

Report to O&S on replacing Burcot Lodge Homeless Hostel

Introduction

This report for O&S explores the most effective way of replacing the existing homelessness facilities at Burcot Lodge Hostel. This temporary accommodation option will eventually be closed as a result of the sale of the Council House and the land surrounding it. In order to identify the best option for replacing the hostel, this report also explores the wider context to the provision of temporary accommodation to homeless households in Bromsgrove.

Background information

Burcot Lodge Hostel is owned by Bromsgrove District Council and provides temporary accommodation for up to eight homeless households in Bromsgrove - it is managed on a day-to-day basis by Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT). This arrangement has been in place since 2004, when the council transferred its stock together with its homelessness function to BDHT.

The council is planning to sell the Council House and surrounding land, and, at some stage during the course of this sale, the homeless hostel will need to close down. Advice provided to officers suggests this sale process will take at least a year to complete. However, when the hostel does close, BDHT will have eight fewer units to offer to homeless households when they are required, and there are concerns that unless alternative provision is created, there could be an increase in less suitable placements being made – for example in bed and breakfast in Bromsgrove.

The legal context – local authority duties and the use of temporary accommodation

The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 placed a duty on local housing authorities to secure permanent accommodation for unintentionally homeless people in priority need. Authorities' duties towards homeless people are now contained in Part 7 of the 1996 Housing Act (as amended).

Authorities do not have a duty to secure accommodation for all homeless people. If an applicant has become homeless unintentionally the authority must assess whether they, or a member of their household, falls into a 'priority need' category.

These categories are set out in section 189 of the 1996 Act and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 which includes:

- A pregnant woman or a person who resides with a pregnant woman, or might reasonably be expected to reside with a pregnant woman, who is eligible for assistance under the above Act.
- A person with whom dependant children reside or might reasonably be expected to reside;

- A person aged sixteen or seventeen who is not a relevant child for the purposes of section 23A of the Children Act 1989; other than a person to whom a local authority owe a duty to provide accommodation under section 20 of that Act.
- A person (other than a relevant student) who is under 21; and at any time after reaching the age of sixteen, but while still under eighteen, was, but is no longer looked after, accommodated or fostered.
- *Vulnerable* as a result of old age, mental illness or handicap, physical disability, or other special reason or with whom such a person resides or might reasonably be expected to reside.
- a person (other than a relevant student) who has reached the age of twenty one and who is *vulnerable* as a result of being looked after, accommodated or fostered. You have not been looked after, accommodated or fostered as defined by the Children's Act 1989.
- a person who is *vulnerable* as a result of having been a member of Her Majesty's regular naval, military or air forces.
- a person who is *vulnerable* as a result of having served a custodial sentence (within the meaning of section 76 of the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000) (a); or having been convicted for contempt of court or any kindred offence; or having been remanded in custody (within the meaning of paragraph (b), (c) or (d) of section 88 (1) of that Act).
- homeless or threatened with homelessness as a result of an emergency such as a flood, fire or other disaster.
- a person who is *vulnerable* for any other special reason, or with whom such a person resides or might reasonably be expected to reside.

When a household makes an application to a local authority for assistance with homelessness the authority is under a duty to carry out inquiries in order to satisfy itself as to what level of duty is owed to a homeless applicant. If an authority has reason to believe that a homeless applicant has nowhere to stay and is in priority need, then there is an immediate duty to make suitable temporary accommodation available pending further inquiries.

After the completion of inquiries local authorities must inform applicants of their decision. The type of help that an authority might be under to a homeless household under the 1996 Act ranges from a main duty to secure suitable accommodation (which may be a private rented tenancy), to providing advice and assistance. Authorities only have an absolute duty to secure accommodation for households who are deemed to be eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need.

Where an absolute duty to secure accommodation exists, a household may have to spend a period of time in temporary accommodation before a final offer of accommodation is made. The length of time spent in temporary accommodation will largely depend on the availability of suitable accommodation in the authority's area. The Localism Act 2011 has enabled local authorities (since 9 November 2012) to discharge their duty towards homeless households in priority need by using privately rented housing irrespective of whether the household is in agreement with this.

An overview of the demand for and provision of temporary accommodation in Bromsgrove

The hostel is one of several temporary accommodation options available to BDHT. BDHT also uses up to 39 units of its own housing stock to provide temporary accommodation. These properties are provided on a rolling basis utilising void properties as and when available. They also make placements in specialist options such as domestic violence refuges, or occasionally in local bed and breakfast establishments in Bromsgrove.

