

To: Pandemic Scrutiny Committee

Date: 19th August 2020

Title: Housing & Homelessness Update

Introduction

The Housing Options Service Trafford (HOST) is currently contracted to Salix Homes. This contract arrangement was established in April 2016 for a three year period up to March 2019, with an option to continue by a further two years on a plus one, plus one basis.

HOST provide the following statutory services on behalf of the Council:

- To make inquiries into the cases of homelessness or threatened with homelessness within 56 days.
- To secure temporary accommodation in accordance with homelessness legislation – for those where there is reason to believe that a person is eligible, homeless and with a priority need.
- To create and review Personal Housing Plans.
- To prevent homelessness for 56 days and to inform the client in writing that they are owed the Prevention Duty.
- To relieve homelessness for 56 days and to inform the client in writing that they are owed the Relief Duty. Any accommodation secured to end the Relief Duty must be for at least six months.
- To investigate what 'Main Homelessness Duty is owed (eligibility, homeless, priority need, intentionality and local connection). To inform the client in writing what duty is owed and also the right to review any decision including any reasoning when the decision is a negative one.
- To inform clients when any duties are ceasing due to a either a suitable offer of accommodation being made and accepted/refused or when a client deliberately refuses to co-operate.
- To secure ongoing accommodation for those in the Main Homelessness Duty – this must be for at least 12 months.
- To inform other authorities of any placements made by Trafford to that authority.
- To review homeless decisions and suitability of accommodation offers. This is a Council responsibility and currently not carried out by HOST.

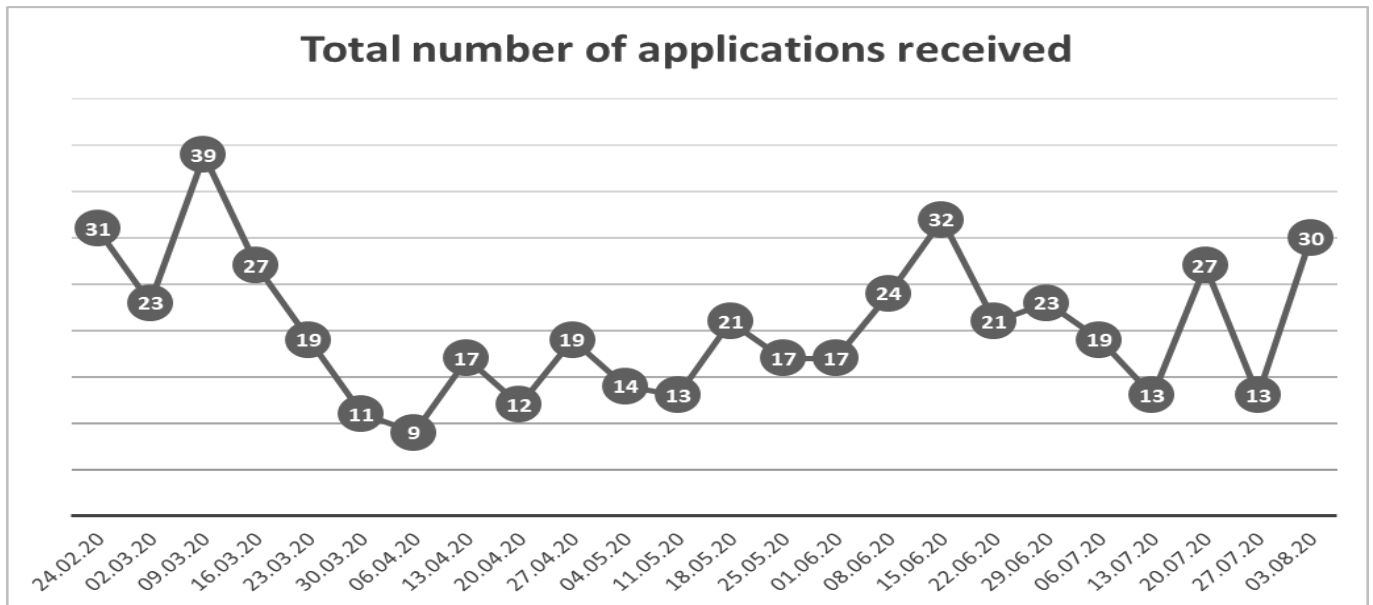
HOST during the Pandemic

HOST closed the reception at Sale Waterside at the end of March following lockdown advice from Government and the service became wholly remote via email and telephone. The reception has since opened (from mid-July) on an appointment only basis for those residents that may require addition support and are unable to undertake the full homelessness assessment via the telephone or for those that are required to supply additional information to support their application. The service has remain in fully operationally throughout the pandemic.

