

# Housing and Homelessness Policy and Accountability Committee Agenda

Tuesday 12 November 2024 at 7.00 pm

145 King Street (Ground Floor), Hammersmith, W6 9XY

Watch the meeting live: [youtube.com/hammersmithandfulham](https://youtube.com/hammersmithandfulham)

## MEMBERSHIP

Administration	Opposition
Councillor Jacolyn Daly (Chair) Councillor Asif Siddique Councillor Sally Taylor Councillor Omid Miri	Councillor Adronie Alford

**CONTACT OFFICER:** Debbie Yau  
Governance and Scrutiny  
E-mail: [Debbie.Yau@lbhf.gov.uk](mailto:Debbie.Yau@lbhf.gov.uk)  
Web: [www.lbhf.gov.uk/committees](http://www.lbhf.gov.uk/committees)

**This meeting is open to the public and press. The building has disabled access.**

**Residents with an interest in any of the items on the agenda are encouraged to attend and participate in the discussion. If you can't attend in person, you can join remotely. If you would like to attend, please contact: [Debbie.Yau@lbhf.gov.uk](mailto:Debbie.Yau@lbhf.gov.uk)**

Date Issued: 4 November 2024  
Date Updated: 5 November 2024

# Housing and Homelessness Policy and Accountability Committee Agenda

12 November 2024

<u>Item</u>		<u>Pages</u>
<b>1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b>		
<b>2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b>		
	<p>If a Councillor has a disclosable pecuniary interest in a particular item, whether or not it is entered in the Authority's register of interests, or any other significant interest which they consider should be declared in the public interest, they should declare the existence and, unless it is a sensitive interest as defined in the Member Code of Conduct, the nature of the interest at the commencement of the consideration of that item or as soon as it becomes apparent.</p> <p>Where Members of the public are not allowed to be in attendance and speak, then the Councillor with a disclosable pecuniary interest should withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is under consideration. Councillors who have declared other significant interests should also withdraw from the meeting if they consider their continued participation in the matter would not be reasonable in the circumstances and may give rise to a perception of a conflict of interest.</p> <p>Councillors are not obliged to withdraw from the meeting where a dispensation to that effect has been obtained from the Standards Committee.</p>	
<b>3. MINUTES</b>		4 - 11
	<p>To approve the minutes of the previous meeting.</p>	
<b>4. ROUGH SLEEPING UPDATE</b>		12 - 23
	<p>The report provides an update on rough sleeping in the borough and the services that are in place to house and support rough sleepers. A rough sleeper in the context of this report is someone who has been verified as rough sleeping by the Council's outreach service and registered on the rough sleeper database, known as CHAIN.</p>	
<b>5. VOIDS UPDATE</b>		24 - 28
	<p>This report provides an update on the status of empty properties also known as voids in the housing service. This includes information on the current number of voids, improvements made over the past two years and an outline of the ongoing plan to reduce the number of vacant properties.</p>	

## **6. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

To note the dates of future meetings:

- 27 January 2025
- 23 April 2025

# Agenda Item 3

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

## Housing and Homelessness Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes



Tuesday 23 July 2024

### **PRESENT**

**Committee members:** Councillors Jacolyn Daly (Chair), Asif Siddique, Sally Taylor, Omid Miri and Adronie Alford

**Other Councillors:** Councillor Frances Umeh (Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness)

### **Officers:**

Richard Shwe (Director of Housing)

Clare Dorning (Head of Homelessness)

Laura Palfreeman (Rough Sleeping Commissioning Manager)

Ed Shaylor (Assistant Director, Housing Standards)

Stefan Robinson (Head of Policy and Programme Management Office)

Clancy Connolly (Policy Officer)

Debbie Yau (Committee Coordinator)

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence. Councillor Asif Siddique was attending remotely.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Omid Miri to the Committee.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3. MINUTES**

#### *Matters Arising*

In response to the Chair's request, Richard Shwe (Director of Housing) gave an update further to the discussion at the last meeting. He noted the Repairs service continued its major improvement yielding a high resident satisfaction

rate of 80/90, as compared to 40/50 when he first came on board. The satisfaction rate of the contact centre had also increased to 90% in the last three months, with no overdue complaints for the last five months. The Repairs service had turned things around by strengthening contract management including engaging the DLO for sheltered housing repairs work and enhancing independent inspections before and after the repairs. The Repairs team had been triaging to make sure the right trades were providing the required services at the right time. On the outstanding information requested at the last meeting on complaint-related compensation, Richard undertook to look into the matter and provide the information.

**ACTION: Richard Shwe**

## **RESOLVED**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 March were agreed to be accurate.

### **4. UPDATE ON THE HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND ROUGH SLEEPING UNIT**

The Chair explained that this meeting shall focus on homelessness prevention and temporary accommodation which was distinct from rough sleeping. Homelessness was one that residents might find themselves in through no fault of their own and facing a future without the fundamental need of a shelter and it could be very frightening. The purpose of the Committee's scrutiny was to understand the achievable ambitions behind the statutory mechanism. The Chair said she was keen to bring in strategic and delivery partners when the Committee scheduled a discussion on rough sleeping.

Clare Dorning (Head of Homelessness) gave a presentation on the report, including ways to access the homelessness service, the Council's homelessness duties, homelessness demand, the help and support offered by the Council, accessing Council and housing association properties.

Councillor Omid Miri appreciated the report and presentation. Noting it was the ambition of the Homelessness service to reverse the current proportion of households approaching the service at the Prevention stage (30%) and Relief stage (70%), he asked about the alarming indicators, if any, that could be used to achieve this.

