



AGENDA FOR THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Members of the Housing Scrutiny Committee are summoned to Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD - Islington Town Hall on, **3 March 2020 at 7.30 pm.**

Enquiries to : Ola Adeoye
Tel : 020 7527 044
E-mail : democracy@islington.gov.uk
Despatched : 24 February 2020

Membership

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan (Chair)
Councillor Sue Lukes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Theresa Debono
Councillor Troy Gallagher
Councillor Mouna Hamitouche MBE
Councillor Gary Heather
Councillor Ben Mackmurdie
Councillor Marian Spall
Rose Marie McDonald (Resident Observer) (Co-Optee)
Dean Donaghey (Resident Observer) (Co-Optee)

Substitute Members

Councillor Vivien Cutler
Councillor Osh Gantly
Councillor Satnam Gill OBE
Councillor Sara Hyde
Councillor Jenny Kay
Councillor Roulin Khondoker
Councillor Nurullah Turan

Quorum is 4 Councillors



A. Formal Matters

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1. Apologies for Absence
2. Declaration of Substitute Members
3. Declarations of Interests

If you have a **Disclosable Pecuniary Interest*** in an item of business:

- if it is not yet on the council's register, you **must** declare both the existence and details of it at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent;
- you may **choose** to declare a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest that is already in the register in the interests of openness and transparency.

In both the above cases, you **must** leave the room without participating in discussion of the item.

If you have a **personal** interest in an item of business **and** you intend to speak or vote on the item you **must** declare both the existence and details of it at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent but you **may** participate in the discussion and vote on the item.

- *(a) **Employment, etc** - Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
- (b) **Sponsorship** - Any payment or other financial benefit in respect of your expenses in carrying out duties as a member, or of your election; including from a trade union.
- (c) **Contracts** - Any current contract for goods, services or works, between you or your partner (or a body in which one of you has a beneficial interest) and the council.
- (d) **Land** - Any beneficial interest in land which is within the council's area.
- (e) **Licences**- Any licence to occupy land in the council's area for a month or longer.
- (f) **Corporate tenancies** - Any tenancy between the council and a body in which you or your partner have a beneficial interest.
- (g) **Securities** - Any beneficial interest in securities of a body which has a place of business or land in the council's area, if the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body or of any one class of its issued share capital.

This applies to **all** members present at the meeting.

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting
5. Chair's Report
6. Order of Business

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7. Public Questions

For members of the public to ask questions relating to any subject on the meeting agenda under Procedure Rule 70.5. Alternatively, the Chair may opt to accept questions from the public during the discussion on each agenda item.

B. Items for Decision/Discussion	Page
1. 2018/2019 Mini Scrutiny Review (Homelessness) - Final Report	9 - 22
2. Main Scrutiny Review : Major Works - Witness Evidence	
3. Quarterly Review of Housing Performance (Q3 2019/2020) - To Follow	
4. Partners for Improvement - Presentation - To Follow	
5. Work Programme 2019/2020	23 - 24

C. Urgent non-exempt items (if any)

Any non- exempt items which the Chair agrees should be considered urgent by reason of special circumstances. The reasons for urgency will be agreed by the Chair and recorded in the minutes.

D. Exclusion of press and public

To consider whether, in view of the nature of the remaining items on the agenda, any of them are likely to involve the disclosure of exempt or confidential information within the terms of the Access to Information Procedure Rules in the Constitution and, if so, whether to exclude the press and public during discussion thereof.

E. Confidential/exempt items **Page**

F. Urgent exempt items (if any)

Any exempt items which the Chair agrees should be considered urgently by reason of special circumstances. The reasons for urgency will be agreed by the Chair and recorded in the minutes.

The next meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee will be on 19 March 2020

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London Borough of Islington

Housing Scrutiny Committee - 20 January 2020

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD - Islington Town Hall on 20 January 2020 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** O'Sullivan (Chair), Lukes (Vice-Chair), Debono, Hamitouche, Heather, Mackmurdie, Spall, McDonald (Co-Optee) and Donaghey (Co-Optee)

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan in the Chair

142 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Gallagher.

143 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

None

144 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

145 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2019 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

146 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)

The Chair informed the meeting that Partners Improvement will be attending the meeting of 3 March, an opportunity for members to review performances of Partners in the last year.

The Executive Member for Housing, Councillor Ward informed members that Tom Irvine of Partners had been advised of the Committee's expectation that the presentation should include specific examples of issues of disrepairs, and how it was resolved and not just statistics.

