



Barrow Borough Council – Homelessness Review 2020

About this Review

The Local Authority has a responsibility to complete a Homeless Review every five years and to prepare a Strategy which aims to address the results of the review

Within this document you will see what our identified priorities are and how we will aim to work towards achieving them over the life of the Strategy.

We are committed to responding to changing demands and needs locally and will review the document annually updating completed priorities, considering new requirements and acknowledging progress.

National Context for this Review

Local Housing Authorities are required under the Homelessness Act 2002 to formulate and publish a strategy for tackling homelessness at least every five years. We develop this strategy collaboratively with local partners, service users and third sector organisations.

This review is being conducted in a time of continuing and new challenges both locally and nationally. Homelessness has increased over the past several years nationally following a sustained period of government austerity coupled with an unfavourable housing market for the main demographics of homelessness applicants. Welfare reform and legislative changes couple alongside these other factors to create a difficult environment for Local Authorities to navigate in order to be effective in eliminating homelessness in their boroughs.

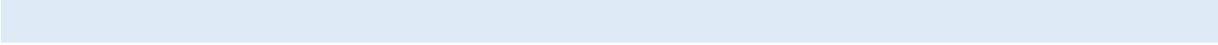
The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 came into effect in April 2018 and has resulted in a complete change to the way in which homelessness applications are managed, dramatically increasing the number of applicants qualifying for assistance and the length of time they must be assisted for.

Prior to the HRA, Local Authorities were only obliged to assist applicants who were “Statutorily Homeless”. This means they passed a series of tests and were entitled to the “Main Duty”. In addition to this duty, most Local Authorities would provide advice and assistance to those who did not meet the requirements to be owed the “Main Duty” and this was sometimes referred to as Prevention. The HRA made Prevention and Relief two separate mandatory duties which any homeless applicant who was eligible for assistance could be owed.

In Q1 2018 immediately prior to the HRA coming into force, the number of applicants owed the Main Duty was 13,320 nationally. The number of households provided advice and assistance was 56,660 and the number of households in temporary accommodation was 80,720.¹

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics>

At the time of writing this review, the latest figures for Q2 2019 show that Main Duty Acceptances have dropped significantly to 8,360. The number of households owed a Prevention or Relief duty was 68,170, an increase of 11% compared to the first quarter of HRA (Q2 2018) and a 20% increase on Pre-HRA advice and assistance. The number of households in temporary accommodation was 86,130, an increase of 6.7% on Pre-HRA levels.



Local Context for this Review

Despite the National picture, Barrow Borough Council together with our local partners remains passionate and resolute in our commitment to prevent homelessness. We will work proactively to prevent and relieve homelessness wherever possible. In the cases where we are unable to achieve a positive outcome in the prescribed timeframe of 56 days, we will continue to work with the client to go on to make a full homeless decision in accordance with the HRAct and the code of guidance. This document has been formulated in consultation and partnership with local partners and statutory agencies, these include Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Police and Liaison and Diversion Teams (Health) and third sector agencies including Salvation Army, specialist supported housing providers and local landlords.

Barrow Borough Council has responded swiftly to the changing demands of the Homelessness Reduction Act, working to ensure that homelessness remains the unacceptable outcome for our residents. Prior to the introduction of the HRAct, Barrow Borough Council provided a significant amount of advice and assistance to applicants who previously would not have been eligible for what was previously referred as the Main Duty; the transition to the new legislation and Prevention and Relief duties were already embedded in the way that we already worked, which afforded us the benefit of being able to adapt very quickly to new challenges.

