



West Midlands
Combined Authority

WMCA Board

Date	28 June 2019
Report title	West Midlands Homelessness Taskforce - Update and Forward Plan
Portfolio Lead	Public Service Reform & Social Economy - Councillor Yvonne Davis Chair of the Homelessness Taskforce Members Advisory Group - Councillor Sharon Thompson
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Report has been considered by	Programme Board - 14 June 2019

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The WMCA Board is recommended to:

- (1) Note this update on the work of the West Midlands Homelessness Taskforce – and its basis in cross-regional collaboration to support the statutory role of local authorities.
- (2) Endorse the Taskforce’s proposed forward plan – including specific actions to add value around five key priority areas incorporating welfare reform, housing affordability, support for Housing First and public service collaboration.
- (3) Agree to providing oversight and accountability for the Taskforce within the mainstream portfolio arrangements of the WMCA, and via the scrutiny and support of the Members Advisory Group

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to:

- (a) Update members on the purpose, work programme and progress to date of the West Midlands Homelessness Taskforce (WMHTF) – a partnership between local authorities, public services, civil society and business sector partners established by the WMCA in 2017.
- (b) Re-state the over-arching goal of the Taskforce – which is to support the ‘designing out’ of homelessness within the West Midlands: supporting and working with statutory partners to help tackle root causes, policy determinants and promote actions that make a difference to citizens, families and communities affected.
- (c) To request the Board’s approval of a forward plan that would further the work of the Taskforce – strengthening the underlying partnership, working constructively with local authorities and public services, and promoting its goals across the WMCA’s policies and programmes.

1.2 Homelessness creates misery for citizens, families and communities. Its determinants are complex – a mix of funding cuts, policy choices, local circumstances and the ability of the system to come together in preventing and relieving its effects. Against some of these factors, this region has been pushing against the tide – with the effect of macroeconomic change, national welfare policy and the fiscal squeeze on local government being felt acutely in this region.

1.3 Homelessness is a complex issue which requires a whole system approach and in reality is addressed:-

1. At a local level through a variety of interventions led by Local Authorities strategically, statutorily and in local delivery partnerships
2. At a Combined Authority level where collaboration efforts and approaches add real value.

1.4 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017(HRA) came into force April 2018 and extended the responsibilities of Local Authorities, especially around the prevention of homelessness. In addition the HRA has increased expectations that local partners meaningfully collaborate, including via the ‘duty to refer’ by public bodies, for homelessness assistance, of those threatened with homelessness. In the West Midlands there is a long history of activity to prevent and relieve homelessness, with outcomes that have often been better than comparative national data. But the headline figures are clear; they tell the story of how difficult (and systemic) an issue homelessness is to resolve within the current national policy context.

- 1.5 The purpose of the Taskforce has been to ensure we are drawing on all of our collective resources and partnerships within this difficult context, and working as collaboratively as possible – across the region’s political differences – to do it. The WMCA and Mayor have no statutory responsibilities specifically for homelessness – and nor does this paper attempt to suggest they should have. The Taskforce was, rather, created to work in a space where regional collaboration and collective intent can help access resource, promote better coordination and practice, and support local partners. The means through which it has done this to date are outlined below.
- 1.6 The opportunity to use convening power to work together to tackle common challenges of public concern has also seen homelessness identified as a priority by Mayoral Combined Authorities in Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region CAs – with a similar emphasis on shared endeavour and the provision of coordination and support for local statutory authorities.
- 1.7 The Taskforce itself was launched in May 2017. It has received the support of all constituent members who are represented at an officer level on the WMHTF and lead members within a Members Advisory Group, comprising portfolio holders for homelessness within each of the constituent Local Authorities with representation from non-constituent members. It has added value to local authority provision in several areas – though as the figures suggest, this is against the backdrop of acute funding, policy and economic challenges which the whole system is having to deal with.
- 1.8 The partnership is now entering a period in which clarity of purpose, strength of collaboration and transparency will be crucial to the ongoing work and resilience of the Taskforce. This is why we are returning to WMCA Board to outline the forward plan and to seek approval, support and a steer from Members on that basis.

2. Background - The WMCA and Homelessness

- 2.1 Homelessness is a matter of real public concern and significant political importance. It has a substantial negative impact upon individuals and families affected, and wider social and economic consequences that are felt by citizens, communities and the public services around them.
- 2.2 Whilst the most visible form of homelessness, rough sleeping, has seen a 42% increase since 2017, this was against a backdrop in prior years of a regional and local trend of holding numbers steady and at a lower than average level. Concerted action continues to address the numbers of those rough sleeping and feedback from more recent counts estimate a lower number than those reflected in the November 2018 count. The wider less visible challenges also include the significant number of households with children in temporary accommodation. Five of the seven Local Authorities within the constituent WMCA have significantly higher rates of acceptances of statutory homelessness than the national average. The top three headline reasons in the region reflect the national picture: Ending of assured shorthold tenancies; Domestic Abuse; Families no longer willing or able to accommodate. Behind every application there are distinct personal circumstances and experiences.

- 2.3 The wider structural and policy context reflects the pressure on available affordable housing, the impact of public sector cuts to support services, alongside impacts of welfare reform including the freeze on housing related benefits. The overall financial cost of homelessness is expected to reach almost £300m by 2020, not including the social and health costs to families, children and vulnerable adults.
- 2.4 The prevention and relief of homelessness and the resources relating to that sit with each of the constituent local authorities, with committed leadership at local authority level optimising resources and addressing specific local situation. The intention of the Taskforce has been to work collaboratively across sectors to augment this picture – not to challenge or undermine it. This remains the goal.
- 2.5 The original intention was that the regional scale and convening purpose of the WMCA should bring added value to existing work on homelessness, especially as it touches upon so many different determinants and areas (such as economy, skills, housing and wellbeing) in which the WMCA has some ability to act. The Homelessness Taskforce was thus established as a body around which expertise, collaboration and resources might be formed. The Taskforce is independently chaired by Jean Templeton, CEO of St Basils. Political oversight is provided by a Members Advisory Group, chaired by Councillor Sharon Thompson, Cabinet Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods in Birmingham.

