

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills)	Date of Meeting:	Tuesday 28 June 2022
Subject:	Riverside Dispersed Accommodation Pilot		
Report of:	Head of Economic Growth and Housing	Wards Affected:	(All Wards);
Portfolio:	Communities & Housing		
Is this a Key Decision:	No	Included in Forward Plan:	No
Exempt / Confidential Report:	No		

Summary:

To provide an overview of the Riverside Dispersed Accommodation pilot

Recommendation(s):

(1) to inform Overview & Scrutiny (Regen & Skills) of the progress made regarding this pilot project and note the contents of this report.

Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

Cabinet Member for Communities & Housing has recommended that the successful outcomes of this pilot project be presented to this Committee for scrutiny

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected: (including any Risk Implications)

N/A

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

The current pilot is being funded primarily via Flexible Homeless Support Grant and also from the Homelessness Prevention Grant.

There are no additional revenue costs associated with the recommendations in this report.

(B) Capital Costs

There are no capital costs associated with the recommendations in this report.

Implications of the Proposals:

Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets):

If this model were to be mainstreamed this would require a budget to be identified in

order to fund the delivery of it.	
Legal Implications: None	
Equality Implications: There are no equality implications.	
Climate Emergency Implications: The recommendations within this report will	
Have a positive impact	N
Have a neutral impact	Y
Have a negative impact	N
The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	Y
The project, whilst saving money for the Council, is seen to have a negative impact on the climate due to its focus being on rehousing.	

Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

Protect the most vulnerable: Those who are homeless, and those at risk of becoming homeless are among the most vulnerable in society.
Facilitate confident and resilient communities: Through the intervention by the Council and its partners at the most critical moment when residents are homeless or at the risk of becoming homeless in order to prevent further reliance on public sector support in the future.
Commission, broker and provide core services: The delivery of a service which is based on the needs of some of the most vulnerable in society.
Place – leadership and influencer: Through the creation of settled sustainable communities
Drivers of change and reform: Through the understanding of the needs of the most vulnerable in society and change and reform of services in order to meet those needs.
Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity: Help to relieve rough sleeping and homelessness in Sefton has a wide-ranging positive impact for those most vulnerable in society by providing residents with the most basic form of need; housing.
Greater income for social investment: This pilot has partly been funded from social investment funding
Cleaner Greener N/A

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD.6797/22.....) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.4997/22.....) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

Cabinet Member Communities & Housing's has been briefed continually regarding this pilot and approved an extension to the pilot on 9th June 2021

(B) External Consultations

Riverside have consulted with Officers of the Council and a consultation with the families involved in this pilot was undertaken as part of the pilot's Evaluation Report

Contact Officer:	Graham Parry
Telephone Number:	Tel: 0151 934 3446
Email Address:	graham.parry@sefton.gov.uk

Appendices:

Appendix A – Sefton Families Final Evaluation Report

Background Papers:

The following background papers, which are not available elsewhere on the Internet can be accessed on the Council website:

[Decision - Dispersed Temporary Accommodation pilot project with Riverside Housing Association proposal](#)

1. Introduction/Background

- 1.1 One of the actions within Sefton's Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-23, is to undertake a strategic review of temporary accommodation in Sefton to ensure that the provision is suitable. At present Sefton's temporary accommodation for families is based in one location, Lonsdale Hostel. However, the provision of hostel type accommodation for this purpose is now considered out of date, with many councils attempting to provide dispersed supported temporary accommodation models as well as or instead of hostel provision.
- 1.2 On 26th July 2019, Cabinet Member approved the delivery of a service to provide dispersed temporary accommodation and support services for vulnerable households, particularly for those who struggle to access tenancies. The service is a 2-year pilot and funded through the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant up to a maximum cost of £150,000. The scheme went live on 2nd December 2019.
- 1.3 In June 2021, Cabinet Member approved the extension of the pilot so that Riverside could extend the pilot by a further six months and, to also extend the provision of properties that Riverside provide by an additional 10 properties, bringing the total number of properties to 30.

2. Evaluation Report

- 2.1 An evaluation of the pilot was carried out by an independent company, Impact Limited, to assess the impact of the pilot. The final Evaluation Report is contained within Appendix A.
- 2.2 The Evaluation concluded that without this service, customers' progression to living in independent accommodation would have been much slower. This could have consequences relating to health, wellbeing, family cohesion, etc. The Council believe that customers would, eventually, have secured private rented accommodation if the service had not been available. However, it concluded that customers would have experienced an extended stay in temporary accommodation and not received the intensive support that has been so transformational.
- 2.3 The Evaluation also concluded that the return on investment for every £1 which Sefton Council spent was £3.36. This represents potential public spending costs savings associated with homeless families of £24,394 per family.

3. Future Service

- 3.1 The Council are currently looking at the possibility of commissioning a service to replace and replicate this successful pilot. The number of families approaching the Sefton's Housing Options Team continues to increase following the Covid pandemic and the end of the Coronavirus Act evictions legislation. The Housing Options Team continue to see their Temporary Accommodation costs increase yearly, so a project which represents a positive return on investment, as this does, and also potentially help reduce budgetary spend would be welcomed.

4. Northern Housing Awards 2022

- 4.1 The pilot has recently been shortlisted for the 2022 Northern Housing Awards within the category for *Best Initiative for Tackling Homelessness*. The Awards Ceremony was held on 17th May 2022. Whilst the project did not win, it did tremendously well to be shortlisted for the Awards Ceremony.

5. Housing Strategy and Commissioning Outcomes

- 5.1 This project is part of the wider homelessness strategy for the Council, which is detailed in Sefton's Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-23.
- 5.2 Since 2018, Sefton has been working to improve services across Sefton for rough sleepers and homeless residents. Successful bids to MHCLG, now DLUHC, have seen subsequent years of Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding secured in order to bolster commissioned services in order to reduce rough sleeping numbers across the borough. In 2018, Sefton had 12 rough sleepers recorded on its official Annual Rough Sleeper Count. In 2021, Sefton recorded zero rough sleepers for the first time in over a decade.
- 5.3 One of the RSI funded initiatives was a 1-year pilot for a psychologist based within Sefton's homeless services. This service has been extremely well received by the homeless providers in Sefton and the outcomes for people within services has improved; joint working with wider health services has improved; trauma informed training and reflective practice introduced to homeless services staff by

the psychologist has been extremely well received. As part of Sefton's bid for RSI 2022-25 funding, a 3-year Psychologist service for Sefton has been requested.

- 5.4 In September 2021, Cabinet granted authorisation to complete a procurement process to replace its Homeless and Housing Related Support contracts with an Integrated Homeless Service from 1st July 2022. As part of this procurement process, the Sefton Supported Housing Group consortium won the contract to deliver services for at least the next five years. These services will be delivered in a Strengths Based Practice approach for the first time. A strengths-based practice is a collaborative process between the person supported by services and those supporting them, allowing them to work together to determine an outcome that draws on the person's strengths and assets

6. Summary

- 6.1 Homeless services have been improved and recommissioned over the last four years, which has seen Sefton's rough sleeper numbers reduced to zero and a shift in approach which will focus on residents' strengths rather than their deficits.
- 6.2 The learning gained from commissioning the pilot with a model of dispersed supported accommodation has been a valuable lesson as Sefton looks to find better ways of assisting the most vulnerable families approaching its Housing Options Team for assistance.

Sefton Families Service Evaluation

Final Report

John Harrison

john@impact-limited.co.uk

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Executive Summary

Overview

The service is being delivered efficiently, effectively and with economy. Specifically:

- Efficiency – the service design and delivery has been successful with innovative elements
- Effectively – contractual outcomes are being achieved and aims are being delivered
- Economy – the project is cost effective and offers value for money

Feedback is overwhelmingly positive. Customers, stakeholders and the commissioners are very happy with the way the project has been delivered and what has been delivered. In particular, we are pleased to report that the service has had a profound effect on customers. The service targeted chaotic families with a history of failed tenancies who require intensive support. Now, these families have been supported, are much more stable and are successfully maintaining their tenancies.

Background

The Sefton Families Service is the first service facilitated by the Riverside Impact Fund (RIF). The RIF aims to provide opportunities to test outcomes-based commissioning models. The service is being delivered using a payments-by-results approach.

Sefton Council have an action within their Homeless Strategy to source additional dispersed accommodation for homeless families. To deliver this action, Sefton were willing to use the RIF to test a new approach. The service adopted an approach that is similar to Housing First. This is a housing and support approach which gives people (usually single homeless) a stable home from which to rebuild their lives. It provides intensive, person-centred, holistic support that is open-ended and places no conditions on individuals.

Sefton Families Service uses dispersed 2/3 bed properties as temporary accommodation with intensive support from a Specialist Support Worker, with the aim of transferring to a general needs tenancy. Initially, the service supported 20 families but has recently been extended to cover 30 families. Outcomes focus on securing accommodation then sustaining those tenancies by supporting families.

Customers

The council felt that the service offered the opportunity to meet the needs of chaotic families. The option of rehousing and offering intensive support appealed because it had the potential to break a cycle of customers re-presenting to the council's homeless services.

Reasons for the families engaged by the service becoming homeless included fleeing domestic violence, relationship breakdown, eviction, overcrowding (including sharing with wider family) and leaving a home that was unfit for habitation. Customers' financial hardship is often the bedrock of the fractured housing history of many of stimulus for them becoming homeless, particularly those affected by the benefit cap (which limits the overall amount that unemployed people can claim i by reducing their Housing Benefit). In many instances, financial distress is accompanied by other complex issues such as substance misuse, harassment, antisocial behaviour, child protection issues and domestic violence.

Customer feedback shows that:

- Families are very happy with the new homes including the standard of decoration and the neighbourhood

- Families are receiving appropriate support with their issues / needs. In particular, they are very appreciative of the work of the Specialist Support Worker
- Referrals to external support agencies are delivering tangible benefits
- Customers highlight the transformational nature of the project with a sustained tenancy and intensive support contributing to their ability to address a wide range of needs and issues.

Very few customers engaged by the service were in temporary accommodation at the time of referral, with the service being used to pre-empt the need for this type of accommodation.

Outcomes and Aims

The aims and contractual outcome of the service are being met and the service is hitting its contractual targets ahead of time. At the end of May 2021, twenty-three families had accessed temporary accommodation. Two of these families then left their properties to return to family or move out of the area. Five families have transitioned to general needs. A measure of success is the contract extension to June 2022 with the addition of 10 more properties. The service also has a number of stated aims for improving the lives of its customers, achievement relating to these aims include:

- Sustaining tenancies – there are twenty families sustaining tenancies with five families transitioned to general needs
- Maximising independence – families have greater financial security, housing stability, children are accessing education regularly and families have the potential to move towards economic independence through work and training
- Reduce social isolation – if they want it, families are in accommodated close to familial and community networks
- Improve health and wellbeing –health and wellbeing has improved. Families are accessing health and mental health services

Sustaining tenancies is the most important element of the service because it is unlikely to be happening if other needs are not being addressed. It is also something the customers have struggled to achieve in the past. There have been no repeat presentations to Housing Options from any family referred to Riverside.

The service has exceeded the contractual outcomes and added further value e.g. grant applications, dealing with debt and arrears.

