Housing Options – Customer Journey

Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-committee

13th May 2024

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The best possible customer journey

- Vulnerable residents seeking our help with housing, including emergency housing need to be treated with dignity and respect.
- Our physical space needs to be welcoming, accessible and enable confidentiality.
- Resident should be given enough time to tell us about their situation.
- Our explanation of how we can help needs to be timely, empathic, easy to understand and the options clearly set out.
- To achieve this we need to remove barriers that stop staff delivering a quality service; ICT improvements, improved physical working environment, training.
- A Customer Charter should set out our standards. The charter should be done in consultation with users, interest groups, stakeholders, Members and staff; an opportunity to set new standards.

Homelessness – Statutory Duties

- The **Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA)** 2017 places a statutory duty on the Council to prevent homelessness (the Prevention Duty) and to give relief to those already homeless (the Relief Duty)

- The Council has a statutory duty to take **reasonable steps to prevent and relieve homelessness;** Duty can be discharged through offer of a suitable home in the private rented sector (PRS)

- **S.188 interim accommodation duty** – temporary accommodation duty to homeless families and vulnerable adults ('priority need' groups) with recourse

- **S.193 full housing duty** – owed to unintentionally homeless households with priority need. Duty can be discharged through offer of a suitable home in the private rented sector (PRS)

The Housing Register – Statutory Duties

- The **Housing Act 1996** requires local authorities to have an allocation scheme. Within this they must give reasonable preference (i.e., give certain groups an advantage over other groups that have a lesser or no housing need), in their allocations policies to people with **high levels of assessed housing need**.

Band 1A
- Emergencies
- Medical/Disability need for ground floor or wheelchair accessible property (includes homeless applicants)
- Priority decants
- Under-occupiers

Band 1B
- Priority Medical
- Priority social
- Decants
- Priority target groups

- **Band 2 – Group A**: Overcrowded Households and Homeless Households with at least 3 years' residence

- **Band 2 - Group B**: Overcrowded Households, Homeless Households and Medical needs with less than 3 years' residence.

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- **Band 3**: Households with no defined Housing Need – "adequately housed" – over 8000 households in this band

See:
- Allocations Scheme document - Homeseekers (thhs.org.uk)

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Housing Options – who does what?

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Homelessness and rough sleeping

- Lead Professionals (front of house team)
- HOST Complex (vulnerable singles)
- Housing Advice (private tenants)
- Homelessness Intervention Prevention Project (HIPP) (social tenants in rent arrears)
- Complex Assessment Team and Reviews
- Street Population and Rough Sleeping Commissioner
- Hostel Access

Temporary Accommodation and Procurement

- Emergency Bookings and Allocations Team
- Housing Management
- Tenancy Sustainment
- Current and Former Rent Arrears team
- Accommodation procurement (TA and PRS)
- Beam (specialist employment service)

Housing Register and Allocations

- Applications and Administration
- Advertising and Shortlisting
- Assessment and Attainment Team
- Occupational Therapist Team (housing needs medical assessment)
- Members Enquiries and Complaints
- Business Support (part of Resources Directorate)
- Information Change Management (Part of ICT)

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Inter-teams customer process involving Homelessness, Housing Register, Lettings, and Temporary Accommodation processes

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A

Continue here with Letting team

Client

Start of end-to-end Homeless customer journey

Contact Council via phone, email, online or in-person

LP, HOST Complex and Statutory & Advocacy Teams

LP (families & low-level singles)

HOST (Singles with complex needs, rough sleepers, PRS)