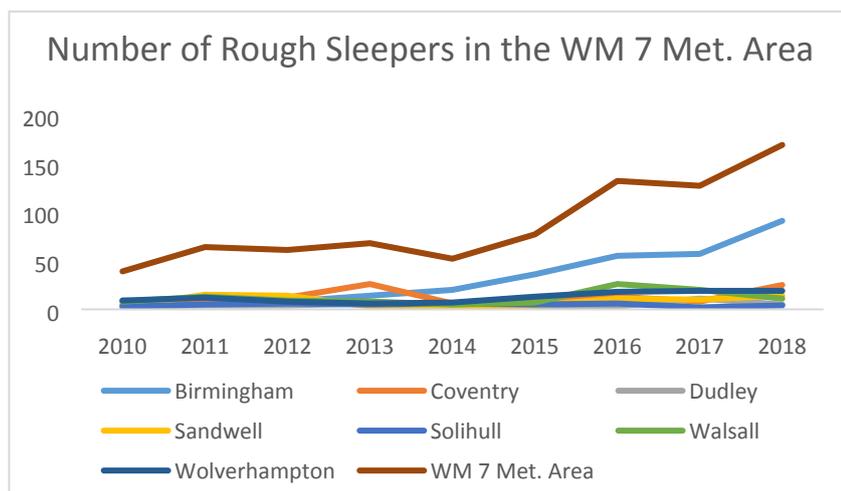
3. The National Picture and Local Action

- 3.1 Efforts to reduce and prevent homelessness in the West Midlands take place within a difficult national context – one in which some progressive policy and legislation has been passed, but against a backdrop of real fiscal and economic challenges.
- 3.2 Government set a national target in March 2018 to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminate it by 2027. Government then established its own Rough Sleeper Taskforce, with an advisory panel including the Mayor and the WMHTF Chair. The Rough Sleepers Unit at the MHCLG has been strengthened, with the intention of better performing its role to advise and fund specific workstreams relating to the reduction of rough sleeping within Local Authorities.
- 3.3 The figures for the 2018 rough sleeper count show an increase in rough sleeping from 295 to 420 (+42%), although the rate per 10,000 households across the whole region is lower than the national and regional average (1.5). The count in the West Midlands 7 Met area increased from 127 to 169 (+33%), mainly due to increases in Birmingham (from 57 to 91, up 60%) and Coventry (from 8 to 25, up 213%). The region has areas with high levels of temporary accommodation use. As the data below show, these figures are part of a medium term regional and national trend, although more recent counts reflect activity to reduce numbers of those rough sleeping. Street activity unrelated to homelessness is also an issue that Local Authorities are grappling with.

Snap shot Rough Sleeper counts and estimates submitted by local authorities to MHCLG in Autumn 2017 & 2018 (as above- these may be subject to recent change)

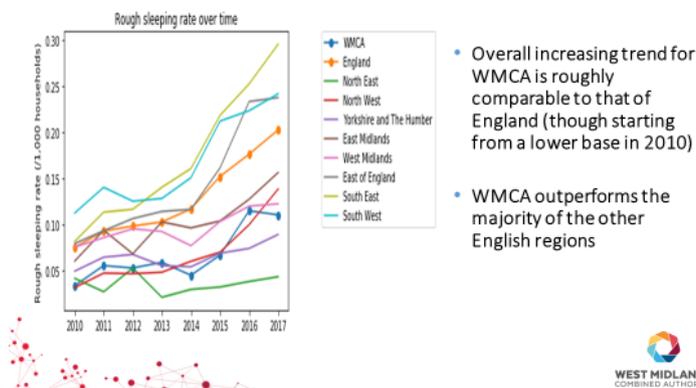
Area	2017	2018	Change 17 - 18	% Change 17 - 18
England	4751	4677	-74	-2%
West Midlands	295	420	125	42%
WMCA	127	169	42	33%
Birmingham	57	91	34	60%
Coventry	8	25	17	213%
Dudley	11	5	-6	-55%
Sandwell	10	14	4	40%
Solihull	2	4	2	100%
Walsall	10	11	-9	10%
Wolverhampton	19	19	0	0%

