

HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

Monday, 29 January 2018 at 5.00 p.m.

MP702, 7th Floor, Town Hall, Mulberry Place, 5 Clove Crescent,
London E14 2BG.

This meeting is open to the public to attend.

Members:

Chair: Councillor Helal Uddin
Vice-Chair: Councillor John Pierce
Councillor Andrew Wood, Councillor Gulam Robbani, Councillor Rabina Khan and
Councillor Shiria Khatun

Substitutes:

Councillor Danny Hassell, Councillor Chris Chapman, Councillor Marc Francis and
Councillor Rajib Ahmed

Co-opted Members:

Anne Ambrose	Tenant Representative
Moshin Hamim	Leaseholder Representative

[The quorum for this body is 3 voting Members]

Contact for further enquiries:

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

5 - 8

To note any declarations of interest made by Members, including those restricting Members from voting on the questions detailed in Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act, 1992. See attached note from the Monitoring Officer.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

9 - 14

3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION:

4. SPOTLIGHT SESSION: CABINET MEMBER FOR STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT AND WASTE

The Committee will hear a presentation on this topic at the meeting.

5. QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE DATA FOR KEY RESIDENT PROVIDERS

The Committee will hear a presentation on this topic at the meeting.

6. THE LONDON PLAN

The Committee will hear a presentation on this topic at the meeting.

7. HOMELESS SCRUTINY REVIEW ACTION PLAN

15 - 44

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting of the Sub- Committee

The next meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee will be held on Monday, 19 March 2018 at 6.30 p.m.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS - NOTE FROM THE MONITORING OFFICER

This note is for guidance only. For further details please consult the Members' Code of Conduct at Part 5.1 of the Council's Constitution.

Please note that the question of whether a Member has an interest in any matter, and whether or not that interest is a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, is for that Member to decide. Advice is available from officers as listed below but they cannot make the decision for the Member. If in doubt as to the nature of an interest it is advisable to seek advice **prior** to attending a meeting.

Interests and Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs)

You have an interest in any business of the authority where that business relates to or is likely to affect any of the persons, bodies or matters listed in section 4.1 (a) of the Code of Conduct; and might reasonably be regarded as affecting the well-being or financial position of yourself, a member of your family or a person with whom you have a close association, to a greater extent than the majority of other council tax payers, ratepayers or inhabitants of the ward affected.

You must notify the Monitoring Officer in writing of any such interest, for inclusion in the Register of Members' Interests which is available for public inspection and on the Council's Website.

Once you have recorded an interest in the Register, you are not then required to declare that interest at each meeting where the business is discussed, unless the interest is a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI).

A DPI is defined in Regulations as a pecuniary interest of any of the descriptions listed at **Appendix A** overleaf. Please note that a Member's DPIs include his/her own relevant interests and also those of his/her spouse or civil partner; or a person with whom the Member is living as husband and wife; or a person with whom the Member is living as if they were civil partners; if the Member is aware that that other person has the interest.

Effect of a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest on participation at meetings

Where you have a DPI in any business of the Council you must, unless you have obtained a dispensation from the authority's Monitoring Officer following consideration by the Dispensations Sub-Committee of the Standards Advisory Committee:-

- not seek to improperly influence a decision about that business; and
- not exercise executive functions in relation to that business.

If you are present at a meeting where that business is discussed, you must:-

- Disclose to the meeting the existence and nature of the interest at the start of the meeting or when the interest becomes apparent, if later; and
- Leave the room (including any public viewing area) for the duration of consideration and decision on the item and not seek to influence the debate or decision

When declaring a DPI, Members should specify the nature of the interest and the agenda item to which the interest relates. This procedure is designed to assist the public's understanding of the meeting and to enable a full record to be made in the minutes of the meeting.

Where you have a DPI in any business of the authority which is not included in the Member's register of interests and you attend a meeting of the authority at which the business is considered, in addition to disclosing the interest to that meeting, you must also within 28 days notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest for inclusion in the Register.

Further advice

For further advice please contact:

Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director Governance & Monitoring Officer Tel 020 7364 4800

APPENDIX A: Definition of a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest

(Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012, Reg 2 and Schedule)

Subject	Prescribed description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vacation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
Sponsorship	<p>Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the relevant authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by the Member in carrying out duties as a member, or towards the election expenses of the Member.</p> <p>This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.</p>
Contracts	<p>Any contract which is made between the relevant person (or a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest) and the relevant authority—</p> <p>(a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and</p> <p>(b) which has not been fully discharged.</p>
Land	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the relevant authority.
Licences	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the relevant authority for a month or longer.
Corporate tenancies	<p>Any tenancy where (to the Member's knowledge)—</p> <p>(a) the landlord is the relevant authority; and</p> <p>(b) the tenant is a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest.</p>
Securities	<p>Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where—</p> <p>(a) that body (to the Member's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the relevant authority; and</p> <p>(b) either—</p> <p>(i) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or</p> <p>(ii) if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.</p>

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FLONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON MONDAY, 13 NOVEMBER 2017

C1, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE CRESCENT,
LONDON, E14 2BG

Members Present:

Councillor Helal Uddin (Chair)
Councillor John Pierce (Vice Chair)
Councillor Shiria Khatun
Councillor Andrew Wood

Co-opted Members Present:

Anne Ambrose	Tenant Representative
Moshin Hamim	Leaseholder Representative

In Attendance

Mark Baigent	Head of Strategy, Regeneration and Sustainability LBTH
Elizabeth Bailey	Senior Strategy, Policy and Performance Officer
John Coker	Strategic Housing Manager LBTH
Paul Davey	Director of Business Transformation THH
Sandra Fawcett	Chair of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum
Afazul Hoque	Interim Service Manager Strategy, Policy & Performance
Councillor Sirajul Islam	Cabinet Member for Housing
Marc Lancaster	Strategy, Regeneration and Sustainability Officer
Rushena Miah	Committee Services Officer
Susmita Sen	Chief Executive Tower Hamlets Homes (THH)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors: Rajib Ahmed, Gulam Robbani, Rabina Khan, Marc Francis.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

Councillor Shiria Khatun disclosed that her husband manages Air BNB serviced apartments in Tower Hamlets.

Councillor John Pierce declared that he is a Tower Hamlets Homes Board Member.

The Chair declared that he is employer works closely with Poplar HARCA and sits on the Tower Hamlets Homes Board.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2017 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

The actions log was noted.

4. APPOINTMENT OF THE VICE CHAIR

The Committee agreed to appoint Councillor John Pierce as Vice-Chair.

5. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION:

6. SPOTLIGHT SESSION: THE IMPACT OF AIRBNB IN THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

The Committee received a presentation from Marc Lancaster, Strategy, Regeneration and Sustainability Officer, on the impact of short-term holiday platform letting.

Members asked if there was data available to identify the number of foreign property buyers who let out their homes to holiday platforms. It was confirmed that an in-depth analysis on this had not taken place but there had been some research on larger properties of 1000 square feet or more in the Canary Wharf area.

Some Members expressed concern that communities in constant flux may negatively impact community cohesion, give rise to anti-social behaviour (ASB) and affect the identity of a local area.

Other views highlighted the importance of working in partnership to tackle ASB and suggested the enforcement team should be invited to attend this committee. There was a consensus that political will and resources have been supplied to target ASB, therefore Council departments should be working on a shared vision with registered providers.

It was confirmed that short-term lettings fall outside of the Landlord Licensing Scheme.

