

# LiH Scrutiny Commission | Temporary Accommodation

22 March 2023

## 1. BACKGROUND: PREVIOUS INFORMATION CONSIDERED BY LIVING IN HACKNEY SCRUTINY COMMISSION

The provision of temporary accommodation has been considered by Scrutiny Commissions on a number of previous occasions. Links are provided below for ease of reference:

- December 2016: [Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission](#) (agenda item 4)
- April 2017: [Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission - response to recommendations](#) (agenda item 7)
- March 2018: [Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission](#) (written update given under AOB)
- October 2017: [Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission](#) (agenda item 4)

To support the Commission in preparing for this meeting, a tour of some of the Council's portfolio of temporary accommodation hostels in the borough took place on 28 February 2023. This included the chance to speak with residents, staff and temporary accommodation providers and see the work that is taking place to develop longer term TA supply and improve living conditions.

## 2. CONTEXT: LIVING IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION AND THE STRATEGIC CHALLENGES

Hackney currently has around 3,100 households who are living in temporary accommodation provided by the Council. This is one of the highest populations of people in TA in London.

TA provides much needed shelter for people who are experiencing homelessness, but does not provide a settled home. The key strategic challenges that Hackney faces in terms of temporary accommodation provision are:

1. **Rising demand:** the Council has experienced significant growth in approaches for housing and a rising population who are living in temporary accommodation.
2. **Reducing supply:** the available supply of temporary accommodation has reduced sharply, with rising costs and the need to look well outside of London to secure the temporary accommodation we need to meet demand.
3. **Quality of temporary accommodation:** the Council is working hard to ensure that we are able to provide good quality temporary accommodation to people who need it - this includes working in partnership with providers to improve the quality of temporary accommodation.
4. **Financial pressures:** the costs to the Council of providing temporary accommodation have increased significantly as a result of the increased demand and the very challenging market for accommodation. This compounds the wider financial challenges that the Council faces.
5. **Moving on to settled accommodation:** it has become increasingly challenging to support people who are living in temporary accommodation to secure longer term

housing. This is in the context of extreme constraints in the supply of social housing, significant challenges finding affordable privately rented housing in Hackney and the impacts of welfare reform (in particular the LHA cap) on affordability.

6. **Growing complex needs:** people approaching the Council for housing support increasingly require additional support beyond that which has traditionally been provided for people in general needs temporary accommodation. This includes people with needs that are not eligible for adults' social care or NHS support.

These strategic challenges and the Council's response are explored in further detail in section 4 below.

Living in TA can have significant negative impacts on a household's health and wellbeing, as shown in the report that was recently published by Shelter: [Still Living in Limbo](#). As highlighted in the report:

*“Temporary accommodation was never intended to exist outside of emergencies. But it's now accommodating almost 100,000 households, including over 125,000 children. And its use is on the rise. The number of households living in temporary accommodation has doubled in the last ten years. Temporary accommodation is often far from a temporary arrangement. The majority of households live there for a year or more.”*

Spending extended time living in temporary accommodation can also have specific negative health impacts, as identified in [a report commissioned by the North East London Integrated Care Board](#) which highlights:

*“The chances of a household living in temporary accommodation in London is much higher than elsewhere in England. 59% of all English households in temporary accommodation are in London: this represents 56,000 households including 75,850 children – of which 17,582 households are in NEL, with 22,468 children including 2,624 under 5s. This is not because of the decisions councils make but because of London's high housing costs and shortages, and because the benefit people receive do not reflect these costs. The health impacts of this are well reported and include poor facilities (such as shared kitchens and bathrooms, lack of laundry facilities on site, lack of internet connection), small rooms (often with all family members sharing one room, which creates a cramped living environment and no places for children to do homework etc), properties in disrepair and other factors such as inability to continue stable education and employment which have a significant impact on the physical, mental and emotional health of those living in these settings.”*

The Council is committed to ensuring that the quality of the temporary accommodation we provide is of a good standard, that residents are supported to access all the services they need (including health services) and that residents are supported to find settled accommodation. It remains the case, however, that the housing market in Hackney, the scarcity of affordable housing in the borough, and growing needs make meeting this commitment extremely challenging to fulfil.

### 3. OUR STATUTORY DUTIES

Local housing authorities have a legal duty to ensure that suitable accommodation is available to homeless households who are accepted as being in priority need (such as families with children and households that include someone who is vulnerable, for example because of pregnancy, old age, or physical or mental disability) provided they are eligible for assistance and are unintentionally homeless.

Hackney, along with all other London councils, is experiencing a significant increase in the number of households who are facing homelessness and approaching the Council for assistance. Whilst this additional demand places substantial strain on housing advice services, the impact is most acute in the provision of suitable temporary accommodation.

The housing authority can provide accommodation from within its own stock or arrange for it to be provided by another landlord, for example, a housing association or a landlord in the private rented sector. If settled accommodation is not immediately available, temporary accommodation must be made available until the applicant can find a settled home, or until some other circumstance brings the duty to an end, for example, where the household voluntarily leaves the temporary accommodation provided by the housing authority.

In many ways the term 'temporary accommodation' enshrined in law, is a misnomer because it is sadly the case that for many households living in temporary accommodation their stay can be for an extended period of time, often many years. This is a consequence of the wider affordable housing crisis and the lack of suitable affordable options for settled housing. Where a household has specific needs due to disability or household size the availability of potential housing options shrinks even further.

In this context, Council officers work closely with our residents who are living in temporary accommodation to support them in exploring options for settled accommodation - this will typically include considering options for housing outside of the borough or outside of London in order to find affordable housing that meets their needs. As well as direct support we have developed (and continue to develop) toolkits and guidance that can help residents make informed choices and access opportunities they may not have previously considered. We have also introduced [the Hackney Money Hub](#), which includes proactive work to help residents ensure that they are claiming all of the benefits and other financial support that they are entitled to and help them make a longer term plan to manage rising costs, particularly housing costs.

## **4. STRATEGIC PRESSURES AND HACKNEY'S RESPONSE**

### **4.1. The rising demand for temporary accommodation**

#### **4.1.1. The picture nationally and across London**

Nationally, statutory homelessness started to rise in 2010/11 for the first time since 2003/04. This is attributed to several factors, including:

- A continuing shortfall in the delivery of new affordable housing relative to levels of need.

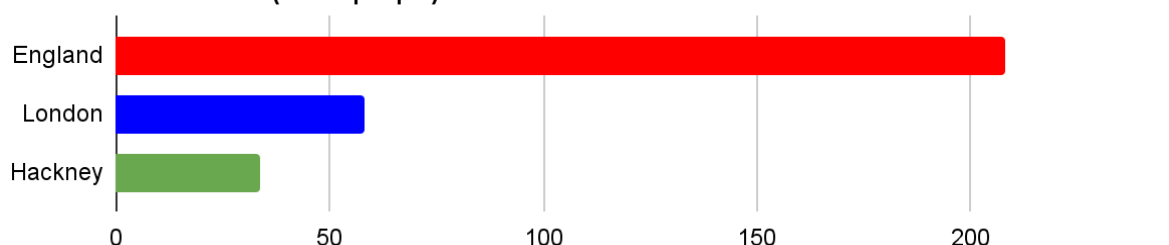
- Housing Benefit reforms, including the cap on benefits, which means that benefits support has not kept pace with rapidly rising rents.

