

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 9 February 2022

Subject: An update on families residing in both bed and breakfast accommodation and homeless accommodation outside of the city boundaries, and the impact on schools and transport

Report of: Strategic Director of Children and Education Services
Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods)

Summary

MCC has experienced a high level of homeless presentations, including families with children. Compounded by a combination of factors such as high population growth, welfare reform changes and a shortage of affordable housing in the City, the Council has utilised out of City placements to meet its statutory duties in relation to homelessness.

This report sets out the collaborative work undertaken by the Homeless Service and Children's services to support families who are impacted by homelessness.

Recommendations

Members are invited to consider and comment on the information contained within this report.

Wards Affected: All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city

Placing families in settled accommodation quicker, and transferring children to a school local to the accommodation, will reduce the travelling time needed to get to school.

Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	Having good quality accommodation will help people to thrive. Reducing the number of people who are homeless, or placing them in appropriate accommodation with help to access employment and learning opportunities will contribute to Manchester becoming a thriving and sustainable city.
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Having accommodation that people can access, in areas where they have a support network to help them, and their children, into education or employment will help grow talent in the city.
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	Having good quality accommodation in our communities improves the environment people live in and helps them to make a positive contribution.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	Ensuring properties are a good quality and high standard will reduce the need to heat properties and therefore reduce energy waste.
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

None

1.0 Introduction

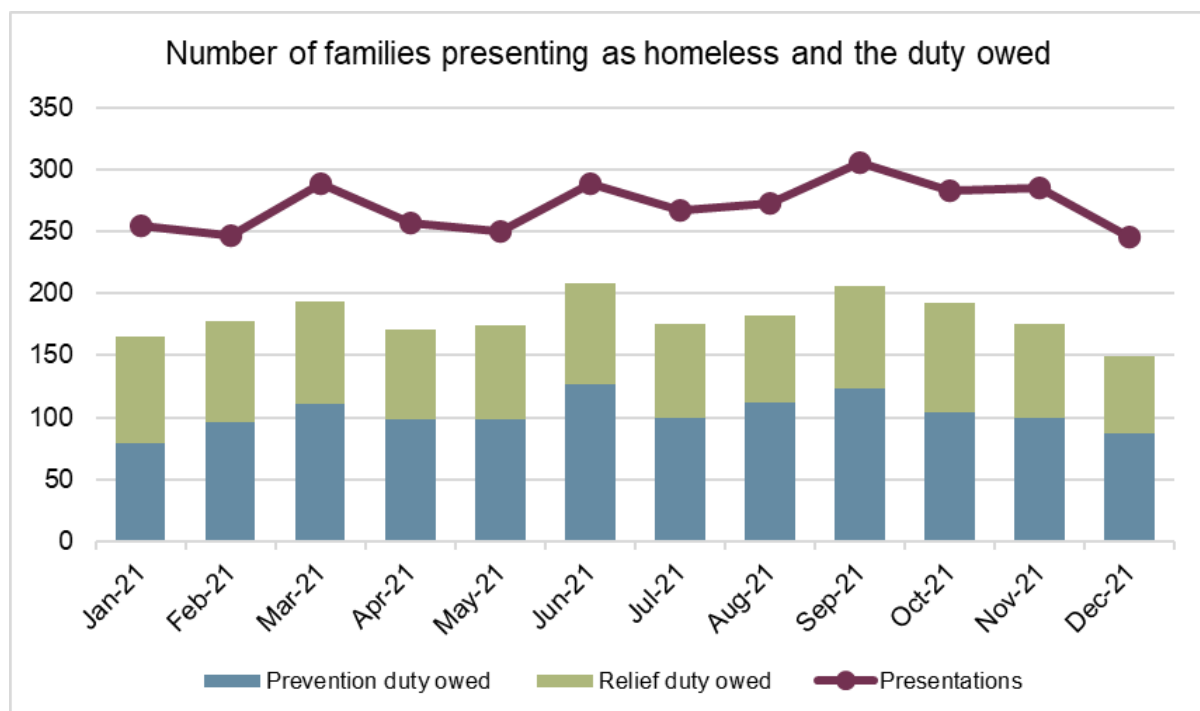
1.1 This report is further to the discussion at the November 2021 Children and Young Person's Scrutiny Committee where it was requested that a report on families being placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, and accommodation outside of the city, be brought to the Committee to discuss.