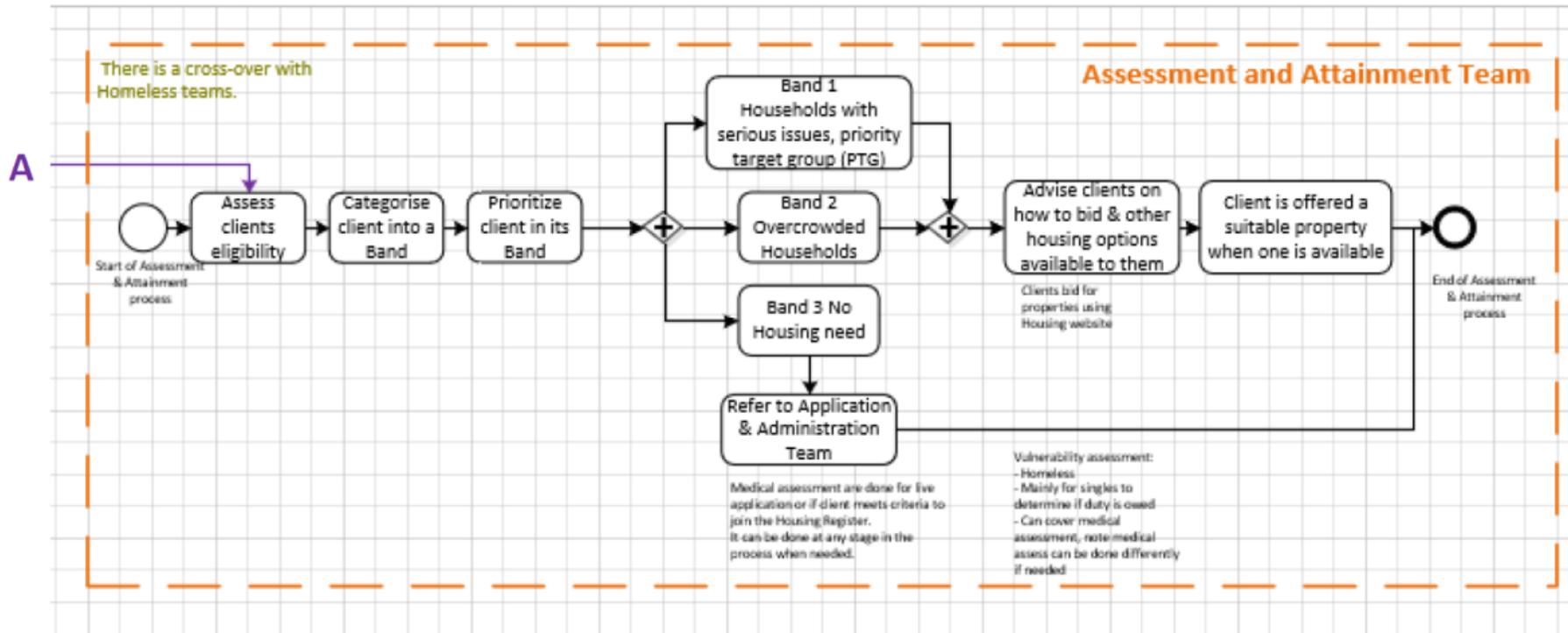Statutory & Advocacy (private tenants)
a. Review team
b. Complex Assessment team

Carry out PHP

Housing options are considered to determine which option is suitable & viable for client

Carry out Housing Assessment

Client makes Housing Application
Update an existing application

Is duty owed?

Yes

No

Issue s.184 notification to client
- No duty owned including Review rights.
- Signpost client to advice & guidance.

End of LP, HOST & Statutory & Advocacy process

Assess if TA should be used

Put on Housing Register

B

BSO

Is client homeless?

No

Yes

Direct client to ASK MO

ASK MO is an online advice.
Options:
- Join Housing register
- Private renting
- Mutual exchange
- Shared ownership
- Seaside & county homes
- Homefinder

Establish reason(s) for Homelessness
Client is made aware of PRS Customer Charter

Support to direct client to right team

Intermediate End

Application and Administration Team

Cross-over with – Officer that deals with homeless complaints & MEs (Review Officer Competence)
Mes – Members enquiries

Start of lettings

Contact LBTH via phone and online
Managed by Lettings advice team

Register Housing Application
Northgate

Is it a Band 2 or 3 client?

Yes

No

Band 3 client

Band 2 client

Refer to Assessment & Attainment team

Deal with lettings enquiries & complaints
iCasework

Check documents for band 3 clients

End of lettings

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There is a cross-over with Homeless teams.

