

**Tower Hamlets**  
**Homelessness & Rough Sleeping**  
**Strategy**  
**2024 -2029**

**Foreword from Mayor - to be provided.**

## Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 -2029

### Why have we carried out a review and produced this strategy?

The council has a statutory duty under the Homelessness Act (2002) to conduct a review of the nature and extent of homelessness in its District (borough) every five years and to develop a strategy setting out:

- how services will be delivered in the future to tackle homelessness; and
- the available resources to prevent and relieve homelessness.

Our most recent Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy ended in December 2023 and this new strategy fulfils this statutory and mandatory requirement on the council in its role as a Local Housing Authority.

Both the review and the development of this strategy were undertaken in consultation with key partners and stakeholders operating within the borough. Collaborative work across the council and its partners will be essential to the delivery of this strategy. We are committed to maintaining and building on existing partnerships - working to support people to stay in their properties, or to find lasting and affordable housing options.

### Links to the council's Strategic Plan and Annual Delivery Plan

In addition to meeting its statutory obligation, this strategy reflects the council's commitment to focusing on improving outcomes for our residents. The council's Strategic Plan defines the council's vision for the future and identifies its goals and objectives. It sets out the most important priorities for the council between 2022 and 2026. These priorities are translated from the Mayor's vision and the administration's manifesto pledges. At the same time, all local authorities must deliver certain homelessness services and make decisions, as set out in law. The Strategic Plan also includes important actions that the council will take to make sure that these services and the decisions made provide the best outcomes for our residents.

Under **Priority 2: Homes for the future** – our ambition is that *'Everyone in Tower Hamlets lives in a good quality home that they can afford'*. The council's Strategic Plan sets out the following priorities which the council's new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will assist in delivering:

i. **Create a homelessness fund to prevent evictions and combat homelessness.**

By reviewing the current services and resources available to deliver the council's statutory duties to prevent and relieve homelessness, this will enable both officers and members to identify any gaps in service provision. Similarly, it will also allow for the redirection of resources and funding to target areas for improvement.

ii. **Protect tenants against revenge evictions.**

The Housing Options Service provides mediation where the relationship between a tenant and their landlord breaks down, attempting to mend or remedy the relationship to prevent a household becoming homeless. With the forthcoming publication of the Renters Reform Bill, it is anticipated that 'no fault' section 21 evictions will be abolished. The government are now proposing new and additional mandatory and discretionary grounds for eviction. The new mechanisms and protections contained within the draft Renters Reform Bill will need to be considered and incorporated into Housing Options prevention and relief activities.

iii. **Develop strategies to:**

- Tackle overcrowding, and
- House people experiencing homelessness (including, as a priority, to house rough sleepers)

The review has considered the support and services available for those at risk of/or who are experiencing homelessness or rough sleeping which in turn, has preceded and assisted in the development of this new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. It has enabled the council to determine its priorities to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, and these priorities will inform the direction of travel which the Housing Options Service and its partners will take over the course of the next five years to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping. The new strategy is designed to:

- Identify the priorities to enable the council to address the causes of homelessness in the borough.
- consider new initiatives to prevent homelessness, wherever possible, which are designed to meet locally identified need.
- ensure that the council provides sufficient and suitable temporary accommodation for those households that are or may become homeless; and
- ensure that appropriate support is available for people who have previously experienced homelessness in order to prevent it happening again.

This strategy reflects the council's commitment to focusing on improving outcomes for residents at risk of or experiencing homelessness or rough sleeping in our borough. On the back of the review, these priorities have been developed in consultation with residents and stakeholders and intend to provide direction to the council's Housing Options Service; to enable it to respond to increased demand on its services while adhering to the statutory framework and guidance set out by the government. The priorities within this strategy to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough are addressed in the accompanying Delivery Plan which the council and its partners will be implementing and following to ensure the council's activities meets these priorities to ensure better outcomes for our residents.

**What is the Statutory framework for Homelessness?**

**The Homelessness Act (2002)** sets out the definition of homelessness, and the duties that local authorities owe to applicants who are accepted as being homeless or threatened with homelessness, while **Part 7 of the Housing Act (1996)** provides the primary homelessness legislation setting out the statutory duties on local housing authorities to prevent homelessness and provide assistance to those who are at risk of being homeless or actually homeless. **The Localism Act (2011)** also amended the **1996 Housing Act** by allowing local authorities to discharge their homelessness duty by arranging a suitable offer of accommodation in the private rented sector.

The most recent and significant change in legislation came from the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017). The Act implemented on 3 April 2018, placed new duties on local housing authorities to intervene earlier to prevent homelessness and to take reasonable steps to relieve homelessness for all eligible applicants, not just those that have priority need under the Act. This legislation sought to provide increased protection to people facing homelessness. It extended the length of time an individual or household could be seen as at risk of homelessness, from 28 to 56 days, which in turn increased the length of a local housing authority's prevention duty.

The changes the HRA (2017) effected from 3 April 2018 included:

- A new ‘**prevention duty,**’ requiring local authorities to take reasonable steps to assist those likely to become homeless earlier, so within 56, rather than 28 days.
- A new ‘**relief duty,**’ which applies to those already homeless when they ask the local authority for help. It requires local authorities to provide support for 56 days.
- A requirement to carry out a holistic assessment of the applicant’s housing and support needs, (free advice to anyone in a local authority, whether they are owed a duty or not), and to set out how these will be addressed in a ‘personal housing plan’ which sets out the steps that will be taken by the applicant (and the local authority) to stay in or find suitable accommodation.

More recently, the enactment of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) has placed a duty on local authorities in England to provide support to survivors of domestic abuse and their children. All eligible homeless survivors of domestic abuse automatically receive ‘priority need’ status for homelessness assistance - providing re-assurance and certainty for individuals and their families presenting as homeless due to domestic abuse and simplifying the decision-making process for officers.

The Act also introduced a new definition of domestic abuse and requires that local housing authorities, should provide a secure lifetime tenancy to applicants who held a similar security of tenure in the past. The new priority need category means councils should no longer assess whether someone at risk of domestic abuse is also vulnerable to access assistance.

### **The government’s framework to end Rough Sleeping**

In September 2022, the government published their updated rough sleeping strategy: ‘Ending rough sleeping for good’. The strategy cuts across government departments and provides for the first time a clear definition of what the government means by ending rough sleeping - *‘that it is prevented wherever possible, and where it does occur it is rare, brief, and non-recurrent.’*

The government’s strategy is organised through four key themes – **Prevention, Intervention, Recovery and a Transparent and Joined up System.**

The government has been seeking to embed a “prevention first” approach to rough sleeping before people reach the streets. This means ensuring the landmark changes in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 are deep rooted, to prevent more people from reaching a homelessness crisis, as well as bringing forward investment so that nobody leaves a public institution, such as prison or care, to live on the streets.

The government intended through their strategy to drive reductions in rough sleeping and committed to putting tackling homelessness and rough sleeping “firmly at the heart” of its agenda - to end rough sleeping by the end of Parliament in 2024, three years earlier than the commitment made by the previous government.

However, the government’s most recent [annual rough sleeping snapshot](#)<sup>i</sup> conducted in November 2023, shows 3,898 people were sleeping rough across England, an increase of 27% on the previous year. This is the second year in a row that the government has reported an increase in rough sleeping and the sharpest rise over a 12-month period since 2015. This highlights that the government will fail to meet its commitment to end rough sleeping by 2024.

The government’s Rough Sleeping Initiative has therefore been extended to 2025, with up to £500 million of funding allocated to enable local areas to provide the tailored support needed to end rough sleeping over the next three years. Tower Hamlets will receive £5,536,694 over this three-year period. The government also extended, up to March 2024, Housing First pilots in Greater Manchester,

Liverpool city region and the west Midlands, providing a further £13.9 million over two years on top of the £28 million already invested, and expand Housing First more widely through £32 million within the rough sleeping initiative.

£200 million of new funding will be made available for the single homelessness accommodation programme, which will deliver up to 2,400 homes for vulnerable people at risk of homelessness or rough sleeping, including young people and those with the most complex needs, alongside expanding existing accommodation programmes that we know work.

In September 2023, the government launched a new homelessness employer covenant with Crisis to help employers recruit and support employees who have been homeless or rough sleeping. The covenant – developed by Crisis in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) - is a set of pledges employers can take to support people experiencing homelessness in the workplace.

### Regional Policy

The Mayor of London's London Housing Strategy (2018)<sup>ii</sup> sets out the GLA's/Mayoral approach to preventing homelessness and tackling rough sleeping in policies 7.1 and 7.2. Although the GLA and Mayor's powers are limited in tackling homelessness, the London Housing Strategy sets out a commitment to focus on funding, boosting collaboration, and supporting boroughs and third-sector organisations. Within this commitment, the Mayor and GLA promised to:

- Support Local Authorities with the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017). This included lobbying the government for sufficient funding to enable local authorities to carry out their new duties under the Act.
- Lead and facilitate the No Nights Sleeping Rough taskforce to bring together key partners involved in supporting rough sleepers off the street.
- Improve the provision of data collection on why and how people end up sleeping rough.
- Provide an allocation of funding of circa £8.5 million per year to fund a range of pan-London services for London borough services to identify rough sleepers and intervene rapidly to support them off the street.
- Take a collaborative approach to securing private rented accommodation for homeless households by working with London boroughs.
- Work in collaboration with boroughs and refuge providers to explore the scope for London-wide refuge provision for victims of domestic abuse, and of other violence against women and girls.

More recently, following the London Mayoral/GLA elections in May 2024, the Mayor of London has further pledged **to end rough sleeping by 2030**, putting **a new rough sleeping action plan in place**, which will include: **increasing investment from City Hall; coordinating with partners across London who share the same goal; and investing in new hubs across London with the ambition of helping an extra 1,700 rough sleepers off the streets a year.**

### What is Homelessness?

Under the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017), a household (individual, couple, or family), is defined as homeless ***'if they do not have a legal right to occupy accommodation which should be accessible and reasonable for them to be able to live in'***.

In previous legislation, there was a distinction between statutory and non-statutory homelessness, however since the introduction of the Act, this has changed. Now, English local authorities have a duty

to help all people who have legal right to reside in the UK that are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, regardless of priority need, intentionality, or local connection.

Other forms of homelessness considered in the development of this strategy include:

### **Rough sleepers**

Rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness and describes people who sleep outside; in dis-used buildings or in places that are unfit for human habitation such as, car parks, walkways, cars, public transport, stations, and doorways. It can be a dangerous and isolating experience, which leads to a significantly reduced life expectancy for rough sleepers in comparison to the general population. Rough sleepers are far more likely to become a victim of violence or assault.

Many long-term rough sleepers develop issues with drugs and alcohol, which can lead to anti-social behaviour and a corresponding rise in the fear of crime for residents.

Street beggars are often assumed to be homeless rough sleepers. However, people involved in street begging are not always rough sleepers and people who rough sleep are not always street beggars.

### **'Hidden' homelessness.**

Many single homeless people are not visibly homeless, they are often hidden from statistics and services as they try to deal with their situation informally. The majority of the hidden homeless will have slept rough at some time<sup>iii</sup>. They may live in overcrowded accommodation, squats, 'beds in sheds,' garages, or sleep on someone's floor. They may 'sofa-surf' with friends or sleep rough in concealed locations. If they have not approached a local housing authority for help to find accommodation, they are unrecorded and, effectively, 'hidden' without the chance to receive housing support.

We know that hidden homelessness exists. Given that the extent of their presence is difficult to be measured, it would be reasonable to assume that the extent of homelessness is likely to be greater than official statistics show.

Women are often missed and under-represented within rough sleeping statistics, a coalition of homelessness and women's organisations, (commissioned and funded by the Single Homelessness Project), carried out the first census of women sleeping rough in London in October 2022. The second census<sup>iv</sup>, conducted between Monday 25 September and Sunday 1 October 2023, saw double the number of responses than the previous year: 154 in 2022 compared to 391 in 2023. Most boroughs in London saw more women in 2023 than they saw in the 2022 pilot census. This is likely due to increased familiarity with the census in completing it for the second time, a longer lead in time, and a higher level of engagement overall.

From those women who took part in the census, they reported sleeping rough/sheltering overnight in a variety of 'hidden' locations including A&E waiting rooms, on buses or trains, in squats, and in many other locations where they are unlikely to be identified by outreach workers tasked with verifying and supporting people sleeping rough.

The census of women sleeping rough suggests its true extent is underestimated. Counting women sleeping rough is particularly complex as many of this cohort are not in touch with support services and are more hidden than their male counterparts. This data has, similarly to the 2022 census, revealed that women's experiences of rough sleeping tend to be hidden, transient and intermittent, and the locations/ways in which women sleep rough frequently fall outside of the government definition of rough sleeping. This means women are highly likely to be missed in the current snapshot

counts used to enumerate rough sleeping. It also suggests that many women in London may not be identified as rough sleeping during normal outreach work, meaning that they may be unable to access support and accommodation pathways for people who sleep rough.