Support for Families

Key areas of support from the Specialist Support Workers include applying for welfare benefits, organising utilities / bill payments, developing life skills including budgeting, referrals to support services. Key areas of support include:

- Tackling arrears. This has been very successful, with an efficient process ensuring families are not hindered by past debt / arrears issues
- Harnessing support from other teams within Riverside. This includes Income Maximisation (IMAX), Affordable Warmth and the employment and training team
- Referral to other external agencies including food banks, Sefton Welfare Rights, Households into Work and Family Wellbeing Centres.
- Liaising with case workers or social workers and other agencies such as Ambition Sefton (substance misuse), Venus Family Centre (women, young women, families and children), SWACA (domestic violence) and the Early Help team (children and families at risk).

- Securing grants from a variety of charities including the Vicar's Relief Fund, Churches Homeless Trust (both arrears), the Buttle Trust (domestic violence) and Family Action (education).

Properties

Properties are usually void for some time whilst repairs are carried out. The property is painted, carpeted and blinds are installed. White goods are provided alongside the furniture package. The team and the commissioners (and customers) are very happy with the quality of the properties provided. Generally, the team feel that the supply of property has matched the needs of customers.

Challenges

There have been challenges but these have been addressed with no impact on contractual outcomes. Indeed, challenges have sometimes led to innovation or more efficient methods of project delivery. The council are happy with the way Riverside have responded when an issue has been identified. Key challenges included:

- Covid-19. Conducting assessments during lockdown was a challenge for the Housing Options team. The Specialist Support Worker took over the task of assessing customers, managing the referral process, welfare checks and arrears / debt issues. This method is more effective, leading to a better relationship with the family. Day to day support continued to be delivered in person in some circumstances but telephone contact also became more important than it might have been. Covid-19 did cause some delays to properties becoming available. This was caused by the company Riverside use to furnish properties ceasing deliveries for some time at the start of the first lockdown. A further challenge relating to Covid-19 was that many support services were not fully operational
- Arrears. There was an initial misunderstanding (between the council and the service team) about how arrears should be dealt with. This was a challenge for the service in its early days but a solution was quickly identified. It was agreed that the teams would work together to tackle arrears while a family were on the waiting list so problems did not escalate before they moved into a property. This opened up access to Sefton Council's Hardship Fund and the team found other avenues such as the Vicar's Relief Fund to assist with arrears.
- Properties. Geographical location is an issue. There are fewer properties available in areas such as Southport and Maghull. The council mentioned that the aim of providing accommodation near to the customer's last known address has been challenging. They understand that supply has been driven by the location of Riverside stock and, more importantly, the availability of that stock. If the service became permanent, there is the potential to look at working with other housing providers or private landlords in areas where the supply of properties is scarce. There is also the possibility of enhancing the supply of housing by linking it to Sefton's Empty Homes Plan

Payment by Results

The Support Workers feel that payment by results does not impact the way the service is delivered. However, it is a new way of working for the Service Manager and has required adaptation and adjustment from the delivery model she is used to. The key difference with other commissioned services are procedures relating to recording activities and outcomes.

Innovation

There were a number of aspects of the service that were innovative or of particular note. This includes:

- Delivering Riverside's first payments by results service. So far, the service has shown that Payments by Results (PBR) services can work
- Related to RIF is the fact that the service is innovative and, as such, may not normally have been commissioned by Sefton. It has provided an opportunity to test a different approach to dealing with homeless families
- Riverside delivering their first Care and Support service in Sefton. This has been a key step and has been rewarded by the service being extended and Riverside being awarded a contract to deliver an accommodation pathway service for rough sleepers
- Given that Riverside Care and Support had no track record in Sefton, developing relationships and connections with other agencies (besides the council) from scratch in a pandemic, was a major achievement
- The council are happy with the way that the Sefton Families Service team have delivered the service. They feel that there is mutual cooperation and a willingness to raise concerns and offer help or support when required. The council feel that their relationship with Riverside has strengthened as a result of the way that the Sefton Families Service has been delivered.
- Delivering their first dispersed families service of this type. The service adopted something akin to a Housing First approach for families and has proven to be effective
- The team have demonstrated flexibility and creativity in dealing with challenges. They have delivered a service with, perhaps, a more holistic approach that exploited many areas of Riverside's infrastructure. The service drew on a number of teams across Care and Support and general needs to ensure that outcomes were achieved. In particular, the use of IMAX, Affordable Warmth, Money Advice and the Housing Services team has contributed significantly to the success of the service
- Reputationally, the service has been a major success. The team and, possibly, Riverside as a whole are seen as an organisation that will rise to a challenge, innovate and persevere to make a service succeed

Deadweight

Without this service, customers' progression to living in independent accommodation would have been much slower. This would have consequences relating to health, wellbeing, family cohesion, etc. The council feel that customers would, eventually, have secured private rented accommodation if the service had not been available. However, they think customers would have experienced an extended stay in temporary accommodation and not received the intensive support that has been so transformational.

Cost Effectiveness / Value for Money

The commissioners feel that the project is cost effective and offers value for money. If all outcomes for the service are achieved the payment to Riverside would be £7,260 per family. In contrast:

- The estimated cost of one complex eviction and subsequent homeless application is £8,085 per family
- The saving in Housing Benefit / Universal Credit between a private rented property (the tenure customers would probably have been rehoused to) and a social housing property (their current tenure) is £5,544 (2 bed) and £6,984 (3 bed).

Our modelling of potential public spending costs associated with homeless families suggests a saving of £24,394 per family. A return of £3.36 for every £1 spent.

The Future

The pilot service was due to be completed by December 2021 but has been extended until June 2022. The willingness of Sefton Council to extend the service is evidence that it has been successful and is needed. Sefton Council expect to include provision for rehousing homeless families in their homeless strategy in the future.

It is clear that the model adopted in Sefton could be transferred to other areas where Riverside has a significant housing stock and families' services are needed.

Recommendations

Given that the project is mature and successful there appears to be little need for recommendations. To that end, we recommend that the project should keep on doing it what is doing.

Introduction

The Service

The Sefton Families Service is the first service delivered using the Riverside Impact Fund (RIF). The RIF aims to provide opportunities to test outcomes-based commissioning models. RIF ring-fenced £1 million of Riverside's money to work with commissioners to fund services on an outcomes-based commissioning model, also known as 'payments-by-results'. This means that the commissioner pays only when agreed outcomes are achieved.

Sefton Families Service uses dispersed 2/3 bed properties as temporary accommodation with intensive support from a Specialist Support Worker, with the aim of transferring to a general needs tenancy either in the same property or another Riverside property or with another landlord. This will help the family obtain the support they need and move away from homelessness.

Initially, there were 20 units of accommodation supporting 20 families. Recently, the life of the service has been extended by six months (until June 2022) and 10 more properties have been added. The customers of Sefton Families Service were selected by Sefton Council's Housing Options team, who complete the referral. At the outset, Housing Options team were going to complete assessments as well but this is now done by the Specialist Support Workers within the Sefton Families Service.

Once a family moves on to general needs accommodation, ongoing relevant support is accessed, for example via Riverside's Intensive Intervention Service (under 30's), Money Advice, Affordable Warmth and/or external agencies to ensure the best possible outcome for the family.

The payment schedule is based on measurable outcomes. These outcomes focus on securing accommodation then sustaining those tenancies by supporting families. More detail about those outcomes and the progress made towards achieving them can be found in Section 3 below. The service also has a number of stated aims for improving the lives of its customers, they are:

- Sustain tenancies
- Maximise independence
- Reduce social isolation
- Improve health and wellbeing

The Report

This report focuses on:

- The progress to date of the Sefton Families Service, establishing whether the service has achieved its aims and objectives
- Identifying any issues and areas of underperformance
- Identifying and detailing the achievements of the service and any learning points
- Briefly considering the success / challenges of the piloting of a Payment by Results approach
- Considering the fiscal impact of the service

Evaluation

The key elements of the evaluation were:

- Analysis of all data / indicators and outcomes
- Input and analysis of customer satisfaction surveys and case studies
- Interviews with the service team

- Interviews with stakeholders
- Interviews with customers
- Analysis of the fiscal impact of the service

Performance Data

Outcomes

The payment schedule is based on measurable outcomes. These outcomes focus on securing accommodation then sustaining those tenancies by supporting families.

Ultimately, the support will lead to permanent accommodation and prevent families presenting as homeless in the future. Key outcomes / milestones are:

- Access to Temporary accommodation (evidence from licence agreement)
- Sustainment of Temporary accommodation 3 months (evidence from licence agreement)
- Sustainment of Temporary accommodation 6 months (evidence from licence agreement)
- Sustainment of Temporary accommodation 9 months (evidence from licence agreement)
- Sustainment of Temporary accommodation 12 months (evidence from current licence agreement)
- Access to general needs tenancy (evidence from current tenancy)
- General needs tenancy sustainment 6 months (evidence from tenancy agreement/Open Housing entry)
- General needs tenancy sustainment 12 months (evidence from tenancy agreement/Open Housing entry)

The table below shows data up to the end of May 2021. Twenty-three families had accessed temporary accommodation. Two of these families then left their properties to return to family or move out of the area. Five families have transitioned to general needs.

Throughout the delivery of the service the team met their contractual targets, which was 10 properties in the first year and ten in the second year.

Customer Feedback

Customer Exit Surveys

The table below shows the responses to fourteen feedback forms that have been collected by the Specialist Support Worker. They show that there is unanimous agreement that:

- The Specialist Support Worker treats them with respect
- Riverside Care and Support enable them to access other services
- They have been able to have a say in the support they receive
- They are happy in their accommodation

Seven of the ten customers were not ready to move on yet. One customer feels that they need more support than they already receive (but this is not elaborated upon). Four customers were asked if they had encountered any barriers when accessing or using services. None had.

Question	Total	
	Yes	No
Do you receive sufficient support?	13	1
Does your support worker treat you with respect?	14	0
Have Riverside Care and Support enabled you to access other services?	14	0
Have you been able to have a say in the support you receive?	14	0
Are you happy in your accommodation?	14	0
Have you encountered any barriers when accessing or using our services?	0	4
Are you ready to move on / transfer?	3	7

The comments section of the feedback form reveals more about the way the service has helped and supported customers:

- *“Myself and my family are so thankful for all the support we have been given by our support worker. Our lives have been improved and our children are so much more settled and happier in themselves”*
- *“Brilliant, eases stress and anxiety for me. I have received so much help and support and I am so grateful.”*
- *“The service is brilliant, and they help me a lot and help me do things I can’t do”*
- *“I think the care has been brilliant, helpful. Thank you.”*
- *“Boss care and support.”*
- *“Very helpful, very good support with accessing schemes in the area.”*
- *“Excellent service, helped our family so much.”*
- *“I am really happy with everything they are helping me with.”*
- *“I have received a lot of support from Clare. The support I received was amazing, always a text or call away, never had to wait. Couldn’t ask for a better service.”*
- *“Gave support when / where needed and treated with respect, nothing at fault.”*
- *“Can’t thank you enough for all the support.”*
- *“Lovely service from support.”*
- *“Everyone has been amazing. Clare has been the best support; she has done things for me that I didn’t even know existed. Cannot thank her enough.”*

There is one exit questionnaire from a family that has transitioned to general needs. Their feedback shows that they:

- Received sufficient support
- Were treated fairly and with respect by their support worker
- Were enabled to access other services by Riverside Care and Support
- Had a say in the support they received
- Were happy in their accommodation
- Had not encountered any barriers when accessing or using Riverside Care and Support's services

The family commented *"Excellent service – helped our family so much!!"*.

