



SHELTER HOUSING ADVICE AND RESEARCH PROJECT
LEICESTER'S INDEPENDENT HOUSING ADVICE CENTRE SINCE 1974

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Shelter Housing Advice & Research Project (SHARP)
RESEARCH & IMPACT EVALUATION
LEICESTER AUGUST 2019 – MAY 2021

Introduction

As part of its housing advice work, SHARP digitally maintains details of everyone seeking advice (enquiries). This research, prompted primarily by the steady increase in numbers of enquiries over the period under review, August 2019 -May 2021, (see Diagram 1 Below) draws out the main circumstances and reasons that characterise these enquiries.

About SHARP

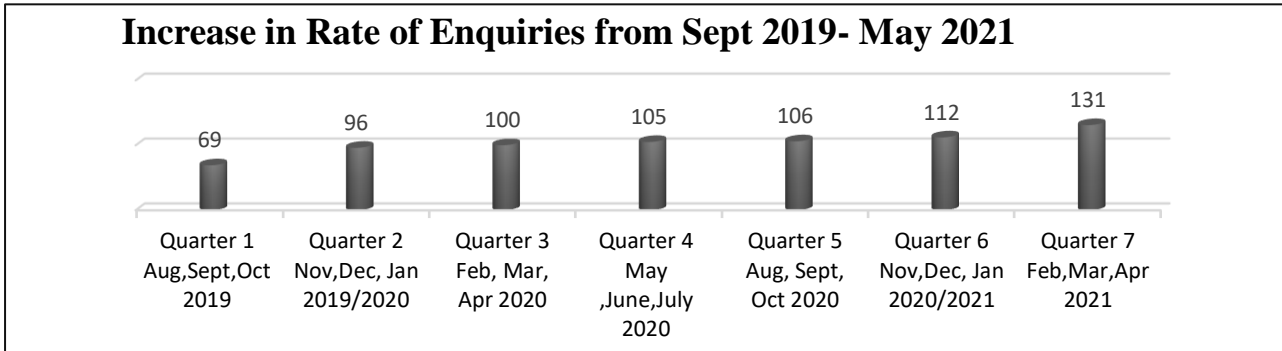
In the late 60's early 70's a small group of people were very concerned about the problem of homelessness and poor housing in Leicester. The individuals concerned initially set up the Leicester Shelter Group. The group identified a need to provide a housing advice service and carry out some campaigning for decent affordable homes in Leicester & Leicestershire.

In 1966 the BBC broadcast "Cathy Come Home" about a family trapped in homelessness and poverty. Such was the outcry after the play's screening that homelessness organisations such as Shelter England were formed. Leicester and Leicestershire's local Shelter group – SHARP – was established in 1974.

Nearly 50 years on there remains the same crisis in the homelessness and housing, as demonstrated by numerous reports, for example, The Archbishop of Canterbury on <https://www.churchofengland.org>. Tackling the housing crisis, Shelter on <https://england.shelter.org.uk>. Crisis – Together, we will end homelessness on <https://crisis.org.uk> and Action Homeless, Leicester, Our Impact 2019 on <https://actionhomeless.org.uk>. Thus at the local level the work of SHARP unfortunately and damningly remains as important today as when it was formed.

SHARP is currently principally funded by a National Lottery grant. As part of the contractual agreement associated with this grant SHARP is required to deal with 20 or so clients per month/ 60 per quarter. As can be seen from Diagram 1, SHARP is currently working with a much higher rate of demand (and having to refer further enquiries on to alternative agencies for help). SHARP has recently received a grant from the Carlton Hayes Mental Health Charity and during the course of the pandemic has had financial help from the Lloyds Bank Foundation, the CAF Resilience Fund, Homeless Link/MHCLG, the National lottery and Leicester City Council.

Diagram 1



Main Findings

Diagram 2 shows a copy of an enquiry form and some typical reasons for enquiries to SHARP.

Diagram 2

Enquiry Form	
Phone: /	Date: 07/05/2021
Drop in:	
Enquiry details:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Been in property since January 2020 ❖ Private Rented ❖ Young Baby ❖ 1Bedroom flat -too small ❖ 1st floor flat, struggling to leave the flat as it is difficult getting up and down the stairs ❖ Issues with the water meter ❖ Bidding, band 3 ❖ Wants help upping bidding 	
Client Full Name: Enquiry A	
Client Mobile Number: Enquiry A mobile no.	
Client Landline Number:	
Client E-Mail address: Enquiry.A12@gmail.com	
Client Full address (including postcodes)	D.O.B Enquiry A D.O.B
Enquiry A Address	Ethnicity: Enquiry A
	Ethnicity
	Disabilities:
Who is your landlord?	None
Enquiry A Landlord	
	Gender: MALE
	FEMALE
Added to Advice Pro	Appointment/Interview Date:
YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>

Over the period in question SHARP Received a total 716 enquiries (i.e. contact made to ascertain if SHARP can help with some kind of housing problem). If SHARP can assist a case file is commenced. As Diagram 3 shows, 462 of the 716 enquiries progressed to being dealt with as cases.

