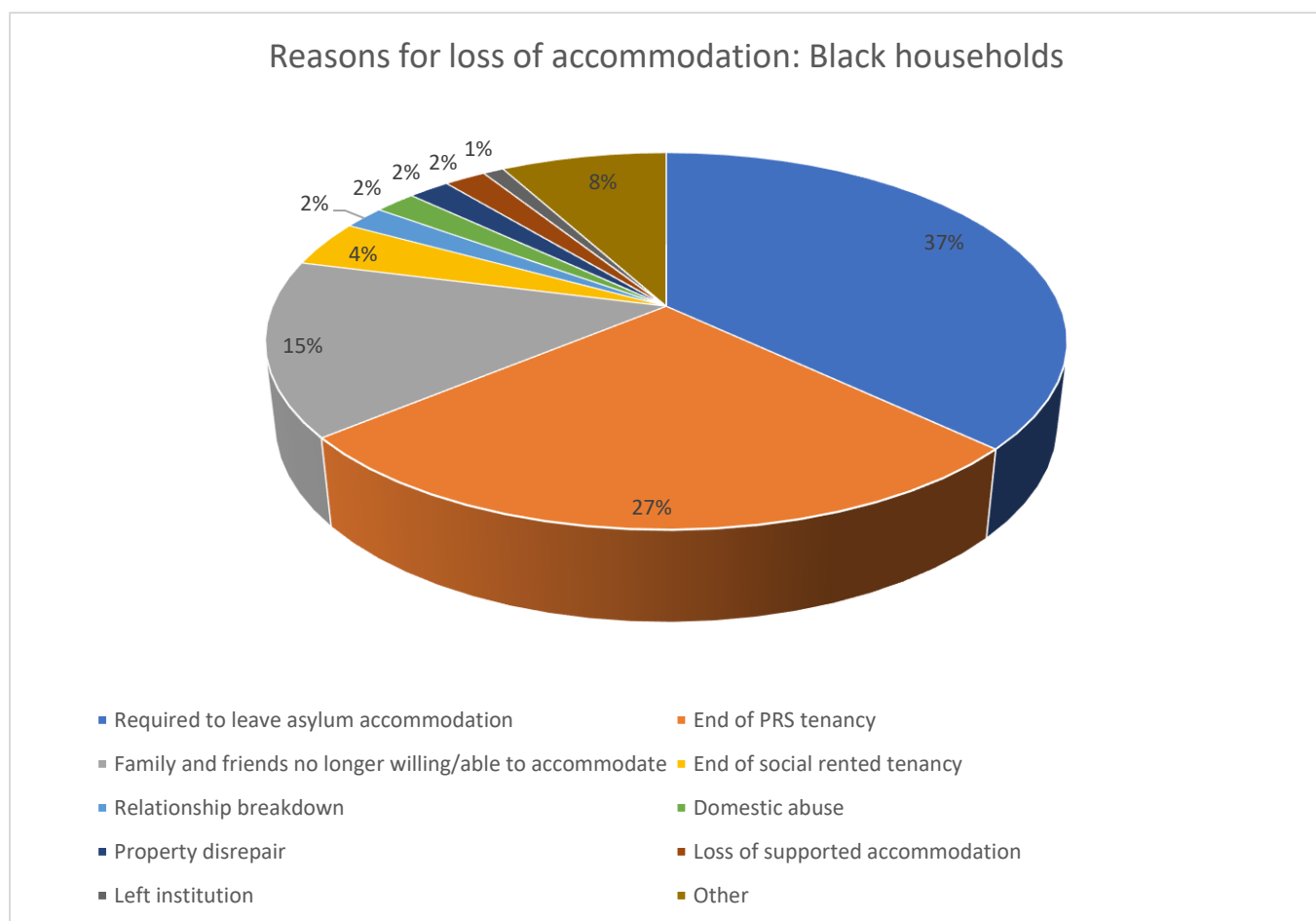
The following sets out applications under the HRA compared with UK Census Data. Whilst the last Census was in 2011 and is set to be reviewed, it does highlight some potential inequalities which require investigation through the 2021 Homelessness Strategy.

Table 10: Ethnicity

Ethnic Group	Census	HRA applications 2018-2020
White	77.5%	65.3%
Pakistani	10.1%	7.6%
Bangladeshi	7.3%	5.2%
Indian	0.7%	0.3%
Black	1.2%	9%
Mixed	1.8%	2.6%
Other	1.4%	10%

The biggest disparity between HRA applications and Census information is Black households; this is in part due to representation amongst those granted refugee status, but other reasons for loss of accommodation were in line with overall trends for all applicants, such as loss of private rented sector accommodation and exclusions by friends and family.

Figure 9: Reason for loss of accommodation: Black households



4.8.2 Age

Applications amongst different age groups have remained broadly the same during the past two years, and reflect data previously recorded for ‘main housing duty’ applicants under previous statutory data recording mechanisms. There has been a slight increase in presentations from over 65-year olds – which is reflected in the increase in people declaring support needs due to old age.

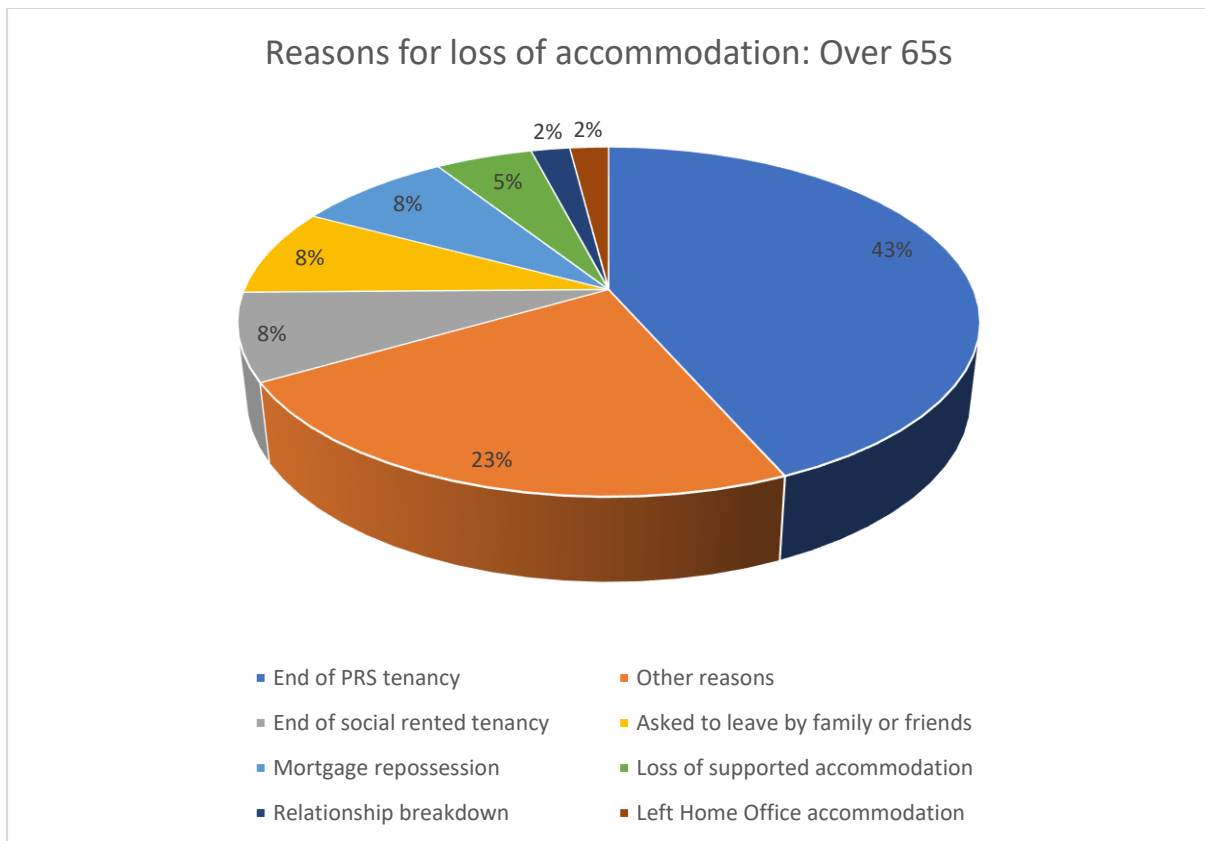
Table 11: Age

	2018/19	2019/20
16-17	9 (<1%)	12 (1%)
18-24	243 (22%)	260 (20%)
25-34	361 (32%)	430 (34%)
35-44	252 (23%)	311 (24%)
45-54	182 (16%)	185 (15%)
55-64	53 (5%)	51 (4%)
65-74	13 (1%)	21 (2%)
75+	6 (<1%)	1
Not known	0	1

The majority of over 65s became homeless due to the loss of private rented sector tenancies, in line with the main cause of homelessness. Loss of social rented and mortgaged properties were also slightly higher amongst this age group than some others, which may indicate a particular need for financial or other support to retain their properties or make a planned move to avoid homelessness.

Oldham’s JSNA data found that life expectancy is 17.2 years lower for males, and 19.6 lower for females than the national average – showing clear inequalities in the borough which may unfortunately be further impacted by housing issues. There is a real need therefore to ensure there are appropriate early intervention and prevention options available for this group.

Figure 10: Reason for loss of accommodation: Over 65s



Presentations from 16-17-year olds look to have had a modest increase, but this may be deceptive due to the way figures are reported. If we look at support needs declared, applicants stating to be a 16-17-year old in need of support have risen from 11 to 19 between 2018/19 and 2019/20; almost double. This may relate to other young people in a household led by another applicant, but still demonstrates a potential increasing need. This is supported by an increase in overall approaches for advice from this age group to the Housing Options service increasing from 44 to 63 in the same time period.

4.8.3 Household type

The past two years have seen changing trends in presentations under HRA, particularly:

- More females with dependent children approaching under the Relief Duty rather than the Prevention duty

- Conversely, single females without children seeking advice at an earlier stage
- An increasing number of single males seeking assistance under both duties

The following also demonstrates demand from household type on the Housing Options service and suggests how it could be tailored in the future to meet the needs of applicants in Oldham. For example, 59% of HRA applications are from single applicants, and 65% from all-adult households who may require a different service to families.

Figure 12: Households Types

	2018/19	2019/20	2018/19	2019/20
	Relief Duty		Prevention Duty	
Single male plus dependents	15 (3%)	15 (3%)	12 (2%)	17 (2%)
Single female plus dependents	98 (18%)	114 (19%)	182 (32%)	156 (23%)
Single male	246 (45%)	282 (48%)	153 (27%)	238 (35%)
Single female	134 (24%)	104 (18%)	78 (14%)	123 (18%)
Single – other	0	0	0	1 (<1%)
Couple plus dependents	27 (5%)	32 (5%)	82 (14%)	92 (13%)
Couple	23 (4%)	34 (6%)	35 (6%)	34 (5%)
3+ adults plus dependents	4 (1%)	3 (1%)	15 (3%)	15 (2%)
All adult household	1 (<1%)	4 (1%)	14 (2%)	4 (1%)
Not known	0	1 (<1%)	0	3 (1%)

Learning points:

- How can we increase housing options available to single males – for example through expanding the Bond Scheme and shared accommodation options for under 35s
- What support do single females with dependents require to encourage them to seek help at an earlier point and reduce presentations at Relief Duty stage
- A significant proportion of households become homeless from the private rented sector, and trends can be seen amongst BME and older households. How do we better reach these groups, for example through the voluntary sector, to provide advice at an earlier stage?
- How do we support an ageing population who may be struggling to maintain their homes – for example through financial support or promoting early help to avoid homelessness
- On the other hand, how do we prevent young people from reaching crisis point and better prepare them for independence – as an increasing number are presenting to the Housing Options service

4.8.4 Economic status

Oldham has a significant proportion of wards within the most deprived 10% or 20% in England on almost all of the measures within Indices of Multiple Deprivation. Whilst its employment rank has improved slightly from 2015 to 2019, its education, training and skills rank has worsened.