In January 2023 Shelter published analysis which showed that the number of people living in temporary accommodation has risen by 74% in the last 10 years

([https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press\\_release/at\\_least\\_271000\\_people\\_are\\_homeless\\_in\\_england\\_today](https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_release/at_least_271000_people_are_homeless_in_england_today)). More than two-thirds of families (68%) living in temporary accommodation have been there for over a year, showing this type of accommodation is increasingly becoming less ‘temporary’ as families cannot escape homelessness due to the severe lack of affordable homes. This is a situation made even worse by the three-year freeze on housing benefit, and the impact of the wider cost of living crisis.

Shelter’s research also identifies that homelessness is most acute in London, with 62% of all homeless households (one in 58 people) living in the capital. Hackney has the fourth highest rate of homelessness after Newham, Westminster and Haringey (see data below).

Rate of Homelessness (1 in X people)



Rank*	Local authority	Rate of homelessness (1 in X people)	Est. no. of people homeless and living in TA arranged by the council	No. of homeless children in TA	Est. total no. homeless people
1	Newham	21	16,568	8,363	16,585
2	Westminster	27	7,280	3,615	7,467
3	Haringey	33	7,986	4,295	7,996
4	Hackney	34	7,555	3,781	7,566
5	Redbridge	38	8,096	4,117	8,111
6	Lewisham	41	7,293	3,885	7,300
7	Wandsworth	45	7,183	3,337	7,201
8	Southwark	46	6,729	2,784	6,742
9	Barking and Dagenham	50	4,411	2,408	4,411
10	Ealing	53	6,852	3,441	6,910

\* Ranking is based on the rate of Homelessness; indicating where homelessness is most acute in the Capital

The Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on the numbers of households approaching councils as homeless. In April - June 2020 the number of households owed a prevention duty fell nationally by almost a third compared with the previous year (attributed to Government measures aimed at reducing evictions during the pandemic). The number of relief duties rose by 18% over the same period, in part because of instructions to local authorities to provide housing for rough sleepers.

Since the end of the lockdown restrictions, the number of households owed a prevention duty has started to return to pre-pandemic levels. The number owed a prevention duty in 2021/22 was 11% higher than in 2020/21 and this increase has primarily affected households with children, particularly those threatened with homelessness due to the end of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) in the private rented sector as landlords look to relet for higher rent or sell their properties.

Data gathered by London Councils also reflects a worsening situation across the capital, both in terms of rising demand and also the increased difficulty in procuring and retaining suitable temporary accommodation. As a result London boroughs are seeing increased use of bed and breakfast accommodation and an increase of the level of spend on homelessness: [London Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation Dashboard](#).

These pressures are also affecting Hackney, where we are facing similar challenges to other London councils. We have managed to mitigate some of the impacts, however, and while the number of households spending more than 6 weeks in bed and breakfast accommodation has increased in Hackney, the rate of increase is not as high as that seen across London as a whole (with a 100% increase in Hackney compared to a 185% increase for London).

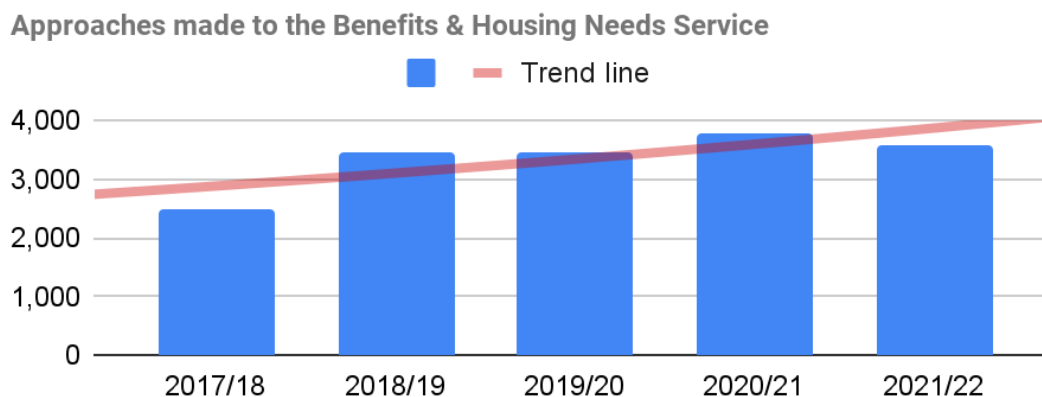
#### **4.1.2. Demand pressures in Hackney**

Hackney has experienced a huge amount of change over the last 15 years, Council services have improved and the borough's population has increased by a third. House prices have also more than doubled over the last 10 years. Better schools, cleaner and greener open spaces and much improved transport links, mean that Hackney is now a highly desirable place to live and the knock on effect of this has been a huge surge in demand for housing and spiralling house prices and rents.

The issue of housing affordability is particularly severe in Hackney, where the increase in house prices and private rents are amongst the highest in London and the country. As average incomes in the borough are relatively low, many households on moderate incomes are unable to take a first step on to the housing ladder within the borough.

The severe lack of affordable housing within the borough means that Hackney residents often have to live in insecure, unaffordable and/or overcrowded housing. Living in unsuitable accommodation has a detrimental effect on a household's health and wellbeing, as well as impacting negatively on future life chances leading to poverty, inequality and hardship.

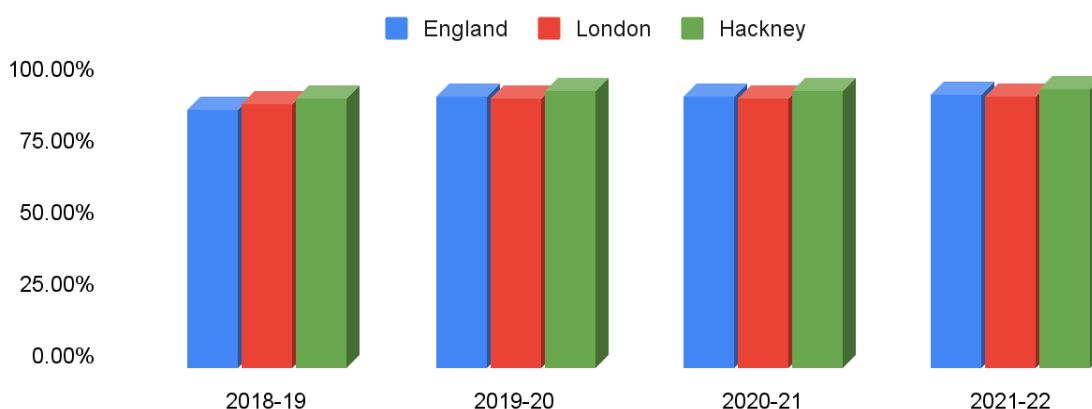
The general levels of homelessness locally in the borough are increasing rapidly, with the number of approaches up by 44% from 2017/18 to 2021/22. In 2021-22, over 3,500 residents approached the Council seeking help to source alternative accommodation.



