

# Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy | 2023 - 2028



*a council that cares for people, our places, and the planet*

## Contents

Foreword from Councillor Ross Houston, Chair of the Housing and Growth Committee	
Introduction	
Our priorities	
Homelessness and rough sleeping in Barnet	
Causes of and levels of homelessness	
Rough sleeping	
Domestic abuse	
Armed forces veterans	
Levels of deprivation in Barnet	
Our track record of tackling and preventing homelessness and rough sleeping	
The challenges ahead	
Insufficient social housing to meet demand	
Increasing lack of affordability of private rents, and instability in the market	
Benefit and welfare reforms	
Meeting diverse and complex needs	
New administrative responsibilities and duties from the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017	
Priority 1: prevent homelessness	
Priority 2: ensure a sufficient supply of accommodation	
Priority 3: provide support for people who are or have been homeless	
Next steps	

## Foreword

TBC

**Councillor Ross Houston**  
**Chair of the Housing and Growth Committee**

## Introduction

This Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy sets out how over the coming five years we will prevent homelessness and support those who face or are at risk of becoming homeless.

Whilst rough sleeping (those who live or sleep on the street) is often the most visible form of homelessness, other forms of homelessness are hidden and include anyone who does not have access to suitable, stable accommodation. This can include people who are staying with friends or family (“sofa surfing”), those at risk of violence or domestic abuse, and those living in temporary accommodation provided by the council when they urgently need a home and are being helped to find long-term housing.

Becoming homeless is a traumatic event that can have long-lasting impacts on the health and wellbeing of those affected. Circumstances vary from person to person, however in general the health, wellbeing, and life chances of those who are homeless are significantly worse than those of the general population. As a council that cares for people, our places, and the planet, we aim to do all we can to support those who are in need and fight reduce the inequalities that many face. In our Corporate Plan 2023-26, we acknowledge the challenges we face to reduce the harms associated with homelessness, and we have committed to continuing to invest in preventing and reducing homelessness and taking steps to end rough sleeping by providing the right support to ensure that where it does occur, it is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Some people living in temporary accommodation have complex issues and needs and may struggle to navigate the housing and care system. They may have been sleeping rough on the streets or be ex-offenders. Many households in temporary accommodation, however, are families with children who are homeless because of family or financial reasons.

The council, in partnership with its arms-length management organisation Barnet Homes and other agencies, already does much to prevent homelessness and support those who are affected by it, and we have a strong track record of working with residents and partners in the voluntary and community sector. During 2022/23 we spent around £X million on homelessness and rough sleeping services, gave advice to nearly X people, and provided temporary accommodation for more than 2,000 households.

We recognise that the environment in which we are working has changed and there is much uncertainty at the time of writing this strategy. Whilst positive progress has been achieved in recent years, our ability to continue to provide support and prevent homelessness faces unprecedented challenge. To keep doing the best thing by our residents, we need to think and work differently. In delivering this strategy we will continue to provide essential services and support to those who are

affected by homelessness, but we will focus on identifying innovative and effective solutions that are necessary to meet diversifying needs and because the status quo is no longer sustainable.

## Our priorities

This new strategy is intended to further the council's existing approach to preventing homelessness, and to focus our efforts on identifying new and innovative ways to respond to the challenges we are likely to face over the coming five years.

In developing this strategy, we have reviewed housing needs, performance, and the resources available to the council and its partners to address homelessness to develop our priorities for action, including data and insight from engagement with residents in our Homelessness Prevention and Insight Project. We have also taken into account the Mayor's London Housing Strategy and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities. In doing so, we have identified three priority areas.



In all that we do we are also committed to providing a strong lobbying voice to help inform the Government on issues such as the need to increase funding for the development of new homes, as well as solutions to the challenges facing private landlords to help ensure a functional and accessible private sector. In all that we do we will use our voice to advocate for a national response to the housing crisis, and to tackling housing shortage and instability as well as inequalities caused by welfare reform. This includes pressing for increases in Local Housing Allowance rates and benefit cap levels. We will do this individually and as part of regional groups through responses to consultations, calls for evidence, and commissioned pieces of work.

## Homelessness and rough sleeping in Barnet

The number of households requiring support has increased in recent years, affected by the change in legislation with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis. Over the past decade, the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation in Barnet has increased significantly, largely driven by the lack of affordable housing, overcrowding, and poverty.

