

Housing Themed Review: Housing Options and Support

Proposed Response

Recommendation	Accept, Amend or Reject	Comments
Recommendation 1: Services to ensure that all residents at risk of homelessness are, alongside guidance and support to find housing, provided with clear and easy-to-understand guidance on the law around homelessness and support on offer, the processes they could go through, and how these normally work. This should include how housing options support works, their rights, what they might reasonably expect, the difficulties involved, the sources of support (from the Council or alternative sources) which might be available.	Accept	<p>The Council recognises the need to reshape the Council's homelessness support offer. The ability to intervene earlier to support households in housing need, and to prevent homelessness wherever possible is critical. Service improvements are needed to deliver the best possible outcomes for our residents so they can either remain in their homes or move to alternative accommodation without the need for temporary accommodation.</p> <p>Work on this recommendation is underway through a range of actions set out in the Prevention and Assessment Service Development Plan.</p> <p>Progress on this action is monitored and reported monthly to the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Lead Member for Housing and Regeneration.</p>
Recommendation 2: Residents in TA, or at risk of homelessness and on the Housing Register to be, in their personal housing plan (PHP) or through other communication, provided with clear, accurate and realistic (i.e. neither too optimistic, nor too pessimistic) understanding of their chances of accessing social housing through the bidding system and how to maximise their chances of doing so.	Accept	<p>This recommendation has been implemented but is being kept under regular review to support a continuous improvement approach to service delivery.</p>

<p>Recommendation 3:</p> <p>Services and portfolio holders to continue to lobby national government to continue to ensure uplifts in Local Housing Allowance sufficient to ensure that residents on Universal Credit or Housing Benefit are not effectively excluded from finding private rented accommodation, and to effectively increase the number of private rented properties which local authorities in London can identify to house households facing homelessness.</p>	<p>Amend</p>	<p>· Lobbying of national government took place in 2024 prior to the general election.</p> <p><i>Suggested amendment:</i></p> <p>Services across the council should take proactive steps to support residents in housing need to access accommodation in the private rented sector through schemes such as employment support and income maximisation.</p> <p><i>Service response:</i></p> <p>Employment support and income maximisation are essential if households at risk of homelessness are to have a realistic prospect of securing alternative accommodation in the borough. For those who are already homeless and living in temporary accommodation, support to secure employment and mitigate the benefit cap is pivotal to facilitating timely move on from temporary accommodation.</p> <p>The Council's Employment Support Service is undergoing considerable change at present. In the future there is an opportunity to focus the Employment Service on supporting households living in temporary accommodation. The service could play a key role in reinforcing common messages that the key to securing settled accommodation in the borough and mitigating the benefit cap is through employment.</p> <p>A small pilot of around a dozen households living in temporary accommodation and having trouble securing settled accommodation in the PRS due to unemployment is currently being scoped with a range of external providers (Maximus UK, Palladium and Get Set UK). Through this pilot, it proposed that community-based support to assist households find and stay in work is trialed.</p>
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<p>Recommendation 4:</p> <p>Services continue to look to increase capacity for face-to-face assessment meetings, especially when the Families and Homes Hub comes into use, to move towards a point where there is capacity for face-to-face to be an option for those who express a preference for it.</p>	<p>Amend</p>	<p><i>Suggested amendment:</i></p> <p>Services to explore ways in which residents can access advice and information which enables them to make well informed decisions relating to their housing whether in person, via telephone or online.</p> <p>This suggested revision aligns to the objectives set out in the homelessness and rough sleeping strategy which was ratified in September 2024.</p> <p><i>Service response:</i></p> <p>There are a wide range of other front facing council services which come into regular contact with residents who are experiencing housing insecurity or who are seeking assistance with their housing options.</p> <p>In line with the council's Stronger Communities approach, options to upskill staff working in key council services including, but not limited to, libraries and Family Hubs to facilitate the provision of basic housing advice and signposting are being explored. By providing key information on pathways and referral routes into the service, utilising the service's new website pages and producing information on realistic housing options for residents, our aim is to ensure common messaging across the council which will, in turn, empower residents to make informed decisions.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5:</p> <p>Services should continue to review the content and wording of PHPs and continue to seek to improve these so that they contain more advice and information, and so that they recognise the context residents find themselves in, and the difficulties they are likely to face in finding accommodation (e.g. affordability, supply, income tests), such that these difficulties and barriers are acknowledged and recognised.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p>A range of tailored advice themes have now been built into PHPs to ensure that the advice and signposting provided to residents is informative and consistent.</p> <p>Further work to enhance this approach is being taken forward within the Prevention and Assessment Service Development Plan.</p> <p>Progress on this action is monitored and reported monthly to the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Lead Member for Housing and Regeneration.</p>

