



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

# Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

[2020–2025]



# Introduction

At Brent we believe that everyone deserves a safe, stable place to call home and are committed to preventing and tackling homelessness across the borough.

As a result of changes to the welfare system, the increasing cost of living and a shortage of secure, affordable homes, homelessness throughout the country has significantly increased over recent years. As a local authority, we have been working hard to address the impact of this in Brent, providing advice, preventing homelessness wherever possible and supporting people to access safe, affordable accommodation. However, there is still more to do.

Informed by a robust homelessness review, this strategy introduces five outcome-based commitments. These commitments set out how we intend to build upon the existing homelessness services we deliver to not only ensure that we meet our statutory obligations and strive to end homelessness in Brent, but that we also provide a service that is efficient, person-centred and forward-thinking.

# Vision

This strategy supports the Council's vision for '[Building a Better Brent](#)' and closely correlates with four of its five overarching themes, reflecting how fundamental suitable housing is to every individual's ability to thrive:

- Every opportunity to succeed.
- A future built for everyone, an economy fit for all.
- A borough where we can all feel safe, secure, happy and healthy.
- Strong foundations.

The Borough Plan also sets out five housing specific aims, which are also reflected in this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy:

- To reduce the number of households living in temporary accommodation;
- Increase supply of affordable homes across the borough;
- Early intervention and prevention of homelessness via support services;
- Contribute to better health and wellbeing for homeless households; and
- Increase satisfaction with services through resident involvement.

This strategy will also work alongside other strategies across the housing service to maximise the prevention of homelessness and to minimise the negative impacts of homelessness upon families and individuals where prevention is not possible.

This means continuing to be pro-active about tackling the prevailing housing conditions in the area by helping to sustain existing tenancies where possible and by increasing the supply of affordable accommodation to those who are in the greatest need.

This is being achieved not only by building effective relationships with landlords in the private sector but also through innovations such as i4B

Holdings – a company set up by Brent to provide high quality, affordable rental properties with the specific intention of reducing homelessness.

However, in providing practical solutions it is important that we do not lose sight of other aspects of the customer journey and our key strategies for the next five years encompass both of these areas of service delivery.

# National Context

Under the Homelessness Act 2002, every local authority in England has a statutory duty to complete a review of homelessness within their area which should consider:

- The current and likely future levels of homelessness within the local area;
- The activities which are carried out for preventing homelessness as well as securing accommodation or providing support for those who are, may become or have been homeless; and
- The resources allocated to these activities.

The findings of this review must then be used to develop and publish a strategy to tackle and prevent homelessness which is renewed every five years.

In addition to this, in August 2018, the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) published the Cross-Government Rough Sleeping Strategy, which committed to ensuring that all local authorities have an up to date homelessness strategy, to include rough sleeping, to be available online by Winter 2019.

We completed a Homelessness Review in Summer 2019 which encompassed services for rough sleepers and its findings have directly informed this strategy.

It is imperative that the new homelessness and rough sleeping strategy also reflect the legislative changes under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which came into force on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2018, as well as the additional funding sources made available to local authorities to address rough sleeping.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 constitutes the most significant change to homeless legislation in 40 years and places greater duties upon

local authorities in respect of the prevention and relief of homelessness. As such, this particular homelessness and rough sleeping strategy is of key importance in establishing a new approach to homelessness, not just for the next 5 years but for future strategies.

Recent national statistics on homelessness and rough sleeping only serve to highlight the importance of having a clear strategic approach and associated monitoring systems.

National Audit Office figures reflect that homelessness of all kinds rose significantly between 2010-2017 with a 60% rise in households living in temporary accommodation and a 134% rise in rough sleepers.

The impact of the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 is still being assessed using the new H-CLIC data gathering system with related statistics being referred to as experimental.

