

Homeless Review 2016 – Executive Summary

1. Introduction

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a legal requirement on local authorities to carry out a review of all forms of homelessness in their district and publish a Homelessness Strategy.

The Homelessness Review is intended to provide part of an evidence base for developing the new Homelessness Strategy in relation to:

- Preventing homelessness;
- Ensuring accommodation is available for people who are, or who may become homeless;
- Commissioning support for people who are or who may become homeless.

2. Definitions

“A household is legally homeless if, either, they do not have accommodation that they are entitled to occupy, which is accessible and physically available to them or, they have accommodation but it is not reasonable for them to continue to occupy this accommodation”

- This is a definition of statutory homelessness, leading to a duty on the local authority to provide assistance.
- However the Homeless Review and Strategy should take a wider view of the population affected by homelessness and insecure housing; including street homelessness. The DCLG definition of street homelessness is:

“People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or “bashes”).”

3. Housing in Birmingham

- Population growing at a faster rate than homes are being built, leading to an increase in overcrowding across all tenures of housing;
- There are more than 20,000 households on the BCC Housing Register (April 2016);
- Annually social housing allocations are equivalent to a quarter of Birmingham’s overall registered housing need;
- Shrinking affordable housing sector;

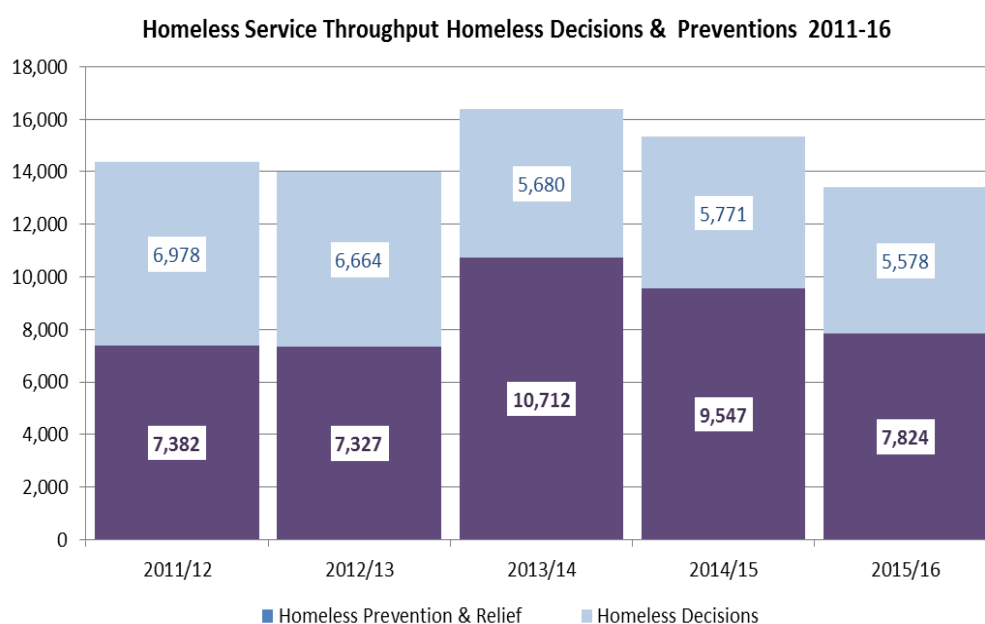
- Reducing housing options for low -income and benefit-dependent households – especially U-35s and large households affected by Benefit Cap;
- A growing private rented market – but high demand and competition in the market with a comparatively low Local Housing Allowance rate;
- Relative to local incomes, Birmingham is one of the most expensive places to rent in the country. Housing costs in the city equate to 47% of household income compared to 49% in London;
- There are 113,000 recipients of housing benefit in Birmingham, of which 28% live in the Private Rented Sector (PRS);
- Birmingham is a mortgage repossession hotspot, where 1 in 69 households face the threat of losing their home compared to 1 in 108 households in England.

