**Sub Regional Homelessness Group – 20th November 2024**

**Housing Board – 6th December 2024**

**2023-24: Overview of Homelessness Across** **Peterborough, Cambridgeshire & West Suffolk**

2023-24 largely saw homelessness levels increasing across the sub region over the previous year with a total of 5,692 households owed either a prevention or relief duty at the point of approach, compared to 5,332 in the previous year (a 7% increase)

Breaking this down further, across the local authorities within the sub region:

1. 3,057 households were threatened with homelessness and owed a prevention duty in 2023-24 (a 7% increase over the previous year). The figure for England as a whole saw a 3% increase. Although an increase, it is positive that this was at the earlier prevention stage, giving councils the opportunity to intervene and try and prevent a homelessness crisis developing.

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| Households owed prevention duty in  2023-24 | % change against 2022-23 | National position -  % change against 2022-23 |
| 3,057 | 7% increase | 3% increase |

1. The number of relief duties accepted by local authorities increased last year after two consecutive years of reduction, with 2,635 households owed a relief duty in 2023-24, a 7% increase on the previous year. The national figure saw a 12% increase over the same period. It is concerning that households are approaching councils at the point of actual homelessness, triggering a relief duty, and further analysis of this will be required by the Sub Regional Homelessness Group to understand the underlying causes of this. Our aim should be to see more households at the prevention duty stage where early intervention opportunities may be available to prevent actual homelessness.

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| Households owed relief duty in 2023-24 | % change against 2022-23 | National position  % change against 2022-23 |
| 2,635 | 7% increase | 12% increase |

Fig 1: Number of Prevention, Relief and Main Housing Duties owed by quarter – 19/20 to 23/24

As shown in Figure 1 above, from Q1 in 2021-22 there has been an upward trend in the number of households being assisted by councils at the prevention duty stage. This is generally positive as we would want the opportunity to possibly intervene at the prevention stage so that households do not ultimately become homeless. Given that the priority is for earlier intervention to stop a homelessness crisis developing, the preferred position is to attempt to assist at the prevention stage. The worrying position is the gradual increase since April 2022 in the number of households being considered at the relief stage, when they have already become homeless.

The number of households owed the ‘main’ housing duty (after all prevention and relief options have been exhausted) has increased in 2023-24 compared to the previous year. This is likely due to the higher number of households approaching the councils at the relief duty stage, and the limit of a 56 day period to successfully relieve homelessness before a main duty decision must be reached. There were a total of 1,264 households owed the main housing duty which is an 15% increase on the previous year. The reasons for homelessness are explored in more detail later in this paper.

Households owed the **main housing duty** (after prevention & relief has been exhausted) 2023-24 - Peterborough, Cambridgeshire & West SuffolkCouncils:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Households owed the main housing duty in 2023-24 | % change against 2022-23 | National position  % change against  2022-23 |
| 1,264 | 15% increase | 2% decrease |

**Causes of Homelessness.**

The reason for loss of last settled home is a good indication of the cause of homelessness for households assessed as being owed a duty.

**At Prevention Duty stage:**

Fig 2:

As in 2022/23, the two single largest causes of homelessness at the prevention duty stage were family or friends no longer being able to accommodate and End of a private rented tenancy.

In summary:

* Family or friends no longer willing to accommodate – 788 households which was 26% of all cases at this stage. This was a 4% reduction on the previous year.
* End of Assured Shorthold Tenancy in the private rented sector – 1006 households which was 33% of all cases. This was a 5% increase on the previous year.
* Domestic abuse – 241 households – 8% of all cases and a 28% increase on last year.
* End of a social rented tenancy – 276 households which was an 10% increase on the previous year.

**At Relief Duty stage:**

Fig 3:

A relief duty is triggered where the household approaches the local authority at the point of actual homelessness. The most common reason for homelessness at this stage was due to family or friends being no longer willing to accommodate. This was the situation with 751 households or 28% of all households that were owed a relief duty (it was 30% of all cases last year). This is a 3% increase from the previous year.

As in the previous year domestic abuse was the second largest cause of homelessness, (452 households) accounting for 17% of all homelessness at the relief duty stage. This is a 3% reduction on the previous year.

Other notable trends include:

* an increase in instances of homelessness as a result of evictions from supported housing (198 households which is a 30% increase on the previous year).
* 69 households becoming homeless as required to leave Home Office accommodation as asylum support. This compared to 16 households in the previous year. As in the previous year the majority of these were in the PCC area (47 of the 69 households becoming homeless).

As in 2022/23, local authorities were accepting more instances of homelessness at the prevention duty stage than at the relief duty stage. This is as we would hope to see and is in line with the intention of the homelessness legislation, where earlier intervention should take place at the prevention stage as opposed to dealing with a crisis situation, at the relief stage, when homelessness occurs.