Nevertheless, analysis by Shelter suggests that 320,000 people were recorded as homeless in Britain in 2018. These figures were presented by the homelessness charity as being conservative as a result of not accounting for many of the 'hidden homeless', i.e. those sofa surfing or living in insecure, unsuitable accommodation such as sheds or cars. In London as a whole 170,000 people have no home. This is equivalent to one in 52 people.

Key causes for these increases include spiralling rental costs and welfare benefit reforms, with the ending of private sector tenancies having become the main cause of homelessness in England.

Meanwhile, the charity Crisis highlights the impact of homelessness in its campaigns, reporting that on average, a homeless person dies at the age of 44 and that people who are rough sleeping are 17 times more likely to have been victims of violence and are 9 times more likely to take their own lives than the general population.

# Local Context

The prevailing housing conditions within London as a whole and within Brent specifically are particularly challenging.

In 2018, the GLA published its London Housing Strategy, which sets out the Mayor's vision and priorities for tackling the housing crisis across London. In relation to homelessness specifically, the strategy highlights the importance of prevention and the need to address the root causes of homelessness in order to drive forward effective prevention work.

The independent charity Trust for London, which exists to tackle poverty and inequality in the capital, reports that 33% of Brent's households live in poverty and that 31% of employees earn less than the London Living Wage – a figure that is only exceeded by the London Borough of Newham. The charity also highlights how expensive the private rental sector is in this area, relative to local low earnings, with only Kensington & Chelsea, Westminster & Camden having more expensive lower quartile rents compared to lower quartile salaries. This is, in turn, reflective of the fact that there is a higher rate of evictions in Brent than in any other borough except Enfield.

This broadly reflects our own data on homelessness approaches which increased from 3500 for the year 2017-2018 to 5500 for the year 2018-2019.

For the year 2018 – 2019 the main causes of homelessness within Brent were the ending of tenancies in the private rented sector, with relatives/friends no longer being willing or able to accommodate coming in at a close second. This is in line with the reasons for homelessness across London as a whole.

Nevertheless, Brent Council have still succeeded in going against the trend for increases in temporary accommodation occupancy across London. We have reduced the overall number of households in TA by 10% year on year for the last 5 years. Brent has also gone from having the highest number of households in TA to the 7th highest.

In addition, we have achieved a 63% reduction in the number of households starting placements in B&B accommodation, going from 752 placements in 2014 to 275 in 2018.

These figures are reflective of the fact that in the year 2018/19, approximately 70% of all approaches to Brent Council homelessness services were resolved under the new prevention or relief duties. This also accords with the level of emphasis placed upon prevention in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

This has all been accomplished despite continually increasing rental rates and the ongoing roll-out of welfare reform. However, forecasted increases in the numbers of homelessness approaches to Brent over the next two years and the current uncertainty surrounding Brexit only serve to emphasise how vital it is that we continue to strive for the best possible outcomes for our residents.

In carrying out our recent Homelessness Review we consulted with our housing partners with a view to tailoring our service more closely to the needs of customers within Brent. Communication and how people are able to access our services were both highlighted as areas for improvement and this is reflected in the commitments and associated actions detailed over the following pages.

## Key initiatives that we will continue

## Find Your Home

The Find Your Home scheme is a service provided by the Housing Needs team, who proactively work with households who are threatened with homelessness, to help them to secure accommodation in the Private Rented Sector (PRS), before they become homeless. Households are encouraged to access services as soon as they are aware that there is a threat that they may become homeless, to maximise the time available for prevention work to be successful.

## Domestic Abuse Service

Our dedicated Domestic Abuse Service is embedded in the Housing Options team and provides a specialist service to survivors of domestic abuse; supporting them to finding a solution to their housing needs. The team have been working with the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance's (DAHA) to improve our response to domestic abuse through the introduction and adoption of an established set of standards and are working to achieve DAHA Accreditation status.