4. Homelessness in Birmingham

4.1 Overall

- Estimated more than 20,000 households each year are either homeless, at risk of becoming homeless or transitioning out of homelessness – this is based on a broad view including priority and non-priority groups and those who are “hidden” to the Council;
- Council and commissioned services collectively respond to over 14,000 household contacts for housing advice and assistance per year (Fig.1);

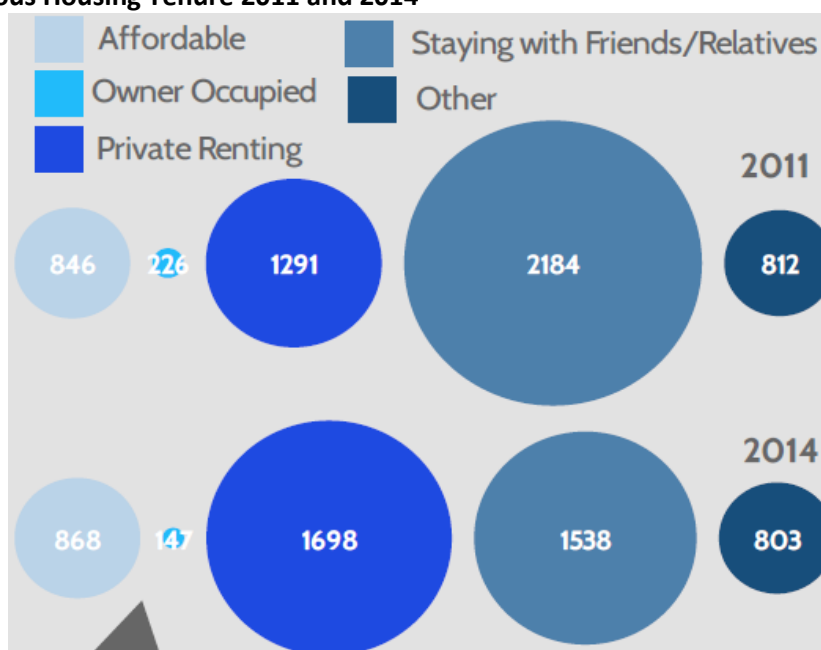
Figure 1: Homeless Service Throughput Decisions and Preventions 2011-2016



- Other registered provider and third sector services also handle significant caseloads;

- 78% of statutory homeless applicants have dependent children;
- 90% of applicants are of working age (18-64), mostly below 35 years old;
- 15% of applications are from outside of Birmingham – approximately half of which are related to domestic abuse;
- Disproportionately higher level of applications from Black and Minority Ethnic groups;
- Most notable change in previous housing tenure/circumstances of households approaching the Local Authority as homeless is the increase in applicants whose previous tenure is private renting (Fig.2);

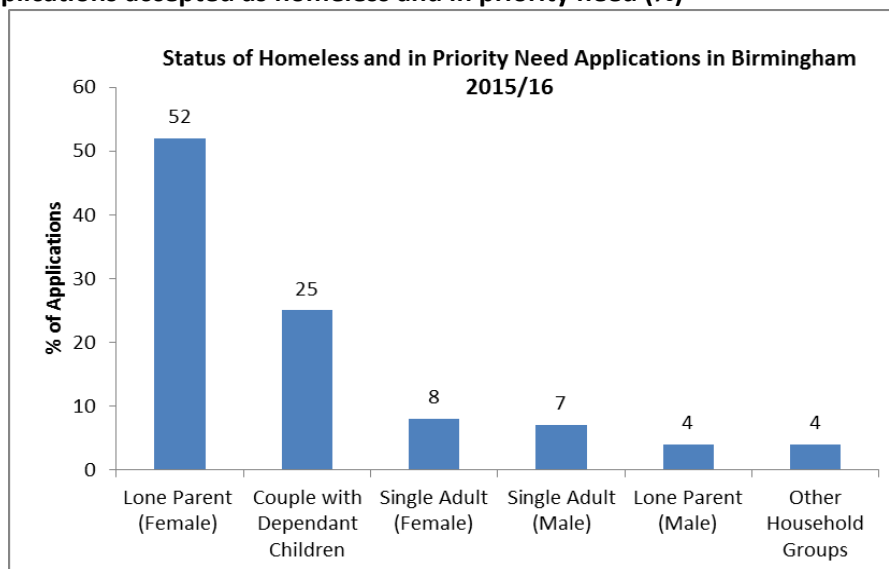
Figure 2: Previous Housing Tenure 2011 and 2014