Clare Dorning advised that the Homelessness Prevention team would improve communication for example via the website so that residents being served an eviction notice could approach them earlier for help allowing work to be done as soon as the 56-day prevention period started. The team could also communicate with parents evicting their 18+ year old due to a clash of lifestyle for example and talk them into helping the 18+ year old to find private rented sector (PRS) accommodation in a few months' time while the young person was being put onto the housing register. Following proactive lines of negotiation for planned departure of the 18+, homelessness was thus prevented. Richard Shwe (Director of Housing) also referred to the case study 1 (page 13) on the successful prevention of the risk of homelessness.

On eviction by friends and families, the Chair considered a healthy stock of social housing and more affordable PRS properties would help relieve the pressure on homelessness prevention.

Councillor Miri sought elaboration on PRS prevention offer. Clare Dorning explained that for a household at risk of homelessness and willing to move into PRS properties, to incentivise that willingness leading to homelessness prevention, the household would be placed on the housing register.

Councillor Adroine Alford expressed the concern about officers' decisions leading to unintended undesirable consequences. For example, placing a homeless carer out of the borough would increase their expenses rendering the service to the vulnerable residents in the borough.

In response, Richard Shwe referred to the multi-agency approach adopted some six months ago. The Homelessness Assessment team would work with colleagues in Adult Social Care, Children's services and health professionals to pool all available resources together to help and support vulnerable residents in need. Clare Dorning noted that to enhance service delivery and improve residents' experience, the Homelessness service had increased face-to-face presence in the reception of 145 King Street to provide initial general advice directly to affected residents. She added that the allocation of temporary accommodation was sometimes subject to the supply available on that day.

The Chair noted from hearsay that there was a list of properties that were available to all London councils for the homeless approaches to swap temporary accommodation among the boroughs. Clare Dorning clarified that each local authority had its own temporary accommodation profile with some having greater supply of hostel accommodation and hence less need for PRS properties. She highlighted that there was a statutory duty for the councils to notify another borough to which a homeless household they had placed. The notice helped the receiving borough to pick up responsibilities of adult social care or children services etc for the households. She added that this was an extension of multi-agency collaboration outside the borough.

On closer cooperation with some other councils, Richard Shwe said that the Housing Service did liaise with councils in West London about having more cooperation. However, families to the south of H&F were reluctant to move across the A4 and go up north.

In reply to Councillor Alford's questions, Richard Shwe noted that being a housing service officer was a stressful and tough job, and bringing staff back to office might help generate more support among them. It also enabled the dedicated officers in the Homelessness Prevention team to operate a 5-day week providing immediate services to residents in need.

Clare Dorning referred to the Homeless Reduction Act which had brought a major change by giving the local authority the responsibility to assess every single approach instead of asking five screening questions as in the past before 2018. The volume of approaches and cases now became less manageable, and officers' caseloads would increase further in case of staff

turnover or sickness. In addition to the high caseloads, officers were required to meet the legal requirements in taking each case through every stage. These factors combined necessitated a Homelessness Action Plan that helped to deliver a range of services to deal with homelessness at different stages.

Responding to Councillor Miri's enquiry about the target of having all the Housing Service's posts filled by the end of July, Clare Dorning was pleased to note that this was on track and it was good to see existing and new staff coming together to manage the caseloads.

Councillor Miri noted the oldest case at present was 18 months and expressed concern about households being homeless for such a long time. Clare Dorning clarified it referred to a mixture of things. It could be a household already in temporary accommodation being issued with a backdated decision. Or it could be a case of lost contact usually single person cases falling to the bottom of the to-do list. In any case, these households were not disadvantaged.

Councillor Asif Siddique commended the team's hard work. Noting that the Homelessness service was managing 1,085 open cases at the moment, he asked how many of them were placed out of the borough and the timeline for them to return, and the number of cases who were aged over 70 and/or disabled.

Clare Dorning said that it normally took the households on the housing register two to three years before securing an allocation and they had to stay in the temporary accommodation until then. Those who were placed outside the borough might sometimes be moved back through temporary accommodation transfer subject to supply within the borough. She undertook to provide the number of out-of-borough households and the requested demographic information of the open cases after the meeting.

**ACTION: Clare Dorning**

Richard Shwe added that there were in-borough properties available in sheltered housing for 60+ but they might need to be upgraded. The Chair agreed with Richard that "sheltered housing" should be re-branded, for example, as "independent living".

Councillor Siddique was concerned about the procedures after a household was being served an eviction notice and approached the service. Clare Dorning said the Homelessness Prevention team would carry out upfront work such as providing useful information and advice for example the right to stay and court cost to enable the households to make informed decisions. Temporary accommodation would be planned but would not normally happen until about three days before the actual date of eviction. If they were taking universal credits or receiving housing benefits, they might be brought to temporary accommodation earlier to avoid incurring more debts due to unaffordable rent.

With reference to her casework with people facing homelessness, the Chair noted there was a lot of misunderstanding due to residents feeling anxious about the situation. She considered the Council should improve communication with the residents on top of meeting the statutory requirements.

Richard Shwe agreed that the legal discussion might frighten the vulnerable households. He considered using plain English and a layman approach in receiving the approaches. Councillor Francis Umeh (Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness) pointed out that this was equally true for the many partners working with the residents risking of homelessness in the borough. She remarked that there were much more to be done to improve communication, including housing officers offering advice in person at the family hubs.

Councillor Sally Taylor echoed the need to enhance communication as according to her casework, residents facing eviction always told her that there was nothing the Council could do until they were actually homeless. It was important for the Council to get the homelessness prevention message across, including to the ward councillors.

Richard Shwe appreciated this was indeed the practice in the past. The Council had changed the policy and strengthened the prevention arm with the help of the PRS and other teams.

#### **RESOLVED**

That the Committee noted the report.

