



Homelessness and Rough Sleeping **Reduction Strategy** **2020-2025**



THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF
KENSINGTON
AND CHELSEA

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Introduction

Being homeless can have a devastating, long term impact on residents and their families, especially children. It can affect physical and mental well-being, leaving people isolated from their communities and support networks, and preventing residents reaching their full potential.

Homelessness takes different forms. Rough sleeping is the most visible and often most destructive face of homelessness, but most households are living in temporary accommodation provided by the Council, living in hostels and refuges, or are the hidden homeless (including those who are sofa-surfing) relying on help from relatives or friends to have somewhere to stay.

Homelessness is a growing problem. Nationally, following a five-year fall, the number of households living in temporary accommodation increased by 94 per cent between December 2010 and March 2020.

Similarly, the number of people sleeping rough has reached record highs in recent years, before the devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The lack of affordable housing is a central cause of, and barrier to, resolving homelessness. Welfare reform measures, such as the introduction and subsequent freezing of Local Housing Allowance rates, the overall Benefit Cap, and administration of Universal Credit, have made it ever more difficult for residents, including working households, to secure and retain a home.

These issues are even more challenging in Kensington and Chelsea which remains the most expensive place to live in the UK. Median house prices are almost 45 times median gross earnings. In the private rented sector, which accommodates almost 36 per cent of households in the borough, the rent for a one bed costs 79 per cent of the average gross weekly pay of a single resident.

Local Housing Allowance covers only 42 per cent of the average rent for a one bed property. The gap between Local Housing Allowance and

rent increases with the size of property so that for four-bedroom properties it covers just 16 per cent of the actual cost.

The number of entrenched rough sleepers in the borough remains low compared to other central London authorities, even after the spread of Covid-19, and we are committed to supporting each person off the streets into secure accommodation.

Responding to the Covid-19 pandemic the Council helped over 150 rough sleepers off the streets and into emergency accommodation. Residents with more complex challenges will be provided with settled move-on accommodation and support, while the Council continues to engage with more entrenched rough sleepers who have not yet felt able to accept offers of help.

Our supply of supported accommodation for single residents with support needs is good, but residents sometimes struggle to move on into their own home. Further, between 2015 and 2020 the Council accepted a full legal duty to house almost 52 per cent of homeless households who approached us for help. There are more than 2,200 households placed in temporary accommodation, and Kensington and Chelsea now has the second highest rate of homelessness, per head of population, in England. We must do more for our residents.

We invest significant sums of money addressing homelessness. In 2018 / 19, we spent (net of grants and income) £5.6m on our homelessness service, £10.2m on temporary accommodation, and £5m on supported housing and floating support.

We have committed to build 600 new homes, at least 300 of which will be at social rent, and we will compel private developers to deliver more genuinely affordable new housing in the borough. This is the start of a journey to increase supply. However, we know this will not overcome the dramatic mismatch between the supply of affordable homes and the demand from residents who cannot afford market price housing. The recent partial update to the Strategic Housing Market Assessment shows that over 1,000 households need affordable housing every year, even after anticipated new supply is taken into account. Therefore, we must and will do more, working with our partners in the community and charity sector, to prevent and relieve homelessness in the first place.

Nationally, regionally, and locally, more is being done to tackle homelessness. In April 2018, the Homelessness Reduction Act came into force representing the most far-reaching change to homelessness law in 40 years. The Act introduced improvements to the rights of people who are at risk of homelessness, and additional responsibilities for local housing authorities to prevent homelessness or otherwise help residents find suitable settled accommodation. In 2018, the Government also produced a Rough Sleeping Strategy and accompanying delivery plan.

In May 2018, the Mayor of London cited tackling homelessness and helping rough sleepers as one of five priorities when he published his London Housing Strategy. In doing so, the Mayor committed to addressing the root causes of homelessness including homelessness caused by violence against women and girls, supporting residents into sustainable accommodation, and to tackling rough sleeping through a variety of measures including a No Nights Sleeping Rough taskforce, funding pan-London and borough-specific rough sleeping services, and services to support the most vulnerable.

Our four-year Council Plan, published last year, recognises the need to shift the focus away from crisis management to providing support at an earlier stage. We are committed to working with residents to prevent homelessness and to reducing our use of temporary accommodation as part of the broader priority of supporting and safeguarding vulnerable residents. We want, as far as possible, for our residents to have access to suitable, affordable accommodation so, as well as increasing the supply of new affordable homes in the borough, we will protect existing social housing and focus on bringing empty homes into use.

Our new Housing Strategy agreed in December 2019 sets the context for this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Reduction Strategy. It includes three cross-cutting themes: prevention and early intervention, narrowing the gap (working towards all residents having equal opportunity to reach their potential), and community involvement (residents at the heart of shaping the future of the borough). This Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Reduction Strategy builds upon these commitments to tackle homelessness.