## Capital Letters

Brent are a founder member, along with 12 other London boroughs, of Capital Letters. This is a new initiative to help increase the supply of affordable Private Rented accommodation available in Brent. Brent officers have been seconded into Capital Letters, to work collaboratively with the other 12 member Councils to increase access to affordable private rented accommodation in our borough by avoiding competition between member Councils.

## Single Homeless Prevention Service

The Single Homeless Prevention Service (SHPS) was launched in September 2017, and is delivered by officers from the voluntary sector, who are co-

located at the Council offices. SHPS prevent or relieve homelessness through landlord mediation, sourcing new accommodation, preparing clients for tenancies, and securing Discretionary Housing Payments to Landlords.

The service provides support for up to 8 months to help clients become stable in their accommodation and eventually sustain their tenancies independently. SHPS is the first payment by results Homelessness Prevention service in the country; it was shortlisted for Homelessness Project of the Year at the 2019 UK Housing Awards, and is now being replicated by other London councils through the Life Chances fund.

## Hospital Housing Advice Service

The Hospital Housing Advice Service is embedded in the Council's Single Homelessness Service, to support the hospital discharge teams within the London North West Healthcare Trust Hospitals, to facilitate a timely and effective discharge from hospital into suitable accommodation. The team work in partnership with the Healthcare Trusts, to reduce delayed discharges by ensuring that patients with a housing need are identified on admission and working to address issues such as the need for minor adaptations to facilitate the patients discharge.

## Brent Sanctuary of Shelter

A cold weather shelter for rough sleepers in Brent, delivered in partnership with the Brent Multi Faith Forum and Housing Justice. The shelter ran for 7 nights a week for up to 15 men throughout the cold weather months. It aimed to provide vital positive social interaction, and act as a locus for providing rough sleepers access to advice and support.

# Commitment One:

**We seek to fully understand the challenge of homelessness in Brent and how it is experienced by individuals so we can develop informed, targeted solutions, and continually improve the quality of the services we deliver.**

In order to work on effectively resolving a problem, it is important to develop a thorough understanding of the issue, the causes of it and its impact. Accurate and reliable data is key to understanding the demand on our homelessness services; allowing us to better target resources and maximise the impact of our initiatives and interventions. Ensuring we have good quality data also means we can better share an accurate representation of homelessness in Brent as part of our statutory submissions to central government, allowing us to effectively inform national policy and decision making around funding.

The insight gained through conversations with service-users as part of our homelessness review highlighted the differing ways that people may become homeless, as well as the varied ways they will likely experience it and the challenges they will face. It is important that these conversations are not a one-off exercise and that we continue to take opportunities to listen to service-users and act on what they tell us, so we can develop interventions that work effectively to tackle the key issues.

Understanding the way that people experience homelessness also means understanding how they feel about the services we provide. Our Homelessness Forum members have stressed the importance of providing good quality services that foster trust and respect between service-users and officers. Ensuring that we develop person-centred approaches and an empathy driven culture, as well as effectively using feedback we receive is key to improving the experience of those who are accessing our services.

**To achieve this, we will:**

- **Embed service standards that foster a culture of respect and empathy and reduce stigma, working with front-line officers to drive forward a person-centred approach to our services, improving the experience of those who access them**
- **Build on analysis carried out as part of the homelessness review to fully understand the lived experience of individuals and design effective interventions for preventing and tackling homelessness**
- **Review our approach to data collection and ensure data quality is maintained so we can monitor any changing trends and more effectively target resources**
- **Develop mechanisms for gaining insight through a variety of feedback routes and review complaints made to the service, ensuring this is used to shape and drive improvements. Associated service improvements will then be monitored through the Homelessness Forum.**

# Commitment Two:

## **Our services are prevention focused and we ensure the right advice and support is available to those who need it.**

In Brent, approaches to the housing needs service for advice and support are increasing, having seen a significant spike of more than 50% since the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018. A forecasting exercise carried out as part of our homelessness review predicts that, although statutory homeless acceptances will decrease as a result of more robust prevention work, we will likely see approaches to the service continue to grow over the next few years. Recognising that resources are scarce, it is vital that we continue to focus and develop our services with prevention in mind so that we can avoid the costly and traumatic impact of a household reaching crisis point.

