

LONDON BOROUGH OF HACKNEY - HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2020-2022

The sad reality of the housing crisis is that more and more Hackney residents are finding themselves homeless or at risk of homelessness. Not having a place to call home impacts on residents' mental wellbeing, it affects children's development and places households under huge pressures.

While Hackney has an ambitious building programme, and almost half the properties in the borough are social housing, we are still unable to match the scale of the demand we are facing. The inadequacy of Local Housing Allowance, the benefit designed to help households on a low income rent in the private sector means that just a handful of properties are affordable to families living in the borough and for more and more households the impact of spiralling rents or living in increasingly overcrowded accommodation is the loss of their home and the need to seek help from the Council.

While the cost to the individual is the most significant, homelessness also carries a financial cost. We now have over three thousand households living in Temporary Accommodation with an annual net cost to the Council of £13 million, up from just £1 million in 2010.

This homelessness strategy recognises the impact of homelessness on residents and sets out the action we will take to offer support and assistance in the first place to prevent homelessness and then if needed, to help find a settled home. This isn't easy, without concrete action from central government there is little prospect of an end to the current housing **crisis**. However, the actions we have set are underpinned by a commitment to be honest with residents about their options and to give them the tools and support to identify their way forward.

This commitment needs to extend across the Council, we all have a responsibility to those residents facing homelessness and we all have a role to play in supporting them.

The reality of the housing crisis is that it is not possible for us to end homelessness on our own, but this strategy commits us to putting in place the advice, support and tools for residents who are at risk of homelessness or who lose their home to ensure everyone has the support they need and that no one in Hackney is left facing homelessness alone.

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INTRODUCTION

This refresh of our existing Homelessness Strategy covers the period 2020 to 2022. It builds on our last strategy publication, which focused on 2015 to 2018. The main objectives for our strategy will continue to be:

- to offer a high quality and innovative service to homeless households
- to assist households in crisis to explore all the options available to them and
- to find long term housing solutions for people threatened with homelessness.

We have made considerable progress in meeting these objectives over the last few years. However, there have been significant changes in the local, regional and national operating environment during this period that have worsened the operating climate, and driven up homelessness. Increased demand for affordable housing continues to be driven by welfare reform, an increasingly unaffordable private rented sector, social housing shortages. In addition, issues persist around the short term nature of the central government funding available for some initiatives.

While rough sleeping is often the most visible and concerning form of homelessness, the definition of homelessness extends much wider than this. It also includes anyone who is at risk of eviction or does not have access to suitable and secure accommodation and may be staying with friends or family (sofa surfing), living in squats or in temporary accommodation provided by the council.

Furthermore, there have been important legislative changes, in particular the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017, which came into force in 2018. It is in this context that this refresh focuses on the following work streams:

- **Single People** - assisting vulnerable individuals and tackling rough sleeping
- **Customer Care** - delivering the best possible service
- **Early Intervention and Prevention** – reducing the risk of people becoming homeless
- **Access for All** - removing barriers and reducing disadvantage

Working in partnership continues to be central to the success of this strategy. We know that the Council cannot tackle homelessness in isolation. Joined up effort will be required across the housing, social care, health, criminal justice, employment and welfare benefits sectors. Both the users and providers of services will have a key role to play.

NEW PRIORITIES - 2020 AND BEYOND

In conducting this refresh of our strategy, the following was undertaken:

- a review of the national, regional and local policy context
- a review of good practice in three key areas – work with the public, local businesses and Registered Providers
- an analysis of statistics gathered to support implementation of Homelessness Reduction Act
- consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, across the housing, social care, health and criminal, employment, welfare and criminal justice sectors
- engagement with service users and service providers.

As a result of engagement from service users, third sector partners, and community and voluntary organisations the following priorities have been developed.

Theme 1 - Single People - assisting vulnerable individuals and tackling rough sleeping

Over the next three years, we aim to help some of the most vulnerable and isolated members of our community to access stable and secure housing. To this end we will:

- Continue to intervene early where single young people under 25 are at risk of homelessness, by providing support to take up education, training or employment, life skills development, mediation and other support
- Put in place effective housing options protocols for care leavers, ensuring they receive the right support and advice appropriate for their circumstances and are made aware of the appropriate housing options available to them
- Maintain “one stop shop” access to co-located, multi-agency services. This includes the dual diagnosis treatment pilot as outlined within the City and Hackney Mental Health Strategy 2019-23. This is a substance misuse contract that better integrates substance misuse and mental health services including psychiatric liaison; a seamless pathway between MH and substance misuse services and ensuring that people with substance misuse problems have access to support for their mental health. The pilot will inform recommissioning of integrated adult substance misuse services
- Increase the supply of appropriate supported housing and temporary accommodation for single young people, to ensure they are not placed in inappropriate accommodation
- Liaise with colleagues at Jobcentre Plus to ensure that Universal Credit (UC) is claimed in full, and, where there is a risk of homelessness that the housing element is paid direct to landlords to prevent arrears and that sanctions are avoided wherever possible
- Link up single homeless people (and those at risk) with mental health services, working in partnership with NHS colleagues to ensure that low to medium (as well as high) level needs are met
- Support the development of additional provision of palliative care for single homeless people, who tend to be younger and more isolated than other users of “end of life” health services
- Analyse our data on homeless people’s support needs, to understand the relationship between specific vulnerabilities, the risk of homelessness and how best to mitigate it.

As regards Rough Sleepers, we will:

- Develop multi-agency information-sharing arrangements around offenders which support the HRA Duty to refer (Integrated Offender Management, MAPPA)
- Develop multi-agency information-sharing arrangement around residents experiencing domestic abuse which support the HRA Duty to Refer (DAIS and MARAC)
- Work with the London Mayor to secure resources for Hackney within the proposed expansion of the London Street Rescue (LSR) and Safe Connections (outreach) services, seeking long term funding for our dedicated mental health outreach worker
- Improve multi-agency working around substance misuse and coordination with street outreach in neighbouring boroughs, to enable safe reconnection and effective work with transient rough sleepers
- Continue to engage with **EASL (Enabling Assessment Service London)**. EASL is a pan-London mental health team which supports homeless people and organisations that work with them. The team carries out multi-disciplinary mental health assessments and also delivers training and support to its partner agencies, so our partners can do more to address the mental health issues of their service users. In Hackney, this includes work with LSR
- Build public and local businesses' response to rough sleeping and street population issues via: publicity campaigns, developing online resources, promoting volunteering within local voluntary and community organisations and exploring alternative giving models which use contactless technology, rather than cash
- Explore how to involve community and faith-based organisations in developing long-term solutions to rough sleeping in Hackney.

Theme 2 - Customer Care – delivering the best possible service

The HRA necessitates a change in how councils work with homeless people, local services and other organisations to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping. In implementing the Act, over the next three years, we will:

- Further publicise our housing need services to the Hackney public, to raise awareness of the services and information available, encourage people to seek advice as soon as they are in housing difficulty and ensure customers are signposted to the right place
- Ensure single points of access to homelessness services, so that customers are not pulled from pillar to post
- Improve the quality of initial advice by gathering more information about people's needs during triage
- Upskill more frontline staff by providing training on homelessness awareness, welfare benefits, substance misuse, domestic abuse support and trauma informed care
- Provide staff in partner organisations with clear and comprehensive information about our services
- Hold open days at key hubs like the Greenhouse
- Promote a person-centred approach for all people using our homelessness services and ensure this is reflected in Personal Housing Plans
- Review the effectiveness of our information and advice services from the point of view of customers, using peer volunteers in initiatives such as mystery shopping

- Support Hackney temporary accommodation residents to move onto more settled accommodation. Our officers will work with residents to ensure they receive assistance around all their housing and support needs identified in their Personal Housing Plan until they access sustainable accommodation. We will work to empower residents, enabling them to engage more actively with the process of finding and moving into sustainable accommodation. This will reduce time spent in temporary housing, as well as helping to build people's resilience and ability to maintain a tenancy
- Review Hackney's Lettings Policy to clarify lettings priorities and ensure that social housing is targeted at those most in need, including people with significant social (eg risk of violence) and medical needs.
- Explore how we can make temporary accommodation more 'psychologically informed', including by finding new ways to engage with residents.

