



TO: Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee

FROM: Strategic Director Adults and Health

DATE: 5th August 2024

PORTFOLIOS AFFECTED: All

WARDS AFFECTED: All

TITLE OF REPORT: Housing

1. PURPOSE

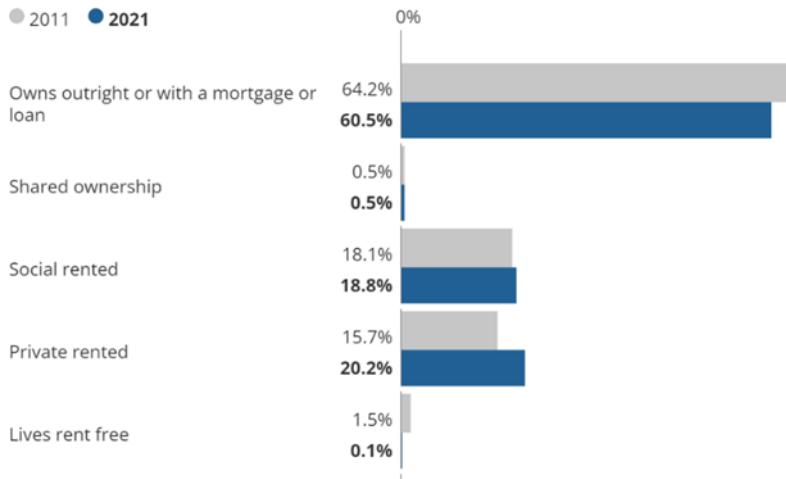
- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an information update on the various Housing functions of Blackburn with Darwen Council including the supply of and demand for housing, homelessness, and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs).
- 1.2 It provides a brief context to the BwD Housing market and updates on recent trends and activity across the various Housing services provided by the Council.

2. BACKGROUND

Housing Market

- 2.1 The Governance and approach to the Housing agenda in BwD was reviewed and updated in July 2024 with Directorate responsibility now as follows:
 - Adults and Health takes responsibility for housing needs, homelessness, asylum seekers, refugee's and HMOs.
 - Growth takes responsibility for housing strategy and housing standards.Both areas form part of a revised Housing and Public Health lead member portfolio overseen by Councillor Talbot.
- 2.2 The Census 2021 shows that 39% of households in Blackburn with Darwen are in rented accommodation. Chart 1 shows increasing rates of social and private renting in the borough. In the case of an increasing proportion of households in social rented accommodation, this is against a backdrop of an overall decrease across the North-West region. The increasing levels of privately renting in the Borough are more significant, with almost 12,000 households in this tenure in 2021.

Percentage of households by housing tenure, **Blackburn with Darwen**



Source: Office for National Statistics – 2011 Census and Census 2021

Chart 1 – households by tenure in BwD and changes over time, ONS Census 2011 and 2021

2.3 Census data also shows the number of households by property type in BwD. Chart 2 shows that over 25,000 (or 43.4% of total households in accommodation) reside in terraced housing which was mostly built in the 1900's pre-war.