In Brent we have already made a number of important changes to the way our teams work and have launched a number of key initiatives that successfully drive forward prevention focused interventions, enabling us to prevent 70% of all approaches under the new prevention or relief duties in 2018/19. We want to continue to develop our offer, however, and although having such a wide variety of initiatives aimed at tackling homelessness in the borough is positive, feedback as part of the homelessness review has identified it can have the unintended consequence of making them difficult to navigate. It is important that we make the support services across Brent as easy to access as possible so we can maximise their impact. The impact of Brexit and what this will mean for EU nationals living in the UK is still uncertain. However, rough sleeping data for Brent identifies that a large proportion of our rough sleeping population is made up of Central and Eastern European individuals. It is important that our officers are providing the right advice to this group so that they are able to continue to access the support they need to improve their housing situation.

Alongside this, it is increasingly important that we bolster our understanding of who is at risk of homelessness as soon as possible so we can target pro-active prevention advice and initiatives at an early stage. By working with other service areas such as Social Care, Public Health and welfare teams we can identify trends and early signs that highlight a possible risk of homelessness and start to develop interventions that prevent households reaching that point.

### **To achieve this, we will:**

- **Get upstream of homelessness, enabling earlier and more effective prevention work, including utilising predictive analytics so we can identify risk factors for homelessness and put in place effective pre-crisis intervention.**
- **Ensure online advice and signposting information is accurate and up to date by developing a regular programme for reviewing web pages and develop staff awareness of homelessness and the corporate support that is available for vulnerable people to access online services.**
- **Identify opportunities to support homeless households to access employment so we can better address the issue of affordability.**
- **Consult with central policy teams to understand the impact of Brexit and develop a clear plan to ensure officers are providing the right advice to those who may be affected.**



# Commitment Three:

## We work to increase the supply of and access to stable and affordable homes across the borough.

At the centre of the homelessness crisis in the UK sits the housing crisis. As populations have grown (the number of people living in Brent increased by almost 30% between 1997 – 2017), the cost of living has increased and the building of affordable homes has slowed down on a national scale, finding somewhere stable and affordable to live has been increasingly difficult for more and more people. Research commissioned in 2017 found that 50% of single people, 56% of couples with one child, and 91% of lone parents with one child could not afford the Local Housing Allowance rent for the appropriate sized property in North West London.

As a local authority, it is important that we drive forward our own development plans, as well as working with registered providers to encourage and support their building programmes, with the aim of providing more affordable homes across the borough. We have a target to deliver 5000 truly affordable homes over the next 5 years. 1000 of these properties will be developed by the Council and will be let at London Affordable Rent. The remaining 4000 will be delivered by our partners, and it is our intention that these rents will be no more than 65% of market rent

In Brent, our homelessness review has shown that the loss of a private sector assured-shorthold tenancy is still the most common reason for people to approach our services for help. Working to improve access to and conditions in the private sector is vital for providing a wider housing offer for Brent residents.

### To achieve this we will:

- **Deliver our own new build programme, providing new affordable homes across the borough that effectively meet local need in accordance with the annual lettings plan.**
- **Create the conditions that encourage Registered Providers to develop more homes in the borough.**
- **Maximise the supply of stable, affordable private rented accommodation through schemes such as Capital Letters and i4B.**
- **Drive up conditions in the private rented sector across Brent through licensing and enforcement processes and work together with local landlords through our Landlord forum to improve standards. Continuing to facilitate access to stable homes in the private rented sector.**

# Commitment Four:

**We minimise the use of temporary accommodation, but where this is unavoidable, work to improve the quality of accommodation offered and keep the stay as stable and as short as possible.**

We recognise that temporary accommodation is not only costly to us as an organisation, but has severely negative impacts to the health and wellbeing of those who need to use it. In Brent we have reduced our temporary accommodation usage by 10% year on year for the last five years and we are placing fewer and fewer households in emergency bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation, with a significant reduction in B&B usage over the last year. It is important that we continue to strive towards reducing the number of people needing to live in temporary accommodation and that we eradicate the use of B&B's completely.