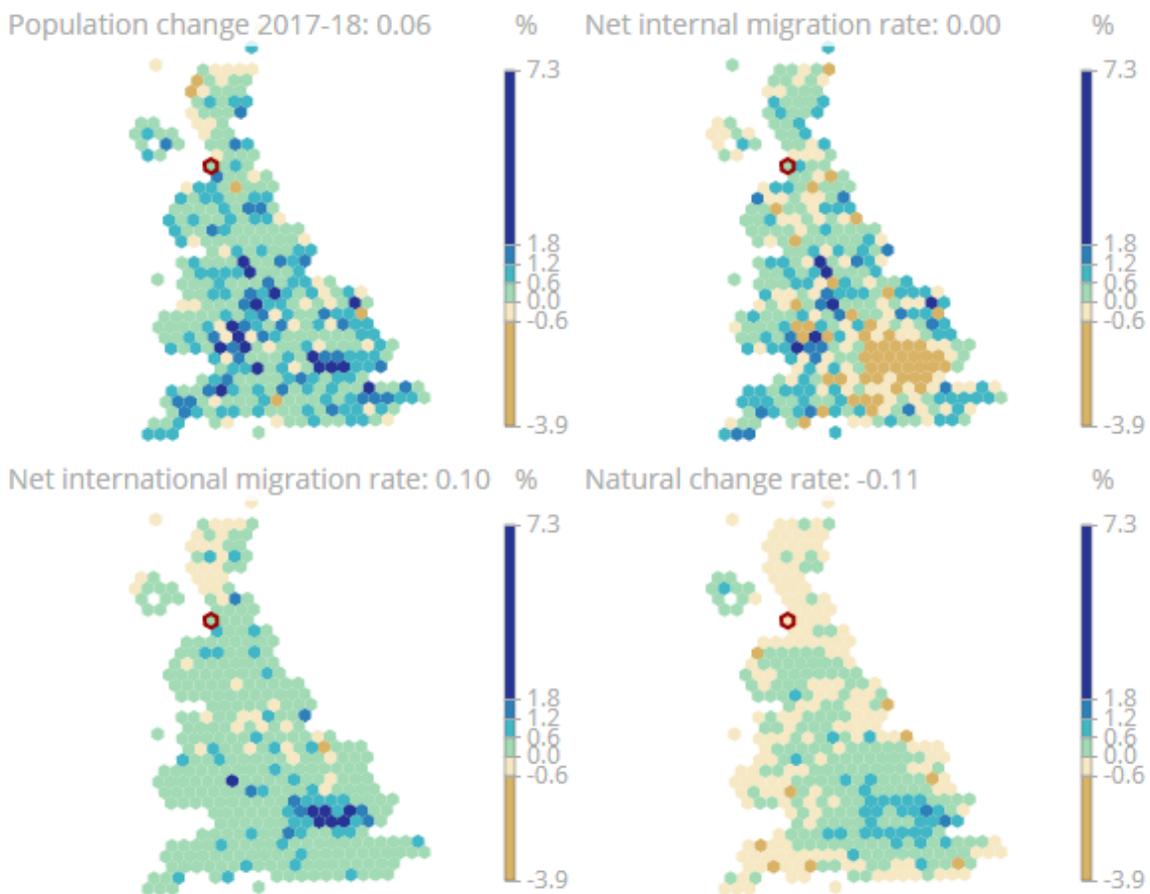
When we compare and contrast between the smaller boroughs and the much larger metropolitan areas e.g. London, their case loads are always much higher due to the wider structural issues, such as affordability and lack of social housing. The table below provides a comparison of our Key Performance Indicators against other Cumbrian authorities, as well as our performance as a region and nationally. Within the Performance section, Barrow Borough Council has performed excellently when comparing itself to other Cumbrian authorities, but also on a regional comparison for the North West and the entirety of England.

The focus of Barrow Borough Council's work and success has been attributed to the work of the SAOs enabling and can-do approach for clients to access a range of accommodation, to promote different options and solutions that might otherwise not have been considered by the client. The prevention agenda within the scope of the HRAct is becoming more central to our work and we are particularly keen to improve our success with providing landlord/tenant solutions and therefore negating the need for the client to have to move out of an already suitable tenancy/property. We acknowledge that multi-agency work is an area key to this solution as the problems are usually more than just that of a housing issue. We continue and strive to meet the needs of our local community to ensure no one is without a home.

Local Context for this Strategy – Economy and Population

Barrow's population is maintaining its expected trend of decline, coupled with an overall ageing population. The population of Barrow-in-Furness dropped from 72,000 in 2001 to 69,000 in 2011, and this trend is expected to continue. Below are the past three mid-year population estimates completed by the Office for National Statistics, in which 2 years saw a net decrease in population and the last showed a net increase of less than 0.1%.²

Barrow-in-Furness



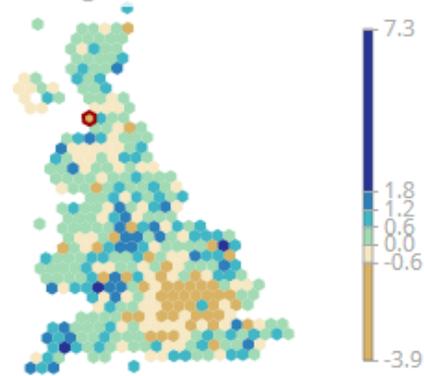
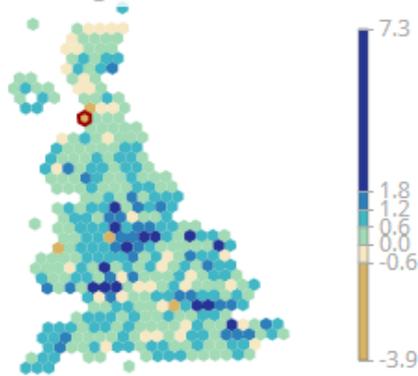
² ONS Data -

