



London Borough of Lewisham Homelessness Strategy 2020-2022

Note to reviewers:

The document will be produced in similar style to the housing strategy 2020-26 in advance of presentation to Mayor & Cabinet

Contents

Introduction	3
Our vision for Lewisham.....	4
Summary of Homelessness in Lewisham.....	5
Priority 1: Prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity with the most appropriate level of support.....	6
Priority 2: Support people to access a stable and secure home.....	8
Priority 3: Support rough sleepers to enable access to services and sustainable accommodation	10
Priority 4: Adapt and be agile in our service delivery to support residents impacted by COVID-19.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Priority 5: Strengthen partnership working	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Implementation.....	16
Appendix A: Partnership map	17

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Introduction

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping is a national emergency. The rising numbers of families and individuals who are homeless can be seen by the high numbers of families living in temporary accommodation, and people who are sleeping rough.

Lewisham, along with the rest of London, is facing an unprecedented housing crisis. There are not enough genuinely affordable homes for those who need them, meaning that too many families and individuals are threatened with homelessness. The lack of genuinely affordable accommodation means that households are often placed into expensive temporary accommodation for long periods whilst a long-term solution is found.

We face a range of challenges due to continuing budget cuts through government-imposed austerity and the enormous impact that COVID-19 has had and will continue to have. The pandemic has fundamentally changed how we deliver our services and engage with our communities. We are still understanding what the longer term impacts will be. This is stretching our already limited resources further and having a dramatic effect on the health and financial wellbeing of our residents. If it were not for our hard working staff both at Lewisham Council and Lewisham Homes, we would be left increasingly powerless to act against homelessness.

We have developed this in line with our six year Housing strategy. A key priority under that strategy is to prevent homelessness and meet Lewisham's housing need. This Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy will further detail how we intend to address homelessness over the next two years whilst we continue to deal with the impacts of COVID-19.

It is the residents of Lewisham that make it such an amazing place. We will put you at the centre of our decision making as we work to ensure that our strategic direction, key priorities and ongoing partnerships are targeted at reducing homelessness and ensuring that everyone has access to a safe, secure and genuinely affordable home.



Councillor Paul Bell

Cabinet Member for Housing

Our vision for Lewisham

Our overarching vision is that everyone deserves a safe, secure and genuinely affordable home. For this to be a reality, we must work towards ensuring that no-one becomes homeless in Lewisham.

The Housing Strategy 2020-26 outlines five key priorities for Lewisham. One of these priorities is '*preventing homelessness and meeting housing need*' which outlines our overarching strategic approach to preventing homelessness.

This homelessness and rough sleeping strategy underpins our Housing Strategy. It provides more detail on how we will prevent homelessness and rough sleeping. It outlines how we, with our partners, will work with and support those who are at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed how we deliver our services, and the full impact of the pandemic has yet to be fully realised. At the time of this strategy being launched, the measures put in place by the government including delays of evictions, and the furlough scheme, were just coming to an end. Public services are preparing for a second wave of the virus. With much uncertainty still remaining around the longer-term impact of the pandemic, this strategy focusses on the next 2 years as we recover and realign our service in the wake of the pandemic.

Our priorities for tackling homelessness in Lewisham are to:

1. **prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity** with the most appropriate level of support
2. **support people to access a stable and secure home**
3. **support rough sleepers** to enable access to services and accommodation
4. **adapt and be agile in our service delivery** to support residents impacted by COVID-19
5. **strengthen partnership working.**

Alongside our key priorities, we have developed five core principles. These principles will guide the direction of the service and support the actions we take to achieve our vision:

1. Homelessness cannot be prevented through housing alone. All our partner agencies, and the community and voluntary sectors have a role to play to successfully prevent homelessness
2. The earliest preventions are the most effective
3. We will prioritise supporting residents into secure and sustainable accommodation over the use of insecure temporary accommodation
4. All services should place the individual at the centre and work together to support and resolve homelessness
5. Policy, service delivery and practice should be informed and shaped in a co-productive manner, developed with those with lived experience.