Customer Interviews

Interviews

As part of the final evaluation of the Sefton Families Service we conducted interviews with ten customers (50% of the total customer base). Due to Covid-19 restrictions, customers were interviewed via a phone call. This is not the ideal method for these interviews as it makes it difficult to develop a relationship with the interviewee and probe their responses and comments. As a result, the questionnaire focused on collecting quantitative information with some comments being recorded as well.

Before Referral

Before referral to Sefton Families Service, four customers were living with family, four had their own (unstable) accommodation (usually private rented) and two were in temporary accommodation (one of these had been evicted and the other had been staying with family).

The reasons for becoming homeless included being evicted (or facing eviction) from their accommodation, leaving insanitary or unacceptable private rented accommodation, being overcrowded in shared accommodation (usually with family) and breakdown of relationships (including domestic violence). One customer was living with family after leaving her home due to being targeted with anti-social behaviour.

"There was me, my four kids, my mum and my elder daughter who lives with my mum in a two-bed flat."

"We had an infestation of mice, then there were other problems then the landlord wanted us to leave."

The length of time customers had been homeless prior to referral to Sefton Families Service varied considerably (from a couple of weeks to four months).

Referral

Customers were asked how they were referred to Sefton Families Service. We know that all the customers participating in the survey were referred by Housing Options. However, six customers did not specifically mention Housing Options. Instead, they referred to the Council, the Housing Department or just *"the Housing"*.

Nine of the ten customers were satisfied or very satisfied with the referral process. Many were aware that they were registered on Property Pool (also referred to as the waiting list). A number of customers mentioned that they had little expectation of securing social housing via Property Pool despite what they perceived to be their priority status. Some were very understanding about the high demand and limited supply of housing. The customer who wasn't satisfied felt that they had to wait too long in unsuitable temporary accommodation.

How satisfied were you with the referral process (that is the way you were introduced to the Sefton Families

Service)?	
Very satisfied	5
Satisfied	4
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	0
Not very satisfied	1
Not satisfied at all	0

“Every time I checked Property Pool there was nothing even though I thought I had a high priority.”

“They (Housing Options) were fine. They just kept saying there was nothing available. But then they passed me on to Riverside so that was fantastic.”

“They were doing the best they could.”

The table below shows that eight customers were satisfied or very satisfied with the time the referral process took. This is partly explained by the fact that, as mentioned above, some customers understood or accepted that finding them accommodation was difficult. A number of customers had previous experience of being homeless and this may have limited (or brought some realism) to their expectations. Also, the fact that they were eventually rehoused into accommodation (and, in most cases, had their expectations exceeded) may have led to a more positive view of the referral process. We haven't got the exact figures but four customers mention having previous experience of being homeless (our data suggests other may well have been homeless before). This may have limited their expectations regarding the time referral took.

The majority of customers mention being surprised at being contacted by the Sefton Families Service and the speed at which they were rehoused once referred. Some customers felt that they had been waiting for a long time between contacting Housing Options and being referred. One of the customers who wasn't very satisfied was in temporary accommodation and had never been homeless before.

How satisfied were you with the time the referral process took?	
Very satisfied	5
Satisfied	3
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	0
Not very satisfied	2
Not satisfied at all	0

“It felt like it took forever, the place (hotel) that we were in wasn't nice and it was hard to look after my daughter in there.”

“When Clare rang to offer me the property, I was amazed.”

“It didn't feel like I had waited that long.”

“I knew that it would take some time...I was very happy with the amount of time it did take.”

Eight of the ten customers felt that referral process ran smoothly. Two felt that it didn't. One of these customers was in temporary accommodation and, clearly, had been very desperate to move out.

Was referral a smooth process?

Yes	8
No	2

Only two customers had any further comments about the referral process.

"It was much better than I expected."

"It was frustrating but, in the end, it worked out really well for us."

Support

The table below shows that all customers were very happy with the level of contact they have with their Specialist Support Worker.

How happy were you with the level of contact you have / had with the Specialist Support Worker?	
Very happy	10
Happy	0
Neither happy nor unhappy	0
Not very happy	0
Not happy at all	0

“They were in touch regularly and I felt that I could get in touch whenever I needed something.”

All customers were happy with the way support was delivered.

How happy were you with the way support was delivered?	
Very happy	10
Happy	0
Neither happy nor unhappy	0
Not very happy	0
Not happy at all	0

“Since I started working with Clare she has done a hell of a lot for me. She’s been there for me more than my social worker. I’d recommend the service to anyone.”

“Mandy has been absolutely fantastic. She has helped me in so many ways. Nothing is too much trouble.”

Customers described a variety of methods that were used to deliver support. All customers had weekly contact, as a minimum, with their Specialist Support Worker. This included text messages at the beginning and end of the week, doorstep visits to check on progress and visits inside the home to deal with major issues, complete paperwork or make home inspections.

“Every couple of days I’d get a text, then phone calls a couple of times a week to check in on me. Then she started doing doorstep visits.”

All customers were happy or very happy with the intensive support they received from the Specialist Support Worker. All customers felt that they got all the support they needed, that they could request help and expect to get it and that Specialist Support Workers often suggested support that they didn’t know they needed. One customer mentioned a document she was given that included contact details for all the support she might need in the future. Many customers valued the contact they had even if it wasn’t related to solving a particular problem or providing a specific piece of help or advice. Some customers are vulnerable, isolated from social networks and dealing with trauma, for them a friendly, supportive chat is a vital service.

How happy were you with the intensive support you received from the Specialist Support Worker?	
Very happy	9
Happy	1
Neither happy nor unhappy	0

Not very happy	0
Not happy at all	0

“She applied for a grant for a charity for my son. I went through a lot with his Dad and he witnessed that. She could get help for him because of that. I couldn’t believe it, I was like wow, it was quite overwhelming. We did his room up and that made him settle (in the new house) really quick so I could settle as well. He suffers with night terrors and he hasn’t had them as much.”

“She sometimes provides help and information I didn’t ask for; she is very helpful.”

Customers were very happy with the way that the Specialist Support Worker worked with them. The most common words used to describe the Specialist Support Workers were lovely, friendly, caring, empathetic, supportive and committed. Customers felt that their worker understood their needs and was doing everything they could to help them sustain their tenancy.

“She actually related to some of the things I’d gone through. She understood what had happened to us and didn’t judge.”

There was a feeling that the Specialist Support Worker recognised the level of support a customer needed (intensive or otherwise) and responded accordingly.

“She did everything for me, I mean she wasn’t wiping my backside but she might as well have been.”

Furthermore, some felt that the Specialist Support Worker went above and beyond what might be expected of them.

“Sometimes when I was struggling for food she was there all the time.”

We used a list of potential areas of support to try and identify what support customers received. However, the nature of the interview format (telephone) meant that probing was difficult and, consequently, we did not get an exhaustive list of support received. Furthermore, there may have been a reluctance to mention certain areas of support. As a result, we have not quantified the support received. In order of mentions, the most common areas of support received included:

- Maintaining accommodation
- Helping to organise utilities
- Budgeting and managing debts
- Applying for welfare benefits
- Managing time and appointments
- Developing life skills
- Developing links with family, friends and the community
- Accessing care & counselling services
- General health and wellbeing
- Mental health support
- Substance/alcohol misuse
- Tackling offending behaviour

Help dealing with domestic violence was not mentioned in our list but was mentioned by a number of customers.

Customers didn’t identify any areas of support they needed that they didn’t get.

The Team

We asked about the contact customers had with other members of the team. Most customers had contact with (or were aware of) the other Specialist Support Worker (i.e. the one they weren’t working with). A number of customers had also had contact with

the Housing Officer. Where customers had contact with other members of the team they felt that the team member was professional and effective.

External Services

All customers had been referred to other services by their specialist support worker. Generally, they reflect some of the areas of support listed above. Again, we have not quantified the services referred to but in order of mentions they include:

- Medical services
- Community participation events and services.
- Support with domestic violence issues
- Additional practical and emotional support
- Psychiatric and community mental health services
- Education, training and employment related services
- Personal care services
- Drug and alcohol services

As we mentioned above, there may have been a reluctance to mention some areas of support accessed. As a result, the list above may not be exhaustive or reflect the actual number of people who accessed these services.

“Actually, working with Clare means that my social worker isn’t on my back anymore.”

All customers are happy or very happy with the support they received from external services.

How happy were you with the support you received from external services?	
Very happy	7
Happy	3
Neither happy nor unhappy	0
Not very happy	0
Not happy at all	0

Current Accommodation

All customers were happy or very happy with their accommodation. A number of customers mentioned that the property had exceeded their expectations. Location, particularly proximity to services, was a key benefit identified by some customers. The neighbourhood, including the area being peaceful and the neighbours friendly was also mentioned. One customer had moved from Southport to Bootle. Whilst this presented challenges with changing schools and other services she was very happy with her new location.

How happy are you with your new accommodation?	
Very happy	8
Happy	2
Neither happy nor unhappy	0
Not very happy	0
Not happy at all	0

“When I saw it (her new property) I was like wow! It’s a house, the kids have got their own rooms, everything is so much better (than her previous private rented flat).”

“The house is amazing, so much more than I could ever have wished for.”

All customers settled in easily or very easily. In part, this was a result of the support they received from the team, the fact that the property was furnished and that they got help setting up utilities and other services. Interestingly, none of the customers who needed help had trouble arranging benefits to cover rent payments.

How easily did you settle in?	
Very easily	9
Easily	1
Neither	0
Not very easily	0
Not at all easily	0

All customers got help furnishing their property. Customers mention getting help with sofas, beds, white goods and kitchen equipment amongst other things. Some had less possessions than others and needed more help. One customer was concerned that there wasn't enough storage in her kitchen. However, most customers were very happy with the furniture and household goods they received. A couple of customers mentioned that they would like to decorate their home but can't do whilst they are under licence. Nine customers wanted to be near family when they were rehoused. One customer specifically didn't want to be near family because of her past experiences. Of the nine that did want to be near family, one customer felt that they could be nearer. However, they had also wanted to be near their child's school and this had been accomplished. *"Basically, the area I'm in now is the area I grew up in. My Mum and Dad are a five-minute walk away."*

The table below shows the positive elements of customers' new homes. As mentioned above, most customers mention that location and neighbours are a positive element of their new accommodation. All customers feel that the support they receive is a good aspect of their new home whilst all but one are positive about getting more independence and establishing a routine.

What is good or bad about your current accommodation?	Good	OK	Bad
Location	8	2	0
Other people who live here	7	3	0
Support offered	10	0	0
Level of independence	9	1	0
The routine of having own home	9	1	0

Impact

Overall, the impact of the service on customers appears to have been very positive. Customer were asked if certain aspects of their life had improved since being rehoused. All customers felt that their health, feeling of wellbeing and independence / resilience had improved. One person (who was working) felt that their financial situation hadn't improved but hadn't got any worse.

Have any of the following improved since you were rehoused??	Yes	No	N/A
Your health	10	0	0
Your mental health	7	0	3
Your feeling of wellbeing	10	0	0

Your financial situation	9	1	0
Your independence / resilience	10	0	0
How you use your time	9	0	1

"I never really went out, now I'm out and about a lot and I sit on the step."

"I didn't realise until I moved how much that place (her old home) had affected me. Here I can open my back door, the children can play out, its lovely."

"I've taken a lot more steps and I'm closer to where I want to be. I'm definitely happier but my mental health needs a lot more work. But being in my own space has given me a chance to reflect and understand everything (relating to a personal trauma)."