4.2 Homeless and in Priority Need

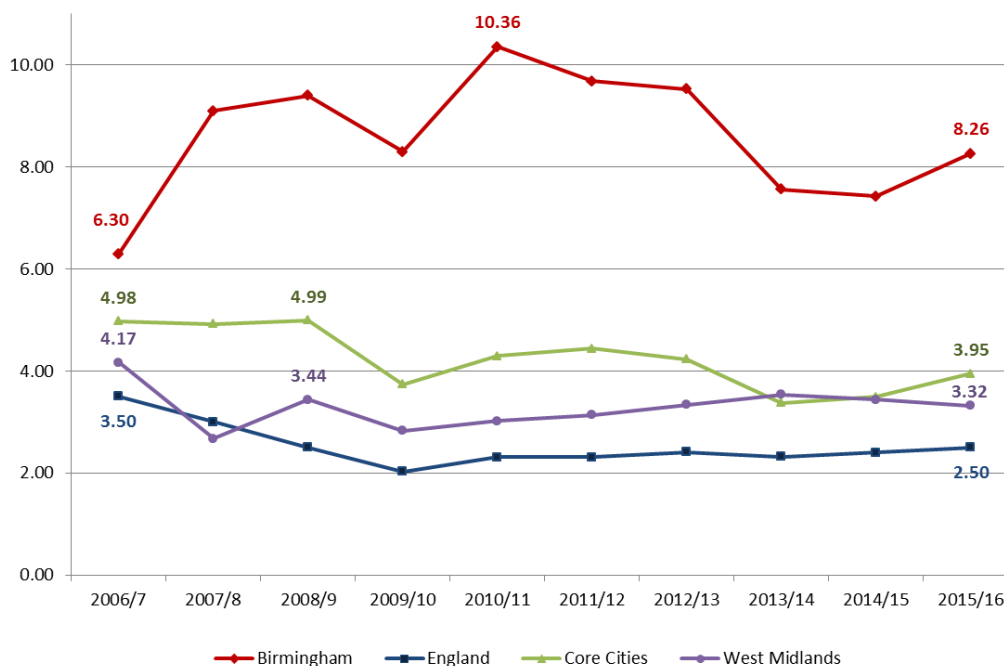
- More than three quarters of applicants accepted as homeless and in priority need have children – either with a lone parent (female 52%, male 4%), or as dependants of a couple (25%) (Fig.3).

Figure 3: Applications accepted as homeless and in priority need (%)



- Birmingham has more than three times the rate of priority homelessness than the national average and double the rate of Core City neighbours (Fig.4);

Figure 4: Priority Homelessness Trends (2006 - 2016) (Rate per 1,000 Households)



- The most frequent presenting reasons for those deemed priority homeless are end of assured short hold tenancy (24.9%), domestic abuse (19.8%) and parental exclusion (12.2%) (Table 1);

Table 1: Priority Homelessness - Reasons for Homelessness 2015/16

Rank	Presenting Reason for Homelessness	%
1	End of Assured Short hold Tenancy	24.9
2	Domestic abuse (involving partner or associated persons)	19.8
3	Parental exclusion	12.2
4	Relatives / friends no longer willing to accommodate	12.1
5	Property related disrepair, overcrowding, returned from abroad and other	7.2
6	Violence and harassment (all types including racial)	5.4
7	Rent arrears and repossession (all tenures)	4.0
8	Required to leave National Asylum Support Service accommodation	4.0
9	Relationship breakdown with partner (non DA)	3.8
10	Other reason - homeless in emergency	3.1
11	Left Social Care, Health or other LA Care	2.6
12	Left hospital	0.5
13	Left prison	0.2
14	Perpetrator of DA/ ASB	0.2
15	Left HM Armed Forces	0.0

