

A young man with short dark hair and a light beard is smiling at the camera. He is wearing a blue t-shirt. The background is a blurred indoor setting with white pillars and a person in a red shirt in the distance.

Prevention of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-25



Havering
LONDON BOROUGH

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Foreword

To ensure Havering is able to continue looking after some of the most vulnerable people in our care, we have created this new homelessness and rough sleeping strategy. Homelessness presents itself in many different ways. Championing early intervention and increasing support for mental health and wellbeing will drive our clear and genuine aspiration to eliminate rough sleeping in Havering by 2022.

However, the Council cannot do this alone. It must work with its partners and those with experience of rough sleeping to drive change and align agendas across our public, voluntary and community sectors. We will provide strategic leadership to undertake this cross-sector challenge so that our partnership is committed to the principles identified in this strategy.

Whilst a person sleeping on the street is the most noticeable face of homelessness, many people are living in hostels or temporary accommodation provided by the Council, or 'sofa-surfers' relying on help from friends or relatives.

Addressing homelessness is particularly challenging due to a lack of good quality, affordable housing in the private rented sector, and a limited stock of social rented homes. This is particularly prevalent in London boroughs. In a bid to address this, we are undertaking one of the most ambitious council home building programmes in London, which will double our existing social housing stock, creating affordable homes for local people.

We have made great progress in helping people out of homelessness and into accommodation, but there is more to do. It is vital that we recognise the need for a broad approach to tackling homelessness, which includes understanding barriers to long-term stability and supporting people through their journey into a permanent home.

This strategy continues our commitment to improving the lives of those threatened with homelessness and provides a great opportunity to develop an effective and collaborative approach to tackling homelessness within Havering. Our strategy signals a move towards a culture where homelessness is everyone's responsibility so that all residents have a safe, stable place to live, now and in the future.

Thank you,



Councillor Joshua Chapman

Cabinet Member for Housing



Introduction

What is homelessness?

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 defines someone (a 'household', i.e. an individual, couple or family) to be homeless if they do not have accommodation that they have a legal right to occupy. This should be accessible and physically available to them, and in which it would be reasonable for them to continue to live.

People sleeping on the streets

People sleeping on the street, or 'rough-sleeping', is probably the most visible form of homelessness and also describes people who sleep outside, in disused buildings or in places that are unfit for human habitation - for example, in car parks, walkways, cars, public transport, stations, and doorways.

It is a dangerous and isolating experience, with significantly reduced life expectancy compared to the general population. People sleeping rough are almost 17 times more likely to become a victim of violence or assault, according to a report from Crisis.

Many people who have experienced sleeping on the streets for long periods may be exploited by drug suppliers, exacerbating addictions to drugs and alcohol, often leading to greater anti-social behaviour on our streets and a corresponding rise in the fear of crime for residents.

In our public consultation with people with lived experience, it was established that people who beg are often assumed to be people who are sleeping rough, which is not always the case. However, they may be just as vulnerable as people living on the streets as they may have been coerced into begging by drug suppliers to pay off outstanding debts.

Hidden homelessness

Many single, homeless people are not visibly homeless. They may live in overcrowded accommodation, in squats, or sleep on someone's floor. They may 'sofa-surf' with friends or sleep outdoors in concealed locations. If they have not approached a local housing authority for help with finding accommodation, they are unrecorded and, effectively, 'hidden', and will not have had the chance to receive housing support.

We know that hidden homelessness exists. In a recent December 2019 Crisis article, the number of hidden homeless in the UK was estimated to be around 79,000 people.



Introduction

Why do people become homeless?

The reasons why people become homeless are numerous and often the result of a combination of factors coming together.

Sometimes it can arise from personal circumstances and start as a child or young adult who has experienced trauma. For instance, a person leaving care is at greater risk of homelessness. A relationship breakdown, issues with substance abuse, or mental health issues can also result in poverty and homelessness.

People leaving care, the armed forces or prison with insufficient resettlement advice and support are at particular risk of homelessness and often struggle to sustain their tenancies.

