

Report for: **Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Panel – 14 September 2020**
Title: **Update on Homelessness in Haringey**
Report
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Ward(s) affected: **All**
Report for Key/
Non Key Decision: **Non-Key Decision**

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1. This paper provides an update on the response of the Council and key partners to homelessness during the Covid-19 pandemic in the context of significant, interim policy changes from central government.
- 1.2. People sleeping rough, homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness were early on identified as at greater risk of infection and subsequent illness during the pandemic and therefore in need of additional focus and support. In line with the government's request to local authorities, made in March 2020, the Council worked closely with Homes for Haringey and other partners to ensure that all people sleeping rough, homeless or at risk of homelessness were offered emergency accommodation and support to meet their identified needs. Earlier work and relationships already in place in the borough in order to support the Council's existing commitment to ending rough sleeping by 2022, as encapsulated in the Borough Plan 2019-2023, have made this work possible, albeit challenging.
- 1.3. Alongside this, a series of policy initiatives from central government, including a continued ban on evictions and a time limited mortgage holiday, have ensured that the number of households directly affected by eviction and losing their tenancy during the pandemic has been extremely low.
- 1.4. The Council supports the focus on practical solutions to reducing homelessness and the recognition of the impact of health and wellbeing, the economy and financial certainty on residents' housing situation. It is in this context that this report provides a general update on homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough and considers future options in this 'new normal'.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. To note the report.

3. Background information

The policy framework

- 3.1. Haringey Council (the Council) is the Local Housing Authority, and as such has a number of statutory responsibilities regarding housing and homelessness, including assessing homelessness applications and providing accommodation to certain individuals and households who meet a number of criteria. This function is currently managed by Homes for Haringey, the Council's Arm's Length Management Organisation.
- 3.2. The Council also directly delivers and commissions services, working closely with the voluntary sector to best meet the needs of people who are rough sleeping. As set out in the Borough Plan, the Council was already working with partners to eliminate rough sleeping in the borough by 2022; this is an extremely challenging target, because people who sleep rough often have a number of complex needs requiring supported accommodation and because of the profile of housing stock in the borough.

The Council's approach to rough sleeping since March 2020

- 3.3. On 26 March 2020, in response to the increased risks faced by vulnerable people during the Covid-19 pandemic, Luke Hall MP, Minister for Local Government and Homelessness at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), wrote to all local authorities in England and Wales requesting that they accommodate anyone who was, or was at risk of, rough sleeping. The letter also advised local authorities to focus on people living in accommodation where it would be difficult to self-isolate, such as dormitory style night shelters and assessment centres. Local authorities were advised that they may need to use alternative powers and funding to offer this assistance and accommodation to people who would not, in ordinary circumstances, be eligible for this (for example, due to their immigration status). This request from MHCLG has become known as the 'Everybody In' directive.
- 3.4. To deliver 'Everybody In', the Council worked with Homes for Haringey and partners across the borough to ensure that anyone who was, or was at risk of, sleeping rough was offered accommodation, subsistence and support. This accommodation included commercial hotels, and temporary use of sites owned by the Council and earmarked for future housing development.
- 3.5. In line with the request from MHCLG, the Council has provided accommodation for over 700 individuals since March 2020; it is estimated that only around 50 of these would have been found in priority need, and thus provided with temporary accommodation by the Council, had they approached prior to March 2020, highlighting the numbers of people living in precarious housing in the borough, reliant on friends and families, for example, for accommodation. Around 150 people offered accommodation have drug or alcohol needs; 30% are under 35 years old, 5% under 25 years old. Around 60% of people were not verified as street homeless when they approached the Council.
- 3.6. As well as providing people with accommodation, the Council provided subsistence and specialist housing-related support, including hot meals, benefits advice, employment support and coordinated engagement with a range of health services to facilitate GP registrations, mental health assessments and widespread Covid-19 testing. Building on existing partnerships, there was a strong focus on working across Homes for Haringey,

the NHS, the Voluntary and Community Sector and with the private sector, as well as on making change at pace, which have directly improved the wellbeing of people sleeping rough in the borough. Through its interventions to ensure that people in Haringey were not sleeping rough during the pandemic, the Council and partners have significantly improved outcomes for many of the people supported, and have undoubtedly saved lives.