Summary of Homelessness in Lewisham

Housing in Lewisham has changed significantly in recent years. The private rented sector (PRS) has almost doubled since 2001, and now accounts for a quarter of available homes. PRS rents have increased by 50% in the last 10 years and incomes have not kept pace, leading to an increasingly unaffordable rental market. There are not enough social homes to meet the demand for them.

Homelessness has increased during the last 10 years and remains high. Since 2015 the number of households in temporary accommodation has increased by 50%. Almost 5,200 households approached the Housing Needs team for Homelessness assistance between April 2018 and March 2020. Despite the Council increasing the number of successful homelessness interventions in recent years this continues to increase. 2,500 households are currently in temporary accommodation arranged by the Council.

There is not enough permanent affordable housing in Lewisham for those in temporary accommodation to move into. Without an increase in genuinely affordable housing across the private rented and social housing sectors, the reliance on temporary accommodation will continue to rise to unsustainable levels.

Rough sleeping is increasing too. We have worked with nearly 200 rough sleepers across Lewisham in the response to COVID-19, an increase of 35% since 2015–16. Despite successful efforts to bring “everybody in” from the streets during the COVID-19 outbreak, the bleak economic outlook will mean more people losing their homes. There is an expectation that homelessness may increase given the economic impact, re-starting of eviction procedures in the courts, and the ending of the furlough scheme.

How do we address homelessness?

It is clear that the Council simply cannot create enough housing to ‘fix’ homelessness. The scope of the problem, and the drivers behind it, mean that a multi-faceted approach is required. Homelessness must be seen as a public services matter rather than simply a housing matter. Policy, service delivery and working practices must be created in partnership with those with lived experience so that the needs of individuals and families are properly addressed.

Temporary accommodation should be a final safety net where all other preventative measures have been unsuccessful. The ethos of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 is rightly focussed on prevention, and we recognise that often the most effective prevention would start well before the legislative requirement stated in the Act. True prevention requires a holistic response from central Government, all public services and the third sector.

Priority 1: Prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity with the most appropriate level of support

It is a tragedy when a household becomes homeless. Homelessness has a profound negative impact on those that experience it. The social and health outcomes of households that become homeless are significantly below those who do not. To make the most difference to the lives of those threatened with homelessness, preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity must be one of our priorities across all public, community and voluntary services.

Homelessness is legally defined in a number of ways but primarily occurs where households have no accommodation available to them, or where it would be unreasonable or harmful for them to continue to occupy such accommodation. When we talk about homelessness prevention we are referring to all types of homelessness including but not limited to:

- households in temporary accommodation
- rough sleeping
- hidden homelessness.

True prevention of homelessness is not simply a matter of managing to keep those at serious risk from losing their homes. It requires a holistic response that provides appropriate support to at-risk individuals, but also empowers people to flourish where possible, and avoid becoming at-risk in the first instance. Timely access to benefits, support to access employment and training, and strategies to deal with debt to break the cycle of deprivation can influence whether someone becomes homeless or not. We will work across council services, partners and individuals to identify their support needs and make sure the right people are getting help at the right time.

Where we are

We are already working to prevent homelessness, and do this through:

- providing advice services in our housing options centre
- advocating on behalf of the tenant at risk with their landlord or friends and family currently accommodating them
- working with landlords to prevent eviction, using a range of incentives
- sourcing alternative accommodating in the private rented sector (PRS), using a range of incentives
- assessing and referring residents into programmes such as supported housing pathways and Housing First as appropriate to needs
- working with partners to expand prevention options.

What we will do

We will expand this offer by:

Delivering an improved housing options advice service by:

- successfully embedding a person-centred remote service delivery model, with face-to-face service provision specifically tailored to individual need

- raising awareness with partners about the 'duty to refer' and support them to spot the signs of homelessness early so that we can work together to prevent homelessness
- using data more effectively to identify households at risk of homelessness or repeat homelessness and take proactive action where possible
- exploring working with local legal advocates and court services with a view to getting information at earliest point and also promoting better outcomes for residents
- improving outreach provision prevention work in the borough.

