



Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

22 November 2023

Report from the Corporate Director Resident Services

**Cabinet Member for Housing,
Homelessness & Renters Security
– Councillor Promise Knight**

Single Homeless Prevention Service (SHPS)

| | |
|---|--|
| Wards Affected: | All |
| Key or Non-Key Decision: | Non-Key |
| Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small> | Open |
| No. of Appendices: | Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) |
| Background Papers: | None |
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1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To update Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny committee about the performance and outcomes of the Single Homeless Prevention Service (SHPS) since it's move to The Turning Point in Harlesden from Wembley.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the committee note the information provided on the Single Homelessness Prevention Service, The Turning Point, Harlesden.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 The Borough Plan includes the following strategic priorities specific to Housing Needs
- Strategic Priority – Thriving Communities
 - Strategic Priority – The Best Start in Life
 - Strategic Priority – A Healthier Brent

- 3.2 These priorities re-affirm the Council's ambition to reduce the impact to health for homeless people. As well as increased access to employment opportunities for homeless households, achieve better outcomes for homeless 16- and 17-year olds.
- 3.3 Other strategies that are relevant to the service are;
- Black Community Action Plan
 - Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy
 - Equality Strategy
 - Health and Well-being Strategy
 - Procurement Strategy
 - Local Plan

Background

- 3.4 The Council has a statutory duty to assess applications from homeless households, pursuant to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (the 2017 Act) and the Housing Act 1996, Part 7 (the 1996 Act). The Housing Needs Service created a dedicated Single Homeless Team in 2018, to specifically deal with applications received from single people and couples without children. This is because single homeless people generally have different support needs, to homeless families, and therefore require a different approach and a different range of solutions to meet their housing needs.
- 3.5 The method of making a homelessness application requires the application to be made online, via the Brent Council, My Account log in page. To create an account, the applicant is required to have an email address, and input their National Insurance number. Whilst support and access to computers is available via the Brent Hubs and libraries, this online application process was identified as a barrier to single homeless people, and often led to delays in their application being made.
- 3.6 Once an account was created, the applicant was asked to complete a series of online triage questions which dependent on the answers, would create an appointment for the applicant to be interviewed by an officer. However, the number of appointment slots that were available were insufficient to cater for the volume of demand, resulting in the appointment slots becoming full, with the first available appointment 12 weeks in the future.
- 3.7 This delay in the assessment interview was a lost opportunity to intervene and prevent homelessness from occurring. Applicants would also physically present at the Civic Centre in crisis before their appointment, as they had become actually homeless since their initial online application. They would often present in an agitated state, due to frustration caused by the delay in being seen and the fact that there are often very few practical solutions available on the day.
- 3.8 When the appointment does go ahead, an officer will determine whether the applicant meets the thresholds to trigger the prevention or relief duty under the

2017 Act, and dependent on their vulnerability, may refer the case to the Single Homeless Prevention Service (SHPS), for advice and support. Many single homeless applicants have underlying support needs, associated with mental health, drug and alcohol addiction, immigration issues, debt and cost of living issues, often linked with unemployment, which have often contributed to their homelessness. However, despite referrals being made to other services, such as Via for drug and alcohol addiction treatment, the applicant will often refuse to engage, and will only want to pursue their application for housing.

4.0 Move to The Turning Point in Harlesden

- 4.1 The online appointment system, as set out above, was not able to cope with the volume of demand, nor was it meeting the needs of single homeless people. Single homeless people need to receive an initial triage to determine what their housing issues are, identify any support needs, and be referred to the appropriate housing and support pathway to meet their needs. It was determined that this could be achieved by operating a face-to-face drop-in service, which is easily accessible, and where partner services can be collocated to provide support services.
- 4.2 The Designworks, Park Parade, Harlesden NW10 4HT, is a Council owned building which was identified as the site to operate this service from. The location of the building is ideal, as it is in the south of the borough, where the majority of the homelessness demand comes from. It is also within 5 minutes walking distance of the Crisis Skylight building, and the Job Centre Plus Harlesden (DWP), both of whom are key partners in tackling homelessness.
- 4.3 The Designworks building entrance located on Park Parade has disabled access and leads onto a small waiting/reception area. After some minor building works, a triage reception and interview facilities were built, creating a section of the building, which could be a dedicated the single homeless service, segregated from the rest of the building.