1.2 This report will cover the numbers of families in bed and breakfast, the numbers of families accommodated outside of the city, and the impact on them. It will also cover the work that is being progressed to stop the use of bed and breakfast accommodation in the city.

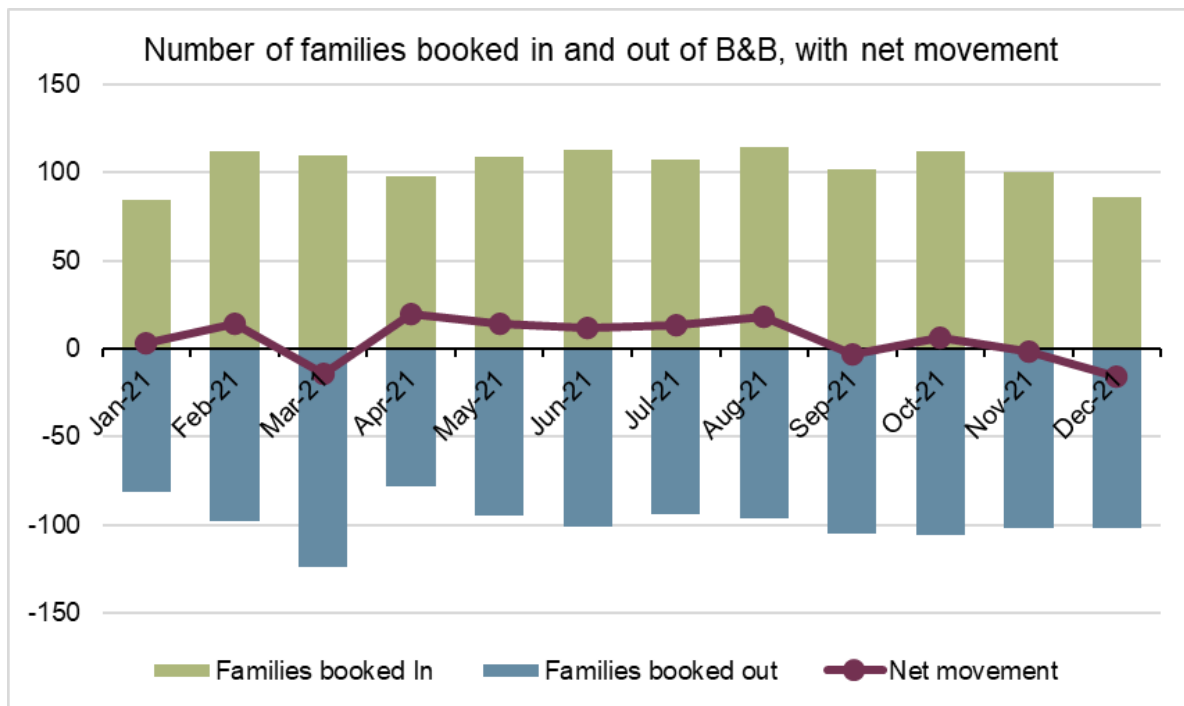
2.0 Background

2.1 The City Council has a statutory duty to assess and accommodate homeless families. Although it is preferable to accommodate families in their locality, close to their support networks, this is not always possible due to the cost and availability of accommodation. The homeless service will therefore accommodate families where there are available properties to ensure that families are not without vital accommodation.

2.2 The number of families presenting as homeless have continued to remain consistently high in Manchester and higher, than more comparative cities.