Long-term unemployment (a particular risk at this time of economic uncertainty following COVID-19), not being in education and employment, or a lack of qualifications or in-demand skills can all lead to homelessness.

Homeless households may:

- have lost their assured shorthold tenancy (AST). There are various reasons used by landlords to issue a section 21 (eviction) notice
- have lost their home due to rent/mortgage arrears
- be living in poor conditions that affect the health and wellbeing of their household
- be living apart from their family because changed circumstances mean they do not have a place to live together.

However, every homeless person has a different journey and the key to effectively tackling homelessness for the long-term lies in intervening from the earliest possible point, and taking a personalised, holistic approach to each individual.



Introduction



Homelessness in Havering

Havering Council is proud of its record in offering assistance to homeless people within our borough. As demand for housing in the borough has outstripped growth in our housing stock, we have worked in partnership with housing associations and within the private sector to find housing solutions. Although this has provided much needed housing, the number of properties is insufficient to meet current and projected housing demand.

Private Sector Leasing (PSL) has been our major source of temporary accommodation (TA) for many years, with approximately 800 properties sourced in this way. Over 70% are from property owners who supply one or two properties. Although this demonstrates the commitment of the Havering community to supporting households experiencing homelessness, TA costs have risen by over 50% in the past four years, making temporary accommodation an expensive and ineffective long-term solution.

The difficulty of acquiring secure, long-term affordable housing is a fundamental cause of homelessness, and remains a significant barrier to reducing the wider problem.

Our 2020 – 25 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy builds on our shared, collective experience gained internally and through collaborative work alongside local partners. It sets out how we will work closely with these partners to both prevent and resolve the problems faced by households at risk of homelessness, and the long-term, sustainable and affordable solutions we will develop to meet these challenges.

This strategy also sets out actions we are taking to end long-term rough sleeping, and the solutions we will put in place to provide residents with early advice and intervention to avoid the destructive consequences of homelessness.

This strategy marks Havering Council's continuing commitment to improving the life opportunities for households threatened with homelessness and the most vulnerable residents in our borough.

The strategy has now become more challenging to deliver due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the risks of a resulting rise in homelessness. However, developing the strategy during the initial stages of the pandemic has allowed us to incorporate current guidelines and protocols into our action plan to ensure that the safety of our staff, partners and residents is maximised whilst maintaining the quality and promptness of support offered.

This is Havering Council's plan to tackle homelessness, and end long-term rough sleeping.



Objectives

1. End long-term rough sleeping
2. Reducing the number of people in temporary accommodation
3. Supporting people who become homeless
4. Provide good value, integrated services that deliver excellent customer care

Objective 1



1. End long-term rough sleeping

The Government has committed to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminating it altogether by 2024.

Havering has a relatively low number of rough sleepers compared with many other London authorities, and we are committed to supporting each person off of the streets into secure accommodation.

The Homeless Reduction Act (HRA) 2017 highlights a clear, increased emphasis on early intervention and prevention of homelessness, mirroring the three key themes of **prevention, intervention and recovery** identified within the national Rough Sleeping Strategy. These ideals form the basis of our own ambitions for this strategy.

Integrated, early intervention outreach teams have been created to work with partners in mental health services, the NHS, and discharge teams. We are fully supporting a holistic approach to preventing, intervening and supporting the recovery of homeless people. Considering the emotional and psychological needs of the individuals under our care, we will develop resilient relationships and provide tailored support to keep them off the streets.

Despite the prevention and relief duties introduced in the HRA 2017, single people remain at particular risk of homelessness due to the limited number of affordable options available to them. Our supply of supported accommodation for single residents with additional needs is strong, but residents sometimes struggle to move on into their own home.

Objective 2

2. Reducing the number of people in temporary accommodation

Simply placing families and households into temporary and emergency accommodation does not provide a suitable, long-term solution for communities.

