

Overview and Scrutiny

Meeting date: 20 November 2023

Member Questions on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

1. Question from Councillor Tabi Joy

There's been a recent surge in homelessness that local councils need to meet as a priority. Are we aware of a corresponding increase of funding to be allocated by central government to help CBC and other local authorities assist with this? If not, are we working with other local authorities to campaign for emergency funding, ideally allocated without any complex and time-consuming bidding application process?

Response

Cheltenham Borough Council received a windfall grant payment of £210,654 from DLUHC for 2023/24, to take account of the increased pressures on homelessness this year. This is on top of the £384,443 Homelessness Prevention Grant received from DLUHC for 2023/24.

Very recently DLUHC have agreed to provide CBC with additional funding of £40,059 and £14,515 to tackle rough sleeping – this was subject to DLUHC agreeing to CBC's action plan setting out proposals for spending this funding by 31st March 2023. Please see the links below to the Officer Decisions to accept the grant funding.

[Decision - Decision to accept DLUHC Rough Sleeper Grant funding \(pot 1\) - Modern Council \(cheltenham.gov.uk\)](#)

[Decision - Decision to accept DLUHC Rough Sleeper Grant funding \(pot 2\) - Modern Council \(cheltenham.gov.uk\)](#)

In addition, Gloucestershire County Council have agreed to fund Cheltenham's Housing Options Service £50,000 to support the provision of a dedicated resource focusing primarily on Ukrainian households at risk of homelessness.

These additional funding streams for 2023/24 means that CBC does not expect to overspend on its General Fund budget for homelessness during this financial year.

Given that CBC, along with many other local authorities across the country, are experiencing increasing homelessness, and in particular increased pressures on temporary accommodation, CBC attended the DCN and Eastbourne Council Emergency Summit on 31st October 2023. This was attended by 158 councils. CBC's

Leader of the Council, Councillor Rowena Hay, supported an open letter to the Chancellor sent ahead of the Autumn Statement, which included a request for the Local Housing Allowance rates to be raised to a level that will cover at least 30% of the local market rent. It also included a request for an additional £150m top-up to be provided to the Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2024-25 (i.e. in line with the £150m top-up funding provided during 2023-24, of which CBC received £210k – as referred to in response to question 1).

2. Question from Councillor Tabi Joy

Has there been an assessment of assets owned by CBC that could potentially be examined as appropriate sites suitable for emergency shelter for homeless people, particularly in severe weather? Similarly are there any plans to expand the existing Safe to Stay Hubs?

Response

We have worked very closely with Cheltenham Borough Homes Housing Options Team and had a number of meetings with CBC's Property Services to review potential assets owned by CBC. This included discussions and careful considerations relating to the following empty buildings:

Sandford Park Lodge – poor repair and deemed unsafe for use. CBC is currently looking at various options for this building which is boarded up but may need to be demolished and redeveloped.

Cemetery Lodge – currently empty but sits within the cemetery estate land which is locked every night at 8pm and therefore deemed unsuitable as access will be restricted during the night posing freedom of movement issues and health and safety issues.

Units on CBC depot Swindon Lane – some empty units but the depot is locked at night and therefore deemed unsuitable as access will be restricted during the night posing freedom of movement issues and health and safety issues. Also, potential security issues for the site.

Unit on Arle Road Industrial Retail Estate – We identified an empty unit but CBC was unable to consider as a new tenant had just been identified and lease being signed to relet as soon as possible.

Somewhere Safe to Stay (SSTS) Hubs

The Cheltenham SSTS hub is based at Cheltenham YMCA and funded through the government's RSI funding 2022-25.

CBC has worked very closely with Cheltenham Borough Homes (CBH) Housing Options Team and had a number of meetings with Cheltenham YMCA to explore the potential of renting additional bedspaces to help end rough sleeping.

In response to some additional funding recently received for this financial year from DLUHC as part of the Move-on & Prevention Grant (links to these Officer Decisions have been provided in response to Question 1), the Housing Options Services is currently negotiating a small number of additional bedspaces for single people who are in precarious housing circumstances, at risk of rough sleeping, or actually rough sleeping.

This has resulted in Cheltenham YMCA agreeing to offer an additional number of bed spaces in line with the new short-term funding for November 2023 – end of March 2024.

3. Question from Councillor Tabi Joy

As part of the Housing & Support Forum, are partners being offered mechanisms of support to apply for funding to continue their work, particularly with increases in fuel and rental prices?

Response

The Housing & Support Forum (H&SF) meets every quarter and brings together a wide range of partners to act as a representative body for housing and housing related support in Cheltenham Borough.