Supporting those at risk of homelessness to remain where they are by:

- working with housing benefit colleagues to ensure discretionary housing payments are available to more households threatened with homelessness
- regularising our offers of financial support to those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness in the PRS so that finance is more easily accessible, for example through our partnership with the credit union
- developing our mediation service to work with landlords, family and friends where relationships have broken down
- developing partnerships with local landlords to reduce PRS eviction.
- building trust with our clients so they feel able to make contact early

What we are aiming for

We will measure our progress through:

- an increase in the number of households that have homelessness prevented or relieved
- a decrease in the number of households entering temporary accommodation.

Priority 2: Support people to access a stable and secure home

Everyone deserves a stable, secure and affordable home to call their own. Working with households to enable them to find the home that is right for them is crucial to achieving that. Our priority is to prevent homelessness through working together. We will make sure we offer comprehensive advice and support so that residents can take responsibility for their housing needs. We aim to empower residents to take ownership of and make decisions about their future housing.

Temporary accommodation should be a last resort where our joint efforts have not been enough to stop homelessness and the household meets the statutory threshold. Where we are unable to prevent homelessness through the use of the private rented sector, we will provide access to suitable, decent and good value temporary accommodation.

The temporary accommodation journey is challenging. We know that temporary accommodation has a detrimental effect on outcomes for families and children. We will seek to minimise the amount of time that households spend in temporary accommodation by working with them to find suitable long-term settled accommodation that is right for them.

There is extremely limited social housing available and whilst we are working to build our own social housing, we know that there is simply not enough for everyone. We will review the way we allocate it to make sure we are prioritising the most vulnerable residents who are in housing need.

We must ensure that we support vulnerable people and young people facing homelessness. Those fleeing abuse and violence are at particular risk of homelessness. We will work with our social care, health and commissioned partners to ensure that our housing provision and dedicated pathways are able to effectively respond to the needs of vulnerable people in housing need.

Where we are

Some of the work we already undertake includes:

- providing financial assistance to prevent or relieve homelessness
- working with residents to create personalised housing plans to empower them to resolve their housing need
- supporting households to identify suitable, affordable properties for rent in the private rented sector
- procuring properties in the private rented sector to prevent or relieve homelessness, and as a long-term route out of temporary accommodation
- referring individuals with specific needs to the appropriate supported housing pathways
- stopping the placement of families into shared nightly paid temporary accommodation
- allocating social homes to homeless households through our choice based lettings scheme
- participating in the 'Setting the Standard' scheme to improve the standard of temporary accommodation.

What we will do

We will expand this offer by:

Strengthening our support for households to find a home in the private rented sector by:

- increasing the procurement of properties in the private rented sector as an alternative to temporary accommodation
- continuing to develop effective tools to support residents to search and secure private rented sector accommodation independently
- engaging with landlords in order to increase number of properties available for housing benefit recipients and at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates
- working with landlords to bring about longer term minimum tenancies.

Reviewing our policies and practices around temporary accommodation and housing allocation by:

- expanding our in-house stock of temporary accommodation through development and acquisition
- reviewing the use of temporary accommodation with shared facilities
- reducing the use of nightly paid accommodation
- reviewing our allocation policy and temporary accommodation placement policies, so that we make best use of our limited social housing, and incentivise residents to work with us to prevent homelessness.

Ensuring our supported housing pathways and specialist housing meet the needs of our vulnerable residents by:

- reviewing the demand for and use of our supported housing pathways
- reviewing housing provision and pathways for young people including care leavers, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, NRPF and those approaching at 16/17
- reviewing service provision for those fleeing domestic abuse to ensure it is suitable and appropriate.

What we are aiming for

We will measure our progress through:

- increasing the number of homes we procure
- increasing the number of households where homelessness is prevented or relieved
- decreasing the number of households in temporary accommodation
- reducing the number of families placed into accommodation with shared facilities
- increasing the number of households that exit the supported housing pathway with a positive outcome.