Assessment and Attainment Team

A

Start of Assessment & Attainment process

Assess clients eligibility → Categorise client into a Band → Prioritize client in its Band

Band 1
Households with serious issues, priority target group (PTG)

Band 2
Overcrowded Households

Band 3 No Housing need

Refer to Application & Administration Team

Advise clients on how to bid & other housing options available to them

Client is offered a suitable property when one is available

End of Assessment & Attainment process

Clients bid for properties using Housing website

Medical assessment are done for live application or if client meets criteria to join the Housing Register.
It can be done at any stage in the process when needed.

Vulnerability assessment:
- Homeless
- Mainly for singles to determine if duty is owed
- Can cover medical assessment, note medical assess can be done differently if needed

Booking and Allocation Team

Transfer to alternative TA process

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Phase 1 - Improving customer journey via channel shift and digitalisation

- System improvements to reduce staff administration time enabling them to focus more on customers' needs; So far over **900 days of officer time per year** has been saved.
- Provided **online customer signatures** reducing the need for clients to come to the Town Hall – nearly 60% of clients are now using this.
- Improved our Residents' Hub IT for clients and staff including queuing system, translation services, more public PCs, and printing and scanning.
- Delivered Housing Online (digital applications) and streamlined the **online housing register application process** for clients, removing separate supplementary forms contributing to a reduction in failure demand.
  - Added an online quick eligibility checker for joining the housing register, offering customers help through other means for those ineligible.
  - Added automated acknowledgement emails for housing register application submissions.
- Achieved the best performance to-date for housing register application processing in March 2024. This means **clients' applications are getting processed faster than ever before**.
- Created and implementing a **backlog clearance plan** for housing register applications to enable timely processing of applications.
- **Improved online document uploads** to enable larger file sizes and more file types, enabling customers to more easily share their documents with us in support of applications.

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Further improvements to the customer journey

A £1.3M revenue and capital investment will enable us to deliver much more, such as streamlining workflows, reducing errors, enhancing data quality, and supporting strategic decision making.

The programme aims to deliver this by:

- Reducing systems and removing duplication by moving to a single Housing Options ICT system; collapsing the disparate systems that operate.
  - Aligning with ICT in Tower Hamlets Housing; moving all housing-related data and processes into a single system.
  - Includes redesign and re-implementation of the Allocations module which provides the foundation for housing applications and lettings.
  - Adoption of other Housing modules which address key customer experience and interaction issues, streamline data management and reporting
- **For customers this will mean** - only asking for documents once and automating customer notifications to ensure statutory compliance as well as timely customer communication.
- **For staff this will mean** - reducing the administrative burden by reducing systems and pre-populating data, providing clear and concise workflow assignment and performance information.