One Member suggested setting up a working group with other boroughs on the issue of short term holiday letting. Mr Lancaster confirmed he would be happy to look into this.

Referencing page 26 of the pack, which states 35% of properties were let for more than 90 nights, a Member queried where the data came from. Mr Lancaster informed the Committee that the data was provided by Air BnB as a

background document; this type of data is not generally available to the wider public but can be made available on request.

It was suggested that a neighbourhood compliance tool should be promoted by housing providers in their newsletters. The Committee decided to put this forward as a recommendation.

In addition to this, Members advised that HMRC should be alerted to this issue as there may be undeclared tax involved in the industry, adding another layer of enforcement.

Councillor Islam said he is due to meet with five neighbouring boroughs also affected by this issue and has begun talks with the Greater London Authority.

The discussion moved on to illegal sub-letting of Council owned and housing association properties. Sandra Fawcett, Chair of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum, said it is the responsibility of the housing provider to take legal action against people who illegally sub-let.

Susmita Sen, Chief Executive of Tower Hamlets Homes, provided a case study of successfully identifying and preventing an illegal sub-let. She said people who illegally sub-let often make changes to their home in order to increase living space. In her example a tenant tried to move a kitchen into the hallway which raised suspicion amongst THH staff.

RESOLVED

1. To note the report.

7. SPOTLIGHT SESSION: CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING MANAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE

Councillor Sirajul Islam, Cabinet Member for Housing, presented a report on performance improvement at Tower Hamlets Homes (THH), the arms-length management organisation for Tower Hamlets Council.

Members wanted to know about THH future ambitions. Councillor Islam said that he was pleased with the stability that has ensued further to the improvement measures. He hopes THH will become an organisation that people are proud of.

There was a discussion on the statistical relevancy of the data as percentage figures were provided but there were no base figures. Paul Davey, Director of Business Transformation THH, confirmed that the data was compiled by an outsourced company called Quest that survey residents on a long term basis. They get on average two thousand responses a year and this is considered to be a reliable sample size in the industry. Mr Davey said he could get the actual figures included in the next report.

A Member requested to learn more about the performance of other housing providers, particularly from the east side of the borough such as Lansbury Ward. This was noted by officers.

Susmita Sen, Chief Executive THH, informed the Committee that the Neighbourhood Housing Officer role at THH has been amended with a greater emphasis on leasehold management duties, as half of THH clients are leaseholders. Back office functions have also been streamlined with clearer lines of accountability.

Members raised concerns regarding the sustainability of some of the funded elements of the improvements, such as the increased police presence and park rangers. They wanted to know what would happen once the funding ended.

Ms Sen said that many improvements could be achieved by agile working and were not necessarily about continued funding. Drugs are a known issue across the borough and she said she envisages continued support from the police and Council to drive drug dealing out of the borough.

Members advocated for a cross borough approach to confronting ASB. They were pleased to hear that resources had gone into the issue of tackling drug dealing but they did not want the Council to be perceived as simply pushing the problem out of the borough and onto another neighbouring borough. It was noted that the ASB sub-group Chaired by Anne Ambrose, Tenant Representative, was a useful forum for discussing the issue, sharing information and joint working.

The Chair asked for an update on THH service charges and capital works charges as he recalled there had been confusion over these. It was confirmed that the billing is now itemised and tenants are given several payment options. The issue has been resolved.

Members requested to see a charges comparison between THH and other local providers.

RESOLVED

1. To note the report.

7.1 SPOTLIGHT SESSION: HOUSING PERFORMANCE MONITORING - QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE DATA FOR KEY REGISTERED PROVIDERS

The Committee received an update from Godfrey Heyman, Resident Provider Partnership Officer LBTH, on performance reports from fourteen social landlords in the borough for quarter two and four 2016/17; and quarter two 2017/18.

The Committee:

- Said that it was difficult to understand the full picture because it was not comparing for same period as data was not available.
- Requested comparable data is presented in the next report.
- Requested that headings are included on every page of the table.
- Requested that future reports include actual sample size of those surveyed as well as percentage figures.
- Suggested that landlords should be invited to take part in these meetings.
- Requested that smaller resident provider organisations are invited to this meeting as an action.

Members thanked Mr Heyman for the update and acknowledge that they were privileged to have access to such data, as this is not as readily available in other local authorities.

The Chair asked if providers have a general code of conduct when conducting tenancy audits. Sandra Fawcett, Chair of the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum, confirmed that there is not a consistent code of conduct policy when carrying out tenancy audits and that every provider has their own policy.

RESOLVED

1. To note the report.

7.2 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORT: UPDATE ON ACQUIRING PROPERTIES TO MANAGE DEMANDS ON TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

The Committee heard a presentation from John Coker, Strategic Housing Manager, on temporary accommodation acquisitions.

Members queried whether the 60 minute maximum journey time with regard to being rehoused was now policy. They provided anecdotal evidence of residents being advised by Council staff that they could be relocated as far as Newcastle or Birmingham and asked officers if the correct advice was being given.

Mark Baigent, Head of Strategy, Regeneration and Sustainability LBTH, clarified that there are two separate issues being discussed. One is the Council buying local property in order to support those requiring emergency accommodation and the other is residents being allocated emergency accommodation in properties that the Council do not own. In these instances residents may need to travel a little further but Mr Baigent assured the Committee that residents would not be moved as far as Newcastle or Birmingham.

It was confirmed Housing Options manages Poplar HARCA properties.

There was a discussion on the transfer of community assets with regard to a property in Turin Street being rented to a mosque. It was argued that the wider community had lost an asset when this transfer occurred as the mosque would be restricted to use by a single community group.

Members asked if impact assessments are made when transferring assets and if there was a process for informed decision making. Mr Coker responded that consideration is given and decisions are made by a corporate wide Asset Management Board.

It was confirmed that the Council cannot make purchases on properties less than ten years old because this is a legal requirement. The Council is largely restricted to using right to buy receipts in order to purchase properties.

The Chair thanked Mr Coker for presenting on the topic.

RESOLVED

1. To note the report.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS


Councillor Wood stated that his party will likely call in the Mayor's executive decision taken on 10 November 2017 to spend £19 million on the acquisition of affordable homes, on the grounds that no scrutiny was conducted on the decision.

With regard to the draft scoping paper tabled at the meeting, Members were advised to contact Elizabeth Bailey and Afazul Hoque for comments by the end of next week.

The Chair thanked delegates for attending and brought the meeting to a close.

The meeting ended at 8.57 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Helal Uddin
Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee

<p>Non-Executive Report of the: Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee</p> <p>29 January 2018</p>	 TOWER HAMLETS
<p>Report of: Divisional Director of Housing & Regeneration, Place</p>	<p>Classification: Unrestricted</p>
<p>Challenge session progress update - Homelessness</p>	

Lead Member	Deputy Mayor Cllr Sirajul Islam
Originating Officer(s)	Rafiqul Hoque - Service Manager, Housing Options Service Martin Ling – Housing Strategy Manager
Wards affected	ALL
Community Plan Theme	A Great Place to Live: Prevent people from becoming homeless, but support those who do
Key Decision?	No

Summary

This report follows up from the scrutiny challenge session on homelessness. The report and recommendations were agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7 June 2016. An action plan was developed to address the recommendations. The report and accompanying action plan was endorsed by Cabinet on 6 December 2016. This report reviews progress made against the original recommendations.