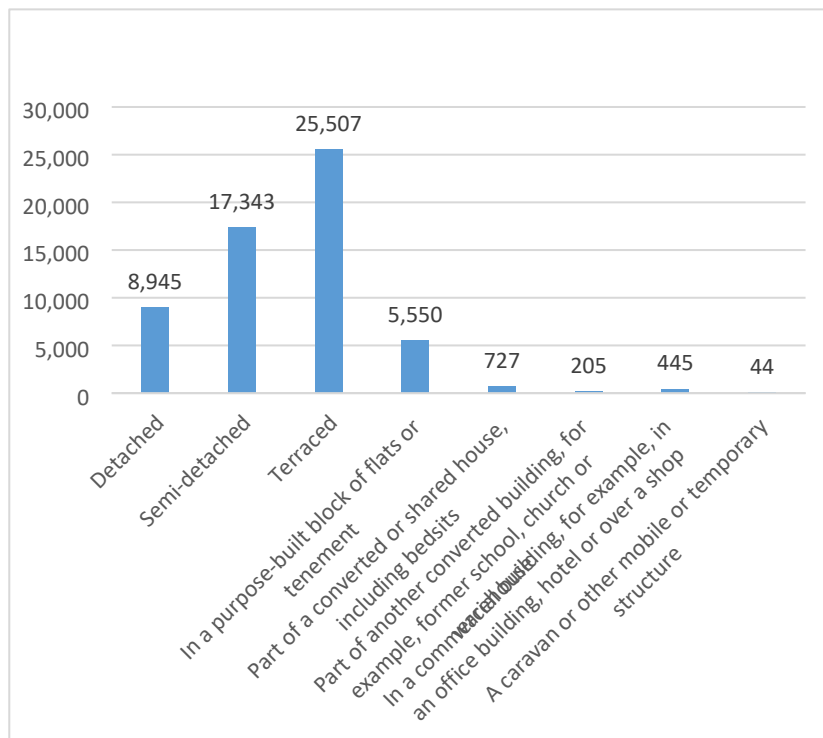


Chart 2 - Households in accommodation by property type in BwD, ONS Census 2021

2.4 In addition to the high proportion of terraced housing in BwD which can bring with it challenges regarding quality and energy efficiency due to the age profile of the housing stock, there is concern about the high number of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in the borough.

- 2.5 There are currently 128 known HMOs in the borough of which 40 are licensed HMOs who meet the criteria for mandatory or selective licencing. BwD does operate selective licensing schemes intended to address the impact of less engaged private landlords and where there is a disruptive impact on local communities. Schemes to date, which are in force for 5 years, have been helpful in prompting landlords to invest in their properties to improve their condition. They have helped increase rent levels, reduced the time to let properties, and reduced the number of vacant properties in the area.
- 2.6 BwD undertook a public consultation between 7 May – 26 July 2024 on a proposal to re-introduce and extend selective licensing in the Hollins Bank area of the Borough. The specified area represents 3,066 households across all tenures and the total number of private rented properties affected is 1,153. The level of private rented accommodation in the proposed selective licensing area is 37.6%; significantly higher than the 20.1% average across the borough. The area also falls within the top 5% of the most deprived areas in the country and is characterised by a mixture of tightly packed streets of two storey terraced housing and post war and more recent infill housing.
- 2.7 Some HMOs in BwD are particularly large with high volume which bring about additional management challenges as well as concerns regarding the quality of this accommodation. It is expected that there are other smaller scale HMOs in the borough that are not subject to mandatory or selective licensing however resources are being concentrated initially on those larger, higher risk, licensable HMOs.
- 2.8 The council has developed several initiatives to help manage and control the quality of accommodation and internal environment provided by these HMOs:
- HMO Strategic Group – This workgroup has been set up since late 2022 to oversee the larger licenced HMOs and to:
 - Monitor the quality, standards and issues arising from existing HMOs and B&Bs
 - Monitor the existing demand and ascertain the future needs for HMOs and B&Bs within the borough
 - HMO Tactical Group – This workgroup consists of internal and external partners who can bring legal weight and enforcement to ensure the HMOs are compliant with Health & Safety, adhere to license conditions, provide suitable support to vulnerable adults and work with the Council's housing teams in nominations and placements to individuals within the borough.
 - Article 4 Direction – The Council's Article 4 direction came into force in August 2023. This now requires anyone wishing to use a property as an HMO for 3 or more residents to secure planning approval for its use.
- 2.9 Further to the activity detailed in paragraph 2.8 the Council's Strategic Housing Team are currently preparing a programme of inspections for the licensed and unlicensed HMOs as follows:
- Licensed HMOs – A programme of inspections for the licensed HMOs to ensure that they are compliant with the license conditions, compliant with government

legislation and operating in an environment that is safe and supportive to the residents.

- Unlicensed HMOs – The team has written to the owners of 88 properties suspected to fall into the category of unlicensed HMO’s. Please note that not all HMO’s have to be licenced however BwD is still able to check health and safety standards.

2.10 In response to the mail out to owners of the 88 unlicensed HMO’s, 74 written responses were received from the initial enquiry. Officers subsequently visited the 14 properties that did not respond to determine whether they were in use as unlicensed HMO’S. Of the original 88 properties, 64 are confirmed as being used as unlicensed HMO’s and 24 are not.