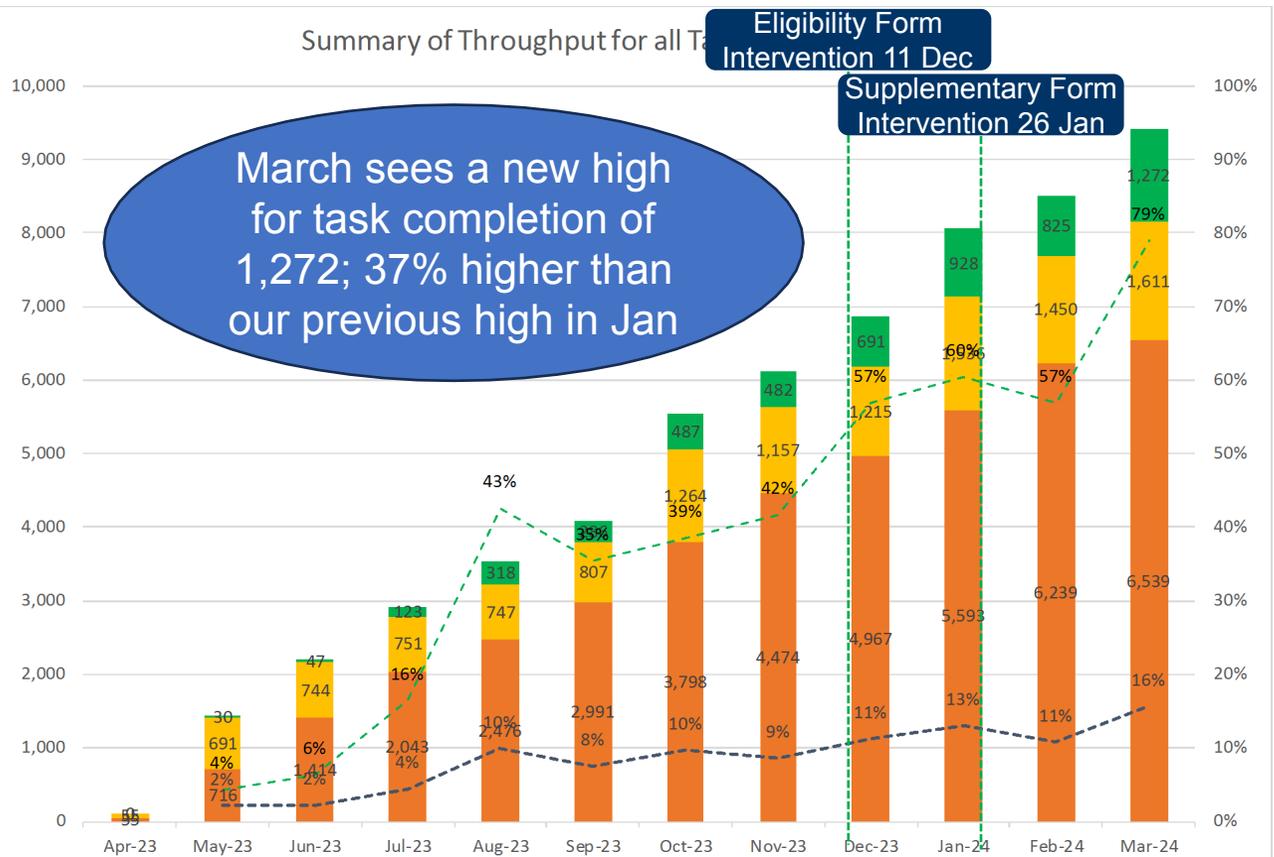The best of London
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Further improvements to the customer journey

- The resident journey is not just a digital one.
- Face to face remains an option particularly for those in an emergency.
- Reducing the touch points for customers in the Residents Hub is a priority.
- Making sure the 'first advice is the best advice' is the goal; achieved through triage.
- Customers aware of their place in the queue and waiting times via a queuing system.
- Staff training to delivery an empathic service.

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Online Housing Register Applications
Summary of Processing for all Tasks

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Summary of Throughput for all Tasks

Eligibility Form Intervention 11 Dec

Supplementary Form Intervention 26 Jan

March sees a new high for task completion of 1,272; 37% higher than our previous high in Jan