Recommendations:

The Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee is recommended to:

1. Note progress made in delivering recommendations from the scrutiny challenge session on homelessness.

1. **DETAILS OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The challenge session on homelessness which was part of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2015/16 municipal year was chaired by Cllr Councillor Helal Uddin (Scrutiny Lead Development & Renewal). The agenda for the session included an introduction to the key issues under review followed by presentations on the overall picture of homelessness nationally, local context and pressures, detail on Council services and how they are responding to those pressures.
- 1.2 The session considered four core issues:
- a) Use of bed & breakfast accommodation by the Council for families with dependent children and pregnant women over the six week statutory period;
 - b) The long term viability of moving away from B&B placements;
 - c) The impact of the Council's prevention work as well as the action plan related to the homelessness statement (including the achievements of this action plan, the monitoring arrangements and the lessons learned); and
 - d) How the customer satisfaction of homeless applicants could be improved further regardless of whether the service owes a statutory duty.
- 1.3 The scrutiny report made twelve recommendations. Progress against each recommendation is recorded in the accompanying action plan (Appendix 1). Of the 23 actions developed by services in the homelessness scrutiny action plan, 57 percent have been completed, 3 percent are delayed and due for completion in 2017/18, 13 percent are overdue with delivery slipping into year 2018/19. Progress has been made on all actions.
- **Recommendation 1:** Improvements highlighted in this report in relation to the Homelessness Statement and Action Plan should be incorporated into the new overarching Housing Strategy to be signed off by the Mayor and Full Council.

Service comment at action planning stage:

The Council currently has in place a *Homelessness Statement 2013 to 2017*, which sets out our approach to preventing and reducing homelessness focused on:

- Homeless prevention and tackling the causes of homelessness
- Access to affordable housing options
- Children, families and young people
- Vulnerable adults

Many aspects of this document are still relevant but over the next 12 months we will consider what other options are available to prevent and meet homelessness demand. The document will be updated to reflect

progress over the past 3 years and take into account improvements highlighted in the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) report. We will engage fully with all partners in 2017 to develop a further 4 year action plan to continue to tackle homelessness. There will be an emphasis on ensuring the most vulnerable and marginalised groups who face homelessness can continue to be assisted, linking their support into their health needs, education and employment opportunities and overall wellbeing.

Update from service:

The updated version of the Homelessness Statement was approved with the 2016-2021 Housing Strategy by Full Council on the 5th of December 2016. However, development of the Homelessness Statement action plan is delayed and will slip into 2018/19. The 2 key reasons for this delay are:

- 1) A restructure of the Homeless services in the Housing Options Service ran through most of 2017 and the new management team was not established till December 2017. It was agreed that the revised action plan should not be taken forward until the new team were in place in order that they have ownership of the plan and service.
- 2) The Homelessness Reduction Act became law in April 2017 but the final regulations are still awaited. It was agreed that the new action plan should be delayed until the more detailed duties become clearer. Work on the new action plan led by the new team will commence in January 2018.

- **Recommendation 2:** Review existing partnership arrangements and objectives on homelessness, and strengthen joint working in order to respond to threats and demands.

Service comment at action planning stage:

As set out above the Homeless Statement will be updated to reflect progress over the past 3 years and take into account improvements highlighted in the OSC report. We will engage fully with all partners in 2017 to develop a further 4 year action plan to continue to tackle homelessness and this will include reviving the Homelessness Partnership Board.

Update from service:

The refreshed Homelessness Statement was approved with the 2016-2021 Housing Strategy by Full Council on the 5th of December 2016. Work on developing a Homeless Statement action plan has been delayed and will commence in January 2018, subject to clarity on duties coming out of the Homelessness Reduction Act. A new Homelessness Partnership Board will be recruited in February 2018.

- **Recommendation 3:** The Mayor and Lead Member should undertake a rolling programme of unannounced visits to all the B&Bs and hostels used as both emergency accommodation for homeless families and single people.

Service comment at action planning stage:

There is no reason in principle why Members should not inspect any of the temporary accommodation (TA) supplied to homeless households. However the properties are not owned by the Council and access to them is generally by agreement with the provider, which would imply visits by prior arrangement rather than unannounced. There is always the risk of entry being refused if unannounced, and, should the proprietor take exception for any reason there is a low risk of refusing future bookings from the Council. The Housing Options Service inspects all hotels before they are used, follows up any complaints about conditions made by residents and undertakes full inspections where there are grounds for concern. The service has ceased using several hotels in recent years because of the failure of proprietors to improve standards. This recommendation was discussed with the Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Performance on 22 August 2016. He agreed this was not a practical recommendation, particularly in light of the fact that the majority of hotels used are out of the borough, and therefore fall within the jurisdiction of the host authorities. It was agreed that officers should ensure they brief the Mayor and the Cabinet Member directly if any incident occurs or issue arises that is likely to have implications for the safety or security of our residents and/or the reputation of the Council.

Update from service:

Nil. No relevant incidences or issues have been reported. No further actions agreed at action planning stage.

- **Recommendation 4:** Housing Options Service on a quarterly basis publish in the Members' Bulletin B&B placements data including the number of unlawful placements.

Service comment at action planning stage:

The Council provides weekly and monthly reports to the Cabinet Members, providing; a breakdown of activity in the Housing Options Service which includes numbers in TA; numbers of placements in and out of borough; numbers in B&B including number of unlawful placements over 6 weeks. There is no reason in principle why the monthly report could not be included in the Members' Bulletin, and the service would be happy to give a briefing to Members on the monitoring it undertakes and how to interpret the data that is supplied.

Update from service:

Performance on homeless preventions, temporary accommodation placements and families in B&B for more than 6 weeks is reported to Members via quarterly strategic plan performance reports and Cabinet Member dashboards. There have been no families in B&B for longer than 6 weeks from September 2016 – Jan 2018, so the Council has

achieved legal compliance on this indicator for 16 months in succession.

- **Recommendation 5:** The P1E return needs to be available in a reader friendly format on the Council website and intranet.

Service comment at action planning stage:

P1E returns have been published on the website by the Business Support Team in Housing Options. Existing and future reports will be reconfigured and re-published in a format which is much more accessible and printer friendly.

Update from service:

The P1E report has been reconfigured as far as possible into a readable and printable format and posted on the external website.

- **Recommendation 6:** The Mayor should not authorise officers to discharge the Council's main homelessness duty through a Private Rented Sector offer.

Service comment at action planning stage:

The ability to discharge the homelessness duty by way of a PRSO is a power introduced under the Localism Act 2012. A compulsory PRSO can only be made to families for whom a homelessness duty was accepted after the introduction of the Localism Act in November 2012. The Service implemented the use of PRSOs following the adoption of the Homelessness Statement under the previous administration in 2013. Following concerns raised by OSC in late 2014 the service suspended the use of compulsory PRSOs, and since then there have been two voluntary PRSOs where the applicant chose to accept a private sector offer in the borough rather than face several years in temporary accommodation outside Tower Hamlets. Since January 2015 there have been a total of 20 PRS properties accepted by families at risk of homelessness in order to prevent becoming homeless, and 19 single people have similarly accepted PRS properties. Of course, by using them to prevent homelessness this meant those 20 families did not need to go into B&B in the first place, but the 'prevention' option is voluntary.

