

London Borough of Enfield

Housing Scrutiny
22nd March 2023

Subject: Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

Cabinet Member: Cllr Savva
Director: Joanne Drew

Purpose of Report

1. To update the Panel on progress against our Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

Relevance to the Council Plan

2. Good homes in well-connected neighbourhoods

In seeking to drive up the quality and availability of properties in the private rented sector, the service aims to increase the number and quality of homes available to low-income households in the borough.

3. Sustain strong and healthy communities

Poor quality housing and homelessness have been identified as key factors in health inequality. Through reducing the number of households reaching crisis point and increasing the supply and quality of rented homes we help to reduce the impact of homelessness and poor housing on the health and wellbeing of our residents.

4. Build our local economy to create a thriving place

The service aims to ensure a thriving, high quality private rented sector that is accessible to low income households. By acting proactively to engage with and support landlords we aim to increase the supply of rented homes.

Background

5. In 2020 we published our Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. This outlined an ambitious plan to end homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough through the delivery of five key ambitions:
 1. Make homelessness prevention a priority for everyone
 2. Treat people with empathy, dignity and respect
 3. Support people to access the right accommodation
 4. Support people to plan for their lifetime housing needs
 5. End rough sleeping in Enfield
6. In October 2020, the Council launched the Housing Advisory Service (HAS) to meet the challenges set out in the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

7. This brought together all of the services offered to homeless households and expanded our prevention activities.
8. This paper is a review of progress against the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, covering each of the key workstreams.

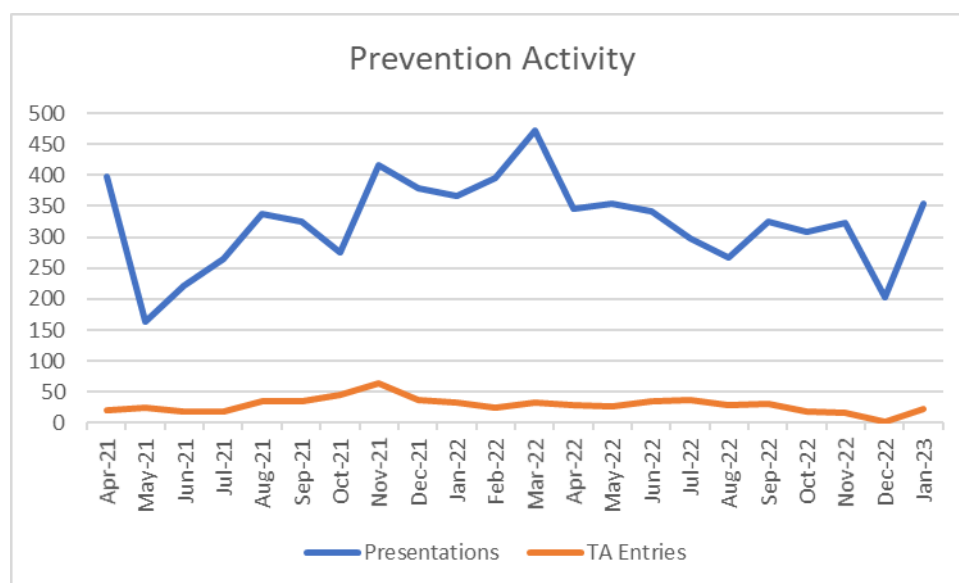
Main Considerations for the Panel

Making Homelessness Prevention a Priority for Everyone

9. The impact of the new service and its new focus on prevention was immediate. The table below provides a snapshot across the last three years:

	Oct-19	Oct-20	Oct-21	Oct-22
Homelessness Approaches	184	196	275	308
TA Entries	71	45	45	19

10. Despite a consistent rise in the number of households approaching the Council for help, the number of households needing emergency housing has been reduced dramatically. In October 2019, 38% of households approaching the Council needed emergency accommodation. By October 2022, this figure had dropped to just over 6%.
11. The chart below shows the number of households approaching the service against the number of households moving into temporary accommodation. Without this increased focus on prevention the number of households needing temporary, or emergency accommodation would have been far higher.



12. This focus on prevention has meant developing a new way of working both across departmental boundaries but also externally with other agencies. The Housing Advisory Service has staff collocated within a wide variety of partner organisations including:

- Job Centres
- Courts
- Probation
- Children and Family Services

13. In addition, we run outreach services in community organisations, work through local schools and educational establishments, and have tried to embed the service in our local communities. The establishment of the Homelessness Prevention Partnership Board has enabled the partner organisations to both assist and have a say in setting the priorities for the service.

