

**DRAFT HOMELESSNESS STATEMENT 2013 TO 2017**

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## **MAYOR'S FOREWORD**

As Mayor of Tower Hamlets tackling housing need is a personal priority of mine. Having somewhere suitable to live is essential to residents' wellbeing, young people's attainment and quality of life.

Local partners have made considerable progress in improving services and reducing homelessness in the borough. Hundreds of families have been prevented from being homeless, there are fewer people sleeping rough for two consecutive nights and the use of temporary accommodation to house homeless households has reduced.

Despite these successes, we face significant challenges that will affect housing need and our ability to respond to these needs. They include unprecedented changes to welfare support, social housing reform, continued economic uncertainties, and government cuts to services.

I am concerned that these changes will mean many of our poorest families and vulnerable households will see their incomes reduced, making it harder for them to meet their housing and other living costs. This will push many families into poverty and increase housing need.

In light of these challenges, the Council and its partners have produced this new Homelessness Statement. It aims to ensure that local services are best placed to continue to tackle and prevent homelessness by focusing on four key themes:

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

I look forward to working with local agencies to deliver these objectives and continue to improve the quality of life for all local people.

**Mayor LutfurRahman**

## INTRODUCTION

The Council and its partners have made considerable progress in improving services and reducing homelessness in the borough since the previous Homelessness plan was launched in 2008. Through strong partnership working local agencies have successfully:

- Prevented over 3,700 households from being homeless through case work intervention, significantly exceeding the Tower Hamlets target;
- Achieved a marked reduction in statutory homeless acceptances;
- Extended services to single “non-statutory” homeless people;
- Reduced the use of temporary accommodation for homeless households;
- Reduced the number of people sleeping rough under the No Second Night Out initiative;
- Made the hostel sector more responsive to the needs of the borough, with the neediest and vulnerable prioritised for vacancies; and
- Assisted over 300 people to move-on from hostels to independent living in 2011/12.

Local partners now face significant challenges in building on existing achievements to continue to prevent households from becoming homeless and support those who find themselves homeless. These include major changes to the benefit system, social housing reform, prolonged economic uncertainties, and reduced resources for services - likely to continue in the coming years. All of these have considerable implications for homelessness and related issues such as poverty, exclusion, employment, attainment and wellbeing.

These weighty challenges make a robust and sustainable approach to tackling and preventing homelessness more important than ever. This statement therefore aims to ensure that local services are as efficient and effective as possible to meet local needs.

The development of the draft statement has been led by the Homelessness Partnership Board, a cross-agency group of key services working with homeless people and those at risk of homelessness. It has been informed by a detailed review of homelessness in Tower Hamlets and consultation with local agencies.

## CONTEXT

### National Policy and Legislative Context

The national landscape has changed considerably since the previous Homelessness plan. Within the context of a challenging economic climate, the Coalition Government has introduced a number of legislative changes that will significantly affect current and future housing needs, and the ability of local housing partners to respond to these needs. An independent homelessness monitor, commissioned by Crisis, has described the weakening of welfare support and changes to social housing, combined with recessionary pressures and high unemployment, as creating a 'perfect storm' – which will have a major impact on those vulnerable to homelessness.<sup>1</sup>

The Government's reform of the welfare system has substantial implications for housing and homelessness. Changes to the Local Housing Allowance, Housing Benefit paid to low income households in the private sector, have made it difficult for some private rented tenants to remain in their current accommodation and for prospective tenants to access suitable accommodation in the sector. Furthermore, the change in the indexation of Housing Benefit, and particularly the introduction of a household benefit cap from 2013 for those not in work, will place considerable strains on low income families and exacerbate housing needs.

The Localism Act 2011 also introduces important reforms to social housing and homelessness. The Act allows councils to permanently discharge their homelessness duty by making available suitable accommodation in the private rented sector. It also permits councils to develop their own allocations procedures and introduces fixed-term tenancies for social housing providers to offer social tenants, including a minimum tenancy of five years. Through its Tenancy Strategy, published in January 2013, the Council has agreed to continue with lifetime tenancies in order to promote stability for its residents and is urging its partners to also adopt a similar tenancy policy.

In addition, the Government has introduced a new Affordable Rent Model for the future delivery of social housing. This allows social housing providers to build new homes and convert a percentage of their relet stock to a new rent model allowing homes to be let at a rent of up to 80% of the local market rent, up from 50%.

These changes could help councils discharge their homeless duties, manage local demand more effectively and make better use of the social housing stock. However, the aggregated impact of welfare and social housing reform could result in increased need and limited affordable housing to meet the borough's growing housing needs. This has important implications not only for housing but for a number of issues including health and wellbeing, family cohesion and financial inclusion.

### Regional Policy Context

Housing and homelessness are also central themes in the London Plan 2011, the strategic document bringing together the long-term economic, environmental, transport and social development framework for the region. The Mayor of London published a revised London Housing Strategy for consultation with the public in December 2011. The strategy includes policies on access to rented accommodation and tackling need around overcrowding and rough sleeping. A final version is expected to be published in the summer of 2013.

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<sup>1</sup>Suzanne Fritzpatrick et al. (2011), *The homelessness monitor: tracking the impacts of policy and economic change in England 2011-2013: year 1: establishing the baseline*.

The Localism Act 2011 passes greater housing and regeneration powers to the Mayor. When the Mayor of London gains these new powers, and the associated budgets, including: new supply, tackling empty homes, and tackling rough sleeping, the Council will work closely with his office, where appropriate, to assist in tackling and preventing homelessness.

### **Local Policy Context**

Housing need is historically high in Tower Hamlets. Homelessness and overcrowding are part of the many challenges faced by the borough's residents. They are inextricably linked to poverty – including child poverty, worklessness and health inequalities. Whilst there are pockets of wealth, with the average annual earnings of those working in the borough at £64,000, over 40% of households are living in income poverty, the highest in the country. Tower Hamlets also has the highest rates of child and pensioner poverty nationally, making the borough one of the most deprived areas in the country.

Housing is therefore a key concern for local people and a high priority for the Council and the Tower Hamlets Partnership. The Mayor and the Partnership are committed to meeting the borough's growing housing needs, as articulated in the Community Plan.