Data source: MHCLG, 2019



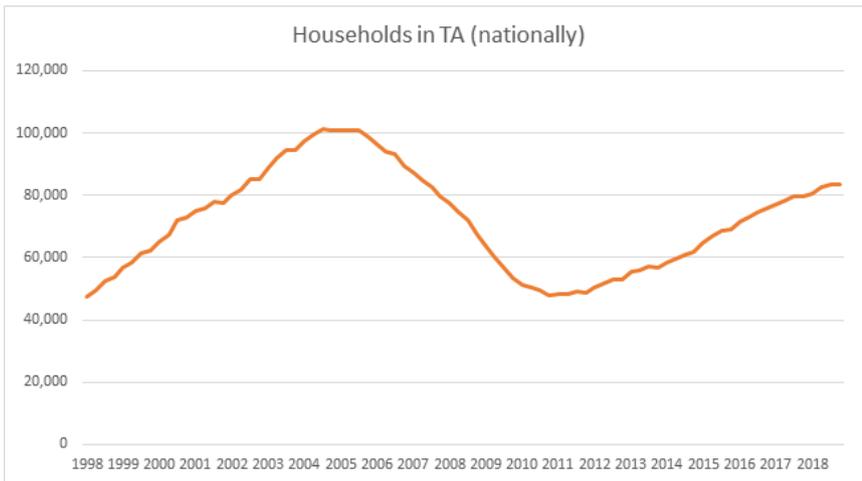
Data source: MHCLG, 2010 - 2019

Rough sleeping by English region

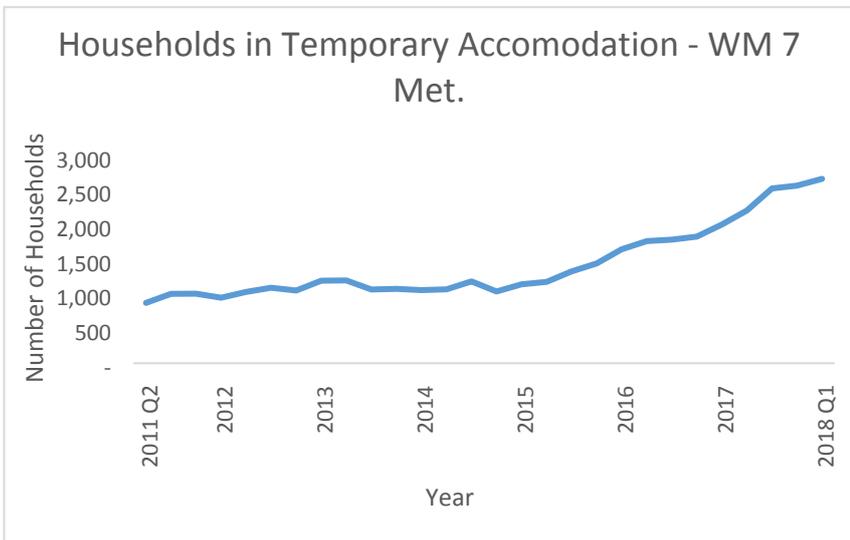


- Overall increasing trend for WMCA is roughly comparable to that of England (though starting from a lower base in 2010)
- WMCA outperforms the majority of the other English regions

Data Source: MHCLG, WMCA, CGI



Data source: MHCLG, 2019



Data source: MHCLG, 2011 - 2018

- 3.4 Each Local Authority, in the context of having legal responsibilities, powers and resources, has continued to deliver and develop a range of provision to prevent and relieve homelessness within their Local Authority area. With the additional responsibilities attached to the Homelessness Reduction Act, Local Authorities have reviewed homelessness strategies and incorporated specific plans in relation to rough sleeping.
- 3.5 The expansion of the Rough Sleeper Unit at MHCLG, and the inclusion of a greater number of Local Authorities within the Ministry's primary remit, has led to further Local Authorities receiving grants under the Rough Sleepers Initiative. These grants are funding a range of initiatives including expansion of outreach services, provision of accommodation access, and commissioning of services for those with poor mental health and substance misuse.
- 3.6 Local Authorities have also sought to protect budgets that fund services that prevent and relieve homelessness. Activities including advice, emergency accommodation, floating support, and supported housing are commissioned in most areas across the WMCA area.

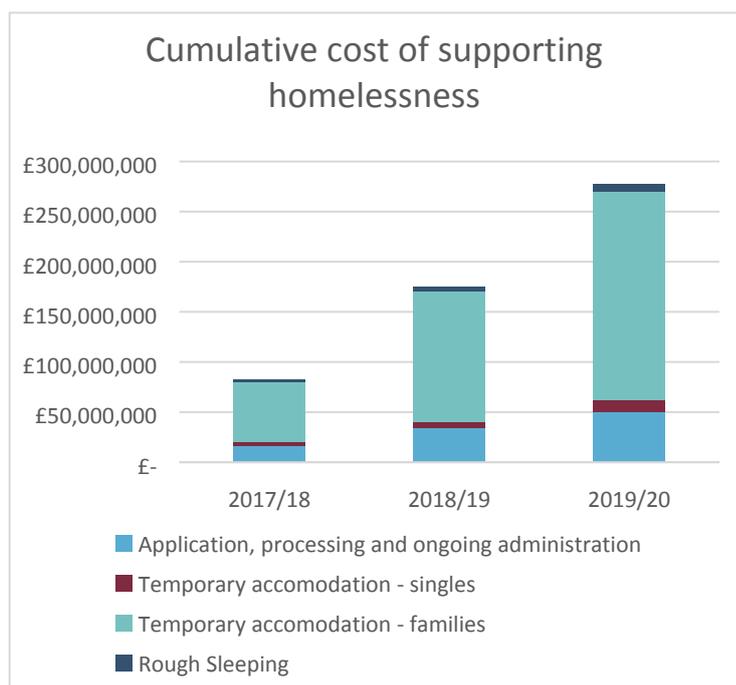
3.7 Delivery models across the Local Authorities have varied, as do the challenges, with responsibility and leadership coming from a range of different places within Local Authorities. This includes Public Health and Housing Departments. It is clear that the prevention and relief of homelessness is a priority across all of the region's authorities.

4. Understanding the Impact of Homelessness in the WMCA region

4.1 The first task of the WMHTF was to understand the evidence base: on the causes and effects of homelessness, and on the impacts on individuals, families and on the public purse. The consultancy KPMG undertook pro-bono work in 2017 on behalf of the Homelessness Taskforce looking at current data on homelessness, trends and attaching financial costs to scenarios.

