

Approach & support to homeless applications

Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee
October 2022



Background context (1)



- The Homelessness Service is responsible for **discharging the borough's statutory duties** to the homeless. This is a high demand service, receiving up to 2000 applications per year, each of them requiring a holistic assessment of circumstances and needs, and a fully worked up Personal Housing Plan setting out the reasonable steps the council will take to **prevent or relieve** the person's homelessness. Additionally, assessments are required to determine what statutory accommodation duties are owed in the form of temporary accommodation.
- Temporary accommodation use in the borough has been increasing since Q1 2022, including a growth in the numbers accommodated in bed and breakfast. The sudden decrease in the volumes of affordable private rented sector is the main factor.
- Around 70 new households (families) per week are seen by appointment. These are a combination of in-person and virtual appointments. To give some context the team alone is currently dealing with an open caseload of about 850 cases. Most cases are dealt with without requiring the household needing an office visit.



Background context (2)



- The main homelessness telephone line receives on average 1000 calls each month.
- On-the-day casework for emergencies presenting at Mulberry Place is focussed on helping the applicant to return home that day or find an alternative place to stay. This is a legal requirement on the council. If this fails, and temporary accommodation is required for a family or vulnerable adult, then accommodation is found.
- 1st stage emergency temporary accommodation has become increasingly difficult to source for all London boroughs, as temporary accommodation volumes have increased and B&B becomes silted-up. The time to source accommodation adds to the length of waiting time for households. If households have needs, e.g. a requirement for ground floor accommodation or to be in-borough, this can add to waiting times.



Approaches at Mulberry Place

- A return to pre-Covid levels of homelessness demand has highlighted a number of issues when homeless clients arrive at Mulberry Place:
 - Long wait times
 - Residents presenting in emergencies and others without appointments
 - Incidents with applicants with complex needs
 - Customers presenting with much wider issues
- A Task and Finish Group, requested by Karen Swift (Divisional Director of Housing and Regeneration) and Raj Chand (Divisional Directors Customer Services) was convened to review the customer journey.



Task and Finish Group Workstreams



- The scope of the Housing Options Task & Finish Group is as follows:

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- **Workstream 1: Housing Options Pathway**
- **Outcome:** *Clear, efficient customer journey for residents presenting at the council site responding as one council/joined up.*
- **Output 1:** Map current as is of the face-to-face customer journey of residents presenting for Housing Options at Mulberry Place
- **Output 2:** Review the current pathways, develop 'to be' for Mulberry Place and new Town Hall; agree roles and responsibilities of professionals
- **Output 3:** Communicating the entire pathway across services and teams involved in the Housing Options customer journeys

Workstream 2: Homelessness Self-Referral Form

- **Outcome:** Manage demand coming through the service as a result of the launch of the Homelessness Self-Referral Form
- **Output: Review and redesign of the current Homelessness Self-Referral Form, with pre-screening questions**
 - Collaborative review of the current homelessness self-referral form to identify opportunities to reduce avoidable demand and provide pre-booked appointments for residents



Further work



- Further work is underway including:
 - Cultivate a culture of 'one council' This means breaking down silos and working together for the benefit of the client who is seeking help from **the council**.
 - Trial embedding Housing Options staff in the Business Support Team (first point of contact for homeless customers) to ensure more detailed advice offered sooner.
 - Early triage/screening process for residents presenting at Mulberry whose immigration or family composition mean that the Council can only provide limited advice and assistance. Identify earlier on who is best placed to support the client avoiding delays in person being seen.
 - Provide toys for children, regular welfare checks for residents re: water, food etc.
 - Encourage customers to use the residents hub rather than the main foyer, particularly if they have luggage.
 - Review the out of hours emergency service that starts at 17:00 and is undertaken by ASC on behalf of Housing Options. This cut off time was in place to coincide with Albert Jacob House closing at 17:00. Mulberry and the new Town Hall have longer opening times and expert staff may still be on site, although there will need to be a cut off time.