All customers feel that using the service has been a positive experience. They also feel that it has had a significant impact on their life.

"It has been brilliant; it has changed my life."

"I've suffered a lot of anxiety and depression over the last few months and after a few weeks here I feel like a completely different person."

The Future

All but two of the customers would be happy to stay in their accommodation for the foreseeable future. Whilst very happy with the accommodation, the two dissenting customers wanted to be in a different location. In one case, this related to being near family whilst another customer wanted to be nearer to their child's school.

Customer Case Studies

There are two cases studies which provide more detail about the customers, their barriers / challenges, actions taken to help them and outcomes.

Customer Profile

The customer profiles show that:

- The parent of Family 1 had left a rehabilitation unit for alcohol treatment. She had also left the family home with her two children due to a relationship breakdown with her ex-husband. The children of Family 1 stayed with their Grandmother whilst their mother completed rehab. The family were referred by Sefton Housing Options. The parent of Family 1 had previously been in full time employment and found it difficult claiming benefits.
- Family 2 were in a private rented property but had to leave due to the landlord selling it. They were also referred by Sefton Housing Options. The family includes four children under the age of 8. One parent was in part time employment and the family were in financial hardship and had debt.

Barriers / Challenges

Both families were experiencing issues with their benefits and suffering financial hardship. The parent in Family 1 had past issues with alcohol and mental health issues. Family 2 had debts and three children not receiving childcare that they were eligible for.

Key Actions

Specific actions enabled each family to meet their support needs/overcome the barriers/challenges. Details of these actions are show in the table below:

	Family 1	Family 2
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referred to Riverside money advice team and worked in partnership with them to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported with applying for free school meals for the children

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure correct UC and HB entitlement Referred to Southport Food Pantry for weekly food items at a low cost Warm home discount application Obtained 15-hour childcare eligibility vouchers for children to attend nursery Free hot meals application for children in nursery Funded cost of uniforms for children from tenant participation fund Attended CAB to address debt issues Application to Sefton Helping Hands for chest of drawers The service funded a school activity club for their eldest son During pandemic, application for food bank parcels, free school meal weekly vouchers Successfully applied for £200 CHT resettlement grant and £150 cash voucher from the Riverside Tenancy Sustainment Fund 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Referred to Ambition Sefton for support with previous alcohol issues Support with registering with local GP surgery and review of medication Referred to Households into Work, which offered a telephone support service during the Covid-19 lockdown and will work towards becoming job ready. Also supporting with UC issues Successfully applied for £100 supermarket vouchers from Riverside Tenancy Sustainment Fund Successfully applied for £1,280 from Family Action Survival Fund. This is towards food and essential items, furniture items, toys and play equipment, TV, TV license, laptop and utility arrears. This is a fund for people affected financially by the pandemic
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Outcomes / Impact

Outcomes for each family are:

- Family 1 moved into a property and then three weeks later lockdown restrictions were introduced. The parent felt isolated and struggled financially as the children were off school and indoors most of the time. Weekly vouchers were secured for the children from their schools for the equivalent of free school meals they would be getting in school. The parent was referred to Sefton Households into Work and accessed their weekly telephone support service. The parent is working towards part time employment and Households into Work are helping with this. This ameliorated some of her anxiety relating to feeling isolated. She is also engaging with her GP. The parent has peer support from the rehabilitation unit she previously resided in. She was also referred to Ambition for extra help around this issue. The pandemic has financially impacted the family as they had to buy more food/essential items as the children were off school, utility bills have also increased. The family received £100 funding from the Riverside Tenancy Sustainment Fund and £1,280 from the Family Action Survival Fund. This took a massive pressure off the family and they have been able to purchase items for the children as well as pay towards utility arrears.
- Family 2 are now receiving the correct amount of Universal Credit. One of the parents does not have to attend work related appointments at the job centre, due to being classed as the main carer for the children. They are in receipt of full housing benefit. They attend the Food Pantry and can purchase fresh foods at a low cost, as they are a family of 6. During winter months there will be credit to their gas meter, their eldest son has health issues and has a low immune system. The three youngest children now attend a local nursery three days per week. Financial hardship is being tackled and they are working with CAB to address their debt. The service funded the cost of uniforms for the children so they were able to start nursery. The family have successfully demonstrated they can manage a tenancy and have transferred to a general needs starter tenancy. The family have been

referred back to the IMAX team to ensure any benefit issues are addressed as they start to claim Universal Credit housing costs. Family 2 have signed up for the keep in touch service.

Team Interviews

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with:

- Service Manager (Interim and Final Evaluation)
- Specialist Support Worker (Interim and Final Evaluation)
- Second Specialist Support Worker (Final Evaluation)
- The Housing Officer (Interim Evaluation)
- Area Manager (Final Evaluation)
- Riverside Housing Services Manager – Sefton (Final Evaluation)

Progress

The service is performing within the contractual agreement with Sefton Council. Key achievements include:

- Met the contractual target of rehousing 20 customers
- In total, 23 customers have been engaged by the service
- Two customers have given notice. These customers have returned to family or moved out of the area, etc.
- Move-ons have been positive and there have been no abandonments
- Five customers have now transferred to general needs
- The contract for delivering the Sefton Families Service has been extended until June 2022 on a block payment contract not on PBR (i.e. more traditional commissioned service) with the addition of 10 more properties

Outcomes

The Sefton Families Service proposal stated that it would develop a two-year pilot of a dispersed tenancies service for homeless families within Sefton that supports families to:

- Sustain tenancies – there are twenty families sustaining tenancies including five families who have now transitioned to a general needs tenancy
- Maximise independence – families have greater financial security, housing stability, children are accessing education regularly and families have the potential to move towards economic independence through work and training
- Reduce social isolation – families are now, if they want to be, in accommodation close to familial and community networks. However, lockdown did lead to less contact with friends, family and support networks for many people
- Improve health and wellbeing – there is some evidence that health and wellbeing has improved. Certainly, families are accessing health services (e.g. health visitors) that they disengaged from whilst in temporary accommodation. Also, around half of the customers have mental health issues such as anxiety and depression which have been alleviated (at least) by the change in their circumstances and the opportunity to engage with relevant support services

There are no plans to amend the stated outcomes as the life of the service progresses.

As we shall see below, Covid-19 has impacted the method of delivery and processes but not the outcomes.

The team feel that the contractual outcomes are being delivered very effectively.

Tenancy sustainment is a key measure and the basis for payments being made to

Riverside by Sefton Council. The performance data in Section 3 shows that this outcome is being delivered. Measurement of the remaining three outcomes is more subjective. However, evidence from customer interviews suggests that these outcomes are being achieved as well.

“It is very positive. Things are going really well. We are getting a lot of positive feedback.”

The team feel that they can demonstrate that they have exceeded the planned contractual outcomes and added further value. Examples (e.g. grant applications, dealing with debt and arrears) are provided below.

“We are working with so-called chaotic families. But when you work with them and support them you realise they aren’t. They are families who needed better support, guidance and bit more attention than other families. They want to keep their family together and they want to keep their homes.”

Customers

The situation of customers prior to becoming homeless varies. However, it includes:

- A significant number of families fleeing domestic violence
- Relationship breakdown
- Families evicted because of arrears or families with arrears who are not accepted by private landlords
- Families that have been living with wider family in overcrowded conditions
- A couple of families evicted because their landlord was selling the property
- A family where the parent had left rehabilitation services for alcohol dependency
- A family that left their home due to being victims of anti-social behaviour
- A family in private rented accommodation that was unfit for habitation
- Some families require the support of social services, particularly in relation to child protection

Very few customers engaged by the service were resident in the Lonsdale Road Homeless Unit or living in hotels, B&Bs and other temporary accommodation. As such, the service has been used in a pre-emptive manner to avoid use of the types of temporary accommodation often used for homeless families.

Customers’ needs / issues vary but include:

- Substance misuse (this is exclusively alcohol misuse amongst current customers)
- Child protection
- Fleeing domestic violence
- Mental health issues

Process

The process envisaged by the Riverside Impact Fund proposal was that referrals would come from Housing Options. The plan was that:

- Housing Options would assess and refer all cases
- The Service Manager would have the opportunity to challenge the referral if felt the family is too high risk e.g. the family requires more intense support than the service can offer
- Criteria would include:
 - Being homeless or threatened with homelessness
 - Being resident in Sefton or having a local connection to the area
 - Having a support need, which impacts on their ability to sustain a tenancy

- Being aged 18 or over
- Having recourse to public funds such as Universal Credit (or Housing Benefit where relevant)
- If there were more applications than vacancies available, the successful applications would have been prioritised as follows:
 - Referrals fleeing violence
 - Referrals currently homeless
 - Referrals in immediate risk of becoming homeless
 - Referrals currently in unsuitable housing

When a property becomes available the Specialist Support Worker will contact Housing Options to establish if there are any families who would be interested in that particular property. This allows families to be rehoused where they have a local connection and can access wider support networks. This does not always work out. One family that were keen to get out of temporary accommodation took a property some distance from their family support but were, eventually, unhappy with the property / location. However, the team were able to subsequently rehouse the family nearer their support network. In the last six months demand has increased. Housing Options have a steady flow of families they can refer to the service. The expectation is that the demand on Housing Options and the Sefton Families Service will increase as a result of the lifting of the eviction ban put in place for Covid-19.

Four months into the service, lockdown was introduced. The Housing Options team were working from home during lockdown and had limited contact with customers.

Furthermore, the crisis relating to single homeless and rough sleepers was, understandably, a greater priority for Housing Options during lockdown.

Consequently, the Specialist Support Worker took over the task of assessing customers and managing the referral process including welfare checks and resolution of arrears / debt issues. This involved liaising with social workers and the Housing Options team.

The Specialist Support Workers feel that this method is probably more effective. In particular, as they will be offering ongoing support it makes them aware from the outset of the needs of the family.

“It (handling assessments) was just easier this way and was more effective in creating an understanding of customer needs and developing an action plan.”

Whilst the team are able to refuse a referral they have not done so. This suggests that Housing Options are aware of the criteria for acceptance and are referring appropriate customers.

Customers are entered onto Mainstay (the Merseyside system for access to short-term Housing Related Support services). If customers are accepted, they are invited to view the available property. The Housing Officer will then put together the furniture package that the family require.

The initial assessment includes establishing the full background of the referral including previous addresses, rent arrears and budgeting issues. The assessment is then reviewed with the Service Manager and (if the customer is suitable) approved.

Once referred, few customers have had to wait very long to be rehoused. This is because a property is usually available when a referral is requested. The exception are customers who want to be rehoused in an area where properties are not available.

Support for Families

Key areas of support from the Specialist Support Workers include

- Applying for welfare benefits
- Helping organise utilities and other bills / payments

- Applying for permanent housing
- Developing life skills
- Budgeting and managing debts
- Monitoring rent accounts and benefits
- Advice on care and counselling services
- Putting in place safeguards to stabilise and manage crisis situations including situations relating to domestic violence, hate crime and anti-social behaviour
- Understanding the licence agreements
- Making links within the community
- Supporting customers with the school/educational and other needs of the children.

A key element of support for customers is around rent arrears and debt. There was an initial misunderstanding (between the council and the service team) about how arrears should be dealt with. This was a challenge for the service in its early days and it is testament to the levels of cooperation across the service that a solution was quickly identified.

