

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: ALL
REPORT TITLE: Response to the Homelessness Scrutiny Panel recommendations to Housing Scrutiny Committee	
REPORT OF: Director of Housing	
FOR SUBMISSION TO: Housing Scrutiny Committee	DATE 16 th July 2024
<p>SUMMARY OF REPORT</p> <p>This report sets out the Council’s response to the recommendations made by the Homelessness Scrutiny Panel on 22nd February 2024 following a deep dive into homelessness services across Camden. This report provides an initial response, and any relevant commentary.</p> <p>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information</p> <p>No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report.</p> <p>Contact Officer:</p> <p>Simone Melia, Head of Housing Solutions, 5 Pancras Square, N1C 4AG Simone.melia@camden.gov.uk</p>	
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>That the Housing Scrutiny Panel consider the response to the recommendations made by the Homelessness Scrutiny Panel outlined in Section 3 of this report.</p>	

Signed: 

Date: 5 July 2024

1. Purpose of Report

In September 2023 the Housing Scrutiny Committee set up a Homelessness Scrutiny Panel to conduct a deep dive analysis into homelessness services across Camden. It was commissioned by the committee to understand more about resident perceptions of homelessness and the support that can be accessed.

The panel conducted multiple interviews with residents, officers across the homelessness system, statutory and voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners as well as those involved in the integrated commissioning arrangements with NHS services. The insights from these interviews formed the basis for the seventeen recommendations the Scrutiny Panel made to the Council.

This report sets out an initial officer response to those recommendations and reiterates a commitment to share a further update at Housing Scrutiny in October 2024.

2. Context

As the report from the panel acknowledges, Camden is not alone in facing increasing pressure on homelessness and rough sleeping services. Across London there have been increasing numbers of homelessness presentations, with 1,246 (17.4%) more in January 2024 compared to a year earlier.¹ In Camden, median monthly rents in the private rented sector are £450 higher than the London median (£1,950 compared to £1,500). Only 2.3% of rental listings across London are affordable to those on the London Housing Allowance (down from 18.9% in 2020/21); there are none in Camden.

The twin drivers of increased demand and reduced supply are placing a major strain on the homelessness budget. The Council is currently forecast to overspend by £5.8m on temporary accommodation in 2023/24. The Council has received additional Homelessness Prevention Grant from central government and is taking multiple steps to prevent homelessness and reduce the cost of temporary accommodation. Despite this, a major budget pressure remains and numbers in temporary accommodation continue to increase.

As noted by the panel, the Homelessness System Transformation programme is aiming to implement a holistic, integrated approach to homelessness which is in line with recommendations made by the panel. In 2024/25, the programme is facilitating joined-up commissioning and strategic planning between housing, adult social care, health and the NHS to build on learning from pilots.

3. Consideration of recommendations made by the Homelessness Scrutiny Panel

¹ Based on data from 27 councils, collected by London Councils.

3.1. The Homelessness Scrutiny Panel made 17 recommendations. Officers have set them out in the same order below, with responses to each in turn.

1. *Utilise Stakeholder Insights:* *Incorporate insights from interviews with partners and residents into the ongoing work of the Homeless System Transformation programme and senior housing management's improvement strategies.*

The Homelessness Scrutiny panel conducted interviews with statutory partners and residents during October-November 2023. Insights from those interviews have been used to inform the work of the Homeless System Transformation programme and officers continue to work with Council partners and residents following a co-production approach. For example, officers have trained people with lived experience to do 'peer research'. These individuals will be supporting the evaluation of the Council's 'test and learn' activities. The Council will be reviewing its homelessness and rough sleeping strategy this year and are planning how its established co-production network of people with lived experience of homelessness will steer and consult with the Council on the new strategy.

2. *Facilitate Collaborative Forums:* *Establish a forum for all partners, especially VCS partners, to ensure close collaboration and ongoing feedback mechanisms. Consider leveraging existing platforms such as the Camden Advice Network.*

Officers agree that it's crucial for the Council to work closely with statutory and VCS partners in supporting homeless people and have various forums that run successfully with multi-agency input at both a strategic and case level. Officers recognise feedback from VCS partners about the need to work closer with Council homelessness services and will explore ways that the Council can connect teams more closely with the Camden Advice Network, for instance.

