

# Strand 2: Tackling homelessness and ending rough sleeping





# Glossary

## **Discretionary Housing Payments**

Can provide extra money when your council decides that you need extra help to meet your housing costs.

## **Local Housing Allowance (LHA)**

LHA rates are used to calculate housing benefit for tenants renting from private landlords. They are based on private market rents being paid in the local area, by people with the same number of bedrooms as the property where you live, or the number of rooms you and your household needs.

## **Homelessness Reduction Act**

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was one of the biggest changes to the rights of homeless people in England for 15 years. The Act places a new duty on local authorities to help prevent the homelessness of all families and single people, regardless of priority need, who are eligible for assistance and threatened with homelessness.

## **Assured shorthold tenancy**

Is the most common type of tenancy if you rent from a private landlord or letting agent. The main feature that makes an AST different from other types of tenancies is that your landlord can evict you without a reason, but they must follow the correct procedure to do this.

## **DAHA Accreditation**

Is the UK benchmark for how housing providers should respond to domestic abuse.

## **Beam**

Is a charity which supports people experiencing homelessness through crowdfunding to pay for things like training programmes, education, deposits for flats, and helping people into work. The Royal Borough of Greenwich partnered with Beam in 2020.

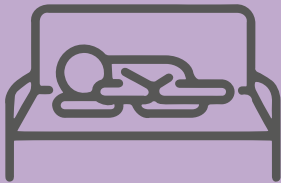
## **Housing First**

Housing First is a homeless assistance approach that prioritises providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, thus ending their homelessness and serving as a platform from which they can pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life.

## **Landlord business forum**

Is a club run by the Royal Borough of Greenwich and National Landlord Association Business Club, which enables local landlords to meet fellow landlords, local business owners, members of the National Landlord Association and council officers. The club meets quarterly and is for all landlords with property in the Royal Borough of Greenwich and surrounding areas.

# Tackling Homelessness and Ending Rough Sleeping



### Our Commitments

- Deliver a person-centred approach to preventing homelessness.
- End rough sleeping by 2024 by implementing the government's Rough Sleeping Strategy.
- Reduce the number of households living in temporary accommodation and improve standards in the sector as a whole.
- Improve the quality of housing in the private rented sector.

We are determined to continue our record of preventing and resolving homelessness and rough sleeping across the Royal Borough of Greenwich through early intervention and strong partnership working. This document sets out how we will achieve our objectives and commitments.

Rough sleeping is the most acute form of homelessness and has a significant impact on people's mental and physical health. Ending rough sleeping in the borough is a key priority for the council. We will use an approach informed by people's experiences, so we can put in place personalised plans for rough sleepers to help them off the streets and into more settled accommodation.

Preventing people from becoming homeless requires a well-rounded, system-wide perspective and upstream focus. We aim to map, coordinate and deliver services with the rights and needs of people experiencing homelessness at the centre. By approaching problems using this all-inclusive approach, we should see a real reduction in the number of people facing and experiencing homelessness.

Our person-centred approach will also reduce the need for temporary accommodation (TA). As the number of households experiencing homelessness has risen, we have been increasingly reliant on expensive TA to house people. Reducing the number of households in TA, improving the standard of TA, and lowering the cost to the council, are key aims of this strategy.

Our ambition is to not only reduce the number of people requiring TA, but also help people move into more settled housing. One way to achieve this is to increase the supply of genuinely affordable homes, which is outlined in more detail in the Ensuring the Supply of High-Quality Homes strand of the wider Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2021-2026.

We also need to recognise the important role that the private rented sector (PRS) can play in providing settled homes for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. We will seek to collaborate with PRS landlords and representatives to make informed and effective decisions, and to ensure that the PRS in the borough meets the needs of our residents.