4.3 Street Homelessness

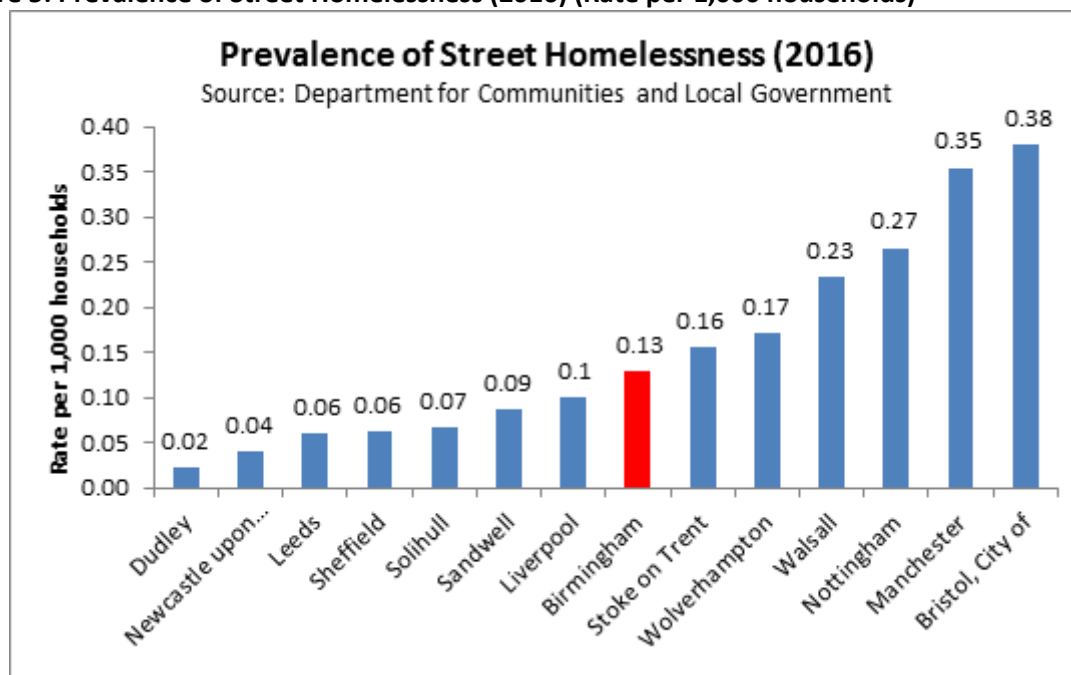
- In line with national trends, rates of street homeless have significantly increased in recent years (Table 2);

Table 2: Street Homelessness – Core City & Neighbours Comparisons (2010-2016)

	2016 Count	% increase on Previous Year	% Since 2010
Birmingham	55	53%	511%
Bristol	74	-24%	825%
Leeds	20	54%	233%
Liverpool	21	40%	600%
Manchester	75	7%	971%
Newcastle	5	-38%	67%
Nottingham	35	150%	1067%
Sheffield	15	36%	88%
Coventry	13	44%	160%
Dudley	3	0%	0%
Sandwell	11	175%	450%
Solihull	6	20%	100%
Stratford	13	160%	63%
Walsall	26	271%	225%
Wolverhampton	18	38%	100%

- When considering the number of households in the City, the prevalence of street homelessness is lower in Birmingham than the national average; ranking fourth of eight Core Cities (Fig.5);

Figure 5: Prevalence of Street Homelessness (2016) (Rate per 1,000 households)



- An initial root cause analysis of 217 individuals on the street was undertaken to better understand the recent sharp rise in people sleeping on the streets in the City. The findings are summarised in Table 3;

Table 3: Street Homelessness Initial Root Cause Analysis (January 2016 Snapshot Survey)