147 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 6)

The order of business would be B2, B1, B3 and B4.

148 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)

None

149 **2018/19 MINI SCRUTINY REVIEW (HOMELESSNESS) - PRESENTATION AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS (Item B1)**

Karen Lucas, Director Housing Needs and Strategy provided members with a brief background on the mini review carried out about Homelessness and Rough Sleeping in the borough. In addition a presentation highlighting the scope of the review, its findings and concerns was received.

Finally members were invited to consider and contribute to the draft recommendations.

The following issues were highlighted and discussed.

The Scrutiny Initiation Document was agreed on 14 January 2019 but due to time constraints; witness unavailability; a decision was taken for the review to be included in the work programme of the 2019/2020 municipal year.

The review considered how the Council's Housing Services manages homelessness; the legislative frameworks; performances and outcomes related to homelessness; the use of temporary accommodation; rough sleeping and partnership working.

Members were reminded of their visits and meeting staff of Streets Kitchen, Solace, St Mungo's, Glasshouse temporary shelter, Now Medical, the Streets Festival and Jubaa Somalia organisation. Also the Chair attended a seminar on homelessness and the committee had received a presentation from Islington Law Centre.

The Director of Housing Needs acknowledged the significant reductions in the number of homelessness decisions in the last 3 years especially when compared to other London boroughs. This was primarily due to the Services focus on engaging on more preventive activities.

Members were informed of strong partnership working across the public sector and the voluntary sector; Leadership officers attending Strategic Housing meetings across the North London sub-region and the pan London Councils meetings, all with a view to alleviating homelessness.

Data provided shows that in 2017/18, 2,504 households approached the Council's Housing Team for advice and the reasons provided vary from family breakdown, domestic abuse and loss of private sector accommodation. In addition other reasons for seeking assistance included residents having children or expecting a child as a common category of priority need each year, making up 78% of all households accepted in 2017/18.

With regards to placing households in temporary accommodation, members were informed that although largely stable across London, it is noticeable that this has been on the increase in the last two years.

Members were informed that despite market challenges, the Council continues to experience reductions in out of borough placements, which indicates that a significant proportion of homeless households were still able to retain their social,

family, educational and employment networks.

The meeting was informed of concerns raised Director highlighted concerns raised by voluntary organisations such as Solace and Islington Law Centre. This included vulnerable women finding it difficult to access services and the Council's continued reliance on the services of its commissioned medical advice service for assessing applications for social housing applications. Other concerns raised was what role in particular do Housing Associations play with regards to preventing homelessness especially as they manage over 14,500 residents.

A street count exercise carried out by members and officers acknowledges an increasing number of rough sleeping on Islington Streets.

A copy of the draft recommendations was circulated at the meeting for consideration. The Chair informed members that although not an exhaustive list, he welcomed any additional recommendations to be submitted to the clerk of the committee.

The Chair informed members that the final report will be circulated ahead of the next meeting when it will be agreed and signed off.

RESOLVED:

That the draft recommendations be noted, subject to including an additional recommendation which will read: 'The Service would need to give consideration to the support given to vulnerable people when discharged from hospital.

That the final report be agreed at the next meeting of the committee

150

2019/2020 MINI SCRUTINY REVIEW (PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR) - PRESENTATION AND WITNESS EVIDENCE (TO FOLLOW) (Item B2)

Members received a presentation from both Janice Gibbons, Service Manager (Environmental Health) and Karen Lucas (Director Housing Needs and Strategy) on the Private Rented Sector. A copy of both presentations is interleaved with the agenda.

The following main points were raised in the presentation and discussed:

- Islington presently has over 25,217 privately rented properties which represents 27% of the total housing stock. It is noticeable that since 2011 that the private sector is experiencing the highest level of growth across all housing sectors.
- Members were advised that in light of the shortage in social rented housing, properties in private accommodation attract rents of about £1752 rent per month and this remains a challenge especially for young private renters as this represents about 34% of their income.