All PRS properties offered to either prevent homelessness or end the homelessness duty are assessed for their suitability, must be supplied by accredited landlords and must be affordable. For PRSOs this means they must be at or below LHA rate and the household must not be subject to the benefit cap. The Service would not discharge the duty unless an AST is available for a minimum of two years. It is arguable that refusing to permit the use of PRSOs in circumstances where the Council is struggling to accommodate homeless households lawfully could amount to a fettering of its discretion. While the numbers are low the Service has lost the opportunity to discharge the homelessness duty on around a further 20 homeless households who are in properties owned and managed by a partner registered provider. In addition to

those private sector properties offered at LHA rate, including some which the landlord is required to make available for a period of 5 years at LHA rate as a condition of receiving an empty property grant from the Council. Officers would recommend instead reinstating the discretion to utilise PRSOs in light of the requirement to ensure that all offers are suitable, taking into account affordability, size, condition, location and the fitness of the landlord. *This policy decision is being reviewed as part of the Housing Strategy.* This matter was discussed with the Lead Member on 22 August who agreed that the PRSO option should be available for use, where appropriate and subject to any offer being suitable as defined by legislation, case law and statutory regulations.

Update from service:

A Policy decision on the Private Rented Sector Offer has been agreed. The Mayor in Cabinet in November 2016 agreed a number of changes to the Common Housing Register Allocation Scheme including the use of private rented accommodation to discharge its homelessness duties in limited circumstances. This was incorporated into the 2016 – 21 Housing Strategy.

- **Recommendation 7:** Develop and publicise a plan to meet the demands on temporary accommodation.

Service comment at action planning stage:

The Service each year provides an estimate of the number of new properties it requires to meet new demand and replace stock lost as a result of private landlords taking back their properties, or the need to return properties earmarked for regeneration and redevelopment. The Service has also made a number of strategic proposals to increase the Council's own portfolio of TA, consider alternative ways of procuring and managing private sector accommodation and to increase the rate of permanent offers to households in TA in order to reduce reliance on and the cost of TA in the private rented sector; and to prevent an unmanageable increase in numbers of homeless households in TA. The work being undertaken on this issue will be incorporated into the Housing Strategy.

Update from service

Temporary Accommodation Strategy has been included as part of the 2016 – 2021 Housing Strategy. Measures included developing the Council's owned temporary accommodation portfolio and developing the use of modular housing.

- **Recommendation 8:** Ensure the future strategy on homelessness adopts an approach to limiting the use of bed & breakfast for families.

Service comment at action planning stage:

The Service has worked hard to reduce the number of families in B&B and achieving legal compliance on B&B placements remains an

overriding priority. There is also work underway to look at improving the throughput of single people from B&B and this will be incorporated into the Housing Strategy.

Update from service

Policy approach to B&B & hostel use has been included in the 2016 – 2021 Housing Strategy. Policy was to reduce B&B use to within statutory limit to zero and this has been successful. The Council has achieved legal compliance on the use of B&B accommodation to house homeless families for 16 months in succession.

- **Recommendation 9:** A summary of all those cases in which a family with children or vulnerable single person has been deemed intentionally homeless should be reported monthly to the Mayor and Lead Member.

Service comment at action planning stage:

This recommendation seems to be predicated on the assumption that those evicted from private rented sector tenancies due to rent arrears will be found to be intentionally homeless (IH). If a tenancy becomes unaffordable, or was not affordable in at the outset and the tenant signed it in good faith unaware that it was unaffordable, then a Council is statute barred from and we do not find them as IH. The Preventing Intentional Homeless Protocol operated internally for those in temporary accommodation has resulted in a marked reduction in IH decisions for this client group. There are data protection issues to be considered where the client has not authorised sensitive personal and financial information to be disclosed to a third party. It is unclear as to the purpose of providing this information and although it could be anonymised it would help to know to what end the information could be used. The additional resources required to do this would impact on service delivery when the proposal under the organisational change is to reduce the number of officers involved in these complex cases. The figures for numbers of households found to be IH are published on the P1E. This recommendation was discussed with the Lead Member on 22 August 2016. It was agreed that there is no need for summaries of IH cases to be provided given the resource implications of so doing, and the lack of clarity of purpose. Data is publicly available on the number of IH decisions issued each quarter; Members are able to seek information regarding this data at any time.

Update from service

Nil. No further actions agreed at action planning stage. Data is publicly available on the number of intentionally homeless cases decisions issued each quarter.

- **Recommendation 10:** Implement a package of support for families placed out of borough in order to help households settle into a new borough.

Service comment at action planning stage:

This already happens. The Service provides detailed information on the local area for all out of borough placements. All new placements into TA receive a settling in visit within 2 weeks of their placement. If support needs are identified then the service will allocate the case to a Tenancy Sustainment Officer or the Family Intervention Programme (FIP) team. Where large numbers of placements are made in a single block then on-site support is provided at the point of sign-up and moving in to the address. All are provided with any relevant information about their new homes, and any issues to do with multiple people moving away at the same time are addressed.

Update from service

The Service supports residents placed out of borough and will continue to do so.

- **Recommendation 11:** Ensure that the policy for determining the suitability of temporary accommodation/private rented sector offers is published and publicly available on the Council's website and intranet site.

Service comment at action planning stage:

This has now been placed on the website at
http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/housing/housing_options_service/housing_and_homelessness_public.aspx

Update from service:

Completed as above.

- **Recommendation 12:** Explore the potential of prioritising a move back to the borough for homeless families who have been placed out of borough for a long period of time when local temporary accommodation becomes available, which is consistent with the Council's legal duties.

Service comment at action planning stage:

The policy for prioritising households for an offer of an in-borough property is set out in the procedure for allocating temporary accommodation (see previous recommendation). Only around 10% of all properties currently offered to the Council are in the borough and therefore it is necessary to ensure that this resource is used in accordance with the published procedure. 90% of all new placements are now out of the borough, the point is largely moot and in reality the majority of in-borough properties we do get are allocated to families who are already in the borough and occupying properties that are under notice of hand-back or which have been found to be unsuitable, for instance on medical grounds. We have recently had a supply of non-secure and leasehold properties within the borough; the smaller units have primarily gone to families unlawfully accommodated in B&B, while larger family units have been used primarily for transfer cases, all

in accordance with the published policy & procedure. Implementation of this policy will have legal implications and could fetter the Council's discretion, request is noted but no action is proposed.

Update from service:

Nil. No further actions proposed at action planning stage.

- **Recommendation 13:** Create awareness amongst hard to engage Registered Providers (RP) on the implications of evictions, and explore what is required to engage with RPs on evictions, including sharing the analysis with all RPs of tenant engagement work undertaken with Poplar Harca on rent arrears and evictions.

Service comment at action planning stage:

It is not this Service's experience that any of the RPs are particularly 'hard to engage'. The Preventing Intentional Homelessness Protocol has been well-received at the Common Housing Register Forum. The pilot with Poplar Harca has identified a number of operational and process issues across this service. The RP and the Housing Benefit Department are all working to resolve for the benefit of all partners and vulnerable tenants. We have found there is a strong appetite among partners to achieve joint working to prevent social housing tenancies breaking down.

Update from service:

A review of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between RPs and Housing Benefit has been completed, and draft revisions made, this is awaiting sign off prior to agreement by the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum.

