

More Home Truths – learning lessons from complaints about the Homelessness Reduction Act

LGSCO Key Questions (March 2023)	Service area / response
<p>What arrangements are in place to ensure all front-line staff know what to do if they have contact with someone who appears to/may have housing issues?</p>	<p>The LGSCO report refers to staff employed in the Housing Register specifically. In Tameside Housing Advice (THA), our staff are trained to identify when Homelessness Reduction (HR) applications need to be referred to the Homeless Prevention team. The process is intended to ensure any person who is at risk of potential homelessness will be identified as early as possible. We will be undertaking a service review to bolster the staffing resource in this area, turning reactive duty into a prevention approach.</p> <p>There are recommendations that other front line services should know when to signpost to THA. Other departments such as Children’s and Adult Social Care do already have relationships with the THA service. We propose a briefing note to remind all services of these requirements.</p>
<p>How does the council keep track of applicants whose notice to leave private rented accommodation has expired but who remain in the property?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there well-recorded decisions justifying this in each case? - What triggers a review of the decision that it is reasonable to remain? 	<p>All case information is recorded on our case management programme; Locata. The current programme does not have a specific field for this data. However when engaging with the Housing advice team – the data is recorded.</p> <p>The cases are discussed in staffing supervisions and actions/justifications are recorded.</p> <p>Each case is considered on an individual basis. The Officer will be actively discussing with applicants what will happen at the point the Notice expires. In some cases, the tenant chooses to exercise their legal right to stay and such decisions are noted and recorded. Staff will always take into account personal circumstances and service user wishes when issuing advice on reasonableness to remain.</p>

How does the council make sure Personalised Housing Plans (PHPs) are tailored to the individual and kept under review?

Personalised Housing Plans (PHP) are completed at point of acceptance of the duty. They are then updated and amended at key stages during the homeless process. Compliance with this requirement is high but caseload levels mean that while initial PHP's at application stage are completed, there are some cases where updates at key points have not always been done.

As part of our service review we will look at the rate of plan reviews. Obviously significant changes of circumstances can trigger a review of the individual plans. The quality of PHP's in relation to them being tailored to individual will also be reviewed and fed into our supervision, team guidance and training plan.

What steps can officers take to prevent or relieve homelessness?

- How does the council provide staff with guidance on these steps?

The service has continued to implement change to improve service delivery and customer outcomes. There is no doubt that the cost of living crisis will impact on homelessness levels in Tameside and service delivery. Preventing Homeless is a key objective of the Council.

- There are a multitude of steps that staff can use including:
- Allocating homeless at home status
 - Financial measures, including payment of arrears and rent top ups to prevent loss of private rented
 - Financial measures to access private rented, deposits, RIA and tops
 - Sanctuary scheme for Domestic Abuse victims
 - Referrals to supported housing
 - In house debt team
 - Safe Accommodation Team referral
 - Access to social housing

Staff can access homeless prevention fund to both prevent and relieve homelessness.

All staff have now participated in a 2 day homelessness training event. In addition a staff training matrix has been established to deliver and monitor staff training and competencies going forward.

	<p>The implementation of a dedicated staff member to focus on homeless prevention is proving successful. The two new workers will adopt this approach and all prevention staff will be moved to this model over the coming months.</p> <p>A suite of key performance indicators is compiled and monitored weekly which is distributed to senior managers and to track and monitor performance is near completion.</p> <p>A designated staff member is now in place to act as key point of contact between the statutory service and the RSI service. This staff member is a co-ordinator from the RSI team who is now based at THA and this is proving very effective in promoting better communication and avoiding duplication.</p> <p>A homeless option toolkit is in a pilot testing phase with staff. This will be rolled out in full this summer.</p>
<p>Is there a difference between the number of households with a priority need owed the relief duty and provided interim accommodation?</p> <p>- Is it clear in each case why interim accommodation was not provided?</p>	<p>Yes, there is a difference as not all people owed a relief duty are in priority need. Decision letters to confirm non priority with full reasons for this decision are issued at point of presentation which include information on applicant's statutory right to review.</p> <p>When an applicant has been identified and there is no priority need, they are offered a referral to The Town House Shelter on date of homelessness.</p>
<p>What robust processes are in place to ensure the council can meet its homeless duties during periods of staff absence or leave?</p>	<p>Staff rotas are managed to avoid gaps in service and there is a duty rota which is covered when staff are on leave or sick.</p> <p>In the next few months we will be undertaking a service review to address gaps in staff capacity and to bolster our prevention approach.</p>