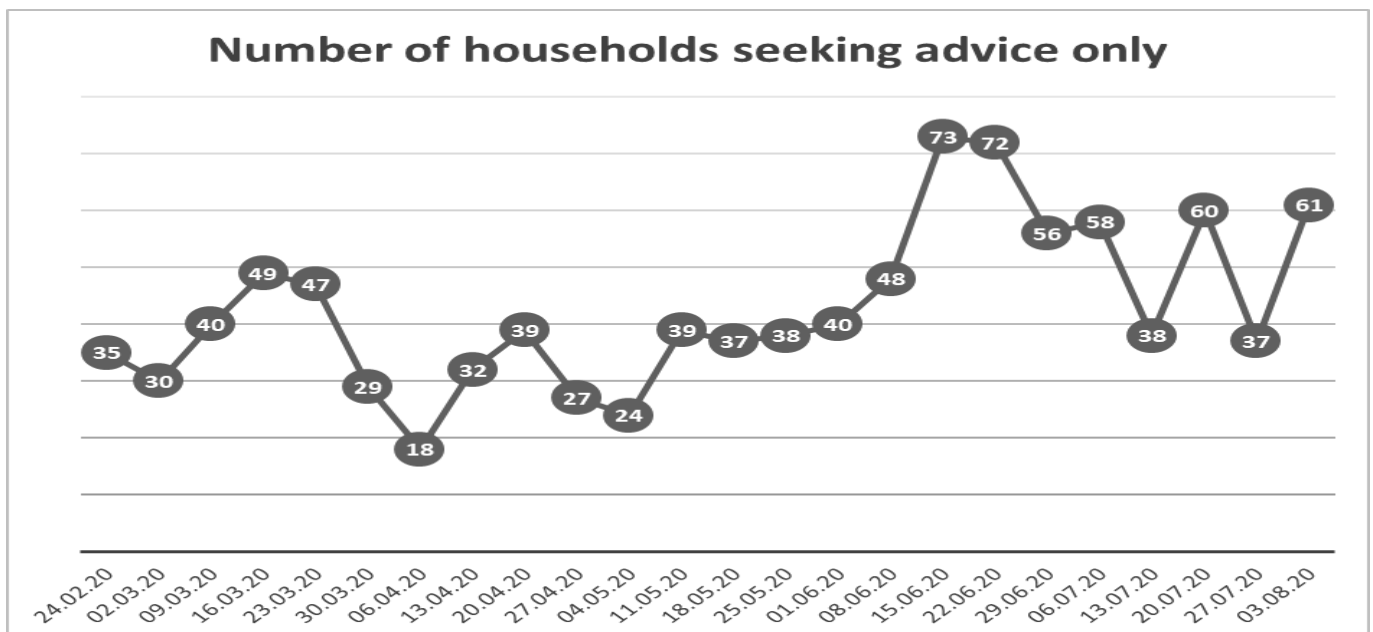
HOST Performance during the Pandemic

The Housing Strategy & Growth Team has continued to monitor the performance of HOST on a weekly basis throughout the lockdown period. The graphs below show some of the key performance indicators:

The total number of applications has seen a fluctuation throughout the lockdown period – however the number of applications in February before the lockdown is the same at that of last week.