Reason for Homelessness?		Last Settled Accommodation?		Previous Area?	
Refused to Say/Unknown	113	Refused to Say / Unknown	92	Birmingham	203
Evicted / Excluded	53	Hostel	52	Poland	5
Asked to Leave Family/Friends	22	Private Landlord (Birmingham)	18	London	4
Relocated for Work	7	Friends	16	Germany	2
Abandoned	6	Other	16	Dudley	1
Relationship Breakdown	4	Family Home	11	Wolverhampton	1
Chose to Move On	4	Supported Housing	7	Elsewhere	1
Left Due to Other Tenants	3	Hostel (Poland)	3		
Discharge Hospital / Prison	3	BCC Tenancy	2		
Travelled Abroad	1				
Licence Expired	1				

4.4 Temporary Accommodation

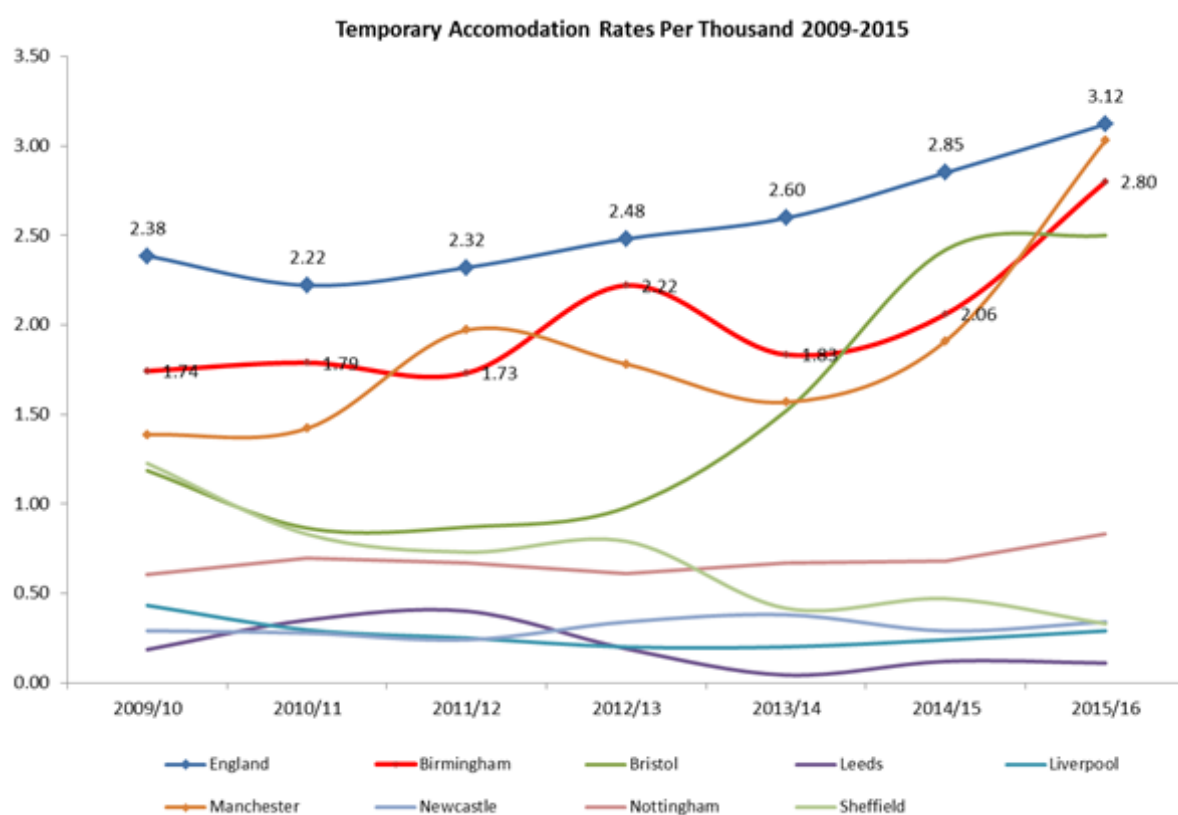
- Temporary accommodation is used to provide emergency accommodation whilst undertaking investigations into homelessness and following the acceptance of a homeless duty to accommodate households waiting for the offer of permanent accommodation.
- Almost half of the households in temporary accommodation require a 2 bed property (Table 4);