Rough sleeping has been shown to have huge detrimental effects on women’s health and life expectancy with the average age of death for women who rough sleep reported to be lower than that of men (life expectancy for women who rough sleep is 41 years, compared to 44 years for men who rough sleep. In comparison to the average for the general population which is 81 years for women and 76 years for men)<sup>v</sup>.

### Overcrowding

Overcrowding is a recurrent issue faced by some of our residents in the borough, across London and across England. Although homelessness and rough sleeping are more visible symptoms of the housing crisis, the extent of overcrowding is a more hidden aspect.

Data from the council’s Common Housing Register (1 March 2024) indicates that from the total of 24,493 applicants on the Register, 10,920 applications were from overcrowded households (around 45% of all applications on the Common Housing Register). The overall rate of overcrowding in England in 2020-21 was 3%, with approximately 738,000 households living in overcrowded conditions.

The table below shows the breakdown of bedroom needs of those 10,920 overcrowded households on the Common Housing Register, requiring between one and six bedrooms and the average length of time these households would need to bid in order to receive an offer (as of 1 March 2024).

Beds Required	Total Households	% of Total	Average of Years
1	2,837	25.98%	4.2
2	2,008	18.39%	4.1
3	4,770	43.68%	6.3
4	1,197	10.96%	7.7
5	98	0.90%	8.3
6	10	0.09%	7.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,920</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>5.5</b>

Data from the most recent Census (2021) indicates that across the borough in all housing tenures, (based on the measure of having too few bedrooms), 15.8% of households were overcrowded (19,130 households). This has lowered slightly since the previous Census was conducted in 2011 when 16.4% of all housing tenures in Tower Hamlets were classed as overcrowded, but it was the 4th highest rate of any area in England and Wales after Newham, Barking & Dagenham, and Brent

Most overcrowded households are afforded priority on the Common Housing Register within Band 2A and 2B (unless placed in the higher Band 1 e.g., medical or decant status). The table below outlines high demand within these two bands and that while lets to this cohort make up a high percentage of our available social housing stock, this will not resolve their housing needs because our main levers which are (a) to build more and (b) utilise ways of managing existing stock – e.g. facilitating moves by under occupiers, creating large properties by knock throughs, giving greater priority to overcrowded applicants over other cohorts, will not meet their housing need.



***Demand by bedroom need and banding 31 March 2024***

Bedroom(s) needed	Band 1A	Band 1B	Band 2A	Band 2B	Band 3	Total
1 bed	650	347	2,760	55	6,717	10,529
2 bed	512	159	2,506	55	2,143	5,375
3 bed	369	347	5,090	34	1,114	6,954
4 bed	212	109	1,111	5	77	1,514
5+ bed	21	14	108	0	4	147
<b>Total Current Demand</b>	<b>1,764</b>	<b>976</b>	<b>11,575</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>10,055</b>	<b>24,519</b>
<b>Total Lets 01 April 2023 to 31 March 2024</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>521</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>1,222</b>

The negative impacts of overcrowding on communities, families and individual’s health and well-being are widely known and linked to poorer health and educational outcomes impacting on mental health and the greater incidence of depression and anxiety. For young people, living in overcrowded conditions affects their ability to learn at school - overcrowding can lead to children sharing a bedroom with parents or sleeping in living or dining rooms, with sleep being regularly disturbed – and access to space to study at home being limited. Children living in overcrowded conditions are more likely to miss school due to illness and infection, impacting their educational attainment. It can also lead to delays in cognitive development.

Overcrowding can be a contributory factor to young people’s homelessness. Severe overcrowding is often a symptom of homelessness with families or friends over-occupying a property to keep housing costs low. This is one of the least well-understood causes of homelessness. Young children are particularly affected by an overcrowded living situation – affecting their studies and development, young adult children often have little choice but to move out of their family home prematurely.

**What causes Homelessness?**

There are any number of reasons why a person can become homeless. These include social and economic factors such as a lack of affordable housing which serves to fuel demand and housing costs in the private rented sector, (placing financial pressures on those on lower incomes who often lack financial resilience, especially when people’s incomes are too low, and property prices are too high), rising levels of poverty, unemployment, fragmentation of families and life events often can push people into homelessness. The reasons that people cannot find another home are usually economic – they cannot find an affordable property because their income is low in comparison to high housing costs. London has a chronic shortage of social housing, which is in high demand because it is cheaper and more secure than housing in the private rented sector. Households often wait many years for a social home to become available. As a result, many people have little choice but to rent privately.

Other causes may include personal crisis, traumatic events, mental health or addiction challenges. Relationship problems can also contribute to homelessness and can include domestic abuse and violence, addiction and mental health problems. Some may become homeless after leaving prison, care, hospital or the army.

Many people become homeless because they can no longer afford to pay their rent. Over the course of the last 12 years, welfare reform and changes to Housing Benefit/Local Housing Allowance entitlement have also been contributing factors to homelessness.

Reductions in the amount of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) payable since April 2011, (and further Housing Benefit changes implemented in January 2012, April 2013 and April 2016), have had an adverse impact on levels of homelessness and the ability of local authorities to use private rented accommodation to discharge their duties to homeless households<sup>vi</sup>.

In particular, the welfare reforms brought in by the government since 2016 have impacted on affordability in the Private Rent Sector. In November 2016, the Benefit Cap was reduced from £26,000 to £23,000 in London (a measure included in the Welfare Reform and Work Act (2016)). From April 2017, young people aged 18 to 21 who claimed Universal Credit were not entitled to the housing costs element, with certain exemptions. This entitlement to housing costs was however reinstated with effect from 31 December 2018.

The reforms saw Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates frozen for four years from 2016 to 2020, although there was some provision for rents in the most expensive areas. This meant that those in receipt of LHA were unable to cover the full contractual rent due as real rents increased over time. By April 2020, 946 of the 1,000 LHA rates in the UK were poised to be lower than the corresponding 30th percentile – with an average shortfall of 9.6%. This shortfall existed despite the end of the freeze and an uprating of 1.7% in line with the Consumer Price Index from April 2020.

While the Chancellor announced in the Autumn statement in November 2023, that LHA rates will increase to the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of local market rents in April 2024, this increase is also time-limited, and Local Housing Allowance rates will be frozen again from 2025/26, unless the government rethink this.

What is clear is that different types of individuals may experience homelessness for varied reasons.

## **Tower Hamlets – the local context**

### **Population and demographics**

Data from the Census 2021 identifies that Tower Hamlets has an extremely young and diverse population, with the youngest median age, (the middle point where half of the population are younger and half are older), being 30. This may partly be accounted for by a large university student population residing in the borough.

In addition, the Census 2021 found that Tower Hamlets was the local authority with the largest population increase in London at 22.1%, from around 254,100 in 2011 to 310,300 in 2021. This is higher than the overall increase for England at 6.6%, where the population grew by nearly 3.5 million to 56,489,800. In 2021, Tower Hamlets ranked 40<sup>th</sup> for total population out of 309 local authority areas in England, moving up 20 places in a decade. The growing population points to the continuation of accommodation pressures in the borough when combined with an increasingly limited supply of land to develop new homes.

The Census 2021 found that Tower Hamlets is the most densely populated borough in England with 15,695 residents per km<sup>2</sup> – compared to the national average of 424 per km<sup>2</sup>.

In the latest census, around 160,000 Tower Hamlets residents said they were born in England. This represented 51.5% of the local population. The figure has risen from just over 138,700 in 2011, which at the time represented 54.6% of Tower Hamlets' population.

Around 43,600 Tower Hamlets residents reported that their country of birth was Bangladesh (14.0%). This figure increased from circa 38,900 in 2011, which at the time represented 15.3% of the population of Tower Hamlets.

The number of households per hectare has increased by 12.5% since 2011 in Tower Hamlets. This advances the point that in Tower Hamlets we are seeing ever increasing demand for homes which is outstripping supply.

### **Local Economy, employment and poverty**

Economically, with Canary Wharf as a financial hub within the borough, Tower Hamlets is seen as having a thriving job market however, the majority of these jobs are not held by residents. This is exemplified by the disparity between the average income of Tower Hamlets residents compared to average workplace earnings in the borough. At £1,054 per week<sup>vii</sup> earnings for workers in Tower Hamlets are the second highest in the UK (after the City of London). Yet residents in the borough earn around £202 less per week on average than those working in Tower Hamlets – the largest gap between workers and residents in Great Britain.

Earnings for males who work in Tower Hamlets are much higher than for females (£1,148 per week compared with £939 per week) but male residents in full-time work earn less than female residents in full-time work (£836 compared with £862).

The median annual gross pay for Tower Hamlets residents working full time in 2022 was £39,868. Nearly 10% of households have an income of under £15,000, a similar proportion to the 9% with incomes above £85,000. 55,381 (40%) households have an income of less than £30,000 per year, 7,443 (5%) are paid £100,000 or more.

Around 9,700 people aged 16 and over in Tower Hamlets were unemployed in the year ending June 2023, the rate of unemployment in the borough is 5.2%, this is the same rate as the previous year ending June 2022 when the unemployment rate was also 5.2%.

Across London, from the year ending June 2022 to the year ending June 2023, there was a slight decrease in the unemployment rate from 4.7% to 4.6%, so unemployment in the borough is 0.6% higher than the overall London rate. Year on year, the number of people unemployed in London fell from around 238,000 to around 230,000 over the same period.

Unemployment across Great Britain stayed at a similar rate between the year ending June 2022 and the year ending June 2023, going from around 1,260,000 people (3.8%) to around 1,240,000 (3.8%).

Borough profiling undertaken by Trust for London found that in 2019/20, 39% of people in the borough lived in households with an income of less than 60% of the national average after housing costs have been subtracted. This was worse than the average London Borough.

The same profiling found that in comparison to London, for Tower Hamlets the average neighbourhood in the borough was 2.03 times as income-deprived than the average in neighbourhood in London in 2019.

Details from the Census 2021 revealed that Tower Hamlets has the highest level of child poverty, 25 percentage points above the national rate. 56% of children live in poverty, more than double the rate seen in Kensington and Chelsea.

In terms of the type of dwellings people reside in, the Census 2021 reveals that there has been a slight fall in the number of owner occupiers in the borough from 24.2% (of households) in 2011 to 23.1% in

2021. In 2021, Tower Hamlets had the lowest proportion of owner occupiers of any area in England and Wales. Unsurprisingly, Tower Hamlets was one of ten boroughs in London with the smallest proportions of owner occupiers.

There has been a fall in the percentage of households who rent social housing homes - from 39.6% in 2011 to 35.9% in 2021. Of these, 16,697 (13.9%) of households reported that they rent from the local authority. **Note:** *there is a known issue with this census question where many social renters are unaware (or do not distinguish between) whether their landlord is the local authority or a Registered Provider of social housing (Housing Association), and therefore the question is often answered incorrectly. The latest dwelling stock data suggests that there are only around 11,500 local authority owned dwellings in the borough.*

### **Housing Tenure, supply and demand, affordability**

Since the previous Census, there has been an increase in the percentage of residents in the borough who live in privately rented accommodation from 32.6% in 2011 to 38.2% in 2021. The Census 2021 revealed that Tower Hamlets had the 5th highest proportion of households renting privately in England and Wales.

The Census 2021 also revealed that the second largest tenure in the borough was the social housing sector, but this had decreased from 39.6% in 2011 to 35.9% in 2021. While Tower Hamlets saw England's third-largest percentage-point fall in the proportion of households in the social rented sector, Tower Hamlets was in the highest 2% of English local authority areas for the share of households in the social rented sector in 2021.

The third largest tenure in the borough are owner occupiers – owning outright or with a mortgage. This has also declined since the previous census, from 24.2% in 2011 to 23.1% in 2021. The lowest of all tenures in the borough was among shared owners who represented 2.6% of all residents in 2021.

Right to Buy sales, (where eligible Local Authority Tenants and some Non-Charitable Housing Association Tenants use their right to purchase the property they live in), have declined since 2018/19 from 97, to 44 in 2019/20 and 40 in 2020/21. The decrease in Right to Buy sales may be attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions which saw a freeze placed on the housing market to stop the spread of the virus which prevented most purchases, sales and valuations. More recent data from DLUHC, published in October 2023 showed that the number of Right to Buy sales increased again in 2021/22 to 54<sup>viii</sup>, showing that local authority Right to Buy sales have recovered to 2019-20 levels.

At the time of the last iteration of the council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, house prices in England rose during 2018 and 2019 with an average growth rate of 2% each year. However, in 2020 house prices increased by 7.4% as pent-up buyer demand from Covid-induced lockdowns was released into the market. This accelerated during 2021, when house prices increased by a further 10.8%.

The housing market continued to see steady growth in the first half of 2022, until the impact of rising inflation, interest rates and affordability began to have an impact on house price growth.