- 3.7. 'Everybody In' has been expensive for the Council to deliver, due to the reactive nature of the expenditure on commercial hotel rooms for such a large number of people, the high number of people who have been accommodated, a proportion of whom do not have access to income. Funding from central government has not been sufficient to meet this cost despite initial commitments that it would. From March to August 2020, a total of £3.1m had been spent on accommodating people who were, or were at risk of, rough sleeping.
- 3.8. In May 2020, MHCLG requested that local authorities develop 'locally appropriate' strategies to establish who should continue to be provided with accommodation, and to set out how their next steps for people who have been housed in emergency accommodation. In this correspondence MHCLG asked local authorities to commit to the 'In for Good' principle, usually adopted as part of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP). This principle aims to ensure that people placed in emergency accommodation are offered somewhere to move-on to after their placement ends to prevent a return to street homelessness.
- 3.9. As well as this request, on 29 June 2020, MHCLG issued an update to the statutory Homelessness Code of Guidance for local authorities. Paragraph 8.44 specifies that 'Housing authorities should carefully consider the vulnerability of applicants from COVID-19'. Paragraph 8.45 specifies that 'Housing authorities should also carefully consider whether people with a history of rough sleeping should be considered vulnerable in the context of COVID-19, taking into account their age and underlying health conditions'.
- 3.10. In response to MHCLG's request that councils develop locally appropriate policies, to the change in the Homelessness Code of Guidance and to the costs of 'Everybody In', the Council has developed a Rough Sleeping Discretion Policy, which was agreed on 27 July 2020. This identifies the circumstances in which people who are not covered by the Council's existing statutory duty will be housed. It ensures that people who have vulnerabilities leading to a greater risk of serious illness if they were to contract Covid-19 will be accommodated, including people who are ineligible for housing assistance due to, for example, their immigration status. The Rough Sleeping Discretion Policy has been designed to ensure that the Council uses its limited resources to support those in the greatest need – in the absence of the necessary Government funding to continue a broader approach.
- 3.11. The Council has committed to ensuring that all who were housed under 'Everybody in' continue to be supported to live in settled accommodation and do not return to sleeping rough, and has adopted the 'In For Good' principle, usually taken during winter SWEP. The Council has developed an Exit Strategy to set out its approach to moving people on from the emergency accommodation provided under 'Everybody In'. The Strategy identifies solutions as well as highlighting the particular local challenges in securing a

consistent supply of suitable accommodation, given the profile of the housing stock in the borough, benefit cap limitations and the significant gap in suitable supported housing.

- 3.12. The Exit Strategy takes a cohort-based approach, in which different exit strategies are implemented in parallel, to respond to the needs of different groups of individuals. In the first instance, those who are more quickly able to move on to settled accommodation, either because they are able to live independently or because the appropriate housing option is more readily available, have been, and are being, rehoused. As of 2 September 2020 there are 255 people still in emergency accommodation; more than 400 people have been offered alternative accommodation, supported to return to previous accommodation or have found their own move-on solution.
- 3.13. Help to find a Private Rented Sector tenancy is the identified exit strategy for nearly a third of those housed in emergency accommodation. This involves the Council providing various types of assistance and support, including signposting, providing either deposits for tenants or incentives for landlords, in many cases both, and extending its Floating Support Service. The Private Rented Sector is where appropriate and immediate accommodation can most easily be found in the borough. The Council has the resources to support this approach and has increased capacity in the medium term. Further initiatives within this are being explored, including house-sharing options for people under-35.
- 3.14. Supported housing is the identified exit strategy for approximately 100 people within the cohort. The Council commissions a range of supported housing for single homeless households with support needs, however this is already over-subscribed. The Council is commissioning 40 modular build supported housing units for short to medium term use; has agreed the prioritisation of emergency accommodation referrals into its supported housing Pathways and non-commissioned units in the North London YMCA foyer service and is exploring options to lease properties including a 25-unit contract with an offender resettlement service in light of the early release scheme.
- 3.15. Night shelters are the identified exit strategy for approximately 60 people in the cohort of those currently housed. Around 40 people within the emergency accommodation cohort are ineligible for assistance because they have no recourse to public funds and a further 20 are EU Nationals who do not have settled status in the UK. This group are amongst the most vulnerable and socially isolated within the cohort and because winter night shelters in shared facilities will not be reopening this winter the options to move them on are severely limited. A major achievement during lockdown was enabling the Council's commissioned night shelter, Cranwood Hub, to remain open when almost every other night shelter in London closed. This was achieved by moving to a self-contained model, which also allowed for an expansion of the available provision by 8 bedspaces.
- 3.16. Sheltered housing and returning to friends or family are the identified exit strategy for approximately 5% of the cohort of those currently being housed. Haringey is practised in using its sheltered housing to resolve homelessness for single adults over 50 with support needs and lets will be prioritised for those in emergency accommodation where possible.