Table 4: Demand for Temporary Accommodation by Property Size (April 2016)

	Housing Requirement			
	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4+ Bed
Households in TA (April 2016 Snapshot)	10%	49%	19%	23%

- The rate of temporary accommodation usage in Birmingham (2.80 per 1,000 households) was below the national average for 2015/16 (3.12) but was higher than all but one of the Core Cities (Fig. 6). Since this time use of temporary accommodation has continued to increase;

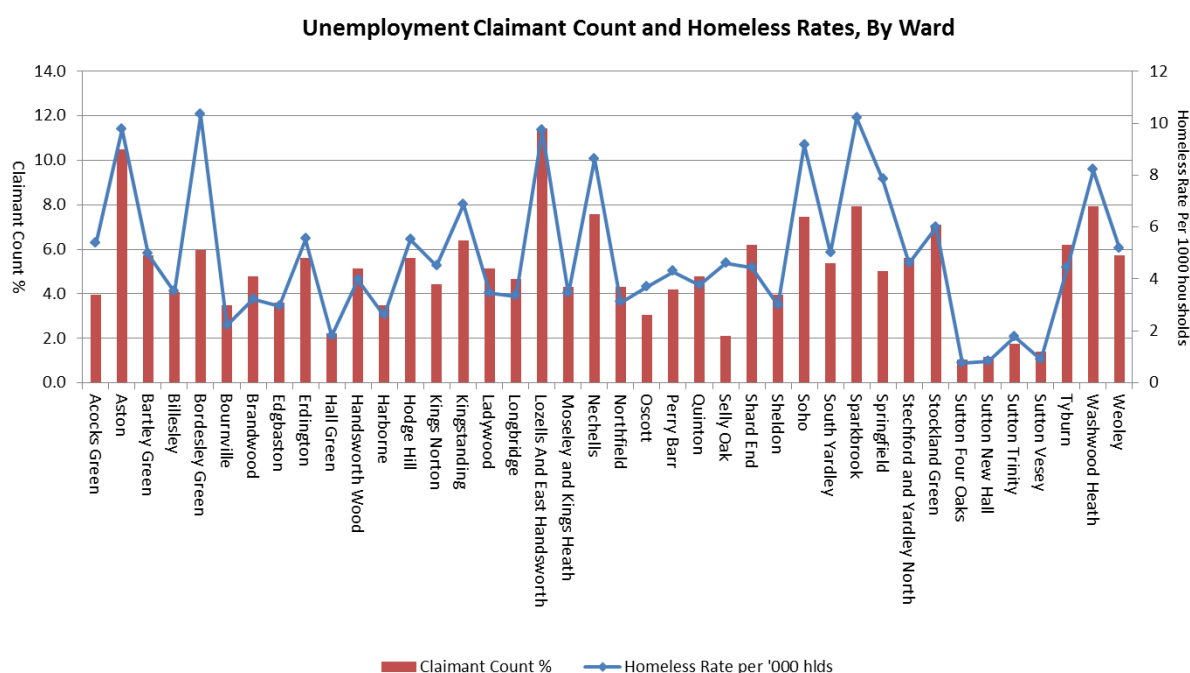
Figure 6: Temporary Accommodation Comparisons 2009 – 2015/16



4.5 Structural Causes of Homelessness

- There is a clear relationship in the city between deprivation – particularly unemployment – and homelessness.
- Figure 7 shows a close relationship between unemployment and homelessness across Birmingham’s wards. This reinforces the importance of access to employment as a key mechanism for preventing homelessness.

Figure 7: Unemployment Claimant Count and Homeless Rates, by Ward



5. Current Services

Birmingham has an excellent track record of innovation in the delivery of homelessness. The City is recognised as having examples of national best practice, for example the positive pathways model for youth homelessness, and strong community and third sector organisations who work well in partnership with the Council. Statutory services are supported by commissioned housing support and homeless prevention services.