The Designworks building entrance located on Park Parade



The waiting area at The Turning Point



The reception and triage area at The Turning Point



- 4.4 There are other rooms available on the ground floor of the building, which are being used for back office working, by council officers as well as partner agencies, and the possibility of more ground floor rooms becoming available as current leases come to an end. The building also has vacant rooms on the upper floors, which can be utilised as additional back office working and larger meeting/conference rooms.

Back office area at the Turning Point



Interview area at the Turning Point



Colocation of Partner Agencies to Support Homelessness Prevention

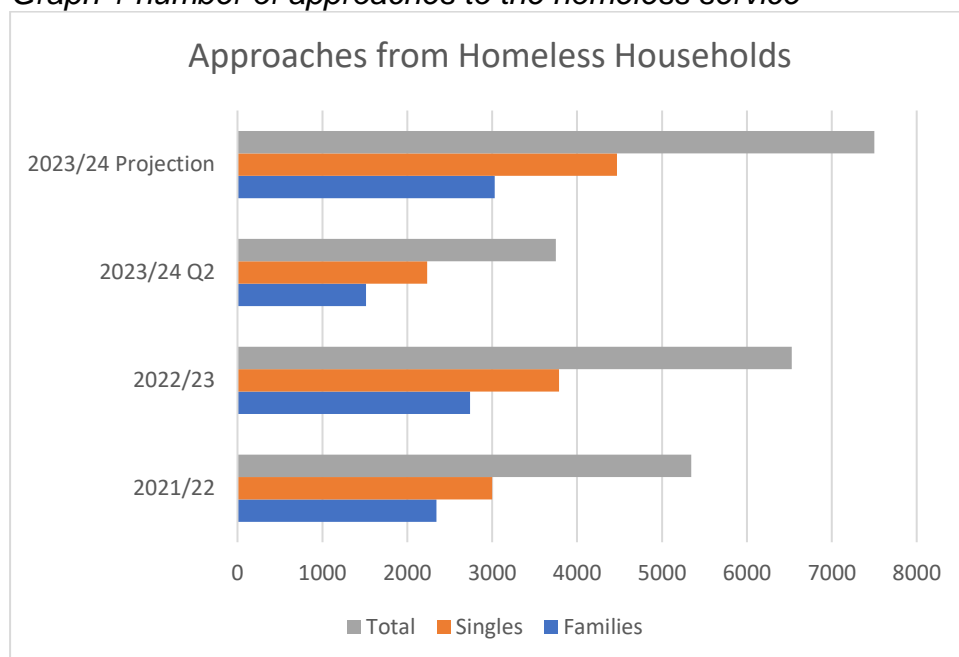
- 4.5 Prior to going live, consultation with the Brent Homelessness Forum took place, where partner agencies were unanimously in favour of this new model of tackling single homelessness. The colocation of teams to provide a holistic service has now begun. The agencies who are currently collocated are Crisis (who are commissioned to operate the SHPS service) and Via, Drug and Alcohol addiction service. The Turning Point will also be used for joint assessments of homeless 16 & 17 year olds, with Children's Services.
- 4.6 The advantage of the colocation of the SHPS service has resulted in people being referred on the day, following their triage assessment at The Turning Point. As the SHPS officers are on site they are able to see people immediately after their triage assessment. This has resulted in higher levels of engagement with the SHPS service, as people no longer have to wait to be contacted by SHPS following a referral.
- 4.7 Health services are also planning to hold Health and Wellbeing session at the Turning Point, where the following services will be offered:
- Blood pressure, BMI assessment, blood sugar level check and diabetes risk score
 - Support with GP registration
 - Mental Health support
 - Healthy Eating advice
 - Physical Activity advice
 - Smoking Cessation advice
 - Employability advice
 - Advice on alcohol and drug addiction

5.0 Demand for Services

- 5.1 The Housing Needs Service has seen a 22% increase in demand from homeless households from 2021/22 to 2022/23. Whilst the COVID – 19 pandemic, associated lockdowns and the ban on Private Rented Sector evictions have been a factor in this growth, demand for homelessness services continues to grow, driven by inflation and the cost of living crisis. There has

been a further 24% increase in demand in Q2 of 2023/24, compared with the same quarter last year. If demand continues at the same rate, the service will receive a total of 7,500 applications this financial year, an average of 144 applications every week. . Graph 1 below shows the number of approaches to the service, broken down between families and single people.