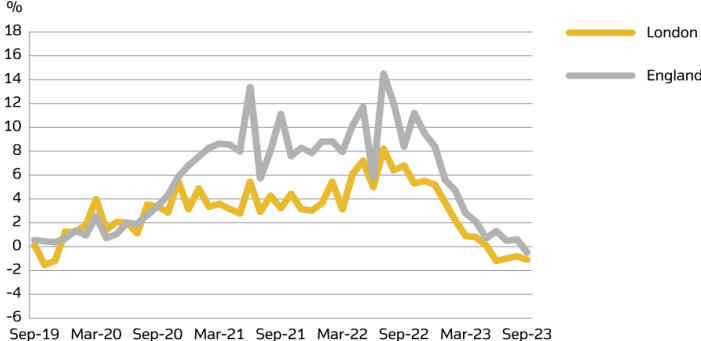
In the first half of 2023, house prices dropped 4% from the peak of August 2022, with expectations of a downturn in 2024. The most recently available data from the ONS<sup>ix</sup> (February 2024) reports that the average house price in Tower Hamlets was £454,000 (provisional), down 5.3% from February 2023. This was steeper than the fall in London (4.8%) over the same period.

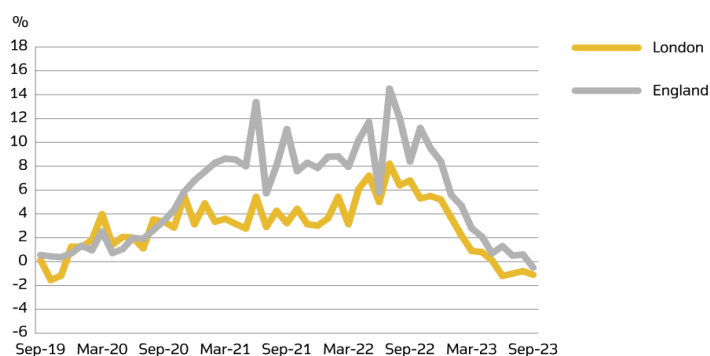
## Appendix 4 – Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-29

Private rents rose to an average of £2,185 per month in March 2024, an annual increase of 13.2% from £1,929 in March 2023. This was higher than the rise in London (11.2%) over the year. Mortgage interest rates combined with impact of the proposals within the Renters Reform Bill (2023), which has since fallen away following the announcement of the General Election in May 2024, including the abolition of section 21 (no fault evictions) has contributed to landlords removing themselves from the market which in turn, is contracting the supply of accommodation within the Private Rent Sector.

The average price paid by first-time buyers was £441,000 in February 2024 (provisional). This was 5.4% lower than the average of £466,000 in February 2023 (revised).

For homes bought with a mortgage, the average house price was £450,000 in February 2024 (provisional). This was 5.9% lower than the average of £478,000 in February 2023 (revised).

The graph below shows how house price change of the housing market over the last five years in both London and England. 



Continued demand for private rented sector accommodation in Tower Hamlets outstrips supply, and it remains increasingly difficult for residents to source accommodation in this sector which is affordable. Aside from the wider national economic conditions driving the PRS (Private Rented Sector), at a local level, this has been driven by economic growth in Canary Wharf and the City of London and a continued boom in overseas investment, which has served to distort the local housing market for residents. Only a small fraction of the population, those who earn incomes way above the national or London averages, can afford to own or privately rent a property. The continued downward pressure on real incomes as the price of food and fuel has risen, combined with welfare system reforms, the benefit cap in particular, has also placed further pressure on existing social tenants – larger families or those on very low incomes may not be able to afford to live in Tower Hamlets anymore. These twin factors could change the demographics of the borough.

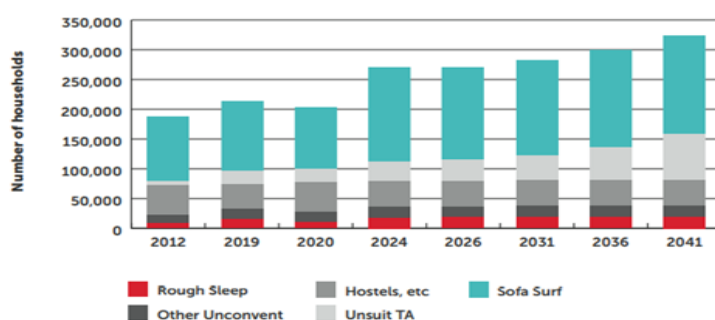
Increasing house prices, rising private sector rents and the reduced income that many households have experienced because of the pandemic and now the cost-of-living crisis have all contributed to the rise in homelessness.

The current cost-of-living crisis has seen a decline in households living standards with lower wages, higher inflation, rising energy, fuel and housing costs all contributing to and increasing the pressures on households and in turn driving demand for support and assistance on local authorities and the third sector. Rising rent costs in the Private Rent Sector as well as mortgage interest rate rises are already increasing the pressures on local authorities' homelessness services who, (prior to the pandemic), had already been beset by austerity and reductions in public finance.

These pressures undoubtedly add strain to people’s finances and will in many cases lead to homelessness as stagnating wages struggle to keep up with rising rents, food and energy costs.

Since the council’s last iteration of a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was written in 2018, data shows that the council has seen an exponential increase in the number of households accessing our Housing Options Service, as well as an increase in the number of residents who have been placed in temporary accommodation. Implementation of the of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) has brought additional assistance for those at risk of homelessness but has increased the number of applicants qualifying for assistance, further stretching the resources of the council’s Housing Options Service. While new burdens funding was provided by the government to assist local authorities with their new responsibilities, the rising costs for local authorities has increased due to the increased costs of providing assistance.

These stresses are anticipated to contribute to an increase in homelessness and the prevalence of rough sleeping, with Crisis’ Homelessness Monitor 2022 predicting that homelessness will increase by substantially in England over the course of the next two decades<sup>x</sup>.



### Demand and supply of social housing in Tower Hamlets

The number of applicants on the council and its partner’s Common Housing Register has continued to increase over the last five years. In 2018, there were 18,808 applicants and this has risen to 24,493 by 1 March 2024. While we continue to build new council homes and work with registered providers and developers to increase the supply of social and affordable homes, the Right to Buy Scheme remains in place which reduces the supply of these homes in the borough. However, the number of homes brought through the Right to Buy Scheme in Tower Hamlets has significantly reduced since 2017/18 when 141 homes were sold through the scheme to the most recent set of data available from 2021/22 where 54 homes were sold through the scheme.

While Tower Hamlets has undergone a dramatic transformation in its housing stock over the last few decades and there is an unprecedented rate of development of new housing, demand for affordable homes still far exceeds supply. There is a severe overcrowding problem and a need for new family (3 bedroom and larger) homes. These needs are clearly identifiable from the statistics, both in terms of the council’s recently commissioned Local Housing Needs Assessment and as evidenced by recent lettings activity. Housing policy locally and at London level seeks to respond to these needs. Across the borough demand for new housing of all types is unrelenting.

Between 2018 and 2021 only 3,250 new home builds were started whereas between 2014 and 2018, 8,000 new home builds were started. This slow-down in new home starts is due to the impact of

COVID-19, rising costs of materials and labour shortages since Brexit, nevertheless it leaves a big gap in housing supply within the borough.

While Tower Hamlets has had more home completions since 2018 than house build starts, this demonstrates that we are unable to build at the same rate. These issues are not unique to Tower Hamlets and are experienced by most local authorities in the country but particularly those in inner London. However, with our extremely densely populated borough, we are in the difficult position of having extremely limited space to build new homes.

In 2018/19, the average weekly rent for general needs social housing in LBTH was £109.96 (£88.27 in England) whereas in 2023<sup>xi</sup> was £128.95 (£98.20 in England, £121.09 in London). This increase in rent is significantly lower than the rise in private rents over the same years.

In Tower Hamlets as of 2021/22, there were 108 vacant dwellings (DLUHC data) in the borough owned by the council with 90 of those vacant for more than 6 months and 94 not available for letting. This is down from 163 the year prior showing some success for the council in getting vacant housing back into the housing supply.

It is estimated that there are more than 3,000 empty homes (an empty home is defined as a substantially 'unfurnished' home) in Tower Hamlets with over half of these classed as second homes (a second home is defined as a 'furnished' home). This may include a holiday home or a property which the owner does regularly occupy, but another property is defined as their 'sole or main residence' which are only in use from time to time by the owner). Given the lack of space for new homes in the borough it is vital that as many of these homes as possible are bought back into the housing supply.

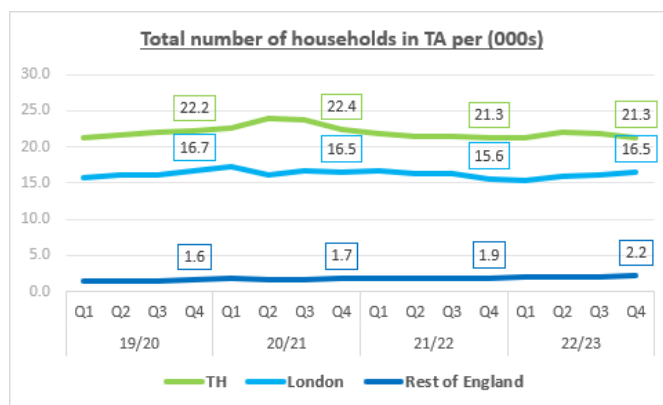
### **Temporary Accommodation Provision in Tower Hamlets**

The reduction in supply and the hike in rental prices in the borough has made finding rental properties for use as temporary accommodation exceptionally difficult and expensive for the council. For some households, the council has had no other option but to pay a portion of the rent through a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) or from our Homelessness Prevention Grant. The government has however cut the budget for DHPs (Discretionary Housing Payments) – from £140m in 2021-22 to £1,161,275 in 2024-25 and using the Homelessness Prevention Grant to meet the costs of temporary accommodation means it cannot be used to help prevent homelessness in the first place.

Although a Pan-London agreement between boroughs exists which prevents boroughs from competing against each other, local authorities must now compete with Clearsprings, a Home Office contractor, who source properties to house asylum seekers. The Home Office has the ability not only to pay higher rents but also higher incentive payments to encourage landlords to cooperate.

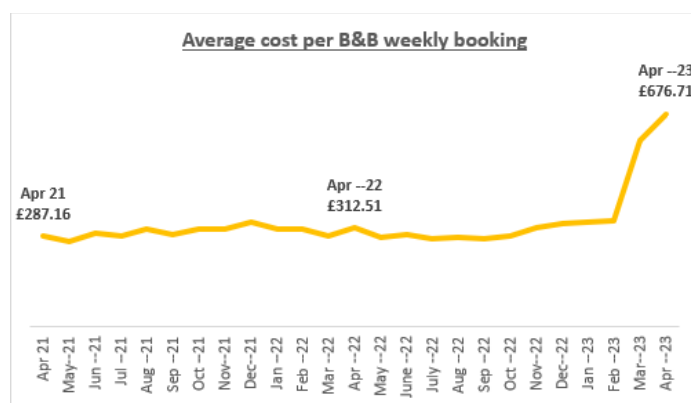
The council tries as much as possible to place people in Temporary Accommodation within the borough or within the neighbouring boroughs, but this is dependent on availability and cost which fluctuates on a daily basis.

The graph below illustrates the high demand for Temporary Accommodation in Tower Hamlets over the last four full financial years 2019/20 – 2022/23.



**(Total number of Households placed in TA (Temporary Accommodation) 2019/20 – 2022/23. Source: DLUHC Homelessness Statistics and Tower Hamlets Internal Reporting Data)**

The costs of using Temporary Accommodation have risen sharply for Tower Hamlets since February 2023, having more than doubled since February 2023 as Graph 2 below illustrates.



**(Average cost per B&B weekly booking April 2021 – April 2023. Source: Tower Hamlets Internal Reporting Data)**

### Reasons for the decline in suitable Temporary Accommodation

Demand for Temporary Accommodation has increased as a wider range of people are owed interim housing duties through the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017). The Act brought additional assistance and support for those at risk of homelessness - extending the duration of the prevention and relief duty periods - also increasing the pressures on the council and its partner services as the Act expanded the number of people who the council has a duty to support. Since the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act, the use of Temporary Accommodation in Tower Hamlets has increased, as a wider range of people are owed interim housing duties. Since the implementation of the Act, more single people have been allocated Temporary Accommodation.

The borough has also seen a considerable growth in short-term lets through companies such as Airbnb. This has resulted in less properties available for longer term renting. Tower Hamlets Council Tax records from October 2022 showed that 6,135 properties were classed as a second homes in the borough. This represents 4% of the overall dwellings in the borough. Compared to other London councils, only Camden (7,125) and Kensington and Chelsea (7,492) had more. In LBTH, the presence of second homes does have more of an impact on housing availability than long-term empty properties.



Smaller buy to let landlords have been and continue to exit the PRS market due to factors including tax and regulation changes, higher maintenance and borrowing costs, resulting in the contraction in the supply of PRS accommodation and buy-to-let markets. In some cases, properties are being acquired by portfolio holders who then offer them to local authorities for use as Temporary Accommodation or Private Rented Sector (PRS), but they require guaranteed rents.

