



Housing Select Committee

Report title: The Impact of COVID-19 on Housing

Date: 15 September 2020

Key decision: No

Class: Part 1

Ward(s) affected: All

Contributors:

Director for Housing Services, Director of Regeneration and Place, Director of Law

Outline and recommendations

The purpose of this report is to provide and update to Housing Select Committee about Housing Services response to COVID-19. The report provides a summary of the housing service response since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Housing Select Committee is recommended to:

- Provide comments on the content of this report, with a particular focus on the potential future impacts of COVID-19 on Housing Services.

Timeline of engagement and decision-making

N/A

1. Summary

- 1.1. This purpose of this report is to provide an update for Housing Select Committee on Housing Services' response to COVID-19. The report provides a summary of the response since the start of the pandemic, and provides detail of the ongoing implications of COVID for Housing Services.
- 1.2. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 meant that Housing Services – along with the rest of the Council - had to adapt in extraordinary ways. Since March 2020 the workplace, and context in which officers have been working have shifted.
- 1.3. The pandemic has created new challenges for the service to overcome, and there remains significant uncertainty about the potential long-term impact of COVID-19.
- 1.4. Housing services adapted quickly and effectively following the outbreak of COVID-19. Housing advice services quickly moved from face to face to remote, and all staff were instructed to work from home where possible.
- 1.5. New housing solutions were rapidly procured in partnership with the Greater London Authority in response to the rough sleeper need. Our allocations policy that determines who moves into social housing was suspended and an emergency policy implemented so that the service could prioritise those most vulnerable into safe accommodation. The rogue landlord team worked to ensure that evictions were stopped. Other processes and procedures were quickly adapted to address the effects of the pandemic.
- 1.6. New and improved partnerships have come about from the pandemic, particularly with NHS and public health partners. For example, the formation of a new strategic group with NHS, Public Health and community peers has allowed for the emerging homelessness and rough sleeping strategy to be formed with a strong multi-disciplinary angle.
- 1.7. The overall cost to the Council in 2020/21 is estimated at £60m and rising. The full year cost of COVID-19 to Housing Services alone is almost £2.2m.
- 1.8. The service continues to shape and deliver around the changing requirements of the pandemic. However, although the service has proven its ability to adapt quickly and effectively, it faces unprecedented challenges in the near and far future.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. Housing Select Committee is recommended to comment on the content of this report,

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with a particular focus on the potential future impacts of COVID-19 on Housing Services.

3. Policy Context

- 3.1. The contents of this report are consistent with the Council's policy framework. It supports the achievements of the Corporate Strategy objectives:
- 3.1.1. Tackling the housing crisis – Everyone has a decent home that is secure and affordable
- 3.1.2. Giving children and young people the best start in life - Every child has access to an outstanding and inspiring education and is given the support they need to keep them safe, well and able to achieve their full potential.
- 3.1.3. Delivering and defending: health, social care and support - Ensuring everyone receives the health, mental health, social care and support services they need. The pandemic has brought this to the forefront of much of our work due to new enhanced partnerships with Public Health and other health colleagues. Service delivery through the COVID-19 prism must prioritise the health and wellbeing of our service users.

4. Background

Housing Services in Lewisham

- 4.1. The key purpose of Housing Services is to work towards for a Lewisham where everyone has a safe, secure and genuinely affordable home. The direction of the service is set out in our Housing strategy 2020-2026 and our Homeless and Rough Sleeping strategy 2020-2022, both of which are due to be adopted following Mayor and Cabinet approval in November 2020. Both strategies are being brought to this Housing Select Committee meeting (15 September 2020) for the Committee's review.
- 4.2. Housing Services undertake a wide range of statutory and non-statutory duties and activities, including:
 - homelessness advice, prevention and assistance
 - procurement of properties to help homelessness prevention and relief
 - provision and management of social housing
 - addressing safety standards in the private rented sector and cracking down on rogue landlords
 - The licencing of properties in the private rented sector
 - supporting people to remain in their homes where possible through grants and loans
 - assisting those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) who are destitute and otherwise meet the requirements of section 17 of the Children's Act
 - supporting refugees resettled as part of the council's Sanctuary programme.
- 4.3. These duties are carried out in an increasingly challenging environment. There are not enough genuinely affordable homes for those who need them. In addition to the challenges already faced by housing services as a result of the housing crisis the service is currently faced with additional ongoing challenges related to COVID-19. These include: the continued closed of night shelters for rough sleepers; the ending of the suspension of evictions from the PRS which we anticipate will result in an increase in homelessness approaches; and the impact on service delivery of a potential second wave of COVID-19.