Theme 3 - Early Intervention and Prevention – reducing the risk of people becoming homeless

As well as addressing the needs of homeless people, it is important that we identify and assist those who are at risk of becoming homeless. To this end, over the next three years, we will:

- Utilise data to identify households at risk of homelessness and offer positive interventions.
- Focus on preventing and managing family evictions
- Work with criminal justice agencies to ensure there is sufficient support for people leaving prison
- Liaise with Jobcentre Plus to ensure that they are aware of any risks of a claimant becoming homeless
- Carry out a review of our current homelessness prevention approaches, to ensure we engage with people early, through triage and online access to advice
- Seek to prevent repeat homelessness through enhancing floating support, as well as volunteering and befriending
- Mitigate the impact of welfare reform via budgeting and debt advice, for example by working with Jobcentre Plus, Citizens Advice and appropriate advice agencies to ensure vulnerable residents are supported to make their Universal Credit claim
- Provide housing advice in hospital, to help ensure people are not discharged onto the streets or into unsustainable housing
- Help people to navigate through pathways to the services they need, to ensure that lack of support does not heighten the risk of homelessness
- Promote trauma informed approaches, which focus on the triggers that can cause homelessness for vulnerable people
- Be proactive in identifying people who are not managing their tenancies and ensuring they get the support they need
- Use Personal Housing Plans to prevent homelessness by providing support around people's full range of needs and through promoting ownership of the actions contained within the plan, which increase customers' feelings of well-being, personal success, self-care and resilience
- Ensure floating support services focus on preventing homelessness in an accountable and outcomes focussed fashion, for example helping to maintain temporary accommodation tenancies and transition into settled accommodation.

- Support victims of domestic violence to remain safely in their homes, or in a new home where necessary and appropriate. This includes using the Pan London Reciprocal Scheme and encouraging registered providers to re-house residents within their own housing
- Continue to support our employment and training initiatives - to increase residents' income/choice of housing and improve wellbeing
- Continue to engage with the **Shelter Hackney Family Service (HFS)** which supports families who are at risk of homelessness and dealing with other issues.

Theme 4 - Access for All – removing barriers and reducing disadvantage

Homeless people and those at risk of homelessness often experience difficulties when trying to access the services they need. To address this, over the next three years we will:

- Reduce the stigma experienced by homeless households, by ensuring that homeless people and those at risk are treated as valued members of the Hackney community
- Ensure that services are inclusive and meet the needs all those requiring assistance so that no clients are disadvantaged
- Increase accessibility for people who are disabled or unwell by delivering more housing advice services in people's homes or other appropriate locations
- Promote services which are personalised, flexible and focused on individual circumstances and goals and which are psychologically-informed
- Work with partner agencies to understand the particular homelessness risks and challenges faced by migrants
- Continue with co-location of services, to maximise the benefits for service users in terms of access, especially those with multiple/complex needs
- Identify those who need social housing early in their journey through homelessness services
- Ensure that Social Housing providers are not operating exclusionary lettings policies
- Help more customers to access the Private Rented Sector, for example through considered and effective use of Discretionary Housing Payments
- Subject to funding being available, provide a range of supported housing that meets the diverse needs of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and provide options other than Temporary Accommodation for vulnerable people who need care and support
- Co-design Temporary Accommodation options with Adult Social Care and Public Health to ensure placements meet all individuals' needs
- Work with **Enable by Riverside**. They are a specialist support provider who have recently been commissioned to provide borough-wide floating support service for people at risk of homelessness, including those with mental health needs and learning disabilities and are in Temporary Accommodation.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING – AN OVERARCHING PRIORITY

Homelessness cannot be solved by the Council alone. That is why efficient and effective partnership working is so important. In Hackney, our intention is to take a “whole systems” approach. In this context, our partners have helped us to develop some specific aims and objectives.

Housing - Working with Registered Providers

Over the next three years we will work with Registered Providers to:

- maximise social housing allocations/lettings for homeless households from registered providers' stock – using the East London Sub-regional Agreement and the new East London Housing Partnership (ELHP) homelessness forum for Local Authorities and Registered Providers as a basis for this
- provide support to tenants which helps them develop skills and find employment
- promote health initiatives to maintain independent living
- encourage more affordable house building in Hackney via the Mayor of Hackney's Housing Challenge fund.
- support and encourage Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation across Housing Providers. DAHA accreditation is the UK benchmark for how housing providers should respond to domestic abuse in the UK, and will ensure providers follow established set of standards and best practice to better identify, recognise, and prevent domestic abuse and its associated homelessness.
- work with registered housing providers to promote homeless prevention, and inspire them to place it at the heart of their organisations and culture. We will encourage registered providers to have clear operating procedures in place on homeless prevention, and to ensure that industry best practice is followed. We will monitor cases where tenants are evicted, and highlight where more could have been done to prevent their homelessness
- promote the Homes for Cathy Group which is dedicated to raising awareness and sharing best practice in addressing homelessness across housing providers. Urging all local registered housing providers to join Homes for Cathy and pledge to meeting its nine aspirational commitments around preventing and addressing homelessness.

Housing - Working with the Private Rented Sector (PRS)

To promote access to affordable and good quality accommodation in the PRS, there needs to be effective partnership working, involving landlords, lettings and management agents. Therefore, over the next three years we will:

- Continue to hold a regular landlord forum and ensure that we continue to educate our landlords to become good practice landlords in conjunction with the National Landlords Association
- Continue work with lettings and management agents, developing formal partnership arrangements where necessary
- Promote good practice, for example by working with landlords and agents to end “no DSS” policies
- Include Private Sector Housing environmental and housing enforcement staff in strategic discussions about improving access to the PRS for homeless people and those at risk
- Continue to work with the **Hackney Private Sector Housing Team**. This service provides a range of interventions aimed at improving housing conditions and preventing homelessness. Support provided includes negotiation with private landlords, including enforcement action where necessary. The team also administers the statutory Mandatory Licensing Scheme for larger HMOs (which ensures fire safety, housing management and housing conditions in the PRS meet prescribed standards) and the selective licensing schemes.

Homelessness and Health

Over the next three years we will work with NHS, Public Health and Social Care colleagues to:

- Ensure housing, health and social care professionals can support homeless people's well-being through understanding each other's roles, policies and practices
- Upskill frontline staff to recognise symptoms of physical and mental health conditions, so clients can be referred to health care services
- Ensure tackling homelessness is a priority for integrated commissioning, across the Prevention, Planned Care and Unplanned Care workstreams. Develop a shared vision of intended outcomes and monitor progress against these
- Continue with joint commissioning of specific projects such as Housing First, which address the links between homelessness and ill health (mental and physical) recognising that both can be causes and consequences of each other
- Work with GPs and other primary care staff to promote understanding of housing and homelessness issues and to provide housing/employment/financial information to their patients which will help prevent homelessness
- Promote the City and Hackney Wellbeing Network, Well Family and post-natal support.

Complex Needs and Multiple Deprivation

Homeless people and those at risk often have additional vulnerabilities associated with mental health, substance mis-use and offending. Many have also experienced violence and abuse. In light of this, over the next three years we will:

- Maintain close working relationships with services such as PAUSE and STEPS, updating service level agreements in light of the HRA. PAUSE works with women who have experienced, or are at risk of, repeated pregnancies that result in children needing to be removed from their care. Supporting Transition & Empowering People Service (STEPS) support clients with the most difficult life circumstances presenting with a range of multiple and complex needs. This small group of individuals may have needs around drugs or alcohol, mental health, dealing with offending, anti-social behaviours or homelessness.
- Build on the multi-agency links that are already in place regarding complex needs, to develop a shared vision, values and working protocols around the most vulnerable homeless people
- Continue to fast track complex needs clients into accommodation where appropriate
- Deliver our Housing First pilot - this will provide wraparound support for up to 20 entrenched rough sleepers, including those with dual diagnosis/complex needs
- Implement complementary/alternative supported housing solutions for the cohort of complex needs clients whose needs differ from Housing First.