Our vision to supporting households that present as homeless or at risk of homelessness is to treat them with respect, care, and compassion. We endeavour to understand each household's very specific needs and aspirations, and to treat them as individuals. We aim for all our interactions to be positive, and to work with residents to create the best chances for the best possible outcomes for them. We face challenges in meeting everyone's needs due to housing supply constraints and lack of affordability, so we take steps to make sure that expectations are realistic and that residents are informed of all their options.

It is important for households to be aware that, despite our efforts to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation, placements in temporary accommodation are unfortunately often longer-term than we might hope for, and we will share this message in a caring, sensitive, and compassionate way. Our approach is priority- and needs-based, which means that many households may not qualify for social housing. We will give advice and support on the options available, including accommodation in the private rented sector, and we will signpost residents to other organisations that can help.

### Causes of and levels of homelessness

Whilst there are many causes of homelessness, the biggest cause within Barnet and across London is the shortage of affordable homes, combined with changes to the welfare system, funding challenges in health, social care, and criminal justice, and an insecure and expensive private rented sector. The 2021 Census showed that only 13.5% of Barnet's housing is rented from the council or another provider of social housing; this is the sixth smallest provision of social housing of all London boroughs, and significantly smaller than boroughs such as Hackney and Islington where respectively 40.6% and 40.3% of all residents live in social housing.

With demand for social housing outstripping supply, many households on low incomes need to rent privately with the help of benefits; however, private rents in Barnet are high and increasing, and are well above Local Housing Allowance. The resulting lack of affordability means that for many households it is increasingly difficult to secure and sustain accommodation. As a result, nearly 3 in 10 cases of homelessness in Barnet resulted from the end of a private rented sector tenancy in 2021/22.

The shortage of affordable housing also means it is difficult for the council to find suitable accommodation for homeless households. With a limited, and contracting, supply of private rented sector accommodation, pressures on supply and cost mean that households may increasingly need to be placed away from the borough in temporary accommodation. We recognise that needing to relocate often disrupts education, childcare, employment, and support networks, and we want to avoid placing households in accommodation away from Barnet. We therefore need to explore innovative ways to increase the affordable housing supply within the borough, alongside furthering our efforts to prevent households from becoming homeless.

In 2022/23 (to 24 February 2023), the average waiting time for properties for households on the Housing Needs Register who were offered a permanent social housing home was 1.8 years, excluding properties that were let to tenants who moved from a regeneration site.

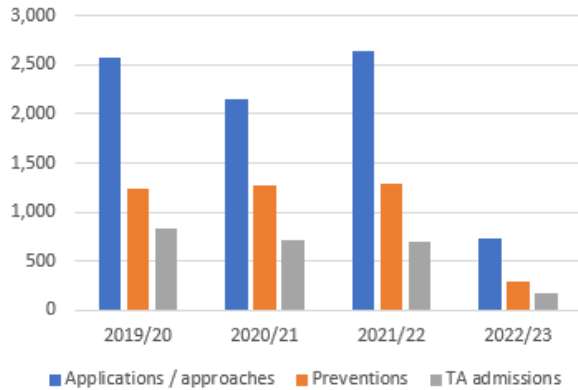
Average waiting time in 2022/23

Property size	Number of lettings	Average waiting time (days)	Average waiting time (years)
1-bedroom	204	456	1.2
2-bedroom	167	449	1.2
3-bedroom	80	1,485	4.1
4-bedroom	24	768	2.1
Total	475	643	1.8

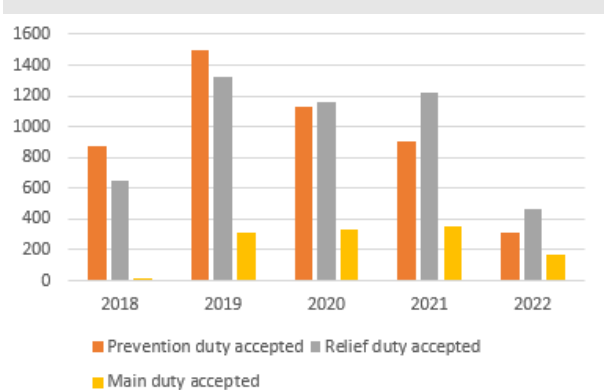
The number of applications or approaches to the council has increased significantly following the enactment of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in fewer approaches, however in subsequent years, similarly to our peers in London, we have seen a return to higher numbers. In Quarter 3 2022/23 there was a significant increase in demand, with 984 new applications opened. This was a 62% increase compared to the same period

in 2021/22 (608 applications opened). It is possible that, in addition to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on tenancy sustainment, there is a surge in demand as a result of the removal of measures during COVID-19, such as eviction cases that were previously stayed now progressing through the courts.