We commissioned an independent and impartial review of our homelessness prevention activities to gain a better understanding of how we can improve our services. The Homelessness Review, carried out by independent specialist consultants Neil Morland & Co. was undertaken during 2019 and is published alongside this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Reduction Strategy.

The aim of the Review is to identify whether the activities undertaken by the Council for tackling homelessness reflect good practice, deliver good outcomes for people experiencing homelessness, and represent good value for money. In addition, it looks at services provided by other public authorities, voluntary organisations and elsewhere, including support services within the borough. Having also considered causes of homelessness in

Introduction

Kensington and Chelsea, the review identifies key priorities for tackling homelessness which have been carried forward to form this new Homelessness Strategy for the borough.

The review presents key findings, underwritten by detailed recommendations. For example, the review recognises a need to improve the recording, measuring and monitoring of current and future levels of homelessness. Doing so will deepen our understanding of the causes of homelessness in the borough and help to maximise the impact and outcomes of homelessness services.

The review recommends that we strengthen partnership working so that residents who are at risk of homelessness (especially residents who may require more support) can be identified earlier and can access appropriate assistance in a timely manner. Up-to-date policies and joint-working protocols reflecting best practice should provide the framework for all homelessness prevention activity.

The need to improve access to and use of suitable accommodation is another key finding. We need to ensure that the quality of accommodation provided to residents and families is of a high standard, while reducing the reliance on placements into temporary accommodation. This means that, where appropriate, we must explore further, and also make more use of suitable, affordable private rented accommodation as an option for households whose homelessness cannot be prevented.

At the time of publication and adoption of this strategy (autumn 2020), we face a great deal of uncertainty at local and national level about the short, medium and long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, both on public health and on the economy. There will be continued impacts on the risks of homelessness and demand for our services which we would not have seen without the pandemic. The lack of certainty means that, rather than planning for any given scenario, this strategy must instead set out principles which will underpin our response to the challenges that lie ahead, whatever they turn out to be.



Our vision

We want Kensington and Chelsea to be a borough where our most vulnerable residents get the help they need when they need it, not when it is too late.

We want better and more collaborative relationships across the Council and with organisations which help homeless households.

We want to help prevent the devastating impact of homelessness wherever possible.

We want to develop a new relationship with our community, as they too can play a part in helping address homelessness, making sure everyone knows about our services and what they offer.

Our relationship with those who are at risk of homelessness needs to be different. We provide a valuable service and want to talk to residents about the housing challenges in Kensington and Chelsea to make sure our community knows what we can do to help, being open and clear about what we can and cannot do.

We will work with residents and their families to find realistic long-term solutions. For many households this may not mean settled accommodation in the borough, at least in the short to medium term.

Our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Reduction Strategy presents an eight-point plan which sets out how the Council proposes to work towards this vision.

Our proposed eight-point plan in summary

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Reduction Strategy has eight key priorities across four broad areas.

Preventing residents from becoming homeless and assisting them when they have become homeless

1. Give residents the power and ability to solve problems by refreshing and personalising the advice and information we provide when people are worried about homelessness.
2. Make sure we speak to residents as early as we possibly can and work with them to find the right solutions, either to prevent homelessness or to move into appropriate and settled accommodation.

Providing suitable accommodation for homeless households

3. Improve our procurement and provision of accommodation for homeless households.

Reducing and working towards the elimination of rough sleeping

4. Prevent residents from rough sleeping in the first place.
5. Support rough sleepers into suitable accommodation and off the streets for good.

Working with partners to prevent homelessness earlier

6. Look at the wider causes of homelessness in the borough and develop solutions through early identification and intervention.
7. Make our housing services more visible and accessible to all residents, and communicate better what we can and cannot offer.
8. Work with partners and other housing providers to develop more effective interventions and solutions to homelessness through earlier identification and intervention.

Our cross-cutting themes

In addition to the eight priorities, we are also committing to two cross-cutting themes that will underline everything we do.

Prioritising resident involvement

‘Done with, not done to’

We will engage with our residents in an empathetic, honest and respectful way so residents feel genuinely listened to, and trust that we are doing all that is possible to help them.

Resolution focused help

‘Personal before the process’

We will embed a resolution focused culture in our services, working with residents and alongside our partners to find authentic options that reflect the particular circumstances of a resident and their family.

The eight-point plan in more detail

Preventing residents from becoming homeless

1. Give residents the power and ability to solve problems by refreshing and personalising the advice and information we provide when people are worried about homelessness.