The Forum enables:

- sharing of important up-to-date information and best practice
- provides a voice for residents in housing need
- Identifies levels of need and trends in housing and housing related support services and draws attention to matters of concern and helps identify possible solutions
- Develops a joined-up approach to developing housing and housing related services that meet the identified housing needs of Borough residents
- Monitors progress of CBC Housing, Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028
- Helps partners understand the impact of the commissioned homelessness prevention services
- Ensures the work of the Forum has a strategic housing relevance through better integration with other local strategies and plans

At present, Cheltenham Borough Council is the only authority in the county that has such a forum. By having this forum, it is possible to promote potential new funding streams to its members should anything relevant become available – we would

obviously do this as a matter of course. More recently, funding opportunities have arisen that require bespoke solutions that specific organisations are best placed to provide. In these situations, we would work directly with the relevant organisation.

Two very recent examples are provided in the links below:

[Decision - Decision to award a small grant to CCP as part of DLUHC Rough Sleeper Move-On & Prevention Grant Funding - Modern Council \(cheltenham.gov.uk\)](#)

[Decision - To award a small grant of £5,000 to Open Door as part of Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities \(DLUHC\) Rough Sleeper Move-on & Prevention Grant Funding. This will cover the period to 31st March 2024. - Modern Council \(cheltenham.gov.uk\)](#)

4. Question from Councillor Tabi Joy

Through what media and digital channels is the StreetLink campaigns information being shared? Just so as many local people have access to this as possible.

Response

The StreetLink service is promoted widely on internet platforms by local, regional and national organisations who work to promote housing, homelessness and ending rough sleeping.

For example:

- [Housing options and homelessness | Cheltenham Borough Council](#)
- Cheltenham Borough Homes website - Rough Sleepers web page: [Homelessness Advice - CBH | Cheltenham Borough Homes](#)
- P3 website – How to get help/tell us about someone sleeping rough: [Gloucestershire Street Outreach - P3 \(p3charity.org\)](#)
- Internet Searches – this will take members of the public to: <https://thestreetlink.org.uk/>
- Proactively via media platforms such as X (formerly known as Twitter) during times when SWEP is called
- Reactively via our communications team when responding to questions from the media about homelessness

StreetLink is used widely by the public, faith/voluntary organisations, and other organisations, such as the police. For instance, across the county during the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023, 530 StreetLink referrals were made by members of

the public, followed by a further 212 StreetLink referrals from faith/voluntary organisations.

We are therefore confident StreetLink referrals are working effectively.

5. Question from Councillor Jackie Chelin

This is an impressive report, and clearly involves an intricate multi agency approach (which the infographic helps to clarify really well). Would it be possible to share any information about the demographics (gender, race, faith, etc.) of the people submitting homelessness applications?

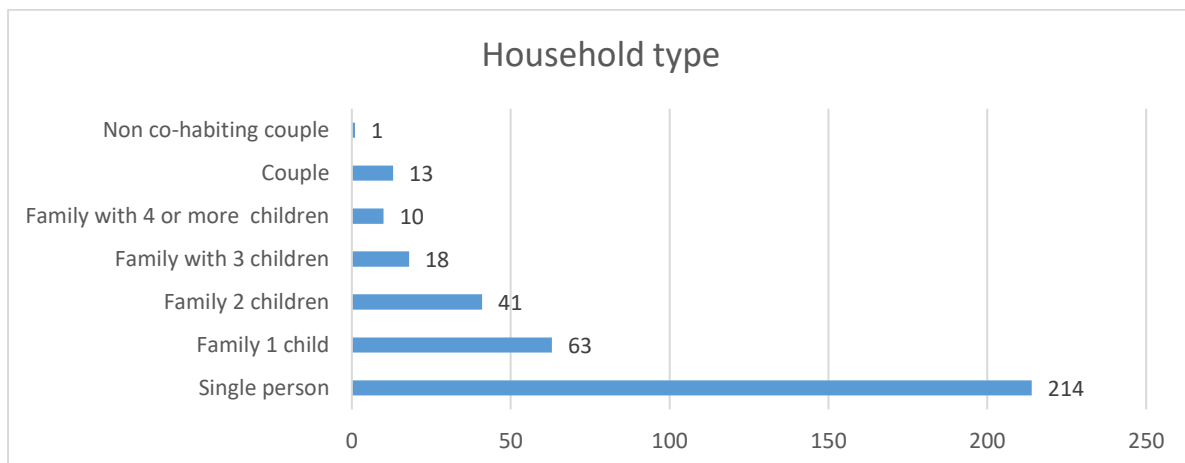
Response

Demographics of homeless applicants April-October 2023

This information covers households who made a homeless application between 1 April 2023 and 30 October 2023.

The categories and definitions for the data are set through the Homelessness case information level (HCLIC) and part of the information required to be collected on all cases.