# A Systems Approach

Homelessness is a complex issue and the product of many factors that interact in unpredictable ways and are often out of the control of the people who experience it. For example, homelessness can be caused by many different things including the availability of affordable housing, the economy, national social policy, household income, housing

security, physical and mental health, relationship stability, public attitudes, investment in homelessness prevention programmes and the quality of support services. An individual who is or is at risk of homelessness or rough sleeping cannot change many of these factors, as Sarah's story demonstrates:

### Sarah's Story

Sarah lost her privately rented home after facing financial difficulty when the working hours on her zero-hour contract were cut. She was unable to find another job, had no savings and moved back into her family home. The house was overcrowded, which caused tensions between Sarah and her family, and after several months she was asked to leave. Unable to afford the deposit and rent for a flat and unlikely to secure social housing quickly, she had to rely on the kindness of her friends. Sarah's mental health worsened, and she became increasingly anxious and depressed. To avoid feeling like a burden, Sarah began sleeping on the streets. The toll of rough sleeping caused Sarah's mental and physical health to further deteriorate to the point where she lost her job and was unable to maintain her relationships.

There are numerous points in Sarah's story where she was unable to improve her situation because of things that are beyond her control. For example, her financial hardship was caused by employment laws that do not guarantee job security. The lack of affordable housing and benefits that do not cover the full cost of privately rented housing means she was unable to find an alternative home.

By taking a systems approach to preventing and resolving homelessness, we aim to address the different and often connected factors that cause homelessness. We will lobby central government

to urgently address issues including renter's rights and more genuinely affordable housebuilding programmes, and make policy changes which will improve people's welfare, employment and economic status. We also want to improve our services within the council including more information sharing, working more cross-departmentally and embedding strategic aims to reduce homelessness and end rough sleeping.

Ultimately, we want to offer people a package of services built around the needs of the individual.

Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2018:

[homelessnessimpact.org/post/what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-systems](https://homelessnessimpact.org/post/what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-systems)

# Deliver a person-centred approach to preventing homelessness

- Establish a Homelessness Prevention Board to drive a joined-up approach to homelessness prevention across the borough.
- Use data more effectively to understand the routes people take into homelessness and rough sleeping.
- Review the restructured homelessness services implemented following the enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- Develop digital tools designed to help residents more easily, improve results and assist staff.
- Specialist support for vulnerable people including survivors of domestic abuse and victims of modern slavery.
- Improve access to employment opportunities and address in-work poverty for people in housing need or those at risk of becoming homeless, to help them sustain long-term housing.
- Review the use of Discretionary Housing Payment to address the increased demand for additional financial support that has been required following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- Provide a rent guarantee scheme that is attractive to private landlords and with rents that are within Local Housing Allowance levels.



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The Homelessness Reduction Act represented a significant shift in housing and homelessness legislation. It placed a greater emphasis on preventing and relieving homelessness, regardless of a person's priority need status. Between 2018/19, when the act was introduced, and 2019/20, the number of households successfully prevented from becoming homeless through our services increased from 1,022 to 1,211. We aim to continue to improve these services to prevent homelessness, helping people before they reach a point of crisis.

We will focus our resources on services and programmes which have the greatest impact on preventing homelessness. Among the households accepted as homeless, the most common reason was eviction from a friend or relative's home. The next most common reasons were termination of assured shorthold tenancy and people leaving accommodation provided by the Home Office as asylum support.

To deliver a more person-centred approach to our upstream prevention services, we will set up a Homelessness Prevention Board with wide range of partners. This will be the next step in developing a package of services that are built around people's individual needs.

We aim for different council services to share data and information to develop a shared understanding of the cross-cutting issues that are affecting people experiencing homelessness, and which will give us expert insight into how well our programmes are working. This will help us better understand the routes people take into homelessness and support people with complex needs, before they even reach a point of crisis.

We will also continue valuable work with partners to identify and support the most vulnerable groups, preventing crises and protecting the welfare of residents. The council will be looking to build upon our services that were awarded the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation. This includes supporting survivors of domestic abuse and victims of modern slavery. We will also engage with the perpetrators of these crimes to prevent future violence.