An officer has been appointed to work on the Preventing Intentional Homeless protocol / initiative and enhance joint working with RP partners in the borough, DWP/Housing Benefits team, money advisors and relevant support agencies to prevent homelessness. All the large partner RPs operating in the borough have had communication in December 2016 explaining the project and requesting appropriate referrals to Housing Options before they initiate any court action

Where necessary, the project officer is attending team meetings and doing presentations to further explain the project and its benefits - preventing homelessness and maximising rental income for the landlord. Housing Options is currently working with roughly 10 RPs who have made referrals. The protocol will be rolled out with all partner RPs and the Service will ensure partners understand the protocol and are engaged in this valuable work. Initial review of the protocol following work with Poplar HARCA is complete. A further review of the Protocol will take into consideration any additional feedback received from new partners involved in this initiative in approximately 6 months (June / July 2018).

- **Recommendation 14:** - Explore customer empathy training for relevant front line staff in the wider Housing Options Advice Service.

Service comment at action planning stage:

As part of the organisational change proposal there will be a programme of training for officers who will be required to undertake additional and/or new duties. This recommendation will be incorporated into this training which is timetabled in the action plan for implementation and embedding for August and September. It is proposed to use Cardboard Citizens (training provider) who's training Housing Options Singles Team (HOST) found useful and innovative.

Update from service:

A detailed training programme was devised and has now been implemented as part of the new structure which came into effect in September 2017. The training covered all aspects of the job roles of employees within the new structure including policies and procedures, finance/procurement, IT, legal and customer services.

- **Recommendation 15:** - Consider a mentoring scheme between HOST trained frontline staff and frontline staff in the wider Housing Options Advice Service.

Service comment at action planning stage:

Some training of officers in order for this to be effective and the recommendation assumes that there is capacity and capability within HOST to do this. Shadowing has been undertaken as part of PDRs in the past in order that staff working in different areas gain an appreciation of the different challenges and responsibilities within the Service. This had some effect but did not break down the 'silo' effect of working with different client groups and in different teams. The proposed organisational change will address this, in that officers in the generic lead professional team will deal with all clients at first point of contact ensuring a consistent approach to service delivery.

Update from service

All staff have had relevant training in their job role. They will receive on-going training and, where appropriate, be offered shadowing opportunities within other teams to develop their skills and knowledge base further.

- **Recommendation 16:** Undertake an analysis of the recommendations identified in the diagnostic peer review report and implement those that would benefit the service.

Service comment at action planning stage:

This recommendation is incorporated into the Service Manager's PDR and work has already started on this. It will be programmed to include a Steering Group of Team Managers and Team Principals in HOS and an action plan will be drawn up. Negotiations with Facilities

Management will also be required to address recommendations regarding a refresh of the reception area.

Update from service:

Completion of analysis of recommendations identified in the diagnostic peer review and a comprehensive action plan developed. Work to the reception area has been completed, although some IT issues are yet to be resolved. Whilst some work has been completed, actions have been put on hold given the urgent need to implement changes required as part of the Homelessness Reduction Act, which comes into effect in April 2018.

- **Recommendation 17:** A future full scrutiny review looks into homelessness.

Service comment at action planning stage:

The new Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee has been established this municipal year. The Committee held its work planning session on 27th June 2016 and identified a range of issues that they would like to consider during the current year which includes homelessness and a review of actions to implement the recommendations from this challenge session.

Update from service:

A full review of homelessness will be carried out by the Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee (HSSC) as part of their work programme for 2018/19. The review has been delayed due to other more pressing priorities areas for action such as the Homeless Reduction Act (HRA) which comes into effect in April 2018 and its implementation, and the fire safety review of high rise residential buildings, following the Grenfell tower fire.

Progress updates against the action plan developed to address scrutiny recommendations on homelessness is on track for consideration at the HSSC on 29 January 2018.

2. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

- 2.1 Following a Homelessness Scrutiny Challenge session that took place on 7th June 2016, this report provides an update to the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee on the progress made against the action plan that was subsequently approved by the Mayor in Cabinet in order to meet the Committee's recommendations.
- 2.2 As outlined in the original report, as a result of the combination of the increasing numbers of applications to the homelessness section, the scarcity of available temporary accommodation and the high levels of rent charged to the Council, significant service pressures are being faced. Due to the difficulties in procuring suitable accommodation

within the borough, it is necessary to place families in temporary bed and breakfast accommodation as well as the increasing need for properties to be provided outside Tower Hamlets. In order to alleviate this, the Council has recently introduced various initiatives to increase supply, including approving significant capital investment to purchase properties to be let as temporary accommodation.

- 2.3 The gross budget of the Homeless Service for 2017-18 is £35.5 million, with the major cost element being the £27.4 million budget for the rent payable to landlords for the supply of temporary accommodation. The main source of income derives from the rents and charges that are levied to customers.
- 2.4 The majority of the rental income is however met through benefits payments, so the financial implications within the service budget cannot be looked at in isolation. Although the Council has a statutory duty to pay benefits, the level of subsidy that is recouped from the DWP is capped. The high rent levels charged by suppliers of temporary accommodation are leading to budgetary pressures within the Housing Benefits budget due to this variance between the statutory benefits paid out and the Government subsidy received.
- 2.5 The Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee considered a report in September 2017 which outlined the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which comes into effect in April 2018. Although specific detail is still not currently available, the act proposes that local authorities will be statutorily responsible for new duties to prevent homelessness, and although any financial impact is not quantifiable at this stage, all councils are likely to face additional service and budgetary demands. The Government announced New Burdens funding allocations in October 2017 which will partly mitigate this risk. The national allocation totalled £72.7 million of which the Council has been awarded £1.6 million over a three year period.
- 2.6 The Homelessness Statement is incorporated within the various Housing Strategy documents that were approved by Full Council in December 2016. The activities contained within the action plan contribute towards continued improvements in service delivery and although there are no specific financial consequences arising directly from the recommendations, ultimately the Housing Strategy and its constituent elements underpin key decisions in relation to service provision and must be considered within the context of the Council's funding gap and the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

3. LEGAL COMMENTS

- 3.1 The Council is required by section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 to have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to have executive arrangements that ensure the committee has specified powers. Consistent with this obligation, Article 6 of the Council's Constitution provides that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may

consider any matter affecting the area or its inhabitants and may make reports and recommendations to the Full Council or the Executive in connection with the discharge of any functions.

- 3.2 This report provides progress made against the original recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny challenge session and subsequent report titled "Homelessness Scrutiny Challenge Session Report" which made 17 recommendations. An action plan was developed to address the recommendations. This report and an action plan was endorsed by Cabinet on 6th December 2016.
- 3.3 Appendix 1 is the Action Plan Update and paragraph 1.3 of the report gives an overview as to progress against the recommendations and actions.
- 3.4 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was passed on 27th April 2017. The Act places new legal duties on English councils so that everyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness will have access to meaningful help, irrespective of their priority need status, as long as they are eligible for assistance. The Act amends part VII of the Housing Act 1996 as well as to the Article 3 of the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012.
- 3.5 Those sections of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 making changes as indicated above are not yet in force however: these come into force on such day or days as the Secretary of State may by regulations made by statutory instrument appoint. The current indication is that these sections will come into force in April 2018 and the Action Plan Update indicates where it will be affected by the changes.
- 3.6 When considering its approach to homelessness, the Council must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010; the need to advance equality of opportunity; and the need to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

4. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1. The recommendations and action plan (Appendix 1) explore ways the council could use existing resources better e.g. through better informed planning and strategy development, considering how it can reduce expensive costs in relation to temporary accommodation and improve outcomes for the community especially those that are homeless or faced with homelessness, this includes a new Homelessness Partnership board, roll out of the Preventing Intentional Homeless protocol and sustaining legal compliance in the use of B&B accommodation.

