

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 7
8 MARCH 2022	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Adrian Chapman, Director Place and Economy	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Cllr Steve Allen, Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communities	
Contact Officer(s):	Sean Evans, Head of Service – Housing Needs	07920 160007

HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING: END OF YEAR UPDATE & THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Sean Evans , Head of Service – Housing Needs	Deadline date: N/A
It is recommended that Communities Scrutiny Committee note and comment on the report.	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

1.1 This report was requested by the Communities Scrutiny Committee.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

2.1 This report is to update the Committee on the work of the Housing Needs Service over the last year and how Covid had impacted demand and service delivery.

2.2 This report is for Communities Scrutiny Committee to consider under its Terms of Reference No. Part 3, Section 4 – Overview & Scrutiny functions, paragraph No 2 Functions determine by the Council:

1. Housing need (including homelessness, housing options and selective licensing);

2.3 This report links into the Corporate Priority: Keep all our communities safe, cohesive and healthy:

Providing affordable, warm, safe and secure housing is the cornerstone of a strong society, and the Common Housing Allocations Policy is one of the vehicles available to the council and its social landlord partners to achieve this.

Whilst this work cuts across the entire Sustainable Community Strategy, it most closely aligns with the priority to achieve strong and supportive communities.

3. **TIMESCALES**

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	N/A
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4. **BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES**

4.1 **Service Delivery**

The Housing Needs team have continued to operate an amended service delivery during the pandemic, which has meant officers working from home where their role allows and contact with customers has generally been over the telephone. We have opened up a number of alternative communication channels which have allowed customers instant access to services. The Housing Jigsaw system has been developed to allow online applications for the Housing Register and Choice Based Lettings and Homelessness Presentations.

The Rough Sleeper Outreach service and the Temporary Accommodation Management team have continued working out in the city. The Outreach service have been conducting outreach at least 3 times a week throughout the pandemic, when not on outreach they have generally been basing themselves with our partner organisations such as the Light Project Peterborough at the Garden House. The Temporary Accommodation management team have continued to visit households where they're able to ensure clients are supported and properties are maintained.

Demand for Services

Homelessness

The number of clients contacting us for homelessness assistance has remained at a steady level during 2021, but as more positive measures were introduced by Government to bring the pandemic and restrictions to an end, we have started to see an uptick in demand as we've moved into 2022.

End of the restrictions on evictions

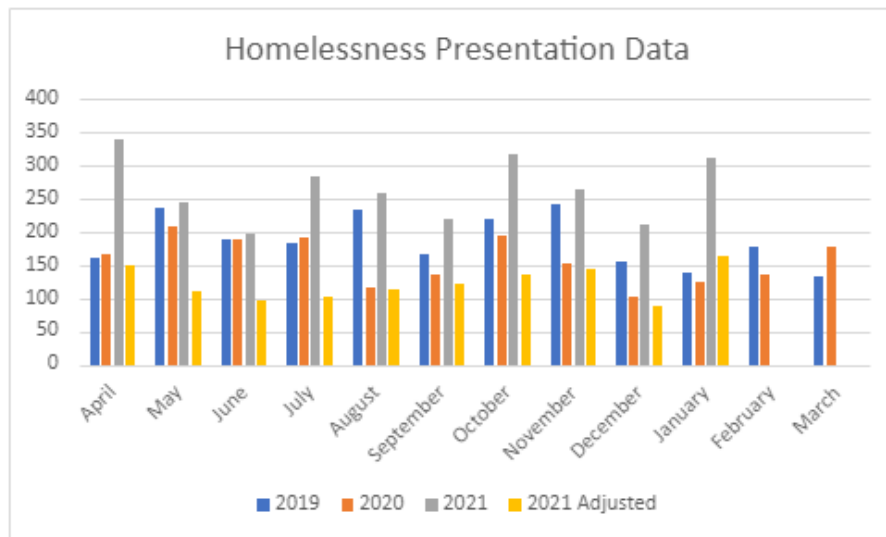
During the pandemic there were restrictions on how landlords could seek and obtain possession of their properties. While measures were still in place for landlords to still obtain possession in the most severe cases of breach of tenancy, the number of evictions was very small and has meant that for many landlords eviction action has been pent up in the system until the restrictions were lifted.