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/previousReleases>

Barrow-in-Furness

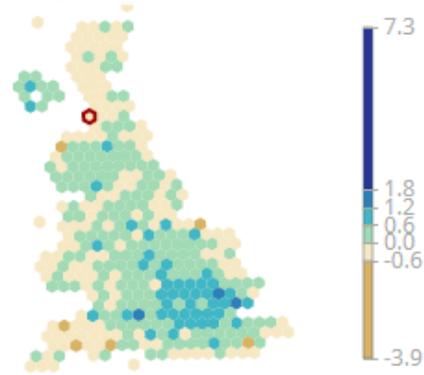
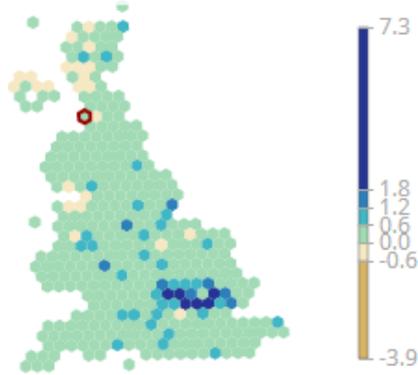
Population change 2016-17: -0.64%

Net internal migration rate: -0.62%



Net international migration rate: 0.04%

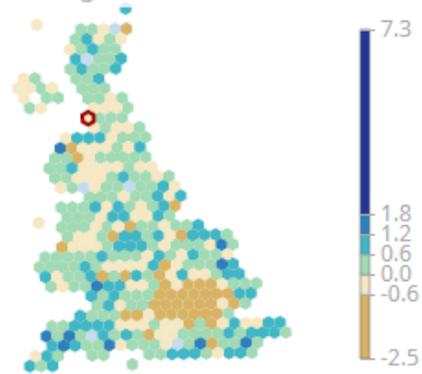
Natural change rate: -0.05%



Barrow-in-Furness

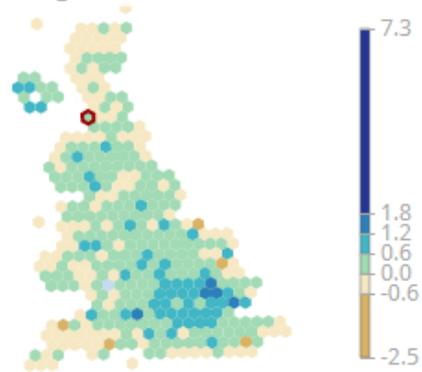
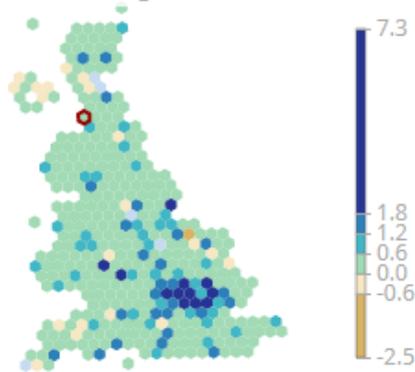
Population change 2015-16: -0.29%