All recommendations and actions contribute towards the delivery of the One Tower Hamlets priorities and objectives.

5. BEST VALUE (BV) IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Several of the recommendations and actions aim to achieve better value for the Council within the resources available. Examples include, investigating the potential to develop long term temporary accommodation options which would reduce the current high expenditure related to the Nightly Paid Market for temporary accommodation. Current proposals include developing the Council's owned temporary accommodation portfolio and developing the use of modular housing.

6. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

- 6.1 There are no direct greener environment implications arising from the report or recommendations.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no direct risk management implications arising from the report or recommendations.

8. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no direct crime and disorder reduction implications arising from the report or recommendations.

9. SAFEGUARDING IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no direct safeguarding implications arising from the recommendations and action plan updates.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- None

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Homelessness Scrutiny Review Action Plan Updates

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

- None

Officer contact details for documents:
N/A

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HOMELESSNESS SCRUTINY CHALLENGE SESSION REPORT – ACTION PLAN UPDATE

- Completed - where an action has been completed 100%
- Delayed – where an action has missed its deadline but is still due for completion in 2017/18
- Overdue - if completion in 2017/18 is unlikely

Recommendation 1: Improvements highlighted in this report in relation to the Homelessness Statement and Action Plan should be incorporated into the new overarching Housing Strategy to be signed off by the Mayor and Full Council.

Comments from service: The Council currently has in place a *Homelessness Statement 2013 to 2017*, which sets out our approach to preventing and reducing homelessness focused on:

- ☐ Homeless prevention and tackling the causes of homelessness
- ☐ Access to affordable housing options
- ☐ Children, families and young people
- ☐ Vulnerable adults

Many aspects of this document are still relevant but over the next 12 months we will consider what other options are available to prevent and meet homelessness demand. The document will be updated to reflect progress over the past 3 years and take into account improvements highlighted in the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) report. We will engage fully with all partners in 2017 to develop a further 4 year action plan to continue to tackle homelessness. There will be an emphasis on ensuring the most vulnerable and marginalised groups who face homelessness can continue to be assisted, linking their support into their health needs, education and employment opportunities and overall wellbeing.

Actions	Responsible Officer	Date to be completed	Status	% Completed	Comments
Update Homeless Statement and incorporate into Housing Strategy	Martin Ling	30/11/2016	Completed	100%	Updated version of the Statement was approved by Full Council on the 5 th of December 2016.
Develop Homelessness action plan with Homelessness partners	Martin Ling	31/03/2017	Overdue	25%	This was delayed for 2 key reasons: A restructure of the Homeless services in the Housing Options Service ran through most of 2017 and the new management team was not established till December

					<p>2017. It was agreed that the revised plan should not be taken forward until the new team were in place in order that they have ownership of the plan and service.</p> <p>The Homelessness Reduction Act became law in April 2017 but the final regulations are still awaited. It was agreed that the new plan should be delayed until the more detailed duties become clearer.</p> <p>Work on the new plan led by the new team will commence in January 2018.</p>
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Recommendation 2: Review existing partnership arrangements and objectives on homelessness, and strengthen joint working in order to respond to threats and demands.

Comments from service: As set out above the Homeless Statement will be updated to reflect progress over the past 3 years and take into account improvements highlighted in the OSC report. We will engage fully with all partners in 2017 to develop a further 4 year action plan to continue to tackle homelessness and this will include reviving the Homelessness Partnership Board.

Action	Responsible Officer	Date to be completed	Status	% Completed	Comments
Update Homelessness Statement and incorporate into Housing Strategy	Martin Ling	30/11/2016	Completed	100%	See above
Develop Homelessness action plan with Homelessness partners	Martin Ling	31/03/2017	Overdue	25%	See above
Set up and agree Terms of Reference of a new Homelessness Partnership Board	Martin Ling	21/03/2017	Overdue	25%	A new board will be recruited in February 2018.

Recommendation 3: The Mayor and Lead Member should undertake a rolling programme of unannounced visits to all the B&Bs and hostels used as both emergency accommodation for homeless families and single people.

Comments from service: There is no reason in principle why Members should not inspect any of the temporary accommodation (TA) supplied to homeless households. However the properties are not owned by the Council and access to them is generally by agreement with the provider, which would imply visits by prior arrangement rather than unannounced. There is always the risk of entry being refused if unannounced, and, should the proprietor take exception for any reason there is a low risk of refusing future bookings from the Council. The Housing Options Service inspects all hotels before they are used, follows up any complaints about conditions made by residents and undertakes full inspections where there are grounds for concern. The service has ceased using several hotels in recent years because of the failure of proprietors to improve standards. This recommendation was discussed with the Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Performance on 22 August 2016. He agreed this was not a practical recommendation, particularly in light of the fact that the majority of hotels used are out of the borough, and therefore fall within the jurisdiction of the host authorities. It was agreed that officers should ensure they brief the Mayor and the Cabinet Member directly if any incident occurs or issue arises that is likely to have implications for the safety or security of our residents and/or the reputation of the Council.

Action	Responsible Officer	Date to be completed
None		

Recommendation 4: Housing Options Service on a quarterly basis publishes in the Members' Bulletin B&B placements data including the number of unlawful placements.

Comments from service: The Council provides weekly and monthly reports to the Cabinet Members, providing; a breakdown of activity in the Housing Options Service which includes numbers in TA; numbers of placements in and out of borough; numbers in B&B including number of unlawful placements over 6 weeks. There is no reason in principle why the monthly report could not be included in the Members' Bulletin, and the service would be happy to give a briefing to Members on the monitoring it undertakes and how to interpret the data that is supplied.

Action	Responsible Officer	Date to be completed	Status	% Completed	Comments
D&R SPP to provide data to Democratic Services to be included on the Members' Bulletin	Abidah Kamali	31/09/2016	Completed	100%	Performance on homeless preventions, temporary accommodation placements and families in B&B for more than 6 weeks is reported to Members via quarterly strategic plan performance reports and Cabinet Member dashboards. There have been no families in B&B for longer than 6 weeks from September 2016 – Jan 2018, so the Council has

					achieved legal compliance on this indicator for 16 months in succession.
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Recommendation 5: The P1E return needs to be available in a reader friendly format on the Council website					
Comments from service: P1E returns have been published on the website by the Business Support Team in Housing Options. Existing and future reports will be reconfigured and re-published in a format which is much more accessible and printer friendly.					
Action	Responsible Officer	Date to be completed	Status	% Completed	Comments
P1E reports currently posted on the external site will be reconfigured into a readable and printable format, as will future reports	Jamie Jackson	31/09/2016	Completed	100%	The P1E report has been reconfigured as far as possible into a readable and printable format and posted on the external website.