Diagram 3

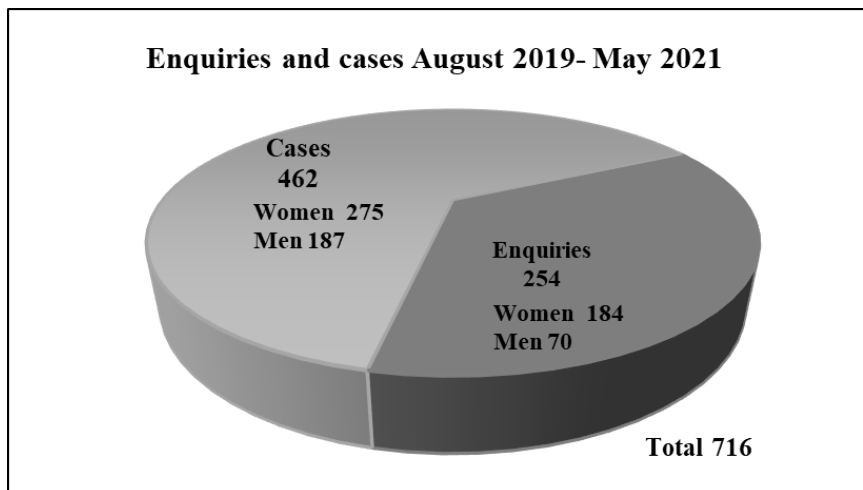
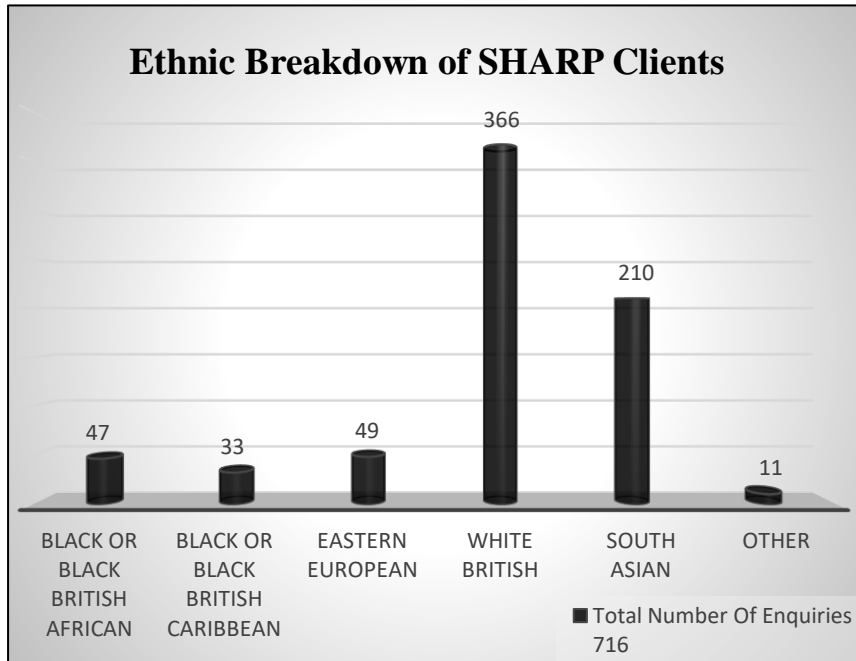


Diagram 4 shows the range of ethnic backgrounds of enquiries as expected from Leicester as a diverse city