If arrears are identified, the Specialist Support Worker will apply to external agencies for funding to tackle debt and arrears. Housing Options are also able to offer £500 from their Hardship Fund to tackle arrears. Debt / arrears management was made much more effective by One Vision and Sefton Council agreeing to reduce arrears by 50% if the balance could be secured from other sources. There are charitable trusts the Specialist Support Worker can apply to for help with ameliorating arrears. The Specialist Support Worker has applied for grants from the Church Homeless Trust and the Vicar's Relief Fund. If arrears are carried forward into the new property (e.g. if the customer is a former Riverside tenant) a payment plan is put in place. This element of the support has become an integral part of referral and assessment since the Specialist Support Worker took over the assessment role. Again, it has resulted in a more efficient process that ensures that customers who are accepted are not going to be hindered by past debt / arrears issues.

" I had a family with £3,000 in arrears. Whilst they were on the waiting list I worked with the former landlord and made sure that this debt was tackled."

A key element of the Specialist Support Workers work is tenancy support. Their work is augmented by support from other teams within Riverside. This includes Riverside's Income Maximisation (IMAX) team. IMAX provide money advice. Riverside also provide support through their Affordable Warmth team e.g. in relation to utility debt. The Specialist Support Worker has also referred a customer to the employment and training team within Riverside. Support for areas such as benefits is also provided via referral to Sefton Welfare Rights. More recently, Riverside's Former Tenant's Arrears team have worked with a customer who had a tenancy with Riverside to reduce the amount of arrears in return for following an agreed payment plan.

A key element of support relates to sustaining the tenancy. There are differing levels of support needed to achieve this.

"Some are quite capable of sustaining their tenancy, for instance some of those fleeing domestic violence. Others, like those who have had evictions in the past, may need more intensive support."

A number of customers have a social worker. A key element of the Specialist Support Worker's role is liaising with the social worker to ensure that the family sustain their tenancy but also that any safeguarding concerns continue to be monitored and addressed.

External agency referrals include Households into Work (supporting families, in which two or more people are in long-term unemployment, find meaningful work) and Family Wellbeing Centres (offering support relating to parenting, health, relationships,

education, employment, etc.). The Specialist Support Workers have also referred customer (or family members) to the Area Health Teams

During the lockdowns, the Specialist Support Worker also liaised with food banks in Sefton to ensure that families (most of whom are on benefits) were not going short (particularly as families were spending more money on food when children were not in school).

The Specialist Support Workers have applied to the Buttle Trust for grants for children who have witnessed domestic violence. Grants have averaged £2,000 and covered everything from counselling to extra-curricular activities to clothing, toys and bedroom items. They have also worked with Family Action to secure grants for welfare and educational grants (the latter to assist with technology for home schooling during the pandemic).

Another key element of the process is assessing then sourcing the furniture package that each tenant needs. A service charge for furniture is levied and this is determined by whether they need the full package or some elements of it.

Some customers already have support in place for existing needs (e.g. substance misuse, child protection plan, etc). In these cases, the Specialist Support Worker will liaise with their case workers or social worker. However, there are customers who can be helped by being referred to other agencies. Customers have been referred to:

- Ambition Sefton (help and support with alcohol or drug problems)
- The Venus Family Centre (support, advice and information and activities women, young women, families and children)
- SWACA (an independent domestic abuse service for women and children)
- The Early Help team (identifying children and families that may be at risk of running into difficulties and providing timely and effective support)
- Social Services

“A sign of progression is a family with a child protection plan who (having engaged with services and met all requirements) moved to child in need (a lower level of need) and is now working with the area health team.”

The Team

There are currently three members of the team:

- There are two Specialist Support Workers. One worker was appointed at the start of the service and the other was appointed in the Autumn of 2020. These two workers are the only full-time members of the team. They are responsible for most of the activities described in this report. This includes:
 - Notifying Housing Options that a property is available
 - Identifying potential tenants from the list sent by Housing Options.
 - Assessing the priority and suitability of referrals e.g. establishing if they are interested in the area the property is located in
 - Completing the Mainstay assessment
 - Determining the furniture needs of the customer
 - Undertaking welfare checks
 - Assisting with benefit claims and setting up utility and other bill payments
 - Developing support plans and supporting the family
 - Referring to other support agencies
 - Managing transition to general needs
- The Service Manager. She oversees the service, recruits the Specialist Support Workers, manages claims and invoicing and liaises with the stakeholders, other

Riverside teams and the Commissioners. The Service Manager also manages the Liverpool Dispersed tenancy service.

- The Housing Officer (who also works on other Riverside services) is responsible for managing the property and the tenancy. This includes managing the void property, arranging decoration of the property, preparing the sign-up pack, signing up tenants, arranging the furniture package, managing the claims for housing benefit and dealing with any housing management issues such as anti-social behaviour.

"I have really enjoyed the job and find it really rewarding."

The Service Manager feels that the team have worked very well and are very effective.

There are no issues with staffing or resource so far.

Properties

Properties have to be identified then approved by Treasury within Riverside. The cost to the tenant is a set affordable rent and a variable service charge. The affordable rent means that if the family transition to general needs they can afford to live there.

Properties are usually void (vacant) for some time whilst repairs are carried out. The property is painted, carpeted and blinds are installed. The customer provides a list of furniture they need and white goods are provided alongside the furniture package. Some additional adaptations are made to properties provided to victims of domestic violence to provide extra security (e.g. alarms, fire retardant letter boxes, etc.).

The team are very happy with the quality of the properties provided and the relationship they have had with Riverside's general needs and assets teams. In recent months, two new build properties have been supplied to the service.

This process has led to a minor issue. Whilst on licence customers cannot decorate their property, this is something that some of them would like to do.

Generally, the team feel that the supply of property has matched the needs of customers.

Geographical location is an issue. Staff feel that there can be too many in certain areas (e.g. Bootle, Seaforth and Litherland) and not enough in other areas. However, supply is based on what is available and voids within the more sought-after areas like Southport and Maghull seldom come up. Sefton Council are understanding of the fact properties in the more sought-after areas like Southport and Maghull are rare (see section 6 below).

Overall, staff are generally happy with the quality, location and suitability of properties provided.

There are fewer properties available in areas such as Southport and Maghull although a couple of properties in Netherton were made available. The lack of availability in these areas appears to have been exacerbated by the pandemic (and the eviction ban) with even fewer vacancies becoming available in areas such as Southport. Ironically, the lifting of the eviction ban appears likely to increase the demand for support from homeless families. If the service became permanent, there is the potential to look at working with other housing providers or private landlords in areas where the supply of properties is scarce.

"We work with Jon (Farrell) and his team to get the right properties, he's really good."

One family did feel isolated in the property they were allocated. The Service Manager feels that they took the property to get out of the hostel as soon as they could. The family have now been rehoused to a more appropriate property. This flexibility allows the service to achieve its outcomes by meeting the needs of customers.

"We don't want anyone to fail so we'll do whatever is possible to help them."

There have been minor issues with some properties (which is to be expected). The Specialist Support Worker has reported such issues and is working with the families to encourage them to take responsibility for reporting any housing management issues.

The Housing Officer was happy with the families rehoused and felt that they were easy to manage during their tenancy and had not presented any problems or issues.

Impact on Customers

A major impact of the service is on the general wellbeing of the customers and restoring their independence.

“It’s massive because they have been in hostels, B&Bs or living with family members for months and months.”

Whilst in hostels or other accommodation many customers disengage from the services and support they need. Housing has a significant impact on health. Customers start to reengage with social workers, health visitors, go to children’s centres and begin to consistently access support for specific health and mental health needs. One resident with substance misuse issues in the past was able to fully engage with the support she needs.

Covid-19 and Lockdown

The Covid-19 pandemic, lockdown and the related restrictions has resulted in changes to the way the service has been delivered. As mentioned above, Covid-19 did mean that the Specialist Support Worker took over the role of assessing customers for referral. From the perspective of team members, it is felt that this development streamlined referrals and made the process easier. Day to day support continued to be delivered in person in some circumstances but telephone contact also became more important than it might have been.

As mentioned above, the consequences of the eviction ban may be twofold:

- A more limited supply of properties for the service
- A potential surge in demand when the ban is lifted

The causal link between Covid-19 lockdowns and domestic violence is still being examined. However, there was a clear surge in cases that led to an increase in demand for services such as Housing Options. A significant proportion of the customers referred to the Families Service are domestic violence victims, given that the service and Covid-19 are coterminous we cannot establish whether domestic violence referrals would have been lower if the pandemic had not happened.

The Housing Officer felt that Covid-19 had not really affected housing management. In part, this was a result of some tenants not being particularly demanding or challenging. For some customers, phone calls and regular texts were the main form of communication. However, because some customers were vulnerable it was necessary to continue face to face support. This was possible with use of appropriate PPE and, if possible, doorstep visits. Covid-19 has impacted on the methods of support with many meetings being virtual.

“It wouldn’t be the first-choice method of support but I think they got the same results.”

Covid-19 did cause some delays to properties becoming available. This was caused by the company Riverside use to furnish properties ceasing deliveries for some time at the start of the first lockdown.

A further challenge relating to Covid-19 was that many support services were not fully operational. The services they offer were reduced, physical appointments were not available and demand for service was not being managed as effectively. Furthermore, services such as mental health were facing a massive increase in demand. This presented a challenge for the team and led them to explore other avenues of support.

Partners / Stakeholders

As mentioned above, a key relationship is with Housing Options. However, this has changed during Covid-19. Assessments are now being carried out by the Specialist

Support Workers rather than Housing Options. At times, the flow and volume of referrals has been sporadic. However, the team understand that this has been a result of intense pressure from the volume of single homeless Housing Options are dealing with.

The team also work with a variety of support services throughout Sefton including social workers, Sefton domestic abuse team, health visitors, children's centres, debt advice, etc. These are crucial to sustaining tenancies and achieving outcomes relating to health, wellbeing, financial stability, etc. Many of these services have continued to offer support virtually through regular phone calls.

As mentioned above, the team work closely with IMAX, Affordable Warmth and other teams within Riverside.

" I feel that I have built really good working relationships with my team and the teams we work with across Riverside."

There are quarterly meetings with Sefton Council. The team feel that the commissioners are happy with their work. In particular, they take the fact that service is to be extended as a sign that they are doing well.

General Needs

Five customers have now transitioned to general needs accommodation. The service offers a Keep in Touch service for eight weeks follow on support. The Specialist Support Worker calls the family every two weeks to ensure that their tenancy is running smoothly. The family are then referred to Riverside internal services. This includes the IMAX team and the intensive support service.

The key point is that if the team feel that a customer is not ready they will not be transitioned to general needs. The Housing Officer responsible for the property once it is in general needs also has to agree to the transition. This includes checking there are no issues with neighbours, all arrears are cleared and that the tenancy has been conducted in an appropriate way.

A key element of the transition is the switch from Housing Benefit support for the supported tenancy to Universal Credit Housing Costs for the general needs tenancy. This required support from the Specialist Support Worker and Riverside's Money Advice team.

The team feel that all their current tenants in temporary accommodation are on course to transition to general needs. The key variable that determines when they will transition is the extent to which they currently need to be supported.

The tenants now in general needs are doing well. There is some confidence that customers will be able to sustain their general needs tenancies for as long as they want them.

Payment by Results

The Support Workers feel that payment by results does not impact the way the service is delivered.

" I don't feel under any pressure to deliver results, I am just doing my job in the same way I have in the past. Obviously, I have to make sure that all my records are up to date and documented."