Recommendation 6: The Mayor should not authorise officers to discharge the Council's main homelessness duty through a Private Rented Sector offer.
<p>Comments from service: The ability to discharge the homelessness duty by way of a PRSO is a power introduced under the Localism Act 2012. A compulsory PRSO can only be made to families for whom a homelessness duty was accepted after the introduction of the Localism Act in November 2012. The Service implemented the use of PRSOs following the adoption of the Homelessness Statement under the previous administration in 2013. In the period to November 2014 a total of 72 households had a homelessness duty discharged by way of a PRSO; 53 went to households who were unlawfully accommodated in B&B. The remainder went to people who had either been placed out of the borough and needed or wanted to return, or who were in TA within the Borough that was under notice from the landlord. All these offers were to households where the homelessness duty had been accepted since the implementation of the Localism Act, unless they voluntarily accepted the PRSO in preference to being transferred out of the Borough. Only four of these households were made offers outside the borough, at least two of these were 'restricted duty' cases with no recourse to public funds, which were only entitled to receive a private sector offer and could not afford a property in the Borough.</p> <p>All properties procured were obtained at the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate and were assessed for their suitability for each of the applicants who were offered them, including an assessment of the affordability of the property. They were all let at LHA on a minimum two-year Assured Short-hold tenancy. This included 20 leasehold buy-backs in Carradale House, let at LHA on 5-year assured short-hold tenancies (AST) by Poplar Harca.</p> <p>Following concerns raised by OSC in late 2014 the service suspended the use of compulsory PRSOs, and since then there have been two voluntary PRSOs where the applicant chose to accept a private sector offer in the borough rather than face several years in temporary accommodation outside Tower Hamlets. Since January 2015 there have been a total of 20 PRS properties accepted by families at risk of homelessness in order to prevent becoming homeless, and 19 single people have similarly accepted PRS properties. The family-sized</p>

accommodation could have been used either for families unlawfully accommodated in B&B or where the Council was under threat of legal action from landlords for failing to return their properties. Of course, by using them to prevent homelessness this meant those 20 families did not need to go into B&B in the first place, but the 'prevention' option is voluntary.

The availability of affordable PRS properties has substantially reduced, either for the prevention or relief of homelessness, and has become particularly difficult for family-size accommodation. The Council has received further offers of Poplar Harca buy-backs, which have been let either as non-secure tenancies, or ASTs, but as TA rather than discharging the homelessness duty. Had the Council discharged the homelessness duty on these cases, this would have resulted in a reduction in the number of families listed as being in TA. All PRS properties offered to either prevent homelessness or end the homelessness duty are assessed for their suitability, must be supplied by accredited landlords and must be affordable. For PRSOs this means they must be at or below LHA rate and the household must not be subject to the benefit cap. The Service would not discharge the duty unless an AST is available for a minimum of two years.

It is arguable that refusing to permit the use of PRSOs in circumstances where the Council is struggling to accommodate homeless households lawfully could amount to a fettering of its discretion. While the numbers are low the Service has lost the opportunity to discharge the homelessness duty on around a further 20 homeless households who are in properties owned and managed by a partner registered provider. In addition to those private sector properties offered at LHA rate, including some which the landlord is required to make available for a period of 5 years at LHA rate as a condition of receiving an empty property grant from the Council. Officers would recommend instead reinstating the discretion to utilise PRSOs in light of the requirement to ensure that all offers are

suitable, taking into account affordability, size, condition, location and the fitness of the landlord. *This policy decision is being reviewed as part of the Housing Strategy.* This matter was discussed with the Lead Member on 22 August who agreed that the PRSO option should be available for use, where appropriate and subject to any offer being suitable as defined by legislation, case law and statutory regulations.

Action	Responsible Officer	Date to be completed	Status	% Completed	Comments
Policy decision on PRSO to be agreed as part of the new Housing Strategy	Lorraine Douglas/ Rafiqul Hoque / Martin Ling	30/11/16	Completed	100%	The Mayor in Cabinet in November 2016 agreed a number of changes to the Common Housing Register Allocation Scheme including the use of private rented accommodation to discharge its homelessness duties in limited circumstances. This was incorporated into the 2016 – 21 Housing Strategy.

Recommendation 7: Develop and publicise a plan to meet the demands on temporary accommodation.

Comments from service: The Service each year provides an estimate of the number of new properties it requires to meet new demand and replace stock lost as a result of private landlords taking back their properties, or the need to return properties earmarked for regeneration and redevelopment. The Service has also made a number of strategic proposals to increase the Council's own portfolio of TA, consider alternative ways of procuring and managing private sector accommodation and to increase the rate of permanent offers to households in TA in order to reduce reliance on and the cost of TA in the private rented sector; and to prevent an unmanageable increase in numbers of homeless households in TA. The work being undertaken on this issue will be incorporated into the Housing Strategy.

Actions	Responsible Officer	Date to be completed	Status	% Completed	Comments
Final Temporary Accommodation Strategy to be included as part of the Housing Strategy	Lorraine Douglas Rafiqul Hoque	30/11/16	Completed	100%	Measures included developing the Council's owned temporary accommodation portfolio and developing the use of modular housing.

Recommendation 8: Ensure the future strategy on homelessness adopts an approach to limiting the use of bed & breakfast for families.

Comments from the service: The Service has worked hard to reduce the number of families in B&B and achieving legal compliance on B&B placements remains an overriding priority. There is also work underway to look at improving the throughput of single people from B&B and this will be incorporated into the Housing Strategy.

Actions	Responsible Officer	Date to be completed	Status	% Completed	Comments
Policy approach to B&B & hostel use to be included in the new Housing Strategy	Lorraine Douglas/ Rafiqul Hoque / Martin Ling	30/11/16	Completed	100%	Policy was to reduce B&B use to within statutory limit to zero and this has been successful.

Recommendation 9: A summary of all those cases in which a family with children or vulnerable single person has been deemed intentionally homeless should be reported monthly to the Mayor and Lead Member.

Comments from the service: This recommendation seems to be predicated on the assumption that those evicted from private rented sector tenancies due to rent arrears will be found to be intentionally homeless (IH). If a tenancy becomes unaffordable, or was not affordable in at the outset and the tenant signed it in good faith unaware that it was unaffordable, then a Council is statute barred from and we do not find them as IH. The Preventing Intentional Homeless Protocol operated internally for those in temporary accommodation has resulted in a marked reduction in IH decisions for this client group. There are data protection issues to be considered where the client has not authorised sensitive personal and financial information to be disclosed to a third party. It is unclear as to the purpose of providing this information and although it could be anonymised it would help to know to what end the information could be used. The additional resources required to do this would impact on service delivery when the proposal under the organisational change is to reduce the number of officers involved in these complex cases. The figures for numbers of households found to be IH are published on the P1E. This recommendation was discussed with the Lead Member on 22 August 2016. It was agreed that there is no need for summaries of IH cases to be provided given the resource implications of so doing, and the lack of clarity of purpose. Data is publicly available on the number of IH decisions issued each quarter; Members are able to seek information regarding this data at any time.

Action	Responsible Officer	Date to be completed	Status	% Completed	Comments
None					

Recommendation 10: Implement a package of support for families placed out of borough in order to help households settle into a new borough.

Comments from service: This already happens. The Service provides detailed information on the local area for all out of borough placements. All new placements into TA receive a settling in visit within 2 weeks of their placement. If support needs are identified then the service will allocate the case to a Tenancy Sustainment Officer or the Family Intervention Programme (FIP) team. Where large numbers of placements are made in a single block then on-site support is provided at the point of sign-up and moving in to the address. All are provided with any relevant information about their new homes, and any issues to do with multiple people moving away at the same time are addressed.

Action	Responsible Officer	Date to be completed	Status	% Completed	Comments
The Service already supports residents placed out of borough and will continue to do so.	Lorraine Douglas/ Janet Slater Rafiqul Hoque	On going	Ongoing	On going	On going

Recommendation 11: Ensure that the policy for Determining the Suitability of Temporary Accommodation/Private Rented Sector Offers is published and publicly available on the Council's website and intranet site.