- The Council through Housing Services provides help and support for people who live in privately rented properties, signposting residents to accredited private landlords and liaises with landlords who provide temporary accommodation for people designated as homeless.
- Other support includes a phone advice service, a drop in service at 222 Upper Street, funding organisations like the Citizen Advice Bureau which is located at 222 Upper Street and Islington Law centre. The Council offers monthly outreach surgeries for hard to reach communities in children centres, community centres, Finsbury Park Mosque and Job centres
- Members were informed of the importance of the Trailblazer programme, the Early Homelessness Prevention Service in alleviating homelessness.
- Meeting was informed that information such as Landlord Accreditation schemes; complaints procedure and a London rents map showing average rents is published on the council website.
- Meeting was informed that staff are trained in negotiation skills when issues arise with landlords to resolve issues with their tenants.
- With regard to Landlords forum, the Director acknowledged that in recent year the noticeable drop in attendance the Service will be looking at ways of raising its profile as it recognises their value and contribution in alleviating homelessness. Similarly the Council is keen to hear the views of private sector tenants about the advice and support available to them.
- Figures provided show that of the 2,488 clients that sought advice from CAB, only 8% were identified as private sector clients. The Director acknowledged that more work will be required in this area as it is obvious that private renters were not accessing this valuable resource.
- Members were advised that as many residents were unlikely to be offered social housing, the private sector remains the only option to help prevent homelessness.
- Islington Lettings and Islington Residential, the two letting schemes run by the Council, work in partnership with approximately 15 private sector landlords across London. The council pays the landlord either an incentive fee or a rent deposit fee. Most of the landlords offer a minimum tenancy term of 12 months with some exceptions of up to 2 years.
- In response to a question about rents being charged for residents placed in private accommodation by the Council, Members were advised that market rates are being charged.
- The Director advised that although private accommodation is available for households identified as homeless, the aim of the Council in the last few years has been to reduce the number of households placed in private accommodation. Members were advised that in the last year, Housing Services have acquired properties to ensure that the standard of temporary accommodation is of good standard.
- The Right to Rent was rolled out across the whole of England on 1 February 2016. In response to a question on refusal rates, meeting was advised that presently there is no data available.
- The Director in response acknowledged that in cases of refusals, the housing team could make referrals to the No Recourse to Public Funds. Meeting was informed that Islington Law Centre have noticed an increase in the number

of refugees experiencing difficulty in assessing housing.

In terms of residential environmental health, a number of issues were highlighted -

- Environmental Health (EH) investigates over 500 complaints and referrals relating to poor private housing conditions each year and in most cases landlords tend to address the issues raised by private tenants.
- Islington has over 663 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) which are licensed and are subject to inspection at least once in 5 years.
- Net cost of Environmental Health is £500,000, it comprises a small team of 9.5 equivalent enforcement officers and receives about £250,000 income from licensing and enforcement fees.
- Enforcement action taken is proportionate to the issues raised. This could be either verbal or a written notice of intention, formal notices or Financial Penalty Notices.
- Members were advised that in more serious cases with landlords, Environmental Health will prosecute, issue Rent Repayment Orders, and initiate action under the Proceeds of Crime Act.
- Mandatory HMO Licensing applies to any rented property that is occupied by five or more people who form more than one household and share basic amenities such as a kitchen, bathroom or toilet. There is an Additional HMO's Licensing scheme covering HMOs occupied by 3 or 4 people in Holloway Road and Caledonian Road that ends in September 2020.
- Following consultation in 2019, the meeting was advised that council proposes to roll out a borough wide Additional HMO Licensing Scheme and a Selective Licensing Scheme covering all privately rented accommodation during 2020.
- In addition to the above, the manager advised that the Councils has a commitment to consult on proposals to introduce selective licensing for all privately rented properties in 6-7 wards.
- In response to a question on whether EH's remit extended to privately rented properties owned by leaseholders on council estates, the Manager advised that the Service will only intervene where there are issues that can be dealt with under the Housing Act for example issues such as damp, electrical faults.
- In response to a question, the Manager advised that the service has powers to investigate Registered Social Landlords (RSL's). In most instances when issues are brought to EH's attention, this is raised with RSL managers to resolve.
- In response to a suggestion on whether Islington letting activities should be discontinued considering that it is not meeting it's aims, the Director of Housing Needs acknowledged that a further analysis would still need to be carried out, however a decision has been taken pending its review to put a temporary arrangement in place to run both schemes together pending a business assessment. The Director of Housing Needs informed members that

a review of the financial model would need to be carried out prior to any decision being taken.

- With regard to private renting concerns on council estate, meeting was informed that colleagues in Homes and Communities would refer any compliant issues to Environmental Health.
- In light of the initial findings from the review carried out on the Right to Rent about private renters being unfairly discriminated against and whether council staff were prepared to handle enquires, the Director of Housing Needs acknowledged that additional training could be provided in this area.
- With regard to the recent refusal by the Secretary of State to renew the Liverpool Licensing scheme and its implications with the Finsbury Park Selective Licensing Scheme, the manager advised that Finsbury Park scheme will not require permission from the Secretary of State.