To improve the effectiveness of our services, we plan to expand the training we provide to staff and partners. This will allow us to have greater influence over housing outcomes as we will be able to adapt to challenges that rise in the coming years and work towards the overarching aim of continuous improvement.

We will also upgrade our digital systems and tools to improve how residents access our services. With improved digital infrastructure, staff will be able to dedicate more time to supporting residents. New systems will also help improve the data we use to monitor and design services more effectively, while introducing new digital services will improve communication with residents.

Accessing employment or training can be key in helping people avoid or recover from homelessness. While recognising that in-work poverty still affects many people in the borough, increasing a household's income can help them to explore different housing options. We will continue our valuable partnership work with the charity Beam and Greenwich Local Labour and Business (GLLaB).



# End rough sleeping by 2024 by implementing the government's Rough Sleeping Strategy

- Scale our outreach services to engage with rough sleepers.
- Embed healthcare into services offered to rough sleepers.
- Provide suitable emergency accommodation for rough sleepers to help them off the streets and into a place where our services can better engage with them.
- Reserve a proportion of move-on accommodation in council homes for rough sleepers who have been assisted by our commissioned services carried out by partners.
- Monitor results and explore opportunities to expand our Housing First project for rough sleepers.
- Develop initiatives to improve partnership working with other boroughs to address cross-border activity, prevent displacement and share information.
- Support London-wide initiatives that support rough sleepers such as No Second Night Out, Routes Home for non-UK, Severe Weather Emergency Protocol, Pan-London Safe Connections, Pan-London Accommodation Network and London Homeless Health Programme.



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To end rough sleeping in the Royal Borough of Greenwich, we will focus on helping people who are sleeping on the streets recover, while working to prevent future instances of street homelessness.

The number of rough sleepers in the borough has been increasing over the last few years. Between 2018/19 and 2019/20, the number of rough sleepers rose from 91 to 133. In addition, the proportion of those sleeping rough who also have multiple complex needs, including substance misuse and/or poor mental health, has also increased.

The 133 cases of rough sleeping in the borough each represent someone facing tremendous hardship who has different experiences and needs. Personalised and individual support programmes are vital to help people sustain settled accommodation in the future.

We want to expand our outreach services to continue to meet demand, while increasing the number of suitable emergency accommodation to help and move people sleeping rough off the streets and into safe accommodation. These services will be person-focused and tailored to the needs of the individual. In line with government and NHS advice,

we will ensure that emergency accommodation is COVID-safe.

People sleeping rough often have worse mental and physical health than the general population and are not always able to regularly see medical professionals or easily access health services. As well as being a basic human right, studies have shown that improving access to healthcare can positively impact housing and employment for rough sleepers. We will work closely with our health partners to improve access to healthcare for people experiencing homelessness.

We aim to expand our housing-based initiatives because evidence strongly suggests that housing-based solutions for rough sleepers are more effective at helping people sustain accommodation. The council will continue to monitor the number of Housing First homes and look for funding opportunities to expand this initiative. We will also reserve several council homes for rough sleepers who are moving on from our commissioned services and use our procurement service to provide access to the private rented sector.





# Reduce the number of households living in temporary accommodation and improve standards in the sector as a whole

- Maximise the number of genuinely affordable homes delivered through our Greenwich Builds programme.
- Develop a cross-departmental temporary accommodation (TA) and procurement strategy to ensure value for money, improve housing standards and ensure that TA is being used effectively.
- Work in partnership with other local authorities in London to coordinate TA rates.
- Review our downsizing incentives to encourage people who are living in council properties with spare bedrooms to move into homes that fit their housing need.
- Reduce our use of expensive emergency overnight accommodation by increasing the supply of good quality and affordable TA.
- Explore opportunities to develop our own TA homes.
- Review our arrangements with private sector landlords to allow us to use their properties for those in housing need.