Maintaining Strategic Links

In order to ensure that different council departments, other statutory agencies and the voluntary sector all pull together to tackle homelessness, strategic coordination is needed. Therefore, over the next three years we will:

- Continue to involve the Council's Public Health team in the delivery of our strategy, utilising relevant funding streams where possible
- Work closely with City and Hackney Integrated Commissioning Board, to ensure a whole systems approach to tackling homelessness, its causes and consequences
- Engage with voluntary sector partners on funding, design and delivery of services
- Ensure structured oversight of the delivery of this strategy

- Develop data sharing protocols and potentially shared digital platforms, in order to facilitate frictionless, inter agency data sharing, for example around the content of Personal Housing Plans
- Review the administrative processes around Duty to Refer, widening the scope where appropriate and ensuring consistency of approach

CONTINUING PRIORITIES

As well as focusing on the themes set out above, we will be continuing to deliver on our existing commitments, rolling the priorities set out below forward into 2020 to 2022:

- **Youth Homelessness** – to tackle the level of youth homelessness within the borough which is increasing. Being homeless as a young person has a devastating effect on an individual's life opportunities. Homeless young people are much less likely to be in education, employment or training, are more likely to turn to crime and to become victims of crime, and have comparably worse health than their peers. We will also work closely with Young Hackney and CYPS to ensure that looked after children receive support, advice and guidance when transitioning into independence.
- **LGBTQ+ Homelessness** - LGTBQ+ members are at higher risk of homelessness than the heterosexual population. The service will work to understand and recognise the extent of homelessness within the LGBTQ+ community locally, ensuring wider recognition of the specific issues that LGBTQ+ individuals face. We will ensure individuals have the opportunity to disclose their sexuality, and make sure our policies, service provision and operating practices do not inadvertently put members of the LGBTQ+ community at risk of abuse or discrimination
- **Homelessness among BME Households** – to address why black and minority ethnic households are disproportionately represented within homeless households both nationally and within Hackney.
- **Long Term Housing Options** - to encourage households to look for other solutions – downsizing to reduce costs, moving into the private sector and/or taking advantage of the developing intermediate market in Hackney of low-cost home ownership/shared ownership schemes, Hackney Living Rent and Self Build schemes.
- **Care Leavers** - Put in place effective housing options protocols for care leavers, ensuring they receive the right support and advice appropriate for their circumstances and are made aware of the appropriate housing options available to them

PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE 2015-2018 STRATEGY

Since publication of the last strategy we have:

- Reviewed the Hackney Greenhouse service to ensure rough sleepers and other single homeless people can receive full assessment of their housing and support needs on the same day that they approach the service and access emergency accommodation
- Embedded the No First Night Out approach into our services - building successful partnerships with Jobcentre Plus, Shelter, Citizens Advice, hospitals and prisons to encourage referrals which prevent rough sleeping and homelessness
- With the CCG, jointly commissioned a Hospital Discharge project to provide aftercare to people under Section 117 of the Mental Health Act and other patients. This reduces their risk of homelessness and significantly reduces bed blocking on wards

- With the CCG, jointly commissioned 20 units of Housing First accommodation. This service will support people with health issues, who have not thrived in traditional hostel accommodation, to live independently
- Launched our permanent No Second Night Out hub in 2018, ensuring we provide a rapid response for all new rough sleepers in Hackney. Emergency sit-up bedspaces created at Mare Street hostel mean no one has to spend a second night on the streets. Multi-agency panel meetings are helping us to move on Pathway residents more quickly and to more suitable/sustainable accommodation
- Reviewed and re-commissioned our accommodation pathways for people with mental ill health and single homeless people. This enables us to provide support to people with all levels of need, including via step-down and additional floating (tenancy) support
- Developed the Multiple Needs Service (MNS), renamed STEPS, an innovative project which supports some of Hackney's most excluded and disadvantaged people
- Supported PRS tenants in Hackney by expanding our property licensing scheme, to increase the supply of decent quality and well managed housing, running our Better Renting campaign against no-fault evictions and pushing for secure tenancies and caps on rent rises, and working with local landlords and lettings agencies to ensure they understand their responsibilities around 'Right to Rent' legislation
- Carried out a comprehensive review of our Temporary Accommodation provision and estate
- Set up the Settled Homes Team to support Hackney Temporary Accommodation residents to find settled homes in the private or social sectors and provide tenancy sustainment support after they move. As of July 2018, the team had supported 179 households to move on from temporary accommodation- and embedded its operating principles across the service
- Supported delivery of the HRA through upskilling staff and partners and introducing a new case management system.
- For those residents presenting as homeless either through the Greenhouse or Hackney Service Centre we have promoted a number of employment and training initiatives including - Hackney Works' award-winning Apprenticeship Programme for people aged 16 – 60, Hackney Apprenticeship Network – which works with major employers, including Homerton Hospital and Amazon and local SMEs, Part-time apprenticeships at the Council for Single Parents and disabled young people and young people with Special Educational Needs, Employment pathways, which include paid work experience opportunities and a supported employment service and a pre-employment scheme pilot.
- Employed 10 local apprentices with lived experience of homelessness or rough sleeping, with 5 securing permanent jobs within the Benefits and Housing Needs Service to date.

NEW CHALLENGES - THE OPERATING AND POLICY CONTEXT

Homelessness in Hackney

Hackney's good schools, open spaces and transport links have meant the borough has become an increasingly attractive place to live. Life expectancy is increasing for men and women and more residents are in work than five years ago.

At the same time, Hackney continues to be an area of high deprivation, with all local authority wards in the top 10% most deprived in the country. Hackney has lower than London average weekly pay, and high numbers of people receiving out of work benefits and housing support. 48 per cent of Hackney children are estimated to be living in poverty after housing costs. An estimated 53,000 working age people in Hackney are affected by a common mental health condition. Around a third

of households in Hackney are considered overcrowded. In 2018, approximately 10% of the working age population (19,700 people) were claiming out of work benefits.

The increasing desirability of Hackney as a place to work and live has significantly impacted on the cost of and demand for housing in Hackney. Over the past 20 years Hackney has witnessed the largest increase in property values anywhere in the UK. Property prices in the borough have risen by 472% (compared to a 331% increase in property prices across London, and 272% nationally). This growth in property price inflation has in turn driven up rental values, with market rents in Hackney increasing by 47% since 2011.

Although Hackney is building more new social housing than any other council in London, there are currently more than 13,200 people on Hackney's social housing waiting list, as need far outstrips supply. Currently 3,300 households are living in temporary accommodation, many of them outside the borough. The number of available social lets continues to decline as fewer tenants relinquish social tenancies, and properties are lost to right to buy. Hackney Council has an excellent track record of delivering new schemes to boost social renting and shared ownership but this cannot match the escalating scale of demand.

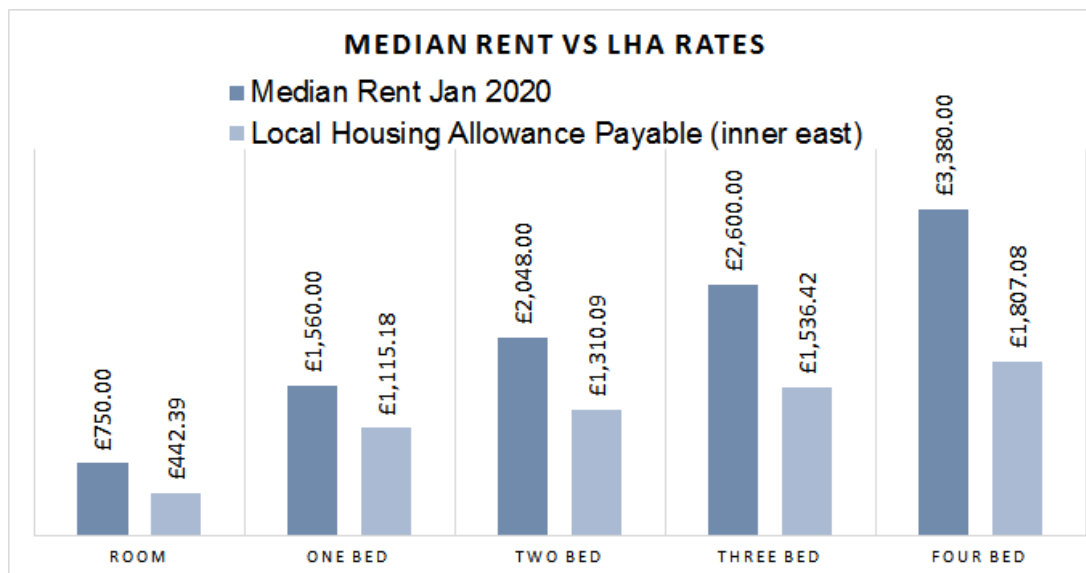
Around a third of Hackney residents are private renters. Capitalising on rising rental values, many private landlords are not renewing tenancies and/or are excluding low-income households, including those who receive welfare benefits, leading to homelessness. The situation has been made worse by welfare changes including cuts to Local Housing Allowance, Universal Credit and the overall Benefits Cap that are impacting on our most vulnerable residents. As these welfare and housing reforms take full effect, an increasing number of Hackney households are experiencing financial difficulty, and finding themselves priced out of the local housing market and presenting to the Council as homeless.

The impact of Welfare Reform

The Welfare Reform programme began in 2009 with **changes to Local Housing Allowance (LHA)**, which restricted the amount of housing support payable to people living in private rented sector (PRS) accommodation. Traditionally LHA rates were set at the mid-point of market rents, meaning out of every 100 properties in a locality half would be affordable for someone requiring help with housing costs. This was reduced initially in 2011 to the 30th percentile, meaning only 30% of properties in an area would be affordable and then completely disaggregated from the rental market and frozen for four-years freeze in 2016/17.