We will do this by:

- reviewing Housing Needs communications to ensure all are clear and helpful. Make advice and information on housing options more easily accessible, working with advice agencies and other local stakeholders to ensure that residents are supported in making informed choices
- assessing the effectiveness of the information and advice we give and how we give it, so, we can make sure people get the information they need, when they need it, and can make informed choices
- engaging with the community and community organisations in new ways, to share best practice, share valuable local information, and to build a joint understanding of the housing challenges and solutions for our residents
- holding events in the community and offering a programme of workshops with resident, faith and community groups about housing, homelessness prevention and our services. Our aim is to explain what our services can offer so people will approach them at an earlier stage and to explore how we can all work together to prevent homelessness, given the challenges in the borough. We plan to hold workshops in areas where there are higher levels of homelessness, to improve awareness of and access to the support we can offer. We will also review the impact of our joint work with the community so we can learn and improve
- making the conversations we have with people more specific to their individual needs so that we develop more personal solutions by ensuring all our staff are trained and have the right information they need to support this

- agreeing with residents the steps that they can take and steps that we can take in order to achieve this. Any steps residents are asked to take will be realistic, achievable and based on their circumstances. We want to work with residents so that together we can prevent their homelessness
- reviewing our staff training and procedures to ensure that residents consistently receive advice that reflects best practice.

What we do to meet this priority now

- Give advice about housing in the community and in our Customer Service Centre.
 - Provide regular housing advice sessions in a local community centre.
 - Carry out regular outreach sessions at the Women's Refuges in the borough to provide earlier assistance to residents who are experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse.
 - Develop a Personal Housing Plan with everyone at risk of homelessness that approaches us setting out the actions both residents and the Council can take to help prevent them from becoming homeless.
 - Offer mediation when someone is asked to leave their home by family, friends or landlords if it has been caused by a disagreement to enable them to remain at home in the longer term or while a suitable alternative option is identified'.
- Provide advice and intervention through our Tenancy Relations Service to residents who are threatened with illegal eviction.
 - Work closely with partners and other housing providers on individual cases.
 - Help residents to find suitable private rented housing if their homelessness cannot be prevented; for example, by offering private landlords rent in advance, deposits and incentives in some cases.
 - Help residents who are at risk of becoming homeless to get support from a range of services which may be able to help them keep their home, such as the Housing and Employment Team, or the Environmental Health Team that deal with poor conditions in the private rented sector.
 - Improve the information and use of the Council website to reach residents, community members and advice agencies to publicise that we are here to help. We will inform our community that the earlier residents come to us the better assistance we will and can provide.



2. Make sure we speak to residents as early as we possibly can and work with them to find the right solutions, either to prevent homelessness or to move into appropriate and settled accommodation.

We will do this by:

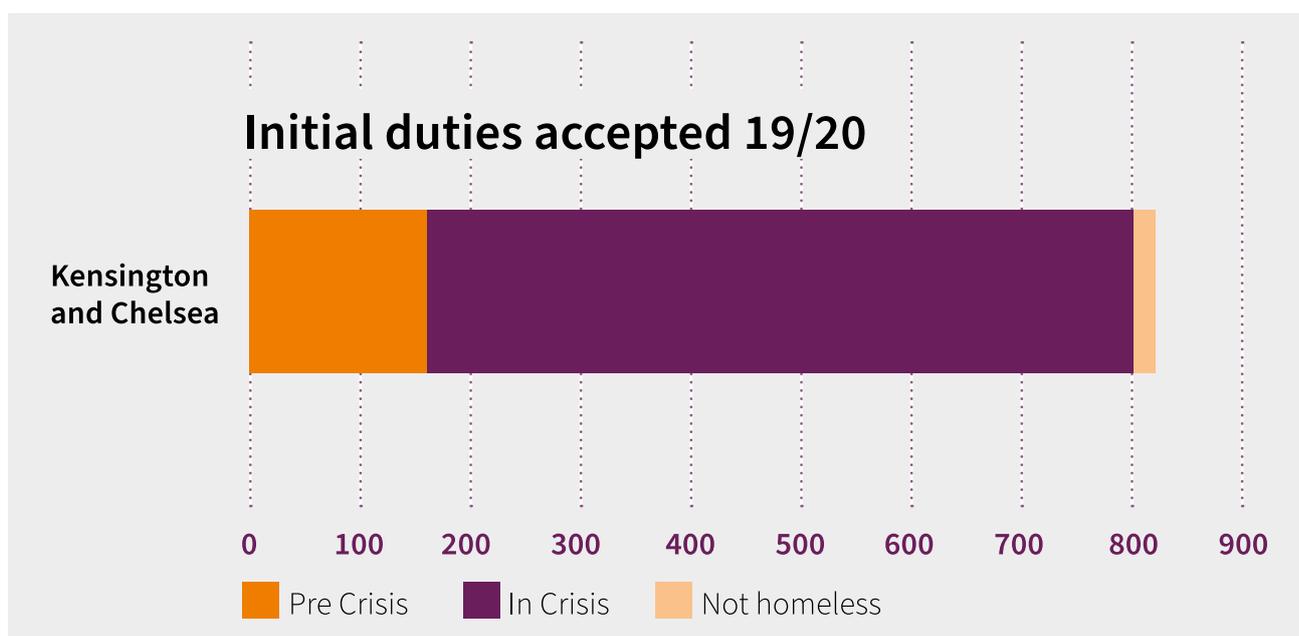
- introducing early identification protocols and referral pathways to be used by other Council services and external partners (including voluntary, public health, community and charity organisations) to help them identify those who need help with housing and working in partnership to provide a solution as early as possible
- reviewing and refreshing protocol for Joint Assessment of Homeless 16 and 17 year olds by Housing and Family Services
- reviewing pathways into settled housing and tenancy sustainment for care leavers
- providing residents with more information to help them choose a suitable new home. We will help residents look for affordable accommodation in the area of choice where this is practical. We will then help the resident to settle in and support them with advice and assistance throughout the tenancy, if it is needed
- providing practical help and advice to help residents find a home in the private rented sector where residents are unable to find their own accommodation (See Priority 3 to find out more about how we will support people moving into the private rented sector)
- improving pathways into specialised settled housing, for example exploring pathways for single women into suitable and settled accommodation with specialist social landlords, and other housing pathways for residents who may benefit from housing with support, such as care leavers, or residents with disabilities
- maximising the use of social homes and promoting transfer schemes and exchanges. We will engage with our residents in properties that maybe larger than their need and develop further options to provide more appropriate homes to all that need them. We will better promote and explain the potential benefits for residents of exchange schemes and increase support residents to transfer or exchange to address under occupation and overcrowding
- improving the opportunities for residents to move on from supported accommodation to ensure we are making the best use of limited supported accommodation, supporting residents to live independently in their own home
- exploring opportunities for joint bids with other providers for funding to increase the supply of housing and support, especially for residents who need more specialist forms of housing and care
- gaining Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation in order to improve our services response to domestic abuse through the introduction and adoption of an established set of standards
- developing a service that is recognised for excellent customer care.