Diagram 4

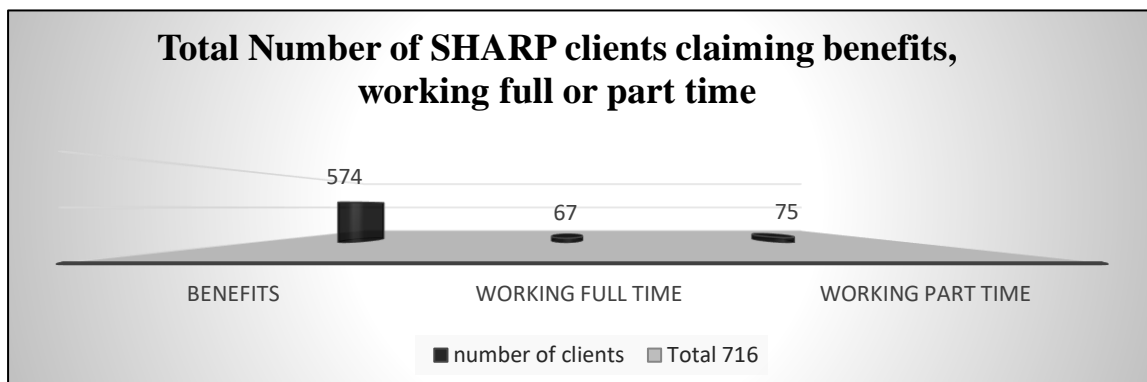


Leicester is the 32nd most deprived local authority in England (out of a total 317). The local economy is also characterised by high levels of in-work poverty and low wages.

Local charity – Charity Link <https://charity-link.or> reported on Local Poverty - According to the End Child Poverty Coalition (2017), Leicester is 8th in the table of local authorities with the highest rates of child poverty across the UK and the percentage of children in poverty after housing costs is 41% in Leicester.

Diagram 5 shows that whilst the majority of enquirers were unemployed and in receipt of benefits support, a significant proportion were in fact in full- or part-time employment.

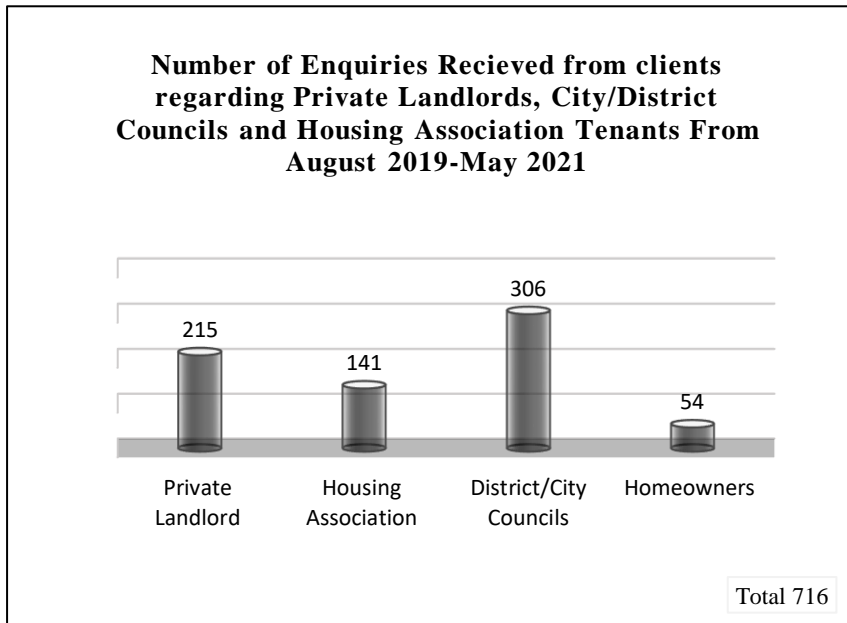
Diagram 5



The next three diagrams show the main reason for enquiries received by SHARP. Diagram 6 shows the numbers of enquiries by different types of landlord/housing type. As can be seen, only a small proportion of enquiries were from homes owners.

Diagram 7 breaks down the main reasons for enquiries, and 8 further breaks down the reasons (excluding homelessness and sofa surfing) by landlords/housing type. As can be seen the landlord/housing type influences the numbers of main reasons for enquiries.

Diagram 6



Relationship breakdown was a major reason for enquiries.

