

Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-

Our Mission

Islington Council's commitment is to ensure that by 2030, everyone in Islington has a safe, decent and genuinely affordable place to call home.

We are committed to eliminating rough sleeping and preventing homelessness by providing every individual with a realistic, good quality housing option. Homes and Neighbourhoods contribute to this mission through their work to end homelessness by uniting people, organisations and businesses with one shared vision set out in our Homelessness Charter:

"We believe that everyone who is homeless should have a right to: A safe, secure home along with an appropriate level of support to create a good quality of life. Safety from violence, abuse, theft and discrimination, and the full protection of the law"

Introduction

This is Islington's fifth Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy. It sets out how we work with a shared purpose to prevent and relieve homelessness and work to eliminate rough sleeping in the borough. It has been produced in consultation with our partners and colleagues and it is informed by the wider landscape of best practice and regulation.

The Strategic context

Since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act and the lifetime of our previous two strategies¹, the housing crisis has worsened. Due to the impact of systemic pressures across factors that affect the housing situation for individuals and households, residents of Islington are facing housing pressures not seen for two decades.

Councils across London are experiencing severe and escalating pressures on their resources at the same time that greatly more individuals are coming forward to use their housing needs services. In Islington we have experienced a 20% increase in homeless applications over the last 12 months in comparison to the previous 12 months. Numerous research reports published over the past few years demonstrate the unaffordability of housing across the United Kingdom through rising rents, lack of supply and changing housing policy. Housing Needs Directors from across London are reporting to the All-Party Parliamentary Group every month that the homelessness and temporary accommodation situation is deteriorating and the most recent

¹ https://www.islington.gov.uk/~/_media/sharepoint-lists/public-records/housing/businessplanning/strategies/20202021/20210203homelessnessandroughsleepingstrategy2019231.pdf

research from the Kerslake Commission² reports that rises are stemming from affordable housing shortages, a lack of statutory support services, and the cost-of-living crisis.

Despite the council's commitment to build genuinely affordable homes, affordable housing is in short supply in the borough. Across the country a quarter of private and social renters³ reported finding it either fairly or very difficult to afford their rent and around 6% of owner-occupiers with mortgages said they found it fairly or very difficult to keep up with mortgage payments. Temporary accommodation both supply and demand is also in crisis with London Councils estimating that one in 50 Londoners are currently housed in temporary accommodation.

The ongoing impact of welfare reform is another factor affecting housing affordability in the borough and across London and severe homelessness pressures have been compounded by the rapid increase in the cost of essential goods in recent months. Londoners living in private rented accommodation currently spend almost 40% of their income on rent. This added financial pressure on low-income households and drop in disposable income will make rent further unaffordable and place them at risk of homelessness.

Islington's annual streetcount carried out in November 2023 met 16 people rough sleeping in the borough on one night. Whilst this figure is comparatively lower than other central London boroughs, outreach teams continue to meet people new to the streets, which continues to make up almost half of those met rough sleeping each month. Between April 2022 – March 2023, Islington's outreach team met and supported 337 individuals who were rough sleeping away from the streets.⁴

The UK is also seeing the consequences of the conflict in Ukraine which has led to the creation of the Homes for Ukraine and the Ukraine Family schemes, designed to accommodate Ukrainian nationals fleeing their country. The minimum six month placements are now ending with many sponsors not intending to maintain the current arrangements. Home Office policy towards ending hotel accommodation after refugee status is granted has also led to increased rough sleeping for refugee and asylum seekers.

How we work

Our work across Homes and Neighbourhoods is underpinned by the council's CARE values and the working practices and principles set out in our Charters including our Homelessness Charter and Private Sector Charter. It will be implemented through the accompanying Action Plan.

Islington has signed up to the London Mayor's Charter to end rough sleeping⁵, released in December 2023. This further strengthens the Council's commitment to work in partnership to end rough sleeping and intervene early through our prevention work, to ensure we can do all we can to prevent someone spending a first night on the street.

² <https://www.commissiononroughsleeping.org/2023-report-turning-the-tide>

³ English Housing Survey 2020/21, DHLUC

⁴ [Islington 2022-23.pdf](https://www.islington.gov.uk/media/123456/Islington_2022-23.pdf)

⁵ <https://www.endroughsleepinglondon.org.uk>

Early intervention

Understanding the adverse effects caused by homelessness we encourage all housing applicants in housing need to approach our services early so we can find solutions to their housing circumstances.

We work to ensure an efficient and appropriate customer journey for the people we work with by deliver our services with a Rapid Rehousing Focus which streamlines communication between officer and customer and aims to resolve enquiries at the first point of contact

We keep people in existing accommodation wherever practical through mediation and provide a prevention service to all applicants regardless of priority need and including those threatened with homelessness. And our commissioned floating support services provide support to people at risk of homelessness due to unmet support needs.

We manage relationships with partners who have a Duty to Refer and Duty to Prevent through established meetings with the public bodies with the duty to refer including DWP, local hospitals, the probation and prison service and job centre and we now receive regular referrals from these bodies through developed processes.