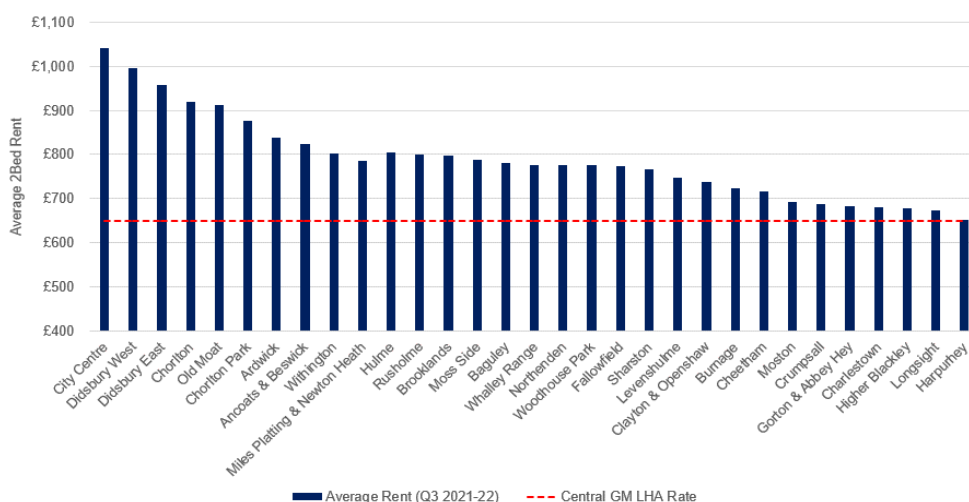


2.3 Bed and Breakfast is used as an emergency accommodation option before families move to either dispersed temporary accommodation or a private rented sector offer. Historically, the time spent in Bed and Breakfast has been very short, with swift move on to alternative accommodation.



2.4 Over the past 6 months, it has become increasingly difficult to move families out of emergency accommodation due to a reduction in the amount of dispersed temporary accommodation being brought online. There are currently 94 families in bed and breakfast accommodation as of January 2022 and the average number of days in B&B accommodation for families being 20 days.

2.5 The most significant challenge to accommodating families is the buoyant housing market in Manchester and the capped Local Housing Allowance rate. It has become more profitable for providers to rent properties on the open market. To illustrate this challenging issue further, due to the changes brought about by welfare reform, there is not a ward in the city that has an average rent that is lower than the local housing allowance. This is illustrated in the table below.



2.6 The impact of this significant constraint, is that it is increasingly difficult to place people in temporary accommodation and/or in affordable settled accommodation in the city.

2.7 Consequently, and to ensure the council meets its statutory duties, more placements are being made outside the city, and in addition, more discharge of housing duty accommodation offers (settled accommodation) are being made outside of the city too, as this is where families, due to their circumstances, can find more affordable accommodation.

2.8 As of the January 2022 there are currently 1,196 temporary accommodation family placements in Manchester, and 755 family placements outside of the city. The table below sets out the numbers of both families and singles currently in Temporary Accommodation in and out of the city.

	Manchester	Outside Manchester	Total	Average time in TA (days)
Families B&B	38	56	94	20
Singles B&B	182	115	297	79
Families In-house TA	42	0	42	182
Singles In-house TA	252	0	252	186
Families dispersed	1,116	699	1,815	548
Singles dispersed	107	121	228	490
Total	1,737	991	2,728	434

2.9 As at January 2022 there are the following number of dependent children (including pregnancies) in temporary accommodation;

- 181 in B&Bs
- 10 in nightly rate accommodation
- 67 in in-house TA
- 3,649 in dispersed

2.10 The experience of becoming homeless for families often impacts on:

- Continuity of education due to difficulties in getting to current school, or requiring a move to a new school
- Being apart from local support networks, friends and family
- Continuity of health and social care support
- Getting to the accommodation

2.11 The mitigation and support that MCC puts in place is set out in more detail in 4.0.

2.12 Due to the level of high demand and the current shortage of affordable housing, families who present as homelessness are often unlikely to find affordable and permanent housing in their preferred locality and where they originally presented as homeless to the council.

2.13 As such, families often need to find alternative areas to live permanently where they can afford the rent based on their income and particular circumstances. A consequence of this is that the majority of children move schools during the lifecycle of presenting as homeless to moving into temporary accommodation and then to finding a permanent home.

2.14 To help address these challenges issues, both the Homelessness Service and Childrens Services work together to provide a floating support offer which provides families with advice to support families during this unsettling period.