Diagram 7

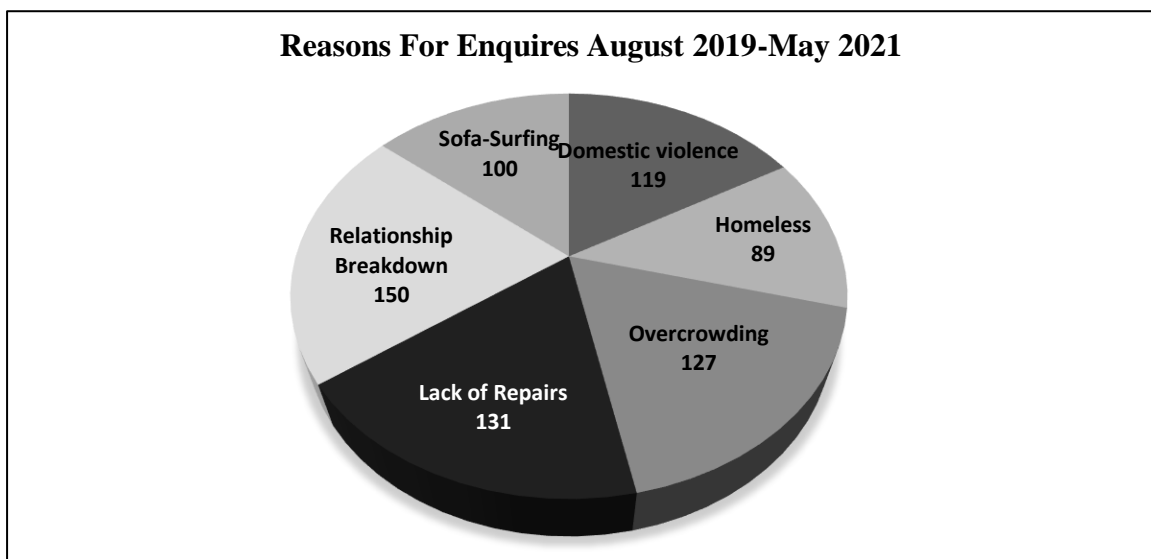


Diagram 8

Breakdown of Reasons for Enquires by Housing Provider				
	Domestic Violence	Lack of Repairs	Relationship Breakdown	Overcrowding
Private Landlord	9	68	36	102
Leicester City Council	64	47	92	103
Housing Association	41	51	48	1

It is now the situation where private landlords are the main providers of accommodation in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, not Leicester City Council or District Councils. This is down to the fact there is increased demand for housing but a decrease in the Councils' housing stock. For example, Leicester City's council housing stock has reduced from over 35,000 in 1981 to 19,200 in 2021. Which means peoples only option is private rented accommodation.

Private landlord rents are nearly treble that of Leicester City Council weekly rents, plus deposits of 1 month's rent are required to secure a private rented property. Most people cannot afford this. The total number of enquiries received from August 2019 to May 2021 with concerns about private landlords' high rents and deposits and disrepair problems is 215 out of the 716. Shown below is the breakdown of these enquiry numbers:

- Lack of repairs and general maintenance: **61**
- Rent/deposits needed from SHARP: **9**
- General complaints: **18**
- Section 21 Notices served: **31**
- Accommodation has not been suitable: **45**
- Landlord not using the tenancy protection for deposits: **19**
- Harassment from landlords: **32**

SHARP's view is that given the misery felt by many who don't have a home, some private landlords add to that misery by providing a poor standard of housing. SHARP's view is that all private landlords should be licensed, thus enabling inspections on properties to ensure they are of the correct standard, health & safety is checked on a regular basis, and there is no harassment from landlords. The most common problem with private landlords is lack of repairs, no gas or electric safety certificates, landlords being verbally abusive, and incorrect tenancy agreements. We are already aware of the No Fault Section 21 Notice (a Notice served through no fault of the tenant) that is regularly being served on tenants which makes people totally afraid of privately renting, there is no security, you can end up moving your family from property to property.

The main reason for Housing Association enquiries were:

- Poor repair service
- Lack of care for vulnerable or elderly people

The main reason for council housing enquiries were:

- Waiting times (time spent on the council's waiting list)
- Overcrowding
- Anti-social behaviour from neighbours

Relationship breakdowns can come in different forms. Relationship breakdowns increased during and after the City's lockdown due to Covid 19, for example our story on Client A below is an elderly person who suffered a relationship breakdown between relatives. This resulted in a need for accommodation, and support from other external agencies. Client B is a lady who sought help from SHARP after being made homeless due to domestic violence.

Client A

90-year-old man, who lived on his own in a property owned by a relative.

The relative wanted to sell the property with the proceeds of the sale funding his new lifestyle abroad. This left client A in a very distressed and confused state, as this had been his home for over 30 years.

The property was in a very poor state of repair with no heating upstairs and just two gas fires downstairs. The hot water was heated by a small immersion heater in the kitchen, the windows did not close properly, and the flooring was thin and cold.

The relative was causing lots of problems and also started to harass client A, whilst under the influence of alcohol, the relative also started to make physical threats to client A as the relative thought he was deliberately refusing to move from the property.