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The number of households living in TA has nearly trebled since 2015/16, reaching 1,272 at the end of March 2020. The nature of TA means that the people cannot put down their roots when living there and the accommodation might be ill-suited to their needs. It is the last resort for relieving homelessness. We want to reduce the number of people who get to this stage, improve the quality of TA and help those in TA move on and into more secure and stable accommodation. Our ultimate goal is for TA to only be used in emergencies and for a limited time period.

We want to reduce the use of bed and breakfast (B&Bs) and nightly-paid accommodation. The increase in the number of households in TA has forced the council to use B&Bs in emergencies to make sure that people have a roof over their heads, but nightly-paid solutions should be used as a last resort.

At the end of March 2020, five per cent of the households in TA were living in B&B accommodation. A further 56 per cent of

households in TA were living in nightly-paid accommodation. Both these types of accommodation are generally more expensive than alternatives and do not provide a stable home environment, but they can be arranged quickly to help residents who are in immediate crisis.

We also want to improve the standard and quality of the TA we use. We will explore all opportunities to develop our own TA by using our in-house development team and building on council land. This will give us the opportunity to directly provide high quality TA at a more affordable cost.

This will form part of the total supply of TA, but we also aim to increase the number of private sector leases which we can use. These are units that we lease for an extended period so we can more closely monitor the standard of accommodation. Developing our relationships with PRS landlords will also be key to achieving this.



# Improve the quality of accommodation in the private rented sector

- Find and secure more high-quality private rented sector (PRS) homes to use as TA and suitable 'move-on' accommodation for residents.
- Review our Landlord Business Forum to improve engagement with the PRS sector.
- Collaborate with landlords to improve our understanding of the sector and to better inform our services.
- Lobby central government for national policy changes including improving security and affordability.
- Use enforcement action where required to improve standards in the minority of homes that are poorly managed.
- Develop a data-informed approach to landlord incentives.
- Offer tenancy workshops with residents to help them stay in PRS tenancies.

The private rented sector has an important role to play in the housing market so accessing the full potential of the sector is one of the key aims of the strategy. To do this, we will develop our collaborative approach with the sector and strengthen our partnerships with landlords and lettings agents. This can then help to increase the supply of high-quality PRS units to be used as TA and move-on accommodation to those in temporary housing.

Since 2001, the number of people who rent in the private sector has more than quadrupled<sup>2</sup>. As the proportion of people living in PRS properties has grown, the demographics of those living in it has evolved. The PRS is traditionally perceived to cater for young professionals who want the freedom to move between homes with ease to access different employment opportunities. However, a survey of renters showed that only six percent of private renters live in the sector primarily for the freedom and flexibility it provides<sup>3</sup> and a quarter of all new-born babies' first home is in the PRS<sup>4</sup>.

The unaffordability of purchasing a home and the undersupply of social housing means that the PRS is the only feasible option for a significant proportion of households who would rather live in alternative tenures. Whereas households with higher incomes have more relative freedom to move, lower-income households are limited by factors such as cash deposits, discriminatory practices (i.e., refusing to let to people on benefits) and local housing allowance (LHA) levels that do not match market rents.

The legislation and perception of the sector has lagged behind these shifts. The PRS is now an essential part of the housing market and needs reform to be fit for purpose. Many of these shortcomings are structural and need nationwide reforms to resolve. This legislation needs to be developed with the input of partners to ensure it is robust and achieves its aims.