Graph 1 number of approaches to the homeless service



5.2 Although the demand from single homeless people continues to grow, moving to a drop in service has enabled applicants to be seen on the day they approach, rather than have to make an appointment and wait to be seen. A backlog of circa 500 cases of people who had completed an online application under the old system but have not been assigned a caseworker or seen as there were not enough appointment slots to cope with demand. This backlog has now been eradicated as people have been able to present at the Turning Point in person.

6.0 Performance

6.1 The Housing Needs target is to prevent or relieve 50% of all homelessness applications received and accepted the main homelessness duty for 25% of applications. The remaining 25% are expected to either not be eligible for homelessness services or receive a decision that they do not meet the statutory threshold to trigger the prevention or relief duties.

6.2 The year to date performance on prevention or relief of single homeless cases is at 30.6%. It is too early to judge the impact on performance after moving to te Turning Point. This is because cases referred to SHPS will still be being worked on to prevent and relieve homelessness.

Table 1 Year to date performance of single homelessness service

| | Apr-23 | May-23 | Jun-23 | Jul-23 | Aug-23 | Sep-23 | Year to date |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------------|
| Total number of single homeless approaches | 365 | 397 | 424 | 427 | 328 | 294 | 2235 |
| Percentage of homelessness prevented and relieved successfully | 43.08% | 29.31% | 35.90% | 18.18% | 25.27% | 31.33% | 30.67% |
| Percentage to whom the main duty accepted | 37.50% | 22.15% | 26.42% | 50.75% | 19.47% | 25.89% | 30.22% |

- 6.3 A mystery shopping exercise was commissioned by the Director for Customer Access in order to better understand our residents' and customers' experiences of our services. The exercise tested a number of phone lines and locations where customers access services. This is a learning exercise and will help to identify opportunities for improvement in anticipation of a further round of mystery shopping next year. It is also designed to help us better meet the commitments set out in our Customer Access Strategy (2022-2026). An independent company called Mystery Shopping Ltd, which has experience of working with local government, carried out the mystery shopping exercise on the Council's behalf.
- 6.4 Two visits took place at the Turning point as part of the mystery shopping exercise. One visitor was someone presenting as homeless, and the second was requesting support/advice for their friend who is going to be made homeless. A summary of the results is below.

Visitor 1 – presenting as homeless:

- Score of 100% for the handling of the enquiry e.g. response from staff and advice. Some really positive comments were received here: *'The staff were friendly, gave easy to understand information and made me feel comfortable to talk about my problems. They were not condescending or made me feel I had done anything wrong in getting evicted'*.
- Score of 100% for how the interaction was closed e.g. advice about next steps, a friendly goodbye, asked if they had further questions etc.
- Overall score of 88.9% for the visit, which is classified as a very high score. We aim for over 85% overall, and an average would be around 70-75%.

Visitor 2 – asking for advice for their friend:

- Scored 100% for the welcome and greeting
- Score of 66.7% for handling of enquiry –
- Score of 75% for how the interaction was closed

- Overall score of 77.8% for the visit and positive comments e.g. *'I felt that my friend would receive the support that he needed and be viewed sympathetically.'*

6.5 The average overall score across the two visits is 83.3% - which is classified as high. Potential areas for some improvements were to make around the welcome and greeting at the site, but the mystery shopping suggests that overall handling of the enquiries was very good.

7.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

7.1 The Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness, and Renters' Security is aware of the issues raised in this report.

8.0 Financial Implications

8.1 A new contract has been let under the Council's contract terms and conditions for a four year period (1 November 2023 to 31 October 2027) to the existing provider (Pan London Single Homelessness Prevention Service Limited) to deliver the Single Homeless Prevention Service in Brent.

8.2 The contract value from 1 November 2023 to 31 Oct 2027 is £2.1m. In comparison to the previous contract, this is a £500k increase over the 4 years. This will be paid from the Housing Needs General Fund budget. There will be no grant subsidy, as seen in previous years, and the additional cost will be absorbed in the budget. This has also been noted as a risk in the Medium Term Financial strategy.

