
Briefing Paper

Homelessness Prevention in Oldham

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1.0 Background

At the council meeting on 13 September 2017 there followed a request that the Leader bring forward a report to Council outlining how local services are working to end homelessness in the Borough. This report provides information regarding the contribution that many agencies make towards homelessness prevention in Oldham.

2.0 Statutory reporting on Homelessness Prevention

Oldham Council are required to complete a statutory return (P1E) and formally report on a quarterly basis to the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on a range of indicators in respect of homelessness activity within the borough. One element of this return focusses on the prevention or relief of homelessness within Oldham. A prevention should only be recorded where it is anticipated that the intervention will prevent homelessness for at least 6 months.

Oldham Council is consistently one of the highest performers across Greater Manchester in this area of work and a number of agencies contribute to this indicator. **2046 households in Oldham had their homelessness prevented during 2016/17.** The cost of a single person sleeping rough in the UK for 12 months is estimated at £20,128¹. Homelessness also has a human cost. The distress of lacking a settled home can cause or intensify social isolation, create barriers to education, training and paid work and undermine mental and physical health. When homelessness becomes prolonged, or is repeatedly experienced, there are further deteriorations in health and well-being.

This work has therefore not just resulted in financial cost savings to the council, but also social cost savings to the households themselves who are able to remain in their

¹ Crisis – At what cost? 2015

accommodation or move in a planned way to new accommodation. This also has a positive impact in terms of community cohesion. There are significant social costs to any household in becoming homeless in terms of access to local services, health care and isolation from social or support networks.

As would be expected the main agency working to prevent homelessness is First Choice Homes Oldham (FCHO) but this is not just through the commissioned Oldham Housing and Advice Service (OHAS). The OHAS service worked to prevent homelessness for 513 households in 2016/17 whilst FCHOs Income Team, Tenancy Support Service and Tenancy Relations Service prevented homelessness for 207 households.

Colleagues within the council also contribute to this indicator particularly through the use of Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) where households may be at risk of eviction due to rent arrears or through the addition of target hardening works where households may be at risk of violence but want to stay within their property. These works such as additional security measures (e.g. locks, CCTV, alarms) are often done in conjunction with registered housing providers within their properties. Colleagues in social care may also contribute to the prevention of homelessness by securing access to accommodation through their own stock, for example, After Care services.

A number of voluntary or charitable agencies also contribute to the statutory recording of homelessness prevention. These agencies include Oldham Citizens Advice Bureau, KeyRing, Threshold and DePaul. In total they prevented 199 households from becoming homeless in 2016/17.

3.0 Interventions to prevent homelessness

In terms of the statutory reporting there are a range of interventions that have been put in place to prevent homelessness. The main prevention reasons are listed below (these are set by DCLG):

- Resolving Housing Benefit problems
- Resolving rent or service charge arrears in the social or private rented sector
- Negotiation or legal advocacy to ensure that someone can remain in accommodation in the private rented sector
- Financial payments from a homeless prevention fund
- Debt Advice
- Sanctuary Scheme – target hardening measures for domestic violence
- Family Mediation
- Conciliation including home visits for family/friend threatened exclusions
- Mortgage arrears interventions
- Crisis intervention - providing emergency support
- Providing other assistance that will enable someone to remain in accommodation in the private or social rented sector

The main reasons where homelessness is prevented or relieved as the household is supported to obtain alternative accommodation before becoming homeless through:

- Allocation of social housing
- Social housing – management move

- Access to private rented accommodation through use of a landlord incentive
- Access to private rented accommodation without use of a landlord incentive
- Accommodation arranged through friends
- Access to supported accommodation

In Oldham the main prevention reasons are:

- Resolving Housing Benefit problems
- Resolving rent or service charge arrears in the social or private rented sector
- Allocation of social housing
- Access to supported accommodation

4.0 Funding

4.1 The council receives **Preventing Homelessness Grant** funding on an annual basis. This is paid to the Council as part of the Revenue Support Grant. For 2017/18 Oldham Council has received £80,672.

During 2017/18 this funding is being used to fund the following services:

Oldham Reconnect (Young Person’s Mediation Service) £40,000

This service aims to resolve some of the issues which result in young people becoming homeless. Currently provided by De Paul UK and linked to the Young Persons Housing Pathway (funded by Health and Wellbeing) the service primarily receives referrals through the Oldham Housing and Advice Service (OHAS), Children’s Social Care, After Care, the Early Help Service and local colleges. A trained mediator works with young people and their families to negotiate a return home or a planned move into alternative accommodation.

This service was funded on a part time basis in 2016/17 and prevented 35 young people from becoming homeless. During 2016/17 this service received funding of £23,000 from Oldham Council in respect of Preventing Homelessness Grant. It is estimated (based on £1,558 or £11,733) per young person) that this could have cost the authority between £54,340 and £410,655.

This does not take into account the other costs, or risks associated with a young person becoming homeless. Young people who are homeless are also more likely to be vulnerable and at increasing risk of becoming involved in crime or being the victim of crime. It is widely acknowledged that there are clear links between homelessness and difficulties with substance or alcohol misuse and sexual exploitation.

Oldham Nightstop £15,000

This scheme works alongside Oldham Reconnect and can provide families with a ‘breathing space’ in which to work on their difficulties. The service aims to recruit local householders who have a spare room and are willing to provide accommodation and support for a short period (2-3 nights) to young people who have become homeless. The

service is currently provided by Depaul UK and links into their other support services for young people in Oldham including supported accommodation and supported lodgings.