The shortage of affordable and suitable temporary accommodation across London and in the borough has led to significant challenges to the council as we work and remain committed to supporting our residents placed in temporary accommodation.

The level of homelessness continues to rise, leading to an ever-increasing volume of case work where homelessness cannot be prevented. Moving people into settled sustainable accommodation is becoming increasingly difficult, in part this is due to the gap between Local Housing Allowance rates and widening rents. This is presenting a significant challenge to the council as it is an increasingly difficult cost implication to sustain.

The chronic shortage of affordable properties in the borough is unfortunately leading to more households being placed in unsuitable B&B accommodation (mainly outside of the borough but within our neighboring boroughs in East London). The borough is seeing a significant volume of statutory breaches and judicial review threats because families are being placed in unsuitable accommodation and/or beyond the statutory 6-week time limit.

The council continues to pay a higher rate to secure whatever accommodation is available than the Pan-London rate set for properties in other boroughs. This has been necessary to ensure that the council remains legally compliant to provide suitable accommodation and to reduce and negate the challenges brought by judicial reviews.

We recognise that this presents challenges to residents who we place in Temporary Accommodation, and these challenges can include:

- Isolation from family and friends when moved to Temporary Accommodation outside of the borough.
- Longer stays in bed and breakfast accommodation.
- Mental health and other health issues
- Effects on children's education – families moved into Temporary Accommodation are often forced to change their children's schools, which will be particularly difficult if they are moved often.
- Families who chose to leave their children in their current schools, face long travel journeys getting their children to schools and face financial implications due to travel expenses.
- People living in Temporary Accommodation face increasing financial hardship.

Over the course of the next five years, the council intends to reduce its reliance on commercial hotels for use as temporary accommodation. However, difficulties in the supply of affordable accommodation in the borough means that the council will increasingly have to look for accommodation beyond its own borough boundaries. The council are having to compete with other local authorities to procure accommodation in the borough which unfortunately because of the contracting supply of suitable temporary accommodation in the borough leads to the council having no choice but to place households into unsuitable bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation, for longer than is legally permitted. Consequently, this reliance on B&B accommodation means that we are currently not meeting our legal obligations and are at continued risk of judicial reviews. As of 1 December 2023, there were 211 families in B&B of which, 155 have been in B&B for more than 6 weeks.

### Gypsy and Traveller Provision in Tower Hamlets

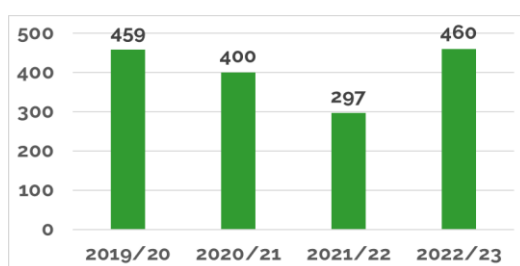
Tower Hamlets does not currently have a large population of Gypsy and Travellers. We have one site occupied by Gypsy and Travellers which is managed by the council, and this has 19 pitches which are all occupied. In the last 5 years there have been no vacancies of the site.

### The prevalence of Rough Sleeping

Figures from the **Annual Snapshot of Rough Sleeping** published by DLUHC shows on a national basis that rough sleeping had been decreasing since its peak in 2017 when it was estimated that 4,751 were seen rough sleeping on a single night, by 2021 this estimate had decreased to 2,443. However, the most recently published data from DLUHC<sup>xii</sup> estimates that 3,069 were sleeping rough on a single night - a 26% increase in rough sleeping from the previous year. This presents the biggest increase in London in a single year since 2015.

It is likely that much of the fall in rough sleeping between 2020-2022 was due to the government’s Covid-19 response, as well as subsequent efforts to retain low levels of rough sleeping. There was a short-term spike in the number of people seen sleeping rough immediately after the first lockdown, followed by a fall to below pre-pandemic levels. However, there is concerning new data from CHAIN (Combined Homelessness and Information Network)- (the *Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) collates a multi-agency database recording information about rough sleepers and the wider street population in London. CHAIN, which is commissioned and funded by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and managed by Homeless Link, represents the UK’s most detailed and comprehensive source of information about rough sleeping*) -which shows that there has been an increase in rough sleeping within London which is likely to worsen during the cost-of-living crisis.

In Tower Hamlets during 2022/23, 460 individuals were sleeping rough. This represents a 55% increase between 2021 and 2022 due to Covid protections/the ‘Everyone Initiative’ ending and increases in the cost of living. Since the last strategy was published in 2018, rough sleeping in Tower Hamlets has mirrored the trends seen in London in the last five years.



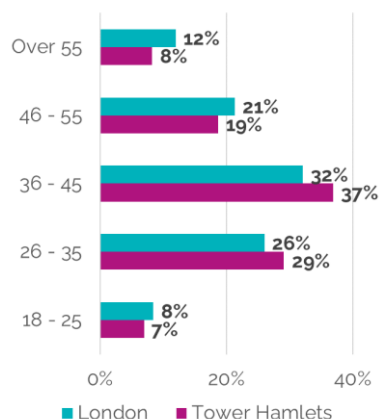
Source: CHAIN

Tower Hamlets has the 7th Largest Rough Sleeping Figure in London.

In 2022/23, 59% were new rough sleepers (Flow), 25% were individuals seen rough sleeping in the previous year (Stock), 16% were individuals who has a gap in rough sleeping (Returner).

The vast majority of rough sleepers (84%) are male. The majority of rough sleepers were between the ages 26 and 45 in 2022/23. The most common age group was 36-45 (37%). The age distribution amongst rough sleepers remains broadly consistent with other years, however the rough sleeping population in Tower Hamlets is slightly younger relative to London.

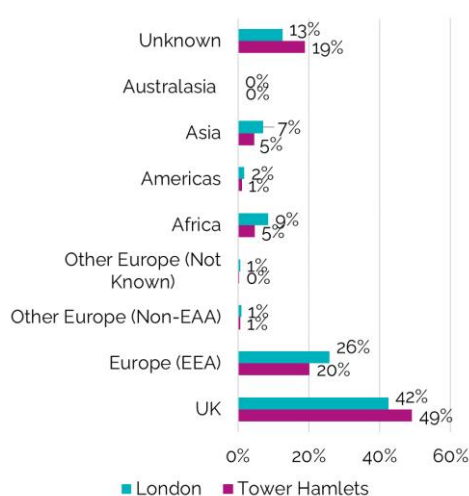
The most common age group among those identified as rough sleepers between the ages of 35-45.



Source: CHAIN

The top 5 ethnicities among the rough sleeping population are:

- White British (28%)
- White Other (21%)
- Black African (10%)
- Bangladeshi (7%)
- Black Other (4%)

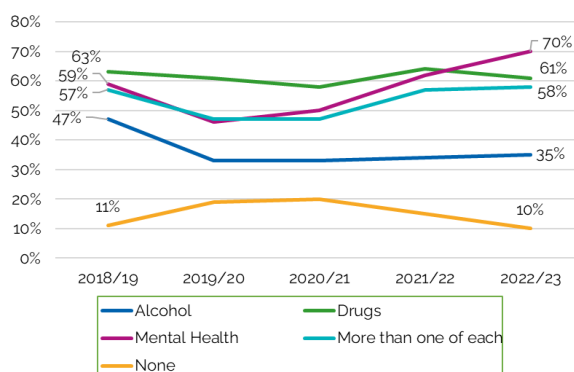


Just under half of the rough sleeping population in Tower Hamlets identified as UK nationals (49%). This is slightly higher relative to the London Rough sleeping population. There was no one who identified as Chinese, White and Asian, White and Black African and Gypsy, Roma Travellers recorded as rough sleeping in 2022/23.

The chart compares the rough sleeping population with the general population in Tower Hamlets. **Black ethnic groups and White Other groups** see the **biggest overrepresentation** in the rough sleeping population.

## Appendix 4 – Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-29

The chart below demonstrates the support needs recorded for rough sleeping clients. Overall, support needs remain consistently high over time (between 35% and 70%). Only Alcohol needs have seen the largest decrease over time. Mental health needs have risen the most from 59% to 70%.



Source: CHAIN

Between 2020 and 2023, TH SORT team recorded physical health data on the CHAIN data base. Thematic analysis shows that the following conditions consistently came up (sample size ranges from 70 – 138):

- Respiratory conditions such as Asthma and COPD
- Mobility difficulties
- Problems with bones joints and muscles.

In 2023, HIV was recorded much more frequently compared to the previous 2 years.

### The challenges for Tower Hamlets since 2018

- **Implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA)**

The key challenges in implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) have been:

- Insufficient access to affordable housing, particularly in London.
- An increased administrative burden, leading to additional cost pressures to meet the duties arising from the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- Meeting the H-CLIC (Homeless Case Level Information Collection) data requirements. (Homelessness Case Level Information Classification - the new statutory homelessness case level data collection which replaced the P1E to monitor the Homeless Reduction Act (2017)).

The Act has increased the focus on prevention but does not address the challenges that all London and southeast of England local authorities contend with - high levels of poverty and a lack of affordable housing. Local authorities have a statutory duty to house homeless households but lack the resources to do so.

The Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) has increased the overall number of applicants seeking help, altered the profile of those qualifying for assistance, (in particular more single applicants and more households with complex needs are coming forward under the new duties), and increased the time that applicants placed in temporary accommodation spend there, (short-term housing that local authorities provide or arrange for people who have become homeless, intended as a short-term solution while the person or household finds more permanent accommodation).

While extending the duration of the prevention and relief duty periods, the Act has enhanced the support available to people facing homelessness. At the same time, it has increased the pressures on the council and its partner services as the Homelessness Reduction Act has expanded the number of people who the council has a duty to support. Since the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act, the use of temporary accommodation in the borough has increased, as a wider range of people are owed interim housing duties. The use of temporary accommodation is critical to ensuring that no-one is left roofless and since the implementation of the Act, more single people have been allocated temporary accommodation – this may be attributable to the significant reduction in recent years of the borough’s supply of hostel accommodation. The overall numbers of households living in temporary accommodation, the amount of time spent in and the costs of temporary accommodation for local authorities has increased.

The National Audit Office (NAO) has identified a 39% increase in real terms expenditure on temporary accommodation since 2010-11. The NAO and others have referred to wider costs to public services stemming the use of temporary accommodation, such as health care and have identified that the amount being spent by local councils on temporary accommodation for homeless households in England was £1.7 billion between April 2022 and March 2023.

This represented a 9% increase in spending in just one year. Over the course of the last five years, spending has increased by 62% in England over the last five years. One third of the total was spent on emergency B&Bs and hostel accommodation at a cost of £565 million.

Analysis of expenditure<sup>xiii</sup> by local authorities over 2020/21 showed that councils spent at least £1.4 billion on temporary accommodation. Notably, the beneficiaries of this expenditure are often private providers. Shelter (2020)<sup>xiv</sup> noted that a lucrative private market has developed in temporary accommodation for providers which has exacerbated the difficulties local authorities face in sourcing temporary accommodation within their own area.

The implementation of the HRA has brought significant new burdens to English local housing authorities. Local housing authorities have seen increased footfall, and an increased administrative burden associated with each case.

From April 2018, the way in which local authorities collated homelessness statistics changed. Before then, homelessness data was collated by each local housing authority and submitted to the government on a quarterly basis via the P1E system. P1E data collection involved aggregated data from each local housing authority on the number of people who had sought advice and assistance from the council for their homelessness, recording the household make-up, age and nationality profile of applicants as well as recording the outcome of the homelessness decision-making process. Local Authorities were not required to provide information on the longer-term accommodation outcomes for those homeless applicants and it was not possible to identify the personal data of the individual clients. The limited range of the data collection made it difficult for both local authorities and the government to report on the homelessness picture across the country and to analyse the activities that brought effective solutions.

In order to address these reporting inadequacies, the government overhauled its homelessness statistics collection. The new ‘H-CLIC’ data collection became obligatory from April 2018 and now reports household-level data rather than aggregated local authority-level data. It covers a broader range of households, including all those who receive homelessness assistance from their local authority rather than focusing primarily on the homeless households to whom authorities had been obliged to assist under the statutory homeless definition.

In November 2018, the LGA (Local Government Association) conducted a survey of councils to gather information on their experience of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) since its implementation. Many reported that H-CLIC data collection system, (Homelessness case level collection), continues to impose a significant administrative burden after the Act's implementation, to the extent that council officers are being diverted from core work. One third of respondents to the LGA's survey on the Act did not think they had been sufficiently resourced to deliver their new duties.

The transition to the new case-level data reporting requirements has been a difficult process, especially when initially introduced. The accuracy, and to an extent the ease, of providing H-CLIC data has improved. With the potential value of HCLIC (Homeless Case Level Information Collection) data in informing the design and delivery of their provision, although there was little evidence so far of it being actively using it for this purpose.

- **COVID-19**

The government's nationwide 'Everyone In' strategy during the pandemic brought together local authorities and an army of volunteers from various homeless charities. They helped 37,430 people into temporary accommodation in budget hotels, delivering them hot meals and support from a secure and settled base. In January 2021, the government reported that the scheme had helped 26,167 people move into permanent accommodation.