Number of applications, preventions, and TA admissions



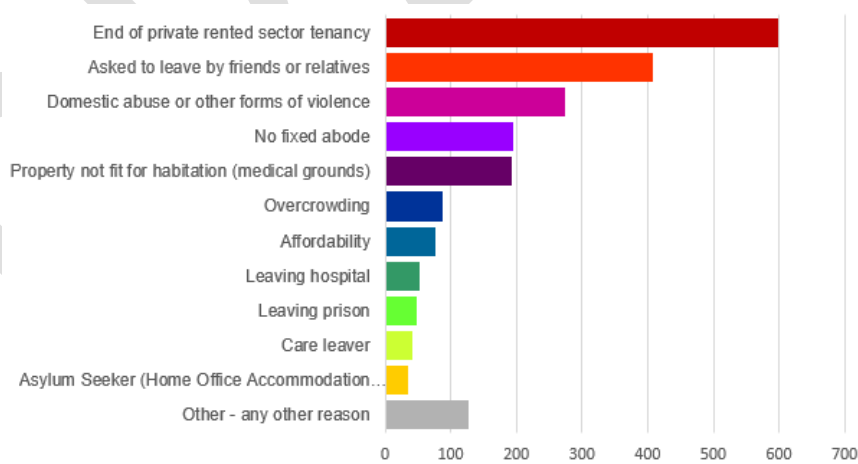
Number for which the prevention duty, relief duty, and main duty were accepted



*\*will be updated post-year end*

Across London, the main reason given for people presenting as homeless is that family or friends are no longer willing or able to provide accommodation, accounting for around a third of all homeless applicants, followed by the end of private tenancy, which accounts for around a quarter of applicants. In Barnet, evictions from the private rented sector are the most common reason for homelessness, accounting for just under 30% of all applicants, followed by being asked to leave by friends or relatives, which accounts for 19% of all applicants. The chart below shows the most frequent reasons for loss of last settled accommodation before the household became homeless.

Reason for loss of last settled accommodation 2021/22



**Rough sleeping**

The number of people rough sleeping in Barnet fell during the pandemic when additional accommodation was available through the Everyone In initiative which ran from March 2020 to March 2022. The number of approaches Barnet Homes received from rough sleepers subsequently reduced, however remains higher than before the pandemic. Despite this, there were 8 rough sleepers counted in 2022 as part of the national count, which in 2022 took place from midnight on 18 November. This was lower than the previous' years counts of 13 in 2021 and 24 in 2019 and 2018. Whilst the number of rough sleepers is likely to be higher than the estimate from the spotlight street count, it is a good indicator of trends in rough sleeping.

According to the 2021/22 CHAIN<sup>1</sup> report on rough sleeping in London, in Barnet 109 people (63%) were seen rough sleeping only once in 2021/22, compared to 182 (65%) in 2020/21. The 2021/22 figure was around the average (mean) for the Outer Boroughs. The total number of people seen rough sleeping in Barnet (173) in 2021/22 equated to approximately 4 people per 10,000 of the population; the eighth lowest of the Outer Boroughs. The total number seen rough sleeping in 2021/22 was lower than in 2020/21, but higher than in 2018/19.

65% of people seen rough sleeping in 2021/22 were new rough sleepers (compared to 79% in 2020/21), 26% were also seen rough sleeping in the previous year (2020/21) (compared to 10% in 2020/21 also seen in 2019/20), and 9% were returning to rough sleeping (the same as in 2020/21). The CHAIN data showed that 51% of people seen sleeping rough in Barnet were UK nationals, 85% were male, 27% were from an ethnic minority background, 6% had experience of serving in the armed forces, 29% had experience of prison, and 6% had experience of being in care.