Restrictions on evictions were lifted and the processes returned to normal at the end of August 2021.

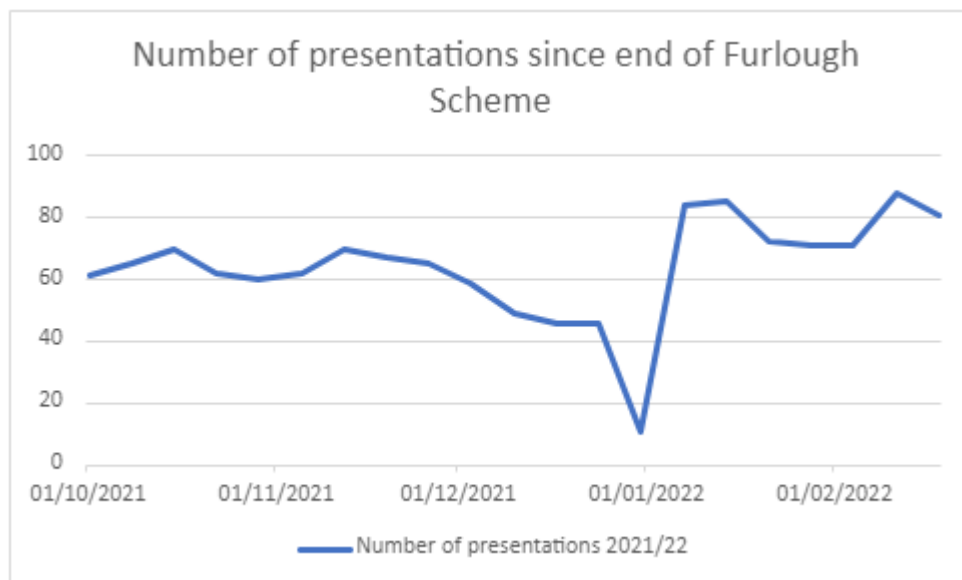
End of the Furlough Scheme

The furlough scheme introduced during the pandemic provided valuable support to households who were unable to work during the time and allowed them to continue to maintain their housing costs during that time. As the Furlough Scheme came to an end in October 2021 there was a real risk that many of those employees on Furlough would not have jobs to return to and would be made redundant. While this would not provide an immediate increase on demand for housing, for those made redundant it's likely that they would start to experience issues with meeting their housing costs with a few months if they were unable to find alternative accommodation.

The table below shows the number of households approaching the Council for assistance as they believed that they were homeless or threatened with homelessness. The online customer portal for homelessness applications was open in April 2021. The 2021 adjusted figures shows the number of presentations which resulted in a homelessness duty being owed.



As we had predicted we expected to see the lifting of restrictions start impacting on demand in this year. The chart below shows how the number of presentations to the service have increased after the new year as a result of the furlough scheme ending in October 2021.



Rough Sleeping

Everybody In

At the start of the pandemic in March 2020, just prior to the 1st lockdown, we received contact from our specialist advisor at the Ministry of Communities and Local Government and were asked to set up a local response to accommodate all rough sleepers in the area. In addition, we were advised that our night shelter and crash beds provision could no longer operate because of the risk of transmission in settings with shared sleeping spaces.

Working with our Safer off the Streets partner we were quickly able to mobilise a rest centre response. We secured exclusive use of the Holiday Inn Express in Orton Northgate and over the first weekend we located and moved in over 50 rough sleepers and night shelter/crash bed residents.

Partners supported us with volunteer staff to man the rest centres. Charities, restaurants and food providers came together and provided 3 meals a day 7 days a week. Health and Welfare services were brought in to support client's primary health needs and drug and alcohol misuse issues.