4.2 Based upon 'do nothing' projections, this work estimated that the cost of supporting the immediate presenting needs of homeless households in the West Midlands by 2020, to rise from circa £100m to £278m. This includes the:

- Cost of homeless applications £50.7m
- Temporary accommodation for single homeless £20.1m
- Temporary accommodation for homeless families £20.8m
- Additional cost of rough sleeping £7.8m



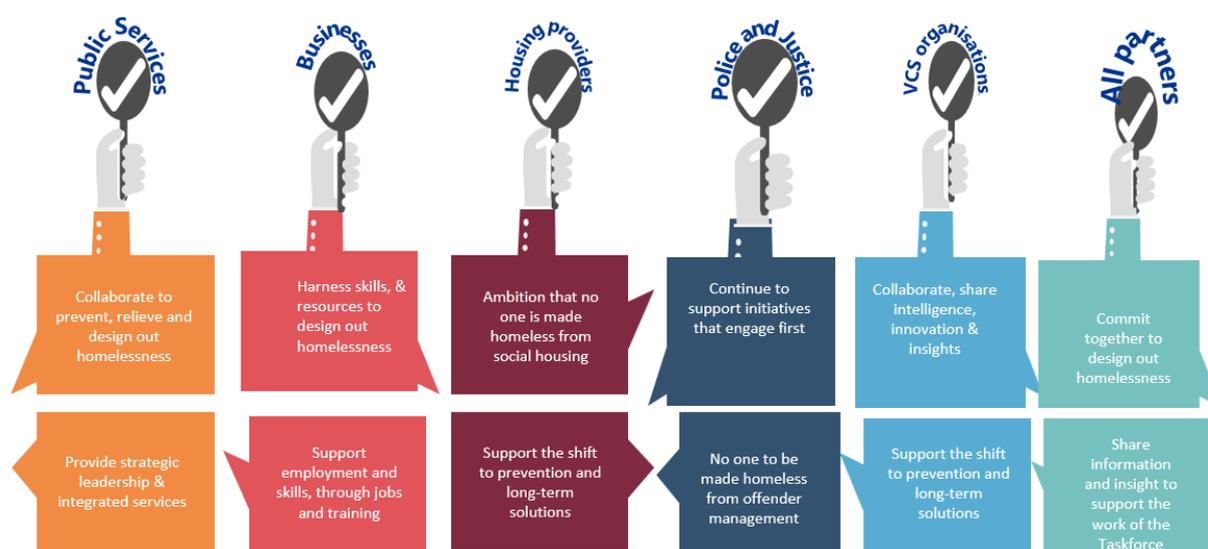
4.3 This work, which we hope to update over the coming months, forms an important part of the regional case for change. Note that the Homelessness Reduction Act has brought a change nationally in homelessness data reporting requirements, and these changes have resulted in delays in the availability of data to analyse. We also anticipate that, in the short term, costs will increase as a result of the additional duties to a wider cohort through the HRA. Early adopter experience indicates that as prevention activities take effect, the costs of statutory homelessness will reduce.

4.4 In April 2019 St Mungo's and Homeless Link published a major report on the loss of expenditure in the homelessness sector by region (as well as the national picture in light of fiscal austerity). In the West Midlands this showed a 59% reduction in funding of single homeless services between 2008/9 and 2017/18. For families there was a 15% increase in the same period – much of this relates to the increase in costs of placing families in temporary accommodation. Overall this represents a 42% reduction in spending power.

5. Context and Background to the Homelessness Taskforce

- 5.1 The WMHTF has an independent chair. It comprises senior officers from the seven constituent WMCA local authorities alongside other public and voluntary sector agencies, as well as representation from the Business community and Housing Association sector. Other agencies represented include DWP, National Housing Federation, Crisis, Women's Aid, West Midlands Fire Service, Public Health England, West Midlands Police, Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner and Gowling CLG (representing the business community). The Taskforce has taken time to build a collaborative programme and a shared vision.

WMCA Homelessness Taskforce – our commitments to making a difference



- 5.2 Whilst rough sleeping can draw the greatest concern and activity, partners recognise rough sleeping as the 'tip of an iceberg' of homelessness. The activities of the WMHTF are therefore committed to supporting local authorities and public services in addressing the prevention and relief of homelessness in all its forms.

- 5.3 This follows the key principles of:

- Achieving System Change
- Working Collaboratively
- Connecting Mainstream Strategies
- A People Centred Preventative Approach

- 5.4 Due to the varying nature of homelessness and how the law varies in the way in which it affects homeless people, Task Groups (reporting to the Taskforce) were set up reflecting the primary affected groups – Rough Sleepers; Children & Families; Young People (16-25) and Older Singles (25+). These groups do not exclude other cohorts of homelessness, nor cross cutting issues, which are picked up within the Task Groups or the work of the Taskforce.

5.5 Each Task Group (made up of a small number of WMHTF members) undertook a review of homelessness against a 'positive pathway' model of prevention, relief and recovery. From those Task Groups arose key gaps, challenges, asks and areas where change is sought. These are outlined below:

6. Key Gaps and Challenges identified through each of the Task Groups

Rough Sleepers

- Gaps in resources for consistent multi-disciplinary Street Intervention Team approach.
- Gaps in physical health nursing, drug and alcohol treatment, and mental health prevention and crisis interventions.
- People who are migrants and understood to have 'no recourse to public funds' having very limited options in support and means to exit the streets.
- Public understanding of homelessness, the relationship with street begging, and opportunities to positively help.
- Accommodation and support that is accessible and sufficiently extensive that can help the most excluded, entrenched and with greatest support requirements.

Children & Families

- Financial inclusion is not sufficiently consistent and resilient, specifically lacking access to timely benefit and financial advice, dealing with Local Housing Allowance shortfalls, and the impact of regulations around benefits including Universal Credit.
- Communications that convey key messages to the public and especially those at risk, and make use of key contact points with the public.
- Temporary accommodation use is at very high levels including bed & breakfast provision.
- Lack of options and access to suitable accommodation, including competition for limited resources, especially the affordable, larger family homes.
- Enabling people to stay in their own homes; targeted prevention can provide a means of avoiding homelessness occurring, opportunities exist in areas of employment, debt, antisocial behaviour, and domestic abuse.
- Those with the highest levels of presenting needs are also the hardest to house, including those with multiple needs, intentionally homeless, repeat customers, and large families.
- Access to, and best use of, stock, and stock development are not consistently achieved across the WMCA area, with varied practice and priorities across the region.

Young People

- Affordability and access to the Private Rented Sector, including the limitations imposed by the Local Housing Allowance.
- Lack of a consistent youth housing offer which includes the relationship between employment and affordable housing.
- Access to good early advice relating to decision making around housing options.