Person-centred, trauma-informed, holistic

We aim to end rough sleeping in Islington by working holistically, in collaboration with our partner agencies and jointly across council departments and the subregion. We work with statutory services as well as community, faith and grassroots groups, to ensure that people have access to the support they need, as well as social activities where meaningful connections can develop. We see beyond immediate housing need by supporting individuals with their health and wellbeing, substance use, employability and personal safety.

We put the person at the heart of our approach across services. We work in a trauma-informed way to ensure that people with lived experience of homelessness, including rough sleeping receive integrated, holistic support. Our approach to rough sleeping is compassionate and supportive, with a focus on the strengths and aspirations of individuals, as well as any support needs they may need help with.

Over the past 5 years, Islington Council has successfully applied for and received significant investment from Central Government's Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) funding (Department of Levelling up, Homes and Communities). This additional funding, which runs until March 2025 has allowed the council to create a truly multi-disciplinary team that offers a holistic approach to rough sleepers. With a strong focus on outreach, the service meets the person where they are at, breaking down barriers to ensure that the right type of support is available, at the time it is needed. This support is made up of commissioned services, as well as internal council services, who work closely together to ensure co-ordinated support is offered, which is strengths based and identifies a route away from the street. Services include but are not limited to: an assertive

Achieving DAHA across our housing service

We recognise that domestic abuse devastates lives and are working to put a stop to it amongst our residents, residents and employees. The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) is the gold standard for housing providers in tackling domestic abuse and keeping our residents safe and feeling safe is a priority for the council.

We achieved accreditation in 2021 for our tenancy teams and expanded this to encompass all of our housing services in December 2023. The importance of delivering the right response, the first time, cannot be underestimated. If actioned in a safe and supportive way, this can lead to a survivor, and their children living a life free from abuse, without detriment to their health, and where they may achieve their educational goals and life aspirations. Our view is that this, in turn, will contribute to creating connected and thriving communities, free from fear and violence and resulting in a safe space in which to live:

- over 70 domestic abuse champions recruited across housing who are responsible for cascading resources, information, learning and good practice to colleagues across the council
- work with our specialist domestic abuse partner Solace Women's Aid to provide enhanced training to assist with identifying and responding safely and effectively to domestic abuse
- our women's complex needs outreach worker works with women experiencing homelessness and multiple-disadvantage, who are also affected by domestic abuse
- we are training our staff to understand the intersectional issues that affect the experiences of our residents to provide better outcomes, with a particular focus on survivors of domestic abuse.
- developed a robust High Risk Moves Policy to support staff who respond to domestic abuse survivors who may have to move as a result of abuse
- our Home Shelter scheme to allow survivors to remain in their homes.
- Work well within the Islington VAWG strategy and embed a trauma-informed approach in our work and develop perpetrator policy and procedures that are aligned with current Government guidance and VAWG policies; embed policies and procedures across to new staff across the dept and develop induction pack for new starters.
- Improve joint working with ASC and Children's, "by and for" partners and Housing Associations

outreach team, physical health outreach nurse, mental health social worker, psychologist, peer support workers and complex needs navigators, who can offer intensive support as needed.

We work collaboratively with community safety colleagues and the police to identify vulnerable residents at risk of cuckooing, who as a result are at risk of homelessness, to offer intensive support and ensure the resident can remain safely in their home,

Empowering individuals and communities

We provide support to access skills and employment opportunities by signposting to those at risk of homelessness and those who are already homeless to IMAX and make referrals to

floating support. We fund SHP to run a peer support service for those with lived experience of homelessness and use trainee roles in our housing teams.

Islington is currently working with Crisis to pilot Built for Zero, a community-led response to ending homelessness, using real-time data to target resources and improve services and remove barriers where needed. Islington, along with Brent are the first Council's to Pilot this approach in London and the UK. As part of this approach, representatives with lived experience are invited to join the senior executive board, to support the direction of travel based on their profound knowledge of homelessness.

Our Independent Housing, Intensive support (IHIS) scheme, seeks to empower individuals by offering a social housing tenancy, with intensive wrap-around support to people with a history of rough sleeping. This provides a stable home, with ongoing support, which allows individuals to 'put down roots' and make a home. This programme is built on Housing First Principles and has recently received additional external funding to expand our current provision of 60 one-bedroom properties. This expansion will offer another 20 homes for people with a history of rough sleeping, as well as 20 homes for care experienced Young People at risk of homelessness.

Improving health outcomes

We want to address health inequalities - Homeless people often experience very poor health outcomes and have highly complex health needs alongside facing barriers to accessing health services which leads to further deterioration in their health.

Our previous strategy sought to understanding of the connection between homelessness and health and wellbeing and we are building on the successes achieved through the *"Everyone In"* programme during the pandemic by continuing to provide a range of accommodation options, best suited to people's needs when met rough sleeping. We know that the health inequalities for people experiencing homelessness are increasing and we work to provide people with support that they need to recover and remain well.