Priority 3: Support rough sleepers to enable access to services and accommodation

One rough sleeper on the streets of Lewisham is one too many. The impact of sleeping rough on the lives of those doing so cannot be understated, and those who are rough sleeping often have a wide range of needs that need to be addressed to help them off the streets.

Lewisham has a wide range of commissioned and voluntary support services working with us to reduce rough sleeping. We are committed to a London-wide approach as demonstrated by our part in the No Second Night Out hub and other approaches coordinated by the Greater London Authority (GLA). However, we need to develop a longer-term, more holistic approach to addressing rough sleeping, one that focuses on individual need and local conditions.

People experiencing rough sleeping come from so many different circumstances, and the support we are able to provide is often dictated by these circumstances. Although our offer cannot be the same for everyone, we want to be able to support every single rough sleeper to start a journey to sustainable accommodation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a massive impact on rough sleeping. The government instructed authorities to identify and accommodate all rough sleepers and those in shared sleep facilities in the early days of the pandemic. The government has since established a Rough Sleeping COVID-19 response taskforce to direct this work, with a view to supporting authorities in finding long-term solutions for those accommodated. We are committed to building on the work that has been done to date and supporting rough sleepers to access the accommodation and support they need to have improved outcomes.

Where we are

Our current support for rough sleepers includes:

- a Housing First offer for rough sleepers
- outreach provision co-ordinated at the regional level
- rough Sleeping Co-ordinator and navigators to undertake casework, co-ordinate support activity and deliver improved outcomes
- satellite health services at key sites for rough sleepers across the borough
- an outreach health service in conjunction with the broader outreach provision
- extensive support offer for those accommodated under 'Everybody In' to identify an appropriate accommodation and support package; with a view to facilitate a move into long-term accommodation.

What we will do

We will expand this offer by:

Developing the support we offer to rough sleepers by:

- expanding our interventions for chaotic, entrenched rough sleepers in need of long term support
- developing a robust private rented sector offer with move-on assistance
- reviewing our use of shared facilities accommodation in light of COVID-19

- building on our current outreach offer to ensure it reflects the needs of rough sleepers in Lewisham
- expanding support to help regularise the immigration status of rough sleepers where appropriate
- ensuring that our range of support and housing offers can help all rough sleepers, from all circumstances, to start a journey to sustainable accommodation.

Embedding new ways of working with health and commissioning partners by:

- creating a new Strategic Rough Sleeping group to drive this agenda, alongside public health and NHS colleagues
- establishing a director level reference group to oversee our rough sleeping action plan; and to ensure a systemic approach is taken to end rough sleeping
- developing the way we support former rough sleepers to retain long-term tenancies according to their specific needs
- continuous development of rough sleeping services, ensuring that we adapt and improve according to lessons learnt, both generally and through what we have learnt from COVID-19
- working with health partners to ensure that health pathways meet the varied and complex needs of rough sleepers
- striving, with health partners, to address health inequalities experienced by rough sleepers.

What we are aiming for

We will measure our progress through improvements in outcomes including:

- an overall reduction of rough sleepers, including bedded-down contacts, new rough sleepers and Streetlink referrals
- a reduction in repeat rough sleepers
- client move-ons into long term solutions
- reconnections with family and / or friends
- an increase in long-term tenancies sustained by previous rough sleepers
- engagement with health services, and improved outcomes in clients taking up these services
- reduction in A&E attendance
- reduction in the use of drug and alcohol through an increase in accessing treatment and support
- regularisation of immigration statuses.

We will also strive to understand the factors that drive health inequalities for Lewisham's rough sleepers in Lewisham. We will consider the appropriate indicators to demonstrate improvements in these areas.

Priority 4: Adapt and be agile in our service delivery to support residents impacted by COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has put immense pressure on resources as we work to support vulnerable people and households who are in desperate need as a result of the virus itself and the resulting economic decline.