The following table shows the economic status of HRA applicants over the past two years; this information was not recorded pre-HRA. As can be seen, the number of applicants in employment had declined over the past two years and those actively job-seeking significantly increased in line with changes to Universal Credit.

Table 13: Economic Status

	2018/19	2019/20
Full-time employment	148 (13%)	126 (10%)
Part-time employment	125 (11%)	134 (10%)
Student / in training	11 (<1%)	20 (2%)
Registered unemployed	309 (28%)	615 (48%)
Not registered unemployed but seeking work	123 (11%)	53 (4%)
At home and not seeking work	77 (7%)	64 (5%)
Long term sick	227 (20%)	198 (16%)
Retired	15 (1%)	17 (1%)
Other	80 (7%)	31 (2%)
Not known	4 (<1%)	14 (1%)

According to the Oldham JSNA in 2017/18, 68.1% in Oldham were in employment which is significantly below both the North West and England averages. Youth unemployment was highlighted as a particular issue, which presents challenges in terms of securing accommodation that is compounded by the lack of accommodation available within the boundaries of the shared room rate.

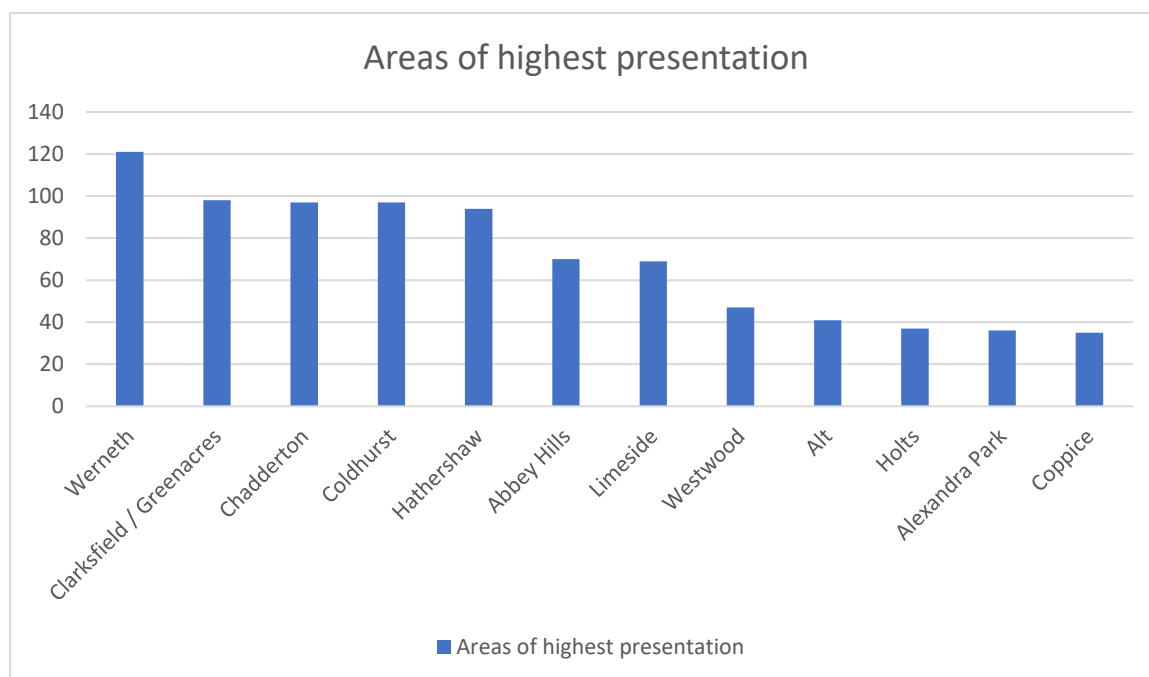
Learning Points:

- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is yet to be fully seen, but will have a significant impact on people in part-time and self-employment, as well as limited employment for jobseekers
- Partners in Oldham such as the Housing Authority, DWP and Get Oldham Working must work closely together to support HRA applicants into employment opportunities to ensure they can access and sustain housing
- Partners should promote whatever financial relief funds are available to clear arrears and help applicants to access housing

4.9 Geographical trends

The following chart utilises postcode data provided at the point of application to determine the most common areas HRA applicants stated to have been homeless or threatened with homelessness from in the past two years:

Figure 11: Homelessness presentations by area



The areas above include those with high concentrations of private rented sector accommodation (Clarksfield, Greenacres, Coldhurst, Hathershaw) corresponding with high numbers of presentations from households leaving assured shorthold tenancies. These areas also feature in the bottom 10% of neighbourhoods in the national indices of deprivation. In contrast, the areas seeing the lowest levels of presentation are those with lower levels of deprivation such as the Saddleworth villages and outer parts of Royton and Failsworth.

Learning Points

- How can the Housing Options service embed itself more closely within place-based integration initiatives, or upskill colleagues in the community?

4.10 Customer groups

As part of the Housing Authorities duty to provide or secure the provision of advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness, section 179(2) of the 1996 Housing Act states that housing authorities must design advice and information services to meet the needs of people within their district including, in particular, the needs of the following groups:

- (a) people released from prison or youth detention accommodation;
- (b) care leavers;
- (c) former members of the regular armed forces;
- (d) victims of domestic abuse;
- (e) people leaving hospital;

(f) people suffering from a mental illness or impairment; and,

(g) any other group that the authority identify as being at particular risk of homelessness in their district.

The data on support needs already outlined in this Review has highlighted that several of these groups are at particular risk of homelessness, and this section explores this – and the services currently available to them – further.

4.10.1 People released from prison or youth detention accommodation

Numbers presenting under HRA 2018-20	152 ¹ / 269 (count of support needs)
Developments under 2016-21 Strategy	<p>Probation funding introduced at start of Covid-19 Pandemic to provide accommodation to non-priority groups upon discharge</p> <p>Probation part-funded the Greater Manchester Mayor’s ‘A Bed Every Night’ rough sleeping accommodation programme</p> <p>Together with the other 9 Greater Manchester housing authorities, Oldham Council part-funds a dedicated Housing Advisor within Forest Bank prison who works alongside the Through the Gate service delivered by housing charity Shelter</p>
Current services	<p>Fornightly partnership meetings between housing and Probation in place to monitor active caseloads</p> <p>Duty to refer working well, including two-way information sharing on risk between Probation and the housing authority</p> <p>Funding provided through Covid-19 continues on a temporary basis supporting non-priority households not qualifying for temporary accommodation</p>
Gaps identified	<p>Specialist supported accommodation for ex-offenders excluded from other provisions</p> <p>Direct access provision for non-priority applicants discharged from prison where duty to refer not made prior to release</p>

¹ Estimate based on Duty to Refer from prisons and Probation due to HCLIC only reporting on applicants leaving all institutions including prisons, hospitals and care homes

4.10.2 Care leavers

Numbers presenting under HRA 2018-20	75 ² / 111 (count of support needs)
Developments under 2016-21 Strategy	<p>Pledge signed by Council Cabinet committing to applying priority need and not making intentionally homeless decisions to Oldham care leavers up to the age of 25</p> <p>New housing pathway interviews and literature put in place to ensure young people leaving care have better awareness of their housing options, rights and responsibilities upon turning 18</p>
Current services	<p>Fortnightly partnership meetings between aftercare and housing to monitor active caseloads and plan for young people moving on</p> <p>Joint assessments in place for young people leaving care and those presenting as homeless</p> <p>Referral mechanisms in place for young people aged over 21 presenting as homeless who want to be reconnected to Personal Advisor support</p> <p>Tailored information is available on Oldham Council's website</p>
Gaps identified	Joint commissioning of accommodation services to be explored

4.10.3 Former members of the regular armed forces

Numbers presenting under HRA 2018-20	25*
Developments under 2016-21 Strategy	N/A
Current services	<p>Oldham Council, as part of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, signed up to the Armed Forces Community Covenant in October 2013</p> <p>Tailored information is available on Oldham Council's website</p>
Gaps identified	Due to low numbers of presentations and responses via consultation this group have not been identified as a priority for further service development, but this will be kept under review as part of the Strategy's annual updates

² Estimate using locally held data due to above previously cited HCLIC limitations

4.10.4 Victims of domestic abuse

Numbers presenting under HRA 2018-20	225 (339 declared support needs)
Developments under 2016-21 Strategy	<p>Domestic abuse Housing First project launched across Oldham, Tameside and Stockport</p> <p>Virtual waiting pool introduced for Oldham refuge to ensure local residents were able to be prioritised for vacancies / make planned moves into a safe space</p>
Current services	<p>Ongoing joint working between IDVA service, Housing Options and housing providers to support applicants experiencing domestic abuse</p> <p>Domestic Abuse Partnership includes representation from Housing Authority and housing providers</p> <p>Oldham benefits from a specialist honour-based violence service, Project Choice – although this is at risk of discontinuation in 2021 due to funding issues</p>
Gaps identified	<p>NRPF provision continues to pose challenges in Oldham</p> <p>IDVA capacity is strained alongside that of the Housing Options service, and there is a need for joint expertise with the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Bill in 2021</p>

4.10.5 People leaving hospital

Numbers presenting under HRA 2018-20	35 ³
Developments under 2016-21 Strategy	The Oldham Hospital Discharge Protocol was reviewed in 2018, with e-learning on the Duty to Refer provided to NHS staff and ongoing relationship building undertaken by the housing authority
Current services	First Choice Homes Oldham (FCHO), a registered housing provider who were contracted to deliver homelessness and allocations services on behalf of the council up

³ Estimate based on duty to refer due to HCLIC only reporting on applicants leaving all institutions including prisons, care homes etc.

	to July 2019, employ a Hospital 2 Home officer part-funded by Oldham CCG. This officer provides housing advice to patients at Oldham Hospital and completes referrals to the housing authority where homelessness assistance is needed
Gaps identified	Since FCHO no longer deliver the statutory housing options service, consideration could be given as to whether such a role as Hospital 2 Home would benefit from being based within the current Housing Options team

4.10.6 People suffering from a mental illness or impairment

Numbers presenting under HRA 2018-20	726
Developments under 2016-21 Strategy	Services including Housing First and the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) Team include Dual Diagnosis provision to support applicants to navigate mental health services
Current services	A bi-weekly Adults with Multiple Complex Needs Group meets to take a case conference approach to applicants at risk of safeguarding issues Free counselling is available via Talk, Listen, Change and Groundwork in Oldham
Gaps identified	Services continue to struggle to meet the volume of need from applicants with mental health issues. Aside from specialist provision within the Housing Options team, appropriate psychologically informed training could be an option to pursue through the 2021 Strategy

4.10.7 Any other group that the authority identifies as being at particular risk of homelessness in their district.

This review has identified that the following support needs and groups of individuals have a particularly significant representation in Oldham which requires an appropriate response in the 2021 Strategy:

- Refugees and other persons from abroad
- Persons with substance misuse issues
- Jobseekers

A review by the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) Team jointly commissioned by Oldham and Rochdale Councils also identified a need for support for single people who were ‘sofa surfing’ and at risk of rough sleeping. The RSI Team found that only 31% of people referred to its service were found to be actively rough sleeping; the rest were either could not be located or were in these unstable lodging arrangements.