Treat people with empathy, dignity and respect

14. Homelessness prevention requires taking a holistic view of the situation. A family approaching us for assistance will often face multiple barriers. Employment, benefits issues, physical and mental health all form part of the challenge is assisting individuals and families to rebuild their lives. Housing is a key building block in enabling this to happen.

15. Caseloads are far lower than in the old homelessness service. This was designed to enable a greater focus on ensuring that we provide the right level of support to prevent people from losing their home. However, to do this properly we have engaged a range of new partners to assist us.

16. Each household has a Housing Coordinator whose role is to coordinate the range of services and schemes on offer. The intention is to ensure that we equip households with the tools to help them secure long term sustainable housing. Key partners in this include:

Beam

17. In 2020, we launched a new partnership with Beam. This was to assist residents to access training and employment opportunities. This partnership has grown from an initial pilot and now covers the full journey from training to employment and moving out of temporary accommodation.

SHPS

18. SHPS is our Single Homelessness Prevention Service. This was launched alongside the Housing Advisory Service to address the needs of single homeless people and childless couples. As such this is a non-statutory service as it caters for the needs of households for whom we do not have a statutory duty. SHPS works with around 500 households per year to secure permanent accommodation.

Floating Support

19. Within the Prevention Team we have established a floating support team to provide intensive support to those either struggling to maintain a tenancy or to navigate the process to secure a new home. The team support around 60 households at any one time.

20. Alongside our traditional casework we have begun piloting different approaches. In 2022 we launched a Serious Youth Violence Project designed to target families with young people at risk of being drawn into gangs. The pilot involved the Housing Advisory Service, Children Services and Early Help Hub, as well as schools, social services and other Services.

14. The team worked with 15 families over the course of a year, providing intensive support to gain employment and move out of temporary accommodation. 10 families moved out for temporary accommodation as

a result. On average we reduced household debt by 18% and four families moved into employment.

15. We built on this experience to develop a new team focused on households in temporary accommodation who are benefit capped. The project is funded through the ESF and works with the 250 household in temporary accommodation who are benefit capped.

Support people to access the right accommodation

16. Initiatives to help residents to move to the private rented sector included the launch of Enfield Let (our ethical lettings agency), Capital Letters procurement increasing supply, and changes to the allocations scheme that both encouraged residents to move out of temporary accommodation and prioritised those unable to do so for social housing. This in turn led to the number of households living in temporary accommodation falling for the first time in many years, bucking the national trend.
17. The impact of landlords evicting tenants, combined with the on-going cost of living crisis has meant that the number of households approaching the Council for help has risen from 196 in October 2021 to 461 in February 2023. We anticipate that the high number of households in need of assistance will continue for at least the next two years, reflecting wider changes in the housing market.
18. Despite these high figures the service has effectively intervened so that the number of households needing emergency accommodation remains relatively low. The key challenge is in both securing affordable private rented accommodation for households to move on to and emergency accommodation in the immediate aftermath of their housing crisis.
19. House prices were initially boosted by the government through waiving stamp duty on purchases for a limited time. House prices continued to climb until the mini budget.
20. The government has recently made several proposals to increase the regulation of the private rented sector. The key elements of the proposals are:
 - Removal of s21 'no fault' evictions
 - Decent homes standard extended to cover private rented properties
 - Minimum EPC rating for new lets to be EPC band C from April 2025
 - Minimum EPC rating for all lets to be EPC band C from April 2028
21. These proposals are all welcome developments in improving the quality of properties in the private rented sector. Our Licencing scheme plays a vital role in driving up the quality of properties in the private rented sector. Since its introduction in 2021 it has registered some 13,500 properties and ensured compliance with gas and electrical safety for these properties. The Council has received £4.7m in license fees to date with another £3.7m pending payment. Five cases are being progressed for prosecution and the team have imposed 59 financial penalties for housing related offences. It will have an ongoing role in ensuring the enforcement of new standards in the Private Renters Bill.