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Timeline of the COVID-19 Pandemic

- 4.4. In early 2020 news reports on the 'coronavirus' (now referred to as COVID-19) began to increase. By 13 February 2020 the first case in London had been reported. On 3 March 2020, the Government launched an action plan to address the spread of the virus, and work was already underway in Lewisham to prepare the council's response.
- 4.5. On the 16th March the Prime Minister advised everyone in the UK against non-essential travel, and advised citizens to work from home if possible.
- 4.6. On the 18th March the government announced emergency legislation to bring in a ban on new evictions for three months, as part of measures to help protect renters in social and private rented accommodation.
- 4.7. On the 20th March, the government announced the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, a three-month furlough scheme designed to keep people in employment.
- 4.8. On the 23rd March, strict new rules on movement were announced – commencing what is now referred to as 'lockdown'.
- 4.9. On the 25th March, the Coronavirus Act 2020 was introduced. This was an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom that granted the government emergency powers to handle the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 4.10. On the 5th June, the government's ban on tenants evictions was extended by two months to 23rd August
- 4.11. By the 13th July, lockdown measures had been eased to the state at which they are at the point of publishing this report.
- 4.12. On the 21st August, the ban on landlords evicting tenants was extended to the 20th September. Furthermore, until the end of March 2021, renters will also need to be given six months' notice if their landlord plans to evict them (this is not applicable for notices in relation to anti-social behaviour and domestic violence)

5. Lewisham Council's response to COVID-19

- 5.1. Lewisham's Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel (OSBP) agreed that all formal scrutiny activity be channelled through the Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel, which was received a standing item at each meeting to provide members and the public with a high-level strategic overview and assurance about the Council's response to COVID-19.
- 5.2. The OSBP reports are available for reference at the links below. These reports provided updates on the status of critical services in the context of COVID-19.
 - [August OSBP report](#)
 - [July OSBP report](#)
 - [June OSBP report](#)
 - [May OSBP report](#)
- 5.3. On 11 March, the Council activated emergency measures to respond to COVID-19. Council Gold and a borough-wide COVID Committee Groups were established, both working to a shared strategy and objectives:

Strategy:

- "We will work together with our partner agencies to respond to and recover from COVID-19 for our communities, businesses and staff."

Objectives:

- To provide support to the vulnerable

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- To manage resourcing to meet the needs of emergency and maintain essential public services
- To provide support to our responding partner agencies who are protecting and preserving life
- To provide support to Lewisham businesses and communities
- To inform and reassure through communication and engagement
- To provide community leadership/reassurance
- To minimize disruption to infrastructure and business
- To facilitate recovery and the return to normality

5.4. On 23 March, following the government's announcement introducing stringent measures to prevent further spread of the COVID-19 in the UK, staff were instructed to work from home unless they could not fulfil their normal or critical response work.

6. Housing Services' immediate response to COVID-19

- 6.1. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic - just prior to 'lockdown' - a number of immediate actions were taken in response. Non-essential work immediately stopped, including new licencing activity and housing strategy and policy work. Staff in these teams were quickly directed towards critical housing work.
- 6.2. Housing face-to-face services, including the emergency housing and advice service, moved to a solely remote provision (phone and online). Officers in the housing options service and call centre service rapidly set up new processes to facilitate remote provision.
- 6.3. Officers in the rogue landlord team put in place an emergency process, whereby all complaints were treated as serious and urgent due to the potential health risks. The licensing team set up remote processes to ensure landlords undertook emergency repairs in private rented sector properties.
- 6.4. In line with the corporate direction, housing service staff immediately moved to working from home unless they could not fulfil their critical response work. Having recently been part of the ICT device rollout, the majority of staff were able to quickly transition to working from home arrangements.
- 6.5. A small number of non-critical staff in Housing Services were rapidly redeployed to support critical services, to support the Incident Response Team and to operate the Council's newly established COVID-19 help line.
- 6.6. Early on a set of critical services were identified as part of a pan-London agreed position. These were the focus of maintaining delivery above all other services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Critical housing services were defined as emergency housing provision, emergency repairs and critical housing safety.
- 6.7. Updates relating to critical housing services in the context of COVID-19 have been detailed in the OSBP reports highlighted at 5.2 of this report, and are summarised in this report.