We maintain good links with Islington's Public Health team to encourage more effective connections with frontline health services, looking for opportunities to improve access to preventative care, including but not limited to screening, vaccination, and GP registration. Health services work to ensure drug and alcohol treatment services are genuinely accessible for people experiencing homelessness, and support the work delivered under the Rough Sleeping Drug and Alcohol Treatment Grant.

Many people sleeping rough may be experiencing a range of complex and overlapping needs. We build trusting relationships and involving people with lived experience in our outreach. Our complex needs navigators work with verified rough sleepers and support people with complex needs who are in temporary accommodation who have been struggling to sustain their tenancies or experienced repeated cycles of homelessness. The team provide early and structured interventions to prevent evictions and minimise the risk of rough sleeping.

Complex case work in practice: highlighting the complexities of homelessness, the impact of supportive models and the ongoing need for tailored interventions

We have worked over a sustained period of time with a couple who have a history of entrenched rough sleeping across London with domestic abuse and drug misuse present. The couple's dependency issues have made separate housing placements challenging.

Support over years has included outreach from the complex needs case workers including through pregnancy, drug dependency.

The couple of have spent periods disengaged from services but are now successfully housed in a supported housing project in a shared flat but with separate rooms and tenancies. They have been engaging well with support staff, working on individual and joint improvements.

Drug and Alcohol Community of Practice

In recognising the considerable impact of drug and alcohol use on the health and wellbeing of Islington's residents, especially the association of significant health inequalities this leads to for socially excluded groups, public health and support providers came together to establish a Drug and Alcohol Community of Practice in Late December 2023. It is open to any Islington Partner to whom this area is relevant and seeks to:

- Enhance working relationships across agencies by offering an open forum for agencies to share service updates, concerns, or emerging trends
- Improve referral pathways and access to treatment including harm reduction initiatives
- Share areas of good practice and relevant learning
- Develop a local priority plan setting out key actions such as overdose prevention to drive improvements within the borough
- Highlight training needs across the partnership.

We commission a physical health outreach nurse who offers district nursing through outreach, meeting the needs of those rough sleeping, as well as providing in-reach clinics into supported accommodation and day centres. This service is vital in meeting immediate health needs, as well as providing a link for individuals with primary healthcare. Islington's Integrated Care Board also fund a health inequalities project for people experiencing homelessness, which offers flexible GP provision for people with complex health needs, which includes GP visits to supported accommodation schemes.

Accessing our services

Access to services

Across our housing services, we want to ensure that our residents have access to information, advice, and support that they need. We want our residents to be able to access the right service(s) at the right time and recognise the importance of a diverse range of access routes that reflect diverse needs differing needs.

Targeting our resources

In order to meet our legal duties as a local authority at a time of high demand, we must target our resources depending on the level of need and the ability of individuals to self-help. We provide detailed signposting information for residents in housing need on our website and we provide in person appointments for individuals who may need more support.

Making best use of our housing stock

We proactively make the best use of our existing housing through our mobility scheme which promotes opportunity for people under-occupying their homes.

We carry out audits on our stock and work to recover properties and unlawful profits subject to tenancy fraud and our housing investigations team are working with housing association partners to take on their tenancy fraud investigations in return for nomination rights.

Funding our homeless and rough sleeping services

Funding for our homeless services remain under great pressure. We continue to explore capital and revenue grant funding stream opportunities for rough sleepers to compliment and enhance our existing services.

Funding in highlight

Housing acquisition - we have secured funding to purchase 410 Ex Right to Buy properties which is £1 in every £5 the Government invested nationally with this programme. Over the past five years we have used retained RTB receipts and GLA grant to contribute to the cost of acquisition of 410 ex-RTB properties. This represents a total investment of nearly £113m to provide good quality, in-borough temporary accommodation for rough sleepers, homeless families in Islington and families relocated to the UK through the Afghanistan humanitarian programme.

Rough Sleeping Initiative - we have obtained £8.1 million to fund important homeless services. This funding is the 5th highest for any council in England.

SHAP funding allocations – in 2023 we received the largest Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP) funding for a single council in England. This funding SHAP funds homes and support services for people sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping

rough. The successful bids will provide supported housing, Housing First and housing-led accommodation for two target groups: adults experiencing multiple disadvantage who may have a history of rough sleeping and require high levels of support, and young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness or rough sleeping.

Strategic partnerships, strong leadership and accountability

Our leadership team supports the delivery of the strategy. It is committed to working with vulnerable residents who may be experiencing multi-disadvantage and struggle to access mainstream services. We chair the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Forum which consists of 80 partner organisations. The work of the NRPF team has recently been recognised by becoming an Accredited Borough of Sanctuary.

The strategy is owned by the Homes and Neighbourhoods Department. The council's Housing Scrutiny Committee oversee the delivery of our services. It is delivered in partnership with local agencies and the police as well as by colleagues across the council from departments including Community Safety, Adult Social Care, Residential Environmental Health, VAWG team and public health.