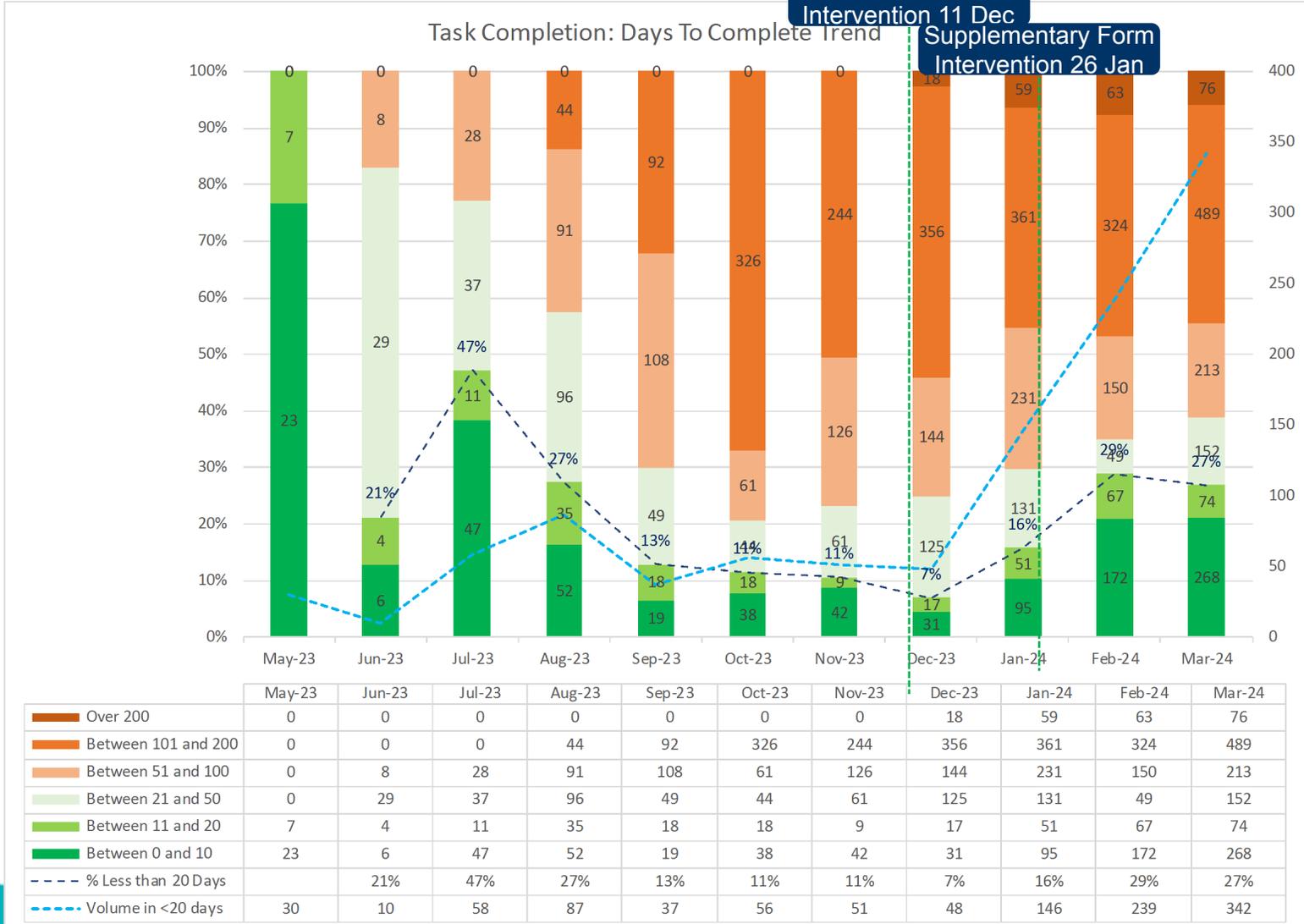|	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24
Completed	0	30	47	123	318	286	487	482	691	928	825	1,272
Received	55	691	744	751	747	807	1,264	1,157	1,215	1,536	1,450	1,611
Outstanding	55	716	1,414	2,043	2,476	2,991	3,798	4,474	4,967	5,593	6,239	6,539
% Processed		2%	2%	4%	10%	8%	10%	9%	11%	13%	11%	16%
% of Incoming Processed		4%	6%	16%	43%	35%	39%	42%	57%	60%	57%	79%

- This chart shows the trend of progress of our tasks and how many we are processing
- The % of incoming processed must be greater than 100% to reduce the backlog
- March sees a new high of completed tasks to-date at 79% of the incoming volume, at 1,272 completed tasks
- This is 37% higher than our previous high of 928 in Jan 2024

There is a positive trend of increasing throughput, demonstrating that higher volumes of incoming cases are being processed

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Online Housing Register Applications
Average Days to Complete Tasks

Task Completion: Days To Complete Trend

Eligibility Form Intervention 11 Dec

Supplementary Form Intervention 26 Jan

|	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24
Over 200	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	59	63	76
Between 101 and 200	0	0	0	44	92	326	244	356	361	324	489
Between 51 and 100	0	8	28	91	108	61	126	144	231	150	213
Between 21 and 50	0	29	37	96	49	44	61	125	131	49	152
Between 11 and 20	7	4	11	35	18	18	9	17	51	67	74
Between 0 and 10	23	6	47	52	19	38	42	31	95	172	268
% Less than 20 Days		21%	47%	27%	13%	11%	11%	7%	16%	29%	27%
Volume in <20 days	30	10	58	87	37	56	51	48	146	239	342