3.0 School and Travel

3.1 Attending school and nursery places remains one of the most significant difficulties that families face when placed at some distance or outside of the city. Families often have children of mixed ages and travel to multiple sites to get children to schools and nurseries. Although families who have been placed at distance from their local school can access free travel passes so that there is not a financial pressure, this still presents parents with at times unmanageable logistical challenges. This can then lead to children potentially missing school days or arriving late.

3.2 The Councils Performance, Research and Intelligence team is looking to identify a random sample of young people currently in temporary accommodation to ascertain whether are notable patterns of attendance or exclusions where the temporary accommodation is further away from the school or whether there was a notable impact on performance after transition into temporary accommodation

- 3.3 In addition, there is also the impact on opportunities for these children to socialise outside of school with their friends. In many cases schools work with families to put in place flexible arrangements, provide access to before or after school clubs or even support with transport to and from school in some circumstances. They will also support families with a transfer to a more local school when accommodation becomes more long term.
- 3.4 As the families stay in temporary accommodation can often be prolonged, families often decide to move their children to a school or nursery close to their dispersed accommodation.

4.0 Support for Families

- 4.1 As the data in this report demonstrates, homelessness and housing related difficulties are a significant issue for many families in the city. The circumstances leading up to a family becoming homeless are often traumatic, especially if violence or domestic abuse are a factor. This is compounded when families have to spend time in Bed and Breakfast accommodation and/or are placed away from their support networks. For many children, family networks and school are protective factors, and the loss of stability and support can have a detrimental impact on their sense of security, as well as their physical and emotional well-being. Parents struggle to manage these additional pressures practically, financially, and emotionally, and this can result in mental health vulnerabilities linked to low mood, depression, and anxiety. This can be made more difficult if the family's usual health networks (GPs, Health Visitors etc) are a significant distance away.
- 4.2 In the first instance both Children's and Homelessness Services try to work with families in order to prevent homelessness. This will be an increasing focus over the next few years to reduce the number of people who become homeless.
- 4.3 If families do become homeless, this increases the vulnerability for children and the completion of an Early Help Assessment (EHA) becomes necessary. An EHA is completed on all presentations unless a social worker is already in place.
- 4.4 The Early Help Project Team have delivered training and support to homelessness staff and partners in the use of strengths-based conversations and the use of the Early Help Assessment as a tool to capture family need so that appropriate responses can be identified.
- 4.5 The Homelessness Floating Support Service complete these Early Help Assessments with families who are moved into dispersed temporary accommodation. As stated above, this identifies any needs the family may have. The EHA will trigger support including, but not exclusive to:
- Liaising with schools and school based support if needed,
 - Applying for transport passes to help children travel to school,

- Transferring children to a school local to the new property if the family decide this is the most appropriate course of action,
- Transferring the family to a local doctor and dentist
- Linking in with the specialist homeless health visitor service
- Referrals to local nurseries and play groups
- Referrals to Sure Start
- Referrals to Early Help for more intensive support
- Referrals and signposting to local voluntary organisations.

4.6 Some of the Floating Support Teams are co-located with the Early Help Hubs to ensure close working with Children's Services.

4.7 In respect of those children who are receiving a 'targeted' or 'specialist' service via the Council's Children's Services (social care or early help service), staff work extensively with partners to provide advice, support, and help to families to secure stable accommodation and prevent rooflessness, support with financial difficulties and advocacy with housing providers and private landlords. Homeless staff take social work intervention into account when allocating properties, and prioritise those receiving specialist help are kept within Manchester to ensure continuity of care.

4.8 The very nature of temporary accommodation, the indicative duration for some and the legal principle of 'ordinary residence' present a challenge for parents to make 'hard choices' and a balancing act for Local Authority Children's Services. On one hand the statutory duty and responsibility to provide help, support and protect sits with the Local Authority where a child is 'ordinarily resident' yet 'temporary accommodation' by its very nature is suggestive of a transitional arrangement.

4.9 This is compounded by the difficulty that a combination of factors, such as the shortage of suitable affordable property and changes to the welfare system, which can lead to families staying in temporary accommodation for a prolonged period of time.