The Chair invited Rowan Milligan of Law for Life, an educational and information charity which provides community based education and training on a range of legal issues. The following points were noted -

A recent survey carried out among private tenants welcomed the proposed extension of the licensing scheme but there were reservations on how it is to be regulated especially as local authorities had limited resources.

Private tenants had concerns with the length of time and processes in resolving complaints about living conditions with Environmental health and possible repercussions as it does not prevent landlords issuing section 21 no fault evictions. Members were advised that although disrepair complaints remain a major cause of no fault evictions, there is no evidence of increasing tenants protections in the rollout of this policy.

With regards the Right to Rent policy and evidence that over 44% of landlords refuse to rent to someone without a UK passport, Members were advised that the issue here lies with the landlords refusal and the issue here lies not in council staff not being adequately trained but

The Law for Life welcomes Islington Council's decision to bring the vulnerability assessments in house with the hope that other authorities will follow suit it and also pleased with the roll-out of Housing First accommodation, a stellar success rates in other places where it has been rolled out effectively.

151 **QUARTERLY REVIEW OF HOUSING PERFORMANCE (Q2 - 2019/2020)**
(Item B3)

Councillor Diarmaid Ward, Executive Member for Housing and Development, introduced the quarterly performance report.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Executive Member informed the meeting that in the last quarter the number of affordable homes built had fallen substantially.
- Members were advised that performance in repairs continues to improve, from 85.4% at the end of the previous quarter to 87.0% at the end of this quarter. The Executive Member informed the meeting that issues around the dashboard is IT related.
- Rent arrears continues to increase and below the profiled target for the point in the year and this is mostly driven by the continued roll-out of Universal Credit in the borough.
- With regard to street homelessness, members were informed that 60 people were supported into accommodation in comparison to 8 in the previous year and this was due to a myriad of factors, in particular the austerity measures introduced by the present government.
- The Executive Member advised members that the Council would no longer be using the services of Now Medical in assessing housing applications.
- In response to a request for ward councillors be kept to date on personnel changes in the Housing Area offices, the Director Housing Needs acknowledged that changes are still ongoing but will ensure that Councillors receive the contact details of personnel when in post.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

152 **WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20 (Item B4)**
RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm

CHAIR



Scrutiny Mini-Review on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping in Islington

DRAFT REPORT OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

London Borough of Islington
March 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homelessness & Rough Sleeping

Introduction

1.1 The Committee commenced the review in September 2018 with the overall aim of exploring the Council's Housing Needs Service tackles homelessness and delivers on its key performance indicators and reduce Homelessness.

The Committee also agreed to the following objectives:

- To highlight compliance in assessments and decisions that are underpinned by the Housing Act(1996) and Homeless Reduction Act (2017).
- That prevention services and commissioned services are targeted and effective.

1.2 A decision was taken at the Committee meeting on 19 March 2019 for the review to continue into the 2019/20 Municipal year. Members agreed for a small task group comprising 3 councillors and housing officers to continue with the review and report back during the autumn of 2019 with findings.

1.3 The review exercise involved visits to voluntary organisations, obtaining evidence from St Mungo's Islington Law Centre, Shelter, Pillion Trust and community based organisations that advocate on behalf of homeless people. Members considered the types of accommodation services available, participated in rough sleep counts in the borough and examined funding streams available to support rough sleepers. In addition members considered performance data relating to the service.

Local context

The Council's vision is to make Islington fairer and create a place where everyone, whatever their background, has the same opportunity to reach their potential and enjoy a good quality of life. Many local residents face both complex and multiple challenges, such as housing, employment, offending, domestic violence, mental health and substance abuse including those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The council does all it can to ensure that being homeless does not prevent people having a secure and dignified existence, or interrupt their employment, education and access to healthcare.

It is generally accepted that there is a housing crisis in England. This crisis has been compounded by welfare reform changes and the reductions in housing benefit introduced by the Government which has increased the pressure on households' ability to manage their finances.

The Government has also introduced significant changes in homelessness law with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, in which local authorities are mandated to provide earlier prevention and relief from homelessness regardless of whether a person is in priority need. This has been hailed as the most significant change to homelessness legislation for 40 years. Islington Council has been focusing on early intervention and prevention for many years, with innovative schemes such as the sanctuary scheme for victims of domestic abuse and a rent deposit scheme. The new law stipulates further responsibilities legal requirements for all local authorities and public bodies in England.