7. Housing Services' response to COVID-19 – emergency housing provision

- 7.1. There have been significant changes in emergency housing activity and provision as a result of COVID-19. As a result of the suspension of evictions from the rented sectors, numbers of homelessness approaches from families has declined compared to pre-COVID-19, whilst approaches from individuals and rough sleepers have significantly increased.
- 7.2. Single homelessness and rough sleeping has been where most activity has focused

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since March, although officers anticipate this may change when the suspension of the eviction ban is lifted.

7.3. **Rough Sleepers**

- 7.4. Extensive work has been done to support rough sleepers who were at particular risk as a result of COVID-19. Housing have worked closely with health and public health colleagues to ensure that our approach is aligned.
- 7.5. On the 26th March the government issued a clear instruction to local authorities that everyone who was sleeping rough or in accommodation with shared sleeping spaces must be urgently supported into safe housing. This intervention was known as the 'everyone in' initiative. It meant that individuals who previously would not have been eligible for offers of accommodation were supported rapidly into temporary housing.
- 7.6. Night Shelter provision at 999 Club and Deptford Reach were immediately closed due to the public health risk posed by shared sleeping spaces. Those currently residing at the night shelter provision were rehoused into temporary accommodation. Lewisham worked closely with the CCG and Public Health teams to establish self-contained isolation units on a 24 hour supported housing site, to ensure that any residents with COVID-19 symptoms or who had tested positive could self-isolate in line with public health guidance.
- 7.7. Rapid procurement of temporary accommodation took place, including a property in Sidcup to house up to 35 people. These units were secured until the end of August and officers have already resettled the majority of these residents into longer term homes.
- 7.8. 'Everyone In' has provided a unique opportunity to undertake needs assessments and work with individuals whilst they are supported with their housing. The service is committed to working with individuals to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to move into secure housing, and has access to longer-term support. The rough sleeping team performed incredible work in procuring suitable accommodation in response to "Everyone In" and must be commended for their tenacity and hard work.
- 7.9. Officers working with rough sleepers have worked tirelessly to support and where possible re-house rough sleepers into longer term accommodation. As at September 3rd 2020 Housing services had supported 247 rough sleepers since March. Of these, 107 rough sleepers had been supported into longer term accommodation. There are 91 rough sleepers still in temporary accommodation provided by Lewisham. There remain a minority of rough sleepers that are resistant to engage with both Outreach and LBL Services.
- 7.10. Officers are investigating more sustainable options for accommodating rough sleepers to the end of 2021. This will need to be self-contained as far as possible, and will involve repurposing resources initially assigned to night shelter provision. A recent acquisition of a building in Lewisham Central ward – Morton House - will support achieving this aim.
- 7.11. With agreement across London, the "Everyone In" approach ended on the 4 July 2020. This was coordinated at a London level to avoid any adverse impact on any individual authority that took a different approach. Following this date rough sleepers accessed Lewisham's services via StreetLink referrals to the pan-London street rescue service, as well as via referrals from partners across the community.
- 7.12. The economic impact of COVID-19 is increasing the numbers of rough sleepers. In the month leading up to 18 August the service saw 78 new Street Link referrals, 23 newly verified rough sleepers and 45 bedded down contacts in the borough. The needs of the rough sleeping cohort are extremely diverse and include:
- people rough sleeping because they had a lack of social safety nets
 - extremely complex and long standing rough sleepers with multiple

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substance use, mental health, behavioural, social and immigration issues.