22. However, for landlords, the high market value combined with the cost of improving their properties means that many are exiting the market, and this is a trend that may be expected to continue.
23. These factors have led to a shortage of the supply of privately rented properties and a rise in rent levels. Research carried out by Savills (on behalf of Capital Letters last summer) suggested that rents had increased in Enfield by between 4% and 6%. They also found that there had been a 42% reduction in the supply of private rented properties in Enfield over the last two years.
24. These figures match the experience of the Housing Advisory Service. The supply of private rented properties at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rents has reduced by 61% over the last year. With LHA frozen at 2020 rates there is little prospect of an increase in supply of affordable accommodation.
25. The changes in the housing market have also impacted the supply of temporary accommodation. Nightly paid accommodation is below LHA rent levels and so supply has also been impacted by the rise in rent levels.
26. This shortage of temporary accommodation means that the service has been dependent on commercial hotels and shared accommodation in recent months. This is not suitable for residents, particularly those with children, for any length of time and it is also expensive for the Council.
27. The original business plan for the Housing Advisory Service was based on assumptions developed before Covid. These assumptions have proved to be correct in terms of the increasing demand and therefore levels of temporary accommodation usage without our new service model. However, our assumptions for reduced use of temporary accommodation have not been fully realised due to the pressures resulting from the pandemic outlined in this report and illustrated below. It is likely that the number of households in temporary accommodation across the country will exceed 100,000 during 2022-23 with two thirds of this usage being in London.
28. Despite these challenges the Housing Advisory Service has reduced the number of households in temporary accommodation by around 400. The original business plan target was to have just under 2700 households in temporary accommodation by the end of 2021/22. This target was not achieved and there were 3163 households in temporary accommodation at year end. There are currently 3098 households in temporary accommodation.
29. Nationally the use of temporary accommodation has continued to climb with over 99,000 households in temporary accommodation at the end of the second quarter of 2022/23. Over 57,500 of these families are in London

Support people to plan for their lifetime housing needs

30. Not all households face the same issues and it important to remember that a household's circumstances will change over time, particularly with the right levels of support.
31. The services described early have helped to create a framework for residents to improve their circumstances. We have introduced pre

tenancy training to ensure that households have the skills to maintain a tenancy alongside the additional services to move people into employment.

32. The next phase of this is to assist some of our residents in temporary accommodation to move into shared ownership properties. This is a relatively new venture for the service, but we have started a pilot with five households who have the financial ability to afford a shared ownership property. For the household this means that they will still have lower monthly bills when compared with private renting.

End rough sleeping in Enfield

33. The number of new rough sleepers found bedded down on the streets has increased significantly both in London and nationally since 2020. However, due to significant investment into our Street Homelessness Services, and the roll out of a number of successful initiatives in Enfield, we have developed a comprehensive pathway to quickly intervene to help people forced to sleep rough, or at risk of sleeping rough. As a result, and we have seen a steady reduction in the number of rough sleepers found bedded down on any typical night.

34. The Street Homeless Service is fully funded through successful bids from external funding streams.

Partnership working

35. Our specialist Outreach Team respond to all reports of rough sleeping made by members of the public through Streetlink. In addition, we have developed multiagency meetings and protocols with partners to gather and share up to date intelligence on rough sleeping in Enfield. We aim to respond to all reports of rough sleeping within 24 hours. However, during periods of severe weather we step up outreach sessions to ensure that we respond to reports urgently.

36. Through our Specialised Housing Board, Preventing Homelessness Board, Rough Sleepers Board and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Meetings we have strengthened our partnership working with relevant agencies such as “Enable” substance misuse service, the Modern Slavery Team, Adult Social Care and mental health services to help rough sleepers access relevant support, maintain their home and ensure they do not return to the streets.

37. In addition, we have worked closely with our VCS partners, including “All People All Places” to support and house rough sleepers, and we have proactively contributed to the North London Housing Partnership, to deliver a Hub for rough sleepers with complex needs in Finchley, Ramfel immigration advice and the Central Eastern European Housing Advice Outreach service.

Increased supply of supported accommodation

38. Our Somewhere Safe to Stay Hub provides a 12-bed rapid assessment and resettlement service with 24/7 support. Since opening in Jan 21, the Hub has helped 164 rough sleepers off the streets. Our Hub has proved very successful, the average time taken to support and find a settled home for rough sleepers is 38 days.