Our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2023 sets out how the council will:

- prevent homelessness through partnership working;
- focus prevention and support for those most at risk of homelessness. The support will extend to the health and wellbeing of individuals, in addition to a place to live;
- work towards eliminating rough sleeping.

There is well established strong partnership working through the Islington Homelessness Forum (IHF), which has been meeting regularly for over ten years and attended by a range of commissioned and non- commissioned voluntary and community sector organisations. These include senior representation from SHP, Pillion Trust, One Housing, St Mungos, Thames Reach, Union Chapel, The Manna, Homeless Link, Big Issue, No Second Night Out, Clash (NHS service provider) and Better Lives (NHS service provider). The strategy reiterates the continuing importance given by the council to a collaborative approach between sectors in reducing homelessness and rough sleeping. In recognition of the link between homelessness and health and wellbeing, the 2019-2023 strategy and its delivery will be sponsored by the Health and Wellbeing Board.

The national and local rise in homelessness has been attributed to the lack sufficient supply of affordable housing. Other significant factors include:

- the increase in homelessness arising from the termination of assured shorthold tenancies in the private rented sector;

- Housing Benefit restrictions introduced since 2010, which arguably has made it difficult for claimants to secure housing at rents which Housing Benefit will cover.
 - Four-year 1% rent reduction of social rents until 2020 has meant that local authorities have had less income than they previously expected, which has meant that it has been even more difficult for local authorities to build affordable new homes.
 - Impact of Welfare Reform - From November 2016 the total annual benefit cap was reduced to £20,000 (or £13,400 for single adults), and there are lower rates of housing benefit available for those under 35 years. Combined with freezes in Local Housing Allowance rates, this has meant that there are fewer existing homes available to provide settled or temporary accommodation for households in receipt of housing benefits.
 - Additionally, the roll-out of Universal Credit is likely to impact on homelessness by limiting the ability of local authorities to access accommodation in the private rented sector; a key prevention measure.
 - Reduction in tax relief for buy to let landlords which would impact on the availability of properties to rent in the private sector and an increase in average rents.
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- A total of 2,504 households approached to Islington Council's Housing Aid Team seeking advice on housing in 2017/18. This represented a decrease of over a quarter from 2014/15, when there were 3,503 households seeking advice.
 - Notably, not all of these households were homeless. Many of these households may also have sought help from other agencies who help with housing options and advice, such as how to tackle debt, or claim benefits.
 - Not all visits to the Housing Aid Team result in a homeless application. The number of applications received in 2017/18 is 32% lower than 2016/17 and demonstrates the continuing emphasis on prevention of homelessness.
 - However, due to a number of factors including the Homeless Reduction Act, recent case law and the likely impact of future welfare and housing reforms, we anticipate a higher number of applications and acceptances for at least the next two years.

Evidence

At its meeting on 14 January 2019, members received a presentation from Ramesh Logeswaran, the Interim Head of Housing Needs regarding Homelessness and Rough Sleeping in Islington.

The following points were highlighted:

- Islington Council's overriding approach to the issue of homelessness is to help people build resilience through prevention and early intervention. As the reasons for homelessness varies, the council endeavours to provide practical assistance such as being able to access rent deposit schemes and signposting residents to organisations such as Home finder UK, Sanctuary scheme and Islington Lettings where alternative and affordable accommodation can be offered.
- Housing officers intervene on behalf of tenants with landlords in the private sector in alleviating homelessness by guaranteeing rental income especially where they are willing to offer discounted market rents.
- The Service makes decisions in line with the Housing Act and support remains in place until a decision is made for all those recognised as homeless.
- In comparison to neighbouring authorities, Islington has had a significant reduction in the number of homelessness decisions due to its approach and has therefore exceeded the Council's corporate target of 400 over the last three years. Meeting was informed that between 2016 and 2017, 1173 households were prevented from becoming homeless.
- Islington has one of the lowest numbers of households in temporary accommodation in London, of which 60% lie within the borough. Islington will continue to purchase properties to use as temporary accommodation, minimising the use of private sector accommodation and ensuring that those who are homelessness are still able to retain their social, educational and family networks.
- Collaborative and strong partnership across the public sector and ideas shared at the Islington Homelessness Forum and Lead officers at strategic housing needs across the North London sub region has resulted in a different approach to addressing homelessness.
- The Lead Officer acknowledged that increase in homelessness was due to insufficient supply of affordable housing and the removal of assured short-hold tenancies in the private sector such as housing associations. In addition, the introduction of housing benefit restrictions in 2010 and the government's welfare reform has worsened the situation.

