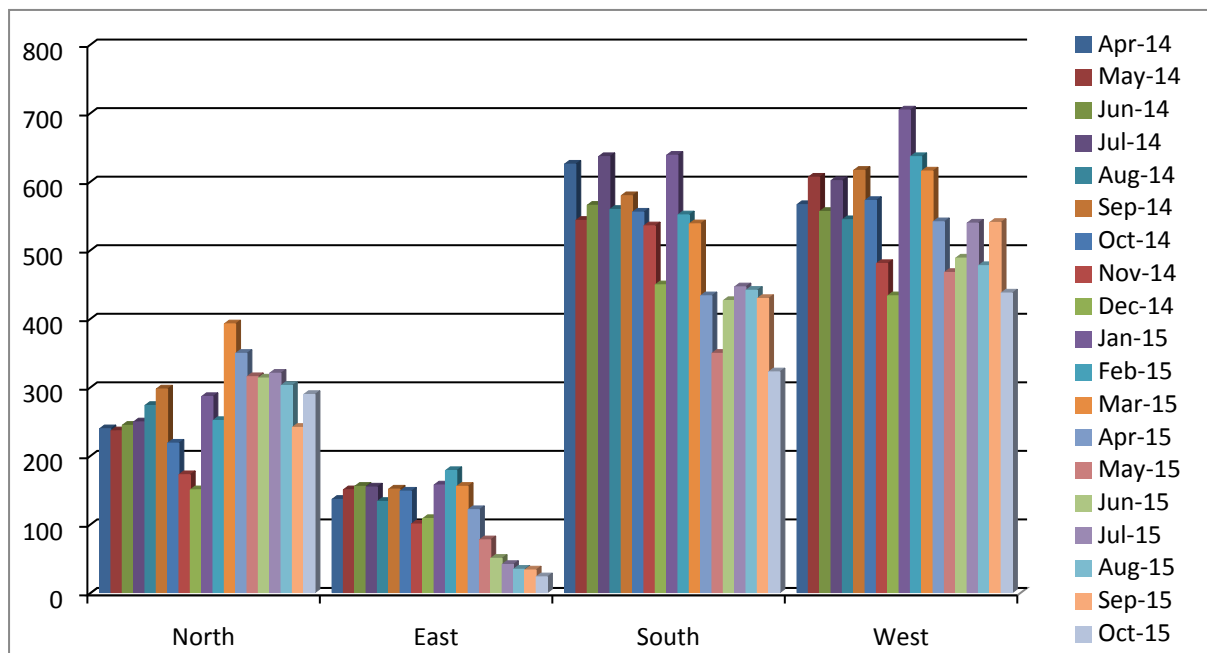


Homelessness Briefing

Housing Options Service

Housing Options runs three housing advice hubs across Wiltshire based in council offices at County Hall in Trowbridge, Monkton Park in Chippenham and Bourne Hill in Salisbury, with the service based at County Hall being the busiest of the three over the last year. All three offer a free drop in advice service to fulfil the Council's statutory responsibility to provide advice and assistance to those at risk of homelessness.

Footfall across Hubs – 2014/15 Financial Year



In the last financial year (2014/2015) the 7 front line housing advisers making up the Trowbridge Options Team dealt with 6,929 housing related enquiries ranging from advice around eligibility for the housing register, giving advice and support to tenants served with notices or excluded from family homes due to a breakdown in their relationships, support to those unable to live in their home due to the risk of domestic abuse or advice to those seeking a transfer from their existing properties for whatever reason.