On average less than **5%** of properties in Hackney are now affordable to rent for those who need help with housing costs. Whilst, Hackney has recently received assistance from central Government via the Targeted Affordability Fund to address LHA gaps, this has had only a modest impact on PRS affordability in the borough. For those already in PRS accommodation, the progressively widening gap between LHA and market rents creates shortfalls that tenants cannot afford to meet. This makes arrears more likely and increases people's risk of homelessness.

The situation is especially challenging for singles, as the extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) in 2012 means that most single people under 35 are not entitled to housing support for self-contained accommodation, and can only receive the LHA rate for a room. Given the competition from young working professionals, and the limited income available to singles it has become increasingly challenging to find accommodation for this group in London.



Impact of the Benefit Cap

The Benefits Cap was introduced in 2013. In November 2016 the Cap in London for out of work claimants was lowered to £15,410 per annum/£442 per week for single people and £23,000 per annum/£296 per week for other households. This change has significantly increased the numbers of households who are not entitled to maximum housing support. Nationally, between October 2016 and August 2017, this more than tripled – up to 61,051 households.

In Hackney, the Benefits Cap was fully implemented in 2017. As of January 2020, 597 households in Hackney were still subject to the Benefit Cap, despite the significant work undertaken to help those affected into employment or more affordable accommodation. Of these: 258 were households without children, 328 were single parent households, and 72 were couples with children. The average reduction resulting from the benefit cap is £62.18 per week in Hackney.

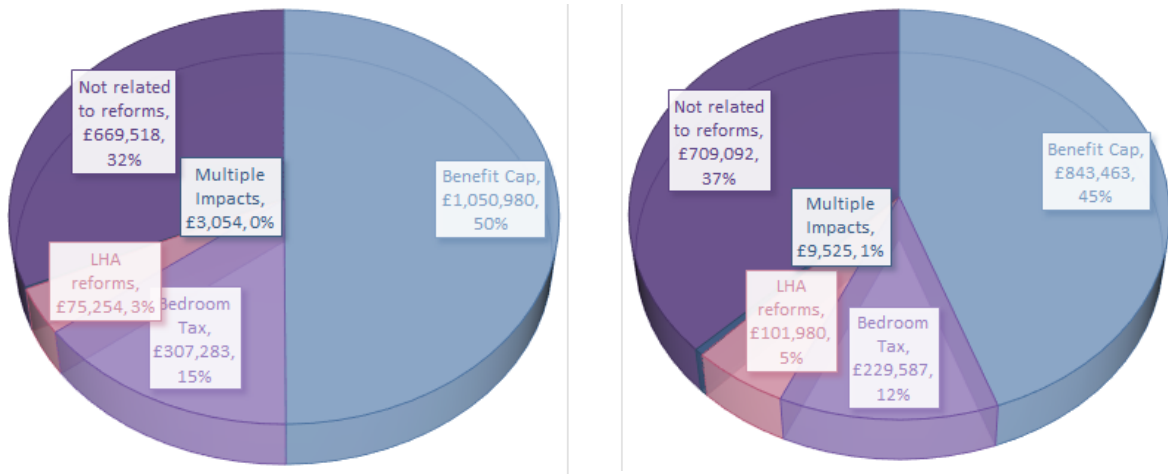
This, alongside other welfare reform cuts, has contributed to increased homelessness and has increased the pressure on local authority and other local support services; in addition PRS landlords are often less willing to accept capped claimants. Housing costs have become widely unaffordable across London, making it increasingly difficult for homeless households to avoid the cap by moving to lower value areas.

Hackney utilises **Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)** to support households to meet rent shortfalls and to meet the cost of moving between temporary accommodation placements and also into PRS tenancies. The cap significantly increases pressure on DHP awards.

DHP Spend Year on Year Comparison

2017-18

2018-19



The amount of DHP spent on the Benefit Cap in Hackney has decreased between 17/18 and 18/19 but the Benefit Cap, still accounts for the biggest percentage of a DHP budget which is under increasing pressure. In total Hackney spent over £1.18m DHP funding to try to offset the adverse impact of the government cuts in welfare support; 63% of the funding available.

In 2019/20 the DHP budget has decreased further to £1.77m following further austerity savings by Central government. After 5 months by the end of August 2019 £885 thousand or 50% of the budget had already been spent. The largest spend of £367,394 remains supporting those impacted by the Benefit Cap. Given current rates of spend it is likely that the Council's DHP budget will be exhausted before the end of the year, as it is not sufficient to meet demand.

The impact of Universal Credit (UC)

UC combines several existing benefits covering living and housing costs. From October 2018 all new claimants or people whose circumstances have changed must claim UC. Existing claimants on other benefits will be transferred to UC by the September of 2024 (This date has been extended several times by the DWP and may still be subject to change). Currently migration of existing claimants is being piloted in Harrogate in North Yorkshire. There is no timetable for when Hackney claimants on legacy benefits will be migrated to Universal Credit.

The Government has made some changes to UC since implementation, including reducing the initial waiting period for payment from six to five weeks and paying an additional two weeks of housing costs when people move from Housing Benefit to UC. Since May 2019 disabled claimants receiving a Severe Disability Premium, who were the most severely financially disadvantaged by the change, have been temporarily exempted and can still claim Housing Benefit. From April 2019 individuals who are homeless and placed by local authorities in Temporary Accommodation, now also continue to have their housing costs covered by Housing Benefit. And from October 2019 the maximum rate at which overpayments and deductions can be recovered from Universal Credit has decreased from 40% to 30% of a person's standard allowance.

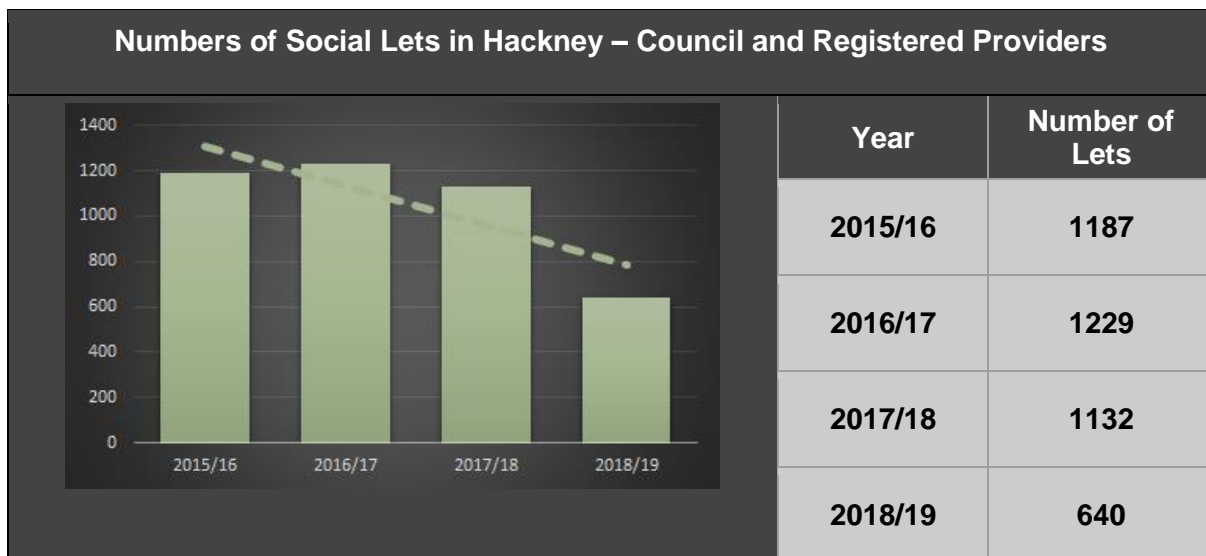
However, there remain significant concerns around its implementation. For those not used to budgeting or who may lack appropriate skills, combining living and housing expenses in one payment increases the potential for falling into debt, particularly given the low level of benefit payments and tight budgets households are living on. The initial five-week wait to receive benefit typically leads to immediate rent arrears for tenants and some landlords in Hackney are reluctant to issue tenancies to UC claimants without rent guarantees. At its most extreme, these factors potentially place more vulnerable households at risk of rough sleeping. Hackney Council has set up a Cross Cutting Universal Credit Steering Group pulling in key council services, registered social landlords, and the advice sector to identify key risks to residents and to help prepare residents for UC migration

Impact of the lack of an affordable housing supply

One driver of homelessness is a severe shortage of affordable secure housing, at a time when high private sector rent has increased demand. Hackney has a large social housing stock and a good record on housing supply – delivering 7,165 new homes between 2013 – 17 (and with an annual objective to deliver 1,330 homes per year up to 2033) and has made a commitment to double the number of homes built by the council from 2018. However, despite having one of the largest council house building programmes in London, as in many other London boroughs, supply has not kept pace with demand. In addition, the number of available lettings per year have been reduced due to the extension of Right to Buy, lack of alternative housing options for households to move on to and greater life expectancy. Hackney has over 13,000 households on the Social Housing waiting list but fewer than 640 social lets (both Council and Registered Provider (Housing Association) became available in 2018/19.