Where we have used temporary accommodation, extensive work has been undertaken to ensure that it provides a safe and comfortable environment that supports the emotional and psychological needs of those using it.

We are proud to have been one of the few local authorities not to use high-cost and low-quality bed and breakfast hotels and nightly charged temporary accommodation as part of our approach to tackle the national shortage in housing supply.

We have also seen significant progress with the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act, which has supported over one thousand households each year in Havering to live independently in the private sector through our Find Your Own (FYO) Scheme.



Objective 3



3. Supporting people who become homeless

Whilst the main goal is to prevent homelessness, there is sometimes a need to provide temporary accommodation to residents who have become homeless. For Havering, this means ensuring that temporary accommodation is more sustainable and better value for money, and provides residents with a foundation to move towards long-term, permanent accommodation.

It is our vision to deliver a Housing-Led service to ensure we make the right accommodation available with suitable support very early on in the process.

Secure housing is seen as the first necessary step, not a final reward, and a foundation from which other issues can be addressed.

We want for our residents to have access to suitable, affordable accommodation. As well as increasing the supply of new affordable homes in the borough, we will protect existing social housing and focus on bringing the small number of empty homes we have back into use.

We will also work with Mercury Land Holdings (MLH), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Havering Council, to purchase properties for a 5-year tenure, giving us high-quality and good value temporary accommodation as we work to reduce homelessness.

Objective 4

4. Provide good value, integrated services that deliver excellent customer care

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 came into force in April 2018. This represents a major change in how we work to prevent and relieve homelessness and shifts the focus toward a cohesive, multi-agency response.

We want to ensure our most vulnerable residents get the help they need at the optimal time, avoiding the need for costly and complex interventions that have a more disruptive effect at a later stage.

We will develop new relationships with our community, and work together to help them play a part in addressing local homelessness, making sure everyone knows about the support and services we offer.

As part of the Homelessness Charter being developed with the third sector to bring together hardworking organisations, charities and individuals dedicated to supporting people who experience homelessness, we will look to share skills and resources to tackle priority issues in Havering such as entrenched rough sleeping, on-street begging and mental health engagement. This Charter will be used where possible to seek and secure external funding opportunities.

Along with our partner organisations, our relationship with those who are homeless needs to evolve to ensure we are finding lasting solutions to help prevent the devastating effect of homelessness. We will continue to nurture and grow our relationships with housing providers, third sector partners and statutory bodies to better integrate the help we provide and develop an evidence base to share best practice and ensure consistency across the sector.

We will develop new protocols in partnership with the NHS and other Council teams to ensure that support is integrated, delivered when required and nobody falls through any cracks between our services, with a particular focus on groups most vulnerable to homelessness. These groups include those discharged from hospitals, residents who misuse drugs and alcohol, and released prisoners.

Our vision is to remove the institutional burden of repeat evictions and support the principle that accommodation for our most vulnerable residents is unconditional.



A photograph of a person sleeping on a sidewalk, huddled in a ball. They are wearing a dark jacket and a bucket hat. A white disposable cup sits on the ground next to their feet. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue band containing white text.

Challenges

Risks and Potential Solutions

Challenges – Risks and Potential Solutions

Housing availability

Since the early 1980s, house building has been sustained almost exclusively by private sector companies and housing associations. Development within the borough has slowed down, with housing stock calculated to have grown by just 6.1% over the last 10 years, a rate insufficient to meet current and projected housing demand.

In addition, the supply of housing is likely to slow further following the downturn in the housing market after Covid-19.

To counteract this, Havering Council has recently embarked on an ambitious regeneration scheme, part of which will see the complete redevelopment of 12 Council estates across the borough. The scheme will deliver around 3,500 new homes in the next 12 to 15 years.

The £1bn scheme is delivered through a joint venture with national developer, Wates Residential, and will seek to double the amount of council rented accommodation and more than double the number of affordable properties.