Learning Points

- How can services better prevent single applicants who are currently ‘sofa surfing’ or leaving Home Office accommodation from becoming future rough sleepers

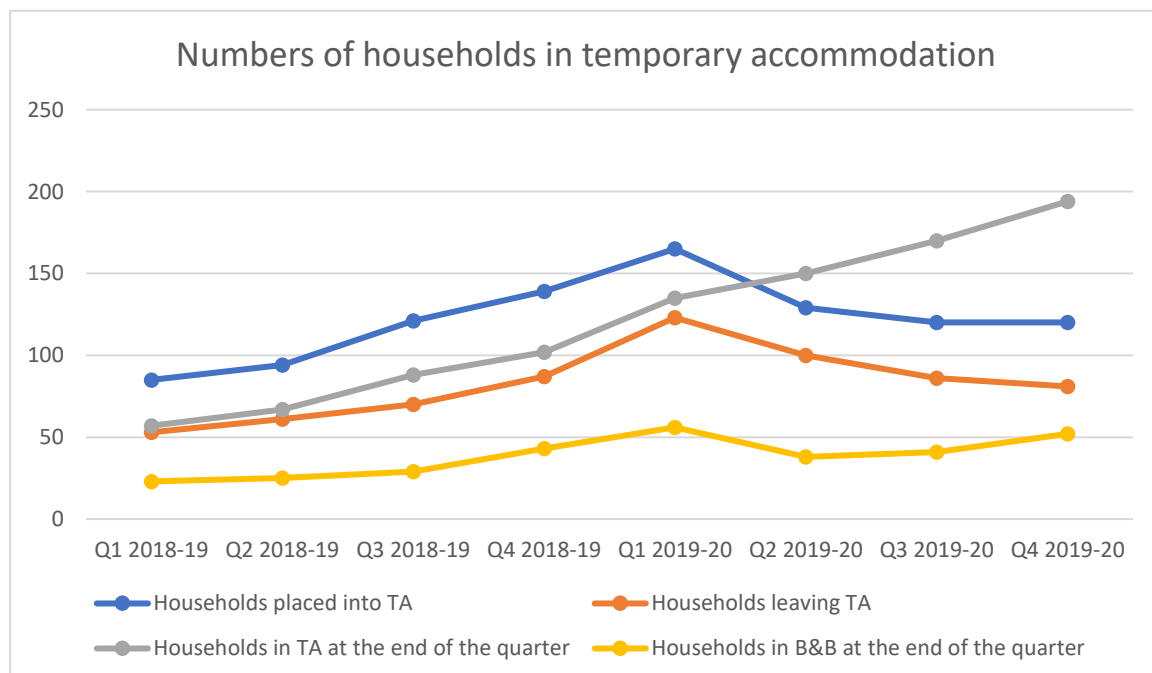
5. Temporary accommodation

5.1 Numbers in temporary accommodation

As homelessness applications have increased, so have temporary accommodation placements. Positively however the Council has proactively been reducing its use of bed and breakfast placements, with these now only being used in an emergency and for short a period as possible.

There was a slight spike in Bed and Breakfast placements at the end of March due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Government’s ‘Everyone In’ directive which requested that local authorities accommodate all known rough sleepers and move any residents from shared sleep spaces to more self-contained options such as Bed and Breakfast. A dedicated accommodation scheme was procured for this group in April 2020, and as of the end of June 2020 numbers in Bed and Breakfast placements had dropped to 13.

Figure 12: Numbers of households in temporary accommodation



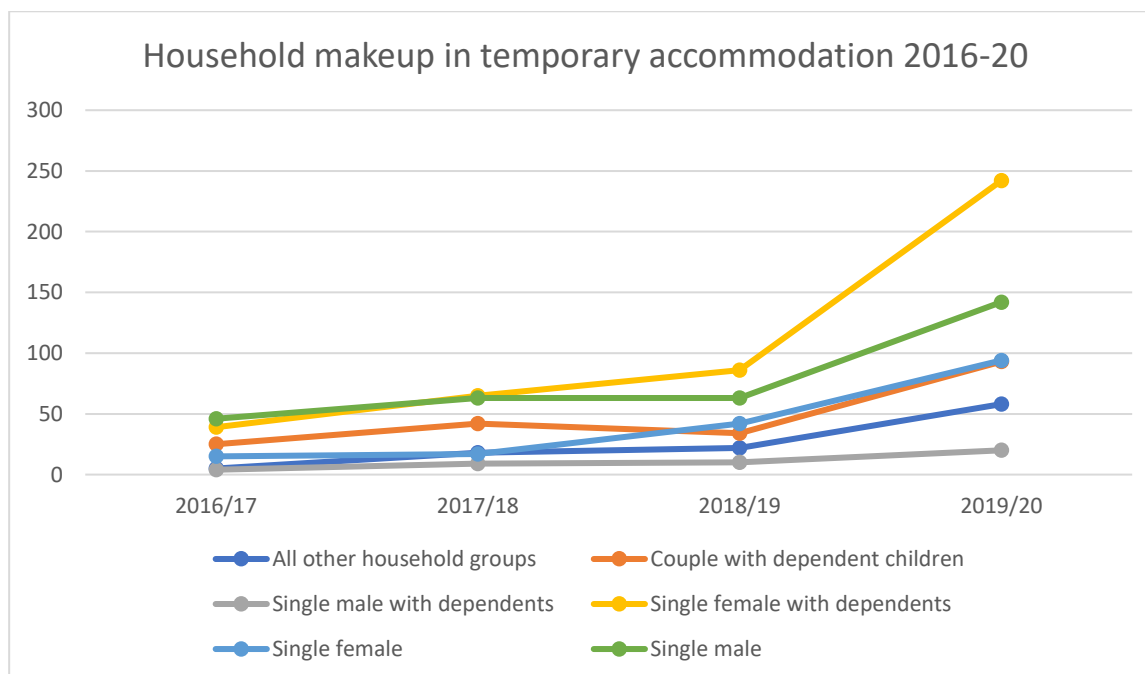
5.2 Household makeup in temporary accommodation

As with Relief Duties overall, there has been an increase in lone female parents and single males residing in temporary accommodation over the past two years. The main reasons for households entering temporary accommodation are domestic abuse and family / friends no longer willing or able to accommodate. Households leaving private rented sector accommodation are less likely to require temporary accommodation because of the longer time available to prevent homelessness – further emphasising the importance of early intervention.

Table 14: Household makeup in temporary accommodation

Household Type		2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	Total	%
Couple with dependent children*		25	42	34	93	194	15.47%
Lone parent household with dependent children	Male Applicant	4	9	10	20	43	3.43%
	Female Applicant*	39	65	86	242	432	34.45%
One person household	Male Applicant	46	63	63	142	314	25.04%
	Female Applicant	15	17	42	94	168	13.40%
All other household groups		5	18	22	58	103	8.21%

Figure 13: Household makeup in temporary accommodation



6. Duty to Refer

The Homelessness Reduction Act introduced a new Duty to Refer which applies to specified public bodies – although other non-specified organisations can choose to refer on a voluntary basis as well. Under this duty these bodies must refer, with consent, any applicant who is homeless or threatened with homelessness to the local housing authority. These public bodies are as follows, including the number of referrals received in the 2018-20 period:

Table 15: Referral received under the Duty to Refer

Prisons	74
Youth offender institutions	0
Secure training centres	0
Secure colleges	0
Youth offending teams	0
Probation services (including community rehabilitation companies)	78
Jobcentre Plus	58
Social Services Authorities	63
Emergency departments	33
Urgent treatment centres	0
Hospitals in their function of providing in-patient care	2

The lack of referrals from youth offending agencies could be because referrals for such young people are typically made by Social Workers from the Aftercare Team under existing protocols in Oldham and would therefore be captured under Social Services Authorities figures.

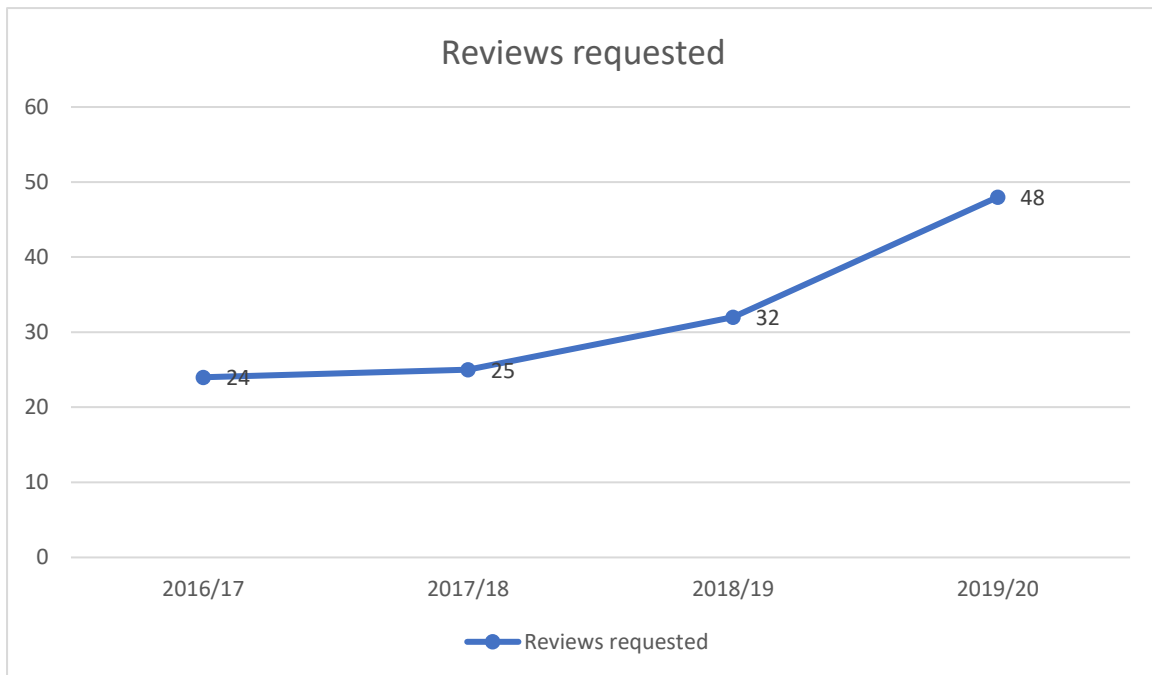
Hospital and in-patient referrals may also be artificially low due to some referrals being diverted through the FCHO Hospital 2 Home Officer.

E-Learning on the Duty to Refer and a half day HRA training course were developed by the Housing Authority in 2018 for partner agencies wanting to develop their knowledge of this subject, and promotion is ongoing via the Oldham Homelessness Forum.

7. Reviews

The HRA introduced several new points of legislation where applicants could ask for a review; as a result, the number of reviews undertaken by senior officers in Oldham has increased over the Review period.

