

Report to Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy: Year One Update

Portfolio Holder:

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Reason for Decision

Oldham's Homelessness Prevention and Reduction and Strategy 2021-26 has been in place for nearly one year and this report provides an update on progress so far with regards to the implementation of actions within the Delivery Plan.

Executive Summary

Local authorities have a statutory responsibility to publish a Homelessness Strategy based on a review of homelessness in their district at least every five years; Oldham's current Strategy was approved by Cabinet in October 2021. The Strategy is accompanied by a Delivery Plan which is kept under review by a multi-agency monitoring group; updates to the Delivery Plan are influenced by factors including trends in homelessness presentations, changes in legislation and other local plans and policies. Good progress has been made towards achieving actions in the Delivery Plan in the first year despite challenging circumstances including increasing homelessness both locally and nationally. However, it is anticipated that these challenges will continue as the cost-of-living crisis impacts alongside growing demand for affordable housing – making early intervention, prevention and partnership working increasingly important.

Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. Notes the progress in implementing actions within the Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy Delivery Plan
2. Comment on the contents within the Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy Year One Update paper

Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy: Year One Update

1 Background

- 1.1 Local authorities have a statutory responsibility to publish a Homelessness Strategy based on a review of homelessness in their district at least every five years. Oldham's current Homelessness Strategy was approved by Cabinet in October 2021.
- 1.2 The Strategy has five priorities, framed by our statutory duties to homeless residents and linked to our Corporate Plan and objectives with particular reference to Co-operative services, communities and partnership working:
- Advice and information
 - Early identification
 - Pre-crisis intervention
 - Prevent recurring homelessness
 - Partnership arrangements
- 1.3 Sitting beneath these priorities is a Delivery Plan which is kept under review by the Strategic Housing Team and a multi-agency Strategy Review Group; the last review took place at the end of June 2022. The Review Group was formed at the start of Year Two of the Strategy to ensure effective overview, insight and information sharing is attributed to the Delivery Plan, as well as helping to identify potential resources. The Review Group is drawn from organisations subject to the Duty to Refer set out in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 as well as others who have a particular interest and/or representation in homelessness, including Aftercare, Domestic Abuse Services, DWP, Drug and Alcohol Services, Probation, and the Council's Emerging Communities Team.

2 Current Position

- 2.1 Year One of the Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy Delivery Plan set out 8 actions for completion by April 2022. 6 of these actions were delivered on time, with two moved to a later date due to awaiting the outcome of funding bids.
- 2.2 The Year One Plan had a particular focus on recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, including promoting advice to landlords and tenants to help prevent eviction and/or promote planned moves, building resources within the frontline Housing Options Team, and responding to particularly affected groups including rough sleepers and people leaving institutions such as hospitals and prisons. The plan also sought to respond to changes in legislation brought about by the Domestic Abuse Act and the new duties this placed on local authorities to provide support to victims in safe accommodation.
- 2.3 The table below provides a comprehensive update on progress in delivering Year One actions:

	Actions	Progress	Outcomes
1	Undertake promotion of referrals to local housing authority to landlords following the easing of evictions following the Covid-19 pandemic	Action plan put in place a promoted via: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Homelessness Forum - Common Allocations Framework (CAF) Partnership - Strategic Housing 	- 'Duty to Refer' tenants at risk of homelessness adopted by social and supported landlords in the borough as part of refreshed homelessness pledges