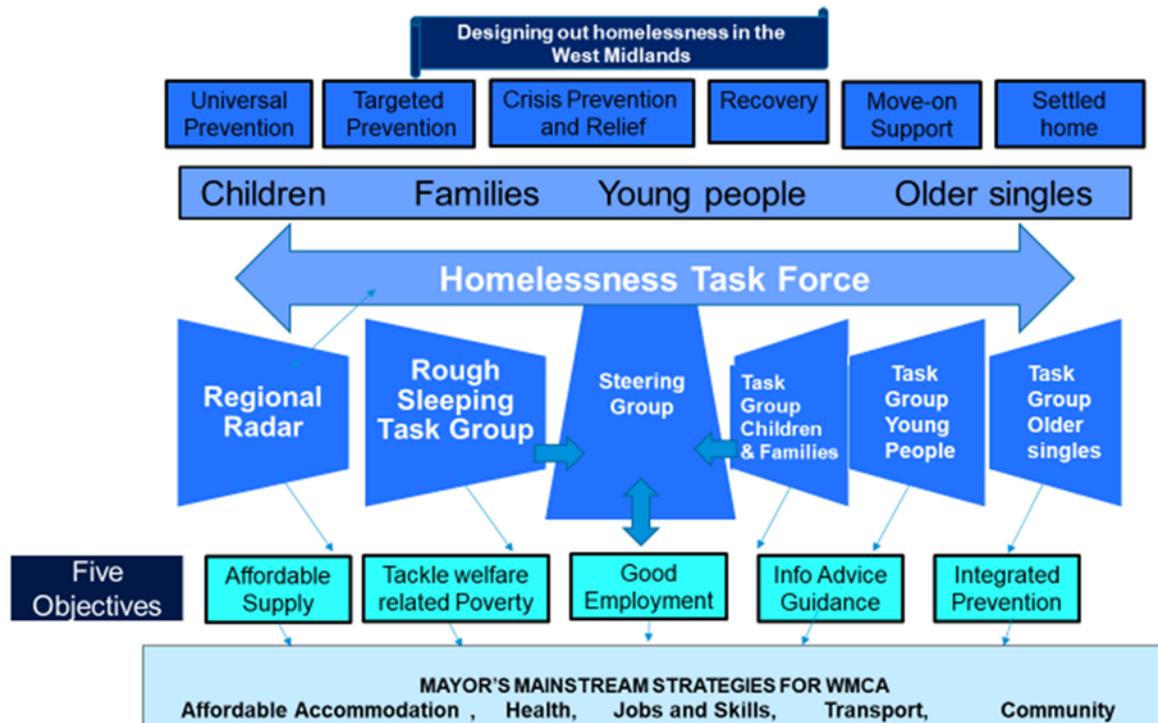
- Good employment contracts that enable security of income and work.

Older Singles

- Housing advice and financial advice need to be made available early.
- An opportunity for businesses to work with people with lived experience of homelessness, not only providing good employment opportunities, but also understanding the signs of employees with financial and housing problems.
- Tenancy breakdown within the Private Rented Sector.
- People often not knowing where to go for support and advice.
- People being made homeless as a result of leaving a public institution e.g. Prison, NASS accommodation, hospital discharge, or facing challenges of domestic abuse or having no recourse to public funds.
- Affordability and access to housing, welfare policy is a significant barrier for people on low incomes and in crisis from sustaining their tenancies.

7. Five Objectives for the Taskforce

7.1 The issues raised by the Task groups were distilled by the WMHFT into five headline objectives for the West Midlands - represented visually on the 'plan on a page' below. The diagram makes clear the 'life cycle' approach taken by the Taskforce, and the extent to which a whole system approach will be needed to make a long term impact on the issue. The funding issue is critical – but so is the need for better and more coordinated policy around poverty, welfare, work and housing alongside more systematic public service collaboration.



7.2 The WMHTF has been clear that, to be as embedded and effective as possible, its five objectives must be built into the mainstream strategies of public services (and the WMCA), and must draw from and be reflected across regional practice. We are beginning this journey and welcome a steer from WMCA members as to how this can best be achieved beyond the specific remit of the WMCA itself. We will continue to look to Taskforce members and the Members Advisory Group for advice on what actions add real value to existing local authority provision. This builds on the following:

The 5 Objectives:-

1. **Accessible, Affordable, Accommodation;** actions for the WMCA include:
 - Establishing a West Midlands definition of 'affordable' accommodation that supports the principle of designing out homelessness and relates to ability to pay, rather than arbitrary national ratios.
 - Ensuring that housing development enabled by WMCA maximises affordable homes aligned to need; and
 - Promoting the aspiration amongst social landlords that no one is made homeless from social housing

2. **Tackling Welfare Related Poverty;** actions for the WMCA include:
 - Supporting the case for reform of evidenced negative impacts arising from Universal Credit; and
 - Supporting the early review of Local Housing Allowance rates with a view to preventing and alleviating homelessness

3. **Access to Good Employment;** actions for the WMCA include:
 - Promote and enable the Youth Housing Offer which supports work and independence
 - Align Employment Support Framework to enable access to work for homeless and vulnerable groups
 - Promoting to employers their role in preventing homelessness, supporting the homelessness sector and creating employment opportunities, through Thrive, a Mayors Pledge and other initiatives

4. **Information, Advice and Guidance;** actions for the WMCA include:
 - Deliver a public facing, homelessness web resource (such as Street Support) of information and advice for the West Midlands; and
 - Support and develop Alternative Giving Schemes (such Change into Action which was launched in Birmingham) across the WMCA area

5. **Integrated Prevention;** actions for the WMCA include:
 - Working in partnership with the Chartered Institute of Housing on a collaborative programme (beginning with a series of cross-sector workshops) to build upon the new 'duty to refer' within the Homelessness Reduction Act and promote and establish a voluntary 'commitment to collaborate' across public services. This will include colleagues in Health, Criminal Justice and DWP.