It is important that we recognise the length of time some households are required to spend in temporary accommodation, and the impact that this can have on their lives and wellbeing. Providing opportunities for residents to give their feedback will allow us to drive up the standards of the temporary accommodation offered and improve the services we provide to those who live there.

**To achieve this, we will:**

- **Increase the supply of council-developed temporary accommodation so we can avoid placing households in Bed and Breakfast or other forms of nightly paid accommodation, reducing the likelihood of multiple moves.**
- **Work with our providers and partners to improve the quality of temporary accommodation offered, and ensure individuals with specific or complex needs are provided accommodation through Housing Related Support services.**
- **Develop opportunities for temporary accommodation residents to give regular feedback and use this to inform improvements.**

# Commitment Five:

**We seek to personalise our services to individuals' needs, and work collaboratively with our partners to ensure those needs are met.**

In Brent we deliver targeted initiatives for homeless families, single households and rough sleepers. However, we also recognise that people's experience of homelessness will vary greatly for a number of different reasons, including their individual circumstances, needs and backgrounds. Our homelessness review highlighted the need to think differently about the way we deliver our services and provide more individually tailored advice and support.

The Homelessness Forum specifically highlighted the lack of specialised support services for LGBTQ individuals and sex workers. Our data tells us that BAME households are disproportionately at risk of homelessness and that young people experiencing homelessness as a result of parental eviction is second only to the ending of a private sector tenancy as the most common reasons for approaching our services in Brent.

Some of the most impactful initiatives we have delivered have been in partnership and have focused on providing holistic support for those experiencing homelessness. It is important that we focus on strengthening our partnerships with providers, faith groups and the voluntary and community sector across the borough, enabling us to provide more streamlined services and interventions that address the often complex needs of those experiencing homelessness.

**To achieve this, we will:**

- **Provide additional staff training so officers feel equipped to provide tailored advice (e.g. family mediation, supporting LGBTQ individuals, sex workers, BAME households, Eastern European Rough Sleepers) and ensure tools are in place to tackle language barriers when they arise.**
- **Build on successful initiatives such as Brent Shelter of Sanctuary, working in partnership to find innovative ways to create focal points for holistic advice and support, improving health, wellbeing and access to employment.**
- **Consider how we can better share information across our partner organisations and our community hubs so we can deliver a more joined-up approach to providing support, ensure smooth handover of cases, and drive forward a single referral process.**
- **Work in partnership with our Homelessness Forum to develop a better understanding of those with complex needs and pilot an approach to supporting them more holistically.**
- **Continue to develop partnership working through 'duty to refer' in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, as well as the Complex Needs Panel.**

# Moving forward

Within this strategy, Brent Council commits to improving the housing services that it already delivers whilst taking a pro-active and innovative approach towards the future challenges that we face.

By better understanding the challenge of homelessness in Brent and how it is experienced by individuals, we can develop informed, targeted solutions, and continually improve the quality of the services we deliver. By making our services even more prevention focussed, we can ensure that the right advice and support is available to those who need it, at the right time. By increasing the supply of and access to stable and affordable homes across the borough, we can meet local housing need. By minimising the use of temporary accommodation and improving the quality of what we do offer, we can reduce the negative impacts of homelessness upon health and wellbeing. By making our services more personalised we can ensure that specialised and complex needs are met and that the housing solutions that we provide are suitable and sustainable.

The delivery of this strategy will be monitored by Senior Managers and by the Brent Homelessness Forum. A tabular monitoring system will be set up to enable team managers to track the completion of specific activities by individual staff members.