123 of the 173 people (71%, lower than the overall Outer Boroughs total of 84%) seen rough sleeping in 2021/22 had a support needs assessment recorded. Of these, 18% had alcohol-only support needs, 29% had drugs-only support needs, 45% had mental health-only support needs, 24% had more than one support need, and 36% had no alcohol, drugs, or mental health support needs. Poor mental health and substance misuse can make it difficult for rough sleepers to sustain their accommodation once they are housed, and targeted support is needed to help maintain tenancies and reduce the risk of anti-social behaviour.

Barnet Homes' data on support for rough sleepers in 2021/22 shows that 95 rough sleepers were accommodated, and of these by the end of the year 47 had moved on into longer-term accommodation, 24 were still in temporary accommodation, and 22 had left temporary accommodation without a known positive move-on, including tenancy abandonments, evictions, and moves into hospital or custody.

A range of support is provided to rough sleepers within the borough, including:

- Barnet's Somewhere Safe to Stay Hub, a 17-bed rough sleeper assessment hub that provides an immediate 'off the streets' offer for rough sleepers with the aim of moving occupants on to sustainable long-term accommodation.
- Change Grow Live, a national health and social care charity which supports people with drugs, alcohol, housing, and other challenges. For 2022/23 and 2023/24 Barnet has been awarded £709,936 in funding from the Rough Sleeping Drug and Alcohol Treatment Grant, which is being used to fund posts within Change Grow Live including a Substance Misuse Outreach Worker, a Romanian Outreach Worker, and a dual diagnosis psychologist.
- Enabling Assessment Service London (EASL), which provides advice to Barnet Homes regarding rough sleeper cases and meets with the Rough Sleeper Team each month. The service will meet rough sleepers on the streets, or in other settings, to provide professional opinions and reports.
- Homeless Action in Barnet (HAB), a day centre that provides a range of services to rough sleepers in the borough including hot meals, showers and laundry facilities, access to medical services, free internet access, a clothes store, and housing advice and support.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) is a multi-agency database recording information about rough sleepers and the wider street population in London. CHAIN is commissioned and funded by the Greater London Authority and managed by Homeless Link, and represents the UK's most detailed and comprehensive source of information about rough sleeping.

- Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme, the Mayor of London's programme aimed at supporting rough sleepers into longer term accommodation with support from specialist staff to access the help they need, such as support for mental health and substance abuse problems, moving towards training and work. In 2021 Barnet Homes was awarded £5.4 million to deliver 55 homes under the programme, with 2-year assured shorthold tenancies issued, floating support in place for the duration of the tenancy, and management of the move-on process as the end of the tenancies nears.
- Together in Barnet, a charity that runs a winter night shelter for rough sleepers during October to May.

### **Domestic abuse**

We are committed to tackling violence against women and girls, including domestic abuse and other crimes which can result in homelessness. In 2021/22, domestic abuse was the third most common reason for loss of last settled accommodation before the household became homeless.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 creates a statutory definition of domestic abuse, emphasising that domestic abuse is not just physical violence, but can also be emotional, controlling or coercive, and economic. The legislation places a duty on local authorities in England to provide accommodation-based support to survivors of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation. It also provides that all eligible homeless survivors of domestic abuse automatically have 'priority need' for homelessness assistance and ensures that where a local authority, for reasons connected with domestic abuse, grants a new secure tenancy to a social tenant who had or has a secure lifetime or assured tenancy (other than an Assured Shorthold Tenancy) must have a secure lifetime tenancy.

Barnet Homes and the council offer a range of accommodation-based support services to survivors of domestic abuse to keep them and their children safe, including the provision of three women's refuges with 24 bed spaces. In 2021/2022, the women's refuges supported 78 women residents and 47 children fleeing domestic abuse. The Barnet Homes-led Domestic Abuse One Stop Shop service for female and male survivors and for those at risk of domestic abuse provided advice and support to 286 clients in 2020/21 and to 361 in 2021/2022, and the Barnet Sanctuary Scheme, which enables survivors to remain in their homes by providing extra security measures to make homes safe and secure, completed 97 sanctuary installations in 2020/21 and 73 in 2021/2022. These schemes involve partnership working between Barnet Homes, Solace Women's Aid, Victim Support, Solicitors, Police, and the London Fire Brigade amongst others to keep survivors of domestic abuse safe and also help them to retain their support networks and local connection.