- 7.13. On 1 July 2020 the Government updated the statutory Homelessness Code of Guidance to reflect the impact on COVID-19 on rough sleepers, and who should be considered to be in priority need. The new paragraph states that applicants who have been identified by their GP or a specialist as clinically extremely vulnerable are likely to be assessed as having priority need. This means that rough sleepers at most risk of COVID-19 are supported into accommodation and have priority need.
- 7.14. **Homeless households with no recourse to public funds**
- 7.15. Fifty rough sleepers that have been supported have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) or are ineligible to claim mainstream benefits or housing assistance. With a lack of clear guidance in relation to the legal basis for providing ongoing accommodation and subsistence to those with irregular immigration status, officers sought legal advice which concluded that Lewisham cannot lawfully commit to provide ongoing shelter and support to all those with NRPF experiencing or at risk of homelessness during and after the pandemic.
- 7.16. Officers continue to work to regularise these individuals' immigration statuses, e.g. where possible assisting people to apply for settled status, and using the National Referral Mechanism to ensure they are provided with adequate protection and support.
- 7.17. Families supported by our No Recourse to Public Funds have remained relatively stable, we currently; however 50% of the new approaches were households whose employment had been negatively impacted by COVID-19.
- 7.18. **Homeless families**
- 7.19. On 18 March the government announced emergency legislation to suspend new evictions from social or private rented accommodation. This meant that landlords were not be able to start proceedings to evict tenants for at least a 3 month period. This has now been extended to the 20th September 2020.
- 7.20. Between April and June there was an almost 50% decrease in the number of families accessing the service.
- 7.21. There was a strong shift in the reason for family approaches during this time, likely a consequence of the suspension of evictions. Between April and June 2020, 29 families approached as homeless due to the ending of a private rented sector tenancy, predominantly due to receiving a section 21 notice. This compares to 82 approaches between April and June of 2019.
- 7.22. The number of families that approached having been asked to leave by their family or friends remained consistent. 83 families approached as a consequence of this between April and June 2020 and 84 families approached between April and June 2019.
- 7.23. Nineteen families have approached the service between April and August 2020 and have been threatened with or become homeless as a result of the impact of the pandemic.
- 7.24. The number of those in temporary accommodation (TA) as at 7 August was 2,494, up from 2,383 at 27 March. 93 of these are rough sleepers housed as part of the emergency response. There are 35 clients who remain in TA despite no duty being owed to them, due to the suspension on evictions.
- 7.25. Over the period of lockdown, Housing Services were able to move all homeless families out of shared nightly paid accommodation and continue to ensure no families are placed into shared nightly paid accommodation.

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7.26. Social housing allocation

- 7.27. On 30 March 2020 Choice Based Lettings of social housing was temporarily suspended, in line with government advice regarding the letting of homes during the lockdown period.
- 7.28. An emergency letting policy was established which ensured that available social housing was directly matched to emergency and urgent lets along recommended Government guidelines. This ensured that the most vulnerable residents and those who were clinically vulnerable to COVID-19 in unsuitable housing were found permanent accommodation as a priority.
- 7.29. During the suspension of Choice Based Lettings, 97 matches to permanent homes, and 32 homeless households with health conditions that made them clinically vulnerable to COVID-19 were moved into self-contained accommodation.
- 7.30. In response to an expectation of an increase in reports of domestic violence, permanent housing offers were made to residents of Lewisham Refuge in order to free up capacity in the refuge for women who needed it as a result of the pandemic.
- 7.31. Due to the exceptional circumstances, if a homeless household who was residing in shared accommodation refused an offer of self-contained accommodation, we did not discharge our housing duty.
- 7.32. The service resumed the normal Choice Based Lettings process on 4 July 2020 and residents are once again able to bid for homes.

8. Housing Services' response to COVID-19 – emergency repairs and critical housing safety

- 8.1. At the start of the pandemic officers made contact with all large and small registered social landlords (RSL) in the borough to establish a line of communication, and request assurance from the organisations about their ability to manage in the crisis. Weekly updates were received from our larger registered provider's partners, covering repairs, health and safety, lettings, voids and development. Regular weekly meetings between the organisations that manage our council homes - Lewisham Homes and Regenter B3 (RB3) - were established.
- 8.2. In early April 2020 Lewisham Homes, RB3 and other RSLs in Lewisham stopped all but emergency and essential repairs.
- 8.3. During the peak of the pandemic, Lewisham Homes and RB3 were carrying out all emergency repairs in time and as per pre-COVID-19. Some issues were experienced with residents refusing access to properties to carry out gas safety checks, meaning that a small percentage of properties were non-compliant during the peak of the pandemic. This was closely monitored and resolved once access powers were reinstated.
- 8.4. Housing services remained in regular contact with all RSLs to ensure that emergency repairs and critical safety works were continuing, and that residents were being supported through the pandemic. There were no major issues flagged to us regarding the response to COVID-19 by landlords, or their ability to undertake emergency repairs and critical building safety works. Registered providers demonstrated a resilience and rapid response to the pandemic.
- 8.5. Data from Lewisham Homes in July suggested that rent collection decreased by 4% over the peak of the pandemic. Housing Services will continue to work with providers to ensure that tenants facing financial difficulties as a result of the pandemic are supported to remain in their homes.
- 8.6. Lewisham Homes, RB3 and other RSLs have now reinstated their usual business

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processes including routine repairs, with additional COVID-19 secure measures in place.