Strategic context

Local strategies and policies: Our strategy is underpinned by local strategies including Islington Together 2030 Plan⁶ that determines the council's priorities, Housing Strategy that sets out the council's priorities for housing in the borough, Tenancy Strategy and Allocation Scheme which determine the priorities and define the procedures for the allocation of social housing in Islington and governs the operation of Islington Council's Housing Register ensure that social housing is allocated fairly and to those in the greatest housing need:

- Challenging Inequality Strategy – to create a fairer, more equal Islington
- Fairer Together – a strategy for early intervention and prevention in Islington
- Carers Strategy
- Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy
- Islington Welcomes⁷

Our strategy complies with legislation and national and local policies and codes of guidance including:

- Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017

⁶ <https://www.islington.gov.uk/-/media/sharepoint-lists/public-records/communications/businessplanning/strategies/20232024/islington-together-2030-plan-accessible-version.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.islington.gov.uk/advice/islington-welcomes>

- Localism Act 2011
- Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities (MHCLG, 2018)
- 1996 Housing Act (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017)
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- North London Domestic Violence protocol and Pan London Domestic Violence Protocol
- Health and Care Act 2022

And best practice in this area of work including DAHA accreditation, NICE guidelines, Guidance relating to Damp and mould

National policies including Ending Rough Sleeping For Good and the Mayor's strategy

Housing Association Partnership Agreement

We have an agreement with the 47 housing associations who manage properties in Islington and how we work with them in partnership to address the challenges our residents face including with the cost of living crisis, how we support our young people may need a different response due to their past trauma, employment opportunities, and supporting residents who are in rent arrears or at risk of eviction and making all attempts to resolve situations. People in housing need, homeless or at risk of becoming homeless can quickly access social housing or other affordable housing options so they can retain their place in Islington and no one will need to sleep rough in the borough.

Cross-boundary cooperation

We work with neighbouring boroughs to meet housing need and identify opportunities for coordination and efficiencies wherever beneficial. We work across 6 boroughs through the North London Housing Partnership to provide targeted early homeless prevention support and we have reciprocal arrangements in place to support individuals fleeing domestic abuse and Across the subregion, the North London Rough Sleeping Multi-Disciplinary Hub accepts referrals from across 6 participating boroughs and intervenes to provide move-on solutions and NLHP Vulnerable Women's Accommodation Service works with clients over a 5 month period to assist move-on.

We have delivered the NRPF Network since 2006. The Network improves local authority implementation of statutory duties for NRPF families, children and adults and we work within the

North London HP Domestic Abuse Reciprocal Agreement to promote housing options for survivors of domestic abuse.

Our priorities

Our four priorities for this strategy are based on our current and programmed work to prevent and relieve homelessness in Islington is aligned with the council's commitment to promote fairness and equality. They are aligned with our Housing Strategy and our Allocation Scheme.

Our four priorities – with icons depicted graphically

Priority 1: Prevent and relieve homelessness through early and tailored intervention

Homelessness is not inevitable and it can be prevented. We work to provide early help for those at risk of homeless and we believe that everyone who is homeless should have a right to a safe, secure home along with an appropriate level of support to create a good quality of life.

Priority 2: Eliminate rough sleeping and help people into settled housing

We work side-by-side and holistically with our council colleagues and partners to eliminate rough sleeping; we work to the values set out in our Homelessness Charter with the aim to reach Functional Zero.

Priority 3: Improve housing options available to meet the needs of our residents

We aim to providing every individual accessing our services with a realistic, sustainable good quality housing option where people can feel safe, maintain contact with their family and friends and which support their life choices

Priority 4: Providing accommodation and resettlement services to refugees and migrants

Islington Council became an accredited Borough of Sanctuary in 2023. We work ambitiously with our partners to make Islington is a place of welcome, safety and success for all and to integrate new communities, build social cohesion and eradicate poverty.

Challenging inequality – supporting our Council-wide programme for a more Equal Islington

The promotion of diversity, equality and anti-discriminatory practices is implied across all our work to address inequality in Islington: it influences our investment decisions, action plans flowing from the strategies and produce positive action plans to address any inequality identified. .

We undertake equality audits annually for lettings of affordable housing, homeless approaches and homeless decisions Produce and publish an Annual Lettings setting annual targets for property types across Priority points and monitor Housing Allocations Scheme to

ensure that our allocations reflect the housing need. Work to establish an evidence base of approaches and failed preventions to better understand the issues, such as ethnicity and

Providing a truly inclusive and accessible service to meet the needs of survivors of domestic abuse through intersectional practice, Local authorities and housing providers have a responsibility to understand intersectionality, to recognise the discriminatory barriers presented within their own services and develop policies and practice that breaks down these barriers to create a service accessible to all survivors, particularly those from Black and minoritized communities

Deliver a customer-focused service and make sure with experience of homelessness have a voice and are involved in determining the solutions to their own issues, and homelessness in general

Promote Islington values through events, social engagement and community outreach work including proactive outreach and early stage prevention services at a range of faith and community based locations at surgeries for specific communities including minoritized groups at locations such as Children's Centres

Priority 1: Preventing and relieving homelessness through tailored early intervention

Homelessness is not inevitable and it can be prevented. We provide early help for those at risk of homeless and we believe that everyone who is homeless should have a right to a safe, secure home along with an appropriate level of support to create a good quality of life; safety from violence, abuse, theft and discrimination, and the full protection of the law.