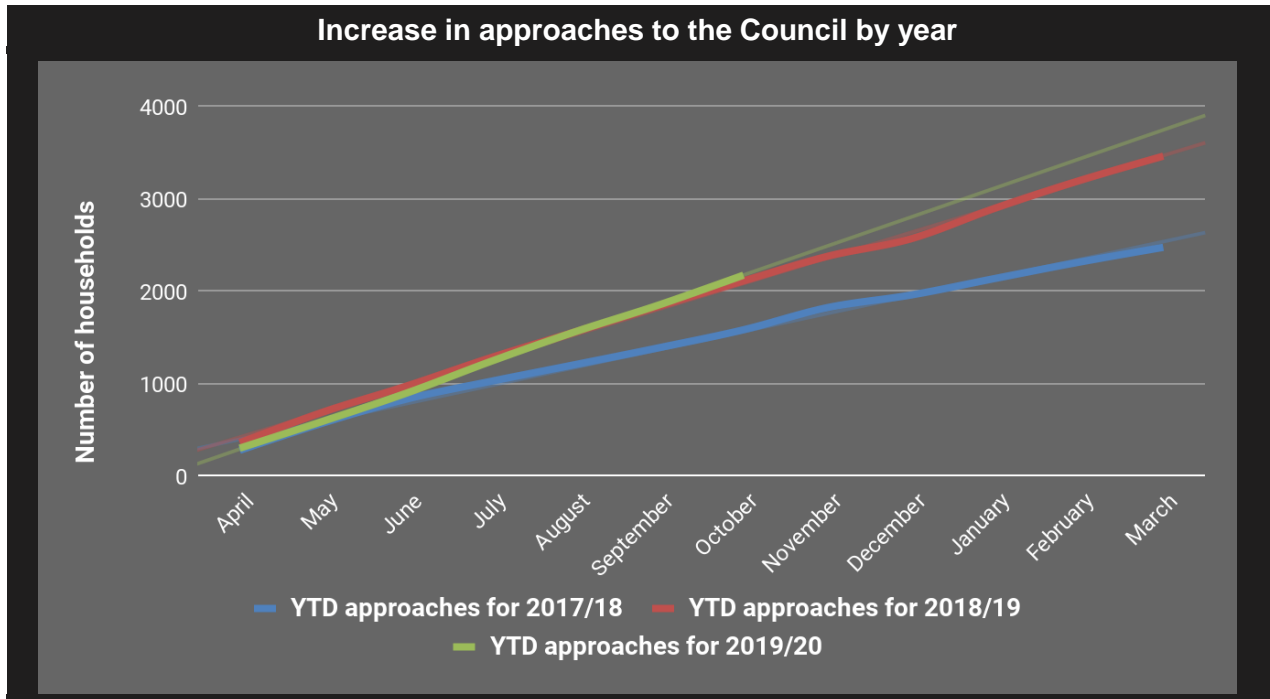
Pressures in the rental market have also driven up the percentage of succession and discretionary succession applications, as the housing crisis means that a high percentage of adult sons and daughters are remaining in the family home, into their 30's and 40's. With only around 640 lettings available each year for 13,000 people on Hackney's housing waiting list, people are waiting longer (in TA) for permanent accommodation. This in turn reduces availability for newly homeless households.

The lack of social housing means that for many young people there are no affordable housing options if relations at home with family become unsustainable and they are asked to move out. For more vulnerable individuals they can easily end up homeless in Temporary accommodation due to few other housing options:

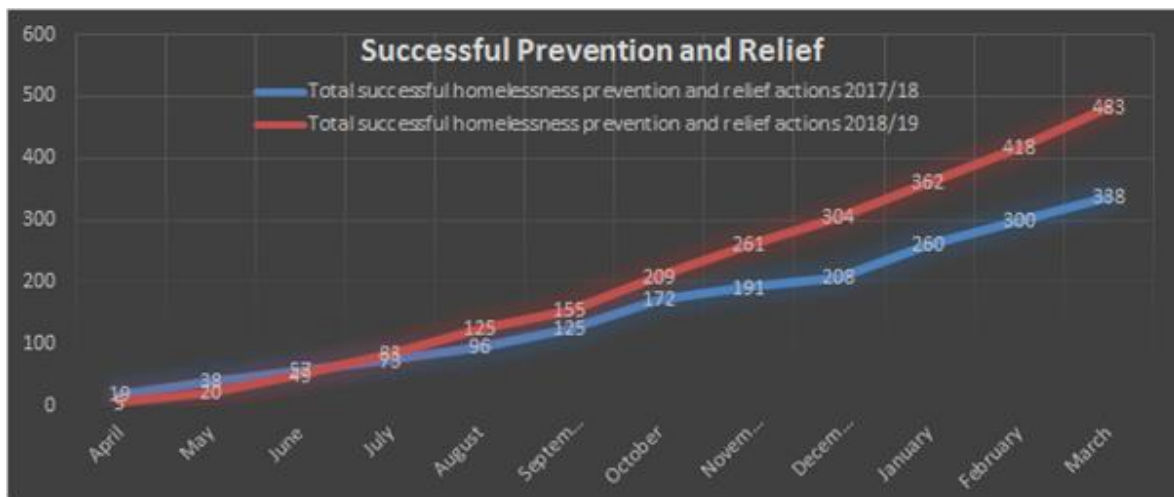


What is the impact on Homelessness?

The combined result of rising rents and house prices, welfare reform, changes to LHA rates, and a lack of affordable housing is increasing homelessness, and pressure on council services. More residents are falling into financial difficulty and are unable to sustain their accommodation, or becoming overcrowded due to lack of affordable housing options. This is resulting in increased numbers seeking housing advice and housing assistance from the Council.



Since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act, homeless services have refocused around better quality advice especially for singles, earlier intervention and an increased focus on prevention. With the added focus provided by the HRA and, more specifically, by the Personal Housing Plan, the Council have had increased success in either preventing homelessness or in providing homelessness relief with homeless preventions significantly higher than previously.



However due to the challenging housing market the increased number of preventions has not kept pace with the increased number of homeless approaches, and the number of households in Temporary Accommodation continues to increase. The London Borough of Hackney now has over 3,300 households in Temporary Accommodation, and the number of Temporary Accommodation placements due to homelessness steadily increases every month. Net expenditure on temporary accommodation is increasing significantly, from £7.2m in 2017/18 to £9.35m in 2018/19, as numbers in Temporary Accommodation go up month by month.

The single biggest cause of homelessness in Hackney continues to be family/friends being no longer to accommodate primarily due to overcrowding. A significant number of people become homeless as a result of domestic abuse, and we see a large number of residents made homeless due to the end of tenancy in the private rented sector. The proportion of households who rent privately has more than doubled in Hackney over the past ten years, to almost a third of the total (around 29,500 households) – higher than the proportion of owner occupiers. As welfare reform has restricted the amount of help available with Housing costs for those on a low income, and rents have risen significantly this group are increasingly at risk of eviction.

Changes to Homeless Legislation - The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) and its impact on services

The HRA came into force in April 2018. It represents a significant change in how councils in England work with single homeless people, other local services and organisations to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping.

The HRA places new legal duties on councils around homelessness which extend existing protection under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by Homelessness Act 2002. The main changes include:

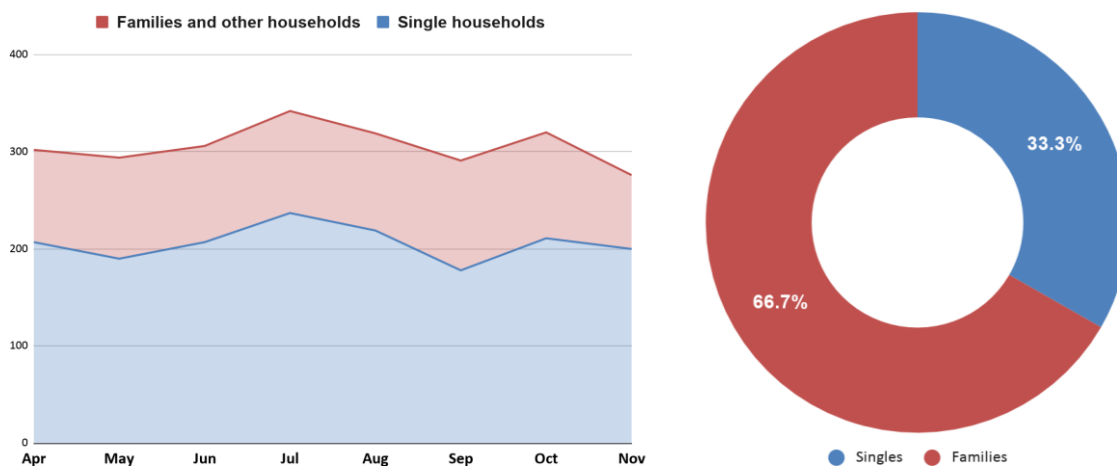
- Improving advice and information about homelessness and homelessness prevention to local people. This includes meeting the specialist needs of groups, such as: care leavers, people leaving hospital/prison, ex-armed forces personnel, victims of domestic abuse and people with mental health problems.
- Extension of the period 'threatened with homelessness' to 56 days. This increases the time councils have to carry out homelessness prevention work – including with PRS tenants who have been served s.21 notices.
- Extension of prevention and relief of homelessness assistance to all eligible applicants, including those not in priority need, are intentionally homeless and/or who may lack a local connection to the area. Councils are expected to take 'reasonable steps' to help people secure accommodation for at least six months – which can be in a hostel or supported housing.
- Assessing cases and agreeing a 'personal housing plan' which reflects applicants' full range of housing and support needs and sets out actions for them and the council which will prevent or relieve their homelessness
- The duty to refer. From October 2018, certain public authorities, including: prisons, hospital A&E departments and Jobcentre Plus have a legal duty to refer individuals who have given their consent who they think may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days.