COVID-19 has affected all our lives in significant ways. People experiencing homelessness are disproportionately affected and face even greater challenges. Factor in additional vulnerabilities, such as poor health, complex immigration statuses, rough sleeping and domestic abuse and it is clear that we need to adapt our services to address the varied and complex needs of people in housing crisis.

During the pandemic evictions have been paused. Whilst this has acted as a temporary safety net for tenants, we need to prepare for the increased demand for our services as landlords and courts begin evictions once again.

Safety has been a key concern during the pandemic. Already we have had to adapt our ways of working in order to protect clients and staff from COVID-19, and it is clear that new, agile ways of working need to be embedded in the longer term. This includes how we deliver our advisory services, and the ways in which we address emergency housing need. We need to work even closer with public health and NHS partners to reduce infection spread and keep the clinically vulnerable as safe as possible.

The longer term impacts of COVID-19 are still to be fully realised which is why we need to be able to shape our service in the face of an ever-changing future.

Where we are

We have had to adapt quickly to the changing environment since the outbreak of COVID-19, including:

- adapting housing allocations to ensure that our most vulnerable residents were prioritised during the peak of the pandemic
- ensuring that landlords were complying with the nationwide eviction ban, thereby preventing illegal evictions
- adapting working practices to ensure safety of clients and staff, e.g. improved technical and remote-working capabilities following the closure of our front door
- ensuring our resources were placed in the areas where need was highest
- creating space in pathways to provide accommodation in case of local virus breakouts
- integrating cohorting into our emergency and temporary accommodation provision to avoid cross-contamination
- ensuring that social distancing and isolation guidelines can be adhered to in our service provision
- supporting rough sleepers into emergency accommodation under the 'Everybody In' scheme.

What we will do

We will expand our work by:

Striving for innovation and continuous improvement by:

- providing innovative solutions to those with complex immigration statuses facing homelessness
- consulting with those experiencing homelessness during the pandemic to ensure effective and efficient service provision
- reviewing the impact of our work and adapt according to lessons learnt.

Creating new ways of working with health and public health bodies by:

- building on work done by the Rough Sleeping COVID-19 response taskforce (see Priority 3)
- strengthening health pathways and service provision to ensure they are able to address the needs of clinically vulnerable people whilst keeping them safe from COVID-19
- ensuring effective partnerships and coordination with health and other public bodies (see Priority 5).

Ensuring our supply of housing meets new needs as a result of the pandemic by:

- ensuring service provision for those fleeing domestic abuse is able to meet potential increased demand due to pandemic lockdowns
- developing and acquire new accommodation options for rough sleepers
- keeping the cohorting approach integral when developing temporary and emergency accommodation solutions.

What we are aiming for

We will measure our progress through:

- the number of illegal evictions prevented following the commencement of evictions
- our ability to adapt quickly when faced with local outbreaks and further lockdowns
- the suitability of accommodation provision; i.e. whether it allows adequate social distancing and isolation where necessary
- efficiency of remote and online service provision
- customer satisfaction in our services.

Priority 5: Strengthen partnership working

Homelessness and rough sleeping are not simply a housing issue. Homelessness prevention needs to be priority for everyone. We need to work with partners across sectors to achieve the best outcomes. COVID-19 makes collaborative, integrated approaches even more vital in order to secure access to appropriate services and for continuity of care. Managing through the pandemic has seen us working even closer with partners, and we want to strengthen this even further.

At its best, collaboration means the council's services working together to place individuals at the centre of our support, using person and family centred approaches. It means designing and delivering services that are shaped by a range of partners as well as by those with lived experience of homelessness and rough sleeping. This will allow us to identify and solve problems faster and better.

There are a number of areas where the work between housing and other services is closely aligned. We want to improve joint working processes to ensure that households can seamlessly access the support they need across services in a way that works for everyone.