<p>Recommendation 6:</p> <p>Services to ensure all those not eligible for support are still signalled to local and regional voluntary sector organisations who may be able to provide support to those facing housing emergencies.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p>This action will be taken forward as part of the Prevention and Assessment Service Development Plan.</p> <p>Progress on this action is monitored and reported monthly to the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Lead Member for Housing and Regeneration</p>
<p>Recommendation 7:</p> <p>Services continue to place high priority on reducing multiple moves by households living in TA (i.e. numerous moves from one accommodation to another), through for instance seeking to lease units which allow for longer stays, in order to minimise the stress, uncertainty and disruption this can cause to those living in TA. And where this is not possible, that services continue to look to reduce uncertainty and disruption by ensuring that the next booking is made before the current booking ends so that households in TA are given as much notice as possible.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p>Work on this recommendation is underway through a range of actions set out by the Temporary and Settled Accommodation Board, all of which focus on increasing the supply of suitable accommodation.</p> <p>The Board provides oversight, guidance and decision making which supports the successful delivery of new accommodation supply of both temporary and settled homes.</p> <p>The Board seeks to improve resident's life changes and reduce the financial burden of temporary accommodation on the General Fund budget through the creation of new supply. This is being undertaken through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of temporary accommodation supply and demand pressures including mapping anticipated supply needs and trends • A review of existing and potential temporary accommodation supply opportunities with a view to producing a short and long-term strategy for maximising supply. • The production of a strategy for effective management and review processes for the supply of temporary accommodation • A review of existing settled accommodation supply, including mapping opportunities for increasing supply through existing and new schemes, partnerships. <p>The Board has demonstrated the positive impact of adopting a whole council approach to temporary and settled accommodation supply. At present, the Board</p>

		<p>is overseeing delivery of a range of new supply initiatives including, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement of a 26-bed unit of self-contained accommodation within the borough via the council's Dynamic Procurement System, for use as temporary accommodation. • The lease of 220 units of self-contained accommodation, including 10 accessible rooms, on Lea Bridge Road for use as temporary accommodation. • The proposed lease of a large property on Langthorne Road, subject to a planning change of use being granted (rooms and configuration to be confirmed), for use as temporary accommodation. • A second Joint Venture with Mears which will provide 400 settled homes in the private rented sector to enable the council to discharge its homelessness duties.
<p>Recommendation 8:</p> <p>Services ensure that, as well as inspecting TA properties before a resident moves in, that we to the best of our ability continue to ensure that the property is inspected on a regular basis once occupied.</p>	Accept	<p>Save for commercial hotels, properties utilised by the Council as temporary accommodation are inspected prior to a resident moving in and periodically throughout their occupancy.</p>
<p>Recommendation 9:</p> <p>Services to continue to ensure that residents in TA have always have clarity from day one on who to contact if there is a problem with their accommodation, a single point of contact in the TA contract management team if they are not satisfied with the response, and that residents in TA are encouraged to report mould or damp and any other issues which could potentially affect health.</p>	Accept.	<p>Residents are currently provided with the Temporary Accommodation Contracts Team contact information should they have concerns about the condition of their temporary accommodation.</p> <p>The service will explore how best to provide a single point of contact within the team if residents are unhappy with the response they receive.</p>

<p>Recommendation 10:</p> <p>In all instances of families with babies and very young children entering TA, services to ensure as a matter of course that there is provision of safe sleeping equipment such as cots, baby mattresses, or Moses baskets.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p>Accommodation will not be suitable for a household with children under the age of 2 if there is not adequate space for a cot for each child aged under 2.</p> <p>Where households with babies and young children under 2 do not have access to a cot when placed in temporary accommodation, services will consider what support is available for the provision of a cot. This may involve services assisting the household to access a cot through direct provision or 3rd parties where needed, especially in emergency situations where a household might be homeless as a result of domestic abuse.</p>
<p>Recommendation 11:</p> <p>When families with school age children are being housed in TA, services to ensure wherever it is practicable to do so that there is basic furniture such as a table or a desk which can be used for doing homework. Policy may recognise that nearby library facilities can be a fallback when absolutely necessary.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p>Wherever possible study space / facilities will be provided. Where this is not possible, the service will explore ways in which residents can be signposted to nearby library facilities.</p>
<p>Recommendation 12:</p> <p>Where possible TA accommodation should include adequate cooking facilities for the preparation of meals.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p>Wherever possible the service will seek to procure temporary accommodation which provides residents with access to cooking facilities for the preparation of meals.</p>
<p>Recommendation 13:</p> <p>To avoid families in TA facing digital exclusion and children in TA facing further educational disadvantage, services look to move towards all TA having access to wi-fi, recognising that we provide data on devices where wi-fi is not available.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p>The service is currently scoping this recommendation, including budgetary implications.</p>