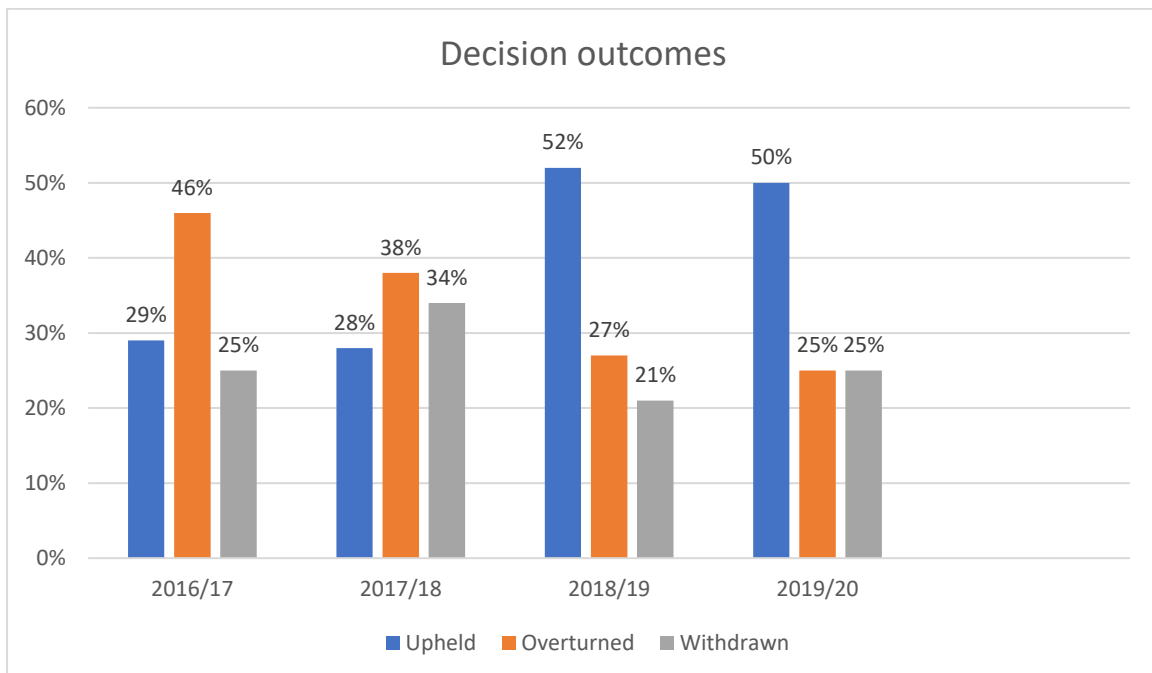
Figure 14: Reviews requested



Whilst reviews requested have increased, decision making has become more robust as review outcomes have increasingly been upheld. This is positive for ensuring resources and applicant expectations are well managed.

There have been no court appeals during this Review period.

Figure 15: Review outcomes



8. Economic factors and housing market data

8.1 Welfare Reform

The 2016 Preventing Homelessness Strategy was introduced during the time of some of the most radical welfare reforms in modern history. Whilst the pace of these changes has slowed in recent years, their effects continue to be felt, namely:

- Benefit cap, and its effects on affordability of accommodation – particularly for larger families;
- Universal Credit, including long-term claimants transitioning from legacy benefits and the effects of sanctions;
- Reduction in support available through schemes such as Support for Mortgage Interest and Free School Meals
- Child Benefit / Tax Credit limitations

Whilst perhaps not being directly attributable to homelessness, debt and affordability is certainly linked – which is something which came through strongly in the consultation for the new Homelessness Strategy.

8.2 Local Housing Allowance

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is the rate of housing benefit – although usually paid via Universal Credit – that can be claimed against a private rented sector property, depending on household size. From 1st April 2020 the government increased rates to match the ‘30th percentile’ of rents in each area, which did lead to an increase in financial support available. This news was welcomed but rates in Oldham remain low – although are higher in Failsworth, where the Manchester LHA rate is applicable – and many tenants solely reliant on LHA to pay their rent will often need to top-up their rent from other income. Maximising incomes, such as through employment, or where possible negotiating lower rents from landlords will be a crucial element of the forthcoming Homelessness Strategy.

An accommodation option which has been growing throughout the Covid-19 pandemic in Oldham is HMO accommodation with en-suite facilities. This is not only more appealing to prospective tenants who may have concerns about shared accommodation, but more affordable than fully self-contained flats. The Council will continue to work with landlords to develop options such as these to open up suitable, affordable options for households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness throughout the lifetime of the new Strategy.

Table 15: Local Housing Allowance Rates, Oldham

Oldham and Rochdale LHA rates	
Number of rooms	Rate
Share room or bedsit	£66.39
1 bedroom	£90.90
2 bedrooms	£103.85
3 bedrooms	£126.58
4 bedrooms	£159.95

8.3 Housing Market Data

A comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment for Oldham was carried out in 2019 and used to inform the Housing Strategy. Key findings were that whilst house prices were below the national average, there was – as with many areas – a significant shortfall in the annual dwelling need in the area. The borough also faces challenges with respect to housing its ageing population, particularly with regards to adapting terraced style stock for those with physical disabilities, and housing larger families.

The Housing Needs Assessment also incorporated a household survey which found that approximately 45% of households stated to have a repair problem in their property. Problems with affordability – a theme running throughout this review – were cited as one of the main reasons for not addressing the repair problem, or not being able to move to a different property. The Council is continuing to explore options such as Selective Licensing and making grants available where possible to help drive up standards.

8.4 Social housing

Oldham Council resumed management of its housing allocations service on 1st July 2019. With this came the implementation of a revised Allocations Policy which prioritised those in housing need. Previously Oldham was a borough which had experienced several years of low demand; however, this is now no longer the case and social housing is now an extremely scarce resource.

Due to this change in policy data is difficult to compare between periods, but the following provides an overview of Allocations activity between 1st April 2020 and 31st January 2021.

What the data tells us is that only 787 properties were advertised in the first 3 quarters of 2020/21, but there were 5,906 households registered for rehousing. Larger, family size homes were particularly scarce, with demand far outstripping supply and overcrowding a particular issue in Oldham.

Table 16: Social Housing Properties Advertised via Choice Based Lettings

Bed size	Number received
1 bed	362
2 bed	288
3bed	105
4 bed	12
5 bed	20
6 bed	0
Total	787

Table 17: Live Housing Register applications as at 31/01/2021

Bed size	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Band 4
1 bed	1031	1395	25	31
2 bed	671	776	29	21
3 bed	537	800	24	18
4 bed	237	220	5	5
5 bed	52	18	0	0
6 bed	9	0	0	0
7 bed	2	0	0	0
Total	2539	3209	83	75

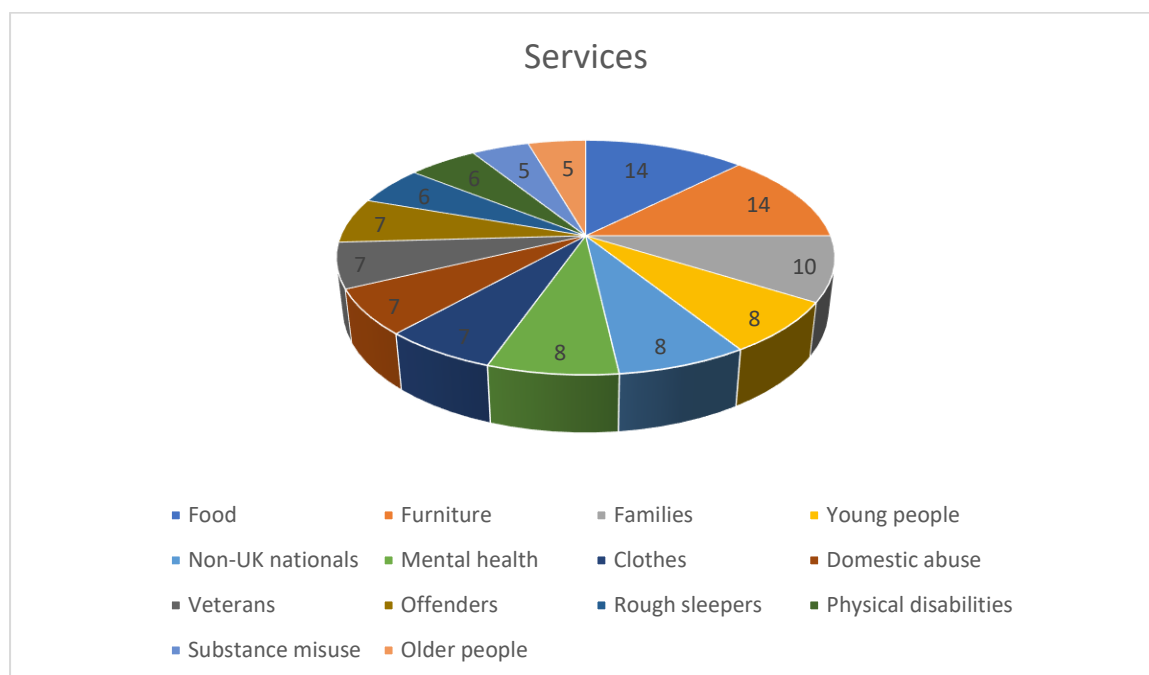
9. Service mapping

9.1 Service provision

Oldham benefits from a strong voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector backed by registered charity Action Together who provide free training, funding advice and other support. The Council, other statutory services and housing providers also provide a range of services within local communities.

Service mapping undertaken in December 2020 identified the following provision available within the borough:

Figure 16: Service mapping



9.2 Tools to prevent and relieve homelessness

The Housing Options Team utilises several tools to prevent and relieve homelessness, as well as referring to partners mapped out above to provide help to applicants. The Council also has wider tools at its disposal, such as Discretionary Housing Payments assistance provided through Children’s and Social Care Acts, which all form part of a preventative toolkit.

The following provides an overview of specific schemes commissioned or delivered by the Housing Options Team and their cost effectiveness for consideration of expansion or redevelopment under the new Homelessness Strategy.

Table 18: Tools to prevent and relieve homelessness

Scheme	Focus	Positive outcomes per annum	Average cost per applicant
Spend to Save	Prevention / Relief	42	£361
Bond Scheme	Prevention / Relief	15	£481
Mediation	Prevention	55	£430
Nightstop	Prevention	49	£224
A Bed Every Night	Relief	60	£1,150
Rough Sleeping Initiative	Prevention / Relief	240	£167
EEA Homelessness Prevention Service	Prevention / Relief	64	£31

Learning Points:

- Whilst ABEN does appear expensive, it is an accommodation-based service so likely to have higher costs – and is mainly grant funded
- Greater use needs to be made of Spend to Save, as with previous years, because it remains a relatively low-cost options to prevent and relieve homelessness. Discretionary Housing Payments are always sought first where possible, but this fund is still a good way of opening up private rented sector options – especially where landlords are reluctant to accept paper bonds
- Mediation and Nightstop are bespoke service for young people aged 16-25. Nightstop is a short-term crisis service, which means that the cost per client is relatively high. Consideration should be given as to whether these services could be more closely aligned, and brought together with the Young People’s Pathway in Oldham to ensure there is no duplication between services and young people only have to go through one ‘front door’
- The EEA Homelessness Prevention Service will clearly be much needed in 2021 with Brexit and the EU Settlement Scheme closing in June but will need to be reviewed after this point as may no longer be required in its current form.