Over time during lockdown, while accommodation availability was scarce the number of people accommodated grew until we reached a point where we were accommodating over 100 rough sleepers across three hotels.

As lockdown measures started easing and accommodation options opened up again, we commenced working with individuals to support them in moving to more appropriate supported accommodation or long-term independent living such as the private sector or social housing.

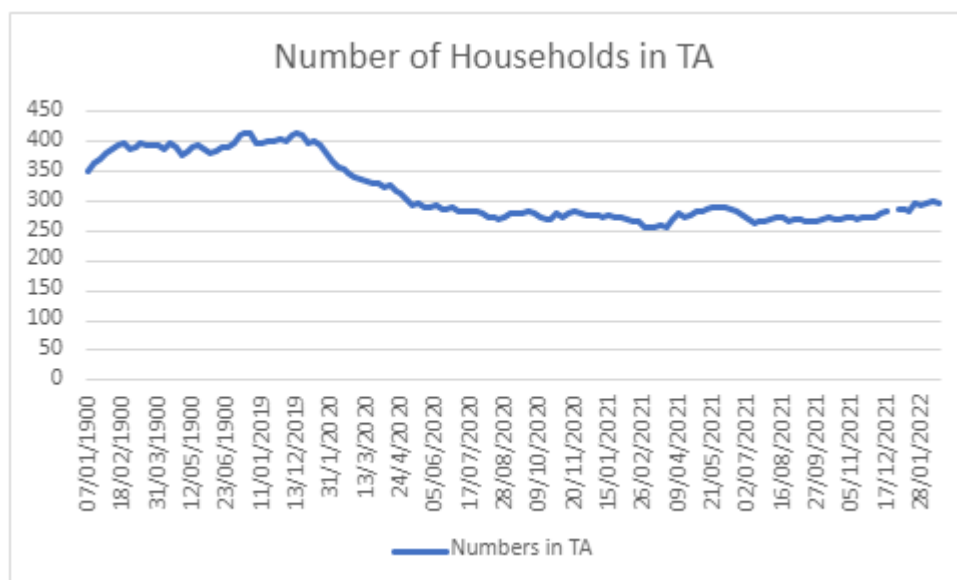
In the first 6 months of 2021 we continued to offer accommodation for all rough sleepers. This came to an end in July 2021; however, we have continued to offer accommodation to all rough sleepers who are eligible for homelessness assistance. Those who we were not able to accommodate were those who were non-UK nationals who did not have settled status in the UK.

Protect & Vaccinate

Just prior to Christmas 2021, with the emergence of the Omicron variant of Covid we received further instructions from Government to provide accommodation all rough sleepers again and those who were ineligible for housing assistance were again provided with accommodation and support to obtain settled status in the UK, but also to support the uptake in Covid vaccinations. As we come out of Covid and restrictions are lifted this programme will come to an end at the end of March 2022. We are working with our partners to ensure that the number of clients returning to the streets is minimised.

Temporary Accommodation

The impacts of the demands detailed above has meant that we have had continued demands on temporary accommodation. However, much of this has been because of the response to rough sleeping and the government initiatives. For those households who have been provided with accommodation because of our homelessness duties those numbers have been stable.



The service has also been successful in ensuring that B&B accommodation is only used in an emergency for those households owed a homelessness duty.

We have not had any families in B&B for longer than 6 weeks since February 2020 and have had no clients aged 16 or 17 in B&B since October 2019.

5. CONSULTATION

5.1 No external consultation has been undertaken.

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

6.1 No anticipated outcome or impact as the report is for information.

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

7.1 n/a

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

8.1 None

9. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

9.1 None

Legal Implications

9.2 None

Equalities Implications

9.3 N/A

Rural Implications

9.4 None

Carbon Impact Assessment

9.5 The report contains no proposals for changes to service delivery and therefore there is no decision to take which may impact carbon emissions of the council or the city.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

10.1 None

11. APPENDICES

11.1 None

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