There were however some noticeable differences between local authorities with the proportions of duties triggered at the different stages and the Sub Region Homelessness Group will investigate this further to ensure that early intervention opportunities are being maximised.

**Outcomes at the Prevention Duty Stage**

The homelessness legislation requires local authorities to take reasonable steps to try to prevent or relieve a household’s homelessness by helping them to secure accommodation for at least 6 months. These duties usually last 56 days each. The reasons for duties ending indicate the likely outcomes for these applicants.

The number of prevention duties that ended increased by 11% on the previous year, mainly due to the higher number of prevention duties that were triggered during the year. The single biggest cause of the prevention duty ending was as a result of a successful prevention with accommodation being secured for 6 months or more (53% of cases had this successful outcome, compared to 50% in the previous year). Nationally 51% achieving this positive outcome.

Of all households where a prevention duty ended, 25% became homeless, and were therefore owed a relief duty. This figure was 26% nationally.

**Outcomes at the Relief Duty Stage**

When the relief duty was brought to an end in 2023-24, in 29% of cases this was due to a successful outcome where accommodation had been secured for 6 months or more (compared to 30% in the previous year). Nationally the figure was 32%.

In 56% of cases homelessness had not been resolved and at this point the local authority would move on to assess whether the main housing duty was owed to the household.

**Decisions at the Main Housing Duty Stage.**

Across all the local authorities in 20223-24, there were a total of 1,852 cases where homelessness was not resolved at the relief duty stage and a decision was made whether the councils owed the main housing duty. Of this number, 1,272 (or 69%) were subsequently assessed as being owed the main housing duty, with a commitment to help secure longer-term housing. This compared to 68% of cases in the previous year.

**Household Types Owed Prevention & Relief Duties.**

Figures 7 & 8 below show the make-up of households where a prevention or relief duty was accepted in 2023-24 (also shown broken down by local authority area).

At the prevention duty stage we can see that the two largest household types are single men (30% of cases, which is slightly up on last year’s 30% of cases) and single parents with a dependent child (29% of cases compared to 28% last year).

At the relief duty stage single men are by far the largest household type approaching for housing assistance, this being 50% of all cases (48% last year). This is more than double the next largest household types - single female and single parent households (21% and 18% respectively).

**Households in Temporary Accommodation.**

The number of households accommodated by councils under a homelessness duty saw increases in Q1 & 2 of 2023/24 before a significant fall in Q3 as a result of reductions in the PCC and WSDC areas. Q4 then saw a slight increase overall with 859 households in temporary accommodation at the year end. This was an 8% rise over the 796 households that were accommodated at the beginning of the financial year.

The number of households being placed in temporary accommodation is affected by several factors. These include what proportion of those owed a relief duty are also owed a duty to provide emergency accommodation and how many households are subsequently owed the main housing duty as they remained homeless at the end of the relief duty.

As has been highlighted earlier in this report, we saw an increase in the number of households owed the main housing duty across the year, after all prevention and relief activities had been exhausted. This was 15% higher than the previous year and undoubtedly contributed to the higher number of households in temporary accommodation at the year-end compared to the beginning.

Of all forms of temporary accommodation, the most unsatisfactory is bed & breakfast style accommodation. Although we saw an increase in its use throughout the first half of the year, a significant reduction in Q3 meant that we ended the year with 179 households in this type of accommodation which was only slightly higher than the 172 at the end of the previous year.

An important factor with councils attempting to reduce their use of temporary accommodation, and B&B in particular, is the ability to make an offer of settled housing so that lengths of stay in temporary accommodation are kept to a minimum. Where this is not possible then ‘blockages’ in temporary accommodation may occur with households stays increasing and the total number growing.

The rising cost of the use of temporary accommodation for homeless households is one of the most significant financial risks that councils are facing. The sub region has seen a growth in the number of households in temporary accommodation, 8% higher at the year end compared to the previous year. The national picture shows a 12% increase over the same period.

Data has just been published as to the picture at the end of Q1 of the current year and we have already seen an 8% growth between Q1 and Q2 in this number across the sub region. The national figure shows a 5% growth over the same period.

Although the data showing an increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation is alarming because of the social impact this has on individuals and families, the corresponding increase in costs, which appears disproportionate to the increase in number of placements, is a significant financial risk to councils. The first release of Local Authority Revenue Expenditure returns for 2023/24 in August this year showed that:

* Councils spent £2.29bn on temporary accommodation from April 2023 to March 2024.
* The amount spent on temporary accommodation has increased by 29% from £1.77bn the previous year.
* Half of this total spend (£1.34bn) was on nightly paid accommodation and bed and breakfasts. The amount spent on this form of accommodation has increased by 55% on the previous year.

Councils await an announcement on the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2025-26, due later in December. Government has already announced that it will also launch a consultation at the same time on its long-term proposals to fundamentally change the way the sector is funded, although it is unlikely that this will support the increased demand and subsequent cost of temporary accommodation facing local authorities.