9.3 Gap analysis

Given some of the issues identified throughout the review, some of the gaps emerging could include:

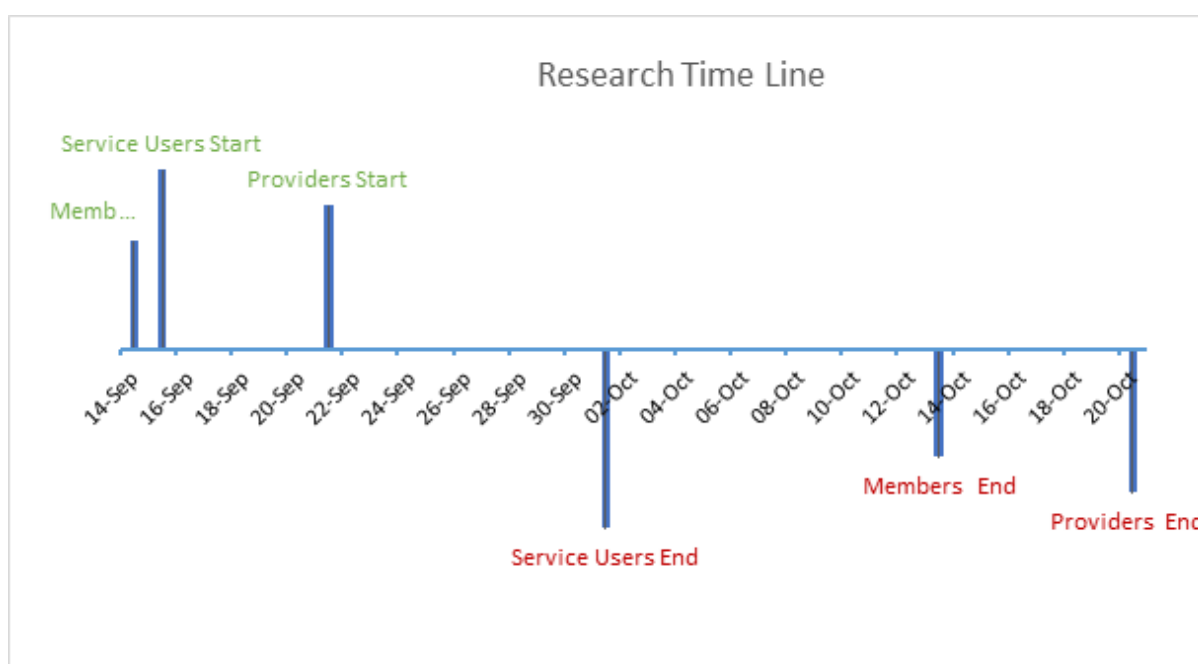
- Debt advice and money management
- Employment, training and skills
- Duplication of provision for young people – should services be more joined up
- Provision of accommodation and day centres – although this may have ceased or been suspended at the time the consultation and mapping was undertaken due to the Covid-19 Pandemic

10. Consultation

10.1 Overview

To support the development of the 2021 Homeless Strategy Oldham Council undertook a month-long period of three simultaneously running consultations promoted via a web survey link to members, stakeholders, and customers and distributed via e-mail, Oldham Homelessness Forum and Social media.

Figure 17: Consultation timeline



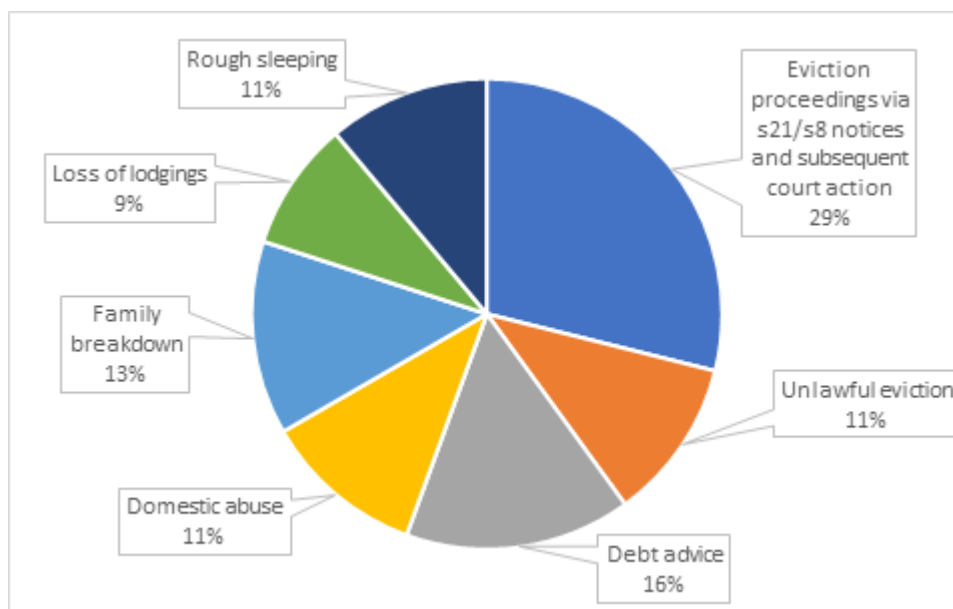
A total of 58 responses were received:

- Service users: 29
- Stakeholders: 15
- Members: 15

10.2 Members

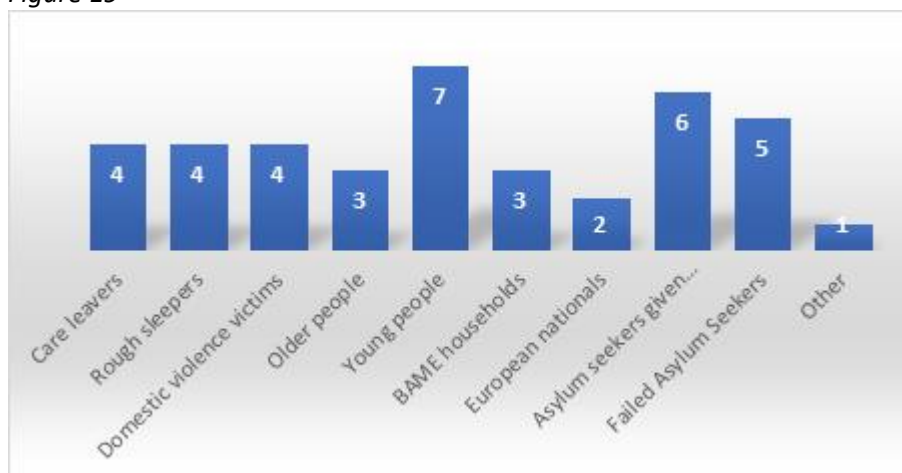
Members were asked what were the main reasons that their constituents approached them for housing advice and responded accordingly:

Figure 18: Member consultation responses



Next, Members were asked which if any of the following groups of homeless or threatened with homelessness people have you seen any increase in enquiries?

Figure 19



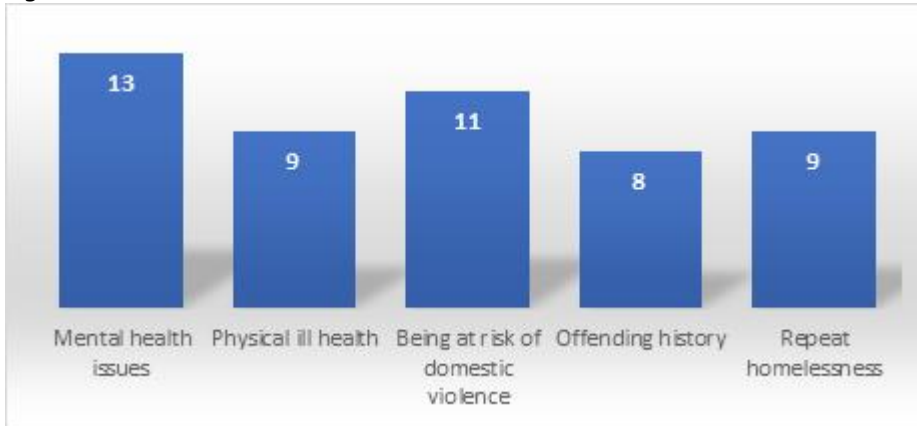
Members were asked more broadly what they thought needed to be done to address the main reasons for homelessness within Oldham. Across all five main reasons for homelessness consistent answers included:

- The need for more Affordable/Social Housing
- The need for better systems in relation to the ending of a private sector tenancy, NASS leavers and being asked to leave by friends or family
- The need to provide better support and advice in relation to the main reasons for homelessness

92% of members strongly agreed that a multi-agency approach is required to find appropriate housing and support solutions.

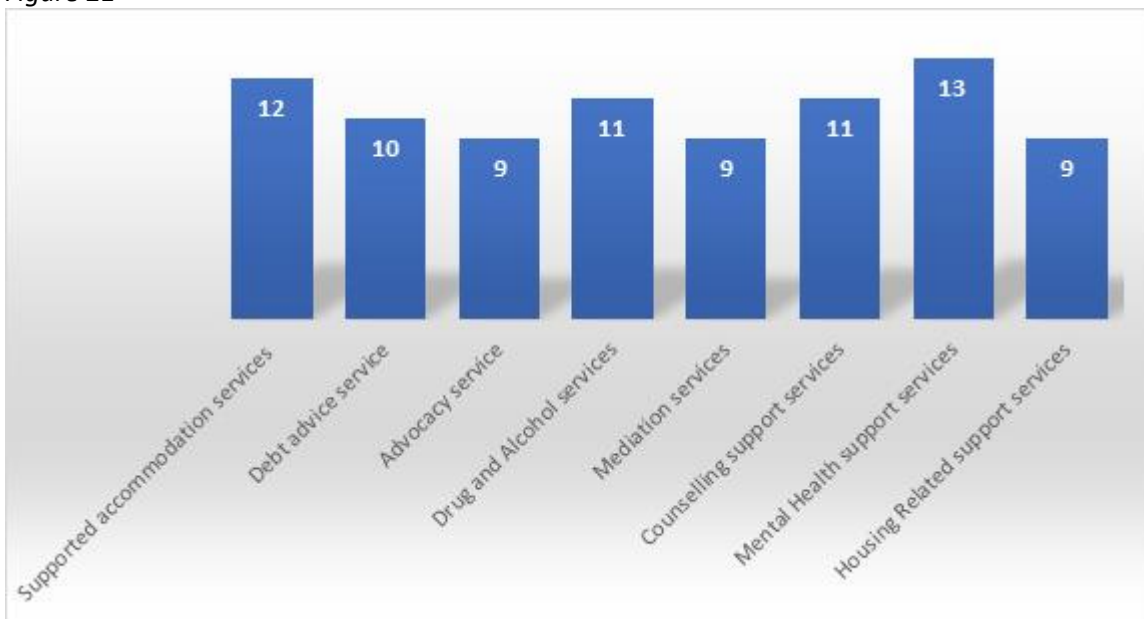
In support of this, members were asked what support they thought was needed in Oldham to meet these support needs and prevent or relieve homelessness.