- This chart shows the trend of the average number of days it is taking us to process and complete tasks since go-live
- It covers only completed tasks
- This can be used to target our resources to improve the trends
- There are the beginnings of a positive shift in reducing the average days to complete with a greater number in January being completed in less days.
- This increased to the highest level to-date at 342 (27%) in March

There is a positive recent increase in the trend of % processed in less than 20 days, reaching a new high of 342 (27%) in March

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Online Housing Register Applications
Overall Summary Backlog Trend

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SHR Backlog Summary Trend
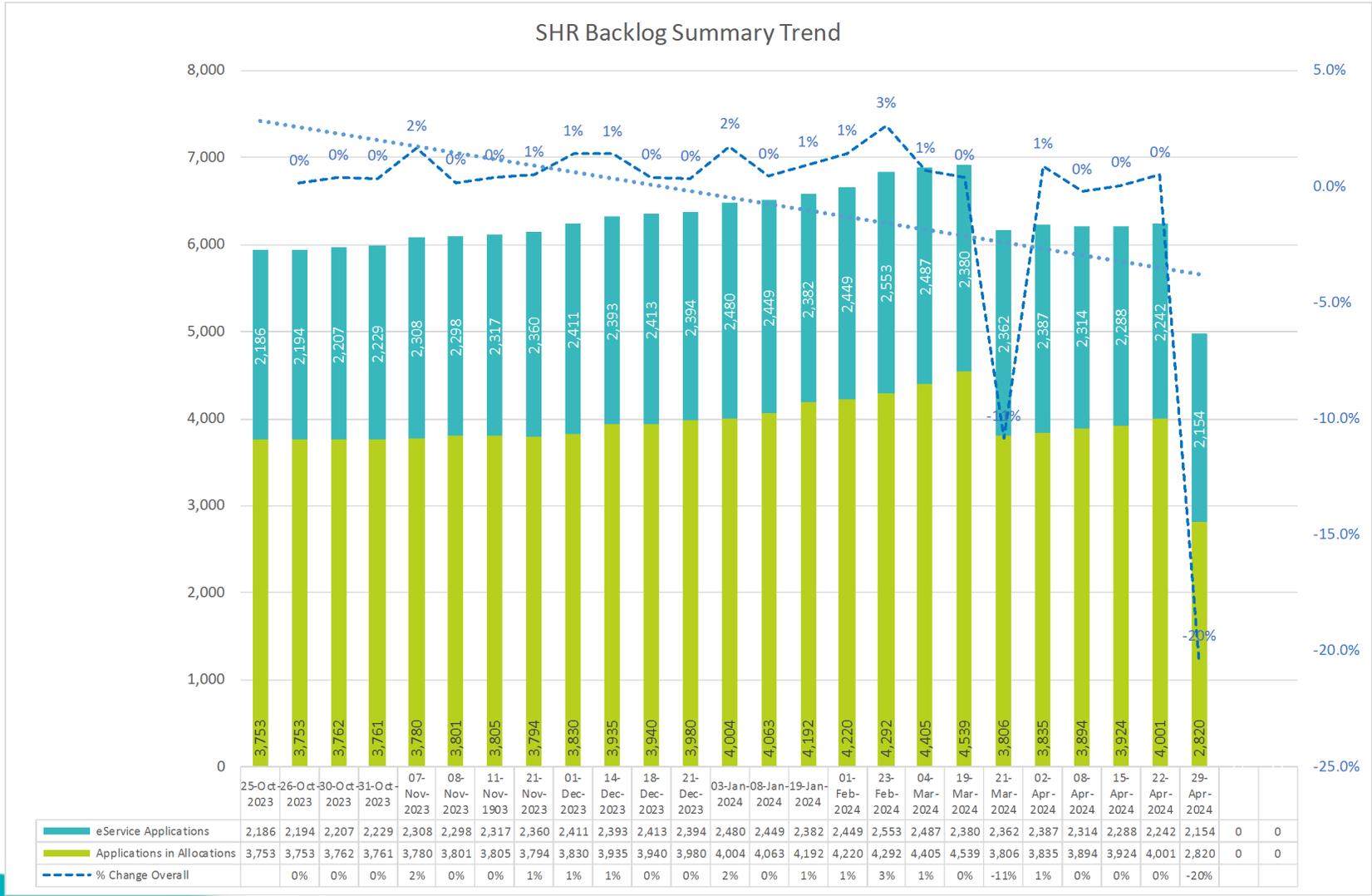
- This chart shows a snapshot of the trend of customer applications awaiting our processing
- eService applications are new submissions to join the housing register
- Applications in Allocations are those which we have initially reviewed for eligibility and processed for full assessment