'Everyone In' was effectively the UK's most comprehensive trial of Housing First to date. Housing First prioritises providing homeless people with a home in the first instance and then wraparound support tailored specifically to their needs.

As a result of the pandemic, Tower Hamlets along with all other local authorities in the country, pursued this policy which brought every single person rough sleeping off the streets and into accommodation. The policy was highly successful and reduced the dangers faced to rough sleepers at the height of the pandemic. Not only did it move people away from rough sleeping, but it allowed them to gain access to support services.

Consequently, rough sleeping levels improved during 2020-21, and a number of people were supported into alternative accommodation. The pandemic served to widen the support available for people rough sleeping for a limited period.

Prior to the pandemic, in 2018-19, Tower Hamlets had the 7th highest estimated number of rough sleepers in London. At the start of the pandemic, emergency accommodation was provided through the 'Everyone In' scheme, including to those with No Recourse to Public Funds. During the second lockdown, further beds were provided through the Winter Emergency Scheme.

Through the 'Everyone In' scheme, Tower Hamlets provided 260 persons with emergency accommodation, 150 of which had been rough sleepers accommodated directly from the street, 180 persons from this group were further enabled and supported to make a positive move-on from emergency accommodation. During this period, officers ensured that protocols were put in place for managing any potential Covid-19 outbreaks in hostels and emergency hotel accommodation. In addition, wraparound care with health partners to support the health and wellbeing of hostel residents was put in place and clients as part of that care were able access the Covid-19 vaccine.

The introduction of a ban on evictions at the onset of the pandemic led to a sharp fall in the proportion of households who became homeless due to the end of an assured shorthold tenancy in London, but the lifting of the ban and the rise in rents post pandemic has seen this figure rise again. At the same

time, the proportion of households becoming homeless due to family and friends being no longer willing to accommodate them has fallen after increasing during the pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic had considerable impact on the homelessness work carried out by local authorities in London. In April-June 2020, the number of households owed a prevention duty fell by almost a third compared with the previous year. This fall is attributable to the government measures which banned evictions during the pandemic. The number of relief duties rose by 18% over the same period, in part because of instructions to local authorities to provide housing for rough sleepers.

The Homelessness Monitor: England 2021 covered the period of the Covid-19 pandemic. The government's action to suspend evictions from social and private rented tenancies, alongside raising LHA rates, was identified by 87% of councils as particularly important in preventing and minimising homelessness. The number of households owed a prevention duty due to the end of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy in January-March 2022 was almost double the number in the same quarter in 2021 and 19% higher than the same quarter in 2022 because of the ending of the ban on evictions.

- **Post pandemic cost of living crisis.**

The social and economic impacts after the COVID-19 pandemic, soaring inflation, wages not keeping pace with the cost of living, increased fuel and energy costs, affect everyone particularly those struggling on low incomes. The removal of public health measures saw the end of the furlough scheme, the removal of the £20 pw Universal Credit uplift and the lifting of the ban on evictions. The council continues to see an increase in demand for social housing and homelessness prevention and advice. Although the service has planned for these events and are trying to stem any potential demand surges, the council is seeing a continued increase in rough sleeping, homelessness, sofa-surfing, and applications to join the council and its registered provider partners Common Housing Register.

### **Our journey since the last strategy in 2018**

The council's last Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was written in 2018 - during a period of ongoing welfare reforms which stemmed from the government's Welfare Reform and Welfare Act (2016). These reforms froze most working-age benefits and brought in the lowering of the household benefit cap threshold (from £26,000 for a family and £18,200 for a single person, to £23,000 in London (£15,410 for a single person)), a reduction in social housing rent levels by 1% in each year for four years from 2016/17, the limiting of support through Child Tax Credits/Universal Credit and the replacement of support for mortgage interest with loans for mortgage interest.

Since the last strategy, there remains a lack of affordable accommodation in the private rented sector with an increasing affordability gap between LHA and average rents in the private sector, meaning that private rent sector accommodation is inaccessible to households on low incomes or in receipt of welfare benefits. Despite an increase in the supply of affordable and social homes in the borough, the challenges remain the same if not greater since the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis began. Tower Hamlets remains a borough where there is a lack of space to build more homes against a backdrop of an increasing population, it remains unlikely that we will ever be able to meet the continuous demand for social and affordable homes.

### **Our work since Tower Hamlet’s last Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2018-2023)**

Since our last strategy was written, the council and its partners have achieved the following against its themes and priorities:

#### **Theme 1 - Prevention of Homelessness**

##### **Priority 1 - Homeless prevention, tackling the causes of homelessness and implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017)**

Communicating the support available to residents in a way that is accessible and easy to understand is a simple but keyway to effectively combat homelessness. Recognising this, the Housing Options content on the council’s website has been updated to reflect changes in legislation ensuring the provision of tailored bespoke advice to specific groups, for example those fleeing domestic abuse. As part of this update, information has been included to those at risk of homelessness in the private rented sector who were part of a range of vulnerable groups. There was a broader refresh in 2021/22 which included updates in pages relating to homelessness prevention and the housing options available to people.

To create greater ease of access for residents, the Housing Options Service began to offer telephone and virtual appointments during the lockdowns and have continued with this approach. An extension of this approach included the introduction of a new self-booking system so households can book appointments at their own convenience rather than queue up for drop-in sessions which would entail long wait times. A new phone system was also introduced in 2021 enabling us to handle more phone calls than was previously possible.

Where possible, the council endeavours to support residents facing homelessness to remain in their current accommodation so that homelessness never becomes their reality. Where a resident has spent considerable time in hospital and may have lost their last settled accommodation, the council employs a dedicated hospital discharge worker to liaise with social services. This ensures that those leaving hospital have the support that they need to remain in their existing accommodation to prevent them becoming homeless once discharged from hospital.

Mediation is also employed by the Housing Options Service when family relationships and friendships breakdown. Officers negotiate with hosts and mediate between families in situations where they are looking to exclude someone from the family home. The council has made use of the sanctuary scheme to support victims of domestic abuse and allow them to stay in their home.

It is important when tackling homelessness to consider its root causes and, where possible, address these. The council commissioned BEAM Homelessness Social Enterprise service<sup>xv</sup>, which provides services to homeless households to support residents into work. The council employs a Housing Options Officer to work with homeless people in Jobcentres on an outreach basis to help them back into work so that they can effectively support themselves financially.

##### **Priority 2 - Preventing homelessness by providing access to affordable and sustainable housing options.**

The council set an objective to increase the supply of housing across social tenures. As part of this we have our own housing development programme, everything developed through this programme goes



to the common housing register and a certain number of nominations go to existing residents. We also partner with private registered providers to provide a certain amount of affordable housing within schemes that go into the lets available through the common housing register.

It is important that, in order to best respond to the challenges posed by homelessness to the borough, we maximise the use of our current social housing stock. There are various methods that we as a local authority can use for this. The council has a current target of ensuring that 35% of social housing goes to homeless bidders. Some council homes are ring fenced for homeless bidders only. Housing stock is used to support those placed in temporary accommodation when a B&B has been occupied by a resident beyond the legal date.

## **Theme 2- Response of services to homeless households and vulnerable people**

### **Priority 1- Preventing and responding to rough sleeping.**

Rough sleeping is a multi-faceted issue and tackling it requires a response from multiple services. We have developed specialist roles within the Housing Options Service which intend to provide a targeted response to rough sleeping in the borough. The council has an Ending Rough Sleeping Team who commission an array of specialist services, works strategically with internal partners on shared areas of work, and develops and maintains a variety of partnerships with external organisations and stakeholders.

The Ending Rough Sleeping Team has utilised additional funding from the Rough Sleeping Initiative and the council's General Fund to provide an array of specialist services to meet the needs of people rough sleeping and to support them move off the streets into accommodation. These services include:

#### **Tower Hamlets Street Outreach Team (TH SORT)**

This team responds to Street Link referrals 7-days a week and its primary remit is to find the quickest, most appropriate route for people to move away from the street. Specialist roles include a Women's Lead Worker, a Health Coordinator and a Complex Needs Worker, who support individuals placed into dedicated Emergency Bed Spaces to find longer term solutions to their rough sleeping. An 'In Reach' worker also provides continuity of support for people transitioning from rough sleeping to accommodation within the LBTH Supported Hostel pathway. This includes supporting people who are at risk of eviction or abandonment to maintain their placements. As part of our ongoing Homelessness Transformation programme, the council has commissioned a new complex needs service for street homeless providing 31 new accommodation units.

#### **Rough Sleeping Navigator Team**

Jointly commissioned with the City of London, this team provides targeted support to individuals who face additional barriers to moving away from the street and have longer histories of sleeping rough. This includes working with our T1000 clients, a specific cohort of people who have spent considerable time rough sleeping and who often have multiple disadvantages, requiring intensive lead worker support to link in and maintain engagement with multiple support services.

#### **Housing First Team**

Housing First is the most evidence-based model for successfully supporting people with the longest histories of rough sleeping and who experience significant multiple disadvantages to access and maintain housing. The council commissions a Housing First Team and work with Housing Association partners to provide housing.

### **Outreach Psychotherapy Service**

An innovative model commissioned across the tri-borough region of Tower Hamlets, Hackney, and the City of London. This is a pioneering and innovative service which seeks to address the underlying causes of rough sleeping, which are often related to experiences of trauma.

### **Day Centre**

Crucial to the aims of the council is a day centre which anyone experiencing homelessness can access for support. Essential needs are met through the provision of showers, breakfast, and lunch. Further holistic support focuses on accessing accommodation, welfare advice, and employment support, as well as the RESET Outreach and Referral Team and Needle Exchange, providing essential support around substance use. Health drop ins are also available. Multiple services and interventions can therefore be accessed at once by people sleeping rough.

### **Temporary Accommodation for Rough Sleepers**

The Ending Rough Sleeping Team works with the council's Housing Management Team to provide bedspaces in hotels for temporary accommodation. This includes specific bookings to support people with no recourse to public funds, who otherwise have highly limited accommodation options. These bedspaces are a vital resource to support people move away from the street quickly into low-threshold provision to allow time for assessment and stabilisation before moving on to longer term accommodation. 24-7 support is in place within the hotel which is essential to meet the needs of the people who are reside there.

### **Health**

People who sleep on the streets for lengthy periods of time have significantly lower life expectancy than the general population (44 years for men compared to 76 years for the general population and 42 years for women compared to 81 years). They experience severe health inequalities and far poorer health than the general population. The Ending Rough Sleeping Team has developed a range of partners and interventions around health. This includes a number of health related drop-ins within our accommodation based services and day centre (including sexual health testing, liver scanning, TB screening, support to access GPs and health checks), facilitating response around access to Covid and flu vaccinations, and a quarterly Health and Wellbeing Fair hosted by the Borough's commissioned day centre and developed in partnership with multiple providers.

The council works closely with a range of key partners to access health support for individuals on the street, including the RAMPH Team (Rough Sleepers Mental Health Project), RESET Navigator Team (substance use support for people sleeping rough), Health E1, the Royal London Pathways Team and Groundswell. The Health Coordinator role within TH SORT is vital to coordinating interventions for clients, expanding partnerships and facilitating training with partner services. The Ending Rough Sleeping Team is keen to develop further responses to rough sleepers' health needs, including expanding health interventions directly on the street and a targeted response to Acquired Pain Injury and Neurodiversity.

### **SWEP**

The Ending Rough Sleeping Team also plans and coordinates the borough's Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) response in both cold and hot weather periods, services which ensure people rough sleeping are offered potentially life-saving accommodation and services.

SWEP is a protocol agreed between London boroughs and the GLA (with input from public health) to safeguard rough sleepers during severe weather. It is activated by the GLA whenever temperatures fall below zero.

SWEP requires boroughs to work with partners – outreach teams, day centres, hostels, police, health – to rapidly identify anyone sleeping rough during severe weather and provide an offer of emergency accommodation. The accommodation should be safe, warm, and be available to all, regardless of whether they have recourse to public funds.

Prior to the pandemic, the accommodation used for SWEP was often basic (camp beds in a shared space). During COVID, self-contained hotel/B&B rooms or rooms in Temporary Accommodation were more typical. The winter of 2022/23 saw a return to the use of shared spaces.

In the winter of 2022/23 SWEP was activated 6 times – with boroughs in London accommodating circa 2,000 rough sleepers in a mix of settings (including rest centres) – in addition to the placements by London boroughs, the GLA accommodated 348 people.

### **Support and Enforcement**

Rough sleepers regularly engage with police officers and law enforcement officials. This highlights the need for Local Authorities to work closely with police and law enforcement to collaboratively implement support and enforcement plans - to ensure that action is coordinated. It is for these reasons that the council employs a rough sleeping coordinator who works in close partnership with teams across the council, Metropolitan Police, British Transport Police, Housing Associations, stakeholders, and local communities.