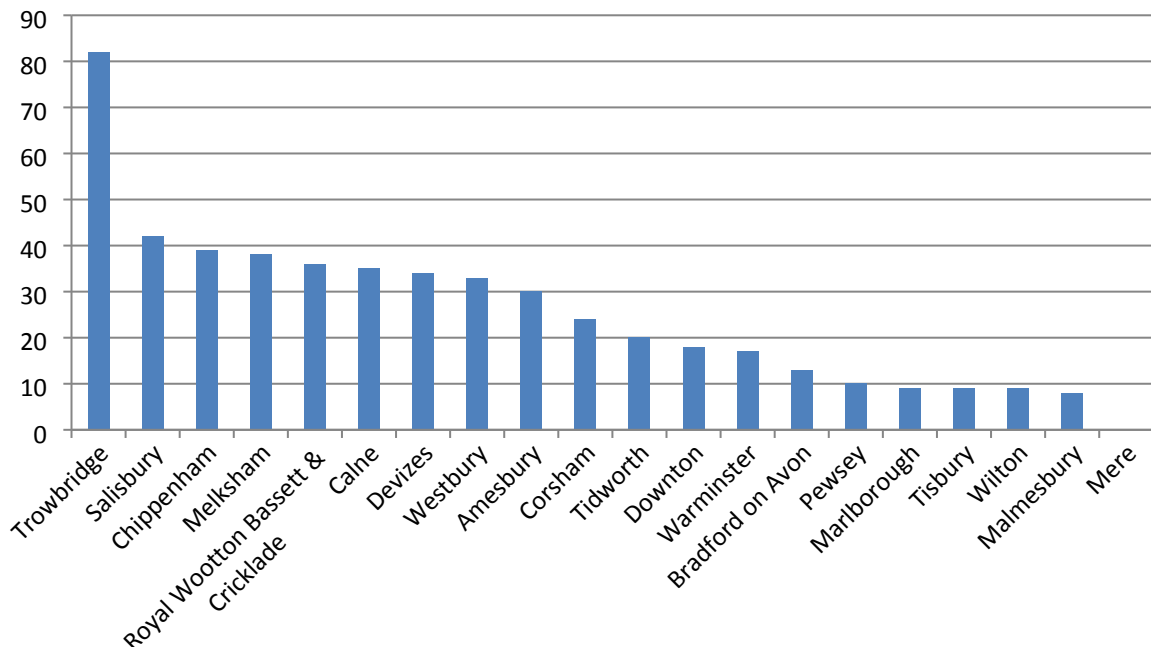
For the first 6 months of 2015/16, we have seen a small drop in footfall as officers have proactively worked to reduce repeat visits and to engage with customers in other ways, such as email and smart phone, which matches the customer's desire

for a flexible and customer focussed service. We have, as a result, seen 3,052 clients in the first 6 months of the current financial year at County Hall.

The housing market remains difficult with a constriction of the private rented sector as landlords seek to maximise rents above what benefit dependent tenants can afford and we have seen, nationally as well as locally, many landlords no longer wish to take on tenants who are reliant on housing benefit. The loss of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy remains both nationally and locally, the single biggest reason for homeless and Trowbridge is no exception. Nationally 31% of homelessness results from the loss of these tenancies but in Wiltshire it is 36%, indicative of the lack of suitable and affordable private rented stock across the County.

The forthcoming freezes to working age benefits/tax credits and the roll out of Universal Credit is likely to increase this trend and the Options Team work proactively to build relationships with local landlords and offer them incentives to work with customers whom we are supporting. As well as a Wilts let Bond scheme to help tenants to afford the financial start up costs of a new tenancy, we are able to offer help to landlords to quickly resolve housing benefit problems and a point of contact for ongoing tenancy issues. We hope to build on this work and ensure that Wiltshire landlords will continue to work with us to help those at risk of homelessness.

The chart below shows the numbers of high risk families likely to be negatively impacted on by the main welfare changes outlined in the recent budget and Autumn Statement.



Despite the proactive work of the Housing Options Team, at the current time 45% of the County’s homeless approaches are via the Trowbridge hub, the single largest of all three hubs. In the first 6 months of the current financial year, this amounted to 101 households who made homeless applications to Wiltshire Council at Trowbridge with an acceptance rate of 80%. We recognise that homelessness brings with it a measure of disruption and upheaval inherent in “being homeless” so advisers do

work hard to manage the expectations of families and also to support them as much as we can.

Where possible, we are looking to prevent household becoming homeless and we achieved this successfully for 157 households in Trowbridge alone in the first 6 month period of 2015. This is better for individuals, to create the stability on which employment, health and education opportunities arise and also for families who have stability of settled living. Housing impacts much wider than just our team as successful outcomes impact on health and wellbeing, crime figures, educational attainment and employment opportunities amongst other areas.

Rough Sleepers

Each local authority has to make an annual estimate or count to Communities & Local Government (CLG) of rough sleepers identified in its district. Last year we estimated that Wiltshire had 9 rough sleepers. This year we have a figure of 23 identified rough sleepers across the County, with 3 of these in Trowbridge.