In terms of developing an overview of the demand for and provision of temporary accommodation in Bromsgrove, and the role that the hostel plays in this, it is important to consider the following factors:

- The number of homeless applications taken in any part of the country, including Bromsgrove, fluctuates over time, as homelessness is influenced by various local and national dynamics.
- Not every homelessness application results in the provision of temporary accommodation, so the number of homeless decisions will always be higher than the number of temporary accommodation placements. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, housing providers rightly focus on trying to prevent homelessness in advance of having to respond to homelessness, so a number of these enquiries will be resolved before the need to provide temporary accommodation arises. Secondly, a housing provider is not under a duty to provide temporary accommodation in every case – a temporary accommodation duty is triggered when a provider has reason to believe that a household is eligible for help, homeless or threatened with homelessness, and that they have a priority need for accommodation. In cases where these tests are not satisfied, temporary accommodation is unlikely to be provided, but the applicant will still receive a homeless decision from BDHT.
- Not every homeless acceptance results in the provision of temporary accommodation. Each year, the number of homelessness acceptances will normally be lower than the number of temporary accommodation placements provided. This is because not all households offered temporary accommodation will subsequently be accepted as being owed the main housing duty under the homelessness legislation. An application may fail on the grounds that, once fully assessed, the applicant is subsequently found to be ineligible, not homeless, not in priority need, intentionally homeless, or without a local connection to the Bromsgrove area. Not all households accepted as homeless require temporary accommodation either – some have other interim arrangements that negate the need for an emergency placement.
- The level of demand for help with homelessness often outstrips the capacity of housing providers to resolve it. This is very important to understand, because households provided with temporary accommodation can often remain there for a considerable period of time, depending on the nature of their circumstances, and the position the housing provider takes in response.

An example of this issue is rent arrears. A household may be accepted for help under the homelessness legislation, but they may be prevented from moving into their address permanently until these rent arrears are cleared. In the meantime therefore, they remain in temporary accommodation, and housing providers experience a 'silting up' of their temporary accommodation resources as a result. The more these sorts of issues arise in their overall caseload, the more difficult it becomes for the provider to move the household on from temporary accommodation into permanent accommodation - the acceptance of homelessness duties builds up, but the ability to discharge these duties slows down.

- In summary, a proportion (not all) of incoming homelessness enquiries in any given year will trigger the provision of a temporary accommodation option by BDHT. The nature and duration of these placements will vary, and some can continue for well over a year. If the rate of temporary accommodation provision is not matched by a similar rate of ending this in favour of a more settled option, the number of households living under a temporary accommodation duty can 'silt up' and cumulatively rise over time. In turn, this has an impact upon the future availability of temporary accommodation for incoming households, and it has a direct bearing on issues such as the need to replace Burcot Lodge Hostel.

Bearing all these factors in mind, there is data available on homelessness and the demand for and provision of temporary accommodation in Bromsgrove. This data is collected by BDHT, and submitted to the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on a quarterly basis in a statistical return called the P1E. The data submitted to DCLG shows the overall demand for homelessness services in the district.

Table 1 – households accommodated under a temporary accommodation duty in Bromsgrove (and across Worcestershire) 2011- end quarter 2 2015

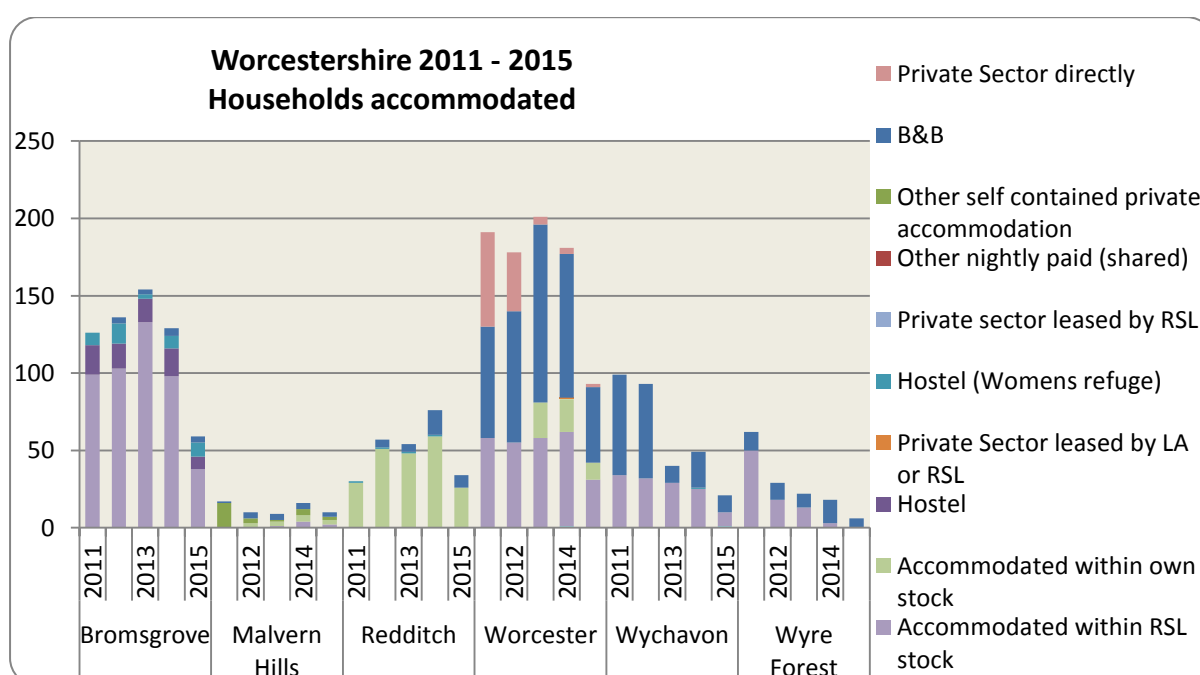


Table 1 shows the number of households provided with temporary accommodation under the homelessness legislation in Bromsgrove (and across the county) between 2011 and the end of quarter 2 2015. NB - some of the placements will carry over between one year and the next – comments in section 2 refer). The majority of households accommodated temporarily are living in BDHT stock.