Spend To Save

£20,000

This funding is allocated to First Choice Homes Oldham and can be used to fund any item that will prevent homelessness. Generally the maximum amount of any grant is £500 per households (although this may be increased where households have specific issues which would make it difficult to move them on from temporary accommodation). Homelessness has been prevented for 95 households through the innovative use of this fund during 2016/17. Furniture packages, key deposits and transport costs have been some of the examples of what the fund has been used for.

4.2 Where possible the council will seek additional funds to support homeless prevention work. Historically this has included through the Governments **Help for Single Homeless Fund** which we delivered in partnership with Groundwork Oldham. The council also worked in partnership with Depaul UK to submit a bid to the governments **Fair Chance Fund**. This was to support vulnerable young people at risk of homelessness in Oldham. The bid was successful and Depaul started taking referrals in 2015. Work is still ongoing but the programme is due to cease in December 2017.

4.3 Oldham Council worked in partnership with colleagues in Tameside and Stockport to secure funding from DCLG in respect of **victims of domestic abuse**. Funding was awarded and commissioning of services to deliver this is currently underway.

4.4 First Choice Homes also fund a number of services which contribute towards the homelessness prevention agenda. These include the **Disability Living Service** (one post is funded through the OHAS contract, FCHO fund a second post) where FCHO staff work in partnership with health professionals, including the Community Occupational Therapy Team, to advise customers, make adaptations where possible and to make best use of suitable housing. FCHO have also sought funding from the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) for their **Hospital to Home Service**. This service focusses on expediting discharge from hospital for households whose current accommodation is unsuitable.

5.0 Joint working arrangements

5.1 There is a strong commitment across many agencies to the prevention of homelessness in Oldham. To evidence this there are a number of formal and informal joint working arrangements in place in Oldham which support the homelessness prevention agenda. These include:

- Pre-Eviction Protocol – in place with registered housing providers and providers of supported accommodation. This protocol outlines the action that should be taken and referral pathways in place when possession action is being taken
- Young Persons Housing Protocol – in place with OHAS and After Care in respect of young people at risk of homelessness and care leavers
- Cold Weather Provision – in place with the council, OHAS, Threshold and DePaul UK in respect of the provision of accommodation and shelter during periods of cold weather to households who may be at risk of rough sleeping

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- Joint work with the police and council's First Response team in respect of providing an out of hours response to reports of people sleeping rough linking in with the OHAS service
 - Agreed referral arrangements in place with Serco to the OHAS in respect of households given a positive decision on their asylum application who will be required to vacate accommodation provided by the Home Office
 - Agreed referral arrangements in place with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to the OHAS in respect of households who may be homeless
 - Agreed referral arrangements to DWP from OHAS for homeless households who may have been sanctioned
 - The development of trusted partner status with a number of agencies working with young people (e.g. OHAS, Oldham CAB, Depaul UK, Threshold, Positive Steps Oldham, Oldham Council – After Care, Early Help) to verify that young people who are homeless meet the criteria to have housing costs paid through Universal Credit.
 - Staff working in Housing Strategy (Homelessness) link in with partner agencies representing groups who are particularly vulnerable to homelessness at a strategic level including Corporate Parenting Board, Reducing Reoffending Board, One Recovery Partnership Board and Youth Justice Main Board.
 - Joint work across the council (e.g. Community Safety, homelessness, Early Help, substance misuse services) in respect of households with Complex Dependencies (any combination of accommodation issues, mental ill health, substance misuse issues, history of offending)
 - Joint work with colleagues in Community Safety and registered housing providers in respect of households at risk of, or experiencing, domestic violence.
 - Joint work with colleagues in Exchequer Services in respect of access to Discretionary Housing Payment for households at risk of homelessness and also use of Local Welfare Provision funding.
 - Annual multi-agency training provided to a wide range of agencies by Oldham Citizens Advice Bureau in respect of Debt Advice to enable front line staff to provide low level debt advice to more people in Oldham or to know where to refer those with more complex issues.

5.2 Cross authority working

Officers from Oldham Council work with colleagues across Greater Manchester on a number of issues in relation to homelessness prevention. Most recently this has been in respect of the Trailblazer work and preparation for the new Homelessness Reduction Act. This includes joint commissioning of training and services. Cross authority bids have been submitted for funding including those referenced in 4.2 and 4.3 above.

The **Greater Manchester Housing Providers** are also working together and have made a number of pledges to support the GM Homelessness Charter. In Oldham these have been agreed by the **Oldham Housing Investment Partnership** (OHIP) members.

6.0 Homelessness Forum

There is an active Homelessness Forum in Oldham. This meets quarterly and includes representatives from a wide range of agencies including housing providers, supported housing providers, substance misuse services, health, DWP, Positive Steps Oldham,

Oldham College, Oldham Sixth Form, Greater Manchester Probation Service and support providers.

In terms of the charitable and faith sector this includes:

- Oldham CAB
- Action Together
- Oldham Foodbank
- Salvation Army
- Chadderton Community Church
- Christ Church Chadderton (Kings Kitchen – provider of meals and food parcels to vulnerable households)
- All Nations Church
- Church of the Nazarene
- Petrus
- Victim Support
- British Legion
- Red Cross
- Oldham Credit Union
- Groundwork
- Ancora Project

This list is not exhaustive and not all agencies attend the meetings regularly but they are kept updated through e-mail of any changes to services or issues that impact on people who may be at risk of homelessness in Oldham.

Over recent months council staff have met with a number of the faith groups (Salvation Army, Oldham Foodbank, Chadderton Community Church) and elected members (Cllrs Moores and Shuttleworth) to discuss the provision available within the borough for people who may be at risk of sleeping rough who are not eligible for statutory assistance or who do not engage with existing services. This work is ongoing.