It is important to note that while the number of approaches in 2021-22 were down on the previous year, this is an outlier as a consequence of the Covid 19 pandemic and the temporary relief measures put in place, rather than an improvement in the impacts of the housing crisis. Year to date figures for January 2023 show approaches at least 7.5% higher than at the same point in time for any of the last 5 years.

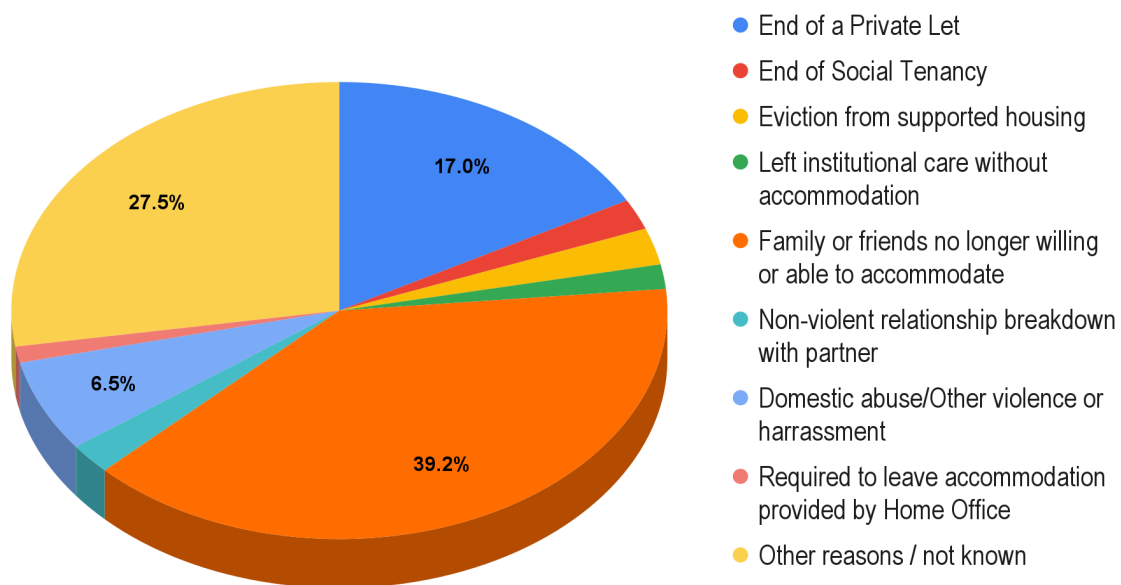
Based on the trend line we anticipate that the number of approaches will continue to increase at around 8% per year, with 5,100 households approaching the service by 2027-28; the equivalent of an average 400+ new households in need each month.

Hackney is also above the trend in terms of the percentage of households for whom we establish that we have a statutory duty of prevention and/or relief, again illustrating how acute the need is in Hackney:



#### 4.1.3. Why are households approaching the Council?

The chart below provides an analysis of the reasons for households becoming homeless who were owed a prevention duty by reason for loss (or threat of loss) of their last settled home (financial year 2021-22):



The largest proportion of households accepted were previously living in accommodation provided by families and friends. This indicates that overcrowding remains a significant issue within Hackney, but might also indicate that increasing economic pressures means that households are less able or less willing to provide accommodation for family members. Increased utility bills, food costs etc are a significant concern, while accessing social activities (which can help diminish family tensions) are also less affordable.

A further significant factor is the rise in households evicted from assured shorthold tenancies within the private sector. Our data shows that 54% of those being made homeless due to the end of a private let were as a consequence of the landlord intending to sell or relet the property, while 25% of households were evicted on the grounds of rent arrears/affordability. This reflects the robust property market within the borough and the greater returns that can be achieved in different markets.

#### 4.1.4. Supporting residents and working to prevent homelessness

Tackling increasing demand requires that we act to prevent homelessness. The Council's teams work with residents on actions that could prevent them becoming homeless. This includes:

- Developing a collaborative approach to working with residents who require housing assistance. We give them the information they need to make decisions around their housing options and always provide support around rent/Council Tax arrears before taking any legal action.
- Supporting residents by seeking to maximise their income through debt and welfare benefits advice and by providing access to apprenticeships, other work and training opportunities in Hackney.
- Our innovative 'Safe and Together' programme works with families who are experiencing domestic abuse to reduce risk and harm to children.

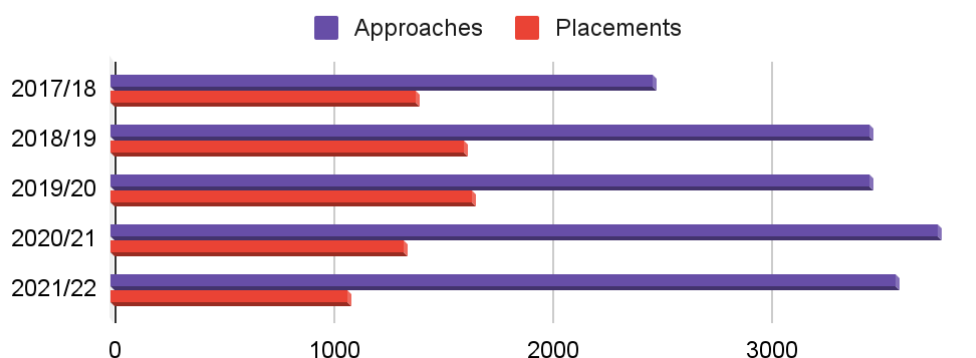
- Reviewing our Allocations and Lettings Policy and targeting resources on those most in need of social housing.

While homelessness and the threat of homelessness has been increasing, the Benefits and Housing Needs Service has continued to work tirelessly on prevention and relief efforts to minimise the need for additional units of temporary accommodation to the greatest extent possible.

Successful prevention of homelessness (rather than assistance in sourcing alternative accommodation) is most effective when the household approaches the service at an early stage. Our experience indicates that Hackney residents are more likely to approach the Council for advice and support at the point when their housing issues have become acute than is the case in other authorities. Data from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) indicate that in Hackney we have more approaches at relief than at the prevention stage than elsewhere (57% of inner London LAs have more approaches at prevention than Hackney and 64% have fewer approaches at relief than Hackney).

Hackney is, however, in the second quartile for the number of successful prevention and relief outcomes within London, despite the limited options we can deliver as a consequence of the local market.