Following the investigation into the incident on Huntley Street in November 2023, the Council reconvened a Homelessness Partnership Forum of organisations in the borough working with rough sleepers. The forum was established and met for the first time in March 2024. The next meeting was due to take place during the pre-election period so has been rescheduled. For the next session, the partnership forum will join the homelessness system transformation partnership to engage them in the homelessness and rough sleeping strategy.

3. *Enhance Multi-Agency Working:* *Encourage housing teams to consistently participate in multi-agency meetings, establish named contacts for key partner agencies within relevant housing teams to facilitate productive collaboration, and explore establishing a system to notify NHS partners when families have moved into the area, so they receive the correct support*

Officers recognise the value of multi-agency working in ensuring the Council provides the right support to residents who are faced with homelessness. A regular multi-disciplinary team (MDT) meeting model has already been piloted at three Adult Pathway services. This pilot will be concluded shortly and a review will take place to consider how the model can be expanded to all 16 Adult Pathway services, within the capacity constraints of colleagues attending these meetings. So far, the feedback on the MDT model has been positive.

Rough sleeping teams and commissioned services have all undergone Team Around Me (TAM) training - An MDT tool developed to work with homeless people and those facing multiple disadvantages. Multi agency working is core to rough sleeping services and was recently enhanced by the creation of the HOP team - a team made up of a nurse and psychologist who are based in the Routes off the Streets outreach team.

Officers are integrating multi-agency working across its homelessness team including its hospital discharge model which features two housing officer posts working across the NHS and housing and TAM training.

Officers will continue to explore ways to embed multi-agency working into homelessness teams; in line with a priority coming out of the Homelessness System Transformation programme.

4. Increase Training for Partners: *Ensure there are regular training opportunities for staff in partner agencies, including VCS organisations, on how to support service users through Camden housing processes. Consider including this in the distribution strategy for the new provision roadmap.*

Camden Council has hosted continued training for the 'Team Around Me' case discussion tool. Internal council staff and wider partners can access this. So far, colleagues from across LBC, NHS, VCS and elsewhere have been trained together on the approach.

The Council is working to develop a 'trauma informed framework' for the council and partners who support people experiencing homelessness. This is due to a gap that has been recognised in good quality, consistent training. As such, officers are developing an e-learning, to be tested with colleagues in Adult Social Care with a view to rolling this out.

In addition to this, officers will consider how the Council can engage partner agencies with the system map and advice booklet being developed to ensure they know how to support residents through the system.

5. Improve Support for Hostel Residents: *Develop specific plans to better support residents in hostels, including opportunities for feedback, monitoring, and consideration of formal time limits for hostel stays.*

To ensure the sustainability of a trauma-informed approach, the Council has introduced listening boxes at its Camden adult pathway hostels alongside exit questionnaires. The outcome of the residents' meetings uncovered a need to further explore and develop a less formal approach so residents can make suggestions and raise any concerns.

Adult social care and Housing Commissioning are working together to deliver a programme of joint visits which are already underway to all 16 Adult Pathway accommodation-based services by October 2024. The visits include separate conversations with hostel residents and hostel staff, checking that the health and

safety monitoring arrangements around residents' living spaces are in place and how services identify safeguarding or pre-safeguarding issues including how they progress them.

Regarding the recommendation of formal time limits for hostel stays, move-on is an essential element of the adult pathway hostel provision and providers are measured on their move-on activity with various targets. Reasons for hostel stays lasting longer are complex and in single adult hostels are a mixture of the increase in need of those going into the hostel pathway meaning it is taking longer for them to be ready to move on. There is also a London-wide shortage of affordable accommodation for residents to move on to, particularly in the private rented sector, where residents in hostels would historically have moved on to. Officers will continue to work to increase moves to independent living for hostel residents.

6. Implement Trauma-Informed Approach: *Ensure the successful implementation and sustainability of a trauma-informed approach across housing staff through comprehensive training and ongoing support mechanisms.*

The transformation programme codesigned with over one hundred stakeholders a 'trauma informed framework' to support greater consistency and interest in implementing this approach across Camden's services. The draft is in its final stages and will be launched in June 2024.

As part of the development of a 'trauma informed framework' for the council and its partners who support people experiencing homelessness, we have recognised a gap in good quality, consistent training. As such, officers are developing an e-learning, to be tested initially within Adult Social Care.

