

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

**Date:** 14<sup>th</sup> November 2023

**Subject:** Homelessness Prevention Update

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**Responsible Director:** Jon Pickstone, Strategic Director of Economy  
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## **SUMMARY**

This report provides a high-level overview of Homelessness Prevention services within London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham.

We have seen a 25% increase in homelessness presentations in the last six months.

We provide a range of preventative interventions such as enabling residents to stay within their existing accommodation including mediation with relatives and negotiation with landlords or move on to properties within the Private Rental Sector.

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

For the committee to review, feedback and comment on the report of Homelessness Prevention.

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## **Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report**

We benchmarked our performance against other West London Local Authorities as part of sharing good practice.

Benchmarking data for Q1 2023/24 is attached as **Appendix 1** and **Appendix 2** case studies.

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## **STATUTORY FRAMEWORK OF HOMELESSNESS LEGISLATION**

- 1.0 Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 is the primary homelessness legislation and sets out the local authority's duties to prevent homelessness and provide assistance to people who are actually homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- 1.1 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 ("HRA") came into force in April 2018, changing the way that local authorities deliver homelessness services. Many local

authorities including Hammersmith and Fulham were already working to prevent homelessness, but the Act puts prevention of homelessness on a statutory footing.

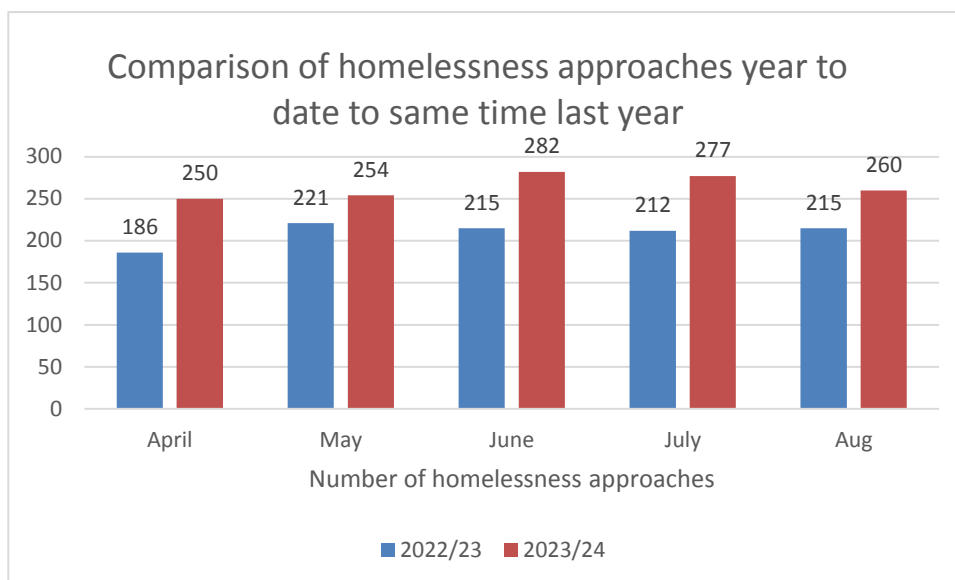
- 1.2 The introduction of the 'prevention duty' requires Hammersmith and Fulham and other local authorities to develop a personalised housing plan with residents who will be homeless in the next 56 days, giving us the opportunity to prevent their homelessness by helping them to remain where they are or to find suitable accommodation. This includes Temporary Accommodation (TA), Private Rented Sector (PRS) and supported accommodation.
- 1.3 We have seen the recent interest rate rises that are having an impact on private tenancies as landlords are passing the increased mortgage costs to tenants through significant rent increases. The average rental increase in the last 12 months since June 2022 in London was 9.3%.

## **HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS SERVICES**

- 1.4 At Hammersmith and Fulham, we have four teams specifically delivering homelessness prevention services:
  - H&F Link Team
  - Homelessness Assessment and Prevention Team
  - Rough Sleeping Team
  - Neighbourhood Services
- 1.5 H&F Link provides a range of services including benefits advice, budgeting support, support to access discretionary housing benefits, tenancy sustainment support and referrals to Beam for training, employment and private rented sector move on. The team also coordinates floating support provision for all borough residents working with Hestia. Residents also have access to employment skills and training opportunities through H&F Works.
- 1.6 Homelessness Assessment and Prevention Team delivers Part 7 of the Housing Act including providing alternative accommodation via Temporary Accommodation, Private Rental Sector or Supported Housing as needed. This team also prevents rough sleeping by receiving referrals from statutory partners including hospitals, Job Centre Plus, H&F Law Centre and Citizen's Advice, for anyone at risk of rough sleeping as part of the Duty to Refer.
- 1.7 Rough Sleeping Team works with Street Link and borough-commissioned services to provide supported hostel provision for rough sleepers to prevent the recurrence of rough sleeping in the borough.
- 1.8 Neighbourhood Services works very closely with the homelessness prevention team to identify early interventions to support residents to manage their tenancies. Tenancy audits are being carried out to identify the resident's support needs and where instances of hoarding have been identified, we make arrangements to clear the hoarded items. In some cases referrals are made to Adults Social Care. We also support residents who are having financial difficulties with their rent or experiencing cost-of-living issues.