- 3.17. There are also around 50 people in the emergency accommodation cohort who are entrenched rough sleepers. These have had long periods living on the streets and face significant inequalities around housing, health and welfare and require expensive wrap-around support and the flexibility of relevant services. For this group, the positive impact of providing emergency accommodation, food and welfare during the lockdown period is truly ground-breaking and has enabled opportunities to form and strengthen relationships which would have been unimaginable previously. These individuals are being supported by multi-disciplinary teams to ensure the best chance for successful long-term outcomes. All of these individuals require supported housing or Housing First as a move-on option from emergency accommodation.
- 3.18. The supply of suitable, stable accommodation for single homeless people in the borough is a challenge and to deliver the Exit Strategy will require a clear and continued focus on the accommodation and support needs of this cohort of residents going forward. £431m of funding for providing longer-term support for those housed in emergency accommodation has been announced by MHCLG, of which £160m has been brought forward into 2020/21. Haringey has made a bid for capital and revenue funding to support the delivery of the Ermine Road Modular Project, in light of the pressures in the supply of supported housing.
- 3.19. The Ermine Road Modular Project is an initiative to acquire 39 modular housing units, which would be located in the first instance at Ermine Road, a site currently safeguarded for Crossrail 2 and therefore available for meanwhile use for an interim period of up to five years. The homes have a 60 year lifespan, and will be moved to another site in the borough if Ermine Road is no longer available. The homes are self-contained, with their own bathrooms, kitchens and living areas and we will be brought together as a specialist supported housing service for people with experience of rough sleeping. Specialist housing-related support will be available on site, 24-hours a day, and following the successful approach taken at Mulberry Junction and Hale Road, the service is expected to be directly delivered by the Council. Staff will provide multi-disciplinary support to support residents to improve their health, social and employability outcomes, with the aim of helping residents sustain settled tenancies in the future.

Family homelessness and temporary accommodation

- 3.20. Rough sleeping is the sharp (and visible) end of Haringey's (and London's) homelessness picture. But there remains a large number of people in the borough who have been accepted as homeless by the Council, and who are being housed in temporary accommodation. The number of households in temporary accommodation fluctuate, but it is currently c.3100.
- 3.21. Households approach as homeless for a number of reasons, the most common being the end of a private sector tenancy. There are a number of underlying factors leading to homelessness – domestic abuse, overcrowding, unemployment, in-work poverty, relationship breakdown, mental and physical health problems.
- 3.22. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, a number of measures were announced by the Government to ease the effect of the pandemic, and in particular its effect on household incomes, on people's housing situation. Further to these, on 18

March 2020, the Prime Minister pledged to bring forward legislation to prevent evictions for private tenants for a period of time. This temporary ban on evictions was due to end in June 2020; this was extended to 23 August 2020; and on 20 August 2020 it was further extended to 20 September 2020 in England. There is extensive lobbying of central government by a range of agencies to further extend the temporary ban on evictions or to ensure other support is in place for families at risk of eviction and therefore of homelessness.

- 3.23. The temporary ban on evictions has led to a sharp drop in the number of families presenting as homeless, with approaches 34% lower since March 2020 compared to the previous year. Conversely, if and when this ban is lifted and private landlords are able to commence proceedings to evict tenants, for reasons including but not limited to rent arrears, an increase in households presenting as homeless is likely to be seen. This is likely to be compounded by the impact of the end of the furlough scheme, and a projected rise in unemployment across the country. The data already shows that the Tottenham and Wood Green constituency has the second highest rate of people being furloughed in the country.
- 3.24. It is difficult to project how many more households may present as homeless if and when the ban ends; and whether in Haringey, and in London, the lifting of the ban will lead to a cliff-edge of evictions and homelessness applications, or whether a slower rise will be seen. Homes for Haringey and the Council are working with partners, such as Citizens' Advice Haringey to support families to make plans for the future lifting of the temporary ban on evictions, including considering the risk of unemployment, fewer hours or loss of income, as an important element of the current approach to reducing the risk of homelessness for families.
- 3.25. An analysis of the impact of Covid-19 on Haringey's low-income residents has been carried out. This suggests that there could be 2062 households who could be at risk of homelessness across all housing tenures. Of these, 1452 live in the private rented sector and therefore have significantly less security than owner-occupiers. Of these, approximately half are families, with the remainder being single people. There is therefore a likelihood that around 700 families could be at risk of homelessness, once the temporary ban on evictions is lifted. But as well as these projections being tentative, not all families at risk of homeless will become homeless: the Council's homelessness strategy is to prevent homelessness as far as possible, by working with residents, and landlords, to avoid this occurrence.

4. Contribution to strategic outcomes

- 4.1. These workstreams contribute to Priority 1 of the borough plan and in particular the outcome that 'We will work together to prevent people from becoming homeless, and to reduce existing homelessness', and to Priority 2 of the borough plan, in particular the objective that 'Adults with multiple and complex needs will be supported to achieve improved outcomes through a coordinated partnership approach.'

5. Use of appendices

5.1. None.

6. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

None