The significant savings that local partners need to make over the next few years is also an important local context. The Council alone will need to make around £90 million worth of savings over the next four years following government cuts. This challenge is magnified within the background of a growing local population. Tower Hamlets, already a densely populated borough, has one of the fastest growing populations in the country, set to increase by 12% by 2016, taking it to 283,800, which will place additional pressures on services during a time of further budget cuts.

## **HOMELESSNESS IN TOWER HAMLETS**

The formal homeless definition for those qualifying for housing assistance is people who have lost their homes, or are at risk of losing their homes, and are in priority need. Priority households include those with dependent children or a pregnant woman, 16 and 17 year olds and people who are vulnerable due to old age, a mental or physical disability, risk of violence, formerly being in custody or in the military personnel.

This statement goes beyond a statutory definition of homelessness. It includes all households without a place to stay or living in insecure, unsafe or unsuitable accommodation; many of whom do not qualify for housing assistance.

### **Homelessness Presentations and Preventions**

In 2011/12 there were 3,300 approaches to the Council's homelessness service by households presenting as homeless or at risk of being homeless. 38% (1,240) were family households (households with dependent children or a pregnant woman); and 62% (over 2,050) were single households.

Of these, over 1,040 households were prevented from becoming homeless as a result of interventions to support them to remain in their own homes (such as reconciliation support, debt advice and support to deal with rent arrears) and support to secure alternative accommodation.

Where homelessness cannot be prevented, households make a formal homeless application, which is assessed by the Council to determine if a main duty to provide the household with housing assistance is owed.

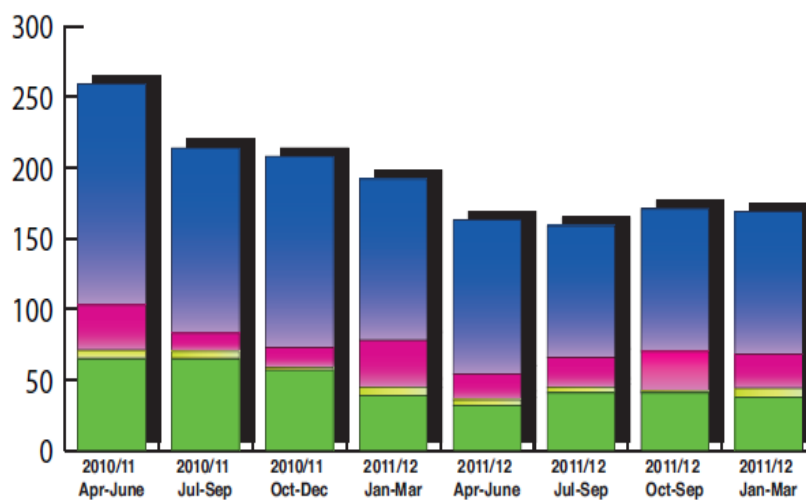
In 2011/12, 662 decisions on homeless applications were made by the Council. Of these:

- 61% were accepted as being owed a main homeless duty (homeless acceptances);
- 13.7% were in priority need but considered intentionally homeless;
- 2.3% were homeless but not in priority need; and
- 23% were not homeless

Whilst the proportion of households in each of the above categories has remained relatively constant, the number of decisions on homeless applications has reduced considerably since 2008/9. In 2008/9, a total of 946 decisions were made. By 2011/12 this had reduced to 662 decisions, equating to a 30% reduction over three years. However, since 2011/12 homeless decisions are beginning to flat-line. Nationally and regionally, homelessness decisions increased in 2011/12.

The reduction in decisions on homeless applications is, in part, due to the success of prevention activity. Over 3,700 households were prevented from being homeless as a result of housing advice and support intervention between 2008/9 to 2011/12, exceeding the borough's target for this period.

It can also be attributed to the introduction of a new lettings policy launched in October 2010. Appreciating that the high levels of overcrowding in the borough resulted in disproportionately high levels of ejection by family and friends, the new policy gave overcrowded households the same level of priority as homeless households. With greater significance applied to the length of time a household has spent on the waiting list, many overcrowded families were able to anticipate their prospect of an offer.



■ Not homeless	65	69	57	39	32	43	41	38
■ Homeless but not in priority need	6	5	2	6	4	4	1	6
■ Priority need but not intentionally homeless	32	13	14	33	18	21	28	24
■ Homeless acceptances	156	132	135	114	109	93	101	101

### Statutory Homelessness

The Council has a duty to provide accommodation for households accepted as homeless. Cessation of such an obligation typically only follows the offer of a social housing tenancy that the Council deems to be suitable.

The number of households accepted as homeless reduced from 700 in 2008/9 to 400 in 2011/12. This represents a significant reduction of 43% over the three years. As is the case with homeless decisions, the number of households accepted as homeless is now beginning to plateau, since the beginning of 2011/12, following a downward trend. Regionally homelessness acceptances increased by 25% between 2010/11 to 2011/12.

The majority of households accepted as homeless are households with dependent children or a pregnant woman. In 2011/12, this group accounted for 80% of homeless acceptances. Of these households, 47% have one dependent child and 13% have three or more dependent children.

The next largest priority need category is people vulnerable due to a mental or physical disability, many of whom are single households. In 2011/12 the majority of single households accepted as homeless fell in this category, either being identified as having a specific notable need (28%), or a general lower level need.

Ethnic minority households in the borough are disproportionately affected by homelessness, as is the case regionally. Between 2008/9 to 2010/11 68% of households statutorily assessed as homeless and 73% of households accepted as homeless were from BME groups. However ethnic minority groups only account for 47% of the borough's population. This is reflective of the general housing needs in the borough. Bangladeshi households are, by far, more likely to be homeless than any other ethnic group.

By far the largest age groups accepted as homeless (based on the age of the main applicant) are the 25-44 and 16-24 age groups, at 58% and 29% respectively. The number of acceptances among all age groups has decreased, with the exception of the 45-59 age group which slightly increased.



All households assessed and accepted as homeless are placed into temporary accommodation (TA), including hostel accommodation for some single households. Local partners have worked hard to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation. The number of households placed by the Council in temporary accommodation reduced from 2,424 in 2008/09 to 1,789 in 2010/11.

Following a year-on-year reduction in households in temporary accommodation since 2010/11, the number of household in TA is beginning to flat-line. At the end of 2011/12 1,796 households were in temporary accommodation, the eighth highest in London.

### **Single and non-priority homeless households**

The majority of households who approach the Council as homeless are single households. They account for 62% of all homeless approaches to the Council.