A second work programme is also being developed to prepare a schedule of visits to these properties to ensure they are also compliant with legal and Health & Safety requirements.

During the inspection of all HMOs the Environmental Health Officers will be checking items such as Safety Records, Emergency Lighting, Fire Alarm Systems, Portable Equipment and much more.

Demand for social housing

2.11 In terms of demand for social housing, BwD forms part of the B-With-Us Choice Based Lettings Scheme managed by Together Housing with the other Pennine-Lancashire local housing authorities and Registered Providers.

2.12 At the end of 2023/24 there were 4645 households registered on the B-With-Us housing register seeking affordable housing and this has slightly increased since. Of the 4719 households currently registered on B-With-Us in BwD, 247 (5.2%) are awarded a Band 1 priority (the highest priority band). The number of applicants in Band 1 has been steadily increasing due to an increase in demand from homeless approaches, and due to some delays being experiencing in Registered Provider’s void turnaround times.

2.13 During 2023/24, the B-With-Us scheme reported 339 affordable rented lettings in BwD. Chart 4 shows that 10% of these lettings went to applicants awarded a band 1 priority, with applicants in band 2 and 3 also having a realistic prospect of securing an allocation of social rented housing.

Priority Band	No. lettings in BwD in 2023/24
Band 1	35
Band 2	117
Band 3	112
Band 4	2
Band 5	73
Total	339

■ Band 1 ■ Band 2 ■ Band 3 ■ Band 4 ■ Band 5

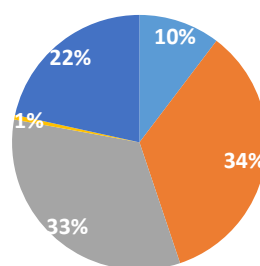


Chart 4: Lettings of affordable rented housing in BwD in 2023/24 by priority band

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

- 2.14 The Housing Needs team ensures the statutory homelessness duties of BwD are fulfilled, providing advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness. Annual homelessness statistical returns, known as HCLIC data for England and Wales at local authority level, are due to be published for 2023/24 imminently but were unavailable at the time of writing this report. When published, this data will enable a more detailed analysis of homelessness trends for BwD in the context of regional and national data.
- 2.15 In 2023/24 BwD successfully prevented or relieved the homelessness of 1,120 households who approached the Council for assistance. There were a further 2,294 approached from households who required advice only to help them resolve their housing needs.
- 2.16 Approaches to BwD from those in housing need and who are homeless has been increasing in recent years due to the national Housing and Cost of Living crises, causing system wide pressure across the Housing Needs and Homeless service.
- 2.17 BwD currently lease 30 properties from Together Housing to use as temporary accommodation for homeless households. This supply of self-contained, high-quality accommodation greatly limits the need for BwD to use B&B accommodation for homeless households. These properties are leased at their core social / affordable rent levels and the total cost for all 30 units is £156,787 per annum. Full lease costs are recouped through Housing Benefit when the properties are occupied.
- 2.18 A more recent trend beginning in Q3 of 2023/24, Oct-Dec 2023 (see para 2.25) did lead to the Council using some B&B's to temporarily accommodate homeless households and this reached a peak of 15 households in February 2024. We are pleased to report that, at the time of writing this report, only one household was placed in B&B, and they have only been resident for 4 days.
- 2.19 Whilst we are waiting for 2023/24 quarter 4 homelessness data to be published, data from the first three quarters of last year shows that when people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness approach BwD Council, they are significantly more likely to have their housing issues resolved with support to secure accommodation than the Northwest region or nationally. This is likely due to the healthy supply of housing for rent (social and private – see chart 1) as well as the availability and supply of supported housing. This trend limits pressure on the Council in relation to temporary accommodation – an area of Local Authorities' statutory functions that is causing significant pressures on General Fund budgets in many areas due to the national pressures discussed in paragraph 2.16.
- 2.20 Further detailed data analysis on homelessness is due to be undertaken shortly to help inform the Housing Strategy for BwD (see paragraph 2.28). There are also ongoing actions planned for the Housing Needs service to ensure the written policy

and procedural frameworks are more robust, and to introduce more data sets to improve our efficiency in evaluating progress and trends in homelessness.