5.0 Reducing the use of bed and breakfast and out of city placements

5.1 The Homeless Service is focused upon reducing both the use of bed and breakfast and the amount of temporary accommodation that is utilised by the service by progressing the following projects as part of a wider transformation programme:

6.0 Prevention

6.1 The most effective way to reduce the numbers of families in bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation is by preventing families from becoming homeless. Officers have been working on the following projects to increase the numbers of families who can access timely advice and support that resolves issues before they need to approach the service:

- A private rented sector eviction working group regularly meets to share information about current interventions to prevent evictions and to agree how advice services can work better together, for example, to ensure that the Breathing Space scheme is used effectively. The group has developed a Risk Matrix which identifies the areas of the city where people may be at heightened risk of being evicted and will target publicity and resources in those areas to encourage people to get advice.
- Communications on accessing financial and debt advice is being increased to encourage people to access help before it impacts upon their rent payments and ability to keep their home.
- Information sharing between the Homelessness Directorate and Manchester Move is being improved to ensure people who apply for accommodation who are at risk of homelessness are identified at an earlier stage and supported to stay in their current accommodation.
- The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) have provided £689k of funding to help people who are at risk of becoming homeless due to COVID-19 related rent arrears. The Council is working closely with Shelter, Citizens Advice and Cheetham Hill Advice Centre (CHAC) to prevent the most vulnerable people from becoming homeless.
- Registered providers and charities that provide accommodation are working with the Council to reduce evictions from their accommodation and ensure that all support possible has been provided to people before any eviction does occur.
- Children's and Homeless Services are working together to develop ways to support homelessness staff at the 'front-door' who deal with families when they first present so that a fuller picture of need and any potential risks for the children are explored at the earliest stage, in conjunction with Early Help Hub Triage teams. The Walmer Street incident is an example of good practice and partnership working, this model of collaborative working is being developed to improve outcomes for households in difficulty. Prior to the pandemic the Housing Solutions Service and Early Help were considering working together in the hubs. This approach needs developing as the outputs could result in greater prevention.

7.0 Apex House as a Model

- 7.1 Apex House opened in March 2021. It consists of 20 flats for families in a mixture of 14 2-bed and 6 3-bed, some with connecting doors for larger families. The accommodation is staffed 24/7 with a mixture of support staff and security. The approach is for families to move directly into Apex instead of B&B, and then to work very closely with the private rented sector team to move families into the private rented sector and not temporary accommodation.

- 7.2 The benefits of the model are the time in temporary accommodation is very short, and families are moved quickly into settled accommodation. This means children are not travelling to their original school over a long period of time, but travel to the original school for a brief period, and then have the option to transfer to a local school when they move into their settled accommodation.
- 7.3 Due to the success of this model, officers are working with developers to create other family hostels to replicate this approach.

8.0 Placing families directly into dispersed accommodation

- 8.1 Officers are seeking to place families directly into dispersed accommodation from presentation rather than placing families in emergency accommodation. This will necessitate a change in process with staff and providers working together to ensure there is sufficient dispersed accommodation available on the day for the number of families presenting.

9.0 Nightly rate accommodation

- 9.1 As an alternative to bed and breakfast, many other Local Authorities use nightly rate accommodation. Nightly rate accommodation is where a family is accommodated in a property or flat, and therefore have their own front door, but the accommodation is on an emergency basis, and paid for on a nightly rate. Manchester has started to use this accommodation as an option to reduce the use of bed and breakfast. Officers are monitoring its use to ensure it remains a better alternative to bed and breakfast, and Manchester does not fall into the same situation as other Local Authorities, where it becomes an expensive dispersed accommodation option.

10.0 Private Rented Sector

- 10.1 The Council has invested significantly in increasing the size of the private rented sector team and providing incentives to increase the number of families moving out of temporary accommodation into the private rented sector as a discharge of homeless duty. Moving families into settled accommodation means more families have the option to transfer to a school that is close to their new property that the children can settle into permanently.