		<p>Partnership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'We Can Help' / Homelessness Prevention Payments campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 109 households prevented from becoming homeless via clearing rent arrears through Homelessness Prevention Payments
2	<p>Review structure of the Housing Options Service to ensure it is sufficiently prevention focused within resources available, including capacity for home visits and co-location</p>	<p>Review completed April 2022:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased frontline resources (recruitment underway) - Dedicated and increased specialisms within service in response to areas identified by Homelessness Review e.g., domestic abuse, rough sleeping, tenancy relations - Re-separation of operational and strategic functions to ensure focus on customers, compliance, and delivery of strategic projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in Prevention Duties accepted by Q4 2021/22 from the 2020/21 baseline in accordance with earlier intervention focus of Strategy - Strategic team focusing on projects including securing over £400k in external funding in 2021/22 from sources such as DLUHC, MoJ and GMCA to provide additional fixed-term staffing and accommodation options for homeless residents
3	<p>Carry out a review of domestic abuse services in the borough and commission an appropriate response in line with the new Domestic Abuse Act</p>	<p>Safe Lives review undertaken, and Domestic Abuse Strategy published by Domestic Abuse Partnership.</p> <p>Women's Service (short-term housing including refuge and move-on accommodation) recommissioned.</p> <p>Increased resources situated within housing services as part of new duty to provide support in safe accommodation including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2x IDVAs - 1.5 x Engagement Officers - 1x Move-On Support Officer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Victims now only have to present to one service if in need of support with housing and domestic abuse due to the new Housing IDVA role - Work is ongoing to increase the availability of dispersed temporary accommodation, supported by the Move-On Officer, which will facilitate greater options for victims with special characteristic and for whom refuge may not be suitable e.g., male, LGBTQ, mental and physical health needs
4	<p>Review current commissioned services and ensure preparations are made for the closure of the EU Settlement Scheme</p>	<p>Services reviewed; No Recourse to Public Funds A Bed Every Night (ABEN) provision recommissioned for 3 further years and Booth Centre advice provision for EEA nationals extended for a further year to provide transition advice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Oldham continues to host 6 ABEN beds for NRPF individuals who would otherwise be destitute and rough sleeping whilst work takes place to seek move-on options

5	Source funding to extend the RSI Team or other service to support 'sofa surfers' to more proactively intervene given their transient nature and focus on more proactive interventions	Moved to Year 3 to allow for sourcing of new funding and recommissioning of rough sleeping services	
6	Review sources of resettlement support for rough sleepers to prevent return to the streets	As above	
7	Source longer term funding to provide stability for current rough sleeping services, including RSI Team and A Bed Every Night	3-year funding secured for all services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recommissioning undertaken for ABEN - Recommissioning to commence for Rough Sleeping Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In the past two years ABEN has supported over 220 people in Oldham who would otherwise have been sleeping rough - 22/23 (one emergency) bed spaces are currently commissioned in Oldham, plus 6 for NRPF households. These help to ensure that Oldham has one of the lowest levels of rough sleeping in Greater Manchester
8	Seek longer term funding to continue co-locating a housing officer within Oldham Hospital	3-year funding secured (match funding required from year 2) for Homelessness Prevention Officer focused on hospital and prison discharges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 138 patients were supported by the Homelessness Prevention Officer dedicated to hospital discharges in 2021/22, with no patients discharged to rough sleeping in line with the aims of the funding at the time - It is hoped similar outcomes will be achieved for prison discharges, particularly as awareness of the role becomes embedded

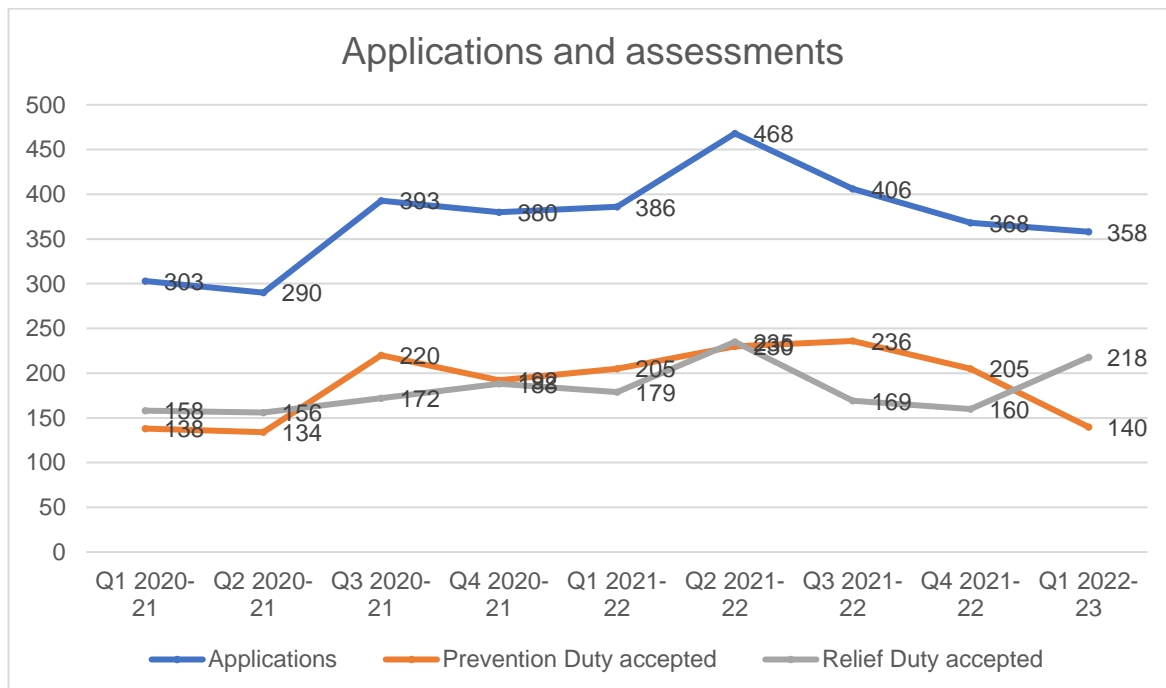
2.4 The following provides a brief overview of the key statistical data which is used to inform the continued development of the Delivery Plan behind the Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy 2021-26.