The Challenge

Since our previous strategy and over the course of the covid pandemic we saw a consistent reduction of homelessness. However, we are presently facing an increase in homelessness presentations, an increase in people living on the streets of Islington and also an increase in people seeking to join the council's housing register. Although we are building the most new council homes in Islington for 30 years, there is far more demand than supply, and in Islington we are experiencing the lowest number of lettings in council and housing association properties with currently over 15,000 households on our housing register waiting to access social housing. Only a small proportion of our properties become vacant for letting every year. Last year we let only 1,119 properties, housing around 7% of those 15,000 households. Less than half of these properties had more than one bedroom.

Housing insecurity for private renters: The median borough rent for a 2 bedroom property is £2046 which is higher than the London median of £1500. Only 23 out of 1710 two-bed homes were affordable to rent on the current housing benefit rates in Islington⁸. The average benefit

⁸ Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 2022

allowance in Islington would need to increase by £560 a month for someone to afford the cheapest 30% of homes in the borough and although the uplift in the allowance from April 2024 will mitigate housing insecurity to some extent, the government intends to re-freeze the LHA in

Reasons for individuals approaching our service

Family and friends exclusions – the common cause of homelessness over this time has been that parents, friends or relatives are no longer willing to accommodate the individual or household in question

Domestic abuse - increased significantly since the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 which introduced automatic priority need for those who have been made homeless for this reason and to the measures that we have taken locally to support survivors.

Domestic abuse: ONS figures show that offences flagged as domestic abuse by police in the period March – June 2020 increased by 7% compared to the same period in 2019. Nationally 90% of VAWG Services saw an increase in demand for services since the Covid-19 pandemic. In Islington, reported domestic abuse offences rose by 4.2% in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20. The additional council investment in April 2020 meant that council funded VAWG services increased their capacity to support survivors by 56% in 2020-21. The council's Housing Intensive team also saw an increase in domestic abuse reported during the same period, Survivors of domestic abuse will experience overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantaged based on the combination of these identities and experiences, which presents significant barriers to accessing support.

Temporary accommodation is not temporary: the availability of temporary accommodation to relieve homelessness continues to place increasing pressures for all authorities: London has the most severe temporary accommodation pressures in the country, accounting for two-thirds of England's total numbers (59,160 households). The number of homeless London households living in Temporary is at near-record levels – figures that have not been experienced since 2005, when numbers peaked at 63,800 households. A recent survey by London Councils has found that between September 2022 and April 2023, 15 boroughs reported receiving a notice to quit, a legal document requesting the return of a property, from landlords for 3,531 properties in use as temporary accommodation.

Our work

We aim to provide early prevention upstream activity to address homelessness and provide sustainable housing solutions to meet the needs of homeless households.

Providing mediation and incentives to prevent homelessness: we take early interventions to prevent people becoming homeless through mediation and incentive payments to their landlords to enable individuals to remain in their current homes. We mediate to prevent family or friend exclusions, developing staff training and provision of a dedicated officer supporting applicants with their housing via the NGS scheme to negotiate or delay the applicant's threat of homelessness

Supporting individuals and families experiencing domestic abuse: we aim to deliver best in class support to individuals and families fleeing domestic abuse. We work in partnership with Islington's Solace's Senior Housing IDVA who is co-located with housing officers. We recognise that survivors' experiences of domestic abuse are in part defined by their race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and other intersecting needs and characteristics. Our officers will receive ongoing training to understand the intersectional needs and experiences of disadvantage and discrimination.

Home Shelter: Survivors of domestic abuse often have to leave their homes because of the risk of repeat incidents of abuse. Our Home Shelter scheme offers an alternative to homelessness helping survivors live safely in their council homes. It is a multi-agency victim centred initiative and referrals are received from different agencies and services. By adding extra security measures to make the homes of survivors more secure, our scheme has been evidenced to successfully allow domestic abuse survivors to remain in their homes instead of having to move or be placed into temporary accommodation. Families who are affected by domestic abuse may have to spend long periods in temporary accommodation until they can access more settled accommodation. The move to new settled accommodation can also be disruptive, expensive, potentially forcing another change of school and health services, as well as a move away from support networks

Supporting individuals leaving institutions: we work to provide specialist support for individuals leaving institutions in Islington.