8. Members Advisory Group

- 8.1 It is important to the Taskforce Chair and members that the work noted above is consistent and robust enough to achieve political consensus, to clearly add value to local efforts, and be resilient to short-term policy changes. We have therefore established a Members Advisory Group (MAG), which supports the governance and operations of the Homelessness Taskforce. This is constituted of the Housing/Homelessness portfolio holder for each of the Constituent Members plus a representative of the non-constituents, and is chaired by Councillor Sharon Thompson, Homes and Neighbourhoods Cabinet Member for Birmingham.
- 8.2 The MAG has written to the Mayor and CEO of the WMCA, commending the 5 Objectives and the ambition of embedding these objectives into the mainstream strategies of the WMCA.
- 8.3 The MAG has offered to provide oversight and scrutiny function on behalf of the WMCA to the Homelessness Taskforce and to help overcome barriers to achieving its objectives. That is ensuring that all new, and where possible, existing programmes incorporate the objective of designing out homelessness; and that the WMCA adopt and progress work to achieve its five Objectives. The Mayor and CEO of the WMCA responded, indicating their commitment to do this. Ultimately, accountability rests with constituent authorities and the WMCA Board.
- 8.4 The task of 'designing in' the prevention of homelessness into mainstream strategies and programmes is ongoing. Representatives of each WMCA Directorate are meeting monthly to progress this work. We will need the support and steer of members to ensure this internal coordination is reflected in collaborative practice across the region.

9. Moving Forward – the ongoing work of the Homelessness Taskforce

- 9.1 Statutory responsibility for homelessness rests clearly with constituent Local Authorities. The focus of the Taskforce has been to contribute through joint working on the wider systemic issues which can support Local Authorities to achieve systemic and structural prevention. Our approach is in line with other combined authorities – which also emphasise the convening role of a Mayoralty, and the power of collective commitments around prevention, referral and relief.
- 9.2 By engaging across sectors, the Taskforce is seeking to spread the commitment to collaborate to prevent and relieve homelessness, and where possible to inform the WMCA's emerging strategies and development programmes to 'design in prevention and design out homelessness.' This has to be a whole system commitment.
- 9.3 Each Local Authority retains the duty and resources to prevent and relieve homelessness and to have a strategy that sets out both (a) how this will be done in relation to homelessness in general and (b) specifically in terms of rough sleeping. The varying size of Local Authorities and other factors means that the challenges and solutions can be quite different according to local circumstances. The Homelessness Taskforce and the Task Groups are contributing to sharing intelligence, approaches and support across the constituent Local Authorities. It will continue to work with a mindset of listening, learning and adding value where the TF and the WMCA is best placed to do so.

9.4 The following sections outline specific strands of current and planned work for the TF:

10 Housing First & Other Initiatives

10.1 In addition to the systemic work of the WMHTF, there have been a number of specific achievements including

- A £9.6 million allocation to pilot a Housing First programme across the region;
- Change into Action – an Alternative Giving Scheme launched in December 2017;
- A partnership with National Express West Midlands providing over 3000 travel tickets to homeless people in crisis to facilitate access to accommodation and support;
- Faith & Homelessness conference and publication; and
- Sector specific consultations on Commitment to Collaborate to prevent and relieve homelessness (begun in May 2019)
- A Winter Plan which was agreed last year as part of the regional support mechanism for partners across the West Midlands.
- A £91,000 grant from MHCLG to prevent and relieve homelessness amongst veterans

10.2 Housing First represents a successful example of constituent authorities and the WMCA working together to secure £9.6m of central government funding, building on early work already happening within the region. The Housing First model was introduced in a 2018 WMCA Board Paper. It is based on the simple premise that the provision of stable housing is the best platform for people with the most complex needs to begin supported recovery and move away from rough sleeping. The model has been successfully applied in the U.S. and Europe, as well as here in Walsall.

10.3 The WMCA is one of three combined authorities that have received a government grant, and each have taken a slightly different approach. We have allocated the full grant amount to Constituent Local Authorities, each of which identified their local needs and ambition for Housing First, and a commitment to deliver a successful pilot. We are especially grateful to Birmingham City Council who did much of the preparatory work, are overseeing the mobilisation, and are the accountable body.

10.4 Since November 2018, through the early adopter models mobilised by local authorities in Birmingham, Dudley, Solihull, Walsall, and Wolverhampton, 55 individuals have been supported and accommodated at year end 2018-19. This met the revised target for 2018-19; there are now challenging targets for 2019-20 and 2020-21. Each Local Authority across the WMCA is currently working to award and mobilise operational Housing First support provider contracts.

	Units Target April 2021	Year end 2018-19	Total Funding Allocation
Birmingham	274	11	£4,073,633*
Coventry	110	0	£1,666,582
Dudley	14	4	£289,799
Sandwell	55	0	£935,137
Solihull	27	1	£518,163
Walsall	88	31	£1,331,032
Wolverhampton	49	8	£785,624
Total (up to)	617	55	£9.6m

*includes project management and data management costs

10.5 In support of Local Authority delivery of Housing First, the Homelessness Taskforce has:

- Brokered WMCA sponsorship of an event for social housing providers to promote partnerships with Local Authorities in delivering Housing First. A second of these is scheduled for 20th June 2019.
- Leveraged bespoke DWP support for Housing First in support of landlords and tenants.
- Convened a meeting of Local Authorities, Housing First providers; mental health practitioners and commissioners to identify opportunities for gaps to be addressed.
- The Taskforce and WMCA will continue to be responsive to LA needs and support where appropriate and where needed.