- **Housing Options Service** - This is the service with responsibility for delivering the Council’s statutory duties including assessing applications for assistance under the homeless legislation and providing temporary accommodation for priority homeless households who are waiting for the offer of permanent accommodation;

- Homeless Prevention Grant – c.£1m per annum. This is a DCLG grant. Although it is no longer ring-fenced there is a very clear expectation from government that the funding is used to prevent homelessness based on a local understanding of the key drivers;
- Legal Advice and Enforcement of standards within the private rented sector;
- BCC Commissioned Housing Support services current annual spend is £24m. These services are mainly delivered via Third Sector providers and Housing Associations:
 - The contracts deliver housing related support services to key groups of vulnerable adults including homeless singles, families, young people including dedicated provision for care leavers, victims of domestic abuse, ex- offenders, learning disabilities, mental health, physical and sensory disabilities, gypsies and travellers;
 - The young people’s housing related support services draw in an additional resource of £3.165m through Supporting People contracts being matched to the European Social Fund – Youth Employment Initiative;
 - All services are delivered through a payment by outcomes contracting methodology and include outcomes relating to ability to live independently within own home, improved health and wellbeing and access to employment training and volunteering.

Services commissioned or established through the Housing Support and Homeless Prevention Grant programme and through successfully securing additional funding from specific government funding initiatives include:

- Let to Birmingham Social Lettings Agency to improve access to decent private rental accommodation; which contributes in the region of 200 homelessness prevention and relief interventions per annum;
- Maintained investment in a street homeless outreach service which has been a service in operation for over 15 years;
- Funded drop-in welfare services for people to access food and showering facilities since April 2011;
- Re-commissioned immediate access accommodation for vulnerable single people in need of accommodation and support;
- Funded the continuation of a pilot Hospital Discharge Pathway Service for persons being discharged from hospital with no fixed abode with the aim of reducing A&E re-admissions;
- Trialled a Homeless Street Triage (HOST) service in 2015 to link up and co-ordinate responses to rough sleeping between the public, police and homeless outreach teams;
- Recently re-commissioned supported accommodation provision for former offenders;

- Increased refuge provision for victims of domestic abuse;
- Since 2010, continually invested in service provision for young people at risk of homelessness delivered via a Youth Hub by a multi-agency service which includes Birmingham City Council's homeless and Children's services. The youth hub works with over 4700 young people each year; 84% of those young people are prevented from accessing statutory homeless or children's social care services;
- Maintained provision of cold weather emergency accommodation and partnership working with faith communities to help expand this across the city;
- Launched an Accreditation Scheme for co-ordinating and making best use of community and voluntary outreach services.

Table 5: Prevention and Relief Interventions 2015-16

Case able to remain in existing home, as a result of:	Total Cases	% of Total cases
Crisis intervention - providing emergency support	684	42.2
Assistance enabling household to remain in private or social rented sector	466	28.8
Resolving housing benefit problems	111	6.9
Mediation using external or internal trained family mediators	101	6.2
Other	84	5.2
Financial payments from a homeless prevention fund	61	3.8
Conciliation including home visits for family or friend threatened exclusions	53	3.3
Debt advice	29	1.8
Negotiation or legal advocacy enabling household to remain in private rented sector	18	1.1
Resolving rent or service charge arrears in the social or private rented sector	8	0.5
Mortgage arrears interventions or mortgage rescue	3	0.2
Sanctuary scheme measures for domestic violence	1	0.1
TOTAL	1619	100
Case assisted to obtain alternative accommodation, in the form of PRS Accommodation:	Total Cases	% of Total Cases
Supported accommodation	2337	37.7
Hostel or House in Multiple Occupation (HMO)	1795	28.9
Other	949	15.3
Private rented sector accommodation with landlord incentive scheme	338	5.4
Accommodation arranged with friends or relatives	261	4.2
Social housing - management move of existing LA tenant	256	4.1
Social housing Part 6 offer of LA accommodation or nomination to PRP	151	2.4
Private rented sector accommodation without landlord incentive scheme	100	1.6
Social housing - negotiation with an PRP outside Part 6 nomination arrangement	17	0.3
Low cost home ownership scheme, low cost market housing solution	1	0
TOTAL	6205	100