Client A approached SHARP for help. After the initial interview it was found that client A needs help, not only with re-housing, but help with his poor physical health, memory loss and anxiety and depression. Client was eventually re-housed in semi-supported accommodation with the appropriate external agencies to support him in his new accommodation.

Client B

This lady had been with her partner for four years and had a child with him, but she knew she had to get away after police found out about the abuse she suffered and finally ended the relationship.

Her ex-boyfriend ended up in prison as a result of the way he treated her, but his campaign of abuse didn't stop there.

The woman says he was able to contact people from prison who then kidnapped their child and set fire to the house she was living in.

She also received multiple threats from her former partner telling her that he would kill her while her own children watched - as well as threatening other members of her family.

The woman said: "I have been fleeing a domestic violence situation with my ex-partner. I'm originally from Luton but moved to Leicestershire to get away from him, I contacted SHARP in January of this year, and they immediately assigned a woman named Mara who spoke with me at length about my situation and what they could do for me.

"I wanted to move out for the safety of myself and my children, but I was told I needed a guarantor, which was just impossible for me because of my situation. I even offered to pay extra rent each month to cover it, but they refused it.

"But I was very lucky to have been put on a guarantee scheme by the charity, which basically says they will cover my rent for an entire year if I am unable to pay it - meaning I could get a property with no issues.

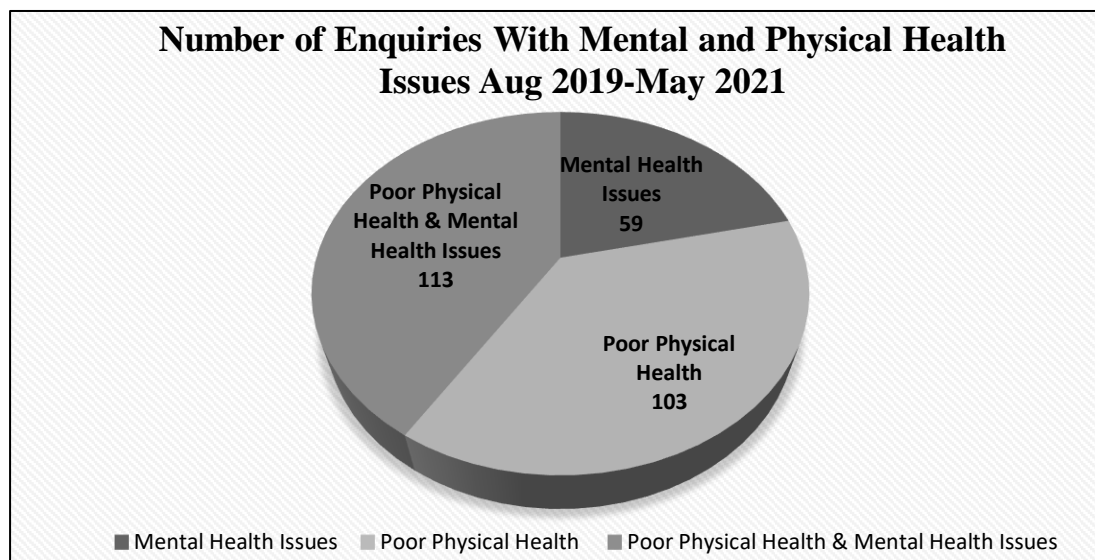
"They then pushed the council to get all of the paperwork done as soon as possible, meaning I could leave the property I was in a lot quicker and ensure my children's safety.

I honestly can't thank them enough. Mara worked tirelessly to help me out, and even when she was not available, the rest of the team did whatever they could to answer any questions I had.

"Being able to live somewhere safe with my children matters so much to me, and it's only possible because of SHARP. I will always be grateful for what they have done."

Diagram 9 outlines the part poor physical and/or mental health has had as reason for enquiries (275 out of a total of 716)