Most of the single person households presenting as homeless are male (68%), and aged between 18-35 years old (30% aged 18 to 25 and 28% aged 26 to 35).<sup>2</sup> Based on available data, 43% are BME and 28% White. Ethnicity data are not available for almost a third of single households presenting as homeless.

The vast majority of single homeless households do not qualify for accommodation assistance from the Council, as most do not meet the qualifying criteria of being in priority need. 72% of the total number of single households presenting as homeless do not have sufficient support needs to be classified as vulnerable.

National research into single homelessness suggests that many single homeless people do not even approach their local authority because of low expectations about the help they are eligible to receive.<sup>3</sup> Single homeless people who are not in priority need often stay with friends, family members – so called ‘sofa surfers’ and are hidden from homeless statistics.

The Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) 2011/12 annual report for Tower Hamlets shows that rough sleeping (both those seen rough sleeping and those accessing services) increased in 2011/12.<sup>4</sup> This represents a year-on-year increase in rough sleepers, and reflective of a regional trend. It shows that there has been a significant increase in rough sleepers seen rough sleeping; the vast majority of these were people seen rough sleeping for the first time. The number of first time rough sleepers has increased by over 90% since the previous year.

CHAIN data show that 89% of rough sleepers are male, and 62% aged 26 to 45. The vast majority are White, most of who are White British. 21% are BME (this consists of 15% Black and 3% Asian). In terms of nationality, 46% are British, 30% are from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and 9% from Africa. The numbers of CEE nationals sleeping rough in the borough has more than quadrupled since 2008/9.

Tower Hamlets is in a minority of authorities providing dedicated advice and support for single, non-priority households. This includes providing information, advice and guidance in finding accommodation within the private rented sector and placement into hostel accommodation.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on local homelessness data for 2011/12

<sup>3</sup> Kesia Reeve and Elaine Batty (2011), *The hidden truth about homelessness: The experience of single homeless people in England*.

<sup>4</sup> Combined Homeless and Information Network (2012), *Tower Hamlets Annual Report 2011/12*,

## Causes of homelessness

Evidence from the borough's homelessness review shows that in 2011/12, based on statutory homeless data, the main causes of homelessness, for those accepted as homeless were:

- Parents no longer willing to accommodate - 24%
- Other relatives and friends no longer willing to accommodate - 22%
- Domestic violence – 14%
- Termination of Assured Shorthold Tenancy –11%

The cause of homelessness for the remaining 29% of households can be attributed to relationship breakdown, non-domestic violence, and rent arrears. There was no specified reason for nearly 18% of accepted households.

Whilst the four main known reasons for homelessness have remained relatively stable since 2008/9, there has been a notable increase in overall proportion of homelessness due to termination of assured short hold tenancy between 2008/9 and 2011/12. This may be due to the impact of changes to the Local Housing Allowance.

The causes of statutory homelessness in the borough are similar to those in the region, though locally domestic violence accounts for a far higher proportion of homelessness and termination of assured short-hold tenancies for less than the regional average.

There is a small amount of repeat homelessness, households who within 2 years of being accepted as homeless re-presented again as homeless and were accepted, within the borough. There were a total of 11 cases between 2008/9 to 2011/12 and these broadly consist of:

- Households, who leave temporary accommodation and secure alternative arrangements elsewhere which then break down; and
- Women, who suffer repeated domestic violence, fleeing & returning to the household.

## HOUSING NEED AND DEMAND

The borough's fast growing population, high property prices and low income levels for many residents, mean that housing need and demand are high.

### Social Housing

As at April 2012 there were 23,400 households on the borough's Common Housing Register of social landlords; this includes those waiting for social housing and those wanting to transfer from their current social housing. The register has been steadily increasing over the years, with the rate of increase stabilising since 2009. Between April 2008 and October 2011 the number of households on the borough's Housing waiting list increased by 8.3%. Social housing accounts for approximately 45% of the borough's housing stock, one of the highest levels in London.

Overcrowding, defined as being short of one bedroom, is the main cause of housing need in the borough. 9,500 (41%) of households on the housing register are classified as overcrowded. Of these households, approximately 1,800 are classified as severely overcrowded – needing additional two or more bedrooms. This is one of the highest levels of overcrowding in the country.

### Private Rented Market

The private rented sector (PRS) currently accounts for 39% of the borough's existing housing stock. Across London the private rented market has grown significantly since 2001, and accounts for all of the overall household growth.<sup>5</sup>

Rental prices in the borough are above the London average. Rental market values for Tower Hamlets show that the average monthly rent in the borough is £1,300, equivalent to the inner London average<sup>6</sup>. Prices vary considerably across the borough. Most recent data on market rent values in the borough show that the average price for a two bedroom property vary from £1,325 in the E14 area (including East India and Lansbury, Blackwall and Cubit Town) to £1,731 in the E2 area (including Bethnal Green North)<sup>7</sup>.

The private rented market is predicted to continue to grow as demand exceeds supply. This is driven by a number of factors including first time buyers unable to access the property market continuing to rent and newly formed households also renting. Rent prices are predicted to increase by 20% nationally between 2012 and 2016 – with the increase being even higher in London.<sup>8</sup> High rental prices in the private sector will continue to lead to increased housing need, particularly overcrowding.

### Affordability

Housing affordability in Tower Hamlets is a significant challenge to preventing homelessness and addressing the housing needs of local people. The considerable disparity between the income levels of residents and the local housing market makes buying a property inaccessible for many residents.

The average house price in Tower Hamlets (as at August 2012) is over £364,500, above the London and sub-regional averages. Whilst sale volumes have fluctuated over the last few years, they are currently above 2008/9 figures. Yet the median household income in the borough is £29,550. This is above the East London median income but below the

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<sup>5</sup> Greater London Authority (2012), *London Housing Strategy for Consultation*, December 2011

<sup>6</sup> Valuation Office Agency, *Monthly Rental Values*

<sup>7</sup> Tower Hamlets POD data (2012), *Private Sector Average Monthly Rents*

<sup>8</sup> Savills (2011), *Residential Property Focus: RE-programmed 2012 – 2016, Decoding the next five years of the housing market*.

London median. There are also over 18,000 households (18.8% of all households) in the borough living on an annual income of less than £15,000; a higher percentage than the inner London average.