Household make-up



59.44% of applications were from single applicants. Most of these applicants were single males (61.21% of all single household applications).

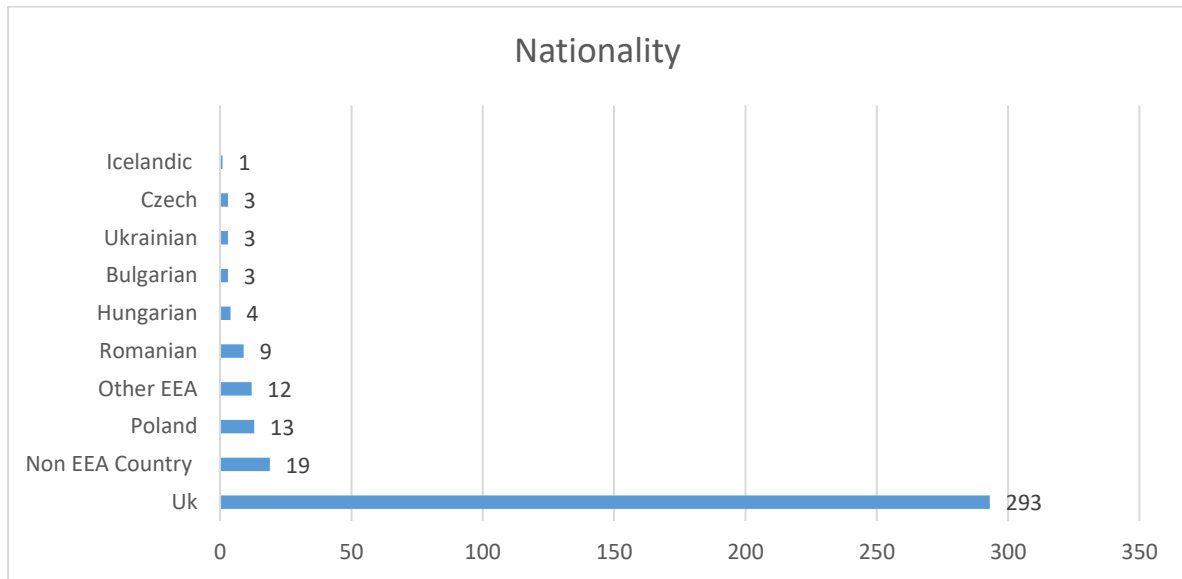
For non-single households 79.45% of the applicants came from households where the lead family member was female. (116 female lead/30 male lead)

Ethnicity

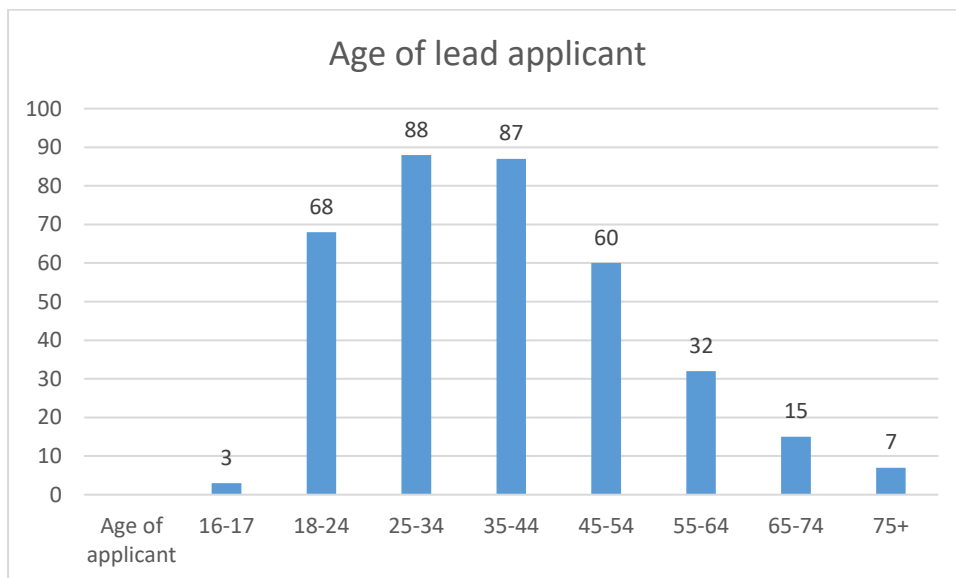
During the first two quarters **73.88%** of homeless households had a White lead household member applicant. The next highest group was White other with 13.33%, Black British with 3.05% and with the remaining spread evenly amongst other ethnic groups.

Nationality

81.94% of applicants were UK nationals:



Age of lead applicant



During the period, the most common age group of lead applicants was those aged between 25-24 and 35-44.