### **5. HAMMERSMITH AND FULHAM PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR POLICY**

Stefan Robinson (Head of Policy and Programme Management Office) explained that the Policy Team had been working in collaboration with the Private Rented Sector (PRS) Team to set a clear policy position on how the Council would support residents to access high quality private rented homes in the borough. He then presented the background leading to the draft H&F PRS Policy, including how the PRS had grown significantly over recent years, and the work undertaken to engage with 270 renters, landlords and local residents through a survey, focus groups or interviews.

Ed Shaylor (Assistant Director, Housing Standards) outlined the powers, namely, environmental health power and public health power used by the Council to intervene with the private landlords. He also briefed members on his team's involvement in the borough's housing standards, including those Council properties on the private rented market and temporary accommodation. He then continued the presentation to outline the priorities and draft commitments of the PRS policy.

Noting the powers available to the Council to intervene with the private landlords, Councillor Omid Miri considered it was necessary to strengthen communication and enhance renters' awareness about their rights.



Ed Shaylor agreed with the Chair that private landlords needed to ensure safety standards were met in rented premises just like restaurant operators. It was also important for the renters to know how to exercise their statutory rights. He then detailed what private renters could do in seeking rent payment orders or settling deposit disputes at a county court, and lodging complaints against the letting agent through the property redress scheme or ombudsman schemes.

Councillor Francis Umeh (Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness) supplemented that one of the draft policy priorities was shaping the national conversation. H&F would support the introduction of a landlord register across the borough to provide residents with public information on the quality of the properties and landlords. She believed landlords would become more effective in their role through the process.

In this regard, Councillor Miri pointed out that landlords were providing housing supply and the average rent might go up if they were forced to exit the market due to increased demand on them. To ensure landlords and renters understood where they could seek support, he suggested providing a one-page briefing note to the ward councillors to help spread the message. Ed Shaylor said consideration would be given to briefing the councillors on the PRS policy.

**ACTION: Ed Shaylor**

Councillor Asif Siddique asked for the number of local authorities having a PRS policy in place. He was also concerned that the scheme of HMO licensing in H&F was not as successful as those in some other London councils. He wondered if it was due to the high licence fees.

Stefan Richardson estimated that based on the Policy Team's research, approximately half of the London boroughs examined had some form of public PRS policy or strategy, and that these were becoming increasingly common because of the rise in the number of PRS homes. Generally, the councils would tend to include the PRS as one of the objectives in their housing strategy. He noted that H&F's draft policy was more ambitious compared to other authorities. At an appropriate juncture, this piece of work would be incorporated into H&F's housing strategy.

Ed Shaylor noted that the fee structure for HMO licensing was set by the Cabinet in December 2021, with the fees and charges schedule being adjusted in line with inflation every year. The level of H&F's licensing fee, which covered the administration cost of issuing the licence and the general management and enforcement of the scheme, was fairly average when compared with that of other boroughs. In addition to licensing HMOs, the Council had also run a selective licensing scheme for rented-out properties on 24 streets including the King Street. The PRS licensing schemes covered about 20% of the private housing stock in the borough.

The Chair asked whether renters who lived in licensed properties were aware of this and the redress that was available to them. Ed Shaylor speculated that renters were probably unaware and hence publicity through social media

might be considered. Councillor Miri suggested sending letters to inform the renters in these licensed properties.

Regarding Councillor Siddique's further question, Ed Shaylor noted that to encourage the landlords applying for the licences, there was an early bird discount for a few months when the licensing scheme was first launched in 2017. On flexibility of licensing, Ed said the landlord could apply to vary the licence between an ordinary selective licence for a family and an HMO licence for 3 or more sharers. The Council's licensing scheme aimed at regulating the properties in terms of safety and space standards. Officers were not involved in the selection or management of tenants, although licence conditions require licence holders to obtain references and deal with ASB.

Noting online application was the only option available to landlords, Councillor Adroine Alford pointed out that some landlords were still struggling with technology. Ed Shaylor said officers could assist those landlords to input the data for them over the phone and to process checks instead of digital payments if necessary.

Councillor Alford asked about officers' working hours post-covid as she could not locate an officer for assistance on a case she considered very serious. Ed Shaylor noted that officers in his team were working full-time in hybrid mode. They organised their visits and completed their paperwork at home or in the office. In the rare situation that an emergency visit was required, officers who did not live far could be engaged at short notice.

Councillor Alford expressed concern that only 270 people had responded to a consultation relating to 30,000 private rented properties. While agreeing more responses might show greater statistical significance, Stefan Robinson stressed that clear efforts had been made to promote the survey and engage residents with it through a wider range of networks and promotional activity, such as via the faith forum, renters' rights groups, resident e-news, community groups, and partners in voluntary community sector as well as via a press release and paid social media promotion. He highlighted that the 270 responses provided a good understanding of the local picture. He explained that the consultation involved a range of different engagement types, including in-depth sharing of experience through conversation and case studies which provided a good depth of understanding of the local experience and could be used to inform the Policy. Stefan mentioned that the Policy would likely undergo substantial development following the consultation.

Councillor Umeh added that the private rented sector was made up of people on disposable income, benefits or caught up in challenging circumstances. She also noted that renters were over-represented by specific minorities (or global majority) of black, and brown Asian who for one reason or another chose not to engage in the survey. She reassured the Committee that this survey together with research and different surveys had helped to support recommendations for a national landlord register, which could provide information on levels of rent and service charges, and develop a decent home standard for the PRS.

In terms of home standards, Councillor Miri asked whether the Council would check the quality of the in-borough temporary accommodation instead of relying on the London-wide scheme currently run by the Ealing Council. Ed Shaylor advised that the Procurement Team of the Housing Service did check all the temporary accommodation they had sourced. Richard Shwe (Director of Housing) referred to the bed bugs situation found in a temporary accommodation last summer. He was pleased to note that the PRS Team, being the independent person holding the Housing Service accountable, had considered that the Housing Team had followed the procedures and met the required standards.

