

LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

Report to: Housing and Homelessness Policy and Accountability Committee

Date: 23 April 2025

Subject: Hidden Homelessness

Report author: Richard Shwe, Director of Housing
Clare Dorning, Head of Homelessness Prevention and Assessment

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

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of hidden homelessness and data which gives insight into the level of hidden homelessness in the Hammersmith and Fulham borough.

2. Overview

- 2.1 Hidden homelessness refers to individuals who are homeless but not visible in official statistics, such as those sofa-surfing, living with friends or relatives, often in overcrowded conditions, or staying in in-secure accommodation. As there is no universal definition of hidden homelessness there is not an exact data set. However, research which we have received from the Greater London Authority estimates that there are as many as 12,500 hidden homeless people in London each night.
- 2.2 Alongside the types of homelessness captured by statutory and rough sleeping statistics, there exist other forms of homelessness that are less well evidenced and understood. These are captured by the term "hidden" homelessness and cover people who may be experiencing homelessness, but their situation is not "visible", either on the streets or in official statistics. Individuals experiencing "hidden" homelessness tend to find themselves in housing situations that are not as well captured in official statistics, such as sofa surfing, squatting and rough sleeping out of sight.
- 2.3 Research into "hidden" homelessness suggest that women are more likely than men to experience this type of homelessness specifically. Women are known to exhaust informal and social means of housing, including staying with friends and family, before approaching local authorities so remain hidden for longer.
- 2.4 Another group more likely to experience "hidden" homelessness specifically is young people aged 16 to 25 years. Many young people often rely on informal support networks for somewhere to stay. UK-wide research in 2014 on young people aged 16 to 25 years revealed that 20% had sofa surfed during the last year, with 16% having done so for more than a week and 4% over three months.

3 Recommendations

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

Wards Affected: All

Our Values	Summary of how this report aligns to the H&F Corporate Plan and the H&F Values
Building shared prosperity	A priority for the homelessness service is to work with households to help them maximise their income and independence.
Creating a compassionate and inclusive council	Homelessness can happen to anyone. Officers work with households to assess their housing needs and identify the housing options which may be available to them based on their individual circumstances.
Doing things with local residents, not to them	Personal Housing Plans are created with homeless applicants setting out the reasonable steps that the Council will take and the steps the applicants can take to prevent or relieve their homelessness.
Being ruthlessly financially efficient	The Council aims to prevent homelessness wherever possible to avoid the need to place into expensive temporary accommodation.
Taking pride in H&F	The Council aims to achieve the best outcomes for homeless applicants and to perform well in meeting the Council's homelessness duties.
Rising to the challenge of the climate and ecological emergency	N/A

Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report

None

4. The Hammersmith and Fulham picture

- 4.1 Homelessness data held locally relates to households presenting as homeless and rough sleepers. While it is difficult to get a clear picture of the level of hidden homeless in the borough from this data, analysis of single homelessness and rough sleeping gives some detail of the housing circumstances of single people presenting to the Council for assistance.

5. Mainstream homelessness approaches

- 5.1 During 2024/25, 505 single people approached the Council as homeless which was 52% of all homeless approaches. The main reasons for homelessness for single people:

Homelessness approaches by reason - Single Households	No. approaches
Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown)	33
Friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	133
Family no longer willing or able to accommodate	339
Total	505

- 5.2 The most frequent reason for homelessness for single people was because they have been excluded by family or friends. The households that were living with friends are most likely to have been sofa surfing and this accounts for 26% of homelessness approaches from single people last year. This is in line with national hidden homelessness research.

- 5.3 The age profile and gender of single homeless applicants:

Age Group	Female	Male	Not recorded/prefer not to say	Total
16-24 yrs	48	41	35	124 (24.5%)
25-35 yrs	44	81	47	172 (34%)
35+ yrs	48	100	60	208 (41%)
Total	140	222	142	504

- 5.4 More single men present as homeless in H&F than single women which is in line with national research, and the population most likely to present as homeless is single males over 35 years. A quarter of single homeless approaches were young people under 25 years.

- 5.5 Data from our rough sleeping population indicates the most frequent reasons for rough sleeping are relationship breakdown and leaving the National Asylum Support Service NASS (asylum) after being granted leave to remain. The age profile of rough sleepers locally is older than the traditional hidden homeless population with over 65% of rough sleepers being 36 years old.

6. The housing options available for single people

- 6.1 The main housing option for single homeless people is private rented accommodation. Single people under 35 years old are eligible for shared room rate Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and are therefore likely to only be able to afford a room in shared accommodation.
- 6.2 In terms of the support available to find accommodation for single people within the hidden homeless population, where a person approaches as homeless the Council will accept a Prevention or Relief Duty and provide advice and information to enable the person to find private rented accommodation. As part of homelessness legislation the Council is unable provide temporary accommodation unless the person is assessed as vulnerable and in priority need.
- 6.3 Financial assistance to help fund the upfront costs of private rented accommodation is very limited for single homeless people due to the competing pressures from priority need homelessness for whom the Council has a statutory duty to house. Limited personal budget funding is available from specific government grant programmes for populations such as rough sleepers and ex-offenders but the Council has not had the resources in the past to provide financial assistance for non-priority single homeless people.
- 6.4 In December 2024, the Council received £65,775 one-off government grant funding from Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government to assist single homeless people at risk of rough sleeping into accommodation. This funding is available to spend this year, and it is proposed to use the funding to provide financial assistance for single people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and not able to access existing funding sources, including the hidden homeless.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 Over 50% of households approaching the Council as homeless are single people and it is likely that this population includes people who would traditionally be considered the hidden homeless.
- 7.2 While the Council would like to be able to assist all those who approach us for housing assistance, the housing offer for the majority of single homeless people is advice and information about accessing private rented accommodation, unless they meet the threshold of priority need in terms of the homeless legislation.
- 7.3 The financial resources available to assist the single non-priority homeless population into settled accommodation is limited, but the Government's one-off grant funding allocation of £65,775 for spend during 2025/26 to help single people at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping into privately rented accommodation, including the hidden homeless, provides the opportunity to offer direct financial support to assist with the upfront costs of securing a private rented tenancy this year.