Presentations from singles

The Homeless Reduction Act significantly increased the Council's obligation towards non priority singles with a requirement to provide detailed housing advice to everyone. As a result since its introduction there has been a significant increase in the number of single individuals presenting at the Greenhouse seeking assistance, housing advice, and emergency accommodation. The Greenhouse was set up to ensure these clients have access to the support they need, and additional staffing capacity has been put in place. However such has been the increase in demand from singles seeking advice, this additional provision is now being stretched to breaking point. The number of approaches from singles is routinely beyond the capacity of the Greenhouse building, with the overflow having to be seen at the Hackney Service Centre.

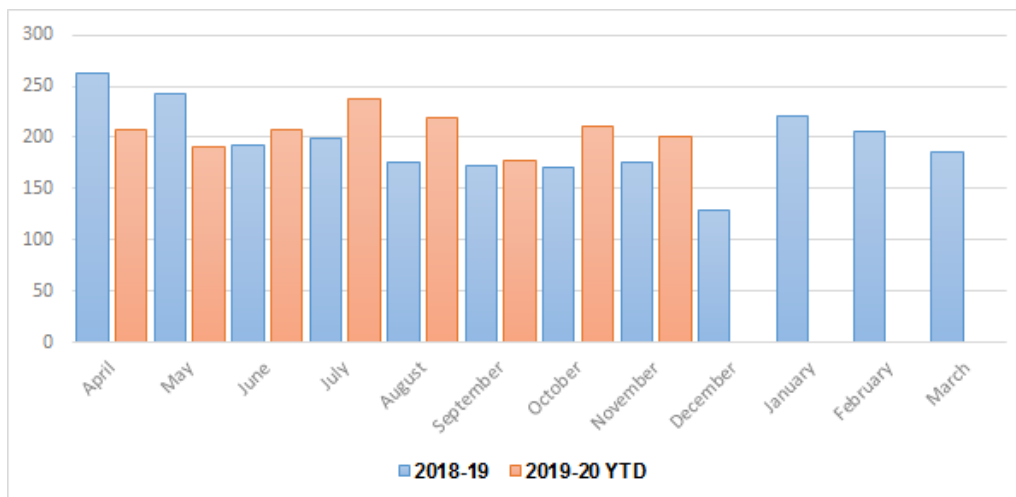
After the roll out of the Homelessness Reduction Act singles now comprise the vast majority of homeless approaches to Hackney Council. As of October 2019 67% of all approaches to the Council were from singles - reflecting the difficulties in the local housing market for this demographic. The situation is particularly bad for young people, with 16.6% of homeless approaches from single young people aged 16-25 (they make up 12% of the Hackney population):

Homelessness approaches in 2019/20 to date



In 2018/19 just over 2,300 singles approached the Greenhouse for help with homelessness. Whilst demand was slightly lower at the start of 19/20 it has recently picked up and is expected to exceed the 18/19 figures by the end of the year. This increase has seen additional demand on the services provided through the Greenhouse (which caters for single people without a tenancy). This has had other impacts; the higher throughput of clients with complex needs has resulted in an increased number of incidents of a physical or verbal nature.

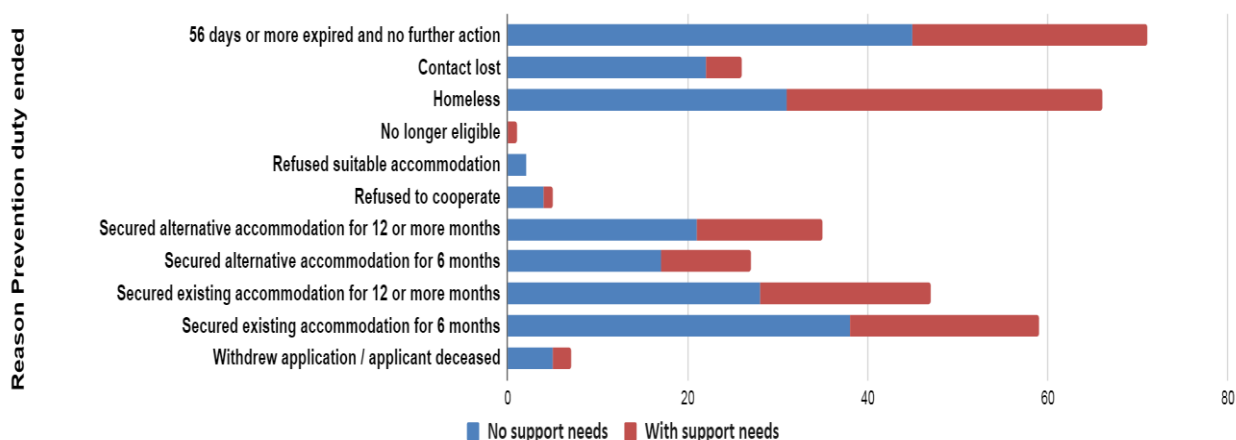
Comparison in the number of approaches from single people



Data indicates there has not only been a significant growth in approaches by single people, but from individuals with one or multiple support needs, particularly around mental health, substance misuse, debt and/or gambling. Of these singles who approached in 18/19 1,341 went on to have a full homelessness assessment, of which it was identified that virtually half of them had support needs most commonly around significant physical or mental ill health. Of these, a third had multiple/complex needs.

Evidence shows that when considering how those with support needs are moving through the HRA process, single applicants with support needs are proportionately less likely to achieve a successful

homelessness prevention outcome. This is a consequence of a number of factors, including the lack of suitable accommodation that can provide a long term solution, that sourcing and sustaining accommodation and tenancies is more difficult for this cohort, and the reluctance of some landlords to work with this client group. As a result since the introduction of the HRA, more of these vulnerable singles are ending up in temporary accommodation – due to a lack of any other sustainable housing option.



In addition to the difficulties of finding placements for the numbers of people approaching for assistance, there are also concerns as to the suitability of the accommodation provided, given the often complex needs and vulnerabilities of these residents. Temporary accommodation provision is general needs and may not be suitable for placing individuals with additional support requirements, despite the recent introduction of enhanced floating support. Some of these individuals are very difficult to place, particularly those considered to pose a danger to themselves or others or are highly chaotic due to mental health or offending issues.

Many of the most challenging singles are 'difficult to place' for a variety of reasons and often a combination of the following:

- Offending history, including gang affiliation
- Sex offenders
- Risks to children
- Risks to adults
- Mental health issues
- Drug and/or alcohol misuse
- Anti-social behaviour
- Physical disability

It is a priority of the service in cooperation with Adult Social Care to increase the stock of Supported Accommodation that would be suitable for the vulnerable and chaotic singles that are failing to cope in general needs Temporary Accommodation.

The HRA requires local authorities to collect additional data on the work they carry out with single homeless people. In time, this will provide a wealth of useful information about single homeless people's accommodation and support needs and how these have been addressed. This in turn will be invaluable in informing service design and delivery. However it has not resolved the fundamental challenge in the housing market in London, which are high rent levels, and the chronic lack of affordable housing for individuals who need state help with their housing costs. The act does nothing to increase housing supply, or enable additional support to help vulnerable individuals maintain

accommodation – at a time when due to pressures on social care budgets, such support services are being cut. Due to central government cuts in funding the council have been required to rationalise housing-related support services, which only serves to undermine the aims of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

Rough Sleeping in Hackney

CHAIN data indicates that rough sleeping numbers in Hackney have been relatively stable since 2015/16: in 2018/19 the total number of rough sleepers (163) was slightly lower than the previous year (171 people) and only slightly higher than the 2015/16 total of 148 people.