What we do to meet this priority now

- We have a good range of support services within the borough providing specialist and generic support for homeless households. Our Supported Housing Commissioning programme provides around 657 units of support over 17 accommodation schemes.
- The Single Homeless Team manages referrals and assesses appropriate pathways to supported accommodation.
- For single people and childless couples, we work with St Mungo’s Homeless Prevention Engagement service (HoPE) in order to find suitable accommodation in the private rented sector.
- Design service delivery, policy and procedure to better address domestic abuse and improve support to residents experiencing domestic abuse by working with residents, and partners such as Standing Together, the Police and voluntary organisations.

Why is this important?

- Everybody we see is unique, their journey towards homelessness and personal differences make for a unique situation. This means that giving rigid pre-set advice and information does not always lead to the best outcomes for people. We want to support our staff to be kindly inquisitive and give them the skills and information they need to personalise advice and information based on what our residents tell them.
- We want to work with residents so that, together, we find suitable solutions and options. We believe personalising, tailoring and improving our personal housing plans (housing plans designed to assist with helping residents resolve their housing issue) will lead to more positive results.
- Since the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) over 75 per cent of the households seeking help from the Council first made contact when they were already in crisis; homeless or imminently homeless.



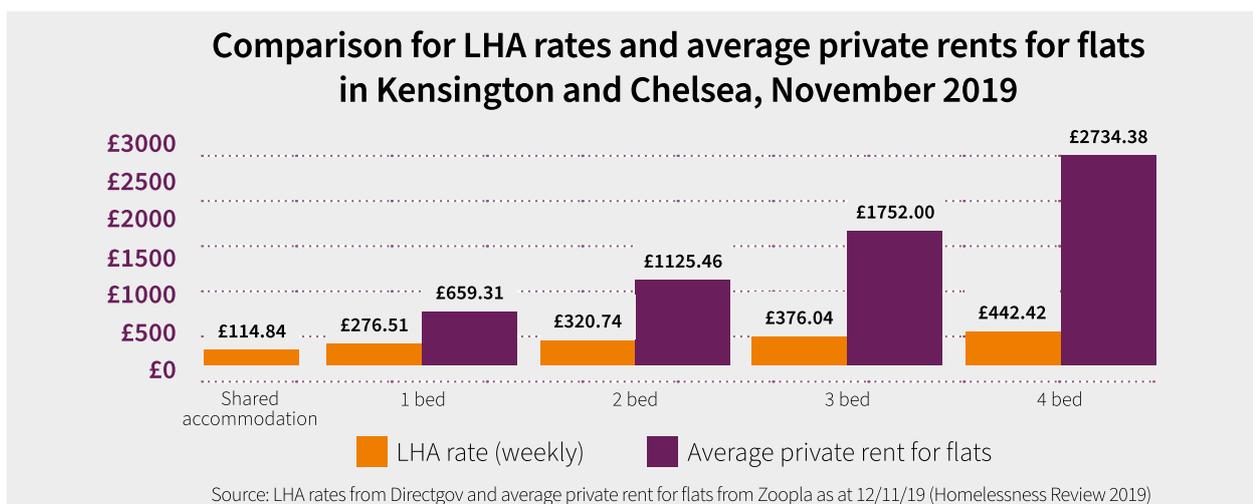
The eight-point plan in more detail

So, for those households there was little or no opportunity to prevent homelessness. We need to find a way of engaging with residents who are at risk of homelessness earlier. We believe that partnering with other organisations will help us to do this.

Understandably, some residents approaching our services for assistance do not trust the advice or solutions we offer or find it difficult to understand. Residents may feel that they are not listened to when their expectations are not met. Residents may not be aware of the advice and support we can offer so they turn to other organisations. Sometimes residents are frustrated that they cannot be offered a new social home quickly as they are not aware of the shortages of supply.

We will increase the use of private rented accommodation in order to offer residents realistic options. The HRA means that we have to provide housing assistance to a lot more people and this will usually mean helping them to find accommodation in the private rented sector if their homelessness cannot be prevented. Settled accommodation in the private sector is a better outcome for families than the uncertainty of a long time in temporary accommodation.

Although the starting point is always to look for private rented homes in the borough, the high cost of renting locally means affordable private rented accommodation will often be available in a range of areas outside of the borough.



We need to work to change these expectations, as they do not reflect the reality of housing availability in Kensington and Chelsea. This will help our residents consider other options much earlier on.