One key issue is that much of the private rental market is unaffordable to those who are reliant on benefits. Housing benefit and the housing

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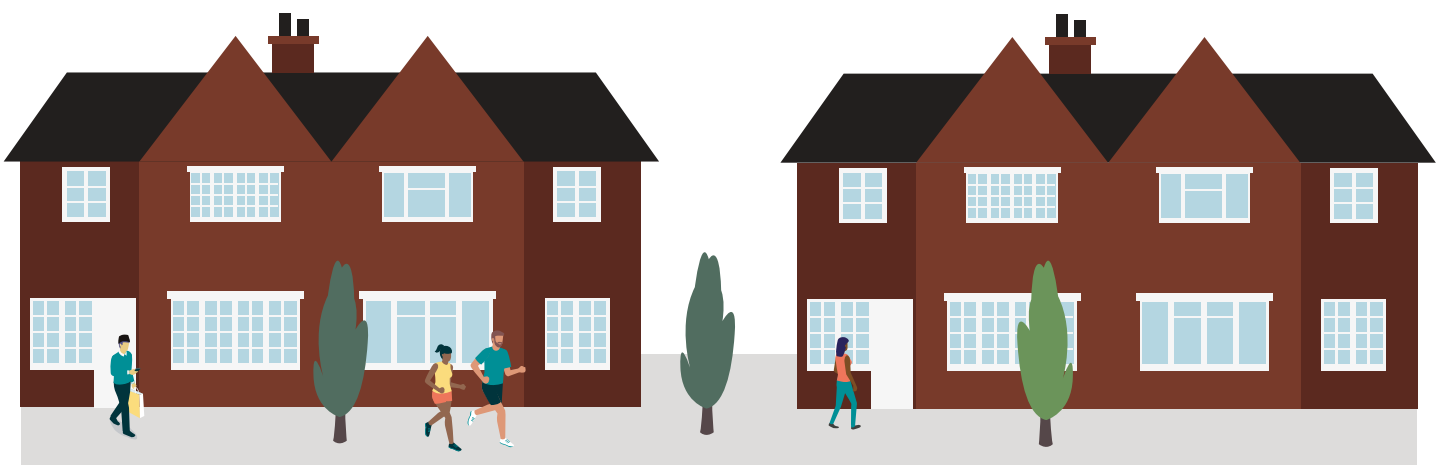
element of Universal Credit (UC), have been capped at LHA levels significantly below market rents for years. In 2019/20, for example, the LHA rate for a two-bed in the borough was £210 and market rent for a relatively cheap<sup>5</sup> two-bed was £277. This means that benefits would only cover up to a limit of 76 per cent of some of the lowest rents in the borough. The government rightly increased the LHA limit to cover the rent of 30 per cent of properties in each area for one year in its response to the pandemic but this needs to be raised year-on-year to prevent it falling behind rents again.

Other issues relating to benefits for households renting privately include the bedroom tax, the single person cap for under-35s and the five-week wait for UC claims to be processed. There also needs to be consideration for how furloughed workers return to work and those with rent arrears are treated fairly to avoid mass evictions from the PRS. The government needs to address these structural failings as part of its approach to mitigate the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and related economic uncertainty.

We plan to continue to lobby central government to improve the security of tenure for renters in the sector. This includes abolishing Section 21 evictions with robust legislation and close monitoring to ensure it achieves the aim of improving security of tenure.

Unlike other tenures, there is little-to-no centralised or statutory data available to make evidence-informed decisions. As a result, policymakers have a less comprehensive understanding of the sector compared to social housing and there are fewer channels of communication. We are, therefore, committed to improving our understanding of the sector by developing a collaborative approach to decision-making with local landlords and lettings agents. We aim to review our Landlord Business Forum to improve engagement and inform meaningful changes.

Greater engagement and improved communication with landlords will also help to improve standards in the minority of properties that are poorly managed. We can outline the standard of accommodation that we expect to landlords and highlight that we only want to use properties that meet these standards.



<sup>2</sup>This is the difference between the 2001 Census (8,312) and our PRS modelling (38,000).

<sup>3</sup>YouGov, 2017

<sup>4</sup>Royal London, 2019: [royallondon.com/media/press-releases/2019/march/half-of-all-babies-now-born-in-rented-accommodation/](https://royallondon.com/media/press-releases/2019/march/half-of-all-babies-now-born-in-rented-accommodation/)

<sup>5</sup>This refers to properties in the lower quartile of rental values i.e., the bottom 25% of rents.