Table 2 – number of households accommodated under a temporary accommodation duty 2011- end of quarter 2 2015

Year	Own stock	Refuge	Burcot Lodge Hostel	B&B	Total for year
2015 to Q3	52	12	11	4	79
2014	98	8	18	5	119
2013	133	0	15	3	151
2012	103	13	16	4	136
2011	99	8	19	0	126

Table 2 sets out which type of accommodation is being occupied by homeless households – BDHT stock is the main property type, and hostel occupancy has remained fairly static throughout the same time period.

Table 3 – homelessness acceptances in Bromsgrove 2011 to end quarter 3 2015

Year	Homelessness acceptances
2015 to Q3	68
2014	58
2013	75
2012	77
2011	70

Table 3 shows the number of homelessness acceptances in Bromsgrove since 2011 which has remained relatively stable during that time period.

Table 4 – homelessness preventions/reliefs 2010 to end of quarter 3 2015

Year	Number of homelessness preventions/relieved
2015 to Q3	139
2014	266
2013	190
2012	228
2011	225
2010	155

Table 4 shows the number of cases where homelessness was prevented or relieved – this has an impact on the need to provide temporary accommodation to homeless

households as resolving the situation in advance of providing temporary accommodation reduces the need to offer this provision in any given year.

Table 5 – overlapping the various data sets for a summary position 2011 to 2015 Q3

Year	Homeless decisions	Homeless acceptances	Total number of households placed in temporary accommodation	Own stock	Refuge	Burcot Lodge Hostel	B&B
2015 to Q3	105	68	79	52	12	11	4
2014	111	58	129	98	8	18	5
2013	111	75	151	133	0	15	3
2012	116	77	136	103	13	16	4
2011	134	70	126	99	8	19	0

Table 5 overlaps the various P1E data sets to provide an overview of the historical position with regards to homelessness and temporary accommodation usage. In short:

- Homelessness decisions and acceptances have remained fairly stable in Bromsgrove – the prevention of homelessness has increased over time
- BDHT’s stock is the primary resource in terms of providing a response to homelessness in Bromsgrove
- Burcot Lodge plays a role in addressing homelessness
- There has been a build-up of households living in temporary arrangements over time though the data suggests this is reducing again

Burcot Hostel – the role the hostel currently plays in temporary accommodation provision

It is clear from the data that the hostel plays a role in providing a temporary address for homeless households in Bromsgrove – the tables above show the number of households who have stayed there during the course of each of the last five years. However, there are several things to note:

- As table 5 above shows, in four of the last five years, a small number of households have been placed in bed and breakfast in Bromsgrove, despite the hostel being less than fully occupied.
- In the last few years, as table 6 below shows, although the hostel has played a role in addressing homelessness in Bromsgrove, it has regularly been occupied at less than full capacity indicating that there is no need to replace like for like going forwards.

Table 6 – breakdown of number of households staying at Burcot Lodge April 2013 to November 2015

	Single/ Couple	Family	Pregnant	Total Households	Number Children
Room 1	15	0	0	15	N/A
Room 2	13	0	1	14	N/A
Room 3	7	1	4	12	1 Child
Room 4	2	2	0	4	1 Child & 2 Child
Room 5	6	0	0	6	N/A
Room 6	9	0	0	9	N/A
Room 7	0	9	1	10	1 Child x 7, 2 Child x 1, 3 Child x 1
Room 8	0	8	0	8	1 child x 6, 2 children x 1, 5 children x 1
Total	52	20	6	78	

Assumptions/costings and next steps

- It is clear that the hostel plays a role in responding to homelessness in Bromsgrove, but that the building is often under occupied in any given year. As a result, we have agreed with BDHT, following analysis of the data as above, that there is no need to replace like with like.
- BDHT have tabled two proposals to replace the hostel (see appendix 1)
- BDHT have advised that they anticipate a 3 month period for conversion works to be completed so the council will need to cover the rent lost during the time taken to convert the 2 beds into 1 beds.
- Currently BDHT are paid to manage the hostel – there are no plans to alter this, as they would go on to manage any newly created replacement facilities
- Void costs are hard to predict, as these will depend upon occupancy rates of the replacement facilities – however, they should be fairly minimal as the number of spaces previously available at the hostel are being reduced.
- On balance, given the higher conversion costs associated with proposal 2, we plan to pursue proposal one in the first instance, and monitor demand for and use of temporary accommodation in the following twelve months. If it becomes clear during the course of this activity that further 1 bed temporary accommodation is required, another property can be converted by BDHT, funded by the Council, thereby providing a further resource.
- A report concerning the above will be submitted to the February 2016 meeting of Cabinet.

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