- 2,504 households approached Islington Council's Housing Aid Team for advice in 2017/18 a fall from the municipal year 2014/15. Reasons provided include family breakdowns or family or friends not willing to accommodate and having children within the family or expecting a child.
- The meeting was advised that two thirds of accepted cases are between 20 and 40 years old and about two thirds of accepted cases tend to be female with a small majority being lone parents.
- The Homeless Reduction Act has introduced a number of changes, the duty to provide advisory service has been strengthened; the period during which an applicant can be considered as threatened with homelessness has increased from 28 days to 56 days; a new duty to assess all eligible applicants and for Council's to take reasonable steps to prevent and relieve homelessness.
- A Personalised Housing Plan is agreed between the local authority and the applicant.
- In terms of impact of the new legislation on the Housing Revenue Account, anecdotal evidence shows a reluctance of applicants to engage in Personalised Housing Plans, an increase in bureaucracy because of the new duties thereby diverting resources away from carrying out their specific duties of searching for alternative accommodation and negotiating with landlords.
- In light of the increasing numbers of people rough sleeping in Islington, meeting was informed that the Council's has robust plans addressing it, especially with it's multiple agency/department approach and externally with other London wide initiatives. In addition the Council has commissioned additional units for emergency shelters; recruited staff to support rough sleepers; joint working with neighbouring boroughs and services to tackle hot-spot areas and is seeking additional funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
- Members were informed that in light of government's requirement that all local authorities have a strategy in place to address homelessness, the Council Executive has now agreed a five-year (2019-2023) Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, endorsed by the Health and Well-Being Board in 2019.
- Vulnerable groups continue to be included as part of the strategy. The meeting was informed that in addition to other groups, former members of the regular armed forces and people from outside of the UK without settled status and no recourse to public funds would be given particular attention.
- The Council proactively engages with stakeholders such as Homes and Communities, Children's and Adults Social Care, Community Safety and external partners such as Partners for Islington, Housing Associations and St Mungo's Outreach through which it is quickly able to intervene early in households before the situation worsens.

- Due to the dearth in social housing and applicant's reliance on private sector accommodation especially housing associations, the Council intends in the long run to build more social housing to address homelessness in the borough.
- With regard to extending the Council's criteria for eligibility to elderly and disabled persons which noticeably has been on the rise, the Lead officer advised that all applicants are treated the same irrespective of age with dignity.
- With regard to officer refusal's and outcomes from judicial reviews, the lead officer acknowledged that in general the Council has a good successful rate in appeal cases.
- On the issue of medical assessments, the Service Director, Housing Needs & Strategy acknowledged that the Service would be prepared to look at other options, will be in discussion with the local Clinical Commissioning Group on whether it would be prepared to carry out the medical assessments.

At committee's meeting on 12 February, Ruth Hayes and Stuart Hearne, Co-Directors of the Islington Law Centre highlighted what role the organisation plays in alleviating homelessness in Islington. The following points were noted:

- Islington Law Centre (LC) provides low income residents with accessible high quality legal advices to challenge the effects of poverty which is inextricably linked to homelessness. The law centre works in conjunction with statutory agencies, the Local authority, the Islington Strategic Advice Service and BAMER community organisations in addressing this issue.
- Through partnership working LC is able to provide a range of services to help reduce the risks of housing crises and homelessness and most of its focus and activities are centred around early intervention, welfare benefits and debt
- LC runs a drop in Reception and Referral service for residents threatened with evictions where they can bring in their correspondence and are assisted in understanding what stage their case is. LC also offers specialist weekly housing advice outreach sessions across the borough; specialist weekly welfare rights and specialist weekly debt advice outreach sessions.
- The Law Centre is funded by Council grants and receives additional funding from both Cripplegate and Cloudesley which is used for follow up casework when required and residents seek advice on a range of issues such as representations on possession proceedings, homelessness, succession rights, rent arrears, landlord and tenant matters, evictions, anti-social behaviour, rehousing etc