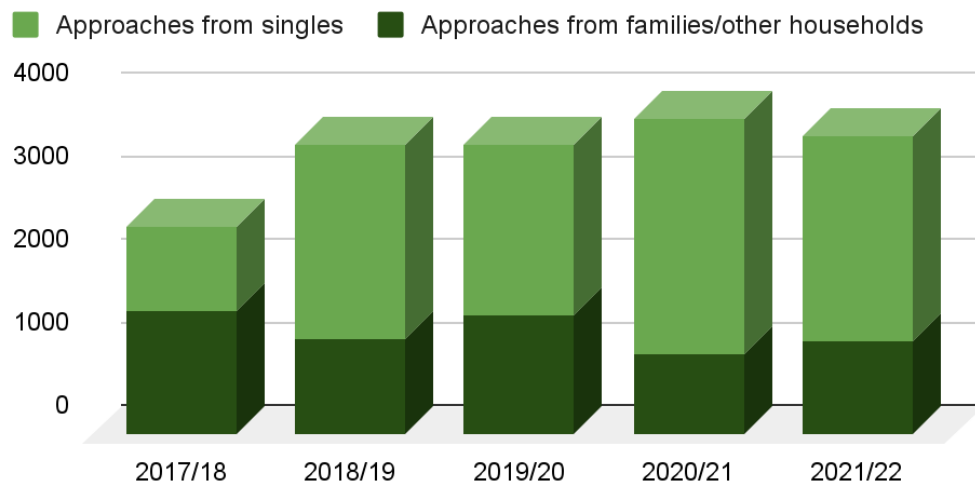
### Households placed in temporary accommodation



While the number of households placed in temporary accommodation has remained relatively stable, the profile of households who need to be placed has changed. In particular, the proportion of larger families, families with disabled member(s) and single people with complex needs has increased.

We have also seen a change in the balance between approaches from single households and those from families. While the number of approaches from families and other households has remained relatively constant over the last five years, approaches from single households increased significantly in 2018 following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act. The Act introduced new burdens and responsibilities upon local authorities, particularly with regard to single people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, who were previously outside the statutory envelope. Previously, single people were provided with generalist advice and guidance on an informal basis but would not necessarily progress into casework.





Additional support has been put in place for single residents in line with the requirement of the Homelessness Reduction Act. The Council has contracted the Single Homelessness Prevention Service (SHPS) to work with single residents with low needs and this commissioned service has three core objectives:

- To prevent homelessness for single people and other households without dependent children who meet the agreed referral criteria and are at risk of homelessness within 56 days.
- To relieve homelessness for single people and other households without dependent children who meet the agreed referral criteria and are already homeless.
- To assist those single people and other households without dependent children whose homelessness is prevented or relieved to sustain suitable accommodation and to prevent repeat homelessness.

Directing single households with lower needs away from the mainstream service into a more dedicated, personalised service can help better meet those people’s needs and find longer term, sustainable solutions to their housing needs.

Where the loss of accommodation cannot be prevented, the Council has a “Prevention to PRS” (P2P) service. This service looks to assist households into the private rented sector rather than placing them into temporary accommodation. The P2P team encourages these residents to examine options which they may not have previously considered and to explore whether the private sector is a realistic choice.

Affordability will always be a key concern, and as part of the ongoing engagement with the resident the team will help them to identify areas which are affordable, or could be affordable if factors such as the Benefit Cap can be mitigated. The team then supports the household to utilise the toolkits that are available such as Homefinders and Rightmove; identifying options which might work for them etc. We actively encourage households to source their own potential property as they should be confident that it is suitable.

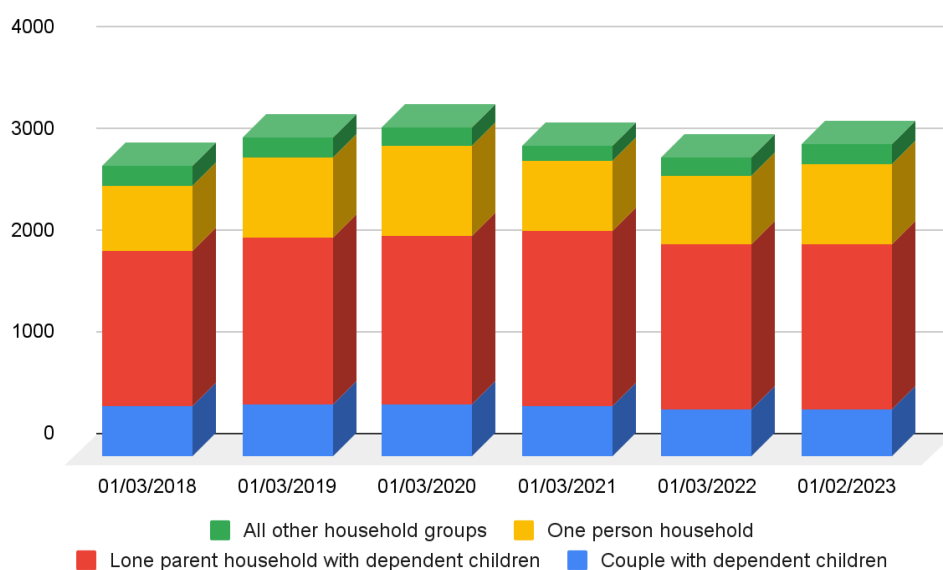
If a household does find a private property that would work for them, the team will support them to arrange the let. This can involve checking safety certificates and land registry, negotiating with the landlord (including potential incentive packages) etc.

## 4.2. Supply of temporary accommodation

### 4.2.1. Availability and competition for temporary accommodation supply

Our stock of temporary accommodation needs to be flexible and there is an ongoing requirement for a steady supply of temporary accommodation sufficient to meet ongoing and future needs; both in the number of units and the size of these units.

Demand for temporary accommodation comes from new households approaching the Council for homelessness assistance, and from households who need to move from one unit of temporary accommodation to another (because they have had children, for example). Not all households approaching the service will either require a placement or attract a statutory obligation from the Council to provide housing in temporary accommodation. Hackney currently provides temporary accommodation for around 3,100 households.



Over the last 7 years Hackney has been pursuing a planned temporary accommodation property strategy delivered through:

- A significantly higher number of Council owned accommodation units within our temporary accommodation portfolio than is the case for nearly all other London boroughs. This approach of developing Council owned temporary accommodation is always a more cost effective approach than merely relying on nightly paid temporary accommodation from private providers.
- A substantial number of units are provided through repurposing void properties on regeneration estates, which currently provides over 700 units of temporary

accommodation. (The availability of these units is time limited as the delivery of the regeneration programme progresses, illustrating the importance of finding additional long term solutions.)

- Units leased by the Council from both registered social landlords and the private sector on longer term leases (eg. [Modern accommodation opens for homeless mothers thanks to Council refurb](#)).

This strategy has meant that we have been able to some extent manage the rising costs and mitigate supply challenges, rather than being completely at the mercy of the volatile housing market. However, as our own stock of temporary accommodation is insufficient to meet the high levels of demand and our financial modelling indicates that to supply the temporary accommodation needed to meet demand and the estimated 8% year on year increase in demand through an entirely in-house model would be in the region of £450M, we are still reliant on going into the market to source additional units of accommodation.

The core issue is that our stock of **suitable** temporary accommodation is diminishing due to reducing availability of privately provided stock (it is important to stress that in this statutory context “suitable” relates to the needs of the family to be placed and not the condition of the property).