As part of the project, Havering Council has developed a social value initiative, which is committed to ensuring the regeneration scheme creates a lasting legacy by investing in education, training and skills opportunities, and employing local businesses to work on the scheme. This is valued at £100m of contracts, ensuring money flows back into the local area.

The regeneration scheme has created a short-term rise in demand for our housing stock as a result of the need to house existing tenants that are temporarily displaced by the programme.



Challenges – Risks and Potential Solutions

Unaffordable rents

For residents in receipt of benefit, rises in local property prices have significantly reduced the number of properties within affordable reach.

We know that the inability to afford, or sustain, an assured shorthold tenancy (AST) in the private rented sector is a key cause of homelessness. This is not just an issue for people receiving benefits, but also for many in low-paid employment.

Though average market rents in Havering have slightly reduced, there remains a sizable gap between average market rent levels for different bedroom sizes in the private sector and the level of rent that housing benefit will cover. The change to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate to the lowest 30th percentile due to COVID-19 will enable many more households to afford private sector accommodation, however, the details and the duration of this change is still not known, potentially giving a temporary and unrealistic sense of affordability.

Gap between local housing allowance and lowest percentile of market rents

from internal data and Zoopla.

2019	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed
Average monthly rent	£874	£1,111	£1,338	£1,716
Housing Benefit entitlement	£694	£858	£1,082	£1,396
GAP individuals and families need to find each month (average monthly rent – housing benefit entitlement)	£180	£253	£256	£320
Percentage gaps	20%	22%	19%	19%
2020	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed
Average monthly rent	£896	£1,189	£1,377	£1,802
Housing Benefit entitlement	£694	£858	£1,082	£1,396
GAP individuals and families need to find each month (average monthly rent – housing benefit entitlement)	£180	£253	£256	£320
Percentage gaps	20%	22%	19%	19%
2020 post COVID-19 16 March 2020	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed
Average monthly rent	£896	£1,189	£1,377	£1,802
Housing Benefit entitlement	£898	£1,147	£1,371	£1,725
GAP individuals and families need to find each month (average monthly rent – housing benefit entitlement)	+£2	-£42	-£6	-£77
Percentage gaps	0	1%	1%	1%

Taken across the London region, the disparity between monthly rent levels and housing benefit entitlement was greater, resulting in unprecedented affordability issues for inner London authorities. However, the uplift in LHA rates during the COVID-19 period has significantly reduced this deficit in line with the current market rents. This makes Havering more attractive to other boroughs as an option to house residents, as it has become a more affordable rental area compared to their own boroughs, and provides an unrealistic view of affordability long-term when the LHA returns to its previous position.

Challenges – Risks and Potential Solutions

Impact of COVID-19 on government spending plans

Nationally, over 1.5 million households have applied for Universal Credit since the 16 March 2020. For those in receipt of work-related benefits, an additional 250,000 job seekers allowance claims have been made.

Government has raised the Local Housing Allowance rates to the 30th percentile of market rents, which has improved affordability.

Despite these efforts, COVID-19 has had a tremendous effect on livelihoods of all in our society. Businesses have resorted to furloughing their staff on 80% wages paid by

the Government, while their premises remain closed.

The self-employed, who have been included in the Government relief package, will also face uncertainty over the plans for how the economy is allowed to restart. Whilst it is too early to assess the long-term impact, we expect the resurfacing of mortgage repossessions for the remainder of 2020, as well as the processing of all private rented possession orders that created a backlog of casework when the courts suspended all landlord notices.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic came with a whole host of ongoing challenges, including the need to balance preventing the risk of transmission by practising social distancing and hygiene protocols, whilst ensuring we are able to engage, interact and build relationships with people who have become homeless during this time.

The Government has provided guidance to people and groups helping those sleeping on the streets, in night shelters and hostels to access accommodation and to keep them and others safe during the pandemic. Information has been given to local authority staff to assess clinical risk and follow instruction from NHS professionals either in-person or remotely.