- our housing officers are co-located with probation colleagues and our specialist triage officer works with individuals released from prison or youth detention accommodation.
- Former members of the regular armed services are prioritised in our allocation policy and we are signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant.
- We have a single point of contact in the housing service for hospital discharges.
- **Young people leaving care and address youth homelessness** – our House project for care leavers to provide peer support whilst developing their life skills and the Shared Lives programme and over the opportunity to be supported in a family environment and help them to develop skills and meaningful friendships that enable them to live life to the full. We are purchasing 20 x 1 bedroom Ex Right to Buy properties for people leaving looked after care and we work with Abianda to support young survivors of domestic abuse who are not eligible for re-housing.

Addressing hidden homelessness: we work jointly with Community Safety team and Police to support people at risk of cuckooing and hidden homelessness. We work collaboratively to offer intensive support to ensure that the resident can remain safe in their home and take enforcement action against perpetrators.

Islington participated in the annual Women's census run by London Councils in 2023 and we recognise that women's homelessness differs from men in that women tend to be more hidden. As a result Islington, along with a number of other boroughs has signed up to pilot a 'gender informed outreach approach' in order to meet the needs of vulnerable women experiencing homelessness.

Supporting LGBTQ+ individuals: with an awareness that LGBTQ+ individuals are a group of residents who are disproportionately affected by homelessness, we have achieved an enhanced Stonewall accreditation and signed up to Stonewall's HouseProud Pledge and have an ongoing programme of awareness training for staff.

Joint working: Supporting council residents into safe accommodation

Our Specialist Support Team support council residents in temporary accommodation who have fled their home due to violence, including households at risk of domestic abuse, gang-related & serious youth violence and vulnerable adults who have been victims of cuckooing. In 2022, assisted 35 households into new, safe housing. Of this over half were families (63%) requiring a 2-bedroom sized property or larger, and in light of the severe shortage of family-sized housing across the city this is a real achievement for the vulnerable families needing a safe place to live

Priority 2: Eliminating rough sleeping and help people into settled housing

We work side-by-side and holistically across the council and with our statutory and community partners to eliminate rough sleeping; We work to the values set out in our Homelessness Charter with the aim to reach Functional Zero.

The Challenge

One person sleeping rough is one person too many. Rough sleeping is the most acute form of homelessness and our prevention work focuses on avoiding this happening by providing early and person-centred interventions. The average of death for people sleeping rough or living in emergency accommodation just 46 for men and 41 for women. Our rough sleeper response will continue to embed a person centred, compassionate response, drawing on people's strengths to move them away from the streets.

We ensure all rough sleepers including the T1000 cohort have a personalised route away from the streets and are committed to ensuring everyone we have rehoused over the past 2 years does not return to the streets. This needs investment and solid longer term housing options in order to make this a reality.

Islington is committed to finding a solution to all people with restricted eligibility that have been supported under "everyone in 2020".

Our work

We work within a blended team approach comprising health practitioners to work to support people with neglected, complex health needs, navigators, outreach workers, substance misuse

services and employment support and our outreach officers and Park Guard contractors are aware of and well-connected to the substance misuse services available in Islington and are aware of the opportunity to offer joint outreach and patrol activities.

We work in close partnership with Adult Social Care, Commissioning and Health, to ensure a needs-led, holistic approach is delivered.

Over the past 5 years, Islington Council has successfully applied for and received significant investment from Central Government's Rough Sleeping Initiative Funding (Department of Levelling up, Homes and Communities). This additional funding, which runs until March 2025 has allowed the council to create a truly multi-disciplinary team that offers a holistic approach to rough sleepers. With a strong focus on outreach, the service meets the person where they are at, breaking down barriers to ensure that the right type of support is available, at the time it is needed.

This support is made up of commissioned services, as well as internal Council services, who work closely together to ensure co-ordinated support is offered, which is strengths based and identifies a route away from the street. Services include but are not limited to: an assertive outreach team, physical health outreach nurse, mental health social worker, psychologist, peer support workers and complex needs navigators, who can offer intensive support as needed.

Using Built for Zero to tackle rough sleeping in Islington

We are committed to achieving the milestone of Functional Zero to measurably solve homelessness in Islington. By working with Crisis, we are using developing models and data to inform our services and work by providing rapid rehousing to existing homeless people, or by identifying people at acute risk and preventing their homelessness. Through this initiative we track the journey of rough sleepers on a weekly basis, review outcomes and put in place wrap around support to the point of permanent housing.

Focusing not only on housing outcomes: Our approach to tackling rough sleeping is a person-centred, compassionate response, drawing on people's strengths to move them away from the streets. We focus not solely on housing outcomes but also use peer coaches to develop beyond immediate need and to support individuals with their health and wellbeing, substance use, employability and personal safety.

Our approach to people with restricted eligibility is sensitive and thorough ensuring everyone's needs are assessed and immigration advice is sourced.

Supported housing

Supported housing schemes provide accommodation for vulnerable people by providing a safe, and supportive environment, with onsite and/or visiting support which aims to help individuals to overcome or manage any vulnerabilities or support needs they have.