We have, over the last year, established a much more robust multi agency approach to identifying and engaging with this difficult and hard to reach client group and will continue to do so. A number of those identified have had accommodation secured for them or been offered accommodation but chose to remain or return to the streets. Substance misuse is an underlying problem and we are working with partner agencies and the NHS to support individuals to address these issues as a first step towards moving on. Wiltshire Council also has plans in place to safeguard those who are sleeping rough during the coldest nights by ensuring that accommodation is available for them. Again, this gives us the opportunity to engage them in looking at longer term solutions which is a process rather than one conversation.

Wiltshire Council has also recently collaborated with the NHS and Julian House to fund a new Trowbridge supported housing unit for individuals suffering from drug and alcohol misuse and this will help further address this intractable issue into the future.

The previous day service provided in Trowbridge by Alabare has recently closed, however the Drop in service has continued due to the support being provided by Rev Barrie Dearlove who was the volunteer Chaplain at the previous day service run by alabare. He has managed to continue with a similar service as alabare did in a temporary location at the Salvation Army in Castle Street, Trowbridge and it has been renamed as Breakthrough Trowbridge.

The drop in is open on a Monday and Tuesday from 10am – 1pm.

Supported Housing

Wiltshire Council continues to fund a number of projects across the County to enable people who are not yet ready to manage independent living to gain the necessary skills to do in a planned way. These will be skills around managing a tenancy, seeking and securing employment to fund future accommodation needs, as well as cooking, cleaning and money management skills so that they can live and sustain accommodation.

As Wiltshire Council looks to manage its own resources more efficiently, however, we are also asking this of our supported accommodation partners and have introduced more effective monitoring and accountability for projects to achieve sustainable outcomes and practical move on plans for individuals.

In Trowbridge itself, there are a number of schemes which our Housing Options Team can refer suitable clients to as part of looking at housing solutions that are right for them:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Type of Accommodation</u>	<u>Ages</u>	<u>Level of Support</u>
Acorn House	Dry House (Alcohol rehab)	18yrs plus	High
Amber Foundation	Supported Shared Housing	17yrs - 30yrs	Med/High
Stonham	Ex-Offenders	18yrs plus	High
The Orchards	Supported Housing Scheme	16yrs - 25yrs	Med
Drinkwater Court	Supported Housing Scheme	16- 21 yrs	Low/Medium
Newburn House	Mother & Baby Units	16-24 yrs	Med
West Wilts Womens Refuge	Refuge		Women Only
Towpath House	Care Leavers	16-19 yrs	High
Rowan House	Supported Housing Scheme (MH)	18-65 yrs	Medium

Using these schemes has helped the Housing Options Team prevent homelessness for 75 individuals across Wiltshire in the 2015 financial year to date and all the schemes we work with are linked to specific housing advisers who visit and work with residents to ensure that viable move on options are in place at the appropriate time.

Housing Register

On 9th December 2014, Wiltshire Council introduced its new Allocations Policy after substantial consultation with other agencies, housing providers, the public, elected representatives and Area Boards. The new scheme was aimed to focus on delivering local homes for local people, manage the expectations of applicants and cut down the waste in administering a register where huge numbers of Applicants had little or no housing need. By adopting a new scheme, it meant resources could be focussed on those in the greatest need and processes streamlined to manage waste.

The Housing register at the end of 2015, 238 have indicated a preferred area of Trowbridge in which to live. Of these applications, 50 are existing tenants looking to transfer and 188 are looking to secure social housing for the first time. Interestingly, 53 of those on the new register have never placed a bid and we will be picking this up at their annual renewal to understand why. In terms of banding and demand, the 238 are broken down as:

Trowbridge Demand



Wiltshire Council continues to work with the housing providers to ensure that the housing stock in Wiltshire is of the right type and in the right place but we have much better information to work with to achieve this moving forward.

We have also been able to use the new streamlined housing register to prevent homelessness more effectively. In general terms, household stay in temporary accommodation on average less as they are prioritised for re-housing and have less competition for permanent allocations.

Currently 51% of all our homelessness preventions are achieved using the housing register to source suitable alternatives for those at risk. Targeting housing in this way further helps the Council meet its objectives of creating sustainable communities and prevent household actually becoming homeless. We are able to negotiate with landlords to allow for a smooth transition for customers from one accommodation into settled living which again reduces stress, costs and benefits the community as a whole.

James Cawley, Associate Director, Adult Care Commissioning and Housing