Our ability to secure accommodation on long leases is hampered by restrictions imposed by the DWP - to be able to satisfy the housing benefit subsidy rules, leased accommodation used as temporary accommodation must be secured on a lease of under 10 years. This means that the housing benefit subsidy achievable is restricted to social rent levels rather than Local Housing Allowance market rates. It should be noted that for temporary accommodation subsidy calculations, the financial return from the government is fixed on the Local Housing Allowance rate as of 2011 less 10%.

It is important to be aware that even under a long lease, landlords can and do seek to increase rent charges as a consequence of inflation and the wider economic factors. Accommodation providers and landlords we have spoken to recently are seeking to build in annual CPI increases into any agreement. The consideration for the Council is to balance the overall long term cost of the agreement against the potential costs of securing nightly let and short term units.

The level of competition in the market means that the number of TA properties which the Council has been asked to return to private landlords has reached previously unseen levels, with 170 properties currently in the process of being returned as the private rented sector shrinks and landlords pull out of the TA market.

The extremely constrained supply of affordable temporary accommodation means that the only family sized temporary accommodation currently available is located well outside of the borough in areas such as Peterborough, Coventry, Wolverhampton, Dudley and Derby. It is anticipated that within the next six months that available temporary accommodation will be even further away.

#### **4.2.2. Working to increase our supply of temporary accommodation stock**

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It is important to recognise that we are not the only local authority facing acute challenges in supply of temporary accommodation. The housing affordability crisis stretches across the capital and beyond and all local authorities are competing to expand their options and opportunities. There is also increasing competition from central Government, who are particularly active in securing accommodation for asylum seekers and their families. It is therefore crucial for the Council to be as proactive as possible in our approach to sourcing temporary accommodation.

The Council has established a temporary accommodation delivery group comprising officers from Benefits & Housing Needs, Housing Services, Regeneration and Finance. The Group's role is to examine and identify potential temporary accommodation delivery programmes, map out the steps and actions required to implement these programmes and work collectively to overcome any blockages or barriers that arise. This includes working with partner organisations, charities and DLUHC / GLA to identify and to bid for funding streams and opportunities that can assist in the delivery of temporary accommodation. This includes examining options within Hackney and also further afield, including exploring opportunities for:

- Repurposing Council properties such as unused care homes and children's homes, with the potential to convert these into hostels.
- Making use of underused Council-owned sites which are sub-optimal for conventional (heavyweight) housing construction; temporary accommodation may be more suitable than our normal regeneration and new homes approach to some of these sites.
- Examining options to use modular development for provision of temporary accommodation.

There have been some successes achieved by adopting a mixed strategy and exploring all the opportunities that are presented. These include:

- The lease of 5 Hostels For Rough Sleeper Move On And General Needs Temporary Accommodation.
- The acquisition of Local Space properties - the Council purchased 34 properties that were originally sold under the right to buy scheme and that were offered for sale by Local Space.
- Adding 3 new temporary accommodation family hostels: Royal Park, Ivy House and Manor House.

Recognising that this is a pan-London issue, the London Housing Directors group and the Society of London Treasurers have established a Temporary Accommodation Working Group. This is chaired by the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea.

### **4.3. Improving the quality of our temporary accommodation**

Ensuring that we provide a good standard of temporary accommodation is a key component of our service. This is especially important as households are increasingly spending an extended period in temporary accommodation.

Our hostel managers, caretakers and temporary accommodation officers play a key role in monitoring and maintaining health and safety standards within our portfolio. These linked videos show members of the team talking about their work: [Emelia](#), [Glenford](#) and [Kazim](#).

We are also partners of the Setting the Standard programme, a pan-London service which works to ensure that Bed & Breakfasts and Studio flats used by local authorities for nightly paid temporary accommodation meet a decent level of quality and management standards. This shared service provides a central inspections team, ensuring that accommodation receives a high-quality inspection on at least an annual basis. Inspections records are shared between participating authorities to ensure confidence in the quality of accommodation being procured and improve efficiencies. Further inspections will be undertaken if necessary when complaints are raised.

Residents in temporary accommodation offered by the Council can expect the property to meet Decent Homes Standards, but we understand that issues may arise, for example problems with damp and mould.

Council officers arrange to visit homes that we use for temporary accommodation to thoroughly assess the current living conditions. The inspection enables us to accurately determine the root cause of any damp and identify the steps that need to be taken to remedy the issue. This may entail the provision of automatic fans and dehumidifiers, but if the issue caused by damp that cannot be resolved with the resident in occupation of the property, then we will seek to rehouse them into another temporary home.

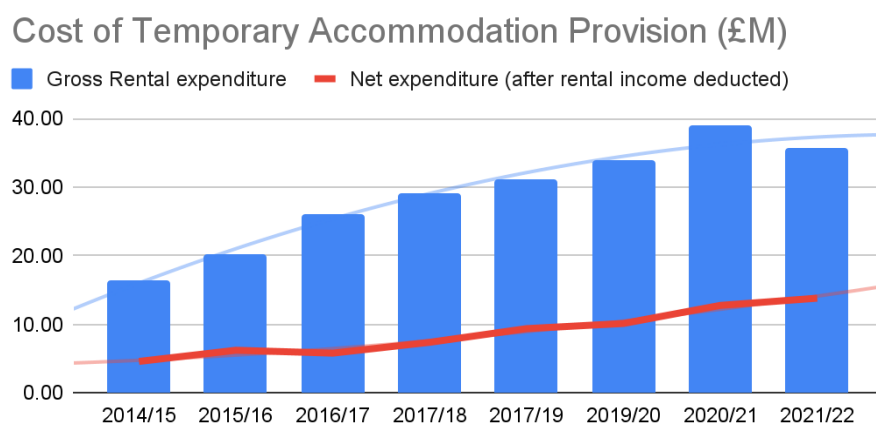
Work is also in progress to invest in maintenance of the Council's own hostel properties, addressing issues such as mechanical and electrical systems and other aspects of the properties which are at end-of-life / obsolete. A programme of capital investment of c. £16M over five years has been secured to repair and maintain the properties to the required standard, including fire safety works. A new role of Temporary Accommodation Health & Safety Manager post has been created as part of this programme of works to create more capacity to move at speed and coordinate delivery with the Council's contractors.

Two HRA sites currently used as TA, have also been brought into the Council's asset review process to look at both short term and longer term options for configuration and refurbishment to make best use of the sites.

Health and safety within temporary accommodation is taken very seriously by the Council. Meetings with the corporate health and safety team and hostel team managers, operation managers and the temporary accommodation surveyor are held weekly, with quarterly review meetings with the Head of Service and Strategic Director for assurance purposes. All Fire Risk Assessments and PEEP (Personal Evacuation procedures) are up to date. At first glance, some of the Council's restrictions regarding access for visitors may seem unfair, however, they are as a result of the requirements for safe building management.