On the way forward, Councillor Umeh noted after revising the draft policy based on feedback from the consultation and this meeting and aligning it with changes in the central government’s legislation, the draft policy would be finalised by the Cabinet in Autumn for delivery and engagement with all relevant parties over the course of 12 months.

Summing up, the Chair hoped that communication with residents would be strengthened.

**RESOLVED**

That the Committee noted the report on draft PRS policy.

**6. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Committee noted the dates of future meetings:

- 12 November 2024
- 27 January 2025
- 23 April 2025

The Chair suggested discussing the following items at these meetings:

- Hidden homelessness and rough sleeping (with third sector partners)
- Voids and Repairs
- Follow up to the Housing Ombudsman’s recommendations

Meeting started: 7.00 pm  
Meeting ended: 9.21 pm

Chair: .....

**Contact officer**     Debbie Yau  
                                 Committee Coordinator  
                                 Corporate Services  
                                 E-mail: Debbie.yau@lbhf.gov.uk

# Agenda Item 4

## LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

**Report to:** Housing and Homelessness Policy and Accountability Committee

**Date:** 12/11/2024

**Subject:** Rough Sleeping Update

**Report author:** Richard Shwe, Director of Housing  
Clare Dorning, Head of Homelessness

**Responsible Director:** Sukvinder Kalsi, Executive Director Finance and Corporate Services

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### SUMMARY

The report provides an update on rough sleeping in the borough and the services that are in place to house and support rough sleepers. A rough sleeper in the context of this report is someone who has been verified as rough sleeping by the Council's outreach service and registered on the rough sleeper database, known as CHAIN.

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### RECOMMENDATIONS

For the committee to review, feedback and comment on the information set out in this report.

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**Wards Affected:** All

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<b>Our Values</b>	<b>Summary of how this report aligns to the <a href="#">H&amp;F Corporate Plan</a> and the H&amp;F Values</b>
Building shared prosperity	A priority for the homelessness and rough sleeping services is to work with rough sleepers to prevent rough sleeping where possible and keep incidents of rough sleeping brief and non-recurring.
Creating a compassionate and inclusive council	The needs of rough sleepers are often complex. Officers work with individuals to encourage engagement with services and identify housing solutions based on their individual circumstances.
Doing things with local residents, not to them	A person-centred approach is taken to assess need and identify housing options for rough sleepers.

Being ruthlessly financially efficient	The Council aims to prevent rough sleeping wherever possible and maximise access to the services available for this population to avoid the need to place into expensive temporary accommodation.
Taking pride in H&F	The Council aims to achieve the best outcomes for all homeless applicants and to perform well in meeting the Council's homelessness duties.
Rising to the challenge of the climate and ecological emergency	Where the Council has its housing properties, we are rising to the challenge of the climate and ecological emergency.

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## Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report

None.

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## Overview

Rough sleeping in London has grown significantly, with a 58% increase in the ten years since 2014. In 2023-24, 11,993 people were recorded on the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) as having at least one night sleeping rough in London – an increase of 19% on the previous year. The most recent quarterly figures record 4,332 individuals rough sleeping between April and June 2024, representing a 20% increase compared to the same period in 2023. (London Councils October 2024).

The needs of rough sleepers are diverse and often complex. The Rough Sleeping Service work with a wide range of services and partners to meet the needs and deliver the best outcomes for rough sleepers and this report provides an overview of the effective joint working that is in place to meet the needs of this population.

## The local picture

### Recording and reporting rough sleepers

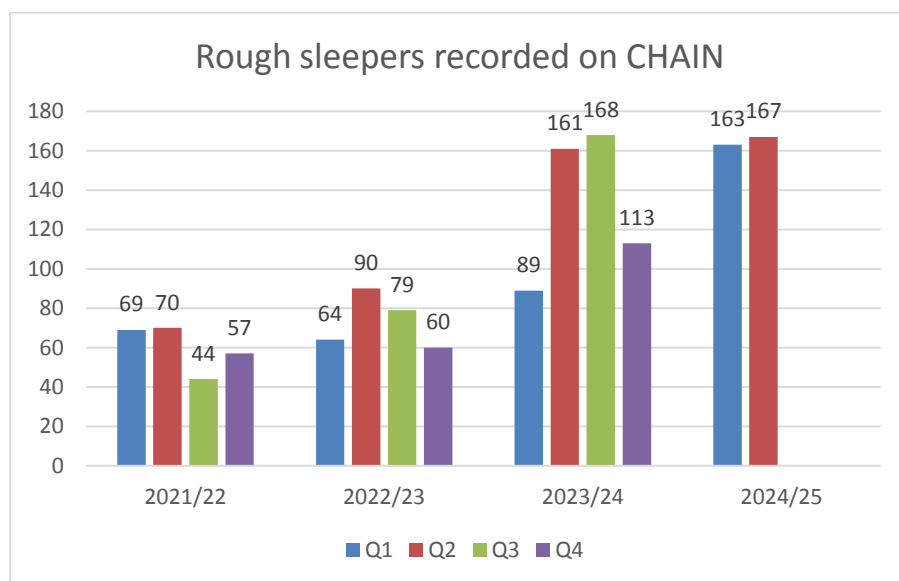
StreetLink is a website service for England and Wales, which enables members of the public to send an alert to local outreach teams when they see someone sleeping rough. This includes anyone who is sleeping outside, preparing to bed down, or sleeping somewhere not designed for human habitation. Once an alert is submitted via StreetLink, the details are automatically sent to the relevant local outreach teams.

Thames Reach provide the Council's outreach service and carry out shifts each weekday. Whilst out on a shift, outreach staff will visit sites which are known to be used by rough sleepers and new sightings reported to them by Streetlink, often key partners will join the team on shift to provide additional support, such as RAMHP, LET and Turning Point.