11.0 Domestic Violence and Abuse

- 11.1 Homelessness prevention forms a key part of commissioned domestic violence and abuse floating support, with Manchester Women's Aid's Connect Service providing an early help offer targeted at vulnerable families. The service is co-located with the Early Help Hubs and is based on the principles of early intervention and prevention. It supports low-medium risk families with safety planning, recovery and mental health support, and its aim is to intervene early in order to reduce both escalation of risk and prevent homelessness due to domestic abuse.

- 11.2 In addition, work delivered through the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 provides support to families in refuge and safe accommodation. Funding for 2021/22 has been utilised to provide additional specialist domestic abuse support to families whilst in temporary accommodation, and additional support in moving on into the private rented sector. Funding is also being used to support prevention with an enhanced Sanctuary Scheme offer established, which has seen additional resource put in place to manage the installation of target hardening/safe rooms as well as providing support to review the impact of safety measures installed.
- 11.3 Collectively these areas seek to reduce the numbers of individuals and families presenting as homeless to the council.

12.0 Refugee Transitions Outcomes Fund (RTOF)

- 12.1 Several homeless applicants are refugees who have been given a positive asylum decision. The Refugee Transitions Outcomes Fund will fund 2 key worker staff to support 90 households in Manchester with:
- housing;
 - housing sustainment;
 - employment;
 - employment sustainment; and
 - improvement on outcome star, at both 6 and 12 months. The outcomes star would include referrals into ESOL, integration, education, training and health.
- 12.2 The expectation is that when the refugee receives their positive decision and are given 28 days to move from the Serco accommodation, the key workers will help the family move directly into private rented sector accommodation and provide resettlement and integration support thereby avoiding the homeless system. The family will be given support to transfer any children to a school or nursery local to their new accommodation, along with local GP (General practitioners) surgeries and other local services.

13.0 Transformation Programme

- 13.1 To support and accelerate the successes of the Manchester Homeless Partnership and collaboration with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, the council is now embarking on a refreshed transformation programme as a different approach is vital to unlock some of the most intransigent system issues that are adversely impacting our residents. On that basis, the programme is focussed on the following outcomes;
- Increasing Prevention
 - Ending Rough Sleeping
 - More suitable and affordable accommodation
 - Better Outcomes and Better Lives for people and families at risk of homelessness or who are homeless.

The programme will help the Directorate to focus on the key aims of prevention, including ceasing the use of B&B accommodation (prioritising families) and reducing the use of temporary accommodation. A more detailed report is being presented to the Communities and Equalities Committee in February 2022 on the aims and scope of the Transformation Programme

14.0 Conclusion

- 14.1 The Children's and Homelessness service continue to work closely together, supporting each other's priorities and programmes, for example, Homelessness are supporting 'The Year of the Child' and Children's are involved with the homelessness prevention agenda and associated transformation programme; working with the homelessness service to ensure that families get the support they need to reduce the risk of homelessness, support families in temporary accommodation and assist families to resettle into safe, secure, long-term homes.
- 14.2 In the first instance, both Services try and prevent families from becoming homeless, and this is a focus going forward. If families do become homeless, an Early Help Assessment is undertaken and this triggers the appropriate and individualised support.
- 14.3 The support will be tailored to the family but can include liaising with the school, and school based support if needed, support in the form of free travel passes to schools, social care or early help support, and support with longer term decisions from education if the family decide they need to move school alongside their housing considerations.
- 14.4 The Early Help Assessment will also identify other needs such as referrals to the specialist health visiting service, support to move GPs, referrals to nurseries and general help with utilities, signposting to voluntary sector organisations and other help such as referrals to ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes.
- 14.5 The Council will ensure that homeless families are placed in accommodation that is available and affordable in order to fulfil the Council's statutory duty. Unfortunately, the placement is often not at the family's preferred location, however, our primary responsibility is to provide emergency and temporary housing.
- 14.6 The Homeless Service is commencing a transformation programme over the next three years that has reducing the amount of bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation as two of its key aims. The clear aim is to move families into affordable settled accommodation in the private rented sector in a more timely manner. This quicker throughput should help families settle into their new areas, moving children to schools closer to their new accommodation and building up new links and social networks.