## WELFARE REFORM AND ITS IMPACT ON HOMELESSNESS

Changes to welfare support, particularly the household benefit cap, will have significant implications for housing and homelessness. This is because it will reduce the housing subsidy for those in high rent areas, such as Tower Hamlets. Some of the impacts will include:

- More families experiencing financial hardship and getting into debt;
- More households presenting as homeless;
- An increase in the number of overcrowded households;
- Increase demand for entry level private sector properties; and
- More families in temporary accommodation being placed outside the borough and outside London where properties are more affordable. This could have implications for family cohesion and the educational attainment of children.

The social and personal consequences of all of the above may lead to fractured employment and education opportunities, disruption to social cohesion, personal/emotional difficulties.

### **Housing Benefit and Local Housing Allowance**

The Local Housing Allowance (LHA), the Housing Benefit paid to low income households in the private rented sector, has been restricted since 2011. Key changes include capping of the maximum weekly rate of LHA, reducing the maximum LHA level from five to four bedroom and lowering the LHA rate from the median (50 percent) to the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of markets rents for new claimants.

#### *Impact in Tower Hamlets*

As at February 2012 1,260 Housing Benefit claimants faced a shortfall between their Housing Benefit and their rents as a result changes to the LHA. The average rent shortfall for a 3 bedroom accommodation, for example, was £14 per week, or £748 a year.<sup>9</sup> An analysis of local homelessness data show signs of an increase in the number of households presenting as homeless due to a termination of an assured shorthold tenancy. This could, at least in part, be as a result of changes to the LHA making households unable to pay their rent. Some households are bridging the gap between their LHA and their rent. However the ability of households to continue to meet the shortfall in their LHA will be made more difficult by the change to uprate the LHA based on the Consumer Price Index, which does not fully reflect the significant rent cost inflation the borough will continue to face.

The University of Cambridge's Centre for Housing and Planning Research estimated that as a result of the cumulative impact of LHA changes, by 2016 only 17% of neighbourhoods in the borough will be affordable to LHA claimants.<sup>10</sup>

The Government notes in its equality impact assessment of the changes to the LHA that it may have a disproportionate impact on some BME groups who have, on average, larger families.<sup>11</sup> Given the high proportion of BME households in the borough, particularly Asian

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<sup>9</sup> Based on an analysis of Housing Benefit data as at February 2012

<sup>10</sup> Alex Fenton, *Which neighbourhoods in London will be affordable for housing benefit claimants 2010-16, as the Government's reforms take effect?*, University of Cambridge, November 2011

<sup>11</sup> Department for Work and Pension (2011)– *Housing Benefit equality impact assessment: Changes to the Local Housing Allowance arrangement and Housing Benefit size criteria for people with non-resident overnight carers*,

households, who on average have larger families, some BME residents could be disproportionately affected by these changes.

### **Housing Benefit and the Benefit Cap**

With effect from 2013 the Government plans to cap the total amount of benefits that working age households are entitled to receive. The cap is part of the Welfare Reform Act and will include the main out-of-work benefits (Job Seekers Allowance, Income Support and Employment Support); it will also include other benefits such as Housing Benefit, Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit. The benefit entitlement for single households with no children will be restricted to £350 per week and £500 per week for everyone else.

#### *Impact of the Household Benefit Cap in Tower Hamlets*

Housing costs generally account for the largest proportion of household income. Many households in Tower Hamlets in receipt of benefits fall within the most affected categories, given the borough's demographics (larger than average family size) and high rental prices. Tower Hamlets was highlighted as one of the most affected areas in the country, having more than 1,000 households affected by the cap. The Council estimates that approximately 1,300 households will be affected, with the median benefit reduction per household at £68 per week, and about 500 households losing more than £100 per week.<sup>12</sup>

91 per cent of those affected are households with children. Larger families with three or more children will find it particularly difficult to access accommodation, many of whom will receive no Housing Benefit once the cap is introduced. This will have significant implications for child poverty and income poverty in the borough, already the highest nationally.

Benefit dependent families in the private rented sector will be most impacted by the benefit cap and will find the private rented sector near unaffordable for them to remain in or access. For larger families in particular, the sector will be completely unaffordable, based on average rent levels in the borough: currently £395 per week for a two-bed property and £485 per week for a three-bed property.<sup>13</sup> Families will be forced to move outside of the borough, probably outside of London, to be able to afford suitable accommodation.

Families in the social housing sector will also be affected by the cap. In light of the new Affordable Rent Model set at 80% of the market rate, new social housing tenants dependent on Housing Benefit could also find the social housing sector unaffordable. The Council has carried out research and developed guidance on what it considers an acceptable level for affordable rents. Indicative affordable rent levels, based on 2012 data, are likely to be 65% of market rate rents for a one-bed property to 50% of market rate for a four bed property.

There is also a sizeable number of homeless households currently in temporary accommodation who will be affected by the cap. As these households will be unable to meet the shortfall between their rent and HB, the Council will have to make up the difference or source and provide more affordable accommodation. In this context, affordable means progressively further away from Tower Hamlets. The Council may have to place families in temporary accommodation outside of the local area, whilst taking into consideration individual family needs, in order to meet local housing needs.

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<sup>12</sup> Based on local analysis carried out in November 2012

<sup>13</sup> Tower Hamlets POD data (2012), *Private Sector Average Rents*

#### Housing Benefit size criteria for people in social housing: The 'bedroom tax'

People receiving Housing Benefit who live in social housing and have a spare room may get a reduction in their Housing Benefit entitlement. This change will come into effect from April 2013. Those who will not be able to pay their rent due to a reduction in their Housing Benefit may have to move, leading to increased housing need. It is estimated that over 2,500 households in the borough will be affected by this change.

#### Other Welfare Changes: monthly payments

Another important change that will impact on housing and homelessness is the monthly payment of benefits under Universal Credit – a single unified benefit that will be administered by the Department for Work and Pensions. Although the Government has not provided specific roll-out dates for local authorities, it is likely to be from April 2014 onwards on a small scale at first. Several areas are currently running pilots and the Greater Manchester area will be the first to implement Universal Credit fully. Tower Hamlets will therefore be able to learn from these authorities.

One of the key challenges is that benefit dependent families will have to deal with the budgeting implications of going from weekly to monthly benefit payments. This will also mean an end to direct Housing Benefit payments to social landlords but give claimants the difficult choice of deciding how to make a much reduced budget stretch to cover all their living costs, including housing.