Net internal migration rate: -0.23%

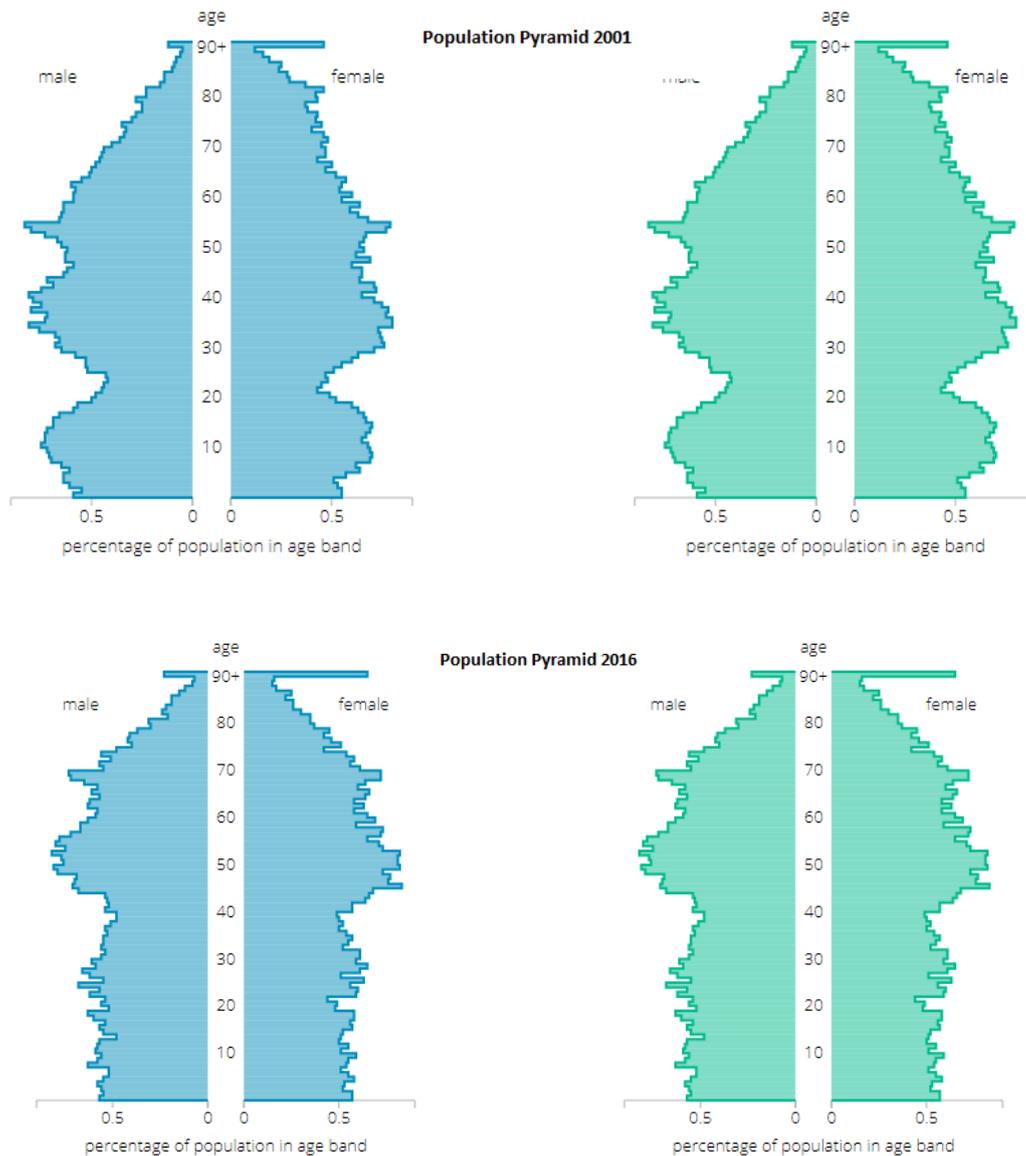


Net international migration rate: 0.02%

Natural change rate: 0.02%



Nationally, most Local Authority areas are seeing population growth, so Barrow-in-Furness sits outside of this trend with overall decreasing or stagnant population change. The population of the borough is ageing, partially due to an increase in life expectancy but mostly due to young people leaving the borough, both for Higher Education and employment prospects. The population pyramids below show a snapshot of the breakdown in age groups for Barrow-in-Furness in 2001 and 2016.



The ageing population has an impact on the type of accommodation which we will need to consider and be mindful of going forward; we have seen an increase of older applicants needing assistance due to interest-only mortgages maturing but with no vehicle for repayment. Additionally factors behind decreasing population are that of younger people moving out of the area for better employment prospects and education, in many cases not returning to the area. The risk groups are therefore likely to be less able to afford expensive private rented accommodation and do look

to social housing as their only option. We continue to develop partnerships and incentives with the local rented sector to provide affordable opportunities.

Local Context for this Strategy – Housing

Table 2.1 Comparative house price change 2000-2015 with neighbouring Districts, the North West and England

Location	Median price by year (£)		% change 2000-2015
	2000	2015	
North West	£56,200	£171,309	205%
Barrow in Furness	£36,500	£105,000	188%
Copeland	£43,000	£117,000	172%
South Lakeland	£79,500	£210,000	164%
Eden	£71,000	£185,000	161%
Allerdale	£56,000	£140,000	150%
England	£82,000	£202,000	146%
Carlisle	£52,500	£125,000	138%

Source: Land Registry Price Paid data

Barrow-in-Furness has experienced a very swift change in property prices comparative to the rest of Cumbria and England, but prices remain lower in Barrow than elsewhere within the county. Barrow's Strategic Housing Market Assessment reports that in the town centre wards of Central and Hindpool affordability ratios (prices relative to average annual local earnings) are between 2.7 and 3.0.