We want our residents to be able to make informed choices about their housing. We are not able to offer a social home to the majority of our residents in housing need so we need to improve the way we offer a wide range of services to help identify solutions that will lead to a settled home. We also want to promote a true understanding of housing within the borough so that residents are more likely to be provided with accurate information no matter who they seek advice from.

With a lack of affordable and suitable housing options in Kensington and Chelsea, moving residents from supported accommodation on to more settled accommodation when they are ready is difficult. 45 per cent of residents in supported accommodation have been there for over two years, and over the last five years the number of available supported housing placements has reduced by 50 per cent. Delaying move on means our supported accommodation isn't being used as effectively as it could be.

Providing suitable accommodation for homeless households

3. Improve our procurement and provision of accommodation for homeless households.

We will do this by:

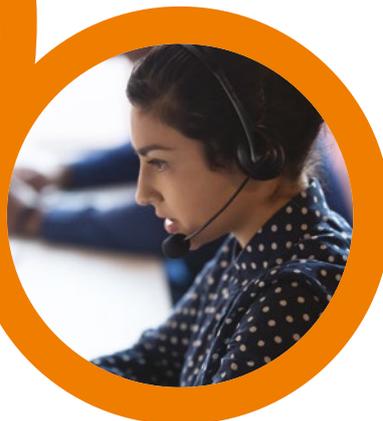
- reviewing and updating our Accommodation Procurement Strategy to improve the supply of suitable good quality accommodation, for example through a Direct Lettings Agency
- supporting the Accommodation Procurement Team and the Private Sector Housing Team to develop stronger relationships with private landlords, exploring ways of working with landlords to increase the supply of suitable homes and to improve standards in the private rented sector
- increasing the number of private rented sector offers we make and where these cannot be in Kensington and Chelsea, due to unaffordable rents, do more to support residents moving to other areas and help them settle in their new community. This will involve:
 - looking at ways to offer households more choice on location of their homes, for example by looking for properties in areas where residents may have friends or family, or areas in which they are already living in temporary accommodation. This may help to avoid the disruption of having to move to a new area or feeling isolated in an area they are not familiar with
 - continuing to invest in and develop innovative private rented sector schemes, which offer households safe, affordable and decent homes (e.g. Real Lettings)
 - doing more to explain why offers of private rented or temporary accommodation are generally outside Kensington and Chelsea
- exploring support initiatives to ensure rehoused residents receive appropriate advice and support to sustain their tenancy over the long term
- developing stronger relationships with private sector landlords to increase the supply of suitable and affordable accommodation.
- continuing to prioritise and support the development of more affordable housing in Kensington and Chelsea, setting new challenging targets and taking the ambitious actions set out in the Council's Housing Strategy which you can find at www.rbkc.gov.uk/housing/useful-contacts-information/housing-strategy. The Council's Community Housing Supplementary Planning Document, which was adopted in July 2020, also supports an increase in the delivery of new genuinely affordable housing in the borough
- reviewing our Housing Allocation Scheme, in consultation with residents and key stakeholders, to ensure that it supports the prevention and relief of homelessness
- strengthening our relationships with Registered Providers (housing associations), in order to maximise the number of affordable social housing homes our residents have access to
- developing a new strategy to reflect strategic priorities and best practice in supported housing pathways. Design tenancy sustainment offers and rehousing pathways for residents with specific or complex needs including those in institutional care
- reducing numbers in TA by 10 per cent