## DEMAND FOR HOUSING SERVICES

- 2.0 We have seen a 21% increase in homelessness approaches this financial year, compared to the same period in 2022/23 as outlined in the table below.



- 2.1 We had 2,599 homelessness approaches in 2022/23 financial year. For the last 5 months we have had 1,323 (compared to 1,049 last year for the same period). We are seeing an increasing trend of more people presenting themselves as homeless and it is imperative we review how we deliver our homelessness and prevention service to meet the current and future demands.

## PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS SERVICE OFFER

- 3.0 Our homelessness prevention service is tailored to all of our residents' needs e.g. single people, families, those fleeing domestic violence, refugees, ex-offenders.
- 3.1 Referrals to the H&F Link service continues and the team has an active caseload of over 100 households at any one time. 63 households referred from April this year have been prevented from becoming homeless. These outcomes had been achieved through landlord/tenant negotiation, often assisted by Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) or awards of Household Support Fund (HSF), combined with sustainable repayment agreements. Interventions are tailored to the particular situation to assist with budgeting, debt management or employability support where relevant.
- 3.2 In addition, we work jointly with Job Centre Plus, Hammersmith and Fulham Law Centre and Citizen's Advice Bureau on specific cases, to prevent and resolve homelessness.

- 3.3 The below table shows the percentage of cases this financial year 2023/24 where we have prevented homelessness within the Prevention and Assessment team.

<b>KPIs</b>	<b>Year to Date (August 23/24)</b>
<b>KPI - 60% of homelessness cases prevented</b>	62%
<b>KPI- 50% of prevention cases closed within 56 days</b>	45%

- 3.4 The target is 60%. We are required to prevent homelessness within the 56-day timeframe, our target for this KPI is 50%. The 56-day timeframe is as specified within the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017).
- 3.5 We are behind our KPI target for closing cases within the required time frame of 56 days. This is due to ever increasing workloads within the team and back log of cases due to residents not providing or required information to assess their homelessness applications.
- 3.6 In November 2023, we are piloting new case handling processes within the team, which will improve decision-making on homelessness applications.
- 3.7 We have also brought in additional resources to close off all outstanding cases by the end of March 2024. This is being funded from the homelessness prevention grant from (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) DLUHC.