## **STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK**

The monumental challenges facing the Council and its partners in tackling homelessness, and related issues such as unemployment and social exclusion, coupled with the unprecedented budget cuts local partners need to make, require a new approach to how homeless services are provided in the borough.

As a partnership, we need to respond to growing needs, intervene early to prevent households from reaching crisis point, and make better use of our resources. This includes avoiding duplication and maximising every contact with households. In order to do this, we need to structure our services so resources are better focused on securing the best possible outcomes for people based on their support needs.

### **One Access Point**

Our vision, over the lifetime of the statement, is to create one seamless access point for homeless households in the borough needing homeless services, regardless of the level and nature of their needs.

This single point of contact will bring together a range of services for homeless people. Most homeless people rarely present with just a housing need. Households presenting as homeless often have varying levels of other support needs. This includes employment and training, money management and income maximisation, parenting, substance misuse, mental health and domestic violence. In order to effectively use our resources to tackle and prevent homelessness, services must aim to identify and address all the support needs of homeless people.

This vision for a more concerted approach to homelessness, in response to the unprecedented challenges, sets the tone for the statement.

### **Aim**

The overall aim of the statement is to tackle and prevent homelessness in Tower Hamlets. This includes:

- Preventing homelessness;
- Supporting those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- Providing accommodation for homeless households

### **Principles**

Throughout discussions with partners there were common ways of working highlighted as being crucial to our achievements thus far as a partnership, and would be even more important in light of the new challenges and opportunities facing the borough. These ways of working have been grouped into three interdependent principles. These principles are intended to guide how we work together as partners, and as individual organisations, to prevent homelessness and provide services for homeless people. They are based on a recognition that the causes of homelessness are complex and multifaceted and therefore need a multifaceted approach. The principles are:

- Multi-agency working
- Early intervention; and
- Building resilience

#### *Multi-agency working*

The Homelessness Statement is a partnership statement: multi-agency working is therefore paramount to the implementation of the statement. Taking a multi-agency approach to service provision is about agencies working together to better understand the



needs of, and achieve the best possible outcomes for, families and individuals. As a partnership this will require us to actively share and make better use of information, expertise and resources to provide seamless, holistic services for homeless people and those at risk of being homeless.

### *Early Intervention*

There is a growing body of evidence at the national and local level pointing to the importance of intervening early to improve outcomes for service users and reduce costs to services. As a partnership, we are committed to taking a proactive approach to homelessness and moving away from simply reacting to crisis, both from a preventative perspective as well as in providing support services for homeless households.

### *Building resilience*

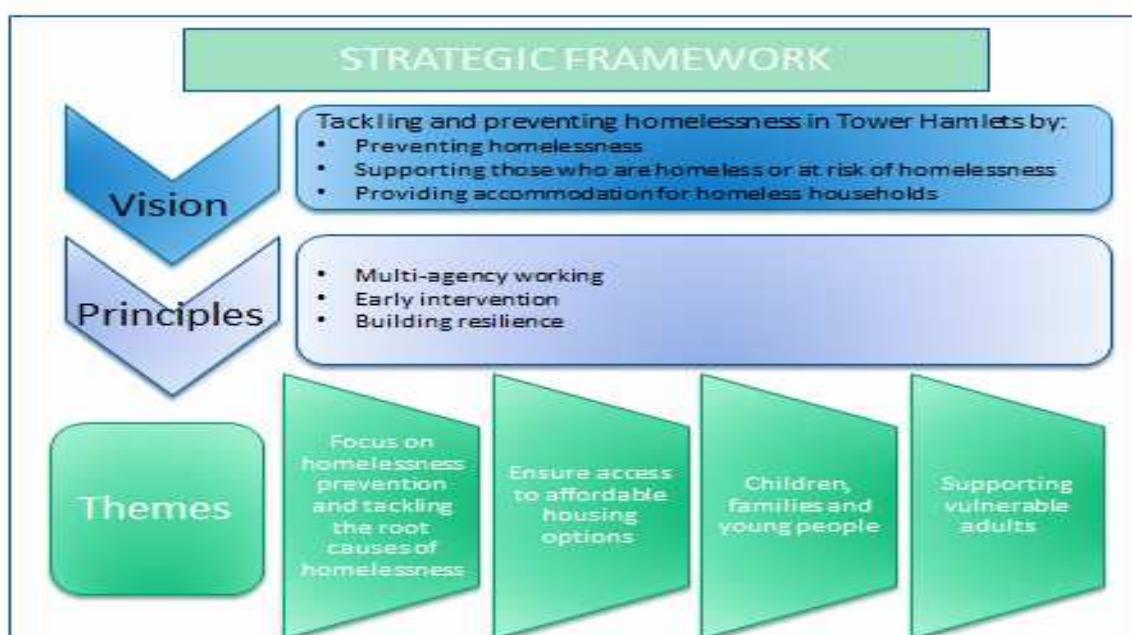
The weakening of welfare support and a continually challenging economic climate will place increasing pressures on households and the ability of services to respond to growing needs. A key aspect of our approach to homelessness needs to centre on assisting people to be better able to assist themselves and take control over their own lives.

It is a commitment by partners to support and empower people and families to develop the skills, competencies and resources needed to successfully respond to challenges, be they economic, social or personal, and avoid reaching crisis point. It therefore requires a recognition and understanding of the multi-dimensional issues that make it difficult for people to cope with life events.

### **Themes**

Using the findings from the evidence base and consultation with agencies, four key themes or strategic objectives have been identified as the basis of structuring the new Homelessness Statement, each with its own thematic objectives.

- Focus on homeless prevention and tackling the root causes of homelessness
- Access to affordable housing options
- Children, families and young people
- Supporting vulnerable adults



## **THEME 1: FOCUS ON HOMELESS PREVENTION AND TACKLING THE ROOT CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS**

***Our aim is to provide timely and accessible services to prevent people becoming homeless, and work in partnership to tackle the underlining causes of homelessness.***

Local partners have a strong track record of preventing homelessness. Since 2008/9 the Council and its partners have exceeded the local target for the number of households prevented from being homeless through successful intervention.

However, the ability of local partners to prevent homelessness is already beginning to be affected by the changes to welfare reform. In 2011/12, over 850 households were prevented from being homeless. This was, for the first time, below target and lower than previous years.