All rough sleepers verified by the outreach service are recorded on CHAIN which is the London rough sleeper database managed by Homeless Link. Each person has a CHAIN reference number which can be used to track rough sleepers as they move between boroughs and can help to track the history of individuals which may be new to the streets in Hammersmith and Fulham but are known in other areas.

### Rough sleepers in Hammersmith and Fulham

CHAIN publish rough sleeper numbers reported by outreach teams across London. An increase in rough sleeping across London was reported in 2023/24, but with the highest increase in Hammersmith and Fulham. In the first half of 2024/25, the borough has continued to see a rise in rough sleeping. Further analysis of the local rough sleeper population is set out in Appendix 1



### Rough sleeping pathway

The Outreach service carry out nightly shifts across borough, targeting referrals received via Streetlink and known locations where rough sleeping is more common. If a person is identified as rough sleeping or about to bed-down they will try to engage with the individual to find out their name and what support is needed. Where possible (i.e. eligibility is confirmed and if a bed space is available), outreach will directly support the individual into accommodation at No Second Night Out (NSNO) which is a pan London provision, Somewhere Safe To Stay or the rough sleeping assessment hub (RSAH). During 2023/24, 104 rough sleepers were referred into off the street accommodation.

The Rough Sleeping Assessment Hub provides 20 beds for rapid assessment. During 2023/24 the Hub accommodated 152 rough sleepers. Ensuring swift move-on from the Hub is essential and the council's Rough Sleeping Coordinator has weekly meetings with the Hub to help facilitate move-on to longer term suitable accommodation and generate capacity for new people to move in. Depending on need and individual circumstances, a range of move-on options are available from these initial hub settings, such as referring to supported hostel accommodation of which we have 129 units across 8 buildings, resettlement support to another location if they have

a local connection or accommodation available outside of Hammersmith and Fulham, and support to access private rented accommodation.

During 2023/24, the following successful move on opportunities were secured for the service users accommodated in the Hub:

Clearing House	5
Private rented accommodation	15
H&F supported housing	33
Out of borough supported housing	9
Reconnected to another borough	13
Placed into temporary accommodation	6

If the hub is full and there is no immediate bedspace available, the outreach team and the rough sleeping coordinator manage a waiting list based on need. They have a weekly partnership meeting to go through the priority list and prepare for the move, this includes looking at the best options to support them whilst rough sleeping which may be a joint visit with RAMHP, drug and alcohol service Turning Point or the Law Enforcement Team (LET), supporting engagement with the North Kensington Law Centre, and providing advice and information on local services such as Barons Court Project. The outreach team can also provide people with mobile phones and sim cards.

### **Partnerships**

Supporting and engaging people experiencing rough sleeping, especially long term and entrenched rough sleeping, requires a partnership approach. As described above, the Outreach team work with RAMHP, LET and Turning Point joining them on select shifts, and if there is an individual they are concerned about, will arrange multi-disciplinary team meetings to get all the relevant partners in place.

The rough sleeping team work closely with local police, probation, LET, and mental health integrated network team (MINT) to try and get the best outcomes for those who are rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping.

In addition, we have in-reach support services working with residents in the supported hostels. This includes 2x nurses who work across the pathway to improve health outcomes, 2 x Rapid Engagement and Support Team (REST) dual diagnosis workers to help facilitate better outcomes for individuals with substance misuse and mental health support needs, and drug and alcohol support workers from Turning point.

Housing colleagues attend hospital discharge meetings, to ensure safe discharges of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and we have strengthened engagement with the justice system, such as arranging to meet prison leavers at the prison gate to support them into pre-arranged accommodation following a duty to refer.

We have been very successful in our Accommodation for Ex-Offenders (AfEO) project which is a two year service with Westminster Council and Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea to fund and support accommodation in the private rented sector for ex-offenders who would not be considered in priority need. Over 100 ex-offenders have been housed into the private rented sector during the two years that the scheme has been funded.

## **New housing provision**

With its strategic ambitions to tackle homelessness and end rough sleeping in the Borough, the Council secured grant funding from the Greater London Authority (GLA) to purchase 321 Lillie Road which will provide 13 additional units of supported housing. The building is currently being refurbished and will be ready for occupation in the new financial year.

## **Challenges going forward**

### **Winter / SWEP**

Whilst efforts are made throughout the year to support people rough sleeping in the borough into off the street accommodation, during winter there is the higher chance of severe weather which can increase the risk to those rough sleeping and will trigger the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP). During SWEP the council will find a bed space for every individual found rough sleeping during the active SWEP alert, this could be in SWEP beds which are distributed across existing provision in supported accommodation, such as living rooms / office space. These beds are available during the night only. The winter night shelters will also open for the period.

Councils have not received any dedicated government funding for this activity, despite the pressures it brings to services and increasing costs to already overstretched housing budgets.

### **Annual count**

Every year local authorities are required to complete a rough sleeping snapshot, known as the annual count, to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The intention is to indicate the number of people sleeping rough in the area on a 'typical' night. This will take place on the 28<sup>th</sup> November and will involve volunteers going around the borough and counting anyone seen rough sleeping or about to bed-down. Last year LBHF counted 14 individuals, and 7 the previous year.

## **Funding**

A number of rough sleeping services are funded through the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) Grant from MHCLG. The last funding round was a 3-year programme which commenced in 2022 and will end on 31 March 2025. The total RSI allocation for LBHF over the three-year period was £3,048,817. The services funded through RSI are detailed in Appendix 1, at present it is not known if or what level of funding may be available from the start of the next financial year.



## **Conclusion**

Rough sleeping presents as one of the housing pressures in the borough but there is an effective rough sleeping pathway in place to assist people off the streets. Successful support services are in place for those experiencing rough sleeping and great examples of partnership working across key stakeholders to find the most appropriate housing outcomes. It is not yet clear what the funding arrangements will be after March 2025, but officers meet regularly with MHCLG advisers and will respond swiftly to any funding announcements that are made to ensure existing services continue to be available rough sleepers.