Figure 20



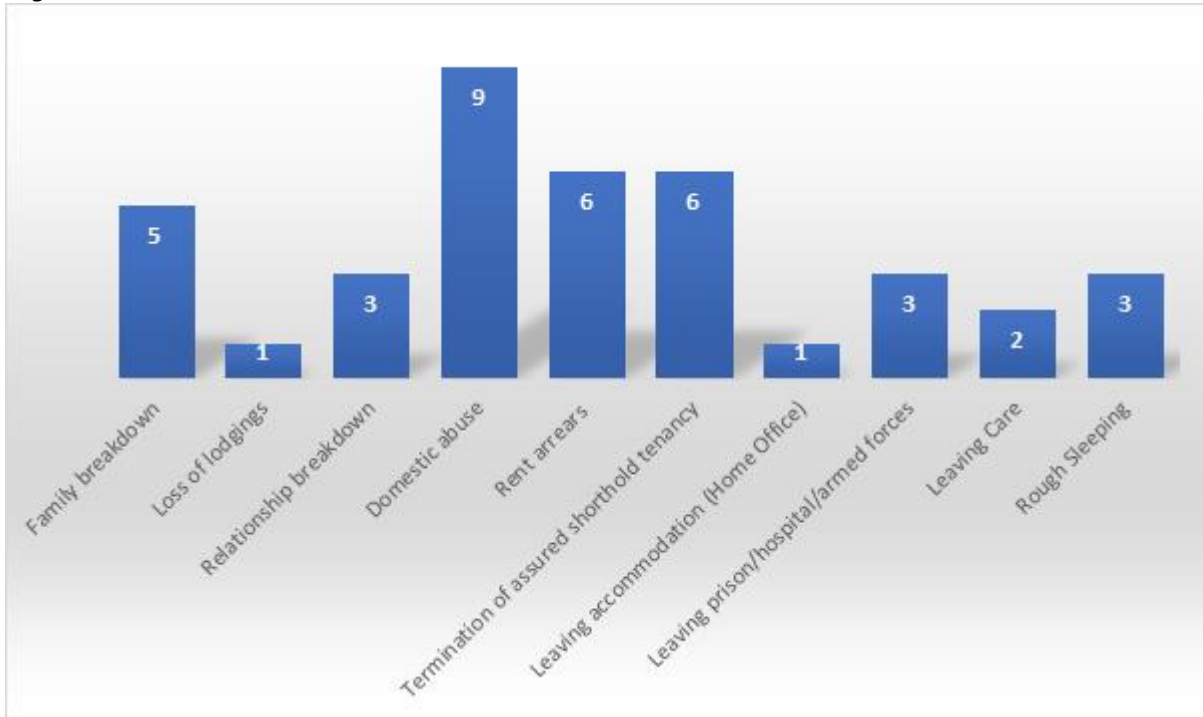
Which if any of the following services below would help to improve the services provided to those homeless or at risk of homelessness?

Figure 21



What 3 things should the new Homelessness strategy prioritise to address homelessness over the next 3-5 years? Members

Figure 22



Finally, members were asked what more we can do to help prevent homelessness in Oldham, which provoked a range of comments:

'Rethink how all elements of services work together, make service accessible with more flexibility to resolve homeless problems'

'I would like to see this included as part of the poverty truth commission, as homelessness is primarily a result of poverty and people's inability to cushion themselves from loss of income/ or their inability to save money to protect against this happening'

'Be aware that some people struggle to seek help so more outreach will be needed. Make sure advice is available in all the necessary languages'

32% suggested 'Building new/refurbishing homes'

16% each reflected on 'Providing supported/specific accommodation' and 'Financial challenges'

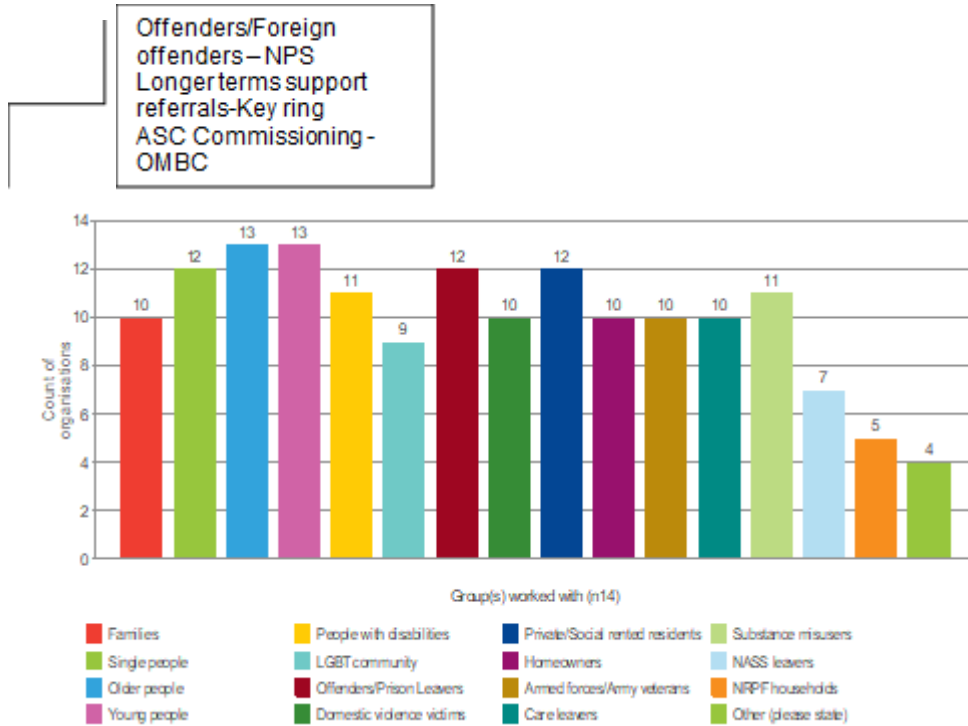
Learning Points:

- Members commented on the main causes of homelessness, particularly the end of private rented sector tenancies and domestic abuse
- There was a particular focus on 'asylum seekers' – whilst the Housing Authority is limited in its ability to assist this group, it is able to support those with refugee status and this review has identified a growing need in this area, alongside other eligible non-UK nationals
- Poverty is a thread running throughout the Review and the consultation, along with the need to help people 'cushion' themselves from loss of income

10.3 Stakeholders

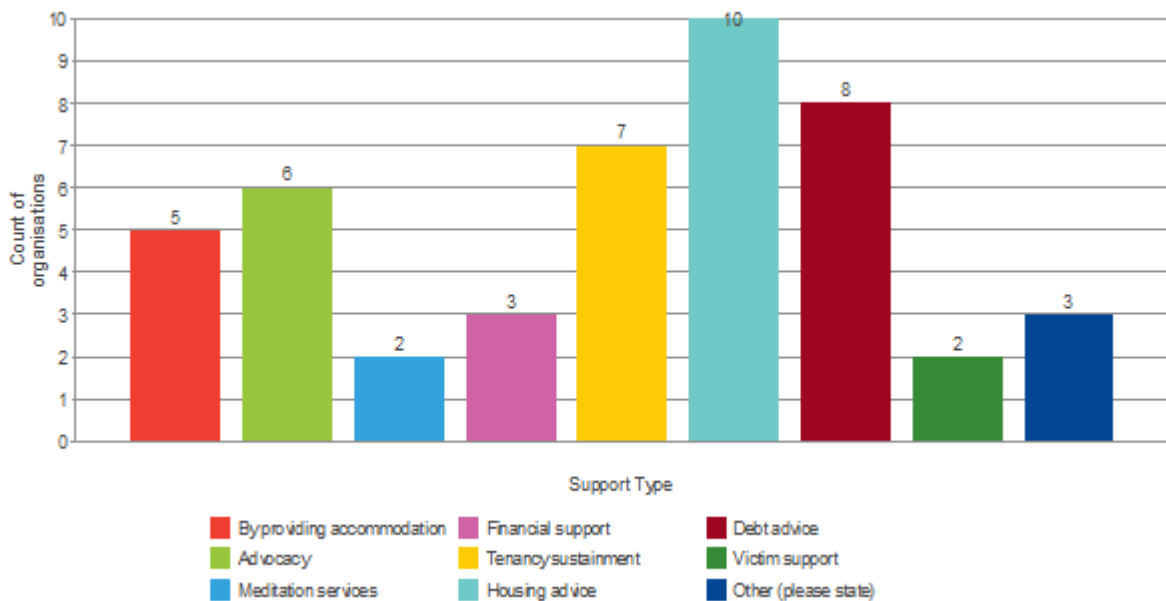
Responses were received from a wide range of stakeholders, recognising the depth and diversity of provision available across all sectors in Oldham.

Figure 23: Stakeholder consultation response



Stakeholders were asked how their organisation works to prevent and relieve homelessness and responded accordingly:

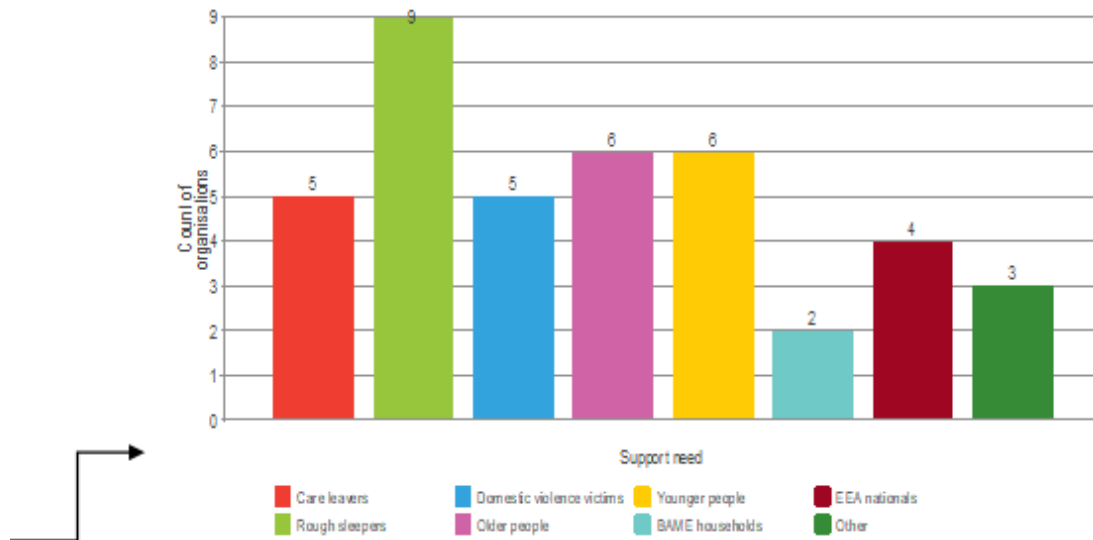
Figure 24



When asked about what further action could be taken to prevent homelessness in Oldham, most commonly respondents felt that organisations could take more actions to support those with higher needs including those with care packages, victims of domestic abuse and those with drug and or alcohol issues.