- The Law Centre also provides legal representation to help people avoid possessions, evictions and homelessness which is available through the Clerkenwell and Shoreditch County Court duty scheme. Tenants of different tenures whether Council, housing associations tenants and tenants in private rented sector are supported by LC.
- Record shows that LC clients tend to be Council tenants, only 8% of tenants in the private sector compared to 31% council tenants and 46% social landlord tenants seek advice and support. With regard to the 8% private tenants that receive pre-advise there is no evidence that they were placed in private sector housing by the Council.
- In light of the increasing overlap between the Law Centre's immigration work and housing needs, the Law centre offer services to Islington residents through its weekly outreach sessions at the Hackney Migrant Centre.
- With regard to the Council's No Recourse to Public Funds team, the meeting was informed that the Law Centre works with young people to regularise their status so that they are able to access work, continue education and benefits.
- With the introduction of the Universal Credit, LC continues to offer advise to young people at risk of losing their homes, however as its implementation is still in its infancy, LC has yet to able to analyse the impact, however it will continue to work with the Council on this issue.
- Homelessness is caused by a myriad of factors such as lack of security in the private sector, low income, erratic income, failures of the social security system along with crises such as job loss, ill health or family breakdown.
- In response to a question about the services of Now Medical, representative from the LC advised that the Council should consider the medical assessments made by the individual's GP or consultant as they were most aware of their state of health.
- In response to a question about local authorities employing the services of Now Medical for housing applications, the meeting was advised that it offers local authorities another option when taking a decision on housing needs of vulnerable applicants instead of relying on GP's opinions. LC representatives expressed

concerns that most applicants affected were vulnerable suffering mental illness, learning disability or physical disability.

- A suggestion by a member that the Committee consider scrutinising the Council's use of NowMedical in the future was noted.

Main Findings

Karen Lucas, Director of Housing Needs summarised the findings from the review as –

- There has been significant reduction in the number of homelessness decisions in the last three years in comparison to the number of homelessness decisions across London boroughs as a result of the Services focussing more on prevention activities.
- Between 2016 and 2018, 1173 households have been prevented from becoming homeless, as the council has been able to provide secured alternative accommodation or help residents remain in their existing accommodation.
- There is evidence of collaborative and strong partnerships across the public sector and a valued voluntary sector.
- The Service actively participates in strategic Housing Needs meetings across the North London sub-region and the pan London Councils meetings to ensure a strong lobbying voice and to help inform Government thinking.
- 2,504 households approached Islington Council's Housing Aid Team seeking advice on housing in 2017/18.
- In Islington, "Parents, family or friends no longer willing to accommodate" was the most common reason for homelessness acceptances, followed by domestic abuse and loss of private sector accommodation
- Having children or expecting a child was the most common category of priority need each year, making up 78% of all households accepted in 2017/18.
Age: consistently two thirds of accepted cases were between 20 and 40 years old.
Gender: consistently around two thirds of accepted cases were female, likely linked to the applicant having dependent children, as single parents were more likely to be female than male.
Lone parent: consistently majority of accepted cases are lone parents. This was likely to be linked to welfare reform, as lone parents are disproportionately affected by the welfare reform.
- Rates of households in temporary accommodation has been relatively stable across London between 2016/17 and 2017/18, however it has risen more recently.

- Islington reduced the numbers of households in temporary accommodation between 2015 and 2018, equating to an overall reduction of 21% in 2017/18 when compared to the numbers of placements made in 2015/16.
- Despite the wider market challenges, Islington has experienced continual reductions in the numbers of placements out of borough.
- This meant a significant proportion of households becoming homeless in Islington had been able to retain their social, familial, educational and employment networks.
- Evidence from Solace Women's Aid highlighted concerns related to the difficulties experienced by women seeking housing assistance from the Housing Need and Homes and Communities services. There was concern about how vulnerable women had found it difficult to access the services they needed.
- Questions was raised about what role do housing associations play in homelessness prevention in the borough?
- What is the impact on service users of the council's targets for homelessness?
- In relation to rough sleeping, London and Islington was seeing a worrying trend of increasing numbers of people rough sleeping and this was reflected in Islington's statistics.

Recommendations:

- The Committee recommended that the service commission an in-house medical assessment to assess housing applications in light of the level of complaints received regarding the present arrangement.
- The Committee acknowledges the present partnership working arrangements to alleviate homelessness and rough sleeping in the borough. However, it recommends that the Service review its liaisons, communication and coordination with the voluntary sector to ensure positive and effective multi agency working.
- To address concerns identified by domestic abuse services, the Committee recommends a review alongside a consideration of whether present guidance, training, knowledge of working with survivors and procedures in use would need to be reviewed.
- The Committee recommends that the Chief Executive liaise with relevant directors to ensure that the proposed localities initiative takes into consideration lessons learned from this scrutiny and from housing first into account in its design.
- The Committee welcomes the present arrangements of alleviating homelessness however it recommends that relevant officers regularly report to the committee on current arrangements for cross borough and pan London cooperation in relation to homelessness.