Providing suitable accommodation for homeless households

- exploring the opportunities provided by pan-London initiatives to improve the supply of suitable accommodation, for example Capital Letters
- ensuring safety, security and suitability of temporary accommodation. Complete update of required standards, including FRA records. Increase spot checks and implement additional compliance enforcement processes, including contract termination where standards are not met. Increase the percentage of accommodation that we own and contract directly with landlords so that we can enforce high standards
- reviewing our accommodation placements policy to make sure residents and families whose homelessness cannot be prevented are offered temporary homes that meet their needs.

What we do to meet this priority now

- Help homeless residents access suitable and affordable accommodation in the private rented sector.
- Help those residents who are owed the full housing duty to move into suitable social housing through choice or by direct offer.
- Work with key partners to help residents through supported housing pathways towards independence.
- We procure temporary accommodation based on what we need to meet demand and provide homes in line with our suitability assessment procedure so that the temporary homes we offer reflect the household's needs.
- We work with our temporary accommodation providers to help them maintain high standards across the stock and we hold landlords and agencies to account if they fail to uphold these standards. We aim to inspect all properties before they are let.
- We have joined the London Councils' "Setting the Standard" initiative to ensure the quality of emergency temporary accommodation.



Why is this important?

The limited availability of social housing is clearly an important factor in levels of homelessness. The Council has set an ambitious target of building 600 new homes, at least 300 of which will be at social rent. However, this won't be enough to meet the needs of homeless households and other residents who need to move to a more suitable home. Currently there are over 3,000 households with priority for social housing on our Housing Register of which over 2,000 are homeless.

Understandably some people feel that waiting for a social home is better than moving into the private rented sector, but the reality is that households can wait around five years for a social home and this wait increases for larger households. Although the Council is committed to doing everything it can to increase affordable housing in Kensington and Chelsea, supply is unlikely to ever meet demand. During these waits for social housing, homeless households are living in temporary accommodation which is often outside Kensington and Chelsea and can also involve a number of moves between different temporary accommodation properties. Evidence suggests that, for some families, living in temporary accommodation can have a serious impact on health and wellbeing in the long-term and disrupts family life, relationships and education. A better understanding of the possible implications of going into temporary accommodation may help some households make decisions about options for settled accommodation.

Providing temporary accommodation currently costs the Council more than £10m annually from its own budget, as national funding does not cover expenditure.



Reducing and working towards the elimination of rough sleeping

4. Prevent residents from rough sleeping in the first place.

We will do this by:

- doing all we can to make sure residents can access support as early as possible. The sooner a resident can access our services the better the chance of them never having to sleep rough. So, the Council will work with other agencies and the wider community to promote early intervention, and look to appoint an advisor who will focus on mediation with family and friends to prevent a resident ending up on the streets
- developing institutional release protocols to strengthen the duty to refer on public authorities. This means that we will work with hospitals, prisons and other agencies to ensure residents are offered a clearer pathway to accommodation and support when they need it
- looking to improve the provision of mental health and drug and alcohol abuse support to make sure residents who are at risk of sleeping on the streets get the support they need either to prevent them losing their home or to move into alternative accommodation
- exploring options to give young people better solutions than sofa surfing and other unsettled and unsafe accommodation, and looking to develop a young resident housing pathway.

What we do to meet this priority now

- Exercise our duty to prevent homelessness in accordance with the HRA. We do this by trying to help residents and their families stay where they are or by finding them new accommodation before they become homeless.
- Refer residents to the West London Rough Sleeping Prevention Project who provide mediation to prevent rough sleeping.

5. Support rough sleepers into suitable accommodation and off the streets for good.

We will do this by:

- implementing the Covid-19 Exit Strategy: *Rough sleepers in emergency accommodation (June 2020)*, ensuring that rough sleepers and single homeless residents at particular risk of the impact of the pandemic are supported to move on to sustainable settled accommodation
- supporting rough sleepers to take full advantage of accommodation offers by accompanying residents to viewings of potential new homes, and using personalised budgets and the help of agencies to help make a new home suitable, such as furniture or small accessibility modifications
- looking to improve the provision of social services, mental health and drug and alcohol abuse support, to make sure residents who are at risk of sleeping on the streets get the support they need either to prevent them losing their home or to move into alternative accommodation
- working with strategic partners, reviewing the use of homelessness hubs and night shelters in light of the Covid-19 pandemic ensuring that rough sleepers continue to be offered safe accommodation with support, building towards more settled accommodation