2.5 Footfall through the homelessness service is continuing to increase, and throughout 2021/22 in line with the Strategy there was a focus on increasing the volume of Prevention Duties being opened, rather than the more crisis-driven Relief Duties. This increase in Prevention Duties can be seen in the Applications and Assessments table below – although Relief Duties do remain at a broadly similar level, reflecting ongoing pressure on the service.

2.6 However, moving into 2022/23 this picture is changing, with Relief Duties beginning to increase again. This is due to a combination of factors including:

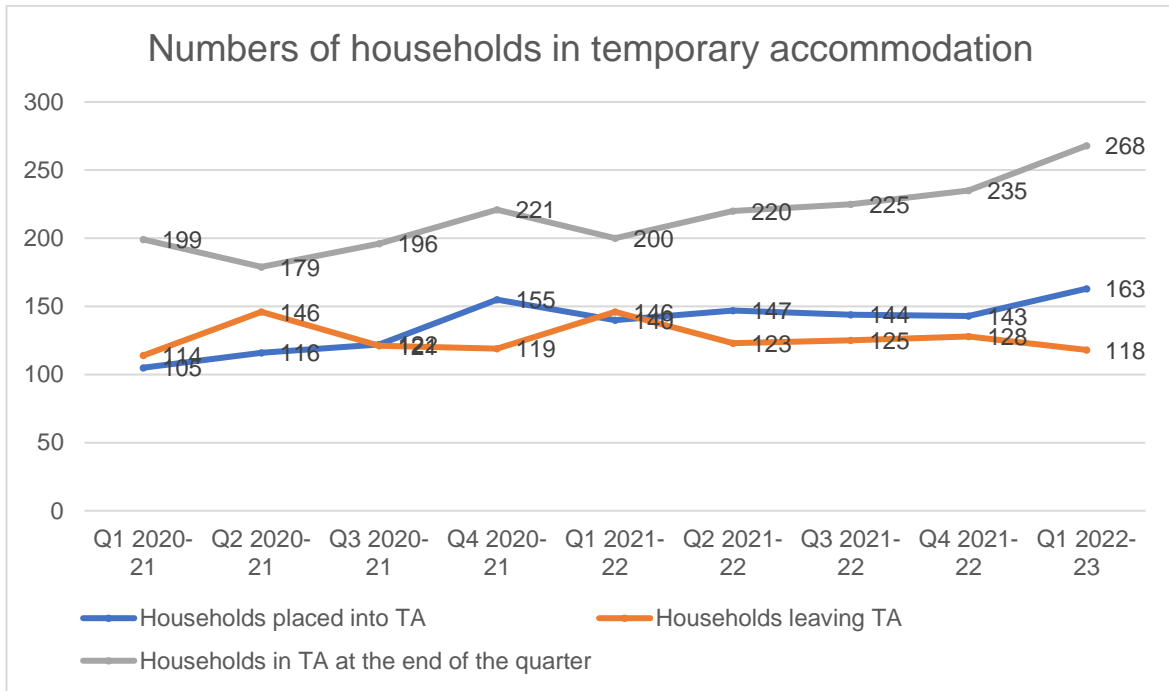
- Increasing evictions taking place from the private sector as can be seen at 2.6.4 below
- Increasing applications from households experiencing family crises and relationship breakdowns.

2.6.1 Applications and Assessments



2.6.2 Temporary accommodation

Where a household is eligible, homeless and in priority need, a duty arises to secure that interim (temporary) accommodation is available for that household pending the outcome of the Council’s full enquiries into their homelessness application. Over the past year the provision of temporary accommodation has increased; this has primarily been due to the difficulties in moving people on to permanent housing than a significant increase in the number of placements, although these are now increasing in Q1 2022/23 in line with Relief Duties. Increasing move-on options, alongside continuing to try to prevent households having to enter temporary accommodation wherever possible, will need to continue to be a priority under the Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy in Year 2 and beyond.