9. Housing Services' response to COVID-19 – private sector housing

9.1. Preventing illegal evictions

9.2. The ban on evictions guaranteed safety from eviction for most renters and has been extended to 20 September 2020. Despite this, there remained threats of eviction to residents- either where they did not hold an assured shorthold tenancy. Officers in our rogue landlord team continued to work with these households, treating every complaint as urgent. Where the resident was not protected by the suspension of evictions (eg lodgers) the team worked to mediate between landlords and tenants, and supporting tenants to remain in their current tenancy through discussion with the landlord.

9.3. Between the 6 April 2020 and the 15 July 2020, the team prevented 91 illegal evictions from taking place – enabling the tenant to remain in their property. A further 18 illegal evictions have resulted in the tenant being evicted and the council will be taking further action in these instances.

9.4. Procurement of accommodation in the PRS and for TA

9.5. The procurement team continued to source and let properties in the private rented sector. Between April and June 101 properties were secured and safely let to households that were homeless or threatened with homelessness. The rate of procurement this financial year has substantially increased when compared to the same period in 2019.

9.6. These properties gave those households secure, affordable accommodation, providing a route out of temporary accommodation for some and preventing others from having to be placed in temporary accommodation at all.

9.7. The team also completed on the acquisition of Morton House which will provide at least 27 homes for those in need of temporary accommodation. They also leased an additional 64 homes for use as temporary accommodation.

9.8. As evictions recommence in September the PSHA will be focused on working with Housing Needs to ensure that they are legal, and working to keep residents in their homes where they are not.

9.9. Licensing of private rented homes and grants for adaptations

9.10. Licensing teams continued to address safety concerns for residents in the private rented sector, ensuring that landlords continued to undertake emergency repairs. Inspections were carried out using video technology.

9.11. The government published advice suggesting that new licensing schemes in development should be paused. This has delayed the service's implementation of a borough-wide licensing scheme and this will continue to be reviewed.

9.12. The grants team continued to work closely with partners to ensure that those in need received the adaptations they need, whilst also following guidelines closely. Between April and June, four adaptations were completed under the mandatory disabled facilities grants scheme, and a further 14 adaptations were completed where the council either provided a discretionary grant or a loan.

10. Housing Services' response to COVID-19 – development

10.1. The development and construction sector has been directly impacted by COVID-19. This has impacted locally on both the direct delivery housing development being led by

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Lewisham Homes on behalf of the Council and also housing development activity being led by the Council's Registered Provider partners within the borough.

10.2. Developments at construction stage

- 10.3. For those schemes under construction there was a temporary pause of activity following the 'lockdown' announcement on the 23rd March 2020. Developers (including Registered Providers) and contractors had to quickly consider, plan and adapt to follow the guidelines issued by the government and supplemented by the Construction Leadership Council. This pause has impacted on timescales for delivery.
- 10.4. As construction activity re-started (and continues to re-start in some cases) it was and remains, at a reduced capacity due to social distancing requirements. This is impacting the speed at which development can realistically be delivered.
- 10.5. In addition contractors have faced and are continuing to face challenges in securing labour. This includes the impact of many contractors and sub-contractors having furloughed staff.
- 10.6. Contractors have also faced and are continuing to face challenges in securing materials.
- 10.7. These factors are impacting on the cost and timescales for delivery. Both Lewisham Homes and the Council's Registered Provider partners are seeking where possible to make up the time lost. This remains challenging.

10.8. Developments at contracting stage

- 10.9. For those schemes where either Lewisham Homes or the Council's Registered Provider partners were due to enter into construction contracts there has been some delay in signing contracts whilst clauses to deal with COVID-19 matters were/agreed.