## **BENCHMARKING EXERCISE**

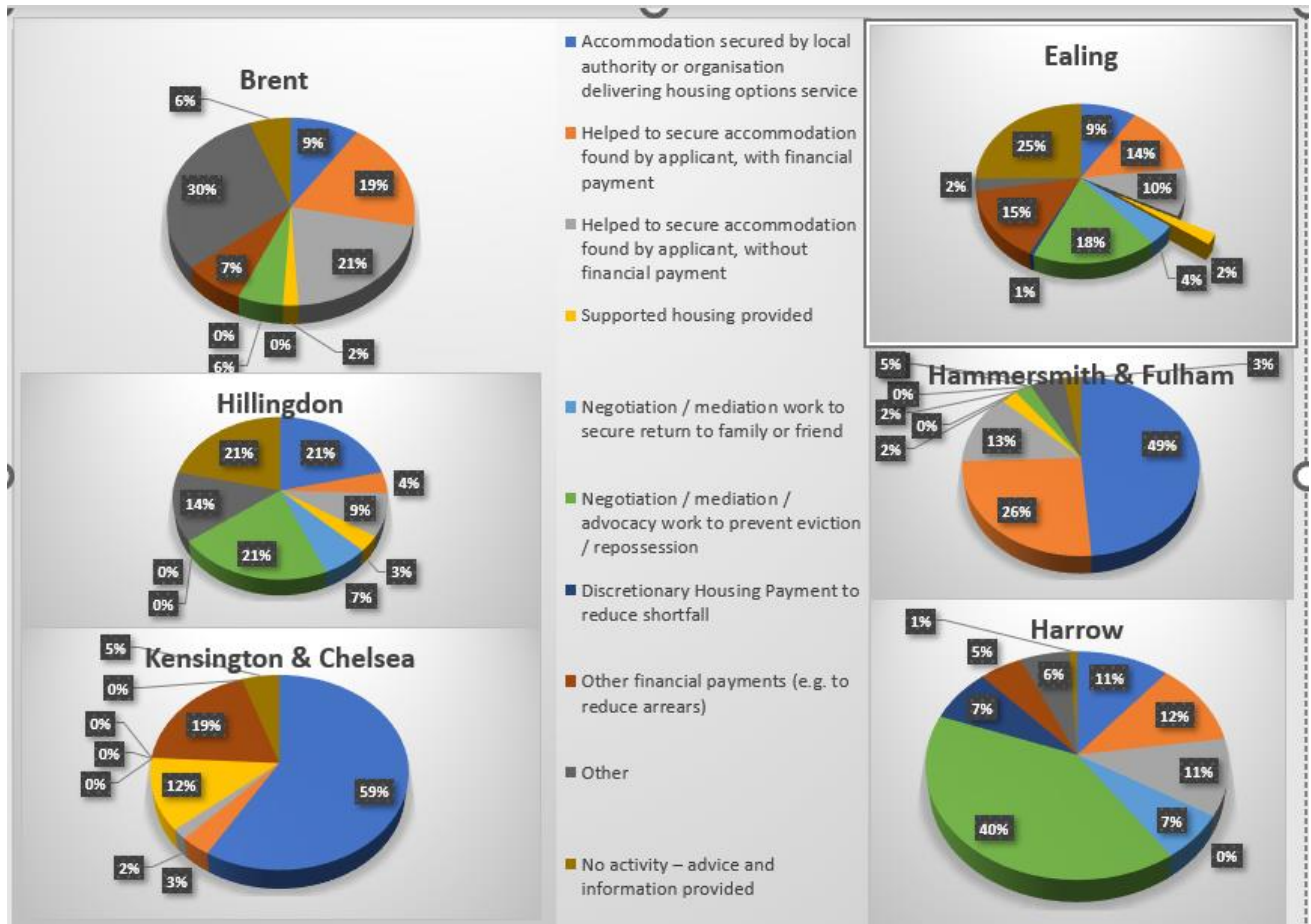
- 4.0 We benchmarked our performance against other West London Local Authorities as part of sharing good practice.
- 4.1 Comparing our homelessness and prevention statistics with other West London Local Authorities, we can review our practices to further improve our performance in doing more early intervention and prevention.

The benchmarking data showed that Hammersmith and Fulham needs to focus more on negotiating with landlords and mediation with families.

- 4.2 We are developing a homelessness prevention toolkit to equip frontline officers, with the necessary means to enable more move-on to private rented accommodation or in-situ resolutions. The toolkit includes affordability assessment calculator, access to Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP), Household Support Fund (HSF) and other prevention funds. It will also contain an improved incentive package to make our procurement offer more competitive and support our residents into sustainable housing.

4.3 We are planning to realign the entire Homelessness Prevention and Assessment Service for 2024/25 to make it more efficient, creating specialism where necessary, and to manage demand and reduce TA spending.

## APPENDIX 1



## APPENDIX 2

### CASE STUDY 1

Resident A came out of prison in April 2023, after serving a 2-year sentence. He approached the Homelessness Assessment and Prevention Team, looking for support as he had found a property within the Private Rented Sector but didn't have any money for the deposit and was unclear on his benefit entitlement. The Housing Advisor supported him to understand his benefit entitlement and because he had been in prison, he was exempt from the single room rate (where under 35s receive less housing benefit as it's assumed they can house-share). The Housing Advisor arranged for payment of his rental deposit of £1,120 and his first month's rent. This work prevented the resident from going into Temporary Accommodation.

## **CASE STUDY 2**

Resident B, a disabled mother with 2 children approached the Homelessness Assessment and Prevention team as her relationship with her partner had broken down and he moved out, so she now had a shortfall on her rent. She was on Personal Independent Payment (PIP) due to disabilities and there was an approximately £400 shortfall every month in her income and her landlord was threatening to evict her if she couldn't pay the full rent. The Housing Advisor arranged for Discretionary Housing Benefit to pick up the difference in her income and the rent and this was awarded to her until the end of her tenancy. Once her tenancy ended, she approached the council again and we supported her to find alternative private rented accommodation by providing her deposit to the new landlord.