## 4.4. Financial pressures

The significant increase in demand and cost relating to the provision of temporary accommodation means that the cost to the Council is expected to reach c £10M for the current financial year, with a significant overspend. The Government's cuts to council funding and benefits caps mean that we expect these pressures to worsen in the years ahead.



Even where we are able to secure appropriate units for temporary accommodation, the costs are increasing steadily. With landlords able to achieve a greater return in the wider rental market, committing a property to the Council for an extended period is no longer financially attractive and many landlords are exiting from the market (either letting for a higher rent or opting to sell). Those that do choose to remain in the TA market are seeking greater returns by offering properties under short term/nightly let arrangements.

Importantly, we have seen net costs rising faster than gross expenditure, as a consequence of the need for more short term and nightly provision which is more expensive. As we are unable to charge higher rents for this type of accommodation the gap between actual costs and revenue is growing.

In response to this forecast increase in cost the Council has taken proactive measures to try to intervene earlier by supporting residents at risk of homelessness, at a stage when interventions could be less costly. This includes:

- Launching the Money Hub service which is identifying households in financial difficulty and working to make timely homelessness prevention interventions.
- Developing a clear communications strategy and to give clear and honest information that can help to avoid unrealistic expectations that prompt demand.
- Refreshing the Housing Strategy, with a Housing Needs survey currently underway.
- Joining the Capital Letters scheme to increase the amount of privately rented move-on accommodation procured with DLUHC grant attached.

- Front loading capacity within the Benefits and Housing Needs Service to focus on homelessness prevention by creating the Prevention to PRS Team (which provides additional support to help residents find a privately rented home) and the Single Homeless Prevention service for those with low to no support needs funded by a performance by results commissioned service through DLUHC.
- Re-gearing and re-profiling the Council's partnership with Local Space to provide affordable move on accommodation.
- Reviewing our service charges for hostel residents to develop a sustainable strategy for the costs of heating, lighting, hot water and Council Tax.

#### **4.5. Move on from Temporary Accommodation**

As noted in section 2, extended stays in temporary accommodation are recognised to have negative implications for residents' health and wellbeing, and our goal is to support our residents to find settled accommodation.

Given the extremely limited availability of social housing in Hackney and London and the high local costs of privately rented accommodation this is extremely challenging. The Council is committed to a significant programme of social housing development, but in the short to medium term there are unlikely to be social housing options available to many residents living in temporary accommodation. We do not believe that leaving families in temporary accommodation for up to (or over) 20 years is in their interests, or is consistent with our statutory obligation to provide 'genuine and effective housing advice'.

We have a responsibility to help our residents understand how options outside of Hackney (including options outside of London) might help meet their housing needs. We do not force anyone to leave the borough, but we have been able to help residents find housing options that dramatically improve the quality of life for them and their families in areas with lower rents.

We encourage and support residents to source their own housing, which often proves to be the quickest and most effective way to secure settled accommodation and empowers residents to make informed choices about where they want and can afford to live.

From the initial meeting with BHN Homelessness Advice Teams, residents co-design their Personal Housing Plan which identifies the steps forward to secure settled and suitable housing. Affordability is reviewed based on the residents' current income along with a [step by step process](#) which helps the resident in their search for housing. Residents are referred for further support to the Housing Supply Team (HST) who will keep them informed of advertised properties available for the client to view and determine if it meets their needs.

When the resident has viewed a property and wishes to move forward to secure a tenancy, they submit the property and landlord details so that a Housing Supply Team officer can review those for affordability, suitability and negotiate with the landlord/estate agent to finalise the terms of the tenancy agreement and address all legal requirements. There are also prescribed financial awards that can help meet rent in advance and/or deposits.

#### **4.6. Support for residents in temporary accommodation who have complex needs**

We recognise that living in temporary accommodation is disruptive and unsettling to residents and their families, and while we work with them to help find a suitable settled placement, we also look to provide additional support to mitigate the challenges they face.

Isolation can be a particular concern and we encourage all our residents to speak regularly with officers not just about their housing options but also other support they might need. While we often cannot provide a direct solution, we will signpost or actively engage with other services and organisations that we work with and could help.

One example of this is Engage Hackney (<https://hackney.gov.uk/support-for-adults>) the all tenure floating support service with an overarching objective of homelessness prevention and reduction.

Launched on 31 October 2019, the service represents the integration of several floating specialist support services into a single service. The service, an important component of the Council's homelessness reduction/prevention offer, was designed to reduce homelessness, promote peer support, befriending and volunteering, support people with mental health needs, learning disabilities, children and young people in transition to adult services, older people and deliver interventions to people who hoard. The service was designed to be delivered through four levels and one pilot.

- Crisis intervention
- Long-term low level support
- More intensive specific support up to 2 years
- A resettlement service to help people move from supported to independent accommodation on a time-limited basis
- Deliver an Assistive Technology pilot

The service was commissioned by the Council to deliver support to 1300 people per year at an average annual contract value of £2,145,000.

The floating support service is currently being reviewed and a first draft of findings are expected to be completed by the end of March 2023.

Benefits & Housing Needs officers are not equipped to support the increasing number of residents approaching with multiple and complex needs and themselves will need additional guidance. To address these more complex needs there are two social workers embedded within the service (one mental health and one generalist) to support staff and provide a holistic, wraparound and psychologically-informed service for the most vulnerable residents.

These specialist team members are now being joined by:



- Two rough sleeping navigators funded by the Rough Sleeping Initiative grant, who will support rough sleepers once they are housed in TA
- The established Hospital Discharge officer within the service
- Two Riverside officers from the Hackney Engage Floating Support commissioned service who will join this newly formed TA Complex Needs Team

In 2022 the Benefits and Housing Needs Service also implemented two youth homeless and care leaver focused officer roles. The two officers support young people between the ages of 18 to 25 to explore youth specific housing options, which includes young people who identify as LGBTQI+. They also work closely with the TA placement team to ensure that young people who have to move into TA before more settled housing has been secured, are placed into the most suitable TA for young people and with the right level of wrap-around support in place.

For people housed in temporary accommodation the impact on health and access to services are likely to be least detrimental when they are placed in Hackney and moves are kept to a minimum. However, the lack of suitable supply does mean a significant proportion of people are moved to other boroughs sometimes a long way from Hackney.

We have been working closely with NHS partners on how we can improve access to NHS services through outreach / inreach work and developing community hubs.

We also know that children living in temporary accommodation face unique challenges, and we look to offer additional support to them, for example:

- We work with CARIS Families, a grassroots charity that runs support services for homeless children and their parents living in hostels in the London Boroughs of Camden and Hackney. They run an after-school club at Royal Park Hostel, offering play and arts and crafts activities to resident children. They also run a Homework Club offering one-to-one academic help and mentoring to school-age residents.
- Hackney Playbus is a small charity dedicated to bringing play opportunities and support to families who need it the most. They visit our hostels to deliver play sessions that provide a variety of resources and activities that support children's early learning and development in all areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

## **5. HOW WE SUPPORT RESIDENTS IN NEED OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION**

We do not view dealing with homelessness (including the provision of temporary accommodation) simply as a technical process, it is key to our service that we respond to the needs of the residents through acknowledging their experiences and responding to their concerns and asks.