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1: Rough Sleeping Categories**

### Rough sleeping categories

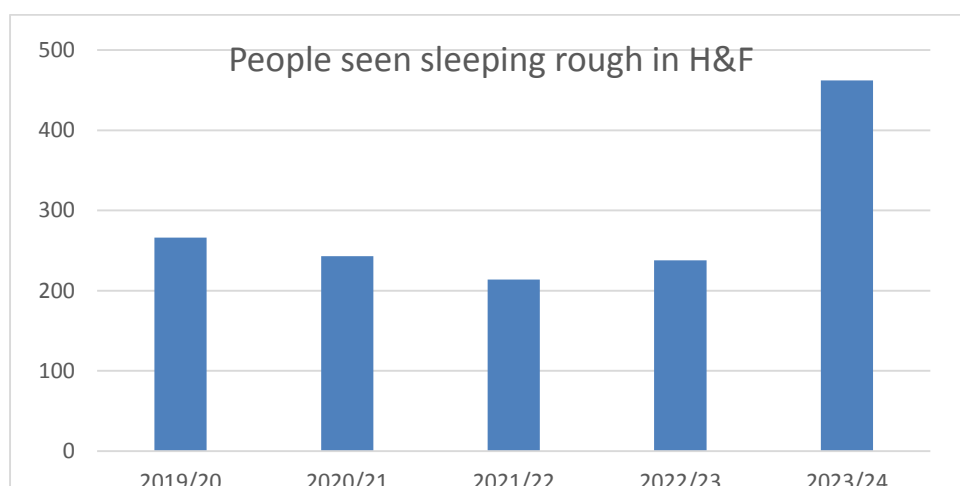
The data on CHAIN is recorded by categories to help build a picture of rough sleeping locally and Pan-London.

- *New Rough Sleepers* - A person is considered 'new' if they have not been seen sleeping rough in the 5 years preceding their first rough sleeping contact during the month.
- *Returning* - A person is considered 'returning' to rough sleeping if they have not been seen rough sleeping in the 180 days preceding their first rough sleeping contact during the month, but had been seen rough sleeping at some point between 180 days and 5 years previously.
- *Long Term* - A person is considered to be a long-term rough sleeper if they have been seen rough sleeping in at least 3 of the 12 months preceding the reporting month, including the reporting month itself.

The data for LBHF shows majority of people experiencing rough sleeping are new and may spend one night in the borough before finding a housing solution. Long term rough sleeping may be the result of multiple factors, such as non-engagement with services including refusal of offers, no recourse to public funds or in rare circumstances very high risk (e.g. arson) reducing the options available.

### Status of rough sleepers

Month	Jan	Feb	Ma	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
New	27	22	26	32	26	37	40	31	17
Returning	4	4	4	5	14	10	8	8	10
Long term	6	12	11	15	22	23	28	22	27



Some of the factors behind this increase include people leaving NASS accommodation, often making informal arrangements which then break down. LBHF is a big transport hub which sees a lot of people passing through. There has also been an increase in individuals returning to the streets after being supported into accommodation, with their return often linked to substance misuse. Table 1

summarises the main reason for leaving their last settled accommodation, where the individual has been willing to provide a reason:

**Table 1 – Primary reason for leaving last settled accommodation 2023-24 (CHAIN report 2023-24)**

Relationship breakdown	21
Evicted	27
Left of own accord	21
End of time limited stay (including NASS accommodation)	46
Still has accommodation	6
Other	10

**2024-25 rough sleeping figures**

In the first half of 2024/25 LBHF have continued to see a rise in rough sleeping across the borough, from Apr-Sep 2024 outreach teams have recorded 420 incidents of rough sleeping in the borough compared to 303 in the same period the previous year which represents a 39% increase.

The number of people experiencing rough sleeping is rising across London. Table 2 shows the total number of people experiencing rough sleeping over the last 12 months across all of London by borough. Rough sleeping on bus and tube lines are also recorded as separate entries.

**Table 2 – Total rough sleeping figures across London from Oct 2023-24 (CHAIN)**

Borough / Location Order	Location	All Rough Sleepers Oct 2023-Oct 24	All London RS Oct 2023-24	% of All RS in Location
1	Westminster	2702	16,042	16.84%
2	Camden	1082	16,042	6.74%
3	City of London	916	16,042	5.71%
4	Ealing	849	16,042	5.29%
5	Southwark	733	16,042	4.57%
6	Lambeth	658	16,042	4.1%
7	Islington	625	16,042	3.9%
8	Newham	624	16,042	3.89%
9	Brent	592	16,042	3.69%
10	Tower Hamlets	581	16,042	3.62%
11	Hammersmith and Fulham	572	16,042	3.57%
12	Croydon	552	16,042	3.44%
13	Haringey	525	16,042	3.27%
14	Hillingdon	455	16,042	2.84%
15	Greenwich	442	16,042	2.76%

16	Lewisham	388	16,042	2.42%
17	Hounslow	375	16,042	2.34%
18	Heathrow	342	16,042	2.13%
19	Hackney	333	16,042	2.08%
20	Redbridge	309	16,042	1.93%
21	Enfield	264	16,042	1.65%
22	Kensington and Chelsea	249	16,042	1.55%
23	Barnet	239	16,042	1.49%
24	Waltham Forest	231	16,042	1.44%
25	Wandsworth	205	16,042	1.28%
26	Barking and Dagenham	169	16,042	1.05%
27	Bromley	164	16,042	1.02%
28	Bexley	142	16,042	0.89%
29	Kingston upon Thames	141	16,042	0.88%
30	Harrow	132	16,042	0.82%
31	Richmond upon Thames	111	16,042	0.69%
32	Bus route	107	16,042	0.67%
33	Merton	94	16,042	0.59%
34	Havering	81	16,042	0.5%
35	Sutton	50	16,042	0.31%
36	Tube line	8	16,042	0.05%

### Institutional departures

LBHF has low figures of rough sleeping from individuals who have departed institutional settings such as hospital, prison, care or the armed forces. Departing asylum accommodation contributes the largest number of people experiencing rough sleeping following departure from an institutional setting as shown in table 4 but the numbers have been decreasing. We have been making use of the pan London service known as Bridges which helps single persons leaving asylum support accommodation to find private rented accommodation, we have had a number of successful outcomes (11) and still have some going through the process. Unfortunately, the funding for this service will be ending in November 2024.