Rough sleeping in Hackney in recent years has been characterised by high numbers of new people coming onto the streets. However, Hackney has fewer long-term rough sleepers and people returning to the streets than similar London boroughs.

In 2018/19, a very high proportion of rough sleepers whose needs were assessed had at least one support need around alcohol, drugs or mental health. The most common 'last settled base' in each year since 2015/16 has been a PRS tenancy.

The Hackney Policy Context

Hackney Housing Strategy 2017– 22

This strategy explains how Hackney will seek to make best use of its existing housing stock and assets and work closely with the Mayor of London around supply, planning guidance and investment, including his Affordable Housing Programme.

In 2018 the Mayor of Hackney committed to increasing the amount of homes built in the borough – 3,000 new homes between 2018 and 2022 of which more than half would be genuinely affordable.

Hackney will increase housing supply by promoting like for like replacement of Right to Buy sales, reviewing the Council grant regime to offer incentives to owners of private sector empty properties and enforcement options to bring homes back into use and using all empty Council homes on regeneration estates which are suitable for occupation for temporary accommodation. Hackney will also look at new ways of boosting housing supply including the potential for purchasing ex-Right to Buy properties, and the consideration of modular housing.

Rough Sleeper Strategy 2020-22

This strategy updates the previous strategy giving an opportunity to:

- Take stock of the progress Hackney has made on reducing rough sleeping in the borough
- Assess the impact of recent policy and legislative changes around rough sleeping
- Reflect on the significant investment in services to prevent and resolve rough sleeping that were introduced during 2019 and that will progress through 2020.
- Update the action plan

The overall aim of Hackney's Rough Sleeping strategy is to end rough sleeping in the borough. The priorities for achieving this vision focus on three areas:

1. Prevention - stopping people from becoming homeless and sleeping rough through providing timely information and advice, appropriate accommodation and support options
2. Outreach - delivering services which can engage with all local rough sleepers and assess their full range of needs; ensuring that street activities are responded to in an effective and proportionate way
3. Pathways – providing accommodation options which are sustainable and support rough sleepers to improve their health and wellbeing and employability, develop independence and resilience.

City & Hackney Mental Health Strategy 2019-2023

This prioritises actions in the following areas:

- Preventing people from developing mental health problems and providing help as soon as possible to those that do
- Improving access to mental health support and services for the whole community, the most vulnerable and those whose mental health problems are masked by other needs
- Working at 'neighbourhood' level with schools, GPs and voluntary and community services

- Giving service users more control of their own care and recovery through personalisation and co-production approaches
- Championing the social inclusion of people affected by serious mental health problems, focusing on their strengths and assets, housing, jobs and friendship networks.

Further Policy Context

Several other relevant documents are referenced in the Horizon Scan and Policy Review which accompanies the Homelessness Strategy. These include:

- Strategic Housing Market Assessment (November 2018)
- Temporary Accommodation Strategy (2015 – 18)
- Lettings Policy (2016)
- Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2015 – 18)
- Community Safety Partnership Plan (2016 – 18)
- The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)
- Hackney Local Account of Adult Social Care Services (2017/18)
- Re-tendering of housing-related support contracts (Sept 2018)

The content of these documents has been taken into account in developing priorities for this Homelessness Strategy.

The Regional and Sub-Regional Policy Context

London Housing Strategy (2018)

The Greater London Authority's housing strategy sets out the following priorities:

Priority 1: Building homes for Londoners: This includes significantly increasing the building of genuinely affordable housing via changing land use, creating housebuilding targets, Affordable Homes Programme and Housing Infrastructure Fund investment and supporting the Build to Rent sector.

Priority 2: Delivering Genuinely affordable homes: This includes: creating clear definitions of affordable housing, investing in homes based on social rent levels, London Living Rent, and shared ownership schemes; replacing Right to Buy sales on like for like basis.

Priority 3: High quality homes and inclusive neighbourhoods: This includes implementing new design and quality standards; investment in specialist and supported housing and addressing the impacts of estate regeneration and overseas buyers.

Priority 4: A fairer deal for private renters and leaseholders: This includes: property licensing and landlord registration; improving the quality of advice and support on offer to leaseholders.

Priority 5: Tackling homelessness and helping rough sleepers: This includes: working with councils to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping and to help homeless Londoners into sustainable accommodation.

These priorities are compatible with our aims around improving the supply of (and fair access to) good quality affordable housing.

London Rough Sleeping Plan of Action 2017

The Mayor of London's Rough Sleeping Commissioning Framework (December 2017) sets out plans to work with boroughs and other partners to prevent rough sleeping, people living on and returning to the streets within a number of cross-cutting priorities: non-UK nationals, physical and mental health needs, emergency accommodation and partnership working around enforcement. The Framework also seeks to increase work with faith and community-based organisations and improve rough sleeping data collection and use.

The Mayor's Rough Sleeping Plan of Action (June 2018) contains further commitments, to be coordinated by the No Nights Sleeping Rough Taskforce – a group of senior partners from Government, local authorities and homelessness organisations. These include:

- Doubling London Street Rescue workers and expanding the remit of the Safe Connections outreach service
- Setting up two floating assessment hubs to respond to rapid increases in rough sleeping or specific local rough sleeping issues
- A London Cross-Borough Accommodation Network to support reciprocal moves between hostels, supported accommodation, social housing and PRS accommodation
- A specialist service to coordinate and carry out mental health assessments with rough sleepers and help them access treatment.

These commitments are echoed in Hackney's refreshed Rough Sleeping Strategy.

East London Housing Partnership (ELHP)

Hackney is a member of ELHP, a sub-regional group of eight East London boroughs and registered providers. ELHP provides opportunities for East London boroughs to pool resources, share tasks and access specialist provision which would not be feasible at single borough level.

A key aim of ELHP is to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping for non-priority homelessness through accommodation, advice and support. Current projects include:

- New Leaf – this works with PRS tenants and landlords to prevent homelessness, including via mediation and brokering repayment plans
- New Routes – this is a rent deposit and procurement fund for offering a psychologically-informed approach and pre-tenancy training to people where other homelessness prevention attempts have failed.

We intend to continue with our involvement in this partnership during the life of our Homelessness Strategy and beyond.

NHS - East London Health & Care Partnership

In 2016, NHS organisations and local councils joined forces to develop proposals for improved health and care. Under this initiative, the East London Health & Care Partnership has drawn up plans which include the following key priorities:

- Promoting the health and independence of local people, particularly good mental wellbeing, and tackling inequalities
- Providing more care outside of hospital
- Building partnerships; encouraging productivity and value for money, and bringing providers and commissioners together in new ways of working

- These priorities are compatible with our aims around improvement of health outcomes for homeless people and those at risk, including, mitigation of the adverse effects of homelessness on mental and physical health.
-

The National Policy Context

The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA)

The HRA represents a significant change in how councils in England work with single homeless people, other local services and organisations to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping.

The HRA places new legal duties on councils which extend existing homelessness protection under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by Homelessness Act 2002. The main changes include:

- **Improving advice and information about homelessness and homelessness prevention to local people.** This includes meeting the special needs of groups, such as: care leavers, people leaving hospital/prison, ex-armed forces personnel, victims of domestic abuse and people with mental health problems.
- **Extension of the period ‘threatened with homelessness’ to 56 days.** This increases the time councils have to carry out homelessness prevention work – including PRS tenants who have been served s. 21 notices.
- **Extension of prevention and relief of homelessness** assistance to all eligible applicants, including those not in priority need, are intentionally homeless and/or who may lack a local connection to the area. Councils are expected to take ‘reasonable steps’ to help people secure accommodation for at least six months – which can be in a hostel or supported housing.
- **Assessing cases and agreeing a ‘personal housing plan’** which reflects applicants’ full range of housing and support needs and sets out actions for them and the council which will prevent or relieve their homelessness.
- **The duty to refer.** Since October 2018, certain public authorities, including prisons, hospital A&E departments and Jobcentre Plus have had a legal duty to refer individuals who have given their consent who they think may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days.

Our response to the HRA is set out in this Homelessness Strategy, above.

National Rough Sleeping Strategy

Government has set a target to halve the number of rough sleepers in England by 2022 and to end rough sleeping by 2027. In March 2018, the Government launched a new Rough Sleeping Initiative, led by the MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government). This includes a Rough Sleeping Team made up of experts from Government departments and homelessness organisations and a pot of targeted funding for local authority areas experiencing high levels of rough sleeping.