2.21 The most acute and visible form of homelessness is rough sleeping. BwD receives Rough Sleeping Initiative Funding 2022-2025 from government and has taken strides in tackling rough sleeping with a range of initiatives supported by this funding.

2.22 Charts 5 and 6 below show trends in rough sleeping using data taken from BwD’s monthly data returns to government. Levels of rough sleeping typically increase during the summer months and decline during the colder winter months when the Council’s Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) is activated.

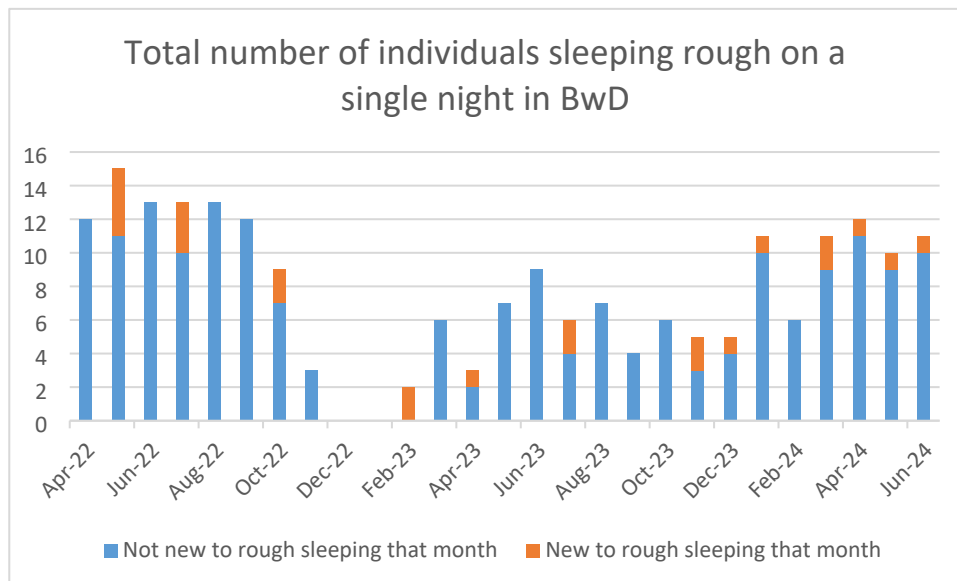


Chart 5: No. individuals known to be sleeping rough on a single night during each month, April 2022 to date

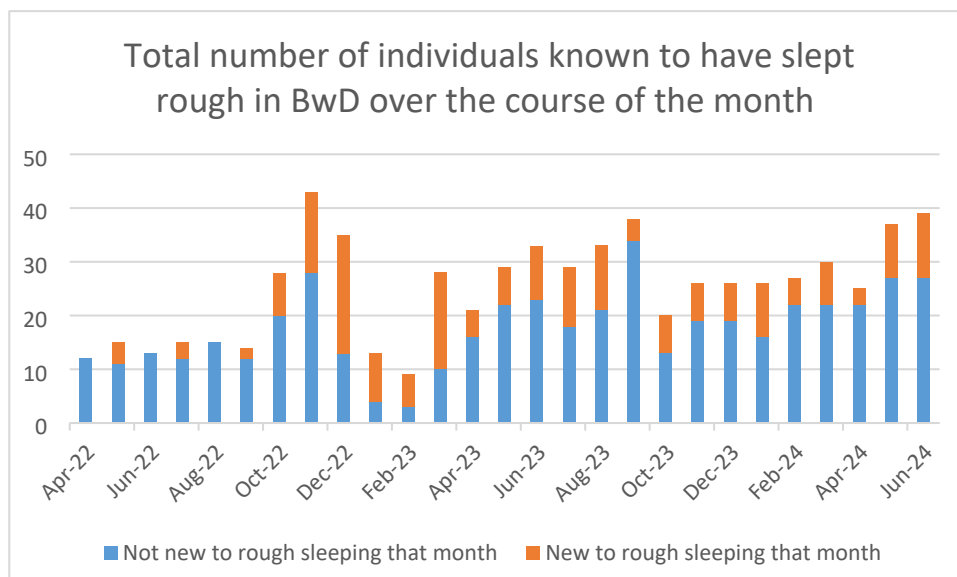


Chart 6: No. individuals known to be sleeping rough for at least one night during the course of each month, April 2022 to date