11. Proposed Forward Plan

11.1 The following points outline the proposed forward plan for the Taskforce. As noted above, the Homelessness Taskforce is entering a crucial period in which it will need to identify some key areas of work on which to apply limited focus and resource. In identifying and presenting these the Homelessness Taskforce seeks the support – and steer – of the Board in achieving these objectives collaboratively. They are summarised below:

- A. *Accommodation* – promoting truly affordable housing that reflects real regional need
- B. *Welfare* – lobbying for changes to Universal Credit, Local Housing Allowances and Private Rented Standards
- C. *Housing First* – ongoing support for delivery of our West Midlands pilot programme
- D. *Rough Sleeping* – doing everything we can to support Local Authorities in delivery
- E. *Collaboration* – convening public services to embed a commitment to prevent and relieve, and work with Landlords to operationalise the ambition to make no one homeless
- F. *Business* – promote their role in supporting prevention, relief and opening employment opportunities as a way to recovery
- G. *Ring-fenced Fund* – a means of providing financial support to specific projects

11.2 These are outlined in more depth below:

Access to affordable accommodation

- 11.3 Working with the Housing & Regen directorate at WMCA, the Homelessness Taskforce is supporting the development of a local/regional definition of affordable accommodation in the West Midlands context. Alongside that will be support for a development programme that reflects the prevention and relief of homelessness across the region.
- 11.4 The WMCA collectively has the opportunity to be a trailblazer for schemes which meet the needs of those currently struggling to find and keep affordable housing. In addition, the commitment to collaborate from social landlords includes an ambition that no-one is made homeless from social housing. WMHAP are exploring innovative ways of supporting families to sustain their home, even when the tenancy is jeopardised. The evaluation of Housing First will illustrate the importance of longer term skilled support for those with multiple and complex needs.

Welfare Related Poverty

- 11.5 Reflecting the availability and access to affordable accommodation, as well as matters of welfare related poverty, the Taskforce has identified difficulties in the operation of Government policy on the payment of housing cost entitlement which are having major negative impacts on homelessness in the region. In line with Government and regional commitments to look at quality, standards and affordability in the private rented sector and develop new policy options, this paper recommends four key actions to mitigate the impact of current policy on homelessness in the region.
- 11.6 Four specific proposed actions (including specific asks to Government) are:
1. Limit the application of the LHA Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) to those who are actually living in private rented shared accommodation.
 2. End the freeze on LHA rates and revalue for all types of accommodation - reinstate the LHA value to the 30th percentile of locally available private rents.
 3. Develop a new “deal” (LHA+) with PRS landlords who are willing to commit to good standards and fair access. This would involve landlords agreeing to meet the “decent homes” standard, provide reasonable lengths of tenancy, and accept tenants referred by local authorities. This could equate to social rents at 50th percentile. (Through this means, the problems associated with the non-commissioned exempt accommodation provision would start to be addressed).
 4. Improve the functionality of Universal Credit rent to be paid direct to the landlord by requiring Jobcentre staff to proactively offer this flexibility to all tenants from the start of tenancy, regardless of past vulnerability or rent history. This option should also be revisited if a tenant has a change in circumstances regarding their housing. This action will also reduce rent arrears and ultimately homelessness in the social housing sector.
- 11.7 Each of these actions would lead to a significant improvement in the contribution of the private rented sector. Taken together they could lead to a real improvement in homelessness outcomes. The Taskforce will continue to make this case for change through all available routes.

Housing First

- 11.8 The Homelessness Taskforce will continue to support the Housing First pilot, Birmingham as Accountable Body and Local Authorities in their delivery of the programme. The Homelessness Taskforce will provide scrutiny to the Housing First pilot, as collectively agreed, including a particular interest in seeing a measurable reduction in rough sleeping as people are housed and supported. The Homelessness Taskforce will continue to provide particular support in seeking to broker mental health services for Housing First, as well as access to suitable accommodation.

Rough Sleeping

- 11.9 The Rough Sleeping Task Group is now Chaired by an officer of Coventry City Council, and due to the ongoing and acute challenges of rough sleeping, will continue to function. Specific areas of work identified are:-
- The recording and learning from rough sleeper deaths
 - The provision of health services for rough sleepers (including drug related factors) – through work led by PHE
 - The approach to severe weather and communication around this
 - Approaches to enforcement, welfare provision, and alternative giving
- 11.10 Rough sleeper counts scheduled for Autumn 2019 will provide an important indicator measure of the impact of Housing First and other Local Authority measures of service delivery, of initiatives supported by the Homelessness Taskforce; and should show us where the WMHTF can support activities may need to be strengthened and/or approaches to date evaluated.

Strengthening Regional Collaboration

- 11.11 We have noted above that a systemic approach to homelessness prevention requires effective collaboration and partnership working. History tells us this has not always been prevalent – in this region or beyond. The Homelessness Reduction Act now requires certain public bodies to refer homeless people. But as a region we can go further. The ambition of the Homelessness Taskforce is for a much wider voluntary ‘commitment to collaborate’ to be adopted. This would see commitments made across our public services to work more closely together to ensure that no one is made homeless through failure demand, and that Local Authorities are better supported by the system in discharging their HRA duties. Birmingham has achieved early adoption from Birmingham Social Housing Partnership, trialling the Pathway model as a template and currently consulting with the City’s Health partners.
- 11.12 The WMHTF is being supported by the Chartered Institute of Housing to extend this approach across the region by conducting a series of focused workshops with public service partners (within key sectors including Health, the criminal justice system, DWP and with West Midlands Housing Association Partnership WMHAP) to design this ‘commitment to collaborate’. This will be a national first and an important plank of the region’s public service reform approach.

11.13 The WMCA has recently received a £91,000 Section 31 grant from MHCLG for work to prevent or relieve homelessness amongst veterans in the region. Proposals for this work are in development.

Business involvement

11.14 Businesses have offered meaningful support to the WMHTF, and offer an important route to prevent, relieve and help recovery from homelessness. The Taskforce has a distinct proposal to business:-

- a. Prevent homelessness by helping people remain in employment and to receive support that can prevent homelessness through their employer.
- b. Relieve homelessness by providing the right sort of support to the agencies and charities that work with homeless people.
- c. Help recovery from homelessness by enabling access to employment for people who have experienced homelessness.