We have commenced our backlog clearance plan with the first 741 applications cancelled in March and a further 1,279 in April
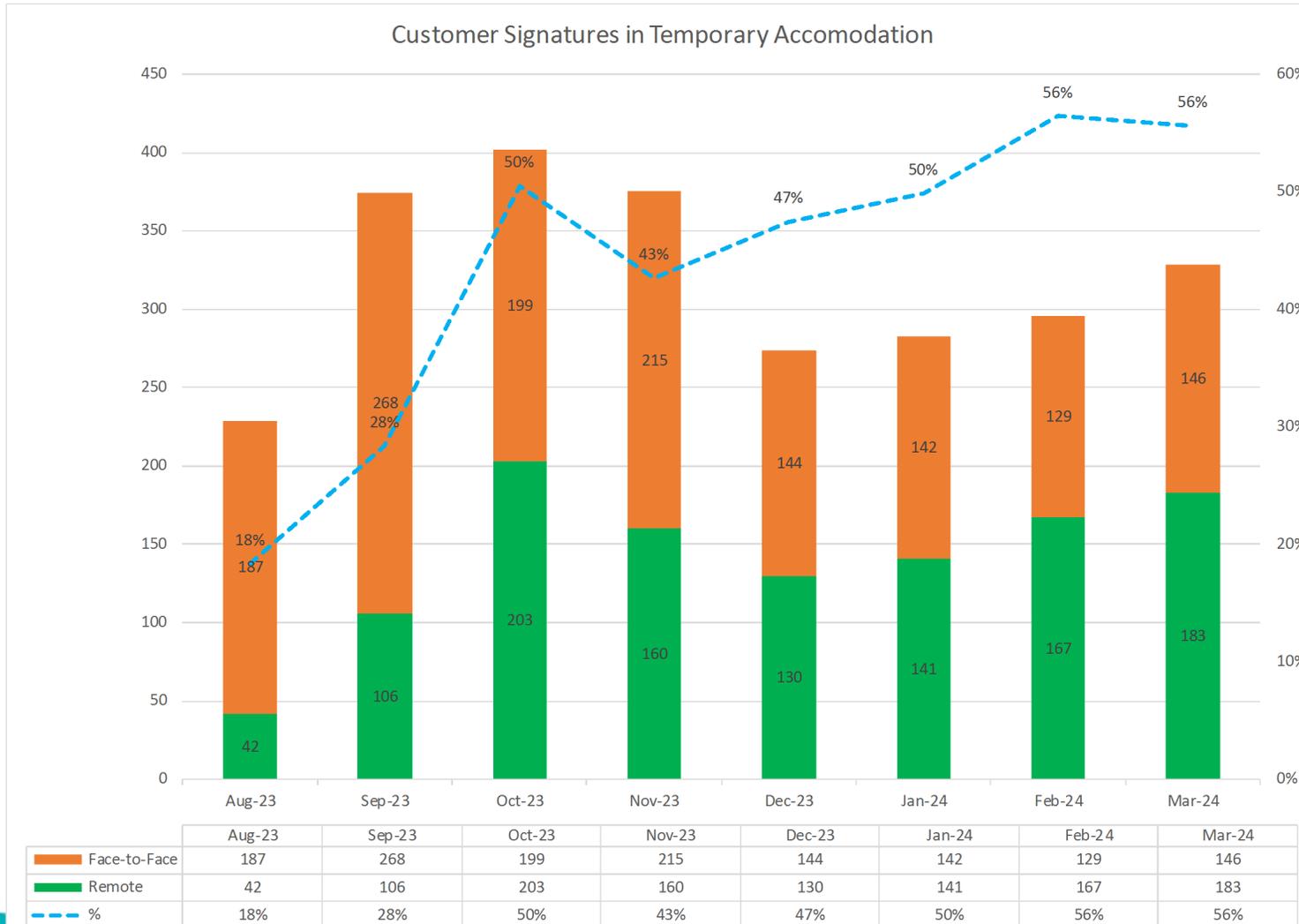
	25-Oct-2023	26-Oct-2023	30-Oct-2023	31-Oct-2023	07-Nov-2023	08-Nov-2023	11-Nov-1903	21-Nov-2023	01-Dec-2023	14-Dec-2023	18-Dec-2023	21-Dec-2023	03-Jan-2024	08-Jan-2024	19-Jan-2024	01-Feb-2024	23-Feb-2024	04-Mar-2024	19-Mar-2024	21-Mar-2024	02-Apr-2024	08-Apr-2024	15-Apr-2024	22-Apr-2024	29-Apr-2024		
eService Applications	2,186	2,194	2,207	2,229	2,308	2,298	2,317	2,360	2,411	2,393	2,413	2,394	2,480	2,449	2,382	2,449	2,553	2,487	2,380	2,362	2,387	2,314	2,288	2,242	2,154	0	0
Applications in Allocations	3,753	3,753	3,762	3,761	3,780	3,801	3,805	3,794	3,830	3,935	3,940	3,980	4,004	4,063	4,192	4,220	4,292	4,405	4,539	3,806	3,835	3,894	3,924	4,001	2,820	0	0
% Change Overall		0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	2%	0%	1%	1%	3%	1%	0%	-11%	1%	0%	0%	0%	-20%		