In Islington we work to provide support services to ensure that individuals, whatever their circumstances or past experiences, can live happier and more stable lives. We are seeing increasing levels of need and complexity as people are impacted by social circumstances including poverty and poor mental and/or physical health.

The council commissions a range of supported housing schemes, which offer bespoke support for people who require Housing Related Support. There are different Pathways, offering differing levels of support from low to high and offer specialist support to meet the needs of specific groups including, but not limited to:

- Young People aged 18-24 years old
- People with mental health Support Needs
- Ex-Offenders
- People with complex and multiple needs
- Women experiencing Homelessness
- Housing First and Independent Housing Intensive Support Scheme

These schemes ensure that bespoke support, tailored to specific needs is available and supports individuals to achieve stability, offering a stepping stone onto independent accommodation. These schemes are run by specialist providers, who have demonstrable expertise in these areas.

Proactive outreach services: we operate homeless outreach services in partnership with community groups and partners to provide proactive outreach and somewhere safe to go for rough sleepers and we work with local organisations to offer drop-in facilities shelters and supported accommodation and provide intensive support to encourage rough sleepers in Islington to engage with other services to move away from the streets permanently.

In-borough sustained independent living for vulnerable residents: our Stacey Street houses former rough sleepers and through this provision of sustainable accommodation allows individuals to recover from rough sleeping and move on with their lives.

Working across the subregion as part of the North London Housing Partnership – the Early Homelessness Prevention Service is an award winning service that provides a 64 bed sleeping hub for rough sleepers and provide specialist immigration advice to NUKN/NRPF clients.

Priority 3: Improving housing options available to meet the needs of residents

We aim to providing every individual accessing our services with a realistic, sustainable good quality housing option. We provide information about the number and types of homes, and current vacancy rates, to help customers to make an informed choice. Our new allocation scheme is due for implementation in 2024 and will contribute to a more equal Islington.

The Challenge

Although we continue to build genuinely affordable homes for local people including lifetime homes however despite continuing to build homes the council has very limited capacity to rehouse those unable to remain in their existing housing into social housing.

Our work

Building new genuinely affordable homes

Islington is continuing to build new genuinely affordable homes as part of the council's commitment to deliver 750 new council homes.

The new homes we build enhance the choice, affordability, quality and variety of housing available in neighbourhoods, and are accompanied by social and other infrastructure residents need and the existing community to thrive, including schools, health facilities and green spaces. The quality and design of new homes means we can better match the housing supply to the future housing needs and incomes of all of Islington's residents.

We work across the subregion through services commissioned through the North London Housing Partnership including Land for Council Homes programme dedicated project co-ordination team working on progressing rooftop developments across each of the six boroughs within the NLHP.

Working to drive up standards in the private rented sector - the private rental sector in Islington performs a vital role in meeting housing need in the borough. We work to improve housing conditions and management for residents living in privately rented accommodation and our Private Sector Charter sets out our expectations on how the sector should operate. Our website provides information for residents to report poor conditions and take the steps that they can take to make the landlord carry out the needed work.

We proactively tackle damp and mould in the sector and conduct quarterly Private Landlord Forums to improve our partnership work with private landlords to prevent homelessness and improve the quality of the management of the management of private rented accommodatn in

the borough. We tackle rogue landlords in the borough through joint working with children's services, residential environmental health and private sector housing partnerships.

Property licensing helps us to regulate the condition and management of private rented properties in the borough. We license properties to improve property standards and management, help address anti-social behaviour and to protect our residents from rogue landlords. We may take enforcement action either by way of instigating criminal prosecution proceedings or considering imposing fines of up to £30,000. The scheme will be extended into two further wards in April 2024.

Our approach to providing temporary accommodation – we have a programme acquiring our own in-house stock. By using available government funding, we can use these properties for general temporary accommodation as well as those with resettlement status, refugee, care experienced people and rough sleepers, households.

This has allowed the council to house families, who were often housed outside of the borough, close to their support networks, council services and schools. The programme uses borrowing and receipts from right to buy sales that we would have had to hand back to the government with interest if they were not used.

We work to resolve housing issues for residents in temporary accommodation as quickly as possible and to reduce the number of households in nightly paid temporary accommodation and work to eliminate the usage of shared B&Bs for homeless families and single people.

Making best use of council housing: our housing mobility team provide intensive support for under-occupying residents to move out of larger homes that no longer suit their needs into smaller homes by accompanying movers on viewings and covering their moving costs. People who have used our downsizing service have been very happy with their new homes and have told us that their moves are "life changing". Our fraud team work to recover homes for deserving residents and to maximise the recovery of unlawful profits.

Housing for local people: we maintain our new generation and local lettings schemes to support next generation of Islington residents gain access to a council home in their area.