- engaging and supporting residents who are risk of returning to the streets, and supporting suitable move-on within supported accommodation through the SPOT Navigator and Supported Accommodation Move-on services
- developing support for rough sleepers with specific needs that is appropriate and sensitive to them, by improving our supported accommodation and commissioning supported accommodation for specific groups with specific needs where possible
- continuing to develop our offer to residents without recourse to public funds to support them to regain eligibility to public funds or the right to rent, or be reconnected to their home country where appropriate
- exploring opportunities for Housing First schemes for entrenched rough sleepers and other vulnerable residents with complex needs.
- Our Dual Diagnosis Outreach Worker and Homeless Intervention Team engage with and support residents with mental health and drug and alcohol problems, and refer them into long-term services that help independent living.
- We support residents into employment, thereby helping rough sleepers secure a home in the private rented sector, and have helped those with no recourse to public funds maintain independence.
- We bid successfully for rough sleeper grant funding to maximise the range of support and opportunity we can offer.

What we do to meet this priority now

- Our Street Population Outreach Team do regular outreach shifts, identifying and developing relationships with rough sleepers in order to offer individualised support and appropriate accommodation.
- We have used No Second Night Out assessment hubs if and when they have had vacancies and when doing so has benefited the resident.
- We have provided winter shelter and emergency bed spaces with a focus on the most vulnerable rough sleepers (and, working with partners, will explore how to do so in line with guidance relating to the Covid-19 pandemic).
- We provide personalised budgets for current and former entrenched rough sleepers, linked to accessing support and achieving milestones that both prevent homelessness and strengthen longer term tenancy sustainment.



What is Housing First?

Housing First is a housing and support approach which:

- gives people who have experienced homelessness and chronic health and social care needs a stable home from which to rebuild their lives
- provides intensive, person-centred, holistic support that is open-ended
- places no conditions on individuals; however, they should desire to have a tenancy.

Housing First may offer an opportunity to get some of the borough's entrenched rough sleepers off the street and into suitable accommodation for good. It could also support vulnerable women living in hostels, poor accommodation or sleeping rough. The Housing service cannot do this alone and will need commitment from other agencies to ensure the success of this innovative approach to housing the most vulnerable in our community and to ensure we have access to additional appropriate housing supply.

Why is this important?

We believe that no one should ever have to sleep rough. The HRA means that we have a duty to assist all eligible residents who are at risk of being homeless in the next 56 days. If we can ensure that anyone in this situation is aware of the help we can provide and accesses our services early, we will have a greater opportunity to stop people sleeping rough.

Historically, we have experienced a low number of established rough sleepers compared to other London boroughs. They are mainly older men who have resisted support thus far and who have become entrenched rough sleepers.

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in an increase in the number of residents suddenly forced on to our streets, including a proportionate increase in the number of female rough sleepers and younger residents. Working with key local and regional partners, and with the residents themselves, we have support and move-on options for the vast majority of rough sleepers hit hard by the pandemic, and we continue to work with those more resistant to support.

Building relationships with both entrenched and new rough sleepers and emphasising personal solutions has proved to be most effective way of working with these residents. However, we will continue to work with rough sleepers, whether they are new to the streets or have yet not found a route away from them, to ensure they can access a range of Council and London-wide housing and support services.



Working with partners to prevent homelessness earlier

6. Look at the wider causes of homelessness in the borough, and develop solutions to homelessness through early identification and intervention.

We will do this by:

- conducting ongoing analysis of available data regarding areas within the borough where there is a high occurrence of homelessness, enabling us to identify true underlying causes of homelessness and repeat homelessness
- ensuring our resources are effectively targeted and monitoring the impact of our spending to ensure it improves outcomes for residents
- learning from our residents. Looking at their lived experiences of homelessness to identify earlier opportunities for successful intervention. For example, by conducting customer journey mapping to understand why and when some residents have better experiences than others and improve services accordingly
- working with Public Health to carry out research into the triggers and impact of homelessness, supporting timely and appropriate support and intervention.