Monthly care planning meetings take place which bring together support and enforcement teams to ensure a multi-agency coordinated approach to reduce rough sleeping and anti-social behaviour. The Ending Rough Sleeping Team attend the Neighbour Crime and ASB (Anti-Social Behaviour) Partnership Board, ensuring this coordination takes place at a strategic level with Community Safety and the police. From the government's Rough Sleeping Initiative Fund, the council receives funding for additional police support. There is also a partnership task force which provides more police capacity in addition to that which is already allocated by the London Metropolitan Police.

Due in part to the nature of rough sleeping, many rough sleepers have a number of complex support needs. The council looks to combat this issue by employing a complex needs worker and a health worker in our outreach team. This provides additional capacity within our rough sleeping team to coordinate new interventions. Many rough sleepers are non-UK nationals who have an uncertain immigration status to support these individuals we have accommodation with dedicated immigration support.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed a unique threat to rough sleepers leading to the Everyone In campaign. To provide a comprehensive response to this Tower Hamlets, like many other local authorities, block booked beds in hotels specifically for the use of rough sleepers. A direct legacy of this response is the block booking of TA units that are ring fenced for the use of rough sleepers (described in more detail above).

### **Priority 2- Supporting children, families and young people and vulnerable adults.**

The council takes an integrated approach, with Housing Options working with youth and family services, to prevent homelessness amongst families and young people. As part of this approach, we conduct 12-week assessments on 16–17-year-olds facing homelessness and use this to decide on the best support that can be offered to young people. We utilise assessment centres to provide a place for these young people to stay before suitable accommodation can be found. Young people under 18 are referred to the council’s “crash pads”.

We work to ensure that young people under the age of 18 are not placed in the hostel system and the council’s Childrens Social Services are a part of all homelessness assessments. We have commissioned a service which helps young people develop budgeting skills to help them live independently. One of our key aims is to intervene in preventing homelessness in young people and families as early as possible and deliver a bespoke individual response for each case. We also look to conduct individual needs assessments to judge the required support on an individual basis. This bespoke approach is something we want to continue and build upon with time.

This links with our objective to support families and young people to be healthier, safer and more emotionally resilient. During the pandemic enforced lockdowns, the accommodation provided as part of the ‘Everyone In’ scheme had adequate cooking facilities to increase residents’ self-reliance.

The council recognises the support required for victims of domestic abuse and that this works hand in hand with combating homelessness. The Housing Options Service is represented on the council’s VAWG (Violence against Women and Girls) steering group demonstrating our commitment to combatting domestic abuse. We are on our way to achieving DAHA (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance) accreditation and fulfilling the required high standard of activity to support survivors of domestic abuse. Officers are trained by IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advocate) (Independent Domestic Abuse Advisors) who ensure that our staff are well equipped to support those fleeing domestic abuse. In addition, we fund a floating support worker who provides specialist housing support and advice for those fleeing domestic abuse. The council also works closely with charities such as Solace Women’s aid and Refuge to support survivors of domestic abuse.

The Housing Options Service and its partners have adopted a multi-agency personalised approach to accurately identify the support and additional needs of vulnerable people who may be at risk of homelessness. We support young people known to the criminal justice system in accessing appropriate accommodation, and will, (where necessary) negotiate a placement within one of our commissioned services. As part of the support offered to ex-offenders, we work with HMP Service to ensure that no-one is released from prison without accommodation. We conduct a video call with the individual before they are released from prison and work closely with their probation officer. Multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) are used for high-risk offenders to identify and offer housing solutions suitable for their support needs.

Housing advisors work closely with hospitals to create personalised pathways for those being discharged who at risk of homelessness or rough sleeping. We also work with hospitals to assist those with health-related support needs.

When considering long term solutions to a person’s homelessness it is important to address the underlying support needs, which may have been a cause of their homelessness to begin with. This approach is key to ensuring they can live independently within the community. We work with the resident to develop a personalised housing plan for the resident and ensure that the resident is clear on what they need to do and what we can do to help them. The case worker will look at reasons for homelessness and develop a plan to reduce their support needs. As a part of this, the Housing Options

Service works closely with the council's drugs and alcohol team and mental health service. It is important that we identify the appropriate accommodation for the resident based on their support needs and circumstances. We also have a commissioned service which helps young people develop budgeting skills to help them live independently.

Since 2017, the Housing Options Service has embedded a Homelessness Intervention Prevention project team who provide housing advice and support to social housing tenants at risk of homelessness, their remit is to support not only council tenants, but those who are tenants of other social housing landlords in the borough (Registered Providers). The team provide debt and money management advice, welfare benefit maximisation and tenancy sustainment advice. Both the council and its Register Provider partners want to ensure that those residents who have a social housing tenancy can remain in their accommodation and to minimise the incidence of eviction from social housing accommodation.

### **Customer Access Project**

The Housing Options Service despite the pandemic successfully embarked on its Customer Access Project which has delivered significant improvements to the customer journey. These include:

- An improved and new telephone system (introduced in July 2021) – one telephone number with options.
- The launch of the Housing Options finder tool on the council's website.
- An improved and revised internet presence which allows residents to 'self-help' (September 2021).
- Better webpages, online forms.
- An appointment system prioritising people at risk of becoming homeless to be seen quickly.
- The move from Albert Jacob House to the Town Hall in Mulberry Place in spring of 2021.
- The trialling of a Residents Hub at Mulberry Place to better plan for move to the New Town Hall in Whitechapel which has brought improved triaging, first time resolution.

### **Homelessness Transformation Programme**

The Housing Options Service began its Homelessness Transformation journey in 2021. The objectives of this project included:

- Upstream work with households before they reach crisis point.
- Increasing successful prevention outcomes.
- Delivery of speedier outcomes for those who are homeless.
- Successful Prevention with cohorts otherwise destined to need Temporary Accommodation.
- Increasing the number of PRS placements.
- The commissioning of a new specialist employment service for the homeless (BEAM) which helps benefit capped households in temporary accommodation into sustainable employment.
- The recruitment of more staff in the Housing Options Service

As part of the council's day to day work, our frontline Housing Options Service has secured the provision of funding for 2 years (since the summer of 2022) to employ two Early Intervention Officers. The Housing Options are presently exploring the potential of a further Housing Options Advisor to be based in the council's MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub).

In addition, funding has been in place since October 2022 to trial the co-location of one Housing Options Advisor within one of the borough's Jobcentre Plus Offices, this is currently for a period of 12

months and its continuation is dependent not only on successful outcomes achieved but, on the services ability, to retain this funding.

In 2023/24, the service has been allocated (from the council's General Fund) an additional £2.19M to plug gaps in service delivery which will be invested across the different teams within the Housing Options Service, with £1.8M from the council's Homelessness Reserve (a ring-fenced account made up of government grant for sole purpose of reducing homelessness). In addition, the Service has secured £1.3M to deliver ICT improvements to consolidate systems and increase automation and will be exploring ways to measure satisfaction with the service that our residents receive.

### **Additional Service Improvements**

In May 2024, the Mayor in Cabinet approved the immediate release of an additional £1.93M for improvements to the Housing Options Service. These improvements will include creating thirty-four new roles with a sustainable funding source to meet the increasing demand and footfall and to address backlogs, as well as extending the hours that residents can access a face-to-face service.

This most recent investment will help to strengthen and support the invaluable work being undertaken by our skilled and professional staff teams in our current operations and will expand the Transformation Programme further. The Transformation Programme will include a complete full service review and redesign which will be underpinned by a robust delivery plan (which will separately developed outside of this strategy's delivery Plan).

Importantly, this additional £1.93M investment will enable the Service to:

- Develop capacity on the frontline to provide an empathetic and dignified response to every service user seeking support by identifying gaps, shortages and whether there are capacity and skills issues.
- Undertake a full and complete service review and redesign, with immediate reorganisation to be initiated.
- Deliver cultural and structural changes, to enhance staff wellbeing and ensure that the newly recruited frontline staff are retained within the organisation.
- Review of the structural composition of the service to identify key issues that may be affecting service delivery.
- Review senior management arrangements in the Service and carry out a separate review of performance across the Service to understand the relationship with frontline staff, both outward-facing and in the back office.
- Establish a service review, with a view to creating a revised and refreshed service delivery plan to address key areas of cultural concerns and staffing shortages in the service

At the time that this strategy was written, a special taskforce was being assembled with the aim of providing and prioritising attention to oversee the recruitment and restructuring of the Housing Options Service. Membership of this taskforce is expected to comprise of the Corporate Directors for Resources and Housing and Regeneration (or representatives), a representative from the Mayor's Office, representatives from the council's recognised Trade Unions and delegates from the service.

The service improvement outcomes from the Transformation programme intend to:

- Develop capacity on the frontline to provide an empathetic and dignified response to every service user seeking support.

- Identify the gaps and issues with the current structure and delivery model of the service to facilitate and implement a long-term service plan and redesign to address ongoing pressures.
- Address the pressures within the service caused by increasing demands including high caseloads and backlogs.
- Alleviate pressures on a dissatisfied workforce and build capacity for staff to access additional support and development.
- Develop and implement expanded face to face service hours to provide those in need with wider access to the service operating longer opening hours on weekdays and on a Saturday morning.

### **Successful funding from the government’s Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme**

The council is taking forward a housing first project in collaboration with Notting Hill Genesis Housing Association (NHG) which has been funded via the government’s Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme which will provide 24 homes and intensive support for people rough sleeping. The primary target group are those within the T1000 cohort (i.e. the people with the longest histories of rough sleeping) and 50% of this provision will be targeted for women.

Working alongside GLA and DLUHC advisers, NHG is receiving capital funding separately to deliver 20 homes. The council will receive revenue funding to commission and monitor the service who will deliver wrap around support to the recipients and also provide an additional 4 units.

The project will deliver and prioritise access to permanent housing for those rough sleeping with tailored, open-ended, wraparound support - aiming to improve housing and health outcomes for those accommodated as well as alleviating some of the pressure on existing rough sleeping, homelessness and hostel services. A range of council and partner services will provide wrap around support including clinical psychology, primary care services, substance misuse, adult social care and rough sleeping.

NHG will begin procuring homes and completing works on these homes with a view to the first units becoming available from November 2024.

### **Revised Homelessness Accommodation Placement Policy & new Homeless Accommodation Procurement Strategy**

Again, at the time that this strategy was in development, officers took forward to the Mayor in Cabinet (July 2024) a revised Homelessness Accommodation Placement Policy and a new Homelessness Accommodation Procurement Strategy.

The need for a revised Homelessness Accommodation Placement Policy has been critical because the previous iteration of the policy left the council particularly open to legal challenge and judicial review, because it restricted officers by requiring them to place residents a maximum of 90 minutes travel time back to the borough from where the placement was made, whether placed in temporary accommodation or private rented sector accommodation.

The review of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping in the borough has shown that the availability of suitable accommodation for those requiring temporary accommodation is becoming increasingly challenging. By remaining unable to procure suitable temporary accommodation across a wider geographical area, the council remained reliant on the use of expensive bed and breakfast and commercial hotels in the borough and surrounding areas. This is detrimental to the health and well-being of residents and costly to the council.

Being able to procure outside of Greater London, for the purposes of temporary and private rented sector accommodation, will make accommodation affordable for the resident and the council.

Under the Homelessness Code of Guidance, families should be in bed and breakfast or hotel accommodation for up to a maximum of 6 weeks. This is significantly hard to achieve given availability of accommodation in the placement areas that the current policy focuses on.

The council will now use ‘zones’ when procuring and allocating temporary and private rented sector accommodation. This policy will also serve to reduce the number of judicial reviews brought against the council when being challenged on suitability. Having zones, will give the council greater control on allocating accommodation, while being able to audit placements made for transparency. Areas in zone C are subject to change considering supply in a specific area or county.

- Zone A – located in the borough of Tower Hamlets
- Zone B – located in Greater London
- Zone C – located outside Zones A and B but in the neighbouring counties and districts of Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Surrey, Berkshire, and Buckinghamshire
- Zone D – located outside of Zones A, B and C

The policy has significant safeguards in relation to priority for in borough placements.

The new Homelessness Accommodation Procurement Strategy sits side by side with the Homelessness Accommodation Placement Policy. The strategy clearly sets out the council’s approach on how officers will procure available housing stock to discharge the council’s statutory homelessness duties and responsibilities. The strategy will ensure that the council follows current legislation and provides clear guidance for staff to ensure affordability and suitability of accommodation which is procured for this purpose.

#### **Piloting of two new grant schemes – Cost-of-Living and Find Your Own PRS Scheme**

The Mayor in Cabinet also agreed in July 2024 to approve two pilot schemes, (1) Cost of Living Grant Scheme and (2) Find Your Own PRS Accommodation Scheme, and to register both on the council’s grants register. Both schemes intend to empower residents who are homeless or at risk of, to source their own accommodation (Find Your Own PRS Scheme) or to help families with expenses incurred where they host a family member who would be reliant on the council homeless services for finding them somewhere to live (Cost-of-Living Grant scheme).