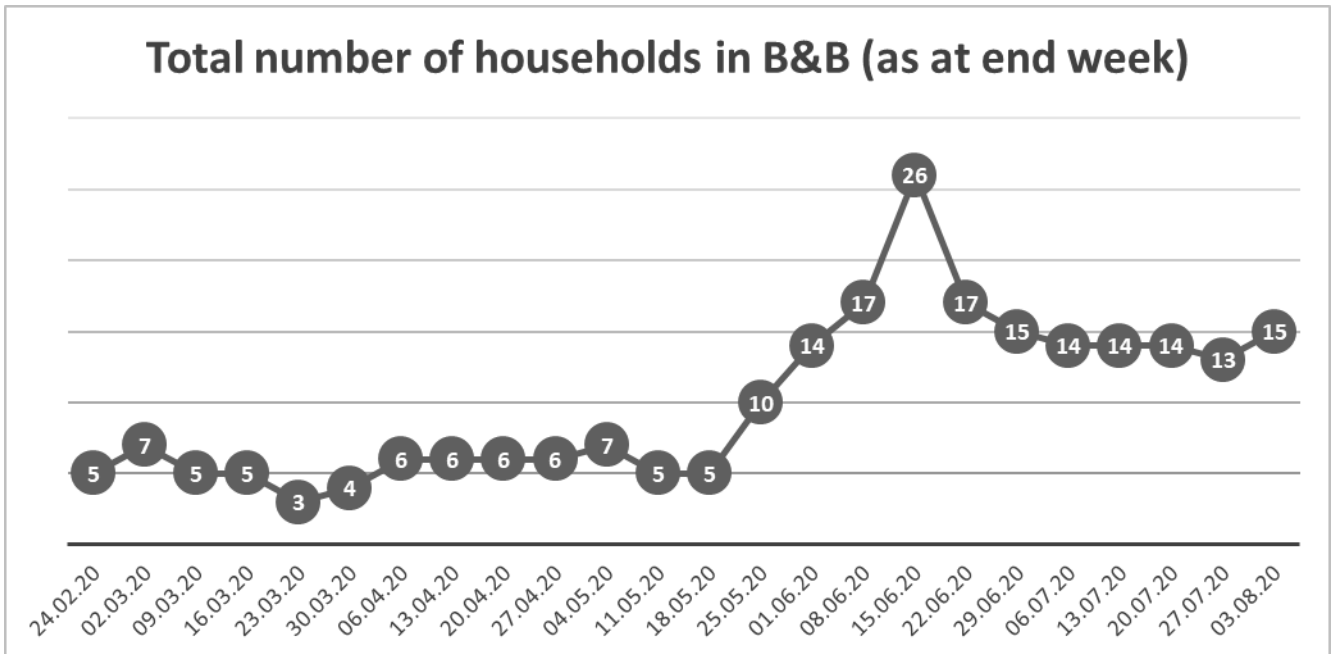


The number of households seeking advice has seen a significant increase from around 30 a week before the lockdown to over 60 last week. We can only assume that this increase of advice will continue to increase as Government interventions such as payment holidays, furlough schemes and the halt on private sector evictions comes to an end.

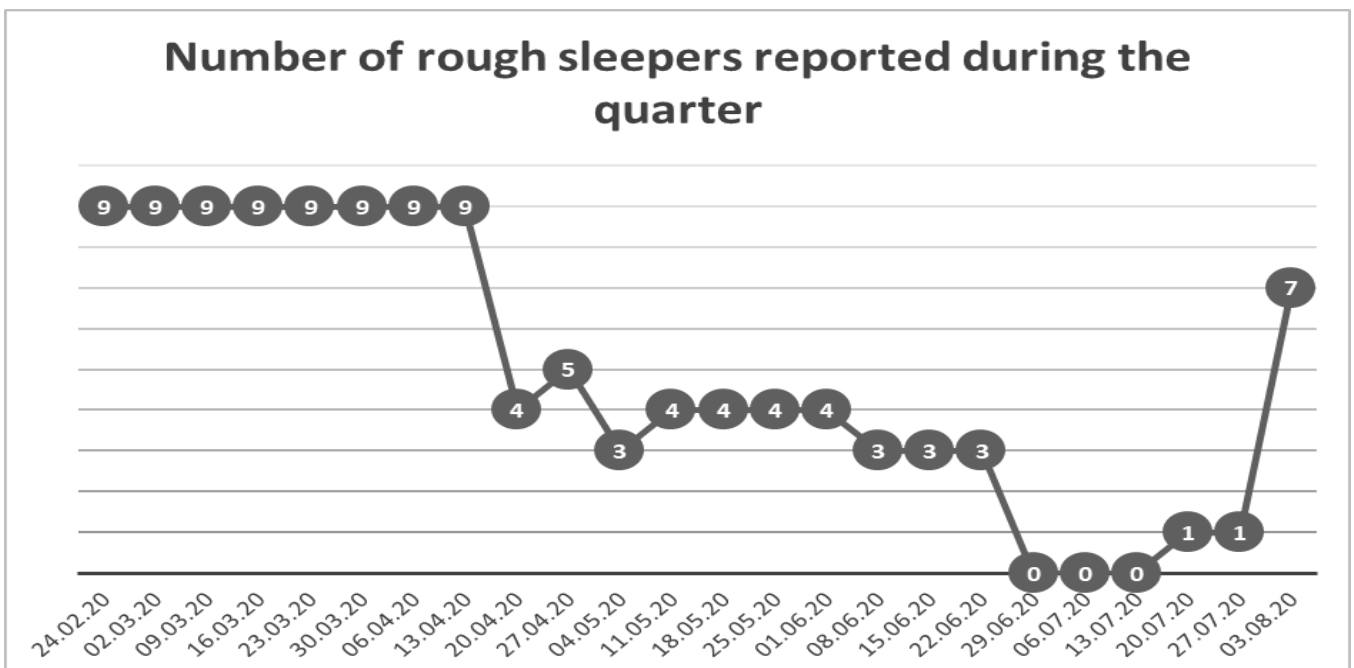


The number of households in B&B accommodation has increased significantly since before the lockdown. This is mainly due to Housing Associations halting any lettings during lockdown and

has resulted in no movement in this sector. In addition due to the Government halting private sector evictions also there has been a lack of available accommodation in the private sector. In addition the Government asked that anyone rough sleeping or in shared accommodation were to be accommodated to reduce the spread of the coronavirus, this in turn saw an increase in the number of people requiring accommodation.