While there is a legislative framework which we are required to follow, our primary focus is on how we can help the residents to achieve a settled resolution of their housing issues. In many instances this will encompass other aspects of their lives that are affecting their housing circumstances and may require support, guidance and access to other services.

Procedures for the placement of residents in temporary accommodation and offers of private sector accommodation in discharge of the Housing Duty are detailed in [the Benefits and Housing Needs service Placement Procedure](#). This can be found on the Council's website in accordance with DLUCH good practice advice (<https://hackney.gov.uk/homelessness>). This requires the authority to take into account certain relevant circumstances, such as medical needs, place of employment, place of education for children of relevant age and support needs, when deciding the type and location of temporary accommodation to be offered.

The review process allows residents to challenge the suitability of accommodation through internal review and also judicial review, based on legislation and case law. Each application for a review must be treated on a case by case basis that recognises the individual factors within the household.

Where we are looking to offer interim and/or emergency accommodation we will follow the same considerations, but urgency may override our ability and a more short term offer may be constrained by what is available.

Residents approaching the service have taken different journeys to the point where they have fallen into a housing crisis. Our ethos is not just to address the immediate housing needs, but to support them in tackling the drivers that led them into crisis. This will help ensure that when they have a settled solution, they can sustain it.

Further details on the statutory dispute process can be found here:

[https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional\\_resources/legal/homelessness\\_applications/homelessness\\_reviews\\_and\\_appeals/ways\\_to\\_challenge\\_homelessness\\_decisions](https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/legal/homelessness_applications/homelessness_reviews_and_appeals/ways_to_challenge_homelessness_decisions)

## **5.1. The statutory process**

The Council has statutory obligations to residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. These are conveyed, primarily, by the [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#), the Localism Act 2011, the [Housing Act 1996](#) and the [Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities](#). But our offer of help and assistance is not restricted just to those who fall within the parameters of the legislation and we will offer more general advice and guidance to any resident seeking information. The Council defines its response to homelessness through the [Homelessness Strategy](#) (a refresh is currently in progress).

Local authorities must give proper consideration to all applications for housing assistance, and if they have reason to believe that an applicant may be homeless or threatened with homelessness, they must make inquiries to see whether they owe them any duty under Part 7 of the 1996 Act. This assessment process is important in enabling housing authorities to identify the assistance which an applicant may need, either to prevent them from becoming homeless, or to help them to find another home. In each case, the authority will need to first decide whether the applicant is eligible for assistance and threatened with or actually homeless. Certain applicants who are 'persons from abroad' are not eligible for any assistance under Part 7 except free advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness.

The Council's housing duty is not an indefinite one and comes to an end when certain conditions are satisfied. These will include where an offer of suitable settled accommodation is made, either social housing or private sector accommodation. With limited availability and extensive waiting times for social housing the Benefits and Housing Needs service has officers dedicated to supporting residents through the process of securing PRS tenancies. This will include helping residents search for property, negotiate with landlords/agents and the legalities of the tenancy. Financial support for rent deposits, rent in advance and removal costs may also be available.

Where a resident refuses an offer of suitable accommodation the housing duty will be brought to an end and notice given to end the temporary accommodation. It is important that any offers of temporary accommodation or settled accommodation are not turned down and are accepted by clients. A dispute process is available which can be followed once the offer has been accepted.

## **5.2. Working with residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness**

Any Hackney resident who believes they are going to become homeless, or who is already homeless, is strongly advised to contact the Council or any other advice agency as soon as possible.

When the Council is contacted a Customer Service Officer will assist and conduct a triage interview to work out the best course of action. If it is clear that specialised advice is required, an interview with a Benefits and Housing Needs officer will be booked (immediately if necessary) to ensure that every approach receives the appropriate response.

An initial meeting with an officer can be expected to last at least 90 minutes due to the level of information that is required by the officer in accordance with legislation. For single people this takes place at the Greenhouse and for families the meetings are held at the Hackney Service Centre. Appointments are prioritised depending on the urgency of the need.

At this interview, as well as establishing the household circumstances and options that may prevent the household from eviction, the officer will identify what statutory duties the Council hold in respect of the client/household:

- Is the client eligible under the Homelessness Reduction Act?
- Does Hackney have a duty to provide temporary accommodation under the Housing Act?
- Or, if we are unable to establish a main housing duty at this time, is the client vulnerable and in need of interim accommodation pending further investigation?


Where possible, officers will liaise between the current accommodation provider and the resident to establish whether there is any possibility to sustain their current tenancy. Under extremely limited circumstances the Council may be able to offer a short term financial incentive to expedite this.

Where this is not possible or practical, we assist the resident to access alternative accommodation; this will include guidance on accessing the toolkits and support mechanisms available to them, advice on affordability and how they may maximise their opportunity to source suitable accommodation.

While the interview will initially be focused on preventing a household from being made homeless, or sourcing other accommodation, there will be instances where a placement in temporary accommodation is necessary. The local authority only has a duty to actually arrange accommodation if the person has or might have a priority need.

Additionally, a local authority must secure **interim** accommodation if it has reason to believe a person might be homeless, be eligible based on their immigration status and have a priority need. The local authority does not need immediate proof or evidence to have a reason to believe someone might be in 'priority need'. The information the person provides at an initial interview can be enough.

Again, this is not a process driven tick box exercise; our focus remains on how we can best support the resident. This can be challenging, as illustrated in a slide deck Housing Advice managers put together for colleagues -

 Copy of Duty Manager presentation - TMs version.pptx as part of internal staff development practices. Also attached is a video where one of our Team Managers explains her role: [Michelle](#) , and another where Michelle sets out her development journey [Michelle's Journey](#) .

Priority Need would apply if someone has dependent children living with them, or they or someone they live with is vulnerable for some additional reason. The local authority must decide if the person is significantly more vulnerable than an ordinary person would be if they were homeless.

It is not always possible at the first engagement with clients to establish whether the Council will have a duty to provide accommodation. Often the client will not have the information, supporting documentation or other evidence to hand. In these instances, The officer will assess whether an emergency/interim placement is appropriate.

Gathering the information can sometimes be a protracted process, particularly when original documentation is not available. We are often reliant on the household being proactive in obtaining and providing the information we need to establish the duty we hold to them, although officers will support them with the process where they can. In some instances this can be a few days, while for others it may be much longer.

Households placed in accommodation on an interim basis will continue to be accommodated until we establish whether the Council has a duty to support them under the Housing Act. If we find that we do not hold a duty to the household they will be put in contact with other support agencies that can help them (this may include other local authorities if, for example, they have a stronger local connection to that local authority area).

For households who we have either accepted at the outset or for whom we subsequently establish a duty, the responsibility of the Council to provide temporary accommodation remains until we are able to discharge them into settled accommodation or they refuse a reasonable offer of settled accommodation.

### **5.3. Sourcing temporary accommodation and placing households**

Having recognised the necessity of providing accommodation, either on an interim basis or as a full duty, our teams then work to source suitable accommodation.