Partly as a result of low prices, of Barrow's circa 33,000 homes almost 30,000 are privately-owned with around 4000 of these being privately-rented. The owner-occupier percentage of 79% of the Barrow population is above the national average of 62.9%, and the private rented sector is smaller than the national average of 20% of overall supply, being at 12% of stock in Barrow.

Barrow also has a relatively small Social Housing sector, with around 3000 homes in this sector, of which 2556 are council owned and the rest predominantly owned by Accent Housing Group. At under 10% of overall supply this is below the national average.

Within the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, Barrow Borough Council has outlined its plans to exceed the required rate of housing growth within the borough in order to address the shortage of appropriate housing availability to meet the needs of the Borough. Further information on Barrow Borough Council's strategic housing assessments is available at: <https://www.barrowbc.gov.uk/residents/planning/planning-policy/housing-assessments/>

The Strategic Housing Market Assessment indicates that there are a total of 2,466 existing households across the Borough that are experiencing some form of housing need, representing 7.7 per cent of the total number of households in the Borough. Of this, the main issue is the incompatibility of housing need to the occupied dwelling – almost 90 per cent of the total in housing need. Issues of particular concern are

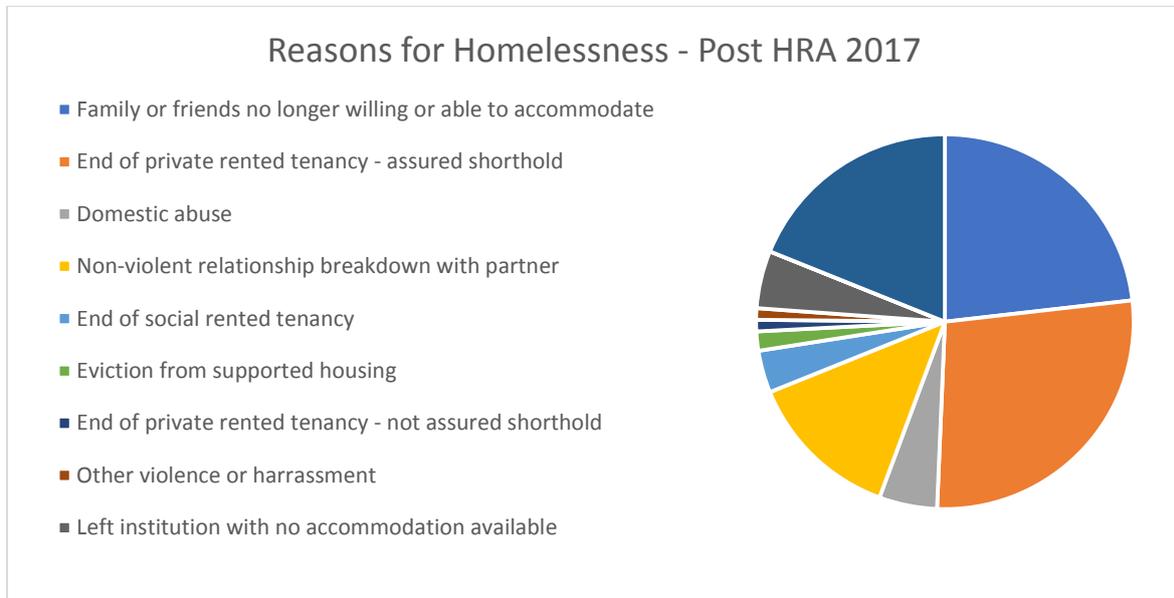
overcrowded properties and people with mobility or other specialist needs. The most likely people to be in housing need in Barrow are the over-65s.

Despite the falling population, partly as a result of the age and condition of the existing stock and the disparity referred to, the new Local Plan calculates that a minimum of 133 net additional dwellings per year will be required over the Local Plan period (to 2031). This equates to a minimum of 2,261 dwellings. The Plan calculates a net requirement for 101 affordable dwellings of all tenures each year over the next 5 years with the need for one-bedroom homes being the greatest, but it needs to be emphasised that this is a calculation of need, not a commitment to build. It is also important to recognise that 'affordable dwellings' includes low-cost sale, and in terms of rented property, an 'affordable' rent is not a social rent.