2.6.3 Costs

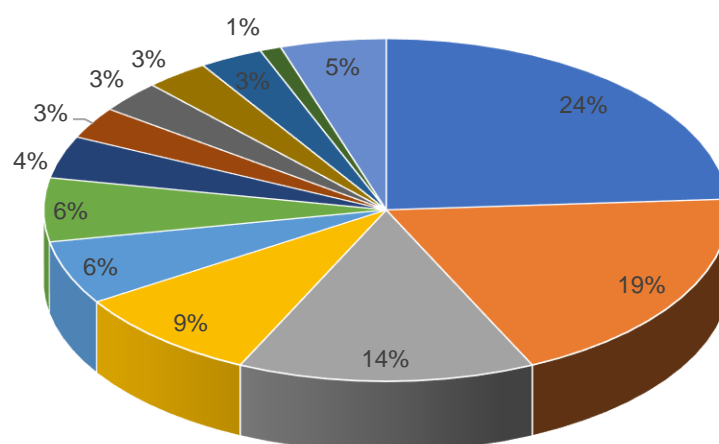
With ongoing and increasing temporary accommodation usage come increasing costs to the local authority. Oldham Council uses three main forms of temporary accommodation; leased / dispersed units; hotel / bed and breakfast placements and nightly paid / ‘annex’ accommodation spot purchased from private providers. The table below provides an estimate of costs and the potential shortfall for 2022/23; this may be subject to change based on Housing Benefit recovery, service demand and any potential new grant income.

Description	21/22 Actual (£)	22/23 Forecast (£)	Variance (£)
Chief Rents (Leased Accommodation)	457,244	500,000	42,756
Hotel Accommodation	213,391	341,618	128,227
Nightly Paid Accommodation	1,608,051	2,047,261	439,210
Total	2,278,686	2,888,879	610,193

2.6.4 Reasons for homelessness

The main three reasons for homelessness in Oldham have remained the same for several years now as exclusion by family; loss of private rented accommodation; and domestic abuse. Oldham and some neighbouring Greater Manchester authorities also have slightly higher levels of presentations from households leaving Home Office accommodation due to the numbers of placements made into the area. A final point of note is continued relatively high numbers of presentations from people leaving institutions. This could, however, be due to effective pathways built via partnership working to help prevent rough sleeping and repeat homelessness for these households.

Reasons for homelessness: 2021-22



- Family not willing or able to accommodate
- Domestic abuse
- Relationship breakdown
- Leaving Home Office accommodation
- Eviction from supported accommodation
- Leaving institution -hospital
- Other
- Loss of private rented accommodation
- Friends not willing to accommodate
- Eviction from social rented tenancy
- Violence or harassment
- Leaving institution - custody
- Disrepair

2.7 Year Two of the Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy continues to focus on increasing Prevention Duties wherever possible and encouraging households to seek advice at the earliest opportunity before reaching crisis point. Actions within the Delivery Plan also seek to review pathways for groups identified as being at risk of homelessness such as those identified in the cohorts above; for example, the plan will:

- Review accommodation pathways for offenders leaving custody in light of changes to Probation arrangements
- Review the current young person's mediation scheme to ensure it meets demand and need
- Continue to develop the role of the Local Authority Asylum Support Officers (LAASLOs) or similar service to support the integration of refugees and migrants and deliver early intervention to prevent homelessness

2.8 By doing so, and keeping the Delivery Plan under review with partners, we aim to work together to make best use of our shared resources to seek to support residents and address the main causes of homelessness.

3 Options/Alternatives

3.1 Not applicable

4 Preferred Option

4.1 Not applicable

5 **Consultation**

5.1 The Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy was developed in consultation with residents, partner organisations, elected members, and staff. Consultation continues on an ongoing basis via our Homelessness Forum, resident feedback and through lived experience via our commissioned rough sleeping services.

6 **Financial Implications**

6.1 The continuation and progress of the Oldham Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy 2021-26 will not in itself incur a financial cost. As the practicalities of implementing the strategy continue to become known, additional reports/business cases will be required and at this point any financial implication will be commented on further in-depth.