At a time when preventing homelessness is becoming more challenging, timely housing and homelessness advice and support are more vital than ever. The Council has a dedicated Housing Options Service providing advice and support to local residents. There are also many voluntary and community agencies in the borough providing housing advice and support to local people. Through the statement local partners will work to ensure that all households receive quality and consistent advice aimed at preventing homelessness.

It is important that people at risk of being homeless are able to access appropriate advice and support to help prevent them losing their home. The Council and its partners have already developed a programme of awareness raising and advice on welfare reform changes and the implications this will have for those immediately affected. Local partners have also developed a Financial Inclusion Strategy to help people better manage and maximise their income, gain access to affordable credit and know where to go for quality impartial debt advice. As many households are finding it increasingly difficult to meet their housing costs, particularly those reliant on Housing Benefit, improving financial inclusion will be a key aspect to preventing homelessness.

In keeping with the Government's *Making Every Contact Count* agenda<sup>14</sup>, effectively preventing homelessness goes beyond addressing immediate housing needs and requires a sustained commitment across all agencies to address the underlining causes of homelessness. These are often: unemployment, low skills levels, substance misuse, mental health issues, crime and dysfunctional family background.

The borough has an Employment Strategy in place, along with a Substance Misuse Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Plan, Children and Family Plan and emerging Mental Health Strategy. The importance of housing, within an holistic approach, is recognised in all of these as central to achieving sustainable outcomes for local people. This statement further emphasises this truth and provides local partners with a framework to help address this.

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<sup>14</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (2012), *Making every contact count: a joint approach to preventing homelessness*

## **Objectives**

In order to improve our focus on prevention we will:

### **1.1 Provide quality, timely and accessible information and advice focused on homeless prevention and support.**

- 1.1.1 Ensure that there is clear and consistent information at all key contact points for homeless households and those at risk of being homeless.
- 1.1.2 Improve the quality and accessibility of housing and homelessness advice services and pathways.

### **1.2 Support people to remain in their homes.**

- 1.2.1 Work proactively with social and private landlords to identify and support people at risk of losing their homes and assist tenants to maintain their tenancies.
- 1.2.2 Provide advice and support for homeowners at risk of losing their homes.
- 1.2.3 Provide financial inclusion and income maximisation advice and support for residents, particularly those at risk of losing their homes.

### **1.3 Address the root causes of homelessness as part of a partnership approach to tackling worklessness and exclusion**

- 1.3.1 Provide employment support and pathways to employment for households at risk of homelessness and exclusion.
- 1.3.2 Strengthen strategic commitment and joint working on homelessness prevention and exclusion.
- 1.3.3 Make better use of information and intelligence across the partnership to tackle homelessness and exclusion.

## **THEME 2: ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING OPTIONS**

***Our aim is to ensure that homeless families are provided with appropriate housing options to reduce the use of, and time spent in, temporary accommodation.***

Despite the borough consistently delivering one of the highest numbers of affordable homes in the country, housing need and demand remain high.

The continuing high demand for social housing and high property prices in the borough mean that demand for entry level private rented sector properties is going to increase. There may be a proliferation of homes in multiple occupation (HMOs) and many households may be pushed into unsuitable accommodation in the private sector. For example, the introduction of the single room rate for single adults under the age of 35 will mean that this group is limited to just being able to afford shared accommodation. This makes it imperative for there to be a clear approach to the private rented sector, which is articulated in the borough's Private Sector Statement.

The Localism Act offers the Council the opportunity to discharge its homelessness duty by securing suitable private sector accommodation for homeless families. This could help to prevent homelessness and reduce time spent in temporary accommodation. However the flexibilities offered by the discharge of the homelessness duty into the local private rented sector are hampered by the severe changes to welfare reform that will make that sector essentially unaffordable for many low income families.

Local housing partners are committed to providing more affordable housing in the borough across the private, social and intermediate (shared ownership) sectors. As outlined in the Overcrowding and Under-Occupation Statement, Tower Hamlets' annual housing target set by the Mayor of London for all tenures is 2885 homes per annum up to 2025. Tower Hamlets supports the target of achieving up to 50% affordable housing across a range of sites and will seek a minimum of 35% affordable housing on individual sites (subject to viability).

The Council has also recently published its Allocation Scheme 2013, outlining the eligibility criteria for obtaining social housing. The new policy has been updated, in light of the changes ushered in by the Localism Act 2011, to better reflect and address local housing need. It included a tenancy attainment function to assist urgent cases, vulnerable households, under-occupiers, overcrowded households, those who in particular are more vulnerable to the consequences of welfare reform and those whose individual housing needs demand often bespoke solutions.

The Government's introduction of legislation to enable developers to challenge the affordable housing element of Section 106 Agreements could have an impact on the number of affordable housing the Council is able to deliver. This could in turn affect housing need and demand.

Ultimately as the overall need and demand for affordable housing continues to grow, securing settled accommodation for homeless households, along with other households in housing need, will remain a challenge. This means that in order to keep pace with need, the Council will need to source housing supply further afield.

## **Objectives**

In order to improve access to affordable housing options we will:

### **2.1 Increase the supply of housing across all tenures**

In partnership with housing providers and developers, continue to provide new affordable homes.

Identify potential funding opportunities to develop new council homes

Bring empty properties back into use.

### **2.2. Develop innovative and sustainable housing options in the private sector**

Improve the accessibility of the private rented sector as a continued opportunity to prevent homelessness, recognising that caps on Housing Benefit allowances influence affordability considerations.

Ensure that the private sector offers safe and good quality housing options.

### **2.3 Maximise the use of the existing social housing stock**

Develop new pathways to social housing to tackle overcrowding.

Ensure that housing allocation reflects need and availability of accommodation, as outlined in the Allocation Scheme 2013.

### **2.4 Ensure that there is a sufficient supply of appropriate temporary accommodation and reduce the time spent in temporary accommodation**

Develop a sustainable approach to procuring temporary accommodation.

Support homeless households in temporary accommodation to secure settled accommodation.