Before the approval of the Cost-of-Living Grant scheme, householders providing accommodation for friends or relatives were unable to receive financial help to meet the costs associated with having long-term guests. Prior to the approval of this Grant, there wasn’t any cost-of-living support available to residents hosting a family in their home for long periods of time. Financial assistance to meet these costs at a time when household budgets are already overstretched could help to sustain hosting arrangements and prevent and reduce the incidence of family and friends no longer willing or able to allow a homeless applicant or household to remain in the property.

The Find Your Own PRS Accommodation Grant Scheme will empower residents to take ownership and control over their housing options with more flexibility and choice in terms of location and type of property they source in the PRS. Those residents who receive a “Find Your Own” Grant payment should see that the payments may help to reduce any financial barriers which might have prevented a resident from securing and settling into a new PRS tenancy. This in turn should minimise the risk of the tenancy breaking down. The Grant supports long-term tenancy sustainment and fundamentally aims to reduce



the risk of repeated homelessness which is costly to the council and disruptive to the resident and their household which will ultimately benefit all residents.

The use and payment of both grants will be considered and managed in line with Tower Hamlets Adult Safeguarding procedures to ensure minimal risk of harm or exploitation to vulnerable individuals and families. Any concerns raised or noted regarding a particular individual or family will be considered on a specific case-by-case basis.

### Trends in Homelessness and Rough Sleeping in Tower Hamlets 2018 - 2023

Our review of homelessness and rough sleeping in Tower Hamlets has enabled us to identify trends within our borough since our last strategy was published in 2018. Our review was undertaken as a desktop exercise and was carried out in the winter of 2022/23. The review has been used to shape our actions and activities to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping over the course of the next five years and will be embedded in future business plan activities for the Housing Options Service.

In 2022/23, there were **more people presenting at the prevention stage (1879) than at the relief stage (1237).**

**Single Person households without children** make the greatest number of approaches for assistance both at the **prevention stage (643)** and at the **relief stage (949)**

In 2022/23 the council received **382** approaches (at the Prevention stage) and **489** at the relief stage **as a result of Family and Friends no long willing to or able to accommodate being the** reason for the loss of settled accommodation.

The second biggest reason for a homelessness approach in 2021/22 is the **end of Private Rent Sector Tenancy (15% of all approaches)**

**Mental Health** is the most prevalent of support needs for **19%** of all applicants, closely followed by **physical ill health and disability (15.5%)** and a **history of offending (95.%)**

Applicants who identify as **Asian/British** are the largest ethnic group (**45%**) who are owed a housing duty. More specifically it is the Bengali population which is owed the highest percentage of duties (**37%**)

**28%** of people sleeping rough in the borough identified as **White British (2022/23)**

In 2022/23, **41%** of those owed either a prevention or relief housing duty were **under the age of 35.**

By the end of 2022/23 **2567** households were **living in temporary accommodation.**

**81%** of these households include children.

Of the households placed in Temporary Accommodation **41.5% of placements in 2021/22 were out of the borough.**

In January 2023, **904** households had been **living in their temporary accommodation placements for 1-2 years.** A further **755** households had been in their temporary accommodation for **between 3 and 5 years.**

**58%** of rough sleepers in the borough have a **combination of support needs** such as **mental health, drug and alcohol abuse.**(2022/23)

Our review highlights the trends/key challenges in Tower Hamlets which include:

- the volume of people, being asked to leave by family and friends.

- the number of households that are threatened with homelessness when their private sector tenancy ends.
- the need to encourage those at risk of homelessness to seek housing advice and support to resolve this at an earlier stage rather than at crisis point and being able to access support through a range of effective customer channels.
- managing and meeting demand for good quality temporary accommodation within the borough against increasing costs and ensuring move-on from temporary accommodation is made at the earliest opportunity to affordable, sustainable, and suitable accommodation.
- ensuring support is available for vulnerable individuals and households.

As a result of these findings our priorities are:

- 1. Working with people earlier to prevent them from becoming homeless and to reduce the use of Temporary Accommodation.**
- 2. Provide good quality accommodation for people who are at risk of, or where they become, homeless.**
- 3. Improve customer service and the individual's experience.**
- 4. Making sure that people have access to the right support services.**
- 5. To prevent rough sleeping but where it does occur, it's rare, brief and doesn't happen again.**
- 6. Boost staff resilience and well-being.**

Our rationale for each of the six priorities from 2024-2029 to tackle Homelessness and Rough Sleeping and the high-level activities which we will undertake is set out below:

**Priority 1: Working with people earlier to prevent them becoming homeless and to reduce the use of Temporary Accommodation.**

The Housing Options Service is the first point of contact for many of our residents when they are threatened with or find themselves homeless. We work to enable applicants to remain in their home where it is safe and possible to do so, although in some instances, it will not be possible because an applicant is fleeing domestic abuse, or their landlord may want to sell the property or to evict an applicant.

Increasingly, applicants are approaching the Housing Options Service at the 'relief stage.' In both 2021/22 and 2022/23, there were more people presenting at the relief stage than at the prevention stage.

The most common reason for approaches recorded locally is where an applicant's 'Family and friends are no longer willing, or able to accommodate them,' at both the prevention and relief duty stages. This has remained the most prevalent of reasons for an approach at the prevention stage since our last strategy was written.

In 2020/21, there was a marked increase in these approaches at the prevention stage from 34.2% in 2019/20 to 46.7% in 2020/21. The increase in 2020/21 may be attributable to the Covid19 pandemic and the social distancing measures and public health concerns that may have increased applicants at risk of losing accommodation with their family and friends. Nevertheless, this figure has now reduced to 39.7% in 2021/22 and to 37.7% in 2022/23 but illustrates that more people are presenting before they reach crisis point, which is a positive trend.

Within the reason of 'Family and Friends being no longer willing or able to accommodate an applicant,' there may be multiple causes underpinning this reason such as family/relationship breakdown or

estrangement, addiction or substance misuse, mental or physical health problems and overcrowding – and some applicants may require enhanced support because they have multiple complex needs.

The Housing Options Service can provide or refer people to services who can help people remain in their homes, through financial and debt advice, working with landlords and agents to resolve tenancy issues, mediating between the applicant and their family or friends where relationships break down. In partnership with other services within the council we work to tackle incidents and escalations of anti-social behaviour, hate crime and domestic abuse. Where it is not possible to prevent homelessness or unsuitable for an individual to remain in their home, officers work with applicants to try to find suitable and affordable accommodation.

By acting earlier to identify problems and providing high quality advice, assistance, and advocacy, we will ensure people have the best chance of staying in their home.

To achieve this aim, we will:

- 1. Introduce measures to increase the rates of homelessness prevention for Private Rented Sector tenants.**
  - a. Recruit new resource within Housing Advice team
  - b. Review the effectiveness of the recent increase in the landlord AST tenancy renewal rates and monitor rates over time.
  - c. Raise awareness of the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords in the private sector.
- 2. Increase the provision of upstream homelessness prevention advice.**
  - a. Recruit a dedicated visiting officer.
  - b. Implement an upstream prevention service for refugees who are becoming homeless.
  - c. Introduce prevention service in children's centres.
  - d. Implement joint protocol (Housing/Children's Social Care) for homeless 16- & 17-year-olds.
  - e. Deliver increased prevention guidance for those leaving care.
- 3. Explore opportunities to utilise financial measures to help prevent homelessness and increase access to private rented homes.**
  - a. Introduce a new 'cost of living grant scheme' to be paid to hosts of families or single people in priority need.
  - b. To assist households in 'self-sourcing' homes in the Private Rented Sector, we will introduce a new 'PRS Find Your Own grant scheme' for priority need households.
  - c. Continue to review our incentives for landlords in line with market conditions, with the aim of increasing access to private rented homes to for households at risk of homelessness.
- 4. Work with social housing tenants and landlords to increase prevention of homelessness due to eviction from social tenancies.**
  - a. Engage with landlords to increase awareness of the Homelessness Intervention and Prevention Project.
  - b. Launch and monitor the Protocol for Social Housing Tenants at risk of homelessness.

**5. Support the prevention of homelessness through our Allocations Scheme.**

- a. Review our Common Housing Register Partnership Allocations Scheme to ensure that it supports the prevention of homelessness and encourages homeless households to utilise their priority on the Common Housing Register.

**6. Enable survivors of domestic abuse to stay in their own homes.**

- a. Promote the use of the Tower Hamlets Sanctuary Scheme.
- b. Implement a joint working Protocol for those fleeing domestic abuse between Housing Options and Housing Management.

**Priority 2: Provide good quality accommodation for people who are at risk of, or where they become, homeless.**

The Housing Options Service aims to provide households with more settled and permanent accommodation wherever it is possible. It is evident that households which remain in temporary accommodation for a number of years can experience impacts upon their health and wellbeing. The council is committed to providing financially sustainable accommodation to families to whom it owes a housing duty while seeking to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation.

There is a widely held expectation among many service users in Tower Hamlets that their homelessness will be resolved through the offer of social housing. This expectation results in the extremely low take-up of alternative solutions to prevent and relieve homelessness, particularly through the Private Rented Sector, with applicants preferring an offer of statutory temporary accommodation as an interim home until an offer of a social tenancy is made.

This results in applicants facing lengthy periods in temporary accommodation which not only fails to provide any form of long-term secure housing but adds to the budgetary pressures arising from the use of temporary accommodation.

A range of accommodation options are needed across the social, affordable private and supported sector to cater for a wide range of housing needs. As a council, we are already committed to working with developers and housing associations to deliver a minimum of 1000 social homes for rent per annum (Tower Hamlets Strategic Plan 2022-26, Priority 2: Homes for the Future).

To procure good quality sustainable accommodation options for people who are at risk of homelessness or who are homeless, we will:

**1. Work with landlords and accommodation suppliers to increase the supply of good quality homes.**

- a. Hold more landlord forums and open days to build new partnerships.
- b. Explore opportunities for Energy incentives for landlords
- c. Carry out cross-regional work with other Local Authorities who have procured in the borough.

**2. Increase 'Move on' of residents living in temporary accommodation into settled accommodation.**

- a. Promote new 'Find your own' incentives and Homefinder

- b. Continue to invest in our specialist move-on team to work with households in temporary accommodation (TA)
- c. Implement and monitor a new target of 90 households per month entering TA with clear move-on pathway and worked with during Relief Duty period
- d. Implement and monitor a new target of 40 move-ons per month from TA. Our specialist move-on officers will work closely with households in temporary accommodation and support them in accessing longer-term accommodation.

**3. Reduce the use of unsuitable and expensive temporary accommodation.**

- a. We will utilise grant funding routes to acquire new suitable properties for use as temporary accommodation.
- b. Review lease agreements between the council and accommodation suppliers to ensure repairs are undertaken when required.

**4. Repurpose or build new homes to increase the supply of temporary and long-term accommodation**

- a. Identify opportunities for existing council or community assets to be repurposed for temporary accommodation.

**5. Increase the number of accessible and adapted homes**

- a. Partner with the council's Private Housing Improvement Team to secure funding to carry out adaptations on properties acquired through the council's acquisition scheme

**6. Ensure our Homelessness Accommodation Placement Policy remains fit for purpose**

- a. Undertake a review and implement a new Homelessness Accommodation Placement Policy.

**7. Expand accommodation provision for people sleeping rough or at risk of rough sleeping**

- a. Provide 24 homes for people who are multiply excluded from other forms of support; this will be gender-informed housing first provision.

**Priority 3: Improve customer service and the individual's experience.**

We know that residents who seek our help because they are homeless or threatened with homelessness are going through a potentially stressful and difficult time in their life. We want to ensure that those needing help and support receive it in a manner which is suitable for them and from confident and knowledgeable staff, who themselves are supported through continued professional development. This priority is not just about the staff delivering homelessness services, it also encompasses the systems and processes which support the staff to deliver those services. This includes looking at how we collect and use data in a more innovative way to target support services and implement new ways of working.

Further improvements to the customer journey over the course of the next two financial years (24/25 and 25/26 include a revenue and capital investment of £1.3m) will enable the Housing Options Service to deliver much more, such as streamlining workflows, reducing errors, enhancing data quality, and

supporting strategic decision making. For customers this will mean - only asking for documents once and automating customer notifications to ensure statutory compliance as well as timely customer communication.

For staff this will lead to a reduction in their administrative burden by reducing systems and prepopulating data, providing clear and concise workflow assignment and performance information.

We recognise that the customer journey is not just a digital one, and face to face contact will remain an option particularly for those in an emergency. To deliver on this priority we will aim to:

**1. Deliver high-quality homelessness advice across a variety of channels and formats.**

- a. Review all homelessness web content to ensure all advice is accurate, up-to-date, and easy to locate for users.
- b. Provide an affective telephone service for residents seeking homelessness guidance
- c. Implement a new webchat function to assist with homelessness queries
- d. We will introduce online digital forms to assist residents with key

**2. Deliver a service which is accessible for all residents.**

- a. Review communications sent to our service users, ensuring that they are all written in plain English, and we will aim to provide communications in the format of the client's choice wherever possible.
- b. Put in place increased support for service users who are deaf to ensure they can access services easily
- c. Review the opening hours of our face-to-face homelessness service.