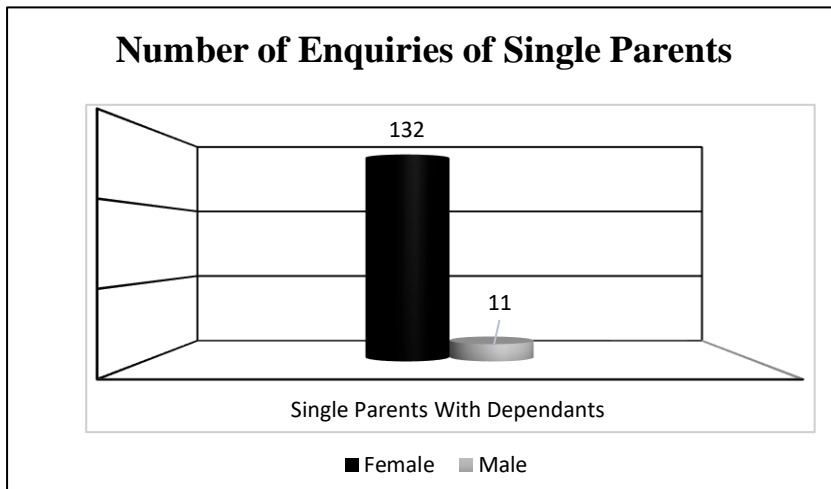
Diagram 9



Also very important is the effect of housing difficulties on the wellbeing of children. Children who live in overcrowded accommodation are less likely to do well at school, and tend to have poorer physical and mental health.

Diagram 10 outline the circumstances of enquiries from parents.

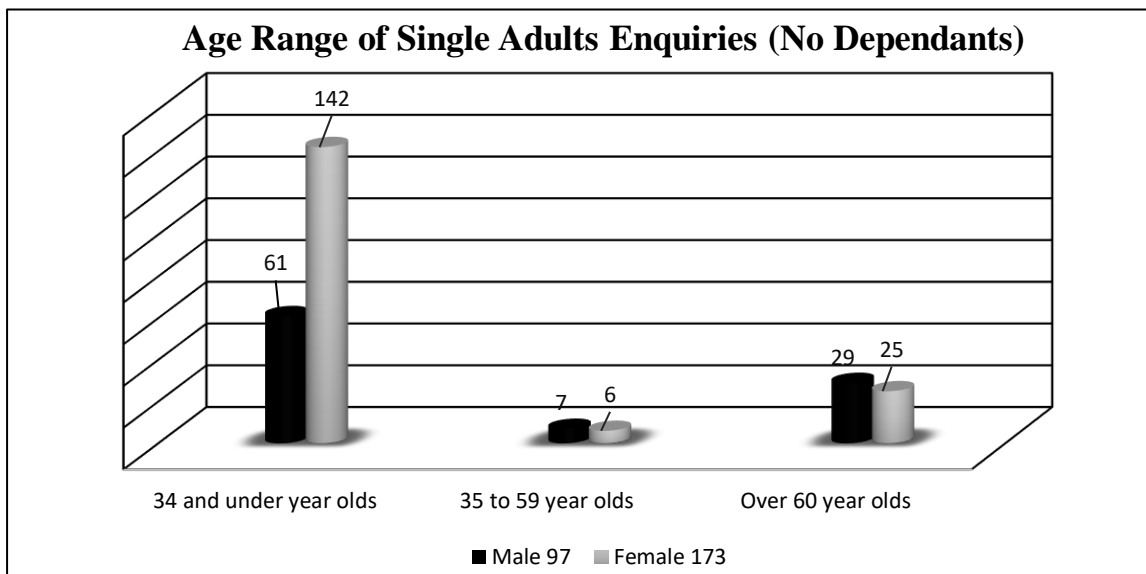
Diagram 10



About 43% of 16–34-year-olds live with parents or relatives. However, one of the major reasons young people face homelessness is because single under 35-year-olds looking for private rented accommodation are only entitled to a lower rate of housing benefit, the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR). This rate is based on the cost of a room in a shared house, rather than self-contained accommodation. In 2012, the SAR was extended to those under 35 (it previously applied only to under 25-year-olds), a change estimated to affect 62,500 Nationally.

A significant Proportion of enquirers were single adults without dependants, as shown in Diagram 11.

Diagram 11



In Summary

The focus of this research is to show that how, on a local level, poor or a lack of affordable housing has impacted people lives, and how as a small charity we have tried to improve this in a small but significant way. The fact remains that housing, whether in Leicester or across the country is a travesty. How do we call ourselves a democracy if in this democratic society we cannot even provide a decent home.

What is a home?

“A house is a building that serves as living quarters, but a home means much more

Home is a vault of memories, where life changing decisions are made, where sanctuary is sought, where your children grow up go to school and thrive, where family values are taught”. Shutterfly community- <https://www.shutterfly.com>

SHARP would like to thank the Kickstarter Nikita Williams-Gardner who helped with compiling this report.

The kickstart scheme is part of the Chancellor’s Plan for Jobs to support business growth and create new job opportunities for young people.