### **THEME 3: CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

***Our aim is to support families and young people at risk of homelessness and assist homeless families and young people to achieve their full potential.***

Families with dependent children account for the vast majority of households accepted as homeless. Local partners have made important achievements in improving services for families and young people, including:

- Homeless services working closely with the Family Intervention Project (FIP), which supports families with complex needs, providing targeted support for homeless households, particularly households assessed as in priority need and intentionally homeless.
- Housing Officers visiting households in temporary accommodation with children under the age of 5, pregnant women and teenage parents, providing them with service information, including signposting them to Children Centres.
- The establishment of a multidisciplinary Young People's Team has been developed to focus specifically on preventing homelessness among young people and supporting homeless young people. The team works in partnership with other services including children's social care.
- A social care assessment undertaken for all 16 and 17 year olds presenting with a housing need to ensure that their needs are identified and addressed, including education, employment and training needs.
- A significant reduction in the number of 16 and 17 year olds accepted as homeless has reduced significantly in the borough, as a result of targeted intervention work by partners in the borough.
- The numbers of young care leavers accepted as homeless remaining low.
- Special emergency accommodation for vulnerable young women and women leaving the care system avoiding B&B accommodation for this group.

Despite the noticeable progress made over the past few years, many families and young people in the borough continue to experience homelessness. Of the 1,796 households currently in temporary accommodation, 1,519 are households with dependent children, totalling 3,544 children or expected children (for pregnant women) in temporary accommodation.

In Tower Hamlets, as in many areas, family breakdown is a key cause of homelessness for families and young people, making family mediation a key aspect of homelessness prevention. In addition to housing needs, homeless families and young people often have a range of needs including independent living, employment, training, parenting, substance misuse, mental health and crime and anti-social behaviour.

The impact of homelessness on families and young people is well known. Research shows that homelessness can have a long-lasting impact on the physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioural development of children. Homeless young people are more likely to experience lower levels of educational attainment leading to fewer opportunities. Furthermore, without appropriate intervention and prevention, young homeless people could become rough sleeping adults with chronic needs.

Changes to welfare support will place additional pressures on low income households, and will make many families homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless – particularly large families. For families that may have to move out of the borough as a result of these

changes, this could cause considerable strain, especially in relation to children's wellbeing and childcare arrangements.

## **Objectives**

In order to prevent families and young people of becoming homeless, and provide appropriate support packages for those who do, we will:

### **3.1 Prevent homelessness among families and young people as part of an integrated approach to youth and family services**

- 3.1.1 Improve joint working across agencies to focus on homelessness prevention and early intervention for families and young people.
- 3.1.2 Improve the use of mediation and respite to address family breakdown as a cause of homelessness.

### **3.2 Support homeless families and young people to be safer, healthier and emotionally and economically resilient**

- 3.2.1 Improve the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) as a tool for supporting families and young people.
- 3.2.2 Provide better support services for homeless families.
- 3.2.3 Support homeless young people to achieve their full potential and positively progress to adulthood.

## **THEME 4: VULNERABLE ADULTS**

***Our aim is to provide targeted services for vulnerable homeless adults, based on a good understanding of individual needs, and support them to live as independently as possible.***

Many homeless adults have chaotic lives and therefore require holistic and co-ordinated support to live independent and empowered lives. Vulnerable adults often have multiple needs and experience multiple levels of exclusion. A report by the charity Homeless Links showed that 8 out of 10 homeless clients have one or more physical health need and 7 out of 10 clients have one or more mental health need.<sup>15</sup>

Vulnerable adults at risk of homelessness, or homeless include: rough sleepers; domestic violence victims; sex workers; ex-offenders; those with mental health issues and substance misusers. Whilst these groups are individually listed here, they are not mutually exclusive and vulnerable homeless adults often fall into multiple categories.

Meeting the needs of vulnerable homeless adults is further outlined in the borough's Hostel Commissioning Plan 2013-2016, as hostels are the primary form of accommodation for homeless adults.

### **Rough sleepers**

Rough sleepers often have complex needs such as drug/alcohol dependency and mental health problems. The homeless charity, St Mungo's, estimates that approximately 64% of its clients have drugs and/or alcohol problems and 70% mental health problems – including those that are undiagnosed<sup>16</sup>.

The Council and its partners have made notable progress towards ending rough sleeping in the borough and the No Second Night Out agenda. Since April 2011 only 13% of all new rough sleepers spent a second night out and the numbers of core rough sleepers is reducing. These achievements, based on multi-agency working, include:

- Regular joint outreach shifts between a range of partners to ensure that rough sleepers needs can be addressed.
- Referral protocols in place between the Council's homelessness service and the No Second Night Out hub.
- The number of 28 day assessment beds in hostels has increased enabling chaotic rough sleepers to come indoors at the moment they are ready.
- A case conference approach to rough sleepers and hostel residents with complex needs which involves outreach, day centres, HOST, Health E1 – a homeless medical centre, and drugs / mental health agencies.
- Operation Ark - a multi-agency pilot to support non-UK nationals with no recourse to public funds and who are not exercising their treaty rights to take up a supported reconnection plan.
- A Community Mental Health Nurse employed to work with rough sleepers and capacity build with the hostel sector.

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<sup>15</sup>Homeless Link (2012), *The Health and Wellbeing of People who are homeless: Evidence from a national audit*

<sup>16</sup>[http://www.mungos.org/homelessness/facts/homelessness\\_statistics](http://www.mungos.org/homelessness/facts/homelessness_statistics)



Despite these improvements in services, local partners are not complacent and realise that there is still a lot to do to eradicate rough sleeping, particularly in light of a year-on-year increase in rough sleepers.

### **Domestic violence**

Domestic violence is the third highest cause of homelessness in the borough, higher than the regional average. Data from the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) show that the vast majority of DV in the borough is against women. In 2010 women accounted for 95% of all DV cases at the MARAC. There is however a small, but important, number of DV cases where the victims are men. Local referral data from the borough's Domestic Violence Team show that of the 450 referral cases in 2010/11, 46% described their ethnicity as Bangladeshi and the majority of victims and perpetrators are aged between 21 and 40.

Local partners have worked hard to ensure that victims of domestic violence are provided with appropriate options and support tailored to their needs. Some key service achievement measures include:

- Floating support service for women affected by domestic violence, operating from two refugees in Tower Hamlets, including a culturally specific service for Asian women.
- Referrals of homelessness cases to children's social care and MARAC when appropriate to ensure seamless support services.
- Local partners signed up to the East London Housing Partnership protocol on DV.

### **Sex Workers**

A survey undertaken as part of the Hostels Needs Analysis showed that there were 18 people who identified themselves as sex workers living in hostels at the time of the survey. However, it is widely thought that this is an under-representation because of the stigma of self-identification. Local data show an increasing number of Eastern European sex workers accessing hostels.