6.2 However it is acknowledged within the report that the Strategy Delivery Plan is taking a pragmatic approach to tackling homelessness in Oldham, acknowledging that resources are finite. The Council has recently had funding confirmation for 2022/23 of £119,890 as part of the Government's Rough Sleeping Initiative and also an allocation of £553,180 as part of the Government's Homelessness Prevention Grant. It is hoped that the Council will supplement these existing financial resources by maximizing results through better partnership working and by exploring the potential to increase external funding.

(John Hoskins)

7 **Legal Services Comments**

7.1 None. (Colin Brittain)

8. **Co-operative Agenda**

8.1 Oldham Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy 2021-26 particularly promotes the cooperative value of Working Together throughout its Delivery Plan, seeking to achieve a common goal of preventing and reducing homelessness as a partnership.

9 **Human Resources Comments**

9.1 None

10 **Risk Assessments**

10.1 The requirement to have a Homeless Strategy is a Statutory Requirement. This report sets out the progress made since the Strategy was agreed as Policy by the Council (Mark Stenson)

11 **IT Implications**

11.1 None

12 **Property Implications**

12.1 None

13 **Procurement Implications**

13.1 None

14 **Environmental and Health & Safety Implications**

14.1 None

15 **Equality, community cohesion and crime implications**

15.1 This Strategy is intended to support the development of more cohesive communities through a reduction in homelessness and its associated issues such as illegal eviction, harassment, antisocial behaviour and rough sleeping.

16 **Equality Impact Assessment Completed?**

16.1 EIA completed when Strategy was introduced in October 2021.

17 **Key Decision**

17.1 No

18 **Key Decision Reference**

18.1 Not applicable

19 **Background Papers**

19.1 None

20 **Appendices**

20.1 Appendix 1: Oldham Homelessness Prevention and Reduction Strategy:
https://www.oldham.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/2676/homelessness_strategy_2021.pdf

20.2 Appendix 2: Delivery Plan

	Actions	Resources Required	Partners	Timescale
1	Undertake promotion of referrals to local housing authority to landlords following the easing of evictions following the Covid-19 pandemic	Staff	Oldham Strategic Housing Partnership	Year 1
2	Review structure of the Housing Options Service to ensure it is sufficiently prevention focused within resources available, including capacity for home visits and co-location	Staff	Human Resources	Year 1
3	Carry out a review of domestic abuse services in the borough and commission an appropriate response in line with the new Domestic Abuse Act	Staff; budgetary	IDVAs; Refuge; Early Help; VCSE; Adult Social Care; Children's Services; Police; Domestic Abuse Partnership	Year 1
4	Review current commissioned services and ensure preparations are made for the closure of the EU Settlement Scheme	Staff; budgetary	GMCA; Emerging Communities; Adult Social Care; Children's Services	Year 1
5	Source funding to extend the RSI Team or other service to support 'sofa surfers' to more proactively intervene given their transient nature and focus on more proactive interventions	Staff; budgetary	VCSE; GMCA	Year 1
6	Review sources of resettlement support for rough sleepers to prevent return to the streets	Staff; budgetary	VCSE; GMCA	Year 1
7	Source longer term funding to provide stability for current rough sleeping services, including RSI Team and A Bed Every Night	Staff; budgetary	VCSE; GMCA	Year 1
8	Seek longer term funding to continue co-locating a housing officer within Oldham Hospital	Staff; budgetary	Adult Social Care; GMCA	Year 1

	Actions	Resources Required	Partners	Timescale
9	Ensure housing advice is promoted to emerging communities to ensure awareness of housing rights and increase prevention vs. relief	Staff	Emerging Communities; SERCO; VCSE; GP surgeries	Year 2
10	Review accommodation pathways for offenders leaving custody in light of changes to Probation arrangements	Staff	Probation; GMCA; Greater Manchester Prison Service; Shelter	Year 2
11	Review transitions process for Children Looked After	Staff	Children's Services	Year 2