7. Make our housing services more visible and accessible and better communicate what we can and cannot offer.

We will do this by:

- developing and implementing a new Housing Needs service model and structure focusing on prevention, early intervention and targeted support. Increase capacity to provide specialist advice and support to residents to prevent homelessness in the private rented sector, including working more closely with partners
- training staff to ensure we work together with residents, collaborating to find a housing solution
- considering how we can employ residents with lived experience of homelessness, particularly younger residents, for example through the apprenticeship scheme
- ensuring the advice and support we provide is accessible to all. We will consult with residents who use (and do not use) our services to find out what works best and then put this into practice
- offering our services away from the Town Hall in community settings. We will talk to our residents and community organisations to identify where we should be based to have the greatest impact on preventing homelessness
- building our relationship with the community to help us to provide support and advice. We will hold workshops with community agencies so they can help us to improve our services, advise residents on how the Council can assist them, and what they can do if they are not receiving the help they are entitled to
- supporting our staff to better promote what the Council can and cannot offer, aiming to build stronger and more trusting relationships with our residents. We need to better explain our services and what people can expect from them. We will ensure that everyone knows about the support and help available to them, but also about the realities of housing in Kensington and Chelsea and why being homeless is unlikely to result in an offer of social housing, but instead offer private rented accommodation. We want to strengthen the message that efforts to resolve homelessness work best when the resident and the Council work together to find a solution.

What we do to meet this priority now

- We are providing advice at the Curve Community Centre one day per week to anyone who wants advice on housing.
- We are trialling new ways of delivering our services. The introduction of the HRA has fundamentally changed our response to homelessness and this has led us to finding new ways of working.
- We have strengthened our relationship with local advice agencies through regular meetings and attending Kensington and Chelsea Social Council.

8. Work with partners and other housing providers to develop more effective interventions and solutions to homelessness through earlier identification and intervention.

We will do this by:

- exploring the opportunity to work across Council services such as Housing Benefits, Council Tax, and externally with agencies such as the DWP, to identify financial trigger points that might place residents at risk of homelessness. This could help the Council to intervene earlier and proactively offer residents support, rather than waiting for them to reach crisis point before they seek assistance. In a borough such as Kensington and Chelsea, where housing affordability is such a problem, we know that losing a job, a change in benefits or mounting debts such as Council Tax arrears can lead to the risk of homelessness. We could use available data to identify a resident who is struggling, and then proactively offer support to find a new job, increase their benefit income or pay off some debt
- exploring the opportunity to work across Council services such as Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Environmental Health, health services, as well as community advice agencies, to identify residents at risk of homelessness earlier and proactively offer them support, rather than waiting for them to reach crisis point or approach us. We know there are many risk factors that are not financial and these can be harder to identify early (see priority 9, to find out how we intend to deepen our understanding of reasons for homelessness). We will be exploring partnering with other Council departments such as Early Help, and external agencies, to identify when challenges such as relationship breakdowns, caring responsibilities or health difficulties might place a resident at risk of homelessness
- exploring opportunities to visit households at risk of homelessness when other agencies are visiting in order to give proactive housing advice
- providing support for residents looking for work through our dedicated Housing and Employment Team. Increase by over 25 per cent referrals to the Housing and Employment Team of residents seeking support and advice in finding work
- working with partners in the community, ensuring that the Council and social housing landlords undertake effective prevention, tenancy sustainment, and financial inclusion work with their tenants. Eviction needs to be a last resort throughout the social housing sector, and we expect social landlords to work with us to prevent homelessness where possible
- raising awareness of the true cost of homelessness including costs to the health care system, social care system and the life outcomes of people affected by homelessness. We hope by doing so we can ensure that all agencies share our commitment to preventing homelessness in all its forms and will implement this strategy with as great an effort as we will.

Why is this important?

Given Kensington and Chelsea's unique housing challenges, we need to identify residents at risk of becoming homeless earlier than we do now. Efforts to increase the supply of affordable homes in the borough are not going to be enough to meet demand – this is an unfortunate fact. So, to support residents to be able to stay in the borough and in settled and safe accommodation, we need to prevent them from losing their home in the first place.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 increased the prevention period to 56 days, but 56 days often isn't long enough for us to prevent cases of homelessness. This includes residents and families living in private sector accommodation that is unaffordable, experiencing domestic abuse, or threatened with being asked to leave by friends and family, all of which are principal causes of homelessness.

We want to offer support long before crisis point in as many cases as possible. To do this well, we need to understand the true reasons people become homeless.

We have a good idea of generic reasons for homelessness. We collect data on reasons for homelessness, but this often does not tell the true story of why residents end up without a home. For example, a resident may approach as homeless due to not being able to afford their private sector tenancy, but this could be because they lost their job. It is these core reasons we want to understand. If we could have intervened earlier by supporting that person to find work again, they would never have become homeless in the first place.

We need to make sure our services match the needs of our community. We believe by carrying out further ongoing research we will be better able to tailor solutions to emerging trends in housing need in our borough and ensure (working with partners in the Council and in the community) that we provide support when it is most effective. We haven't done enough to explore these needs previously which is why we are emphasising its importance by making it a priority.

It is this ambitious mixture, of truly understanding what caused a resident's homelessness and working with partners to identify those at risk and intervene early, that will give us the opportunity to reduce homelessness in the borough.



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