- The Committee recommends that housing associations be scrutinised on what they are doing to help prevent and deal with homelessness when invited to committee to explain their performances.
- That the Housing Director responds with details of all targets set for officers dealing with homelessness, the rationale for them and what is known about the effects of them.
- The Committee recommend that Councillors continue to campaign actively to end Universal Credit and replace it with proper social security system that supports people rather than penalising them, and to consider other campaigns that tackle the root causes of homelessness.

Conclusions

The Council's overriding approach is to help people to build resilience through prevention and early intervention, how the council works to prevent homelessness and support people who are homeless is a good example of prevention and early intervention in action.

Work to ensure that the council is using good quality temporary accommodation in borough will reduce the impact of homelessness on vulnerable people and families.

Whilst there is evidence of strong partnership working across the public sector voluntary sector we want to make sure that the most is being made of the many and varied voluntary sector and grass roots organisations who are able to work collaboratively with the council to help to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping.

In carrying out the review, the Committee met with officers, members of the public and others to gain a balanced view. The Committee would like to thank witnesses that gave evidence in relation to the scrutiny. The Executive is asked to endorse the Committee's recommendations.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 2018/19

Councillors:

Councillor Michael O'Sullivan (Chair)

Councillor Sue Lukes (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Theresa Debono

Councillor Troy Gallagher

Councillor Mouna Hamitouche MBE

Councillor Gary Heather

Councillor Ben Mackmurdie

Councillor Marian Spall

Co-opted members:

Rose-Marie McDonald – PFI Managed Tenants

Dean Donaghey

Substitutes:

Councillor Jilani Chowdhury

Councillor Tricia Clarke

Councillor Vivian Cutler

Councillor Osh Gantly

Councillor Satnam Gill OBE

Councillor Sarah Hyde

Councillor Roulin Khondoker

Councillor Nurallah Turan

Acknowledgements:

The Committee would like to thank all the witnesses who gave evidence to the review.

Officer Support:

Karen Lucas- Director Housing Needs and Strategy

Ramesh Logeswaran

Ola Adeoye – Senior Democratic Services Officer

SCRUTINY REVIEW INITIATION DOCUMENT (SID)
Review: Homelessness and Rough Sleeping
Scrutiny Review Committee: Housing Scrutiny Committee
Director leading the review: Karen Lucas
Lead Officers: Ramesh Logeswaran
Overall aim: <ul style="list-style-type: none">To explore how the Council Housing Services addresses Homelessness and monitors the performance of its delivery.
Objectives of the review: <ul style="list-style-type: none">To ensure that the assessment criteria for applicants is robustThat the support and aligned services is targeted and effective
How is the review to be carried out: Officer presentation Evidence from St Mungo's, SHP and other providers Consider details of the rough sleep count Clarity on the ethnic origin and immigration status of rough sleepers Types of accommodation services. Funding support available for rough sleepers
Scope of the Review

- To consider the Council's Prevention of Homelessness Strategy.
- To consider whether the service is capitalising on opportunities to prevent homelessness
- How the approach to dealing with Homelessness could be improved
- Where partnership working could be further developed

The review will focus on:

Those that are homeless and those threatened with homelessness.

Performance indicators

Examples of gaps and failures in service provision, and how these could be prevented.

Review of case studies/legal challenges.

Types of evidence:

Evidence from officers, especially front-line staff

Performance data

Examples of casework

Street count participation by members

Walk through the referral process

Evidence from the commissioning services

Homeless people and residents

Programme	
Key output:	To be submitted to Committee on:
1. Scrutiny Initiation Document	11 September 2018
2. Draft Recommendations	20 January 2020
3. Final Report	3 March 2020

HOUSING ON SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SCRUTINY TOPICS AND WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20

3 MARCH 2020

- 1) Partners for Improvement - Presentation
- 2) Quarterly Review of Housing Performance (Q3 2019/20)
- 3) 2018/2019 Mini Scrutiny Review (Homelessness) – Final Report
- 4) Main Scrutiny Review: Capital Works - Witness Evidence

19 MARCH 2020

- 1) Mini -Scrutiny Review 2019/20: Private Rented Sector – Witness Evidence
- 2) Main Scrutiny Review 2019/20: Capital Works – Witness Evidence
- 3) Work Programme 2019/20

28 APRIL 2020

- 1) Scrutiny Review: Final Report Capital Works
- 2) Work Programme 2019/20

23 JUNE 2020

- 1) Scrutiny Review: Final Report
 - 2) Work Programme
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