### Accommodation options

There are a number of off the street accommodation and longer-term housing options for those experiencing rough sleeping in the borough:

Service	Availability	Details
Rough Sleeping Assessment Hub (RSAH)	LBHF referrals only	20 bed assessment hub, staffed 24 hours. Provides immediate access to accommodation. Intended as a short term, off the street accommodation, to allow for further assessment of needs.
No Second Night Out (NSNO)	Pan-London	There are 3 hubs across London, LBHF falls under NW London hub in Brent. Only outreach teams can

		refer in and it is for individuals who are experiencing their first time rough sleeping, intended as an immediate off the street option.
Somewhere Safe to Stay (SSTS)	West London boroughs	Short term assessment centre with 20 beds, available for north west London boroughs to refer to. Intended as an immediate off the street offer.
Supported accommodation	LBHF referrals only	Residents will typically move to supported accommodation from one of the above settings. Intended as medium length accommodation to access support to enable independent living in more settled accommodation.
Temporary accommodation	LBHF referrals only	Could be used as an option for eligible individuals as off the street whilst waiting for a vacancy in supported accommodation. Hestia rough sleeping floating support or Navigators can offer support in this setting.

Other options which can be used as appropriate includes:

- Referrals to a female only hub in Brent. This offers high support and is available to west London boroughs. Limited space but we have had some successful outcomes, including one example where a female with complex needs facing eviction has been referred to prevent rough sleeping.
- Reconnection to existing accommodation or where they have a local connection.
- Night shelters (winter period only).

### **Funding and services provided by partners in place for Rough Sleepers**

The main funding available for rough sleeper services is Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) Grant from MHCLG. The last funding round was a 3 year programme ending 31 March 2025 and the total RSI allocation for LBHF over the three year period was £3,048,817. The services funded by this programme are:

- i. Rough Sleeping Assessment Hub.  
The Assessment Hub opened in summer 2020 and was initially located in borough at Meliora House. Unfortunately, the service had to relocate in March 2024 as the freeholder would not agree to a further application to extend the Planning Permission. The Hub currently operates from Cromwell Road in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

The hub consists of 20 bedspaces, providing immediate off the street accommodation for rough sleepers. Referrals are made by the outreach team in LBHF and our Rough Sleeping coordinator. Included in the 20 beds is an allocation of 4 beds available for rough sleepers with no recourse to public funds who need help and support whilst they are awaiting a positive outcome of their immigration status.

The service is managed by St Mungo's who assess the residents needs and help link them into relevant services to meet their needs, such as mental health and drug and alcohol support, benefit applications, and referrals for more stable housing. They also assist with addressing residents health needs by ensuring GP registration and site visits from nurses and drug and alcohol support workers.

- ii. **Enabling Assessment Service London (EASL)**  
This service provides specialist trauma-informed assessment; advice; training; reflective practice with designated services for rough sleepers and people at risk of homelessness to improve the capacity of services to deliver better outcomes for homeless residents. There is some additional funding provided by Public Health.
- iii. **Floating Support**  
Hestia provide floating support to former rough sleepers who have moved to more settle accommodation or at risk of becoming homeless from their settled accommodation. This service supports former rough sleepers to maintain their accommodation and access local services
- iv. **Navigators**  
The Navigator service provides in depth support for rough sleepers to help relocate to where they have a local connection, link with support services, benefit maximisation, set up bank accounts and prevent a return to rough sleeping.
- v. **Housing First**  
This service, managed by Thames Reach, provides long term support prior to and following a move into a housing first long term settled accommodation. Thames Reach provide ongoing support and help to access necessary services and to maintain their tenancy. We recognise that Housing First (rather than the more traditional supported hostel route) is the most sustainable method of ensuring former rough sleepers don't return to the street.
- vi. **Flexible surge funding and personal budgets**  
Surge funding is used to provide personal budgets to rough sleepers to help provide goods or services they need to resettle or maintain their

accommodation, such as white goods, decorative items, taxi's, mobile phone etc.

# Agenda Item 5

## LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

**Report to:** Housing and Homelessness Policy and Accountability Committee

**Date:** 12/11/2024

**Subject:** Voids Update

**Report author:** John Hayden, Assistant Director of Repairs  
Richard Shwe, Director of Housing

**Responsible Director:** Sukvinder Kalsi, Executive Director Finance and  
Corporate Services

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### SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides an update on the status of empty properties also known as voids in the housing service. This includes information on the current number of voids, improvements made over the past two years and an outline of the ongoing plan to reduce the number of vacant properties.

1.2 Over the past two years, the housing service has reduced the number of voids from 395 in February 2023 to 151 voids across the service, categorised as follows:-

Work Areas	Numbers
Minor voids (repairs)	91
Major voids (complex works)	15
Capital works	45
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>151</b>

1.3 The minor repairs targets for voids is to have 60 in the stock as business as usual by January 2025 and to maintain that number moving forward. Currently the service has 91 voids with a reduction of 31 targeted by December 2024.

1.4 The target dates are 28 days for minor voids (removals, minor decorations) and 90 days+ for major voids (which include structural works and major component replacement works).