Reasons for Homelessness

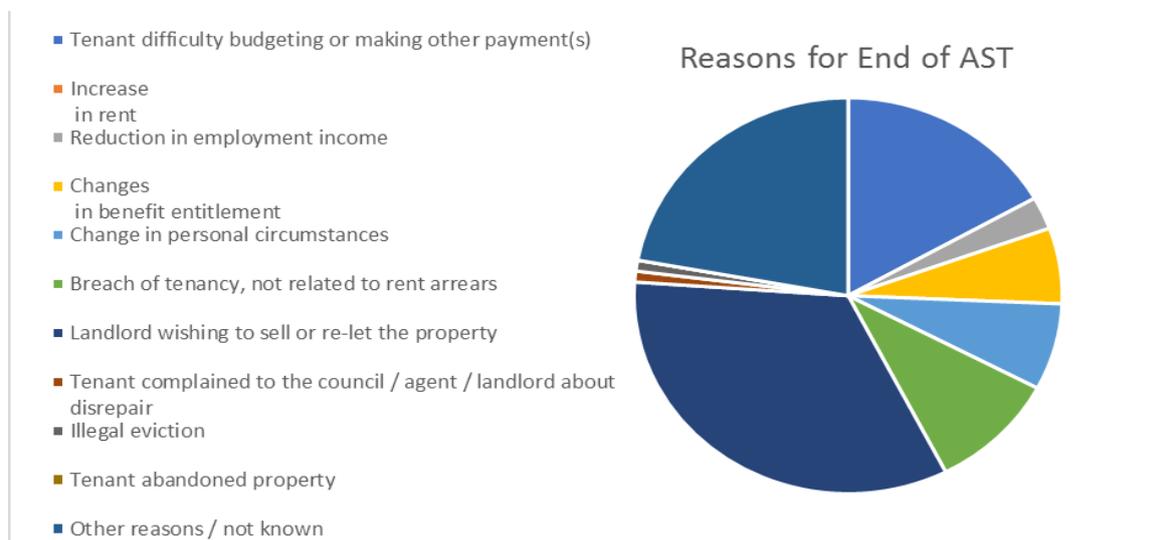
The chart below demonstrates the reasons for applicants approaching Barrow Borough Council for assistance with their homelessness or housing issues. The majority of applications are due to either the end of a private rented tenancy or where friends and family are no longer willing or able to accommodate.



The effect of this on our service is that we must focus more resources towards prevention efforts within the PRS sector, where tenancies are much more fluid with landlords entering and exiting the market with legislative and regulatory changes.

End of Private Rented Tenancy – Assured Shorthold

The following chart indicates what the further reasons are for the ending of an AST when the applicant is a tenant within the Private Rented Sector. Approximately 33% of these cases are where the landlord wishes to sell or re-let their property. In these cases there is very little the council can do beyond explore whether the reason for sale might actually be something which could be resolved, such as tenant behaviour.



The other 67% of cases are related to issues which can be worked on in order to achieve a successful prevention of homelessness, assuming the correct relationships with landlords, partner agencies and resources are available.

Family or Friends no Longer Willing or Able to Accommodate

As previously identified earlier in this document, one of the highest reasons for presentations to the Homeless Service is those being asked to leave by family or friends, this is consistent with the 'sofa surfing' culture in the area and also the trend of parental exclusion in many cases historically based on the fact that they were asked to leave by their own parents at a young age.

We are keen to prevent exclusions from the family home in particular the younger age groups who would struggle to live independently; where ever possible, the focus would be for the young person to remain with the support of early intervention from youth homeless provisions (County Council) or if this cannot be achieved the referral into the supported providers commissioned by the County for young people. We will then track the case so that when the young person is ready for move on the additional preferences will be added to their application for Local Authority housing.

Domestic Abuse

The volume of presentations from those households suffering Domestic Abuse is mitigated by a robust third sector presence in the town, WCM, we work in partnership to ensure those who have to be accommodated in TA are supported appropriately, we are aware that the work that WCM undertake often negates the need for households to present as homeless through their work with the criminal justice system to obtain injunctions and exclusion orders, Barrow Borough Council are pleased to be able to provide funding to enable this valuable work to continue.

Non-Violent Relationship Breakdown

Similarly to those facing homelessness from accommodation provided by friends or family, the efforts made by the council in these circumstances focus around planned and appropriate move on options which avoid unnecessary homelessness.

End of Social Rented Tenancy

As the majority of the Social Rented sector accommodation is owned by Barrow Borough Council we are in a fortunate position to have direct access to those tenancies that might be failing, an internal SOP has been adopted and the Income and Debt Recovery Team can offer their tenants the option to refer themselves for advice and assistance, additionally the Homeless Team will offer all the advice and options to prevent the loss of a Council Tenancy, it is evident that this joint approach is successful in many cases due to the relatively small number of applications being dealt with from this sector.