10.10. Developments at design and planning stage

- 10.11. For those schemes at the design and planning stage both Lewisham Homes and the Council's Registered Provider partners continued with this work by adapting to online working.
- 10.12. Both community engagement and formal planning processes successfully moved online. This took some time while all parties adapted to the new processes but has helped to keep momentum at the earlier stage of housing schemes. However, ensuring that the widest possible range of views are received to consultation remains a challenge.
- 10.13. Other work which happens at this stage e.g. appointment of specialist consultants, due diligence and survey work was challenging to progress due to companies having to furlough staff and as a result of not being able to access sites or buildings safely during lockdown.
- 10.14. The tenant decant process that is required in order to achieve vacant possession of existing homes in order to progress scheme had to cease due to government guidance i.e. both the decant process and the legal action required to achieve vacant possession. Whilst the Council have been able to re-start work with impacted tenants this is on a voluntary basis, delays will be expected to continue for some time as once legal proceedings can re-start, it is expected that there will be a significant backlog in the courts.
- 10.15. Longer term impacts and risks**
- 10.16. The Council's direct delivery schemes are reliant on grant funding or ring-fenced Right to Buy funding in many cases. The Council has needed to renegotiate grant agreements with both the GLA and the NHS to take account of the delays caused by

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COVID-19. Flexibility has been granted to date. In addition MHCLG have provided some flexibility on the spending of ring-fenced RTB receipts. Further flexibilities may be required for both the Council and our Registered Provider partners to take account of the delay caused by COVID-19.

- 10.17. Other risks to the ongoing delivery of housing schemes are the risks of construction costs increases, sales value decreases (will impact cross subsidy) and the supply chain e.g. the survival of businesses especially smaller builders and sub-contractors.

11. Strategy development

- 11.1. The development and adoption of the new Housing and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategies has been delayed by the pandemic. The consultation for the Housing strategy was extended to allow for additional respondents who may have been affected by the pandemic. The results of this consultation, and considerations from the pandemic, have been incorporated into the latest draft.
- 11.2. Formal public consultation on the Homeless and Rough Sleeping strategy has not taken place due to the pandemic. Colleagues across Housing, Public Health, the NHS and community services formed a strategic group to manage the response to COVID-19, and this group have co-developed a two-year Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy. A longer term strategy will be developed through this group.
- 11.3. Both strategies are being presented at this Committee meeting for consideration.

12. The financial impact of COVID-19

- 12.1. COVID-19 has had a swift and substantial impact on the finances of the council, as a consequence of new areas of support requiring funding and loss of income.
- 12.2. The overall cost to the Council in 2020/21 is estimated at £60m and rising. Despite early assurances from the government to fund the cost of the pandemic, £20m of this remains unfunded. Through careful management the council has built up reserves, but these will not be sufficient to cover the impact of COVID-19 and unless there is an improved settlement cuts of £40m will be required over the next three years.
- 12.3. In-year savings of £5.4m have already been identified, although more cuts are required. Services have been directed to make cuts of 5% from their existing budgets to contribute towards achieving this overall target. In Housing this has been achieved through halting recruitment on vacant posts, whilst frontline services have been protected.
- 12.4. As at the end of August 2020, the financial cost of COVID-19 to the Housing Service has been almost £1.3m. It is anticipated that the full year cost could be as much as £2.2m, which includes some post COVID-19 recovery costs.
- 12.5. The service has submitted an in-year revenue funding bid to the government to cover the activity supporting rough sleepers. This funding has been submitted to cover resettlement and tenancy sustainment support to rough sleepers accommodated under the 'Everyone In' agenda. The result of this bid has not yet been announced.
- 12.6. The moratorium on evictions has had a significant impact in reducing the number of approaches from households that are being asked to leave an assured shorthold tenancy. A relatively high proportion of this group of clients often move into temporary accommodation, so there has been less TA use for this group. However, there has been an increase in the number of single households approaching the service who have moved into TA as a result of the 'Everyone In' approach.
- 12.7. The net annual cost to the council of a placement in temporary accommodation is over £8,000 and can often be much higher. As such, there is a substantial risk to the financial position of the service should the moratorium on evictions be lifted without a

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robust alternative being in place.

- 12.8. There is also a £320k pressure on the Housing Revenue Account, particularly around the workforce and supplies.
- 12.9. Whilst there has been an increase in rent arrears in both our general needs stock and our temporary accommodation in this period, measures are being put in place to ensure that this is brought into line as soon as possible. Residents who have suffered financial hardship as a consequence of COVID-19 will be provided with appropriate assistance and enforcement action will focus on those who are not engaging.