The council also commissions the Solace Advocacy and Support Service to provide an Independent Domestic Abuse Advisory Service. Barnet Homes is also a signatory of the North London Domestic Violence Reciprocal Arrangement and the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal, and uses these arrangements to support households to secure, safe accommodation outside of Barnet where this is required and appropriate.

In the year from January 2022 to December 2023, there was an increase in the number of households providing domestic abuse as the reason for loss of last settled accommodation. There were 65 presentations in Quarter 4 of 2021/22 and 104 in Quarter 3 of 2022/23. This may be the start of an increasing trend that could pose particular challenges regarding the availability of refuge spaces within the borough.



### Armed forces veterans

The CHAIN data for 2021/22 showed that 8 rough sleepers (6%) were armed forces veterans; this was higher than the previous four years, although generally there is not high demand within Barnet. From 2019-2022, Barnet Homes received 158 approaches from homeless former armed forces personnel.

Barnet is signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant, which pledges to treat those who service or have served in the armed forces, and their families, with fairness and respect and is aimed at improving access to housing. Under the Housing Act 1996, through its Housing Allocations Scheme Barnet gives reasonable preference to people servicing or have formerly served in the armed forces, as a group of people with high levels of assessed housing need.

### Levels of deprivation in Barnet

The 2021 Census considered households in terms of dimensions of deprivation. Households were considered to be deprived if they met one or more of the following dimensions:

- Employment: where any member of a household, who is not a full-time student, is either unemployed or economically inactive due to long-term sickness or disability.
- Education: no person in the household has at least five or more GCSE passes (grade A\* to C or grade 4 and above) or equivalent qualifications, and no person aged 16 to 18 years is a full-time student.
- Health and disability: any person in the household has general health that is “bad” or “very bad” or is identified as disabled.
- Housing: the household’s accommodation is either overcrowded, with an occupancy rating of negative 1 or less (implying that it has one fewer room or bedroom required for the number of occupants), or is in a shared dwelling, or has no central heating.

The Census found that 51.7% of households in England and Wales were deprived in at least one dimension or measure of household deprivation, a decrease of 5.9% from 2011. Barnet was slightly below the national average with 50.4% of households deprived in at least one dimension (a decrease of 6.4% from 2011), the 22<sup>nd</sup> highest for all London boroughs. However, the Census indicates that there is a gap between the wealthiest and the poorest in the borough, with 0.4% of households deprived in all four dimensions (the 10<sup>th</sup> highest in London, and reduced from 0.7% in 2011), and 49.6% of households not deprived in any dimension (the 12<sup>th</sup> highest in London, and increased from 43.2% in 2011).

Further information about housing and homelessness can be found in the supplementary evidence base.

## Our track record of tackling and preventing homelessness and rough sleeping

- *To be populated with key outcomes following year-end 2022/23 – e.g.*
- Despite Barnet being one of the most expensive areas to live in the UK, outside of Inner London, we were able to reduce the use of temporary accommodation in Barnet from 2,936 households in November 2016 to its lowest number in a decade of 2,076 in August and September 2022. This was an incredible achievement at a time when most London boroughs saw the numbers living in temporary accommodation increase.

### The challenges ahead

We know there is no quick fix to the homelessness and temporary accommodation crisis. We want everyone in Barnet to have access to a stable, safe, and decent home, and we are committed to using our resources innovatively to prevent and reduce homelessness.

### Insufficient social housing to meet demand

There is not currently enough suitable housing in Barnet for everyone to have a safe, secure, and affordable home. There are over 3,000 households on the housing needs register waiting for permanent homes, and of this over 1,800 households are homeless and living in suitable long-term temporary accommodation. The shortage of affordable housing creates significant challenges to reducing the number of households that are homeless.