The number of rough sleepers reported throughout the lockdown period has seen a decrease from 9 at the start of lockdown down to zero for a 3 week period and then back up to 7. Trafford has a Rough Sleeper Outreach Worker who is funded through Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI funding) who attends reports of rough sleepers and engages with them to source accommodation. Reports of rough sleepers are attended to within 24 hours and placements will be made to Trafford’s A Bed Every Night (ABEN) provision funded by GMCA.



Housing & Homelessness Challenges – Pandemic Recovery Period

The government introduced a number of measures to assist people who were impacted by the coronavirus including 3 month mortgages holidays, loan/credit card payment holidays and a halt to evictions/repossessions within the private rented sector. However these measures are due to end in August 2020 which will see some people who will still be significantly impacted financially after this time.

We expect that there will be a significant increase in demand for HOST following these measures coming to an end and we will continue to monitor this demand on a weekly basis to ensure that HOST are fully equipped to ensure that Trafford residents are able to access the housing and homelessness supported when needed.

We anticipate that there will be an increase in all elements of HOST including housing advice, homelessness applications, B&B/emergency/temporary accommodation placements, rough sleepers and the general need for more affordable move on accommodation.

Trafford will continue to work pro-actively with GMCA to access additional housing and homelessness funding when available. In addition Trafford will continue to encourage our Housing Association Partners to increase the supply of affordable move on accommodation with the help from homes England grant funding.

Pandemic Scrutiny Committee Questions

The Committee asked for a briefing note to be provided for the meeting covering a number of areas regarding the homelessness position in Trafford and the support that is being provided.

The questions asked by the Committee and answers are detailed below:

1. Number of homeless residents currently within the borough (with stratification into Trafford and non-Trafford residents)

Housing Options Service Trafford (HOST) are currently only dealing with homeless cases for Trafford residents only. In terms of the non-Trafford residents we are only aware of 36 households/individuals that are placed in the Amblehurst by Manchester City Council due to a recent joint welfare visit.

When Local Authorities place homeless households out of borough a Section 208 notice to the hosting LA is required, however HOST/Trafford Council have not received any such letters recently and are therefore unsure whether other LAs have made any other placements into Trafford.

The number of homeless residents in Trafford is detailed below in terms of which Duty they have been awarded (as at 6th August 2020):

Homelessness Duty	Number of households
Prevention Duty	57
Relief Duty	94
Main Duty	157
Awaiting decision on main duty	5
Duty to Accommodate (included in Relief & Main)	122
Total Number of Homeless Cases	313

2. Where homeless residents are being placed.

The table below provides details of where Trafford's homeless households have been placed (as at 6th August 2020):

Location	Number of households
Nansen Close under a homeless duty	17
Dispersed accommodation under a homeless duty	30
B&Bs (Located in Trafford & Manchester) under any homeless duty	14
Emergency Self Contained Accommodation (Located in Trafford, Salford and Manchester) under any homeless duty	33
Other unit of Temporary Accommodation under any homelessness duty	12
A Bed Every Night accommodation	16
Total number of households in accommodation	122

3. An outline of the provision of care for Trafford and non-Trafford residents including the provision of food and meals, provision of health care, access to benefit advice

All residents are first assessed under current homelessness legislation. During the assessment relevant questions are asked by the officer to ascertain if the applicant/ household has access to benefits, if they are working, are they registered with a GP or do they need assistance, whether they have access to medication, whether they have any support needs (including a social worker) and whether they have any drug or alcohol issues. An assessment is made by HOST as to where the most appropriate placement would be.

Should a household not have any benefits in place, assistance would be given to apply and Trafford Assist would aid with the provision of a food voucher. HOST would also use petty cash to assist if required. The Housing Officers would remain in contact with all households placed into accommodation on a regular basis and any move on plans would be contained within the individual/households Personal Housing Plan (PHP).