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Telephone service

HOUSING TRENDS

Calls Offered
Year ● 2021 ● 2022 ● 2023 ● 2024

% Calls Answered
Year ● 2021 ● 2022 ● 2023 ● 2024

Service	Homeless					Lettings					Temporary Accommodation				
Year	Calls offered	Answered	PCA	ASA	AHT	Calls offered	Answered	PCA	ASA	AHT	Calls offered	Answered	PCA	ASA	AHT
⊟ 2024	3821	3326	87%	00:06:23	00:05:49	8559	7617	89%	00:05:47	00:04:32	1722	1463	85%	00:06:05	00:06:17
⊞ April	584	503	86%	00:08:09	00:05:50	1122	1038	93%	00:04:25	00:04:15	248	197	79%	00:08:16	00:06:04
⊞ March	978	845	86%	00:06:23	00:05:46	2541	2186	86%	00:06:51	00:04:36	497	421	85%	00:05:48	00:06:32
⊞ February	1063	966	91%	00:04:36	00:05:53	2344	2114	90%	00:05:27	00:04:37	465	407	88%	00:04:53	00:06:10
⊞ January	1196	1012	85%	00:07:14	00:05:47	2552	2279	89%	00:05:40	00:04:31	512	438	86%	00:06:29	00:06:14
⊟ 2023	14336	11151	78%	00:10:01	04:35:37	21950	20446	93%	00:02:55	03:17:45	5641	4305	76%	00:08:38	04:27:20

- These charts show an improvement in the numbers of client calls answered this year (11% increase for Homelessness and TA services).

- Average waiting times across the service have been reduced by 8 minutes since September 2023.

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Online Signatures
Electronically Signed TA Documents

Customer Signatures in Temporary Accomodation

	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24
Face-to-Face	187	268	199	215	144	142	129	146
Remote	42	106	203	160	130	141	167	183
%	18%	28%	50%	43%	47%	50%	56%	56%

- This chart shows the trend of electronically signed temporary accommodation documents
- It highlights the % of documents being signed electronically by customers using Adobe signatures
- This enables customers to sign remotely and not have to travel to our Town Hall with their families
- Signatures include commercial hotel agreements and TA tenancy agreements

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Service Improvement Programme 2024

- The customer journey improvements sit within a wider service improvement programme for Housing Options.
- The programme has external support and validation from Martin Esom. Martin chairs the Programme Board.
- The Programme Board has senior representation from across the council. With a role for the Lead member.
- The work to improve Housing Options is a whole council effort.
- The Programme Board has staff and union representation.
- A Delivery Board and workstream leads will deliver the improvements.
- The Customer Service workstream will be led by Leah Sykes, Interim Director of Customer Services.