Given the high levels of demand and scarce supply of available properties, officers expend considerable efforts to try and identify additional units, and often this will be nightly let accommodation or hotel / bed and breakfast accommodation outside of the borough. There are some occasions when despite all our endeavours we cannot source accommodation and clients are bedded down within the HSC.

As of September 2022, over half our TA stock consists of single studio and one bed units. While there has been no reduction in the need for this size accommodation, the need for family sized units is rising. This is particularly true for larger family sized units and those that have been adapted to meet the needs of disabled households and those needing wheelchair accessible accommodation.

While we would always seek to place a household in a suitable TA property, this is not always immediately deliverable, especially for larger households and those with disabled household members who require wheelchair accessible and/or adapted housing.

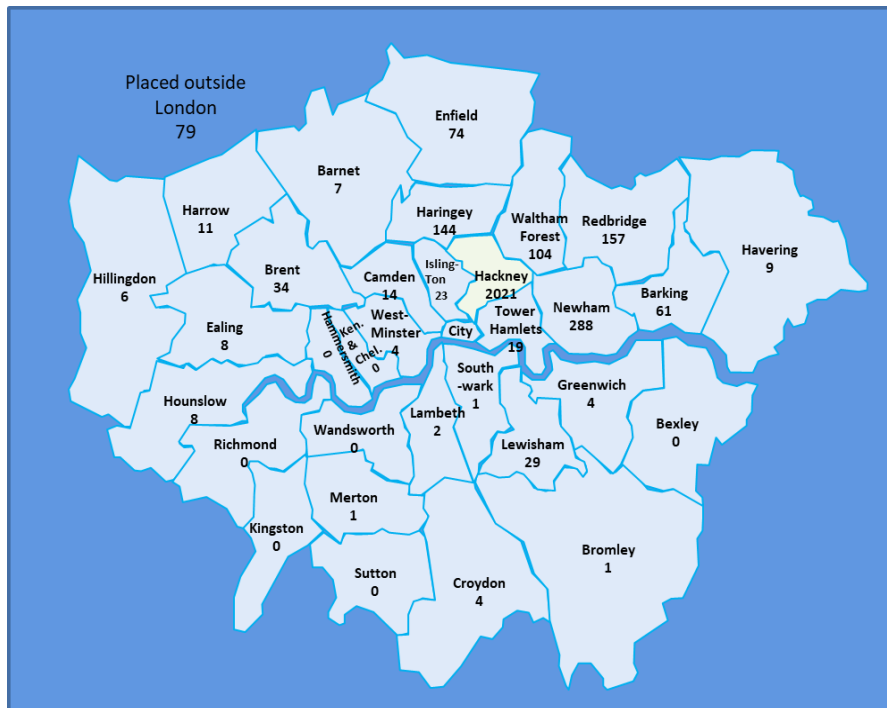
The current stock of this type of accommodation within the Council owned or long leased units is limited and heavily oversubscribed. Consequently we are often required to utilise short term and nightly let properties to meet this need. Even within the short term/nightly let property market, these types of properties are at a premium. Supply is limited and competition fierce. Often a suitable unit is just not available at the point of approach and the only solution is a sub-optimal placement while we try to source viable alternatives.

For these households, they face the prospect of further disruption of moving again when a more suitable property becomes available. The Council is frequently required to source accommodation outside of London and often the offer of a new placement will generate other concerns (eg. the new offer will meet the accommodation needs of the household but may well be out of borough, raising issues around schooling, access to support networks etc).

## Households placements 2018



## Households placements 2022

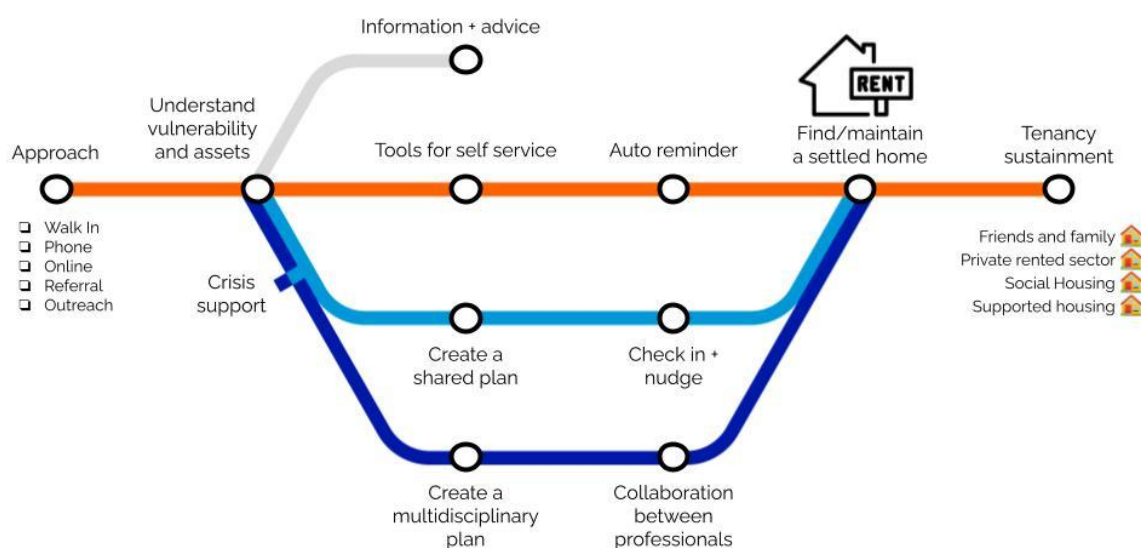


Our engagement with residents does not end at a conversation around temporary accommodation and our teams will continue to focus is on how we can support them into settled accommodation.

This engagement will centre around a personal housing plan: setting out the steps to be taken to help prevent the resident becoming homeless or help them secure accommodation. The plan is an agreement between us and the resident that sets out what actions the Council and the resident will both take to prevent or relieve their homelessness.

This could include mediation by the Council between a landlord and resident, support and signposting to tools and agencies that can assist the resident in finding a solution and for those who are most vulnerable direct intervention on behalf of the resident and a referral to other partner agencies.

This can be illustrated by our “tube map”;



- Those of our residents able to take a leading role and only requiring access to tools and resources will generally follow the orange path.
- Those residents who are less confident and/or more input from the service will follow the light blue path.
- Those more vulnerable residents needing more direct intervention, support accessing other services (such as drug and alcohol support, domestic violence support etc.) will follow the dark blue pathway.

The service is committed to delivering the right support for each individual household, tailored to their circumstances. We take pride in promoting a holistic and trauma informed approach that looks at all the circumstances that may be affecting their ability to find settled accommodation and link them into support where appropriate.

In some cases these will be simple and straightforward conversations about realistic options, the remedial steps available and future planning. For others with more complex needs we are working with the household for an extended period. Here are two videos where officers talk about their work with one of our residents.

[Jenny and Anna Part 1](#)  
[Jenny and Anna Part 2](#)