It is not a requirement under Homelessness Legislation for there to be a food provision, however some of the B&B's used do provide breakfast and access to a microwaves. Trafford Council in partnership with Manchester Council are currently organising a food delivery to be made to the Amblehurst hotel for all households placed there irrespective of what duty they are placed under.

The Rough Sleeper Outreach Worker undertakes regular visits to the hotels/B&Bs and conducts welfare checks of the residents. All other units of temporary accommodation are visited by Housing/Tenancy Support Officers or telephone welfare check is carried out if appropriate. Any households placed into accommodation by HOST are issued with contact telephone numbers for their Housing Officer along with a generic number and email address for the service.

4. Details of partnership working with other Councils for non-Trafford residents

Trafford has worked alongside Manchester Council to monitor the welfare of residents in the Amblehurst and have recently undertaken a welfare check on each household placed there. Trafford and Manchester have worked in partnership with Manchester to provide a hot food offer to clients placed there, this is via 'Reach Out to the Community' and 'Church of the Apostles'. HOST have also assisted Oldham Council with providing additional funds for one of their residents placed in Trafford.

Trafford works very closely with GMCA and the other 9 GM LAs. During the lockdown meetings took place regarding homelessness the pandemic twice a week. These meetings have since moved to once a week until September.

5. Access to drug and alcohol treatment services during the pandemic

All Trafford clients who have disclosed issues of drug/alcohol misuse/addiction are referred to Achieve at the point of application. Achieve who are part of Big Life were co-located within HOST prior to the pandemic but have continued to work remotely.

6. Medium and long term plans for homeless residents in the borough (Trafford and non-Trafford residents)

All clients placed in accommodation by Trafford have a Personal Housing Plan created as part of their homeless assessment, these plans include an agreed pathway to secure move on accommodation. These pathways may include registering on the Council's Housing Register for social housing, accessing private rented accommodation, help with a deposit via the Rental Bond Scheme, referring into a commissioned supported housing scheme or making a Housing First referral. Any Trafford resident that is placed out of borough will be prioritised for access into temporary accommodation back in borough when this becomes available.

Whilst we cannot comment on the processes of other boroughs it is anticipated that similar routes would be followed to secure move on accommodation in line with Homelessness Legislation.

7. Management of newly-homeless residents

All clients would have a homelessness assessment and be monitored with calls from the Housing Officer along with welfare visits.

8. Support for residents without no recourse to public funds

Trafford currently do not have any clients that have no recourse to public funds, however under A Bed Every Night (ABEN) clients with no recourse to public funds can be accommodated. Trafford Council contribute on an annual basis to the Booth Centre in Manchester who assist with clients' applications for residency, reconnection to their place of origin or to friends and family. Trafford Assist also help with food vouchers and monies can be claimed back via the Mayors Homelessness Fund at GMCA.

9. Cost to the Council to support a homeless person per week with comparison to other similar boroughs

Cost varies from £378 per week for emergency B&B accommodation to £420 per week for self-contained emergency, however in most cases Housing Benefit is claimed for this accommodation. Additional costs may occur if food is required via a £20 Trafford Assist voucher, although HOST have only issued 2 vouchers in 12 months. Other costs would be equated to additional staff time due to complexities. We are unsure of the costs of other B&B's LAs use but through experience most are more expensive than the Amblehurst.

10. Current and future sources of funding to meet the needs of homeless residents within the borough

Trafford Council are taking part in the Housing First programme which is funded and commissioned via GMCA.

Trafford also successfully bid for Rough Sleeper Initiative monies (£40k) from MHCLG to fund preventative methods to reduce the numbers of clients who lose their homes. This fund can also be used to secure move on accommodation or remove barriers that stop clients securing move on accommodation such as rent arrears.

Trafford also utilises monies obtained from MHCLG via the Flexible Homeless Support Grant (FHSG) to employ Tenancy Support Workers to assist those clients who need additional support to sustain their tenancies and prevent homelessness.

A Local Authority Asylum Support Liaison Officer (LAASLO) is also funded by MHCLG to assist households in asylum accommodation who have received decisions on their status in the UK.

ABEN is in operation in Trafford and is funded via The GM Mayors charity and Housing Benefit applications. ABEN has been in place since 1st November 2018 and will run until 31st March 2021.

A future funding bid will be made to the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) which was announced by MHCLG in July 2020. The first tranche of the Fund will be a joint GMCA bid, however the next round Trafford will bid for capital funds to bring an empty property back into use for those homeless households who have complex needs.

For further information or advice, please contact Caroline Siddall, Housing Strategy & Growth Manager (caroline.siddall@trafford.gov.uk) or 0161 912 5776