However, it is a new way of working for the Service Manager and has required adaptation and adjustment from the delivery model she is used to.

"It is a long process, particularly internally with the housing side and the finance side. There are a lot of steps to get from a referral to rehousing someone."

There is a feeling that payment by results is appropriate for a pilot but would be less attractive as part of a tendered competitive contract.

Challenges

All members of staff feel that the service has been relatively straightforward to deliver and that there have been few challenges. Some members of the team did expect customers to be more chaotic and present more challenges.

As mentioned above, Covid-19 did present challenges but they have been addressed. The biggest challenge the team has faced was when a family left the service. The circumstances of the case were beyond the control of the team. In brief, a safeguarding issue with a child led to their eligibility for support from the service being withdrawn.

A smaller challenge at the start of the service related to claiming Housing Benefits. This revolved around the Housing Benefits team's definition of supported temporary accommodation (which is eligible for Housing Benefit) and whether tenants should claim Universal Credit. This has now been resolved.

As mentioned above, a challenge at the start of the service related to how customers with arrears should be dealt with. However, this was resolved quite early in the service and the approach mentioned above was adopted.

Another challenge (which the team think has been met) and mentioned elsewhere in this section is the supply of properties.

Innovation

There were a number of aspects of the service that were innovative or different for Riverside. This includes;

- Delivering their first payments by results service
- Delivering their first dispersed families service of this type. The service adopted something akin to a Housing First approach for families
- Delivering their first Care and Support service in Sefton. This has been a key step and has been rewarded by the service being extended and Riverside being awarded a contract to deliver an accommodation pathway service for rough sleepers
- Delivering a service with, perhaps, a more holistic approach that exploited many areas of Riverside's infrastructure. The service drew on a number of teams across Care and Support and general needs to ensure that outcomes were achieved
- Given that Riverside Care and Support had no track record in Sefton, developing relationships and connections with other agencies from scratch (in a pandemic) was a major achievement by the team
- Reputationally, the service has been a major success. The team and, possibly, Riverside as a whole are seen as an organisation that will rise to a challenge, innovate and persevere to make a service succeed

Deadweight

We asked what would have happened to the customers without this service. At best, progression to living in independent accommodation would have been much slower. However, there may have been consequences relating to health, wellbeing, family cohesion, etc. that would have been detrimental if they had not been rehoused. The long wait to leave hostel / B&B accommodation combined with standing rent arrears means that many would still be in temporary accommodation.

"One of my customers said that felt she would have had her child removed from her if she had not been rehoused by the service."

Value for Money

The team feel that the service should be providing value for money. It has led to stability for families that may have needed long stays in temporary accommodation whilst appropriate accommodation was found.

The Future

The pilot service was due to be completed by December 2021 but has been extended until June 2022. This means that the service will continue to accept referrals until August 2021. The team will be assessing referrals to ensure that nine months will be enough time to support the families appropriately. The contract extension will not be delivered on a payment by result basis. The willingness of Sefton Council to extend the service is evidence that it has been successful and is needed.

The team feel that the service is sustainable and could be run cost-effectively as a mainstream commissioned service.

The team also feel that the model adopted in Sefton could be transferred to other areas where Riverside has a significant housing stock and families' services are needed (e.g. Knowsley and the Wirral).

Stakeholder Interviews

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with:

- Riverside Business Development Officer – North East and North West (Region 1 and Region 6)
- Strategic Housing Officer - Sefton Council
- Housing Options Team Leader – Sefton Council
- Riverside Senior Business Development Officer (Final Evaluation)
- Riverside Acting Senior Business Development Officer (Interim Evaluation).

Project Rationale

Sefton Council have an action within their Homeless Strategy to source additional dispersed accommodation for homeless families. This meant that the opportunity presented by the Riverside Investment Fund was attractive to Sefton Council. Space in the homeless families' hostel at Lonsdale Road is limited and cannot meet demand. Furthermore, it is in the south of the borough and the council wanted to provide a dispersed model that provided housing nearer to a family's last known address. The limited capacity of Lonsdale Road and absence of dispersed options meant that Sefton's costs relating to B&B and hotel provision had risen significantly. Beside this pragmatic reason, the motivation for commissioning the service was twofold:

- Providing a permanent, rather than temporary, solution to the issues presented by some of the borough's most chaotic homeless families
- Reducing dependence on B&Bs and hotels which are not appropriate place to temporarily house homeless families

Importantly, Sefton were willing to test a new approach. The service adopted an approach that is similar to Housing First. This is a housing and support approach which gives people (usually single homeless) a stable home from which to rebuild their lives. It provides intensive, person-centred, holistic support that is open-ended and places no conditions on individuals. The difference is that Housing First projects should adhere strictly to seven key principles¹. Whilst Sefton Families Service delivery matched many aspects of these principles there was no insistence that it adhere to them.

The service also adopted an approach that had been used in Riverside's Dispersed Housing Service in Liverpool. However, a key difference was that Sefton required Specialist Support Workers who could offer the intensive support that the customers needed.

Despite the absence of a track record of care and support contracts in Sefton the council did not view the award of a contract as a leap of faith.

"They are a huge RSL (Registered Social Landlord) in terms of national RSL and have a lot of presence in the Liverpool City Region. Even though they are not our biggest stock transfer RSL it still made sense to go with them."

Riverside worked with Sefton Council to map agencies, charities and organisations that could provide support for homeless families. This enabled the team to create a network of support services in an area where they hadn't previously operated.

¹<https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/The%20Principles%20for%20Housing%20First.pdf>

Customers

The council felt that the service offered the opportunity to meet the needs of chaotic families. The option of rehousing and offering intensive support appealed because it had the potential to break a cycle of re-presentation before the council's homeless services by some customers.

"This service would support those most chaotic families that had a history of evictions, rent arrears and ASB (antisocial behaviour). To put them into a service with a high level of support but trial it with a licence. A carrot and stick approach of a possible tenancy at the end of the licence."

Financial hardship is often the bedrock of the fractured housing history of many of the customers.

"A lot of the families we have worked with have been benefit capped. So, they have a big problem around rent arrears."

The benefit cap limits the overall amount that people can claim if they're unemployed by reducing their Housing Benefit. There is a fear that the pandemic and the eviction ban may have doubled the number of people affected by the benefit cap.²

In many instances, financial distress is accompanied by other complex issues such as substance misuse, harassment, antisocial behaviour, child protection issues and domestic violence.

"In Sefton we do have quite a big problem with gangs which has impacted a lot of families that need our support. There are risks to some of these families from remaining in certain areas so we have had to relocate them into temporary accommodation."

Referral

The council are happy with the referral process. As mentioned above, case workers within Housing Options are identifying chaotic families with a history of failed tenancies and a requirement for intensive support. Case workers are very aware of the work that Riverside are doing with customers and select referrals that can benefit from that support.

Housing Options are happy that the Sefton Families Service are now carrying out assessments. It relieves the pressure on case workers with a very high case load (around 50 cases) who over the last eighteen months have been dealing with high levels of demand from single homeless people. Furthermore, the council realise that the Specialist Support Worker can build a relationship prior to rehousing to allow them to plan support and manage expectations. This is similar to the pre-engagement process adopted by Housing First projects.

Outcomes / Impact

The council are very happy with the progress the service has made. The progress to deliver outcomes is evident from the quarterly returns (see section 3). However, the case studies provided to the council (see section 3) have made it evident that work around the service's aims (sustaining tenancies, maximising independence, reducing social isolation and improving health and wellbeing) are also being met.

"The service has progressed to the point where we are extending by six months and expanding capacity to thirty properties."

Sustaining tenancies is an important element of the service because it is unlikely to be happening if other needs are not being addressed. Sustaining tenancies is also important because it is something the customers have struggled to achieve in the past. It is evidence that the Housing First informed approach is being effective.

² <https://cpag.org.uk/news-blogs/news-listings/hitting-home-benefit-cap-and-child-homelessness>

“You are touching on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, if you give someone a tenancy everything else follows from that.”

In terms of impact, the service means that there have been no repeat presentations to Housing Options from any family referred to Riverside. This is regarded as a key measure of success and a significant achievement. This also demonstrates that, so far, the service has eliminated failure demand (duplication and inefficient use of services caused by the inability to tackle the root cause of the subject’s situation). We will examine the fiscal impact of the service in section 7 (below) but the cost of a re-presentation to Housing Options is estimated to be around £600 per week.

There is limited quantitative evidence to allow us to measure the wider impact of the service. However, stakeholders reinforce the view of the Service’s team that the service is likely to have had a positive influence on the work of support agencies and on the wider community. The exception is those agencies that might experience higher demand (possibly mental health services) because customers are now being supported (and emboldened) to seek help with their issues.

There have been no abandonments and no failures of either licences or tenancies. There was an agreement that Riverside would offer customers another option if the licence / tenancy failed but this has not been required so far. As a result, the council feel that the most unexpected outcome of the service is the number of customers sustaining their tenancy. Their knowledge and prior experience of the customers led them to expect that there would be some failures.

Properties

The council mentioned that the aim of providing accommodation near to the customer’s last known address has been challenging. They understand that supply has been driven by the location of Riverside stock and, more importantly, the availability of that stock.

“It is just a case of being realistic. If someone has come from Crosby, you are not going to get a Crosby address are you?”

“If they are from Southport, it doesn’t matter which housing association you deal with stock is limited. We have to have a very frank conversation about their expectations and manage it right from the beginning.”

There is the possibility of enhancing the supply of housing by linking it to Sefton’s Empty Homes Plan³.

“We are getting into the area of Housing Strategy. If a model like this was commissioned long term you could look at the Council’s Empty Homes Plan to possibly link any empty homes into the service. The council could bring them up to standard then transfer them across. That way you would get a more dispersed stock.”

The council are very happy with the standard of the properties being offered to customers. In particular, they mentioned the effort put into decorating and furnishing properties to ensure that customers can move in with ease.

“What people are moving into is such a great start, normally it wouldn’t be that way but they are moving into a home not a house.”

Working with Riverside

The council are happy with the way that the Sefton Families Service team have delivered the service. They feel that there is mutual cooperation and a willingness to raise concerns and offer help or support when required.

“It is all very positive and, from our perspective, the service is running itself. We don’t need to manage it which has been a blessing for the last twelve months when we have been so stretched in other areas.”

³ <https://www.sefton.gov.uk/media/3598/empty-homes-plan-2019-24.pdf>

The council feel that their relationship with Riverside has strengthened as a result of the way that the Sefton Families Service has been delivered.

“We have explored other opportunities with Riverside on the back of this. That includes the rough sleeper accommodation programme.”

“The service has strong political support within Sefton. The report proposing the extension was approved very quickly by the Cabinet member responsible.”

Riverside’s Business Development Officer responsible for Sefton has observed a significant change in the relationship with Sefton. This has been driven by the successful delivery of the Sefton Families Service. Recently, Sefton invited Riverside to work with them on the Next Step Accommodation Programme (a Government programme aimed at transitioning from the Everyone In rough sleeper initiative to longer term solutions). Also, a market test brief issued by Sefton aimed at converting properties for use as temporary accommodation drew on their experience with the families’ service. Riverside are now discussing this project with Sefton. This suggests that the RIF has not only been successful in the context of the families service but has led to the development of an ongoing relationship that should benefit Sefton and Riverside.