1.5 The capital works are more complicated with the majority of the voids having been subject to large insurance claims (Fires etc) in tower blocks and requiring scaffolding to complete the works. These voids are typically repaired during major work projects with large Capital investments on blocks such as window replacements for tower blocks.

1.6 On average the voids team receive 5 new voids a week in addition to the existing voids in the works process.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

For the committee to review, feedback and comment on the information set out in this report.

**Wards Affected:** All

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<b>Our Values</b>	<b>Summary of how this report aligns to the <a href="#">H&amp;F Corporate Plan</a> and the H&amp;F Values</b>
Building shared prosperity	Ensuring that all residents have access to a home.
Creating a compassionate and inclusive council	Getting voids completed will enable residents to get into a home.
Doing things with local residents, not to them	A person-centred approach is taken to assess need and reducing the number of voids.
Being ruthlessly financially efficient	The housing service is reducing voids and thereby reducing the cost to its HRA and general fund by bringing more homes back into use
Taking pride in H&F	Housing is bringing back homes into operation that are quality controlled. The specification for homes is good quality.
Rising to the challenge of the climate and ecological emergency	Where the Council has its housing properties, we are rising to the challenge of the climate and ecological emergency.

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## Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report

None.

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## 2. Finance Implications

2.1 The targeted void loss reduction for 2024 / 2025 was budgeted at 1.5 million across the teams, largely based on the service retaining no more than 150 voids..

2.2 Void rental loss has reduced by £646,142 since January 2024 with a targeted loss reduction of £97,000 by financial year end. A Stretch target for void rental loss has been introduced in October 2024 for a further £250,000 reduction across the stock.

### **3. Voids Audits and reassurance**

3.1 An internal voids audit was carried out between September 2023 and February 2024.

The audit set out issues and recommendations that the housing department need to put in place.

3.2 The main findings of the audit report explained that properties historically were not turned around in a timely manner, resulting in long delays to letting homes.

3.3 Two high risks issues have been identified regarding data input and the use of the NEC housing system. There are seven additional medium risks identified focusing on record management, tenancy agreements and contractor performance.

### **4. Main Void Targets**

4.1 Internal voids improvement project implemented in September 2023 set targets to reduce vacant voids and financial losses across the council. The service has reduced voids from 323 voids in September 2023 to 151 in October 2024.

4.2 All high level and medium risks identified by the audit findings have been addressed and the service has requested a further audit to start in October 2024 to further evidence improvements.

4.3 Void targets have been set for end of Quarter 3 in 2024 including a minor void business as usual target of 60 properties (Minor and major voids) and a reduction of rental recovery to under 1.5 million.

### **5. Audit process and Action Plan for Void Management**

5.1 As part of the Council's internal audit plan for 2023/24, the Housing Services commissioned an internal audit of voids that commenced in September 2023.

5.2 To provide assurance in Housing Services, of the effective management of void properties at all stages, with clear owners and processes. These are essential elements to avoid significant income losses with empty properties but more importantly to assist our residents in obtaining a home.

5.3 The audit focused on the use of time, management of tenancy agreements, the use of resource and resident satisfaction. The audit also reviewed the internal collaboration between teams within the key stages of the void management and allocations processes.

5.4 The outcome is to ensure that all tenancies and voids are managed economically and meet the required standards and set out any High, medium, and low risks which can be adopted into the service to improve the process.

5.5 A voids internal action plan was developed and implemented in September 2023. This included:

- I. Voids performance “Rapid review” completed in September 2023 to understand the current processes that targeted returning 323 voids back to the housing stock. Currently open voids have been reduced to 223 with 177 in the void process and 46 on hold.
- II. The Housing Service has focussed on a deduction of circa £2 million of void losses from empty properties and rental losses over the past year.
- III. The Housing Service has now re-classified voids as minor voids (15 working days), major voids (20 working days) and capital and complex voids (60 days+)
- IV. Weekly void and allocation meetings established with new contractors procured to target and improve all KPI’s for void turnaround times. Voids target business as usual position (BAU) of 60 voids a month by October 2024.
- V. All high and medium risks identified within the audit report have been addressed.
- VI. All key to key and job completion data and monitoring is reported live on the NEC housing system.
- VII. It is planned that Internal Audit reviews the recommendations and the Voids Programme is subject to an updated meeting with Audit in the Autumn 2024.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

6.1 The Housing Service has made significant progress and is focussed on reducing voids across its stock. We have introduced a new tenant satisfaction survey and they are completed 6 weeks after the property has been occupied. The purpose is to assess the property and review residents’ satisfaction so that repairs team can respond in a proactive manner.

6.2 Joint inspections (pre-termination) are now carried out by housing management and repairs teams to support residents and reduce delays to void works. As part of our improvement service plan, we are reviewing the lettable standard for voids on a 12 month basis.

6.3 Housing Repairs is working with sheltered residents in developing a new void standard for sheltered housing. The focus is on additional work elements that includes enhanced items for people living with dementia e.g. “push taps, grab rails”. The rationale for this is to enable residents to live better in our communities.

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

**Appendix A:** Voids Profile 2024.

# Appendix A – Voids Profile 2024

Table 2.1	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Voids Rec 'd	40	41	40	49	46	41	52	46	21	36	37	31	480
Handovers	36	54	65	46	35	43	42	38	29	44	39	48	519

Table 2.2	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Total
Voids Rec 'd	44	40	42	39	40	19	18	0	0	0	0	0	242
Handovers	48	67	52	67	32	27	21	0	0	0	0	0	314

Minor Voids	91
Complex Voids	15
<b>Voids in WIP (Repairs only)</b>	<b>106</b>

**Table 2.2** above indicates the number of Voids received and handed over back into the service since the 1 April 2024.

- **242** new voids have been received in the period with **314** properties handed back to the service for letting since April 2024.
- **106** voids in WIP.