39. In 2020 we successfully bid for the highest national allocation of funding under the Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme. We have used this to buy 91 homes through Housing Gateway Ltd to support rough sleepers into settled accommodation. Once in their new home, rough sleepers are supported by our in-house specialist staff to access the help they need, such as support for mental health and substance abuse problems, moving towards training and work.
40. We have allocated 22 one bed Council properties to house entrenched rough sleepers, with high /complex needs, through our Housing First scheme. Our specialist Social Worker provides needs assessments, intensive support, tenancy sustainment and integration into the community. Our Housing First scheme facilitates a multiagency approach that prevents the most entrenched rough sleepers returning to the streets.

Private rented sector move-on

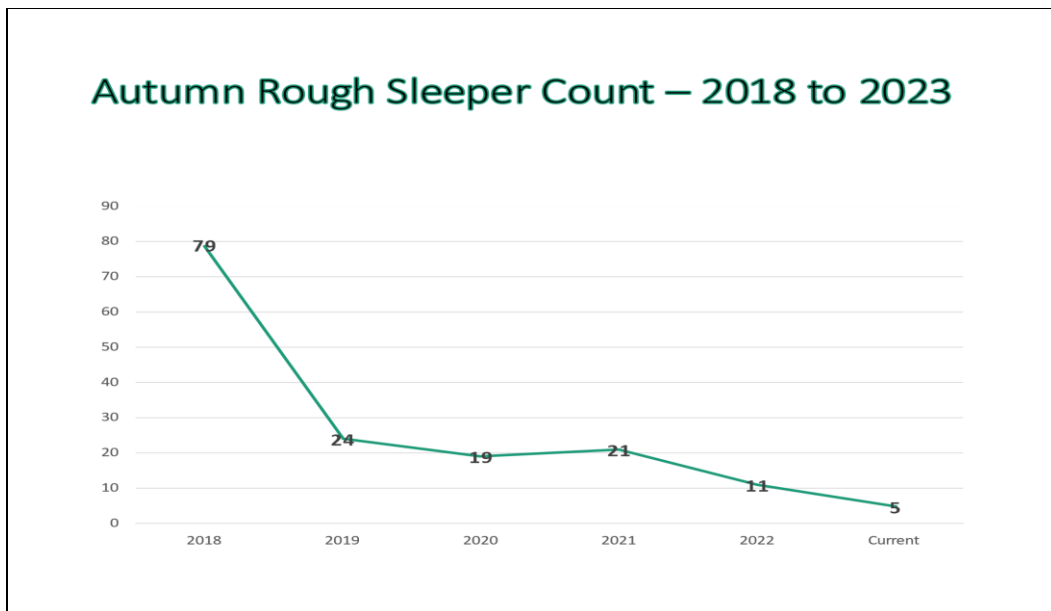
41. Our successful private rented move-on scheme secures long term move-on accommodation for rough sleepers with low to medium support needs. Our floating support workers provide specialist tenancy sustainment support.

Encampments

42. We make every effort to engage with people living in unlawful rough sleeper encampments (more than one rough sleeper bedded down on any site) to offer advice and support, alongside relevant partners. Where this does not lead to the occupants accepting support, or voluntarily moving on, we will take appropriate and proportional action through our Encampments Working Group, in partnership with the Police, Strategic Property Services, and the Antisocial Behaviour Team.

Measures of success

43. Through the above actions, we have reduced the number of rough sleeper encampments from 7 in Summer 2020 to Zero from October 2022. This has significantly reduced the impact of antisocial behaviour that encampments can have on the local community.
44. Due to the significant investment into our Street Homelessness Services, and the roll out of a number of successful initiatives in Enfield, we have seen a steady reduction in the number of rough sleepers found bedded down on any typical night. Since April 2020, our Street Homeless Service has found, visited, supported and housed 840 rough sleepers in Enfield.



45. The most recent GOV.UK rough sleeping data release shows that the key measure for rough sleeping (number of rough sleepers bedded down on a typical night) has seen a significant increase of 26% nationally from Autumn 2021 to Autumn 2022. The highest increase was in London - a 34% increase over the year. However, despite this challenging wider picture, Enfield has achieved a reduction in the number of rough sleepers over the same period – a reduction of 48%. This was the highest reduction in rough sleeping achieved in the UK.

Conclusions

- a. The Homelessness Prevention Strategy has successfully supported greater intervention to reduce and minimise the impact of homelessness in the Borough. However, market conditions have changed significantly and the strategy of supporting residents into the private rented sector is challenged by the severe lack of availability of accommodation. A review of the strategy is underway to tackle this.

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Background Papers

The following documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:

N/A