6. Stakeholder Feedback

During the review, we engaged with many stakeholders and providers of homeless services. Key issues in respect of gaps in current services are summarised below:

- Scope to better track client progress between services and understand more about the impact and sustainability of current prevention interventions;
- There is a role for targeted earlier intervention and prevention e.g. schools education;
- Gap in support for vulnerable clients navigating and accessing services; welfare and tenancy related especially in the private rented sector;
- Private Tenancy Breakdown is a major issue – should be a focus for prevention activity;
- Approach to homelessness as a result of domestic abuse needs refreshing;
- Shortages of move-on accommodation for those transitioning out of supported housing;
- LHA shared room rate is an issue in Birmingham – Black Country BRMA is more generous than Birmingham BRMA rents set by the Valuation Office Agency;
- Could do more through partnership work on shared housing provision.

7. Emerging Issues

A range of national housing policies are likely to increase the pressure on homelessness services in Birmingham:

Welfare Reform and housing costs:

- U35's shared accommodation rate. The introduction of the rate into social housing will create difficulties in discharging homeless duties to those under 35;
- Benefit Cap - over 4000 households affected. This will have a particular impact on larger households;
- Restrictions on HB entitlement for 18-21 year olds;
- Reform of supported housing funding.

Supply of Accommodation:

- Competition from other LA's placing homeless households into Birmingham;
- Devolved HB budgets for management of temporary accommodation;
- HCA investment focused on homeownership;

- Broader classification for “affordable housing” including starter homes;
- -1% p/a reduction in social housing rental income;
- Right to Buy for Housing Association tenants.

Homelessness Reduction Bill:

- When enacted this will place new legal duties on local councils to assess every eligible applicant, regardless of priority need, and help those who are threatened with homelessness to keep their home or find an alternative.

8. Homeless Review – Key Messages

- National housing and welfare policy is contributing to extreme pressure on homelessness services in the city and a significant increase in the levels of street homelessness. Recent DCLG figures on street homelessness clearly show that this is a national issue. We should seek to use all channels to maintain a national debate on this issue;
- Birmingham can build on its excellent record of partnership working and innovation, led by key players in the City to broker new deals with Government. These assets and expertise can also continue to successfully bring in new funding opportunities as they arise;
- Within the city we need to develop a new homelessness strategy to make best use of the assets that we have. The scale of the challenge and the budget pressures facing the Council will necessitate fundamental changes in the way in which services are delivered. The creation of a single homeless system adopting a positive pathway model bringing together opportunities from health, education, training and employment in addition to housing needs to be prioritised. This vision demands a different approach to commissioning that is more flexible both in terms of the use of funding streams and in its ability to respond to evidence of changing demands;
- In terms of our policy and commissioning approach – to be outlined in a new strategy - we need to review:
 - approaches to enable people to access and sustain private rented tenancies;
 - provision of hostel accommodation in the city in the context of changes to supported housing funding;
 - further work on root cause analysis of homelessness, including street homelessness. Engaging with experts by experience will be particularly critical for this activity;
 - housing options for 18-21 year olds and single under-35's affected by benefit changes – with a clear link to employment and training;

- links with the Domestic Abuse strategy to identify the most appropriate options for people experiencing domestic abuse;
- there is an opportunity to bring together funding streams for 16 plus supported accommodation and associated support services from across Supporting People, Children in Care budgets, Public Health and Homelessness Prevention to jointly commission services using the positive pathway model which has been recognised as best practice by DCLG;
- how we learn from other local authorities including establishing a regional and core city learning and best practice hub;
- our approach to securing temporary accommodation in the context of welfare benefit changes;
- how we configure services to respond to the forthcoming Homeless Reduction Act.