The Government identifies three groups to consider and recommends a simple approach to triaging, assessing and accommodating people:

1. The symptomatic group would include anyone with a new persistent dry cough and fever/temperature over 37.8 degrees Celsius. This group should be placed in COVID-CARE sites
2. The asymptomatic high clinical risk group would include people who are eligible for the flu vaccination, and those who are extremely vulnerable. This group should be placed in COVID-PROTECT sites
3. The asymptomatic and low-risk group would include people not included in either of the groups above. This group should continue to use current service provisions or be placed in accommodation to meet current guidance on self-isolation.

Existing risk-management protocols for accommodation for specific client groups (for example, people with substance dependency, mental health issues, a history of violent behaviour, and women) is currently being used.

To tackle this greater challenge, all partners need to work together in a coordinated and strategic way including:

- Local Authorities – to lead on securing funding for accommodation, commissioned drug and alcohol treatment services, social care and support
- NHS – commissioning and provision of primary care, community services, urgent and emergency care, hospital discharge and mental health services
- Voluntary Sector – providing shelters, hostels, outreach support and food banks.

The multi-agency response should be organised and coordinated through local emergency response arrangements, specifically with:

- Local Resilience Forums to support those in our communities who are at the highest risk of severe illness

Challenges – Risks and Potential Solutions

- NHS priority - leadership for people in COVID-Care (symptomatic) and COVID-Protect (asymptomatic, high clinical risk) using the COVID-19 emergency response structures
- Local Government priority - leadership for people in the asymptomatic and low-risk group.

One of the biggest daily challenges is the need to balance our safeguarding responsibilities with the need to protect families and workers by minimising the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and to ensure that we prioritise support for the most vulnerable, including undertaking necessary visits and contacts, whilst taking appropriate infection control measures. Staff across all teams must agree a coordinated plan for the effective distribution of appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) following updated Havering risk assessment protocols.

Outreach staff do not routinely need PPE unless they are in close contact with symptomatic or confirmed cases of COVID-19, in which case surgical masks, gloves, aprons, and goggles/visors are recommended.

Future funding

On 23 December 2019, the Government announced an injection of £263 million homelessness funding citing that: “It cannot be right in the 21st century that people are homeless or having to sleep on our streets, and this Government will work tirelessly to bring this to an end.”

The first £200 million will come from the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant that replaced the Temporary Accommodation Management Fee in 2017, and the remaining £63 million will be delivered to local authorities through the Homelessness Reduction Grant.

Working with local landlords

The Government announced a further delay in February 2020 to the full rollout of Universal Credit pushing this back to the end of 2024.

Lettings agents and private landlords remain reluctant to enter into new AST arrangements with benefit-dependent tenants without a rent guarantor or credit checks being carried out, however, will rent the same properties as temporary accommodation on a nightly basis, given that the greater rent premium covers the risks of damage and non-payment of rent.

This has created competition in the market place with landlords and agents offering their properties to the highest local authority bidder willing to pay incentives. As market rents remain up to 25% above the local housing allowance, it is still far more attractive to offer tenancies to private tenants.





Action Plan

1. End long-term rough sleeping
2. Reducing the number of people in temporary accommodation
3. Supporting people who become homeless
4. Provide good value, integrated services that deliver excellent customer care

Action Plan – Objective 1

1. End long-term rough sleeping

We will achieve this by:

Coordinating services for rough sleepers	• Provide an integrated outreach team to engage and build relationships with rough sleepers with mental health and psychological support needs
	• Provide safe environments supporting the emotional and psychological needs of the individuals using them
	• Provide healthcare and pathway navigators to plan appropriate services
	• Work with NHS to improve the hospital discharge process
	• Empower staff to build effective relationships with rough sleepers
Developing specialised support and housing solutions	• Develop a long-term housing solution for Havering's long-term rough sleepers as part of the COVID-19 restart and recovery plans
	• Develop a flexible tenure scheme to allow housing flexibility those who are at risk of homelessness
	• Enhance our cold weather provision
	• Commission supported housing for rough sleepers who have mental health and substance misuse issues
Bringing together all community support	• Promote volunteering and support schemes
	• Discourage begging through CPN and alternative donation schemes
	• Support EU nationals to obtain settled status
	• Develop a homeless charter for local businesses