Comments from the service: This has now been placed on the website at http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/housing/housing_options_service/housing_and_homelessness_publi.aspx

Action	Responsible Officer	Date to be completed	Status	% Completed	Comments
Place the link to the policy on the LBTH external site	Lorraine Douglas Rafiqul Hoque	Complete	Completed	100%	

Recommendation 12: Explore the potential of prioritising a move back to the borough for homeless families who have been placed out of borough for a long period of time when local temporary accommodation becomes available, which is consistent with the Council's legal duties.

Comments from service: The policy for prioritising households for an offer of an in-borough property is set out in the procedure for allocating temporary accommodation (see previous recommendation). Only around 10% of all properties currently offered to the Council are in the borough and therefore it is necessary to ensure that this resource is used in accordance with the published procedure. 90% of all new placements are now out of the borough, the point is largely moot and in reality the majority of in-borough properties we do get are allocated to families who are already in the borough and occupying properties that are under notice of hand-back or which have been found to be unsuitable, for instance on medical grounds. We have recently had a supply of non-secure and leasehold properties within the borough; the smaller units have primarily gone to families unlawfully accommodated in B&B, while larger family units have been used primarily for transfer cases, all in accordance with the published policy & procedure. Implementation of this policy will have legal implications and could fetter the Council's discretion, request is noted but no action is proposed.

Action	Responsible Officer	Date to be completed	Status	% Completed	Comments
None					

Recommendation 13: Create awareness amongst hard to engage Registered Providers (RP) on the implications of evictions, and explore what is required to engage with RPs on evictions, including sharing the analysis with all RPs of tenant engagement work undertaken with Poplar Harca on rent arrears and evictions.

Comments from service: It is not this Service's experience that any of the RPs are particularly 'hard to engage'. The Preventing Intentional Homelessness Protocol has been well-received at the Common Housing Register Forum. The pilot with Poplar Harca has identified a number of

operational and process issues across this service. The RP and the Housing Benefit Department are all working to resolve for the benefit of all partners and vulnerable tenants. We have found there is a strong appetite among partners to achieve joint working to prevent social housing tenancies breaking down.					
Actions	Responsible Officer	Date to be completed	Status	% Completed	Comments
Review and revision of current SLA between RPs and Housing Benefit	Janet Slater Rafiqul Hoque / Steve Hill	31/09/2016	Completed	100%	Draft revision of SLA complete
Discuss draft SLA at THHF and agree final version	Janet Slater Rafiqul Hoque / Steve Hill	31/10/2016	Delayed	95%	Awaiting sign off and distribution to/approval and approval from THHF
Preventing IH protocol roll out to all RPs	Team Manager LP team	31/03/2017	Delayed	40%	An officer has been appointed to work on this initiative and enhance joint working with RP partners in the borough, DWP/HB team, money advisors and relevant support agencies to prevent homelessness.
Full implementation of protocol	Team Manager LP team	31/05/2017	Delayed	60%	All the large partner RPs operating in the borough have had communication in December explaining the project and requesting appropriate referrals to Housing Options before they initiate any court action. Where necessary, the project officer is attending team meetings and doing presentations to further explain the project and its benefits - preventing homelessness and maximising rental income for the landlord. Housing Options is currently working with roughly 10 RPs who have made referrals. The protocol will be rolled out with all partner RPs and the Service will ensure partners understand the protocol and are engaged

					in this valuable work.
Review of protocol and referrals	Team Manager LP team	30/09/2017	Delayed	70%	Initial review of the protocol following work with HARCA is complete. A further review of the Protocol will take into consideration any additional feedback received from new partners involved in this initiative in approximately 6 months.

Recommendation 14: Explore customer empathy training for relevant front line staff in the wider Housing Options Advice Service.

Comments from service: As part of the organisational change proposal there will be a programme of training for officers who will be required to undertake additional and/or new duties. This recommendation will be incorporated into this training which is timetabled in the action plan for implementation and embedding for August and September. It is proposed to use Cardboard Citizens (training provider) who's training Housing Options Singles Team (HOST) found useful and innovative.

Action	Responsible Officer	Date to be completed	Status	% Completed	Comments
Training programme for new structure to be drawn up and implemented	Janet Slater/Lorraine Douglas Rafiqul Hoque	31/10/2016	Completed	100%	The detailed training programme was devised and has now been implemented as part of the new structure which came into effect in September 2017. The training covered all aspects of the job roles of employees within the new structure including policies and procedures, finance/procurement, IT, legal and customer services.

Recommendation 15: Consider a mentoring scheme between HOST trained frontline staff and frontline staff in the wider Housing Options Advice Service.

Comments from service: This recommendation follows on from the above. Mentoring is a particular skill which would require

some training of officers in order for this to be effective and the recommendation assumes that there is capacity and capability within HOST to do this. Shadowing has been undertaken as part of PDRs in the past in order that staff working in different areas gain an appreciation of the different challenges and responsibilities within the Service. This had some effect but did not break down the 'silo' effect of working with different client groups and in different teams. The proposed organisational change will address this, in that officers in the generic lead professional team will deal with all clients at first point of contact ensuring a consistent approach to service delivery.

Action	Responsible Officer	Date to be completed	Status	% Completed	Comments
Training programme for new structure to be drawn up and implemented	Janet Slater/Lorraine Douglas Rafiqul Hoque	October 2016	Completed	100%	All staff have had relevant training in their job role. They will receive on-going training and, where appropriate, be offered shadowing opportunities within other teams to develop their skills and knowledge base further.

Recommendation 16: Undertake an analysis of the recommendations identified in the diagnostic peer review report and implement those that would benefit the service.

Comments from service: This recommendation is incorporated into the Service Manager's PDR and work has already started on this. It will be programmed to include a Steering Group of Team Managers and Team Principals in HOS and an action plan will be drawn up. Negotiations with Facilities Management will also be required to address recommendations regarding a refresh of the reception area.

Update:

This has been put on hold given the urgent need to implement changes required as part of the Homelessness Reduction Act, which comes into effect in April 2018.

Action	Responsible Officer	Date to be completed	Status	% Completed	Comments
Analysis of the recommendations	Janet Slater Rafiqul Hoque	June 2016	Completed	100%	Complete and action plan devised.
Convene meeting with FM	Janet Slater Rafiqul Hoque	June 2016	Delayed	85%	Work to reception area complete although not all PCs are working.
Convene working group in HOS	Team Manager LP team	October 2016	Delayed	30%	Some work has been completed but remaining actions are on hold pending implementation of the Homelessness

					Reduction Act work which is very urgent.
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Recommendation 17: A future full scrutiny review looks into homelessness

Comment from service: The new Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee has been established this municipal year. The Committee held its work planning session on 27th June 2016 and identified a range of issues that they would like to consider during the current year which includes homelessness and a review of actions to implement the recommendations from this challenge session.

Action	Responsible Officer	Date to be completed	Status	% Completed	Comments
This will carry forward as a recommendation to the 17/18 work programme	Kevin Kewin Afazul Hoque	31/07/2017	Delayed	0%	A full review of homelessness will be carried out by the Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee as part of their work programme for 2018/19. The review has been delayed due to other more pressing priorities areas for action such as the Homeless Reduction Act (HRA) which comes into effect in April 2018 and its implementation, and the fire safety review of high rise residential buildings, following the Grenfell tower fire.
Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee to be provided an update on the progress of the delivery of actions from the homelessness challenge session	Kevin Kewin Afazul Hoque	31/07/2017	Completed	100%	Action plan updates on track for consideration at the HSSC on 29 January 2018.

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