Eviction from Supported Housing

Barrow Borough Council maintains good relationships with the local Supported Accommodation schemes, some of these are part funded from Supporting People commissioning although this is likely to come to an end during the next financial year due to a reducing budget within the County Council. Communication and information sharing within the scope of GDRP enables effective prevention efforts and appropriate referrals. This is demonstrated through the relatively low levels of applications from this sector, despite the typical profile that is often seen within supported accommodation, a higher incidence of homelessness following a period of supported housing.

End of Private Rented Tenancy – Not Assured Shorthold

This covers relatively small numbers, it would be households with live-in landlords (rent a room) or excluded occupiers, those in licenced accommodation or tied in (work).

Left Institution with No Accommodation Available

Although Barrow does not have any prisons or approved premises within the Borough, it does receive regular referrals for former residents being released from nearby institutions, such as those within Lancashire. These applicants tend to present with more complex and challenging needs and the Homeless Team work succinctly with the prison, offender managers and any other support agencies such as Unity (drug and alcohol) to help formulate PHP (personalised housing plans) to assist with appropriate housing options and solutions. In some cases there are opportunities to secure accommodation prior to release, or indeed prevent homelessness by negotiation with existing landlords. We are mindful that in many cases this cohort of applicants have had poor housing history and previously failed tenancies, they are unable to access LA housing stock and the risk of street homelessness is present, BBC are tackling this issue and are working towards the piloting of a 'Housing First' model.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 - Introduction

The HRA 2017 has represented a significant change in which local authorities have to deliver their homeless duties, whilst the principles of assisting people to resolve their housing issues remains central. What has become clear is the extra burden and increased administrative work needed to deliver a quality homeless service; BBC have reflected how best this can be achieved and adapted the staffing profile to ensure SAOs deliver the duties placed on the Homelessness teams.

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide a service to those who are:

Threatened with homelessness

- The previous 28-day period for 'threatened homelessness' is increased to 56 days.
- The former duty for a Council to provide advice is significantly strengthened and a person may approach any local authority, not just the authority they are connected to.
- A range of public bodies are under a duty, with the consent of the applicant, to refer people who they think may be homeless or threatened with homelessness to the local housing authority.

Assessment and written plan

- A duty to assess every eligible applicant's case and agree a plan. The assessment must include the circumstances which have caused them to become threatened with homelessness, their housing needs, and the support they would need in order to avoid homelessness.
- The assessment must set out in writing the steps the applicant should take to keep their accommodation and also the part the Council will play. The applicant may agree or disagree but the reasons for disagreement must be set out.

Prevention

- A 'prevention duty' applies to all eligible applicants threatened with homelessness. A new section 195 requires the Council 'to take reasonable steps to help the applicant to secure that accommodation does not cease to be available for the applicant's occupation'.
- The prevention duty will end when:
 - the applicant has suitable accommodation which the Council thinks has a reasonable prospect of lasting at least six months; or
 - the applicant has actually become homeless; or
 - suitable accommodation is refused or lost through an act of the applicant; or
 - there is a 'deliberate and unreasonable refusal to co-operate' by the applicant.

Relief duty

- If prevention is unsuccessful or an applicant presents as already homeless, the relief duty is triggered.
- The duty lasts for up to 56 days, and is available to all those who are homeless and eligible, regardless of whether they have a priority need.
- The Council must take reasonable steps to help resolve a person's homelessness. If 'priority need' applies, the applicant will be provided with interim accommodation while the LHA carries out the reasonable steps to relieve their homelessness. 'Reasonable steps' may include providing debt advice or a rent deposit.
- The relief duty ends largely on the same basis as the prevention duty, that is when:
 - the applicant has suitable accommodation which the Council thinks has a reasonable prospect of lasting at least six months; or
 - suitable accommodation is refused or lost through an act of the applicant
- The relief duty requires the Council to 'help to secure' the applicant accommodation, that is, help them to get accommodation but not necessarily find it for them, as was the pre-HRA requirement.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 - Performance

The table on the following page outlines the Key Performance Indicators we use in measuring our performance in preventing and relieving homelessness. The data demonstrates an overall positive impression of the performance of Barrow Borough Council in the first 18 months of the Homelessness Reduction Act's implementation which has been a true step-change in how Local Authorities must assist applicants at risk of or already homeless.

BBC successfully prevented the homelessness of 71.2% of applicants who presented as threatened with homelessness, which can be compared to 59.3% for the North West region and 57.5% for the whole of England. For those applicants who present as already homeless there is similar levels of success with 65.4% of cases benefitting from a successful outcome compared to 44.3% for the Region and 42.1% for England.