Covid-19

The council are happy with the way the service has been delivered, despite the issues that might have been created by the pandemic. Key areas include:

- Switching assessments from the Housing Options case worker to the Specialist Support Worker. This is discussed above
- An issue at the start of Covid-19 was that there weren’t many families presenting as homeless. This was partly a result of the ban on evictions. However, the number of customers has increased and is, in part, a result of an increase in domestic violence cases. Interestingly, domestic violence cases presenting to Housing Options were lower in the early stages of the pandemic but have increased in the last nine months.

Challenges

There have been some challenges but relatively few. The council are generally happy with the way Riverside have responded when an issue has been identified. This includes the response to Covid-19 mentioned above. One challenge was agreeing on how to deal with rent arrears. This has already been explored in Section 5 above. However, the council appreciated the effort put into resolving the arrears policy in a timely fashion.

“The approach to arrears was ironed out pretty quickly. We now have processes in place to ensure that Riverside know about arrears and can put a plan in place.”

Innovation

The council feel that, compared to their usual commissions, the service is innovative. This relates to the way the service has been delivered and the funding and tendering approach taken.

“It is basically Housing First for families and the success of it means that it is now a part of our homeless strategy.”

Deadweight

The council feel that customers would have to have secured private rented accommodation if the service had not been available. However, this would have been difficult due to their own housing history and the shortage of private rented accommodation in the borough. As a result, the likelihood was that customers would have experienced an extended stay in temporary accommodation.

“They would have spent much longer in temporary accommodation than is usual. The cost would have been horrendous. If they got a tenancy, they would struggle to sustain it and they would be re-presenting to Housing Options in due course. The lack of the sort of support the service offers would mean even sustaining a social housing tenancy would be challenging.”

Cost of repeat presentations is a concern but the Council’s adherence to trauma informed practices mean they are particularly worried about the impact on the family (and children in particular) in terms of their health, wellbeing and financial situation.

The Future

Sefton Council expect to include provision for rehousing homeless families in their homeless strategy in the future. In the short term, this is covered by the contract extension for the Sefton Families Service.

“It has been a really important pilot. It has allowed us to test this approach and confirm that we want to carry on rehousing families in this way.”

A potential stimulus for further activities in the short-term is the potential impact of the lifting of the eviction ban in June 2021.

Fiscal Impact

Introduction

In this section we consider the fiscal impact and cost effectiveness of the service. The intention is to illustrate the potential savings in public spending from the service's approach. However, the fact that the commissioners feel that the service is value for money and cost effective renders this section a largely academic exercise. Furthermore, the commissioners acknowledge that the approach adopted by the service is considerably more effective than the usual method of dealing with homeless families. As such, fiscal impact or social value is not necessarily the most important way of judging the impact of the service.

Project Cost

If all outcomes for the service are achieved for a family the payment from Sefton Council to Riverside would be £7,260 per family. If service delivers the original target of 20 families rehoused leading to sustaining a general needs tenancy for 12 months, the total cost to Sefton Council would be £145,200. In fact, to help Sefton Council budget for the whole service over the two years and following good practice from other payment-by-results projects, a cap on outcome payments of £150,000 was agreed.

Potential Savings

In 2019/2020 the cost of using temporary accommodation included

- Lonsdale Road hostel - £12,872
- B&B accommodation - £183,276
- Total - £196,148

151 households were housed in temporary accommodation during this period. The number of families in was 62 (including 129 children). The average number of nights in temporary accommodation was 16. This is an average cost per night of £81.

Given that Sefton Families Service customers are sustaining their licence / tenancy, a valid comparison is between the cost of the service and the current alternative to rehousing via the service. The commissioners felt that customers not housed by the service were likely to find private rented accommodation but that factors such as their tenancy history and arrears may mean they spend some time in temporary accommodation. The council also felt that the history of customers suggested that they would re-present as homeless in the near future.

The scenario below estimates the cost of one homeless presentation. We must stress that not all cost within the scenario would be incurred by Sefton Council. The scenario is based on the cost of a complex eviction and subsequent homeless application. The data is sourced from New Economy Manchester's interpretation of a report by Shelter⁴. The scenario includes

- The on-going cost of providing temporary accommodation in the private rented sector whilst the homelessness application was progressing (average 2.3 weeks based on an average 16-night stay at a cost of £81 per night).
- Costs following on from a successful homelessness application e.g. additional costs relating to extended stay in temporary accommodation and a new letting being made (see related costs in this section).

⁴https://assets.ctfassets.net/6sxvmndnnpn0s/7Eapmg2bWNS5YP66zTTtL8/882a3ed442f637ad5990b1c473d324ce/Immediate_costs_to_government_of_losing_a_home.pdf

- Indirect costs that may accrue to the state in the future are not included, such as increased healthcare costs
- Wider economic and social costs are excluded - e.g. economic costs to private companies, individuals and organisations, and social costs to individuals and society around personal well-being, social cohesion, etc.

Direct costs of a complex eviction and homeless application			
Cost	Unit	Agency bearing the cost / making the fiscal saving	Estimated cost/saving (£)
Cost of writing off rent arrears	Per incident	RSL	1,900
Administrative costs of eviction	Per incident	RSL	1,119
Cost of re-letting property post-eviction	Per incident	RSL	2,787
Cost of housing advice funded through the Legal Aid Agency	Per session	HM Treasury	174
Average cost of administering a decision on a homelessness application	Per application		375
Ongoing cost of temporary accommodation (private rented sector) whilst homelessness decision made	16 nights	DWP	568
Cost of advice on housing (funded by the Legal Aid Agency)	Per session	HM Treasury	80
Average cost of administering a decision on a homelessness application	Per application		375
Administration cost associated with new letting (following acceptance of homelessness application)	Per incident	RSL	477
Process costs involved in concluding a local authority's statutory homelessness duty, following re-housing of the client	Per incident		230
Total			8,085

This scenario suggests a cost of £8,085 for one eviction and homeless application. This is £825 more than the total cost of rehousing a family via the Sefton Families Service. If there were more than one incidence of homelessness during the two years (the period of the Sefton Families Service) then the saving would be much higher e.g. a saving of £8,910 on two re-presentations. This scenario assumes some time spent in temporary accommodation. In fact, many of the customers rehoused by Sefton Families Service did not spend time in temporary accommodation, this reduces the total cost to £7,517 and the saving to £257. However, some did and, given the complexity of their needs they may well have spent longer in temporary accommodation than the 16-day average we have used. Also, we have not included additional costs related to the homeless episode from which customers were rehoused. Without the option of rehousing, the time in temporary accommodation (and some of the other costs) could have been much higher.

The scenario uses proxies instead of actual costs. If this exercise was vital to considerations about the future of the service (or similar provision) the commissioners may well be able to identify actual costs.

A secondary saving relates to Housing Benefits / Universal Credit. The commissioners feel that customers not rehoused by Sefton Families Services would, eventually, find

private rented accommodation. Data from the Valuation Office Agency⁵ shows a mean private monthly rent in Sefton of £586 for a two bed and £694 for a three bed. This compares to an average social housing rent in Sefton⁶ of £82 per week (£355 per calendar month) for a two bed and £93 per week (£403 pcm.). This is a saving of £231 (2 bed) and £291 (3 bed) per month or £5,544 and £6,984 over the life of the service. The savings may be lower because some customers are subject to the benefit cap. Indeed, a combination of limited budget and prejudicial tenancy history may lead to customers taking properties at the lower end of private rented spectrum. Whilst they may reduce the saving it may also create the situation (inadequate, poorly managed properties) that leads to re-presenting to Housing Options.

Wider Fiscal Impact / Cost Effectiveness

In their evaluation of Housing First services in 2015⁷ Pleace and Bretherton identified the limitations and possibilities when attempting to measure the savings or cost effectiveness of a project. With regard to limitations, there are parallels with the Sefton Families Service:

- Customers may well, if they choose, access a package of support, involving health, social services and charitable services. This means the actual cost of supporting a customer can be higher
- They also urge caution in using cost offsets. For example, a customer might experience (as a perpetrator or victim) antisocial behaviour. Rehousing may reduce antisocial behaviour. However, cost offsets are not realisable (i.e. they cannot actually be made). Homeless families are a fraction of total activity for large-scale public services (such as the police) so reducing their contact with the criminal justice system does not free up time (or money) in a way that is realisable.

Pleace and Bretherton suggest using lifetime costs. As might be expected, this entails calculating the cost of homelessness over a lifetime (in their case rough sleepers). Additional costs associated with a homeless family might include:

- Greater reliance on benefits and limited tax contributions
- Higher use of health, mental health and social services
- Higher levels of anti-social behaviour
- Extensive use of homelessness services (e.g. hostels, B&Bs, Housing Options and other support).

These costs can be very high. In this section we will calculate costs for the two-year life of the service not an actual lifetime. The table below shows the aggregated outcomes of the risk analysis of Sefton Homeless Families customers. We will use this data to calculate additional costs related to these customers.

Area of Risk	Number of Customers
Accommodation Breakdown	20
Financial	16
Domestic Violence	12
Vulnerability	10
Mental Health	8
Family Relationships	7
Physical Health	3

⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/datasets/privaterentalmarketsummarystatisticsinengland>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/registered-provider-social-housing-stock-and-rents-in-england-2019-to-2020>

⁷ <https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/housing-first-in-england-evaluation-of-nine-services>

Drugs	2
Suicide	2
Alcohol	1
Offending	1
Self-Neglect	1

Base: 20 customers

The table below shows an estimated cost savings related to rehousing homeless families over a two-year period. This allows a comparison with the full cost of the service. There is evidence that (if not rehoused) there would be higher usage of / contact with homelessness services and support services such as social services. In contrast, customer and team interviews suggest that these reduce when intensive support is provided e.g. reduction of child safeguarding status or contact with social workers. The table is based on assumptions, proxies and scenarios relating to customer's risk assessments and areas of support identified in customer and team interviews. As such, all assumptions should be treated with caution. However, the assumptions we have made have been conservative. For instance, we have assumed that without rehousing customers would have re-presented as homeless just once in two years or that those fleeing domestic violence would have only experienced one further incident. There were also two areas (physical health and self-care) where the data cannot be adequately represented by proxies.

As with the section on potential savings above, detailed evidence gathering from the team and the commissioners would allow some comparisons based on actual cost. However, the exercise suggests that the service is cost effective and can, potentially, produce considerable cost savings. More importantly, the service produces outcomes that are much more beneficial to the customer than most alternative approaches to dealing with homelessness.