11.15 The Homelessness Taskforce proposes to work in partnership with Business in the Community; Thrive into Work; Thrive at Work; Chamber of Commerce; Business Improvement Districts and others to achieve this.

Ring-Fenced Fund

11.16 The position of Mayor of the West Midlands can attract additional resources to particular causes. A number of projects, with the capacity to support the work of the Taskforce across the region, have been identified, but need funding. It is proposed that a specific ring-fenced fund (or similar) will be established with a focus on securing financial support for homelessness services across the region. This must be done without redirecting existing resources away from current programmes. Programmes proposed for such funding – the creation of a mainstream business proposal around homelessness, through the BITC good work framework; the establishment of a regional digital platform for homelessness service information and networks for giving and receiving support (for example Street Support).

12. Conclusion

12.1 The Homelessness Taskforce has brought together people from across sectors, disciplines and Local Authorities to take a fresh look at homelessness with a view to adding to local efforts and achieving 'prevention by design' in the developing strategies, systems and programmes that the Combined Authority creates. There has been a tremendous amount of goodwill, commitment and generosity of time, ideas and contributions. It is rare that there is an opportunity to trailblaze systemic change. It is much harder to change existing systems which are already under immense pressure. This has inspired those involved in the Taskforce to be ambitious and plan for what we want to achieve, not just what we want to avoid. We are now asking for the support of the WMCA Board to embed the collective work of the taskforce and approve the commitment to design out homelessness in the developing work of the CA.

13. Financial Implications

- 13.1 The Homelessness Taskforce was set up with minimal resources and considerable pro-bono support. There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report. However, some of the proposed actions underpinning the 5 objectives will require investment, and we recognise this will need to come from a mix of local, regional and national sources. As a Taskforce and as a region, we are committed to making a clear and pressing case to central government as to the need for properly funded mainstream public services which can support homelessness prevention on an ongoing basis.

Specific Financial Implications of Housing First:

- Funding for the Housing First pilot is provided by MHCLG directly to Birmingham City Council via a Section 31 grant agreement. The total funding over the 3 years of the pilot is £9.6m.
- The funding already received for the first year of the pilot is £1.44m. This budget covers the period from delivery of funding until March 2019.
- The second year tranche funding will be released shortly and the third year tranche in April 2020. The exact yearly allocations are subject to ongoing review.
- It will be the regions' responsibility to provide assurance to the MHCLG that funding is accounted for and is only applied to pilot-based activity.

14. Legal Implications

- 14.1 As this report makes clear, WMCA does not have specific statutory duties in relation to housing and homelessness. These powers and duties remain with and are discharged by the Constituent and Non-Constituent Authorities. It is recognised however that this is a problem which transcends individual authority boundaries and the issue touches upon a number of the powers of the Mayoral Combined Authority. The functions of skills, transport, economic development, public sector reform and facilitating the delivery of housing (including both market and affordable homes) across the region are all affected by and in turn can have an influence over the causes and incidence of homelessness in the region.

- 14.2 The Combined Authority and the Mayor have a functional power of competence under section 113A of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 to undertake actions relating to or incidental to their functions. In so far as the matters referred to in this report are concerned it is considered that these powers cover the actions and proposals relating to homelessness within the region.

Legal Implications of Housing First

- 14.3 The WMCA and Birmingham City Council have agreed that BCC is the accountable body for the receipt and expenditure of the Housing First funds. As accountable body Birmingham City Council is directly accountable to MHCLG for the funds, programme and outcomes. In agreeing to Birmingham City Council acting as accountable body, the WMCA will maintain an oversight and scrutiny of the Housing First programme.

- 14.4 A Memorandum of Understanding which has been agreed and returned to MHCLG underpins the relationship between WMCA and MHCLG.
- 14.5 A Memorandum of Understanding is in place between WMCA and BCC based upon the content of MoU between MHCLG and WMCA.
- 14.6 Oversight and scrutiny of the Housing First programme by the WMCA is being undertaken through the Homelessness Taskforce.
- 14.7 A Partnership Agreement has been prepared between Birmingham City Council and each of the 6 other Local Authorities, this specifies the service to be delivered and the outcomes sought. It is expected that the service requirements, including Housing First principles, evaluation requirement and outcomes will be reflected in any commissioning undertaken by Local Authorities.

15. Equalities Implications

- 15.1 The work of the Homelessness Taskforce targets some of the most vulnerable individuals in our communities and seeks to prevent homelessness in all of its forms. It has taken a person-centred life course approach to homelessness taking account of the demographics and equalities impacts for Children and Families, young people and older singles as well as those sleeping rough. We have specific expertise within the Taskforce looking at the root causes of homelessness for each group.
- 15.2 The Housing First pilot is designed to engage and include some of the most excluded and disadvantaged people in society. In the first instance identified as entrenched rough sleepers, and probably having multiple and complex needs, including poor mental health, substance misuse, offending behaviour, and financial exclusion. There will also be a preventative element to Housing First identifying those at greatest risk of becoming entrenched rough sleepers and determining means to divert them from rough sleeping.

16. Inclusive Growth Implications

- 16.1 The work of the Homelessness Taskforce addresses several of the indicators on the Inclusive Growth Framework. Its overall purpose is to strengthen the region's ability to support some of the most vulnerable people within the region and ensure that inclusive growth means inclusive for all, including those experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage.

17. Geographical Area of Report's Implications

The work of the Homelessness Taskforce and the implementation of the Housing First pilot spans across all seven constituent local authorities of the WMCA. The non-constituent members are represented through the Members Advisory Group. The forthcoming veterans work will apply to the constituent and some non-constituent authorities within the WMCA.

18. Other Implications

- 18.1 No other implications have been identified in this paper.

19. Schedule of Background Papers

None.