What this might indicate is that it is often easier to assist applicant towards successful outcomes if more time is given to work on the case. For clarification a "successful" outcome under either Prevention or Relief Duty is accommodation is offered with a reasonable prospect of it lasting more than 6 months.

An identified area of potential improvement for Barrow Borough Council is in increasing the available options and efforts made to help applicants to remain within their own homes during the Prevention Duty. Barrow Borough Council successfully assisted 15.7% of applicants who were at risk of homelessness to remain within their homes. This figure is 26.5% regionally and 35.2% nationally.

Authority	Duties Accepted	Homeless Duties per 1000 Households	Prevention Duty Successful Outcome (%)	Where applicant's existing accommodation was secured during Prevention Duty (%)	Relief Duty Successful Outcome %	Average Number of Households in TA	Number of Households in TA per 1000 Households	Main Duty Decisions Made	Main Duty Acceptances (%)
Barrow	380	2.45	71.2%	15.7%	65.4%	7.60	0.25	24	29.17%
Allerdale	425	1.98	69.6%	17.9%	56.0%	6.40	0.15	50	16.00%
Carlisle	649	2.65	63.8%	14.8%	63.0%	4.33	0.09	63	20.63%
Copeland	423	2.82	74.9%	39.8%	64.2%	5.80	0.19	24	33.33%
Eden	215	1.79	74.1%	16.5%	68.9%	2.20	0.09	6	0.00%
South Lakes	345	1.44	57.7%	15.0%	47.1%	15.60	0.33	57	68.42%
North West	45820	2.94	59.3%	26.5%	44.3%	3222.00	1.03	6560	50.91%
England	333210	2.87	57.5%	35.2%	42.1%	84106.00	3.62	65270	58.80%

In comparison to other LAs in Cumbria, Barrow has a relatively high use of Temporary Accommodation, this may be attributed to the ease of access due to BBC having its own stock of dispersed properties. The cost however is much less than those LAs who have no other option but to commission TA from private landlords. BBC is able to recoup costs from Housing Benefit for rent and service charges. B&B is kept to an absolute minimum and very rarely needed.

The number of households, 2.45 in every 1000 in Barrow is higher than that of its neighbours in the County, considering the national picture, it is however much lower than might be expected since, considering that Barrow in Furness has some wards that fall within the most deprived areas of England.

Good practice, flexible and 'out of the box' thinking keeps case loads to reasonable levels, this is both beneficial to both the client and the Local Authority, enabling quicker solutions therefore reducing both the financial and socioeconomic costs associated with homelessness.

SWOT Analysis

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Flexible approach to Prevention and Relief of Homelessness</i> - <i>Knowledgeable, Experienced and Well-Trained Homelessness Officers</i> - <i>Swift matching with potential properties in private sector</i> - <i>Good intra-departmental e.g. Homelessness – Housing, working partnerships</i> - <i>Excellent resources for enabling applicants to prevent and relieve their homelessness.</i> - <i>Excellent community dedicated to helping people</i> 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Homelessness Prevention rates high, but not when looking at securing existing accommodation</i> - <i>No clear, structured forum for cross-partner working or problem solving</i> - <i>Limited provision locally for applicants of certain support needs e.g. Women’s Refuges, Mid-High Support Needs Hostels</i> - <i>Identifying to partners and members of the public the successful work of the Homelessness Service</i> - <i>Low throughput of certain size properties, such as 3-bedroom houses most needed for families.</i> - <i>No floating support locally</i>
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Reduction of homeless presentations by specialising Housing Advice around prevention and sustainment.</i> - <i>Possibility of building a referral platform (Housing Related Support) to centralise referrals to supported housing providers locally.</i> - <i>Likely introduction of Homelessness Reduction Boards within the near future</i> - <i>Education in Life Skills, Pastoral, Budgeting, independent living and parenting</i> - <i>Housing First initiatives being explored locally</i> - - <i>“Hubs” enable services to make easier contact with users</i> 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Welfare Reform e.g. Universal Credit, continues to contribute towards increasing rates of homelessness</i> - <i>Continuing national policy of austerity could lead to reductions in funding for schemes such as Discretionary Housing Payment</i> - <i>Future Homelessness Grant funding may be stopped following the initial 3 years post HRA</i> - <i>Modern living issues e.g. online gambling, catalogue debts</i> - <i>Availability of housing stock including variety and quality</i> - <i>Landlords exiting the market, reducing stock</i>