Sex workers, as with many vulnerable homeless people, are likely to have complex needs such as drug, alcohol and mental health issues. There is a Safe Exit multi agency initiative in place providing support for sex workers. Local partners recognise that more need to be done to support those women who are trying to exit sex working, including providing services to tackle drug, alcohol, and mental health issues.

### **Ex-offenders**

The number of ex-offender households accepted as homeless is very small, with no more than 8 accepted each year as homeless over the past few years. Nationally, about 15% of prisoners were homeless before their sentence<sup>17</sup>, and approximately 20% of hostel users in the borough are ex-offenders.

Some of the key developments to provide services for people leaving the criminal justice system and help ensure a smooth transition into accommodation for ex-offenders include:

- Two Housing Options officers located in the Probation Service, providing ex-offenders on license or community orders advice to help keep their homes or to find a new one
- Close working between homeless and family support services and ex-offenders and their families to help achieve successful returns home for ex-offenders.
- Providing health related services for ex-offenders as part of mainstream provision for homeless people.
- Private rented sector accommodation options for ex-offenders

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<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Justice (2010), *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders*

For ex-offenders, as with many other vulnerable adults, settled accommodation plays a key role in their rehabilitating and in preventing homelessness. It is therefore important that appropriate housing support and provision are integral to rehabilitation plans.

### **Mental Health**

Locally, the majority of single homeless approaches are assessed as having a low level support need which may include depression or minor intellectual impairment, with a small, but important number having high level mental health needs. Around 46% hostel users in the borough have some form of mental health support need.

Homeless Link estimates that over 70% of people accessing homeless services nationally have a mental health problem and over 45% feel that they need more support to cope with their mental health needs.<sup>18</sup> Its report also shows that 60% of people living in hostel accommodation and accessing homelessness services have experienced complex trauma or have an undiagnosed form of personality disorder.

### **Substance Misusers**

Around 31% of single homeless acceptances had a form of substance misuse recorded as their primary or secondary support need. The Hostels Needs Analysis identifies a high level of substance misuse among rough sleepers and a large group with dual diagnosis – dependent on more than one substance (around 62%). The borough's health profile shows that drugs and alcohol account for over 36% of the deaths of the homeless population compared to 2% for the general population.

A key achievement since the previous plan was implemented is closer working between substance misuse treatment services and homeless services to address substance misuse needs of homeless people. This includes services to encourage engagement, such as a blood borne virus nurse, rapid prescribing clinic and needle exchange service at Providence Row Dellow centre, Community Alcohol Team at Edward Gibbons House, and a Community Drug Team at Booth House.

Equally important are the services which help to support those already engaged in treatment. As highlighted in the borough's Substance Misuse Strategy, housing plays an important part in the care pathways out of drug problems and dependency for homeless substance misusers. Housing support, alongside other support services such as training, employment and health, remain critical to meeting the needs of this group.

### **Objectives**

In order to provide targeted support for vulnerable homeless adults and support them to live independently, we will:

#### **4.1 Better identify the needs of vulnerable people through a personalised, multi-agency approach.**

- 4.1.1 Improve the assessment of vulnerable adults, particularly those with multiple needs.
- 4.1.2 Ensure that structures and processes are in place to support a multi-agency approach to assessing vulnerable adults.

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<sup>18</sup> Homeless Link (2011), *Homelessness, Mental Health and Wellbeing Guide*

## **4.2 Address and reduce the support needs of vulnerable homeless people to enable them to live independently.**

- 4.2.1 Develop a joint commissioning approach for homeless adults with complex needs, including substance misuse and mental health.
- 4.2.2 Have no new people spending a second night on the streets and reduce the number of people who are living on the streets.
- 4.2.3 Improve move-on options for people in hostel accommodation and independent living skills of homeless people.
- 4.2.4 Ensure victims of Domestic Violence are supported and their housing needs are met
- 4.2.5 Support sex workers in their transition to a safe exist.
- 4.2.6 Support ex-offenders to keep their homes or find suitable accommodation on return from prison.

## **DELIVERY**

### **Action Plan and Monitoring**

In order to realise our aim and objectives for tackling and preventing homelessness in Tower Hamlets, a detailed action plan has been developed.

The borough's Homelessness Partnership Board, a cross-agency body of statutory, community and voluntary organisations providing services for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness, will lead on the governance and monitoring on the statement and action plan. This includes updating the action plan on an annual basis. The Board will also be responsible for updating the Tower Hamlets Partnership Community Plan Delivery Groups and Executive on progress against the objectives in the statement.

### **Resources**

It is envisaged that the delivery of the action plan will be funded using existing resources for homelessness across the partnership. Some of the main resources for tackling and preventing homelessness are:

#### *General Fund*

The Council's General Fund accounts for a large proportion of homelessness and other related services funding. It now incorporates what was the ring-fenced Supporting People

Grant. In 2012/13 the gross expenditure budget for the Housing Options Service was £31.7m. This does net down considerably to something in the order of £0.5m, when taking into account rental income from temporary accommodation placements. However, it also has to be appreciated that much of that income is at threat in consequence of the Coalition Government's welfare reform agenda. In addition, the Housing Options Service is unlikely to be immune from the wider savings expectations of all public sector services.

#### *Preventing Homelessness Grant*

The Government has allocated £400 million over four years to support local authorities in preventing homelessness. Tower Hamlets received £1.925m of Homelessness Prevention Grant in 2011/12. It is anticipated that the borough will receive similar amounts for the next three years. This is not a ring-fenced grant.

#### *Discretionary Housing Payment*

Discretionary Housing Payment is an annual fund given to local authorities by the Government to support those who do not receive full housing or council tax benefit and require further assistance to pay their rent or council tax. Following the Housing Benefit changes announced in the June 2010 Budget the Government agreed to increase the amount of DHP councils will receive. Tower Hamlets has received £2.2m in DHP in 2013/14. Given the local impact of welfare reform the borough's DHP allocation will not go very far in alleviating the difficulties caused by changes to Housing Benefit.

#### *Homeless Transition Fund*

The Homeless Transition Fund is intended to help frontline community and voluntary organisations deliver the *No Second Night Out Agenda*. The Fund includes Main Grant Round – of up to £200,000 over two years and Small Grants – a continuous programme of up to £25,000 over a year.