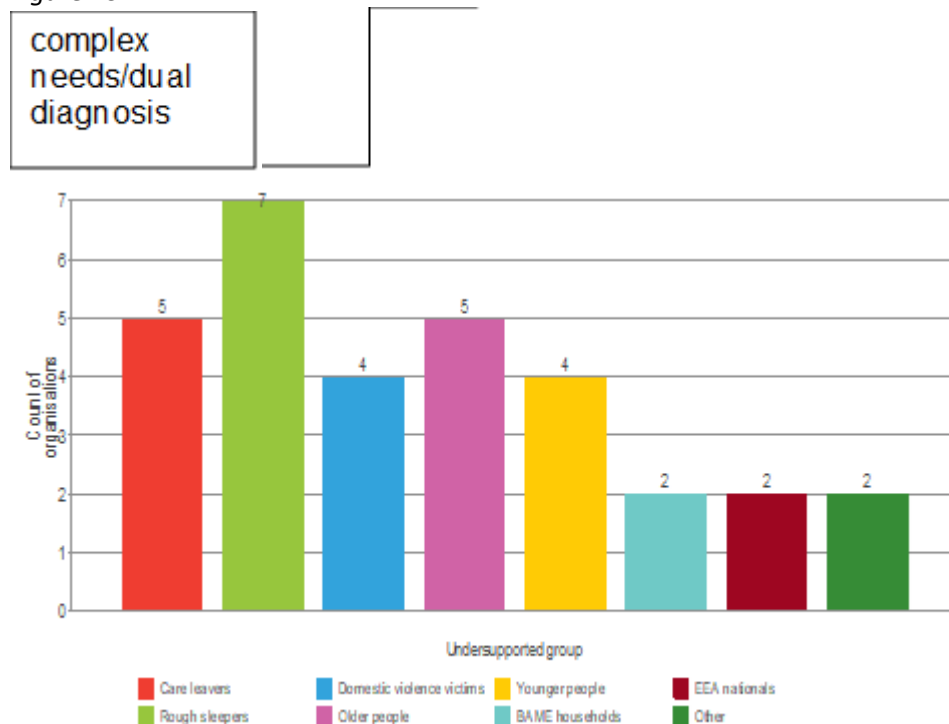
Most stakeholders said they had seen increased demand on their services, particularly from the following groups:

Figure 25



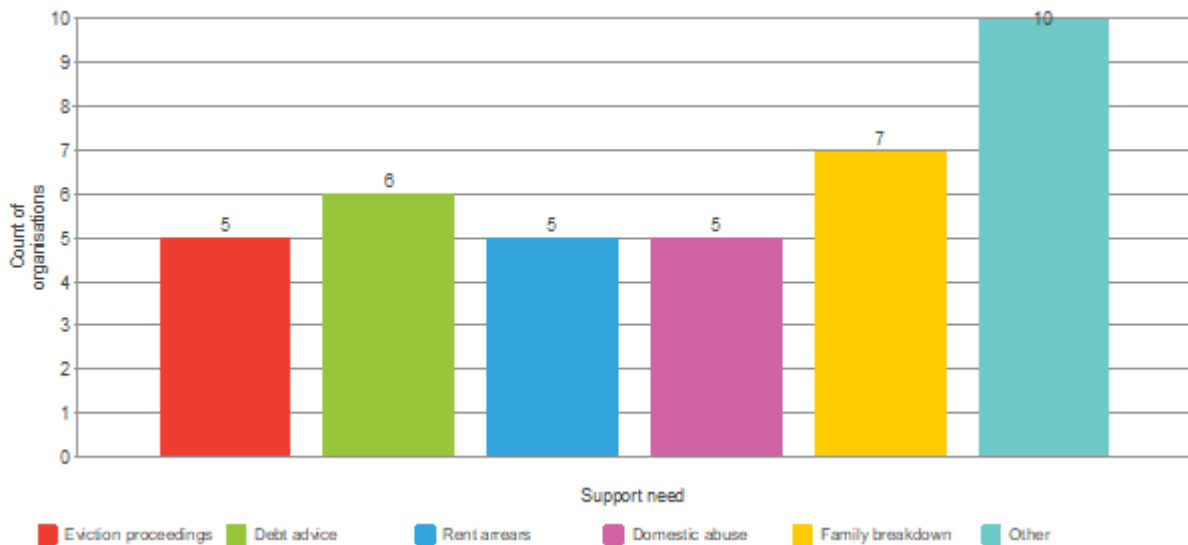
Stakeholders also highlighted these groups are requiring further support still, despite the current services available:

Figure 25



Stakeholders stated people sought help from their organisations for the following reasons:

Figure 26

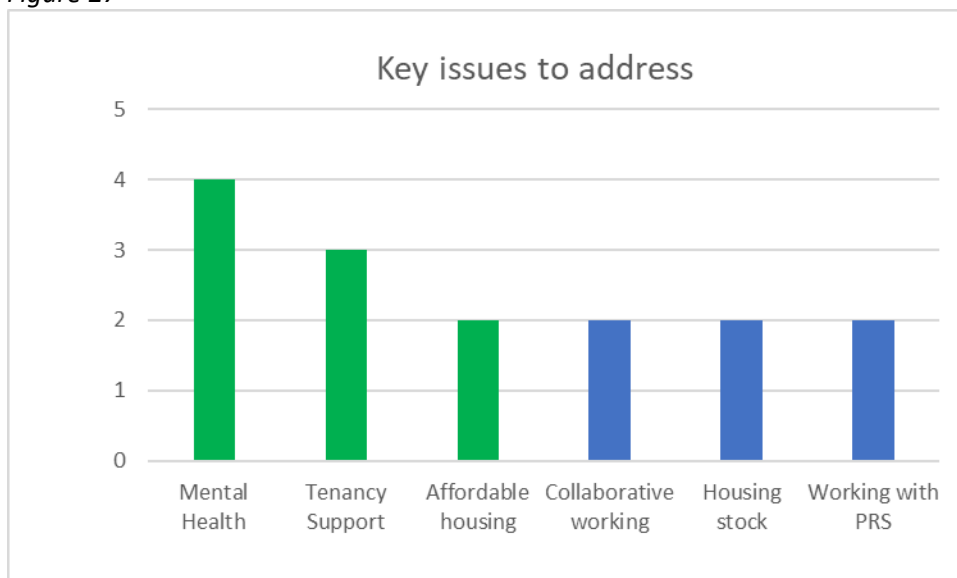


Other includes prison discharge, sofa surfing, rough sleeping and individuals with other support needs mental health, substance misuse.

Stakeholders felt these needs could be better met through increased accommodation supply and improved collaboration, customer service and communication.

What are the 3 key issues you feel that the new homeless strategy needs to address in order to holistically tackle homelessness in Oldham over the next 3-5 years?

Figure 27



The following issues were raised as being potential gaps:

Impact of welfare reform: UC, sanctions and association problems with Housing Benefit
More available accommodation, be it social or private rented or housing association

More cooperative working between agencies and the local authority
Local authority assessment of risk of those who are convicted and involved with the criminal justice system. More attention and exploration of the circumstances associated with risk posed to the public, and how these can be addressed within the current housing stock
Access to interpreters for services across Oldham
Supported accommodation
More support for those rough sleepers with complex issues – securing and sourcing longer term accommodation
Suitable move on accommodation with floating support to manage tenancy issues
Supported accommodation options for young people and care leavers. Enough resources to support people in Oldham when facing homelessness
Advocacy workers

Learning Points:

- Stakeholder responses highlighted the range of support available across Oldham, particularly with regards to housing and debt advice – something Members stated their constituents needed. An opportunity therefore arises to connect the two, and ensure people get the support they need to build their ‘cushion’
- There does however appear to be a lack of services providing mediation and victim support, which would respond to leading causes of homelessness such as domestic abuse and exclusion by friends and family
- Stakeholders reported increasing demand from young people and rough sleepers, which differed from Members – highlighting how different groups have different support networks, and how the 2021 Strategy needs to ensure housing advice services are appropriately targeted

10.4 Service Users

The survey was sent out via email, advertised on social media and particularly promoted in staffed temporary accommodation schemes such as A Bed Every Night in order to gain feedback from people with lived experience of homelessness services. Respondents stated to be from a range of ethnic and national backgrounds – reflecting Oldham’s diverse homelessness population – and has support needs including mental health problems (22%), drug dependency (16%) and offending history (12%).

Respondents were asked why did they become homeless or threatened with homelessness:

Table 19: Service user reasons for homelessness

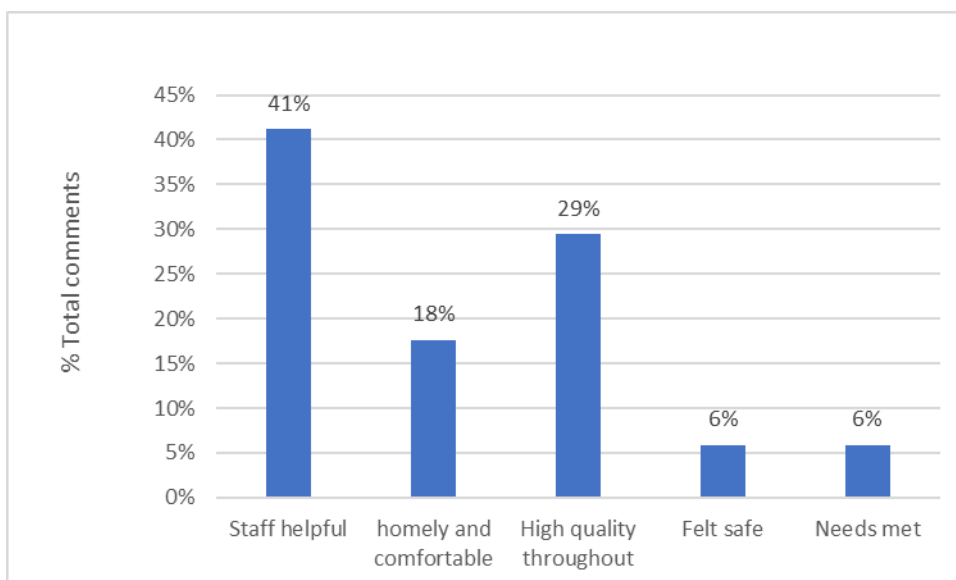
Reason	% Total	Count
Relationship breakdown with a partner	24%	7
Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate	10%	3
Other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	10%	3
Having to leave a rented property for other reasons	10%	3
Other (e.g. homeless in emergency, sleeping rough or in hostel, returned from abroad)	10%	3
Domestic abuse	7%	2
Violence from other associates (e.g. family or friends)	7%	2

Other form of violence – please state	7%	2
Rent arrears in council tenancy	7%	2
Rent arrears in Private sector tenancy	7%	2
Left prison/on remand	7%	2
Left other institution or care (e.g. turning 18 after being looked after by the Council)	7%	2
Other forms of harassment	3%	1
Mortgage arrears (repossession or other loss of home)	3%	1
Required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office as asylum support	3%	1

Respondents living in temporary accommodation were asked questions specifically about this:

- Overall, 79% (23 of 29) respondents reported that they had been provided with temporary accommodation
- 96% stated that they did understand the temporary nature of this accommodation
- 91% stated that this accommodation was in Oldham
- Most commonly respondents reported that they had been in temporary accommodation for 1-2 months (39%)
- Three quarters of respondents stated that they understand the options available to them to find a new home
- 87% were either slightly or extremely satisfied with the standard of their accommodation

Figure 28: Service user comments about temporary accommodation



When asked what barriers they felt had prevented them to find a new home, the following findings emerged

Table 20: Service user barriers to finding a new home

	% Total	count
--	---------	-------

Something else (see below)	22%	10
Social housing application	20%	9
Rent in advance	15%	7
Rent arrears/housing related debt	13%	6
Offending history	11%	5
Support needs	9%	4
History of ASB	4%	2
No suitably adapted property	4%	2
Tenancy references	2%	1
Total	100%	46

How easy or not was it to access the information and advice and assistance you required to resolve your homelessness or threat of homelessness?

Table 21: Service user ease of accessing information and advice

	Count	Percentage
Easy or very easy	14	48
Neither	8	27
Difficult or very difficult	7	24
Total	29	100

When asked why they had found it difficult to access advice and assistance, the following reasons emerged:

Table 22: Service user ease of accessing information and advice

	Count	Percentage
Not able to get through on telephone lines	9	32
Other	9	32
Unsatisfactory response to electronic communications	8	29
Waiting times in Access Oldham	6	21
Accessibility to Access Oldham	2	7
Service opening times not suitable	1	4
Total	33	100

Although participants highlighted that they had issues in getting through on telephone lines, they also indicated that most commonly they preferred to contact the Housing option centre by telephone.

Table 23: Service user preferred channels of contact

	Count	Percentage
Telephone	23	79
In person	9	31
Social media	3	10
Third party	3	10

E-Mail	2	7
Total	39	

What service do you think are needed to meet your support needs to prevent or relieve your homelessness?