	reaching 17th Birthday to plan move-on options at earliest opportunity			
12	Review the current young person's mediation scheme to ensure it meets demand and need	Staff; budgetary	Children's Services; Procurement	Year 2
13	Participate in MASH and Adult Social Care front door review to consider potential future housing links	Staff; budgetary	Adult Social Care	Year 2
13a	Deliver actions within Homelessness Thematic Safeguarding Adult Review Action Plan	Staff	Adult Social Care	Year 2
14	Together with Children's Services, develop young people's housing strategy with a particular focus on sufficiency for 16-17 year olds and care leavers	Staff; budgetary	Children's Services; Procurement	Year 2
15	Publish temporary accommodation strategy including procurement for temporary accommodation services to achieve value for money and sustainable move-on	Staff; budgetary	Procurement	Year 2
16	Ensure homeless applicants have fair access to GP and other primary care treatment, and effective pathways into vaccination and other programmes	Staff	Homeless Friendly; Adult Social Care; Pennine Care	Year 2
17	Continue to develop the role of the Local Authority Asylum Support Officers (LAASLOs) or similar service to support the integration of refugees and migrants and deliver early intervention to prevent homelessness	Staff	Emerging Communities	Year 2
18	Review protocols with and streamline access to services to promote move-on from Temporary and Supported Accommodation and access to services such as Local Welfare Provision, Jobcentre Plus and Discretionary Housing Payments	Staff	DWP; Welfare Rights; VCSE	Year 2

	Actions	Resources Required	Partners	Timescale
19	Improve advice and options available to departing partners in instances of relationship breakdown, including on legal rights, mediation and relationship counselling	Staff	VCSE; GP surgeries;	Year 3
20	Ensure staff in homelessness and related services are	Staff; budgetary	Pennine Care; IDVA; Oldham	Year 3

	equipped to respond to vulnerable applicants in a psychologically informed way via delivering appropriate training		Safeguarding Adults Board	
21	Work to improve landlord / tenant relations through education and information on rights and responsibilities	Staff	PRS landlords; Environmental Health	Year 3
22	Work with partners to support applicants into employment to ensure they can better access and sustain housing	Staff	DWP; Get Oldham Working	Year 3
5	Source funding to extend the RSI Team or other service to support 'sofa surfers' to more proactively intervene given their transient nature and focus on more proactive interventions	Staff; budgetary	VCSE; GMCA	Year 3
6	Review sources of resettlement support for rough sleepers to prevent return to the streets	Staff; budgetary	VCSE; GMCA	Year 3

	Actions	Resources Required	Partners	Timescale
23	Ensure housing options for older people are sufficiently explored and well presented, and meet the needs of those with more complex needs e.g. substance misuse	Staff; budgetary	Adult Social Care; Oldham Strategic Housing Partnership; Turning Point; Pennine Care	Year 4
24	Review and promote financial relief funds available to clear arrears and help applicants to access and sustain housing	Staff; budgetary	VCSE; Welfare Rights	Year 4
25	Review current debt and money management provision and promote availability	Staff; budgetary	Welfare Rights; VCSE	Year 4
26	Work together with registered providers to develop 'right-sizing' initiatives	Staff	Oldham Strategic Housing Partnership	Year 4
27	Consider co-locating the Housing Options service within place-based integration initiatives, or upskilling relevant colleagues	Staff	Communities; Strategic Housing Partnership	Year 4

	Actions	Resources Required	Partners	Timescale
28	Increase the availability of self-service advice online	Staff; budgetary; ICT	Unity (IT)	Year 5

	such as web chat with Housing Advisors so applicants can seek early advice more easily			
29	Undertake a peer review to establish why repeat homelessness occurs, and put measures in place to prevent this happening	Staff; budgetary	VCSE; GMCA	Year 5

	Actions	Resources Required	Partners	Timescale	Progress
30	Continue to lobby for long-term revenue and capital funding from bodies such as MHCLG	Staff	MHCLG; GMCA	Ongoing	
31	Work together with Oldham Strategic Housing Partnership to secure capital and revenue funding for long-term accommodation	Staff	Oldham Strategic Housing Partnership	Ongoing	
32	Review the supported accommodation gateway process in line with an updated needs assessment	Staff	Internal gateway partners; Registered providers	Ongoing	
33	Encourage, promote and support where required voluntary, faith & charitable sector organisations to submit relevant funding applications which enhance and support our local offer to homeless households	Staff	VCSE	Ongoing	
34	Investigate the delivery of new digital inclusion signposting services to such as social media campaigns, stakeholder e-resources, web links etc.	Staff; budgetary; ICT	Communications	Ongoing	
35	Deliver training to partner agencies to promote early identification and referrals for housing advice	Staff	All partners	Ongoing	
36	Increase options available via the Bond Scheme targeted at single households, e.g. en-suite rooms in shared houses / studio apartments	Staff; budgetary	PRS Landlords; Environmental Health	Ongoing	

37	Proactively monitor and review people being released from prison or discharged from approved premises to prevent them being released without an address or appropriate support in place	Staff	Probation; Greater Manchester Prison Service	Ongoing	
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