Priority 4: Providing accommodation and resettlement services to refugees and migrants

Islington Council became an accredited Borough of Sanctuary in 2023. We work to make Islington a place of welcome and sanctuary and work to end destitution through the delivery of targeted refugee and migrant accommodation responses. We work to remove barriers to accessing services whilst building more resilient communities to help prevent destitution and ensure that the council focuses on workable solutions for people in need.

The Challenge

Islington has resettled the largest number of evacuees from Afghanistan of all London Boroughs, the department has now bid for government funding to increase provision of affordable accommodation for refugees. 35 Afghan Households are accommodated, 150 hosting arrangements for Ukraine Refugees are in place, the humanitarian response continues

National immigration policy can exclude people from services which is in conflict with Islington as a place that welcomes everyone and recognises and values the contribution of refugees, migrants and those seeking sanctuary.

Our work

Our No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) team provides services for households from Afghanistan and Ukraine and leads nationally on best practice for the 17,000 people living in the Home Office hotels across London. We provide continued support for Ukrainian refugees and hosts in their hosting arrangements are in place for Ukraine nationals and other refugees or migrants to ensure that basic housing standards are being met, that people being hosted are not being exploited, and that Hosts receive the support from the council they need to make such arrangements work well.

We are developing a refugee and migrant strategy building successful partnerships with VCS organisations and removing barriers for refugees and migrants accessing services through development of a refugee and migrant strategy.

We have hosted the NRPF Network since 2006 which works to address the negative impact of the 'no recourse to public funds' condition that gives rise to increased homelessness and destitution. It challenges policies that increase poverty and informs practitioners in the application of important 'safety net' duties to alleviate migrant destitution. It also continues its programme of training, including through delivery of DHSC, LGA and Home Office webinars on supporting hospital discharge and survivors of domestic abuse.

People recently granted settled status – we have resources in place to prevent refugees becoming homeless due to a sharp rise in approaches from people granted refugee status. Housing Needs' Rapid Response team is made up of dedicated officers in Solutions working to find affordable accommodation in very short timeframes. Active outreach and innovative approaches to finding properties helps avoid an increase in rough sleeping. We have written a housing guide for refugees granted refugee status and in-person surgeries are ensuring good awareness of housing options and challenges.

NRPF Connect – we have evidenced a collective £77.6 million per annum spent on social care support across 82 local authorities using the NRPF Connect database and are working with local government associations to advocate for the policy and funding changes necessary to reduce these pressures.

Delivering our strategy

Ongoing monitoring

This strategy will be delivered by through the four Priorities and the accompanying Objectives and Actions we have identified and set out in detail in our Action Plan. This will be monitored and a midway update will be published. It will be overseen by Housing Scrutiny Committee and will be adapted to meet the further challenges that are likely to arise during its lifetime.

Improving our services through resident engagement

Our residents' voices are important, and we will engage with and be accountable to them in the way we manage their homes and estates. We use a range of resident engagement activities and structures to empower our residents and make sure that their voices are heard by our services including:

- Community drop-ins
- Tenant Satisfaction survey and survey and transactional surveys
- Consultations and focus groups
- Housing Scrutiny Committee.
- Support community development actions through TRA and Community Centres within Fairer Together.
- Establish a Tenant Council to hold the service to account
- Establish a Leaseholder council to hold the service to account.

Give the council a face and create a place where everyone, whatever their background, has the opportunity to reach their potential and enjoy a good quality of life. We are continuously reviewing our services using our menu of resident engagement:

- Our improvement programme scrutinises the quality of service we provide to our customers and we seek feedback from our frontline officers and our customers in annual review.
- Our critical friend Shelter conducts mystery shopping to assess the quality of our homeless services
- our rolling STAR survey measures our customer satisfaction with overall services as we strive for improvement
- we use focus groups to ascertain the quality of housing needs services provided and satisfaction levels of residents who use our services and implement service improvements identified through resident feedback
- Carry out regular audits on domestic abuse casework to ensure that our processes are followed and record keeping is consistent

Responding to the changes affecting the sector

Legislation

We will respond to any guidance issued by government including the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 the Social Housing Regulation Act which sets expectations that the perspectives of council residents which we have extended these principles to our residents in temporary accommodation.

We anticipate the Renters Reform Bill when issued by the government which will remove the use of fixed-term assured shorthold tenancies and assured shorthold tenancies by both private sector and social landlords.

Funding

We rely on the Homelessness Prevention Grant provided by government to deliver our services. Although the current allocation for 23-25 was slightly increased from those of previous years we are providing our services in a context of overall financial pressures as a result of government policy such as rent reduction and ongoing funding cuts to council services. Additionally, reductions in DHP (28% in 2022/23) further constrains our our ability to provide and plan sustainable services is DHP funding.

We ask government to provide councils with greater long term certainty over grant funding which would enable us to achieve better value for money through more efficient localised financial planning. Our current Rough Sleeping Initiative funding runs until 2025, if no further funding is made available beyond this, current interventions funded by this grant will end, and this will have a negative impact on our ability to meet the needs of those rough sleeping.