Cost Area	Source	Unit Cost	Units	Total Cost	Assumption
Accommodation Breakdown					
Cost of a complex eviction	New Economy Manchester Unit Cost Database HO1.0	£6,374	20	£127,480	One less re-presentation in two-year period
Homeless Application	New Economy Manchester Unit Cost Database HO.3.0	£1,711	20	£34,220	
Financial Support					
Housing Benefit savings (2 bed)	Author's calculation (see above)	£5,592	11	£61,512	Maintain social housing tenancy for two years
Housing Benefit savings (3 bed)	Author's calculation (see above)	£7,032	9	£63,288	
Domestic Violence					
Domestic violence - average cost per incident	New Economy Manchester Unit Cost Database CR2.0	£2,470	12	£29,640	One less incident in two years
Vulnerability					
Social Worker – cost per hour	New Economy Manchester Unit Cost Database SS21.0	£6,240	10	£62,400	Reduce contact by one hour per week
Troubled families programme (1 hour per week)	New Economy Manchester Unit Cost Database E&E11.0	£1,914	10	£19,140	Reduce contact one hour per week
Mental Health					
Average cost of service provision for people suffering from mental health disorders, per person	New Economy Manchester Unit Cost Database HE13.0	£3,732	8	£29,856	Intensive support reducing need for mental health support
Family Relationships					
Children in Need - average total cost of case management processes	New Economy Manchester Unit Cost Database SS5.0	£5,456	7	£38,192	Reduced level of child protection required
Physical Health					
Improved general health and reduced use of hospitals and GPs	Hospital outpatient visit H8.0 GP visit HE21.0	£219	3	£657	Three less GP visits, one less hospital visit
Drugs					
Drugs misuse - savings resulting from delivery of a structured, effective treatment programme	New Economy Manchester Unit Cost Database HE2.0	£7,228	2	£14,456	Intensive support reducing need for drug treatment
Suicide					
Average cost of service provision for adults suffering from depression and/or anxiety disorders	New Economy Manchester Unit Cost Database HE11.0	£1,660	2	£3,320	Intensive support reducing need for mental health support
Alcohol					
Alcohol misuse - estimated annual cost to the NHS of alcohol dependency, per year per dependent drinker	New Economy Manchester Unit Cost Database HE1.0	£1,800	1	£1,800	Intensive support reducing need for alcohol support
Offending					
Cost of antisocial behaviour (average of 4 incidents)	New Economy Manchester Unit Cost Database CR.1.0	£1,928	1	£1,928	Reduced antisocial behaviour
Self-Neglect					
No measure	n/a	£0	1	£0	
Total				£487,889	
Ratio of costs of provision to wider costs to public (service cost £145,200)				1:3.36	

The table above suggests that the cost over two years of twenty homeless families is **£487,889** or **£24,394** per family. The cost of provision is **£145,200** or **£7,260** per person. This gives a return of **£3.36** for every £1 spent.

Appendix

Customer Satisfaction

Before Referral

1. Before the project, when did you last have a permanent address?
2. Do you mind telling me why you were homeless?
3. Where were you before you were rehoused by Sefton Families Service?
4. Did you spend time in hostels, B&Bs or other emergency accommodation?
5. How long? What was that like?
6. How were you referred to Sefton Families Service?

Referral

7. How satisfied were you with the referral process (that is the way you were introduced to the Sefton Families Service)?

Very satisfied to Not very satisfied (1-5 scale)
8. How satisfied were you with the time the referral process took? Was it a smooth process?

Very satisfied to Not very satisfied (1-5 scale)
9. Was it a smooth process?
Yes/No
10. Do you have any comments or observations about the referral process?

Support

11. How happy are you with the level of contact you have / had with your support worker?

Very happy to Not very happy (1-5 scale)
12. How was the support delivered (e.g. phone, face to face, etc)?
13. Were you happy with this?
Very happy to Not very happy (1-5 scale)
14. How happy are you with the intensive support you received from the Specialist Support Worker?
Very happy to Not very happy (1-5 scale)
15. How would you describe the way the Specialist Support worker worked with you (qualities and attributes)?
16. What areas are you getting support with?

	Yes	No
General health and wellbeing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Managing time and appointments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Substance/alcohol misuse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maintaining accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Applying for permanent housing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education, training and employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing life skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Budgeting and managing debts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tackling offending behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Applying for welfare benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accessing care & counselling services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helping to organise utilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing links with family, friends and the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, please specify	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

17. Is there any support you need that you don't get?

Yes/No

18. What support do you need?

The Team

19. Which other members of the team did you have contact with (e.g. Specialist Support Worker, Housing Officer, other)?

Very happy to Not very happy (1-5 scale)

20. What support did you receive?

21. Was this support effective?

Yes/No

22. How would you describe the way the team member worked with you (qualities and attributes)?

External Services

23. Did your support worker refer you to other services?

Yes/No

24. If yes, which services were they?

25. What help do you receive from external services

	Yes	No
Psychiatric and community mental health services.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Medical services.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal care services.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drug and alcohol services.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education, training and employment related services.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community participation events and services.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support with gender-based violence/domestic violence issues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Additional practical and emotional support, as appropriate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

26. In general, how happy are you with the support you receive from external services?
Very happy to Not very happy (1-5 scale)
27. If you are unhappy or very unhappy, why is that?
28. Do you have any other comments or observations about the support you receive?

29. Have any of the following improved since you were rehoused?

	Yes	No
Your health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your feeling of wellbeing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your mental health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your financial situation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your independence / resilience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How you use your time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, please specify	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

30. Did you want to be near family when you were rehoused?

Yes/No

31. Did this happen?

Yes/No

32. Why did you need to be near family?

Current Accommodation

33. How satisfied are you with your new accommodation?

Very happy to Not very happy (1-5 scale)

34. How easily did you settle in?

35. Did you get help furnishing the property?

36. If yes, was this OK?

Yes/No

37. How happy are you in your new accommodation?

Very happy to Not very happy (1-5 scale)

38. What is good or bad about their current accommodation? (Tick all applicable)

	Good	Bad
Location	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other people who live here	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support offered	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Level of independence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The routine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, please specify	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

39. Do you have any other comments or observations about your accommodation?

Impact

40. What impact has the service had on your life?

41. Has it been a positive experience?

Yes/No

42. If not, why not?

The Future

43. Are you happy to stay in your accommodation?

Yes/No

44. If no, where would you like to go?
45. Why do want to move somewhere else?

Thank you very much for helping us with this survey.
[Staff Interviews Topic Guide](#)

General

1. What does the project do?
2. What is your role?
3. How is the project progressing?

Customers

4. How many customers so far?
5. What is process for dealing with a customer?
 - a. What are the experiences of customers?
 - b. How are customers referred?
 - c. How are their needs assessed?
 - d. What support do they receive?
 - e. Any unforeseen issues or challenges with customers? Anybody difficult to deal with?
6. Has the project met its stated aims?
 - a. Sustain tenancies
 - b. Maximise independence
 - c. Reduce social isolation
 - d. Improve health and wellbeing
7. What changes in customer's lives have you observed?
 - a. Family cohesion / stability
 - b. Health / mental health
 - c. Mental health
 - d. Financial situation
 - e. Wellbeing
 - f. Wellbeing of children
 - g. Wider family relationships
 - h. Substance misuse
 - i. Crime / disorder

Outcomes

8. What are the short-term outcomes?
9. What do you expect the long-term outcomes to be?
10. What are the outcomes for the customer/individual (list to be developed)?
11. Any soft outcomes – resilience, confidence, self-care, self-esteem?

12. Is it possible to measure what change the project has effected or contributed to?
13. Are there any differences with delivering a PBR project?
14. Does the project provide value for money?
15. Are there any ways the community in general benefitted from the project?

The Team

16. Who are the team members?
17. What are their roles?
18. How do you work with them?
19. Are their role effective?
20. Do you feel that there are sufficient staff / resource to deliver the project? Do you get the support you need to deliver the project / carry out your role?

Property

21. Is the supply of property adequate? Are there any issues?
22. Is being near last address / social networks effective?
23. Is dispersed provision effective / better?
24. How has the transition to general needs worked?

Stakeholders

25. Who are the key stakeholders? What are their roles? How do you work with them?
26. Are the commissioners happy with the project? Does it meet the stated objectives in their Homelessness Strategy (e.g. to provide suitable accommodation)?
27. Has the project met stated aim in relation to stakeholders?
 - a. DWP, as a result of reduced benefits claims by promoting education, training and employment.
 - b. NHS, as families become healthier and improve social networks within the community.

Longer Term

28. What, if any, have been the challenges of delivering the project?
29. Projects usually generate learning points; what do you think they are?
30. Deadweight - What would have happened (to the customers and the commissioner) if the project hadn't been available? Who else provides something like this?

31. What is new and innovative about the project e.g. sharing best practice, changes in the way that the client group are dealt with?
32. What is the future of the project e.g. legacy / continuation planning, what will replace it, can it be mainstreamed?

Stakeholder Questions- Sefton

You and Your Organisation's Role

1. What does your service do?
2. What is your role?
3. Can you describe your involvement with the Sefton Families Service project?
 - a. Refer customers
 - b. Provide funding
 - c. Offer support or complementary services
4. What does your organisation contribute to the activity (and how much)?
5. Do you interact with other Sefton Families Service stakeholders? In what way?
6. Is there a support / referral network or a one-to-one relationship?
7. Did stakeholders / partners influence the development of Sefton Families Service?
8. How do stakeholders / partners view the service?

Demand

9. Do you feel there was a need for Homeless Families Service of this type in Sefton?
10. If yes, why? What needs is it meeting and what issues is it addressing?
11. If no, why?
12. Are there specific issues or challenges in Sefton that make this service necessary?

Project Performance

13. How do you think the project progressing?
14. Do you think that the project meeting its stated aims?
 - a. Sustaining tenancies
 - b. Maximising independence
 - c. Reducing social isolation
 - d. Improving health and wellbeing

Customers

15. Is the project targeting the right people?
16. How are customers identified and assessed (is your organisation involved)?

Impact

17. What has been the impact on existing services? (good and bad)?
18. What has been the impact on the community?
19. In what way are services made more accessible and responsive to customer needs?
20. Has the project reduced (or does it have the potential to reduce) failure demand (duplication and inefficient use of services)?

Outcomes

21. What do you expect the long-term outcomes to be?
22. Is it possible to measure what change the project has created?
23. Is it possible to measure what change the project has effected or contributed to?
24. Were all the changes expected or was there anything that you didn't expect that changed? Have there been any unintended outcomes of the project?
25. Does the project provide value for money compared to other forms of provision for rough sleepers?
26. Are there any ways the community in general benefitted from the project?
27. Has the project impact on other agencies (the local authority, NHS, police, criminal justice system, businesses and residents)?
28. Are you aware of any of the following outcomes (now or expected)?
 - a. Family cohesion / stability
 - b. Health / mental health
 - c. Mental health
 - d. Financial situation
 - e. Wellbeing
 - f. Wellbeing of children
 - g. Wider family relationships
 - h. Substance misuse
 - i. Crime / disorder
29. Were all the changes / experiences created by the project positive?
30. What were the negative changes?

The Team

31. Which members of the team do you work with?
32. Are you happy are with your interactions with the team?
33. Do you feel that there are sufficient staff / resource to deliver the project?

Longer Term

34. Deadweight - What would do you think have happened (to the customers and the commissioner) if the project hadn't been available?
35. Who else provides something like this? Would you have found something else?
36. What is new and innovative about the project e.g. sharing best practice, changes in the way that the client group are dealt with?
37. Which other ways might you/your organisation achieve the same changes?
38. Where would customers go if the project didn't exist?
39. If families were not to receive that intervention from the project, what is likely to happen to those families?
40. Without the project, which stakeholders would be affected and how?
41. Were all the changes / experiences positive?
42. What were the negative changes?
43. Has the project reduced failure demand (duplication and inefficient use of services)?
44. What is new and innovative about the project?
 - a. How effectively has learning and best practice is shared within the wider local system?
 - b. Has the project led to changes in the way that the client group are dealt with?
 - c. Has the project led to changes in the way that services are commissioned?
 - d. Are services on their way to being better integrated, holistic, user-driven, personalised, flexible, and psychologically informed?
45. What is the future of the project?
 - a. Legacy / continuation planning?
 - b. What will replace it?
 - c. Is anything expendable?
 - d. Can it be mainstreamed / secure future funding?
 - e. What changes could / should be made?