Many staff across housing teams, including rough sleeping commissioned services, prevention advisers and hostel staff have been trained on trauma informed practice but we recognise that more can be done to expand this.

Housing Services have a new contract in place with the Psychologically Informed Consultation & Training (PICT) NHS team who are already supporting reflective practice in a number of teams working with homeless people including hostel staff and more recently the homelessness prevention team.

7. Expand Outreach at Physical Hubs: *Build on successful models like Good Work Camden by stationing housing officers at key physical hubs such as schools and community centres to improve accessibility.*

The Council has an outreach homelessness prevention adviser based in Kentish Town jobcentre jointly working with the DWP to identify situations where there is a potential risk of homelessness early and provide advice and guidance and preventative homelessness support.

Other housing co-location includes working jointly with community groups to run outreach homelessness prevention advice workshops for Ukrainian refugees along with VCS organisation Families 4 Peace.

Officers recognise the benefit of co-locating housing officers, particularly in early prevention work, and as such are exploring how the Council can use an early identification database it can access to identify locations of groups at risk of homelessness to best target further outreach sessions within the community.

Officers will also explore options to embed housing advice into community mental health teams and as part of the Council's developing neighbourhood working model.

8. Empower Frontline Staff: *Embed frontline staff input within strategy development processes to foster a sense of ownership and facilitate effective change management. This should include staff from VCS and statutory partners.*

Officers are currently reviewing the Council's homelessness and rough sleeping strategy as the current strategy runs 2019-24. The Council is involving partners across the homelessness system by reaching out through the partnerships it has developed during the homelessness system transformation programme but also to a wider range of third sector organisations who form part of our homelessness forum. Staff from across the homelessness system; frontline and managers, have fed into the themes that will be developed into the strategy.

9. Review VCS Funding: *Conduct a review of funding for VCS partners to alleviate financial pressures and ensure continuity of essential services.*

Officers recognise the value of working in partnership with the VCS in order to deliver essential services. The Council funds a number of VCS partners as part of its Adult Pathway and rough sleeping services including Single Homeless Project, St Mungo's, Salvation Army, Sapphire Independent Housing, Solace, Change Grow Live and Women at the Well.

On top of what is commissioned in housing, officers will be focusing on improving access to VCS organisations with an expertise in mental health, as part of a review of the 'Reach Out' services commissioned by the council and NHS.

Officers recognise that the Council more widely funds VCS partners such as the Camden Advice Network and will explore with colleagues where there are opportunities to work with the VCS to alleviate financial pressures in service delivery.

10. Enhance Communications: *Review all communication materials in a year time to ensure clarity, accessibility, and inclusivity, including translations, simplified language, and replacing Word/PDF attachments with online forms. Consider options for reducing unacceptably long communication delays, including improved case management systems and clearer monitoring of KPIs relating to response times and case progression.*

Officers recognise the importance of providing clear communication that is accessible and timely and as the panel noted have recently reviewed homelessness information on the Camden website to make it more accessible which we will continue to review.

The Council introduced a new database in April 2024 for homelessness casework, which includes the ability to publish an online portal which applicants can access and upload data and receive letters. Officers are in the process of transferring data from multiple databases into this one database, training, and familiarising staff with how to best utilise its abilities but expect that this will also provide efficiencies in casework.

This system includes reporting functionality which will enable the Council to analyse data and trends and respond to these, highlighting any gaps or areas for improvement or performance concerns and amend the service as a result. Officers are committed to embedding this and then developing its benefits further to improve casework.

11. Review Out of Hours Provision: *Consider the effectiveness of current out of hours provision and improve communication of how to access the current provision.*

Officers agree that the homelessness out of hours service needs reconsideration to ensure that it is fit-for-purpose in the current environment. Officers have reviewed the homelessness Out of hours provision and are piloting a process that removes hand-offs which will be evaluated and rolled out if it's successful. The Council is also a London Councils pilot area for testing and further developing a triage tool that has been designed for London boroughs' out of hours provision. The Council has also increased the accommodation that's available out of hours to more efficiently respond to residents' needs.