Action Plan – Objective 2

2. Reducing the number of people in temporary accommodation

We will achieve this by:

Reviewing the Housing Allocation Scheme to ensure that it supports the prevention of homelessness	• Utilise under-occupations to free up family size properties
	• Developing an enhanced tenant incentive scheme to support tenants who may be under-occupying their property to move
	• Incentivise households to remain in private sector accommodation
Providing clear pathways into affordable housing, council properties or supported housing	• Offer long-term, sustainable alternatives to those in temporary accommodation
	• Provide housing, training flats and second chances for care leavers
	• Offer pre-tenancy training for tenants, both face-to-face and online
Improving relations with landlords	• Work with landlords to ensure more high-quality homes are available to rent
	• Improve energy efficiency and reduce costs for tenants
	• Develop a landlords' forum to improve the quality of housing management in the private sector and reduce evictions
Improving homelessness prevention by:	• Work with schools to identify families at risk of homelessness and educate teenagers about their housing options
	• Provide free Wi-Fi in temporary accommodation
	• Enhance the "Find Your Own" scheme
	• Develop Tenancy forums to develop support networks and inform those in temporary accommodation of relevant changes to legislation
	• Support prevention through outreach with health services, community hubs and landlord liaison services
	• Develop an evictions protocol with social landlords and offer early financial assistance
Building and buying more affordable housing	• Develop more affordable build-to-rent homes to support our temporary and permanent accommodation provision as part of our country-leading regeneration programme
	• Make sure we are getting our full allocation of nominations from Housing Associations, and more, to maximise the number of homes available to residents
	• Lobby for changes to LHA rates and a level playing field between private sector and TA subsidy
	• Negotiate better and earlier on S106 affordable housing agreements

Action Plan – Objective 3

3. Supporting people who become homeless

We will achieve this by:

Developing & providing specialist supported housing options.	• Build a high-quality new welcome and assessment centre for families, whilst phasing out our existing hostel provision
	• Provide on-site, specialist support & suitable accommodation to meet all needs
	• Work with hospital discharge teams to help people move into appropriate accommodation
Improving the quality of existing temporary accommodation	• Support Children and Adults services to provide higher quality and better value accommodation for some of the most vulnerable in society
Increasing the supply of quality accommodation	• Develop a sophisticated and nuanced supply and demand model to better predict and provide appropriate temporary accommodation where necessary
	• Procure accommodation of a higher quality and value standard to meet variations in need



Action Plan – Objective 4

4. Provide good value, integrated services that deliver excellent customer care

We will achieve this by:

Intelligent business practices and better coordinated working with partners	• Enhance the protocols for joint working with colleagues in children's services, adult social care, mental health, and the learning disabilities services
	• Utilise a comprehensive 360-degree customer feedback process to develop services for people with lived experience of homelessness
	• Implement systems that support intelligence-led practices to help us to know what is happening across Havering
	• Enable enhanced system functionality to support online access and case monitoring
Ensuring we have well-trained, knowledgeable housing staff building valuable relationships with rough sleepers	• Staff provide trauma-informed care using motivational interviewing techniques and strength-based approaches
	• Staff should be curious, compassionate, creative and constructive in providing solutions
	• Propose our duty to refer scheme to ensure people get an effective response
Ensuring we fully receive and utilise income streams	• Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG), and better care funds to prevent homelessness
	• Ensure that we collect all income due in temporary accommodation
	• Review recharges to tenants and landlords post property inspection.
	• Review the standard lease agreement to make it fit for the future
Providing high-quality properties	• Drive up the standard and quality of private sector leased homes
	• Develop incentives for residents who care for their property
	• Enhance the management of maintenance contractors to improve their performance
	• Fully utilise income streams such as the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and better care funds to improve the standard of properties