- Pre tenancy training 28%
- Mental health support 21%
- Mediation Services 10%
- Employment, education training 10%
- Advocacy services 7%

Finally, service users were asked their top three priorities for the new homelessness strategy to focus on to address homelessness in Oldham over the next three to five years

A total of 84 votes were cast across 15 potential options with the following emerging:

Table 24: Service user Homelessness Strategy Priorities

		Count	% Total
1	Rough Sleeping/Sleepers	18	21%
2	Family Breakdown	11	13%
	Relationship breakdown	11	13%
3	Rent Arrears	10	12%

Learning Points:

- Debt continues to be a theme, with rent arrears this time presenting a particular – and very real – barrier for people with lived experience of homelessness in Oldham
- The most visible form of homelessness, rough sleeping, also continues to be a top priority. This may have been slightly skewed in the service user consultation because it was heavily promoted to ABEN residents, but nevertheless this was supported by stakeholders also
- Employment and education – and the link to that ‘cushion’ – is a recurring theme again
- The main causes of homelessness are also reflected, particularly amongst single males – solutions needed for relationship breakdown and exclusion by friends and family, such as mediation, advocacy and mental health support

10.5 Common Themes from consultation

Services needed		
Members	Stakeholders	Customers
Tenancy Support	Tenancy Support	Tenancy support/Pre tenancy training
Domestic Abuse	Rough sleeping	Financial help
Mental Health	Mental Health	Mental health

Mediation/Counselling service		Mediation
Supported accommodation	Supported accommodation	Advocacy

Key Priorities		
Members	Stakeholders	Customer
Domestic Abuse	Mental Health support	Rough sleeping
Rent arrears/Termination of AST	Tenancy Support	Rent arrears
Family breakdown	Affordable housing	Family Breakdown
Affordable housing		Relationship breakdown

11. Emerging themes

The following brings together emerging themes that have come from the data, desktop analysis and consultation throughout this review – which will be used to develop the priorities and action plan for the new Homelessness Strategy

Emerging theme	Proposed response
Increasing exclusions by friends and family	Strengthened mediation resources, including reviewing the current mediation scheme
Increasing domestic abuse presentations	Carry out a review of domestic abuse services in the borough and commission an appropriate response in line with the new Domestic Abuse Bill
Increasing presentations due to loss of private rented sector accommodation	Work to improve landlord / tenant relations through education and information on rights and responsibilities
Increasing presentations due to relationship breakdown	Improve advice and options available to departing partners, including on legal rights, mediation and relationship counselling
High levels of co-morbidities of need amongst homeless applicants, such as rough sleeping, mental ill-health and substance misuse	Ensure staff in homelessness and related services are trained and equipped to respond in a psychologically informed way
Almost 15% of homeless applicants state to have physical health issues, in line with the national average. The Covid-19 has particularly brought to light 'hidden' conditions such as asthma, COPD and diabetes	Ensure homeless applicants have fair access to GP and other primary care treatment, and effective pathways into vaccination and other programmes
Offending history is the fourth highest identified support need amongst homeless applicants in Oldham, and highly over-represented in programmed such as ABEN and supported accommodation	Review accommodation options for ex-offenders with a particular focus on prevention prior to leaving custody / approved premises
Repeat homelessness and rough sleeping is a concerningly prevalent support need and has a significant rate of co-morbidity amongst other support needs such as domestic abuse, offending history and substance misuse	Undertake a peer review to establish why repeat homelessness occurs, and put measures in place to prevent this happening

Care leaver homelessness is decreasing, but continues to occur	Consider what further steps can be taken to prepare young people for adulthood and prevent future homelessness
Presentations from households leaving Home Office accommodation / former asylum seekers remain stubbornly high, and partly outside the local authority's control	Work together with partners to support early integration and intervention to prevent homelessness, especially in managing the easing of evictions following the Covid-19 pandemic
	Continue to develop the role of the Local Authority Asylum Support Officers (LAASLOs) – a time-limited service – to support the integration of refugees and deliver early intervention to prevent homelessness amongst those given leave to remain
	Ensure housing advice is promoted to emerging communities to ensure awareness of housing rights and prevent crisis situations
Presentations from older applicants is increasing, particularly from the private rented / homeowner sector	Ensure housing options for older people are sufficiently explored and well presented by housing advisors, and meet the needs of those with more complex needs e.g. ex-offenders
Presentations from 16-17-year olds are increasing	Review the current mediation service, as well as options for those who cannot remain at home
Numbers of single males, and single females with dependents in temporary accommodation is increasing	Increase options available via the Bond Scheme targeted at single households, e.g. en-suite rooms in shared houses / studio apartments
	Increase the availability of self-service advice online such as web chat with Housing Advisors so applicants can seek early advice more easily
Increasing numbers of homeless applicants are unemployed and likely to be further impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic	Work with partners to support applicants into employment to ensure they can better access and sustain housing
	Promote whatever financial relief funds are available to clear arrears and help applicants to access and sustain housing
Homelessness is disproportionately affecting certain geographical areas, particularly those already experiencing high levels of deprivation	Consider co-locating the Housing Options service within place-based integration initiatives, or upskilling relevant colleagues
Some commissioned services such as those for young people appear to overlap which may cause duplication and confusion for applicants, rather than promote effective prevention	Review and streamline current commissioned services to promote a 'one front door' approach where possible
Services for EEA Nationals will be changing with Brexit, and approaches to homelessness and support services have increased in the past two years	Review current commissioned services and ensure preparations are made for the closure of the EU Settlement Scheme
Debt and poverty run as a thread throughout homelessness, and there are doubts about whether there is enough help available to 'cushion' people against the effect of this	Review current provision and promote availability

Numbers 'sofa surfing' are continuing to increase, including those leaving NASS accommodation and intermittently rough sleeping according to research by the RSI Team	Source funding to extend the RSI Team or other service to support this group to more proactively intervene given their transient nature and focus on more proactive interventions
Short-term, time-limited interventions make it difficult for services to plan and carry out ongoing effective work e.g. the RSI Navigator and Mediation	Continue to lobby for long-term funding from bodies such as MHCLG

12. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

The following section undertakes a wider SWOT analysis of the findings of this Review, and its emerging themes. As with the previous section this will be used to develop the priorities and action plan for the new Homelessness Strategy – particularly by identifying any considerations and limitations which need to be considered.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong VCSE sector • Housing Options service now 'in-house' at the Council with greater flexibility to make changes to service delivery • Funding for temporary Hospital Discharge worker recently secured (until March 2022) • Tenancy Relations Service – specialist private rented sector officer • Gateway Process for non-commissioned supported Housing • Rough sleeping services and non-statutory accommodation options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duplication of service provision, e.g. young people's services without information sharing • Relatively low volume of self-service / online advice available leading to increased frontline demand on Housing Options service • Lack of affordable housing options • Increased need for shared accommodation options • Low Local Housing Allowance rates meaning lack of options / choice available in the private rented sector
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated teams – more virtual working in a post-Covid world • Greater Manchester Prevention Strategy and joint funding bids • Rough Sleeper Programmes • Domestic Abuse Bill • Housing Options Service review • To increase private sector leasing arrangements • Joint commissioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term grant funding: MHCLG core grants provided year by year and other projects reliant on re-application • Need to make internal savings within the Council due to financial pressures • Growing demand due to volume of applications received • Impact of Covid-19 increased unemployment, reduction in incomes and impact on affordability of accommodation

13. Resources

As with all local authorities, Oldham Council is faced with the challenge of managing increasing demand with limited resources. The Council has the following core staffing structure within its Housing Options Service committed to the support of households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness:

Role	Number of staff	Caseload
Housing Pathway Advisors	7	50-100
Temporary Accommodation Officers	3	40-60
Apprentices	2	
Senior Housing Need Officers	2	
Tenancy Relations Officer	1	30-40
Central Access Point Officer (Supported Accommodation Assessments)	1	

Caseloads clearly need to be lowered, but additional resources need to be drawn in to help with this. Unfortunately, central government grant levels in 2020/21 did not support with this, despite being fully committed to expenditure on the homelessness service. A Housing Pathway Advisor (HPA) salary with on-costs would typically equate to £42,000; the team was uplifted by two HPAs when the funding was last increased, but a further increase in 'burdens' funding is needed to match the ongoing increase in demand which far outstrips Oldham's current grant level below:

Flexible Homelessness Support Grant	£193,534
New Burdens:	£62,418

The service has made a number of changes however to help manage caseloads, speed up assessments and provide a good service to applicants, such as utilising web-based portals, forms and letters, as well as social media apps such as 'Whatsapp' to communicate with customers. Apprenticeships have also been a valuable development opportunity as well as an affordable staffing resource – which should be developed further as part of the new Strategy. The Housing Options service should also look at whether the current 'generic' structure remains fit for purpose, or whether changes are needed such as introducing more specialisms should appropriate funding become available.

14. Next steps

The information in this Review will be used to formulate the new Homelessness Strategy for 2021-2026, with a focus on:

- Preventing homelessness in the district;
- Securing that sufficient accommodation is and will be available for people in the district who are or may become homeless; and,
- Securing the satisfactory provision of support for people in the district who are or may become homeless or who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless again.

Appendix A: List of tables and figures

Table 1: Timeline of legal developments

Table 2: Timeline of Local, Regional and National Strategies

Table 3: Highlights from previous Strategy

Figure 1: Applications and Assessments

Table 4: Applications and Assessments: National comparison

Table 5: Prevention Duties

Table 6: Relief Duties

Figure 2: Final Decisions

Table 7: Full Housing Duties Owed

Table 8: Households not successfully relieved or owed a full housing duty

Table 9: Main reasons for homelessness

Figure 3: Main reasons for homelessness

Figure 4: Support Needs 2018-20

Figure 5: Count of support needs

Figure 6: Support needs and vulnerabilities 2016-20

Figure 7: Eligibility 2016-20

Figure 8: Eligibility breakdown 2018-20

British or Irish citizen, or habitually resident
Non-UK/-EEA citizen: Indefinite Leave to Remain
EEA citizen: Worker
Non-UK/-EEA citizen: Limited Leave to Remain
Non-UK/-EEA citizen: Granted refugee status
EEA citizen: Permanent right to reside
EEA citizen: Other
Non-UK/-EEA citizen: Other protection (e.g. humanitarian, discretionary)
EEA citizen: Eligible family member
Non-UK/-EEA citizen: Exceptional Leave to Remain
EEA citizen: Self-employed

Table 10: Ethnicity

Figure 9: Reason for loss of accommodation: Black households

Table 11: Age

Figure 10: Reason for loss of accommodation: Over 65s

Table 12: Households Types

Table 13: Economic Status

Figure 11: Homelessness presentations by area

Figure 12: Numbers of households in temporary accommodation

Table 14: Household makeup in temporary accommodation

Figure 13: Household makeup in temporary accommodation

Table 15: Referral received under the Duty to Refer

Figure 14: Reviews requested

Figure 15: Review outcomes

Table 15: Local Housing Allowance Rates, Oldham

Table 16: Social Housing Properties Advertised via Choice Based Lettings

Table 17: Live Housing Register applications as at 31/01/2021

Figure 16: Service mapping

Table 18: Tools to prevent and relieve homelessness

Figure 17: Consultation timeline

Figures 18-22: Member consultation responses

Figures 23-27: Stakeholder consultation responses

Table 19: Service user reasons for homelessness

Figure 28: Service user comments about temporary accommodation

Table 20: Service user barriers to finding a new home

Table 21-22: Service user ease of accessing information and advice

Table 23: Service user preferred channels of contact

Table 24: Service user Homelessness Strategy Priorities