12. Streamline Processes: *Review and streamline paperwork and internal processes to optimise officer time towards meaningful preventative work, improve efficiency, and enhance workforce retention.*

As mentioned above, the use of the new database for homelessness casework will help to streamline paperwork and internal processes which will free up staff time and improve efficiencies.

In regard to staff retention, officers have reviewed the frontline homelessness roles and expect that changes in the proposed new structure will assist with recruitment and retention. The Council has a track record of recruiting apprentices into the team and the apprentice in post recently won apprentice of the year. The Council has included the apprenticeship qualification in the latest and future recruitment and agreed day release for those who take this up.

13. Strengthen Internal Review Systems: *Improve internal review systems to address complex cases promptly and minimise reliance on external enquiries for resolution.*

Officers recognise the need to address casework promptly without the need for external enquiries in order to get them resolved although the Council also recognise the importance of ensuring escalation points are available when needed.

Teams across the homelessness system are integrating multi-disciplinary team (MDT) meetings into their practice, supported by the homelessness system transformation programme, with pilots in hostels and homelessness settings. Adult

social care and homelessness teams are working much closer on cases, with escalation processes in place for cases that need multi-disciplinary intervention.

14. Facilitate In-Person Services: *Review arrangements for in-person services post-COVID to restore personalised interactions and support residents effectively.*

Officers recognise the importance of face-to-face interaction and access for residents who are faced with homelessness. Many of the Council's services have remained in-person despite COVID such as our accommodation and rough sleeping outreach services. Other resident-facing services such as homelessness prevention services are reviewing the in-person offer and recognise the need to deliver a flexible service which has face to face as well as other channels available to residents.

The Council works to the Homelessness Code of Guidance which sets out the expectation that face-to-face assessments are available for those who need them and it offers these to residents. The Council also has a pilot in place at its main face-to-face location for homelessness, 5 Pancras Square, to record and better understand what residents are attending in person to access so that it can review changing demands for face to face. The Council has officers available face-to-face in 5PS.

15. Prioritise Housing Officer Capacity: *Consider how to rebalance staff time further towards meaningful preventative work, such as ring-fenced time for this work and further capacity in dedicated prevention teams. Gather further data to show the positive value of preventative work to improve future business cases for investment in dedicated preventative capacity.*

The Housing redesign which is currently in consultation proposes creation of two tenancy sustainment roles to focus on preventing tenancies (particularly in the private rented sector) from breaking down. This will help the Council to focus on preventing homelessness rather than accommodating people once they become homeless.

The Council now has a dedicated officer doing outreach at Kentish Town job centre who will use data on those at risk of homelessness to target prevention for those identified. The Council's new homelessness database will also enable it to review trends and approaches, allowing it to better understand and adjust the service accordingly.

16. Promote Success Stories: *Incorporate success stories into the communications strategy to build trust, motivate staff, and demonstrate positive outcomes.*

Officers recognise the importance of promoting success stories to residents, colleagues and partners and that with the busy nature of our roles, the Council doesn't do this enough. Officers are addressing this with the housing newsletter that includes positive stories and celebrates success across housing teams. The Council has also promoted success stories on the Camden website including our Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) response. The homelessness team also shares all its positive resident feedback on a wall in the shared office space to

celebrate our successes with colleagues in the service. Officers will consider more ways to celebrate successes in internal and external communications.

17. Review Points System: *Conduct a thorough review of the points system's impact on homeless residents and ensure transparent communication following*

The housing allocation policy was last amended in 2018 when the housing landscape was very different and the private rented sector was buoyant, offering an opportunity to those living through a housing crisis. The current policy awards 100 points to homeless households in temporary accommodation with an additional 100 points to incentivise households to work with the service to prevent homelessness with an offer of accommodation in the private rented market. In the last year 5% of social housing lets were to statutory homeless households with a further 6% to households which engaged with the service and had their homelessness prevented. The policy will be fully reviewed over the next 12 months, when priority awards will be re-evaluated.

4. Finance Comments of the Executive Director Corporate Services

In most cases the Council's responses to the Panel's recommendations relate to how the Housing Solutions service and other council services work within their existing budgets. Where additional resources have been allocated e.g. the response to recommendation 15, these are in the context of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy agreed by Cabinet in January 2023.

5. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

There are no legal comments.

6. Environmental Implications

The proposals have no environmental impacts.

REPORT ENDS