<p>Recommendation 14:</p> <p>Services and portfolio holders to lobby the Department for Transport and/or the Mayor of London to look into the feasibility of ensuring that those who are statutorily homeless have access to free bus passes and public transport in recognition of the significant additional travel costs that families in TA can face, for instance in getting to work and school.</p>	<p>Amend</p>	<p><i>Suggested amendment:</i></p> <p>Services across the council to consider ways in which residents placed in temporary accommodation can be supported to access their place of employment and / or children's school.</p> <p><i>Service response:</i></p> <p>Where households are placed into temporary accommodation, there is a legal requirement for the accommodation to be suitable and affordable. This includes the ability for residents to access their place of work and for children to attend school.</p> <p>To ensure that both temporary and settled accommodation is affordable, it is vital that residents are supported by the Council's employment service and have access to income maximisation advice.</p>
<p>Recommendation 15:</p> <p>Services to continue to find ways to incentivise private landlords to offer their properties as temporary accommodation, including through advertising schemes, provision of support services and other incentives.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p>This will be taken forward as part of a new service development plan within the Accommodation Options service.</p>
<p>Recommendation 16:</p> <p>Services and portfolio holders to encourage and support any scope for greater pan-London cooperation on temporary accommodation, with a view to increasing supply and affordability, but also with a view to reducing the instances of other boroughs placing their residents in TA in Waltham Forest, while at the same time we place residents in TA in other boroughs.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p><i>A Temporary and Settled Accommodation Board</i> has been established by the council. The Board provides oversight, guidance and decision making which supports the successful delivery of new accommodation supply of both temporary and settled homes.</p> <p>In addition, the council has confirmed its willingness to engage with pan-London work to increase the supply of temporary and settled accommodation as part of <i>Project 123</i>.</p>

<p>Recommendation 17:</p> <p>Portfolio holders to lobby Home Office to agree that when sourcing accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees they will not pay above market rates, thereby putting further upward pressure on the cost of temporary accommodation in addition to increasing scarcity of suitable temporary accommodation.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p>Engagement with the Home Office and its contractors is ongoing.</p> <p>There is some early indication that Home Office contractors are willing to engage with pan-London discussions pertaining to the future of the Inter Borough Accommodation Agreement (IBAA) which establishes the maximum rates payable for nightly let temporary accommodation as well as incentives payable for private rented sector properties.</p>
<p>Recommendation 18:</p> <p>Continue to prioritise a focus on move on through the rough sleeping pathway, encouraging and supporting a return to independent accommodation within the local community.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p>This recommendation will be subject to future funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Funding for the current rough sleeping pathway ends in March 2025 and no announcement on future funding is anticipated until November 2024.</p>
<p>Recommendation 19:</p> <p>Call on national government to invest in homelessness prevention for residents newly granted refugee status including providing appropriate notification of decisions to local authorities and extend the notice periods for eviction from asylum accommodation following a decision to 56 days.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p>In recent months there has been some improvement in the notice periods provided by contractors working on behalf of the Home Office.</p>
<p>Recommendation 20:</p> <p>Continue to prioritise and apply principles of Housing First.</p>	<p>Amend</p>	<p><i>Suggested amendment:</i></p> <p>Continue to ensure that Housing First properties are allocated in line with recognised Housing First principles - providing access to permanent housing with tailored, open-ended, wraparound support for the resident which emphasises choice and control.</p>

		<p><i>Service response:</i></p> <p>Delivery of this recommendation will be subject to future funding from MHCLG. Funding for the current rough sleeping pathway ends in March 2025 and no announcement on future funding is anticipated until November 2024.</p>
<p>Recommendation 21: Ensure that accommodation provided under SWEP is utilised as an opportunity to end rough sleeping with a clear focus on move on into the wider rough sleeping pathway.</p>	Accept	<p>This recommendation will be subject to future funding from MHCLG. Funding for the current rough sleeping pathway ends in March 2025 and no announcement on future funding is anticipated until November 2024.</p>
<p>Recommendation 22: Services should consider reviewing the Housing Allocations policy, last updated in 2021, to ensure that it is fully aligned with the new Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, and that it is fully aligned with any changes in policy and practice implemented in relation to these or the ongoing work of the Housing Transformation programme.</p>	Accept	<p>A review of the Housing Allocations Policy is scheduled for 2024/25 but will be timed to ensure suggested policy changes relating to veterans, care leavers and domestic abuse survivors can also be captured. There is a statutory requirement for consultation when the review is undertaken.</p>