- 2.23 Trends in rough sleeping are closely monitored to inform service delivery and interventions. These will be examined in more depth as part of a project to deliver BwD's updated Housing Strategy in 2025 (see paragraph 2.28 below).
- 2.24 The Housing Needs team have also been working with the BwD Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) to ensure that recommendations and expectations regarding the key role of SABs in protecting individuals sleeping rough from risk of abuse and neglect, are embedded in the BwD SAB processes and governance structure. This follows government recommendations in May 2024. Of the individuals sleeping rough in BwD, the Council have identified a Target Priority Group of 17 individuals who represent our most entrenched, repeat and/or complex needs cohort who are the most at risk of abuse or neglect including self-neglect and for whom these arrangements will benefit.
- 2.25 In terms of recent pressures, BwD has seen a stark increase in the number of homeless approaches from households who have been required to leave asylum accommodation after receiving positive decisions on their asylum claims. The reason for this is twofold:
- Home Office tackling the asylum application backlog at pace - Official immigration statistics show that nationally, at the end of March 2024, there were 86,460 asylum applications awaiting an initial decision. These outstanding cases related to 118,329 people, including both main applicants and their dependents. This compares to 136,944 asylum applications awaiting an initial decision in August 2023 representing a 37% decrease nationally in just 7 months.
 - The Home Office procuring a high number of units of asylum accommodation in the Borough – the Home Office calculates a maximum asylum seeker bedspace of 1:200 population. There are currently, on average, 762 asylum seekers in the Borough which remains just below the Home Office cap but above the Regional Plan figure. This compares to a figure of 373 in April 2022 showing the increase in demand. Since 1st August 2023 to date, the Housing Needs team has received 333 discontinuation notices from Serco who are ending support and accommodation further to households receiving positive decisions from the Home Office. This increase in demand did lead to BwD having to utilise B&B accommodation to temporarily accommodate families (see para 2.18).
- 2.26 The latest published statutory homelessness data for Oct-Dec 2023 shows that 'Required to leave accommodation provided by the Home Office as asylum support' was the third highest reason for the loss of last settled accommodation for those households owed a homelessness duty by BwD in that quarter. This is higher levels than regionally and nationally and has added some further pressure to an already stretched homelessness service.
- 2.27 Another issue which may also lead to some increase in demand of BwD's housing needs service in the short term relates to the Lord Chancellor's announcement in July 2024 of her intention to lay a Statutory Instrument before Parliament at the earliest opportunity, to reduce the time those sentenced to eligible standard determinate sentences (SDS) serve in prison from 50% to 40% of that sentence. The impact is not envisaged to be significant due to strong existing partnerships with criminal justice partners in BwD, and a supply of accommodation for prison leavers including CAS3 accommodation and the Council's own Accommodation

for Ex-Offenders (AFEO) scheme, but will be closely monitored to ensure preparedness.

A new Housing Strategy for BwD

- 2.28 Colleagues across the Growth and Adults and Health directorates, as well as wider cross-cutting areas of the Council are working closely together to take a one council approach to developing a Housing Strategy for BwD over the next 12 months. A working group held an inaugural meeting on 24th July 2024 to commence this piece of work. BwD Council has an adopted Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy provided at Appendix 1 which is also due for review next year. In addition to looking at the supply, delivery, quality and type of housing in BwD, the new Housing Strategy will also consider the needs of vulnerable people including those who are homeless and those requiring housing with care to help set a strategic direction for the Housing agenda in the coming years. Elected members and all stakeholders will be provided opportunities to held co-produce this strategy in addition to opportunities to participate in a formal consultation in 2025.

3. APPENDICES



HomelessnessRough
SleeperStrategy.pdf

1.

Report Version: 1.1

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Date: 25th July 2024