In August 2018, MHCLG published its Rough Sleeping Strategy, setting out a programme of funding and interventions around the themes of Prevention, Intervention and Recovery. This includes:

- a commitment to providing homelessness specialists in every Jobcentre Plus
- A new Move-On Fund to deliver homes outside of London for rough sleepers and hostel/refuge residents who need additional support
- Floating support for former rough sleepers to promote tenancy sustainment

- Housing First pilots in Greater Manchester, West Midlands and Liverpool to support people with multiple and complex needs into permanent independent housing and to maintain these tenancies.
- *Young Futures Fund*, a new Social Impact Bond (SIB) to support young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), to run alongside the previously announced SIB for entrenched rough sleepers
- Expanding StreetLink, the online system through which the public can alert local authorities and street outreach teams about rough sleepers.

These commitments are echoed in Hackney's refreshed Rough Sleeping Strategy.

Universal Credit

Universal Credit is an on-going reform of the benefits system, which rolls together six "legacy" benefits (including Housing Benefit) into a single monthly payment to claimants. Implementation of UC has not been straightforward and challenges have included:

- Many claimants being worse off under UC than they would have been under legacy benefits, including many in-work claimants
- Built-in waiting times for claimant's first payment of UC, which can cause financial difficulties at the point of handover to the new system
- Delays in payment, due to design flaws and administrative glitches
- Difficulties associated with vulnerable people who have problems engaging with and understanding the new UC system
- Problems with sanctions, which disproportionately affect vulnerable people and young people
- Problems for claimants with no access to, or ability to use, IT
- Lack of confidence in the system on the part of landlords.

The above factors arguably put poorer claimants at heightened risk of homelessness, in particular due to rent arrears, other debt and restricted access to the PRS. However, some changes have been made during the implementation phase:

- the built-in 42-day wait for a first payment has been reduced to 35 days
- advance loans have been made more readily available to claimants
- the Universal Credit telephone helpline has been made free.

Several further changes were announced by the Chancellor in the October 2018 Budget. These include:

- the work allowance for households with children and people with disabilities has been increased by £1,000 per annum from April 2019
- from October 2019, the maximum rate at which deductions can be made from an award has been reduced from 40% to 30% of the standard allowance
- from October 2021, the period over which advances will be recovered will be increased from 12 to 16 months

- From July 2020, Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance (Income-Based), and Employment and Support Allowance (Income-Related) claimants will continue to receive support for a fortnight during their transition to UC
- The minimum income floor will apply to all self-employed UC claimants after a 12 month grace period. This measure will be effective from July 2019 for those who are 'managed migrated' to UC by DWP and from September 2020 for claimants joining UC as a result of a change of circumstance.

Furthermore, the schedule for managed migration (the process by which the DWP will move people to UC from legacy benefits) has been updated. The Government announced that the managed migration exercise will run from 2019, with completion by September 2024.

Funding Supported Housing

Following several years of study and debate following the demise of the Supporting People programme, 2017 and early 2018 saw the government consulting on a “flexible funding model” which would pay for housing costs in Supported Housing. In summary, the Government intended that all long term supported housing would remain within the welfare system, but a separate system would operate in respect of short-term supported housing.

Following this consultation exercise, the government withdrew the proposal and announced, in August 2018, that a decision had been made to keep Housing Benefit in place to fund all Supported Housing.

In addition to this confirmation of the status quo, the government announced its intention to carry out work with providers, local authorities, membership bodies and resident representatives “to develop a robust oversight regime” aimed at ensuring quality and value for money. This will cover short-term, long-term and sheltered and extra care accommodation. There will also be a review of how housing related support is funded.

At the time of writing, no progress had yet been made on developing the oversight regime or reviewing how housing related support should be funded. However, some funding for housing related support, remains in place as part of the legacy of the old Supporting People programme.

The Social Housing Green Paper

This was published in August 2018, with consultation closing in November. The proposals aim to rebalance the relationship between residents and landlords, tackle stigma and ensure that social housing can be both a stable base that supports people when they need it and support social mobility.

The green paper sets out 5 core themes:

- Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities
- Expanding supply and supporting home ownership
- Effective resolution of complaints
- Empowering residents and strengthening the regulator
- Ensuring homes are safe and decent.

It is to be hoped that, as government policy develops, both availability and access to social housing will increase for homeless people and those at risk.

Reforming the Private Rented Sector

The PRS has a major role to play in helping local authorities identify housing for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Since publication of the Housing White Paper “*Fixing our*

broken housing market”, there have indeed been several policy initiatives in England, affecting the PRS, that have bearing on the role of the sector in working with homeless, vulnerable or low income groups. These include:

- Consultation on overcoming the barriers to longer tenancies and the ending of Section 21 “no fault” evictions
- Extension of mandatory licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)
- Development (and proposed extension) of a register of rogue landlords
- Measures enabling local authorities to levy civil penalties against rogue landlords
- A ban preventing lettings agents from charging tenants for their services

Taken together, these and several other key initiatives, such as the local licencing scheme in Brownswood, Cazenove or Stoke Newington wards, imply an emerging consensus that better standards and practice in the PRS need to be promoted by central and local government, in partnership with the sector itself. If these measures are implemented in a successful fashion, they should help to ensure that the PRS gradually becomes a more desirable option for tenants, including those who have been homeless or at risk.

Care Act 2014

From 1 April 2015, Part 1 of the Care Act 2014 consolidated the existing law relating to adults with care and support needs and sets out the legal framework for the provision of social care to adults. It is relevant to homelessness prevention in that an assessment under the Care Act can form part of:

- establishing whether a person is in priority need
- determining whether accommodation is reasonable to continue to occupy
- developing measures to prevent homelessness through the provision of services that enable an adult to remain in accommodation
- determining priority on an allocations scheme
- establishing any need for supported housing or a place in a care home.

The Care Act 2014 came into force three years before the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. However, it remains relevant to strategies aimed at preventing homelessness among vulnerable people, including those who might have benefitted from the Supporting People programme.

A number of people who present as homeless fall within the criteria to receive a social care assessment and a subsequent package of care/support. The presumption that the root or sole cause of their situation is lack of accommodation is often flawed. This is increasingly recognised with rough sleepers and those experiencing multiple incidences of homelessness/threatened homelessness. Increasingly, these individuals are being recognised as having multiple and complex needs.

Children and Social Work Act 2017

This Act came into force in April 2018. It requires English local authorities to publish a ‘Local Offer’ for care leavers up to age 25, informing them about the services they provide under the Children Act 1989, plus anything else they or others offer that ‘may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living’ including services related to:

- *health and well-being*
- *relationships*
- *education and training*

- *employment*
- *accommodation*
- *participation in society*

It will be important for all Local Government departments to listen to care leavers and produce standardised information and services based on what they want. Given the established correlations between having been in care and homelessness, this will have to include a range of social and private housing options, with floating support if necessary, as well as supported housing.

Criminal Justice - Transforming Rehabilitation

In its “Transforming rehabilitation: progress review” (2019) the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts describes how, in its haste to rush through its reforms, the Ministry of Justice not only failed to deliver its ‘rehabilitation revolution’, but left probation services underfunded, fragile, and lacking the confidence of the courts.

Many aspects of the reforms have not worked, services have suffered as a result and there has been no noticeable improvement in the support offered to offenders. For example, the new Through the Gate (TTG) services fail to address needs like stable and suitable accommodation. In some cases, offenders have been provided with tents and left with no fixed address on release from prison.

At the time of writing, few if any measures have been put in place to address the committee’s concerns and the limitations of TTG continue to put pressure on homelessness services in Hackney.

Drug Strategy 2017

This government strategy recognises that stable and appropriate housing is crucial to enabling sustained recovery from drug misuse - and that sustained recovery is essential to an individual’s ability to maintain stable accommodation. It promotes joint working across the homelessness sector, treatment providers and housing support services to identify and share best practice. It urges local authorities to identify routes into appropriate accommodation for those recovering from a drug dependency. It also promotes work across the supported housing sector.

The strategy highlights how homelessness can be both a cause and consequence of drug misuse and that homelessness is often compounded by substance misuse, as well as poor physical and mental health. The most disadvantaged and vulnerable people in society, including those who are homeless, may be at the greatest risk. In this context, it recognises the importance of innovative approaches such as the Housing First model.

Ending Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy 2016 – 2020

This government strategy highlights how VAWG may contribute to multiple disadvantage, characterised by homelessness, a chaotic lifestyle, substance misuse, offending behaviour, gang involvement, prostitution or mental health problems. In this context, it promotes partnership working between homelessness services, drug and alcohol services and children’s services, to ensure wrap-around support for victims and their families.

The strategy recognises that needs may be complex and may require, for example, housing provision, assistance with debt or support for mental health problems. Provision should meet the needs of the diverse range of victims, whether long term residents or victims who have moved in more recently. This can be key to ensuring that VAWG does not cause homelessness.