8.3 A financial assessment has been completed to show that PLSHPS limited are financially viable. Also, a letter from the fund lawyers of PLSHPS' has been received, that shows the successful bidder has access to the required working capital for the project.

8.4 As this is an outcome based contract, the provider will only be paid once results are shown to have relieved and prevent homelessness for single people and couples without children, as well as provided low to medium support needs, in addition to working in the longer term to sustain them in accommodation. The outcome payments are set out in table 2 below:

Table 2: SHPS Outcome Payments

| Outcome | Payment Amount |
|---|----------------|
| Completion of Personal Housing Plan (PHP) | £300 |
| *Prevention of Homelessness | £650 |
| *Relief of Homelessness | £1170 |
| 8 month sustainment | £700 |

** either a Prevention or a Relief Outcome can be claimed*

- 8.5 The council also has an internal Single Homelessness Team, with a current budget of £2m (£1.4m salary).
- 8.6 Based on the number of successful relief and prevention cases from April 2020 to March 2023, and the percentage of cases that are owed a main Housing Duty, the council has saved on average £1.1m over 3 years in accommodation costs. Since moving to the Turning Point, the projected average cost for new placements has reduced from August, by an additional £33k approx. per annum.

9.0 Legal Implications

- 9.1 Local authorities are required to provide information and advice to their local residents, where necessary, under a range of statutory provisions to include the Health & Social Care Act 2012, Housing Act 1977, the 1996 Act, the Homelessness Act 2022 and most recently the 2017 Act. The information and advice provided under those Acts must be proportionate to the needs of those for whom it is being provided.
- 9.2 Specifically under section 179(1) of the 1996 Act, the Council has a duty to provide (or secure the provision of) advice and information about homelessness, the prevention of homelessness, the rights of homeless people or those at risk of homelessness, the help that is available from housing authorities or others and how to access that help.
- 9.3 Section 179(2) of the 1996 Act, states that the service must be designed to meet the needs of persons in the authority's district including, in particular the needs of: persons released from prison or youth detention accommodation; care leavers; former members of the regular armed forces; victims of domestic abuse, persons leaving hospital; persons suffering from a mental illness or impairment; and any other group that the authority identify as being at particular risk of homelessness in the authority's district. Much of this cohort are likely to be single homeless.
- 9.4 Equally the Council has duties under the 2017 Act, to provide homelessness services to all those affected (not just to those who have priority need), by taking reasonable steps to prevent or relieve homelessness for anyone at risk of homelessness within 56 days. The 2017 Act requires Councils to intervene at a much earlier stage than under previous legislation to prevent homelessness in their areas.
- 9.5 The council has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 9.6 The easily accessible face-to-face drop-in service for single homelessness with partner services now available at The Turning Point is consistent with the Council's duty to secure continuous improvement under the Local Government

Act 1999 and will greatly assist the Council in carrying out its homelessness duties towards single people in a more holistic, targeted and practical way.

- 9.7 This service is also consistent with the Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2020 – 2025.

10.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 10.1 The public sector equality duty, as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have "due regard" to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who have a "protected characteristic" and those who do not share that protected characteristic. The protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

- 10.2 Having due regard involves the need to enquire into whether and how a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected characteristic and the need to consider taking steps to meet the needs of persons who share a protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it. This includes removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by persons who share a protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.

- 10.3 There is no prescribed manner in which the council must exercise its public sector equality duty but having an adequate evidence base for its decision is necessary.

- 10.4 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, experience disproportionate levels of homelessness. In addition, homelessness people are more likely to have physical and mental health issues and to have other protected characteristics. This proposal will strengthen existing services and systems that support homeless people. It will benefit those from protected groups and will seek to develop support tailored to their specific needs.

- 10.5 The dedicated single homelessness service aims to increase, strengthen and co-ordinate approaches in local provision to focus on improved access, prevention and early intervention to reduce risk to homeless adults with multiple needs.

- 10.6 An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) has been produced for the single homelessness prevention service.

11.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 11.1 There are no climate considerations arising from this report.

12.0 Communication Considerations

12.1 There are no communication considerations arising from this report.

Report sign off:

Peter Gadsdon
Corporate Director Resident Services