Where we are

Our partnership work currently includes:

- partnership working and an effective 'duty to refer' mechanism with internal and external agencies
- engagement with the multi-agency Homelessness Forum
- task and target meetings held with rough sleeping partners to provide rapid response, setting actions for all rough sleepers identified in the borough
- clear processes to minimise the risk of homelessness to households that are accommodated within our housing stock and facing eviction
- working with health and social care teams to ensure work is joined up.

What we will do

We will expand this through:

- establishing new ways of working across partnerships to collectively reduce the risk of homelessness for families and individuals at risk
- agreeing a joint working protocol with children's social care to ensure the safety and security of young people faced with homelessness
- ensuring that local delivery plans in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are developed with public health, social care and health colleagues, and that these plans are coordinated with local and regional NHS colleagues
- working with public health and substance misuse services to improve targeted support for individuals with these specific needs
- partnering with other local authorities to address additional need brought about by COVID-19
- partnering with other local authorities to secure private rented accommodation for homeless households

- developing future strategy and service provision in collaboration with those with lived experience of homelessness.

What we are aiming for

We will measure our progress through:

- an increase in the number of appropriate referrals made through the duty to refer mechanism
- a decrease in the number of emergency approaches from households that are accommodated with partner agencies.

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Implementation

Governance

This strategy is informed by and sits underneath the Housing Strategy 2020-2026. Any amendments to the Housing Strategy will be reflected in this document as appropriate.

The strategy is owned by the Housing division of the Council, but the objectives are delivered far more widely by partners internally and externally. It will be part of the Council's role to monitor progress against the objectives in this wider local landscape.

A Strategic Homelessness and Rough Sleeping group which has been established between Housing and key partners. This group will oversee delivery of this strategy.

Resources

There are significant costs associated with the provision of housing services including the direct delivery of housing, managing the provision of council housing and providing services to those experiencing homelessness or the threat of homelessness. All of these are affected by the changing demand for housing and levels of residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Grant funding is time-limited and often for highly specific purposes. This piecemeal approach to funding creates additional pressures in trying to deliver against our vision. Even small changes in the available funding will have a substantial impact on the Council's ability to deliver services. A budget report is agreed annually that sets out the resources to be made available to the Council for Homelessness provision.

It is also recognised that our partners bear similar costs – whether these are internal partners commissioning services on which there is increasing demand, statutory agencies like the NHS, or partners in the community and voluntary sector who are dependent on fundraising and grant income themselves.

The aim of this strategy is to work more innovatively with the resources we have, while recognising the reality that reduced funding and increased demand will have an absolute impact, and as a result, this strategy directs resources where they can be most impactful, around the key priorities set out.

Timeframes

This strategy governs the approach to homelessness locally, in combination with the Housing Strategy, over two years.

The work against this strategy will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure delivery against the priorities and actions.

Appendix A: Partnership map

Public Sector Agencies	Housing Organisations		CVS	Commissioned Providers
<p>Council services including: Housing services Joint commissioning Children's and adult social care, including leaving care Economy and partnerships Benefits Main grants Crime enforcement and youth offending</p>	<p>Housing charities: 999 Club Bench Outreach Thames Reach Deptford Reach Crisis</p>			<p>Supported housing providers including: SHP and other commissioned partners</p>
<p>Health providers including: Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust Other trusts including GSTT and Kings NHS England and Public Health England CCG and related provision e.g. GPs, SLAM</p>	<p>Registered providers including: Lewisham Homes Regenter B3 Phoenix L&Q Hyde Additional smaller registered providers</p>	<p>Main grant funded organisations including: Advice Lewisham</p>	<p>Children's services including: Children's centres Youth services Health visitors</p>	
<p>Local, regional and central government including: Greater London Authority London Councils Local Government Association Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government Department for Work and Pensions</p>	<p>Other housing providers including: Private Landlords Lettings agents</p>	<p>Other local charities and community groups including: Citizen's Advice Bureau</p>	<p>Adult services including: Substance misuse services Violence Against Women and Girls provision</p>	
<p>Other public services including: Prisons Probation services Colleges and universities Schools</p>				

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