13. The ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

- 13.1. There remains much uncertainty around the ongoing impact of COVID-19 for housing. A key risk at the point of this report being published is the potential impact of the lifting of the eviction ban, and a potential increase of approaches to our housing needs service. Shelter estimates that 227,000 adult private renters (3%) have fallen into arrears since the start of the pandemic, meaning they could lose their homes when the evictions ban ends and an estimated 2% of renters in the private sector have already been threatened with eviction.
- 13.2. There is further uncertainty relating to the ending of the furlough scheme, and the potential rise in unemployment. It was estimated in July that 36,000 of Lewisham's residents have been furloughed; many of these may lose their jobs now and in the future. This, combined with the eviction ban ending, may mean an increase in approaches to our homelessness service.
- 13.3. There also remains uncertainty around the impact of a future second wave of COVID-19, on the wider economy and employment; pace of developments of new homes; and a potential further increase in rough sleepers over the winter period. As mentioned at point 12.5 of this report, we have submitted for funding to cover the need for accommodation for rough sleepers over the cold weather period. This funding uncertainty combined with a lack of certainty on the use of night shelters with shared sleeping facilities,
- 13.4. The roll out of the additional licensing scheme, approved by Mayor and Cabinet on March 16 2020, continues to be paused. This will be kept under continual review.
- 13.5. As outlined in our draft two-year homelessness and rough sleeping strategy, we continue to focus on the prevention of homelessness, by supporting people to remain where they currently are living, and where that isn't possible, supporting people to access a secure and stable home, most likely in the private rented sector.
- 13.6. Partnerships are also crucial in our efforts over the coming months to respond to these ongoing challenges. We want to build on the partnerships that strengthened as a result of COVID-19, with health, care and public health colleagues.
- 13.7. We are working closely with Lewisham Homes, other RSLs and Lewisham's credit union to support our prevention measures to stop evictions due to rent arrears built-up as a result of COVID-19. We also continue to work across London, and the south east sub-region, to ensure that our response and efforts are aligned and co-ordinated.

14. Financial implications

- 14.1. This report provides an update on Housing Services response to COVID-19; as such there no direct financial implications arising from this report. The financial impact of COVID-19 is referenced in section 12 of this report.

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15. Legal implications

- 15.1. The Council has a public sector equality duty (the equality duty or the duty - The Equality Act 2010, or the Act). It covers the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 15.2. It is not an absolute requirement to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct, or to promote equality of opportunity or foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. It is a duty to have due regard to the need to achieve the goals listed above. The weight to be attached to the duty will be dependent on the nature of the decision and the circumstances in which it is made. This is a matter for Mayor and Cabinet, bearing in mind the issues of relevance and proportionality. Mayor and Cabinet must understand the impact or likely impact of the decision on those with protected characteristics who are potentially affected by the decision. The extent of the duty will necessarily vary from case to case and due regard is such regard as is appropriate in all the circumstances.
- 15.3. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has issued Technical Guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty and statutory guidance. The Council must have regard to the statutory code in so far as it relates to the duty. The Technical Guidance also covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty. This includes steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The guidance does not have statutory force but nonetheless regard should be had to it, as failure to do so without compelling reason would be of evidential value. The statutory code and the technical guidance can be found on the EHRC website.
- 15.4. The EHRC has issued five guides for public authorities in England giving advice on the equality duty. The 'Essential' guide provides an overview of the equality duty requirements including the general equality duty, the specific duties and who they apply to. It covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty including steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The other four documents provide more detailed guidance on key areas and advice on good practice.

16. Equalities implications

- 16.1. Systemic inequalities have been highlighted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Work needs to be done towards ensuring Housing policies and action plans drive positive changes in promoting equality and fighting injustice, and this is a priority of the draft housing strategy 2020-26.

17. Climate change and environmental implications

- 17.1. There are no direct climate change and environmental implications

18. Crime and disorder implications

- 18.1. There are no direct crime and disorder implications.

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19. Health and wellbeing implications

- 19.1. This report provides an update on Housing Services response to COVID-19, as such there are no direct health and wellbeing implications arising from this report. The COVID-19 pandemic has had, and continues to have, an ongoing impact on the health and wellbeing of our residents and staff.

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