**3. Improve the client experience of the homelessness process, delivering clear, empathetic, and timely communication throughout.**

- a. Recruit and mobilise a specialist triage team to improve first contact resolution
- b. Introduce 'self-service' capabilities for residents through improvements to our customer portal
- c. Embed a customer service training plan
- d. Develop new materials and guidance on the homelessness process
- e. Agree approach for mystery shopping to aid service improvements.

**4. Improve communication with residents living in temporary accommodation**

- a. Undertake an annual temporary accommodation survey and issue a clear action plan to deliver improvements to our service for households living in temporary accommodation.

**5. Increase the work we do with service users and people with lived experience to help improve our service.**

- a. Introduce an annual customer survey
- b. Identify resident representatives with lived experience to help monitor the strategy

**Priority 4: Making sure that people have access to the right support services.**

A considerable proportion of households and individuals seeking housing advice and facing homelessness have a need for some form of additional support. Our Homelessness Review identified that in 2022/23, 19% of all applicants approaching the Housing Options Service had mental health needs, but many may have multiple additional needs. Support needs are even more prevalent when it comes to rough sleepers with only 8% having no support needs.

We are committed to addressing and preventing youth homelessness, we recognise the critical importance of engaging with young people under the age of 17. This age group represents a vulnerable population requiring specialised attention and support to ensure their safety, stability, and future well-being.

Safeguarding vulnerable adults is a fundamental priority to our service and we work consistently with our partners to ensure their safety, well-being, and protection from harm. We are committed to developing a comprehensive approach that addresses the unique needs and challenges faced by vulnerable adults experiencing homelessness. We know that homelessness often exacerbates mental health challenges and social isolation, significantly increasing the risk of suicidal ideation and behaviour. Our approach therefore integrates specific measures to identify, support, and intervene for individuals at risk of suicide within the homeless population.

To improve access to and the effectiveness of support services our activities will include:

- 1. Deliver improved support and effective pathways for those fleeing domestic abuse.**
  - a. Put in place clear referral processes and pathways with internal and external partners
  - b. Deliver domestic abuse training programme
- 2. Implement a multi-agency approach to safeguarding vulnerable adults.**
  - a. Identify and implement enhancements in the vulnerable adult homeless hostel/supported accommodation pathway.
  - b. Put in place clear pathways and working processes are in place with internal and external partners
- 3. Provide enhanced support to children and young people.**
  - a. Recommission the Young People’s supported accommodation pathway
  - b. Implement the joint Protocol aimed at supporting children aged 16 and 17 who are homeless or at risk
  - c. Work with partner services in the council to provide effective support for young people of the LGBTQI+ who are homeless or at risk.
- 4. Work with our partners to improve access to mental health and addiction support.**
  - a. Put in place coordinated referral pathways with our key partners.
  - b. Implement co-located housing advice surgeries.
- 5. Review and improve our hospital discharge pathway.**
  - a. Identify and implement improvements to our hospital discharge pathways from the Royal London Hospital and Mile End Hospital.
- 6. Increase support for ex-offenders to aid their transition from custody to stable living situations.**
  - a. Launch and monitor the Accommodation for ex-offenders (AFEO) programme in Tower Hamlets, to provide ex-offenders with accommodation.

**7. Assist our service users to access paid jobs**

- a. Work with the Supported Employment team to increase referrals to the Individual Placement and Support in Primary Care (IPSPC) Scheme

**Priority 5: To prevent rough sleeping but where it does occur, it's rare, brief and doesn't happen again.**

While not the only form of homelessness, rough sleeping is the most visible and dangerous. Many people who sleep rough have experienced trauma and may need support with substance use, mental and physical ill-health, and immigration matters. People may be survivors of exploitation and domestic abuse. They may have spent time in prison or care. Rough sleeping exposes people to severe risks and it is therefore crucial that people are supported off the streets rapidly.

The council recognises the significant costs of rough sleeping and commissions specialist supports services to find local solutions. The council will continue to do this and will raise resident's awareness of the support available to them. We will:

**1. Raise awareness of the causes and solutions to rough sleeping.**

- a. Increase awareness of Street Link to local residents (this application enables members of the public to connect people sleeping rough with the local services that can support them).
- b. Provide training to relevant agencies, including Police Officers, Park Guard and Adult Social Care so that they can provide the highest level of support for rough sleepers and signpost them to the correct services.

**2. Develop innovative accommodation and support solutions for the most marginalised groups.**

- a. Expand our Housing First provision to support more people for whom other service models do not work to access housing and live healthy and fulfilled lives.
- b. Access specialist government funding to develop accommodation options as identified through ongoing strategic commissioning analyses.
- c. Build on existing provision for women rough sleepers to ensure more routes into services and off the streets for women, including learning from the Women's Rough Sleeping Census.
- d. Deliver a pilot study of embedding a social work senior practitioner in the Ending Rough Sleeping Team who will support people rough sleeping to access support from Adult Social Care, upskill partner agencies, and build links with Adult Social Care Teams.
- e. Develop new off the streets accommodation options to allow safe assessment and links into wider pathways.
- f. Review our Severe Weather Emergency Accommodation Protocol (SWEP), in light of the significant increase in rough sleeping since 2022, to ensure system capacity is sufficient to demand.

**3. Build new and strengthen existing partnerships with local partners, the NEL subregion and the national Rough Sleeping Initiative.**



- a. Develop collaborative partnerships with sub-regional boroughs, co-commissioning services where there is sufficient need and opportunity, including staging post accommodation to support with reconnection work to other areas / countries.
  - b. Build relationships with health services including Integrated Care Boards, Neighbourhood Mental Health Teams, Public Health, GP practices and Substance Use services.
  - c. We will strengthen links with prison and probation services, including CAS 3 Accommodation Programme and Strategic Housing Specialists, with the aim of ensuring that no one rough sleeps on release from prison.
  - d. Establish a Rough Sleeping Forum to improve links and best practice sharing with delivery partners and a Rough Sleeping Strategic Group to facilitate strategic coordination of borough wide response to rough sleeping.
- 4. Ensure commissioning is evidence led and co-produced with people who have used rough sleeping services.**
- a. Undertake data analysis to understand where increased flow to the streets is coming from and target interventions and preventative work accordingly.
  - b. Learn from other boroughs approached to involving lived experience within g commissioning and develop an appropriate action plan.
- 5. Develop a targeted prevention Plan to target early interventions and reduce risk of rough sleeping.**
- a. Develop approaches in collaboration with council's partners in the Hostels, Housing Options and Adult Social Care.
  - b. Identify trends, particularly in relation to cases of repeat homelessness, to understand who may require more support than others to sustain a tenancy in the future.
- 6. Improve access to and outcomes from health and social care services for people rough sleeping.**
- a. Coordinate a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Health Strategic Group.
  - b. We will ensure that all existing safeguarding forums are being utilised by commissioned services to a partnership approach.
  - c. Following the Rough Sleeping Health Needs Assessment 2024, we will embed learning to help improve our service.
  - d. We will ensure effective joint working across our substance use pathway in the council.
  - e. To help us to work in partnership with mental health services, we will explore all options for co-location of professionals.

**Priority 6: Boost staff resilience and well-being**

Staff in the Housing Options Service work in a highly intense and emotionally consuming environment. They can also be exposed to traumatic information and scenarios. Stress and anxiety can also be exacerbated by the challenges of delivering this service. This is not unique to Tower Hamlets and is endemic across England and particularly prevalent in London.

The lack of social or affordable homes, spiralling rents in the private rented sector and rising house prices has pushed the supply of housing to its limits in Tower Hamlets, combined with the post-pandemic demand, supply shortages and the cost-of-living crisis. Demand for social housing vastly outstrips supply and it can be challenging managing the expectations of residents who may not have understood the full extent of the housing crisis.

These pressures have led to an increased footfall in customers approaching the Housing Options service for homelessness and housing advice. The council needs to ensure that it develops capacity on the frontline to provide an empathetic and dignified response to every service user seeking support. We will:

- 1. Improve our learning and development offer for staff.**
  - a. Put in place a tailored learning and development programme
  - b. Establish a system for collecting staff feedback on all training.
  - c. Put in place a comprehensive induction programme for all new staff, including new starter pack and new starter checklist
  - d. Implement training for all line managers on effective management and staff well-being.
  - e. Recruit a dedicated training coordinator to work with staff
  - f. Investigate potential training opportunities utilising the Apprenticeship Levy.
  - g. Roll out reflective practice sessions for staff.
  - h. Equip our managers through training to provide effective wellbeing support for staff.
- 2. Enforce the council's customer code of conduct policy and protect staff from abuse.**
  - a. Raise awareness of our code of conduct policy among residents and work with council partners to address any breaches of the policy.
- 3. Improve the working environment.**
  - a. Review the current Residents' Hub and identify any improvements required.
- 4. Work with staff when designing service improvements to improve wellbeing**
  - a. Recruit a dedicated service improvement practitioner
  - b. Establish a wellbeing working group
  - c. Implement regular staff engagement sessions focussed on providing opportunities for open communication.
  - d. Put in place a clear schedule for team meetings
  - e. Develop team-building activities and away days to promote morale
  - f. Undertake reviews of staff wellbeing and stress
  - g. Deliver a system for gathering anonymous feedback from staff on their experiences in the service, particularly with regards to management
  - h. Recruit 30 new positions within Housing Options.
- 5. Invest in our workforce to ensure that the service grows in response to the rising homelessness demand and implement measures to manage staff caseloads**

- a. Develop a caseload weighting system to help manage caseloads for those in high pressurised frontline roles.
- 6. Put in place improved systems, tools and processes to help reduce burdens upon staff and better equip them for their roles.**
- a. We will deliver an IT Transformation programme in the service to streamline systems and remove duplication of activities
  - b. Put in place a comprehensive training programme to accompany IT changes, including easy-to-use manuals and video tutorials for different functions.
  - c. Ensure a suite of up-to-date and easy to access policies and procedures are in place for staff

### **Governance and monitoring of the Delivery Plan**

As part of the delivery of the strategy, we have developed a delivery plan which will be in line with each of the six priorities, as outlined in this strategy. This will clearly show how we will tackle and address homelessness and rough sleeping and will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis over the course of the next five years. It is extremely difficult to predict the changes that will occur over this time period so our approach to the delivery of this strategy must be flexible to allow the Housing Options Service to adapt and change depending on the circumstances.

The delivery plan covers a range of more detailed actions and will include timescales. Our activities within this delivery plan will be developed in line with our existing partnerships. Oversight of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and its associated delivery plan will be provided by a Strategic Board which will be a multi-agency group comprising representatives from services internal and external to the council who work with homeless people.

The Strategic Board will ensure that the delivery of this strategy is monitored and scrutinised, and that work is progressing as it should. A regular update will be provided to the Board alongside an update on the key homeless data to demonstrate the impact of our activity. The Strategy actions will also be reviewed annually to ensure they are still relevant and appropriate with input from the Strategic Board.

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<sup>i</sup> DLUHC Official Statistics: Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2023 (February 2024): [Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>ii</sup> Mayor of London's London Housing Strategy (May 2018): [London Housing Strategy](#)

<sup>iii</sup> Crisis 'The hidden truth about homelessness - Experiences of single homelessness in England (May 2011): [the hidden truth about homelessness.pdf \(crisis.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>iv</sup> [London-2023-Womens-Rough-Sleeping-Census-Report.pdf \(solacewomensaid.org\)](#)

<sup>v</sup> Public Health: Guidance – Health Matters: Rough Sleeping (February 2020) [Health matters: rough sleeping - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>vi</sup> Commons Library Briefing (CBP 5638), 17 August 2021: [The rent safety net: changes since 2010 - House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](#)

<sup>vii</sup> Source: ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, Resident Analysis and Workplace Analysis, 2023

<sup>viii</sup> DLUHC: Live tables on Social Housing Sales (update 19 October 2023) [LT691.ods \(live.com\)](#)

<sup>ix</sup> National Statistics: Housing Prices in Tower Hamlets (February 2024): [Housing prices in Tower Hamlets \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>x</sup> Crisis: The Homelessness Monitor (2022) [Homelessness Monitor | Crisis UK | Together we will end homelessness](#)

<sup>xi</sup> National Statistics: [Registered provider social housing stock and rents in England 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>xii</sup> DLUCH Rough Sleeping snapshot in England: Autumn 2022 [Rough sleeping infographic 2022 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>xiii</sup> DLUHC [Local authority revenue expenditure and financing England: 2020 to 2021 individual local authority data - outturn - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>xiv</sup> Shelter Report (February 2022) Cashing in How a shortage of social housing is fuelling a multi-million-pound temporary accommodation sector: [Cashing in - How a shortage of social housing is fuelling a multi-million-pound temporary accommodation sector.pdf \(ctfassets.net\)](#)

<sup>xv</sup> [About Beam](#)