Delivery of affordable homes for rent in Barnet from 2018 to February 2023

Provider Type	Number of Homes	Rent Level
Barnet Council (Barnet Homes)	53	Affordable Rent
Opendoor Homes	295	Affordable Rent
Opendoor Homes	15	London Affordable Rent
Other Housing Associations	404	Affordable Rent
Other Housing Associations	146	Social Rent
Other Housing Associations	57	London Affordable Rent
<b>Total</b>	<b>970</b>	

Homes to be delivered in Barnet on regeneration sites

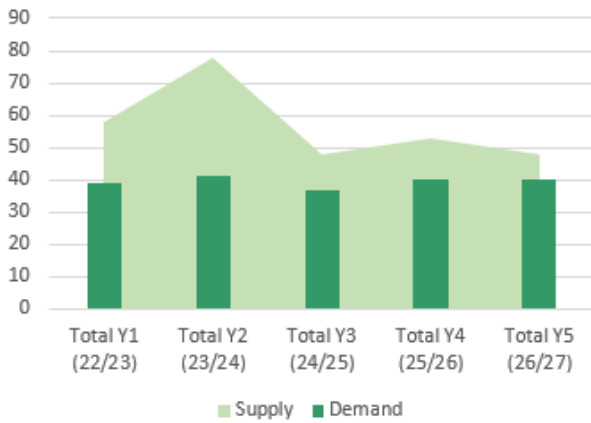
Regeneration sites	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032
Dollis Valley	42			94							
Granville Road	28	18									
West Hendon		78	71	34	96	19					
Grahame Park			209		190	66	72	78	190	229	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>11</b>

Whilst Barnet's housing trajectory shows that the borough will exceed the targets for housing completions in the London Plan, demand continues to outweigh the supply of affordable housing in the borough.

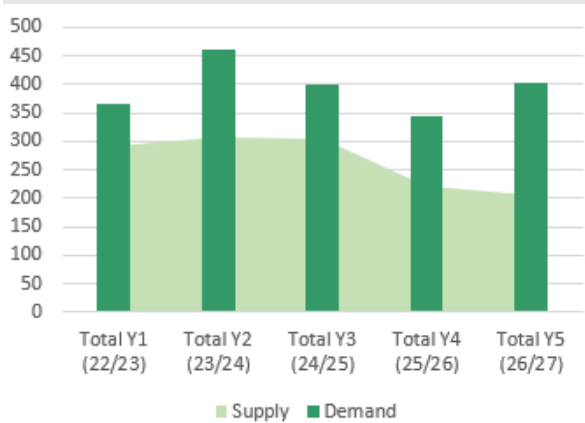
In Barnet Homes' supply vs demand modelling for five years from 2022/23, which includes only demand from households in Bands 1 and 2, direct offers, and regeneration and ad-hoc decanting of properties, we expect a shortage in 1-, 3-, and 4-bedroom properties. The shortfall would increase if the modelling included households in Bands 3 and 4.

Housing supply and demand by property size

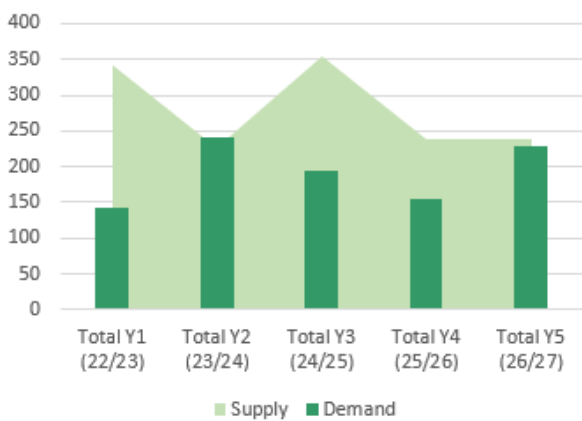
Studio properties:



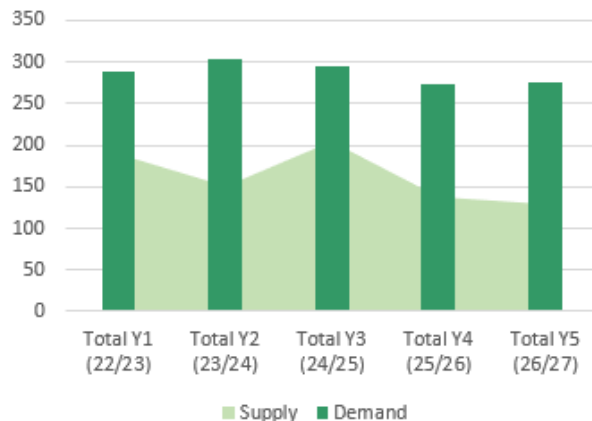
1-bedroom properties:



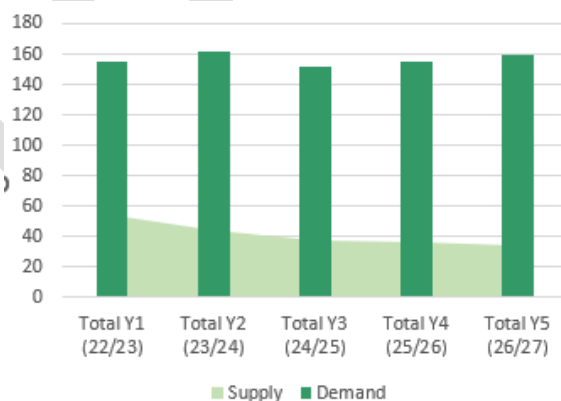
2-bedroom properties:



3-bedroom properties:



4-bedroom properties:



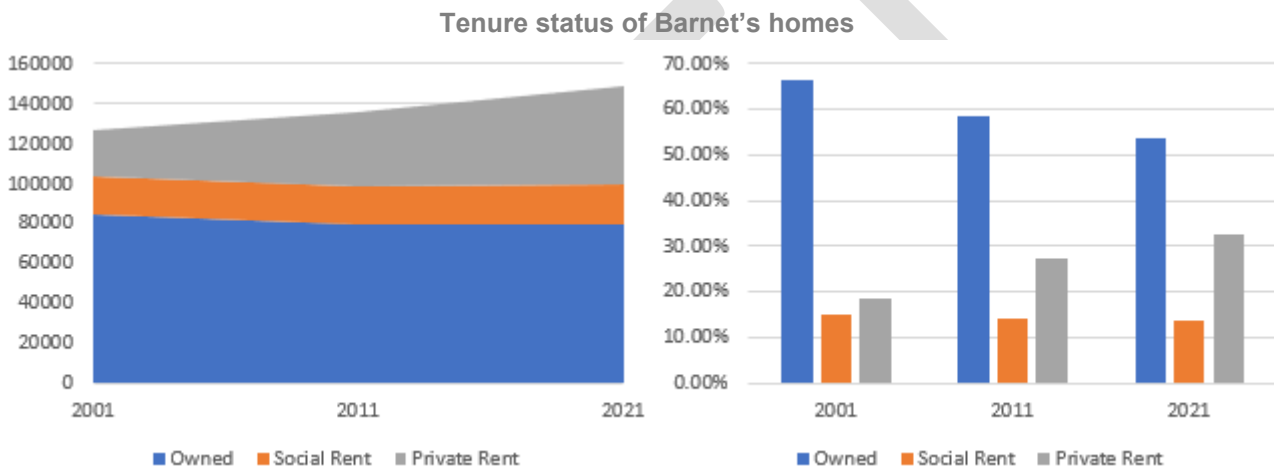
The loss of existing social housing also impacts upon the available supply of affordable housing, with fewer council homes replaced than sold each year. The number of council homes sold under the Government's Right to Buy increased each year from 2017 to 2019. Although the number

reduced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, 69 council homes were sold in 2022, a significant increase compared to previous years.

We face a significant challenge as the number of households in temporary accommodation increases if the number of households that are homeless isn't matched by the availability of suitable, affordable homes. Whilst the lockdowns and emergency measures of the COVID-19 pandemic led to more homeless households being accommodated, we are starting to see an upward trend in the number of homeless cases being opened and are likely to face considerable challenges to bring the number of households in temporary accommodation down further still.

**Increasing lack of affordability of private rents, and instability in the market**

The private rented sector is home to a high proportion of Barnet's residents, and affordability constraints mean that for many it is a way of life. The number of households relying on the private rented sector has more than doubled in the last 20 years, and now accounts for a third of the homes in the borough.



Rents have increased over the past two decades, and the median monthly rent in Barnet in 2019 (£1,365) was slightly higher than that for Outer London (£1,300), with the average monthly rent more markedly higher (£1,548 compared to £1,394). Average property prices are also high at approximately 15 times the average income of £39,700, rising by 13.6% between January 2019 and October 2022.

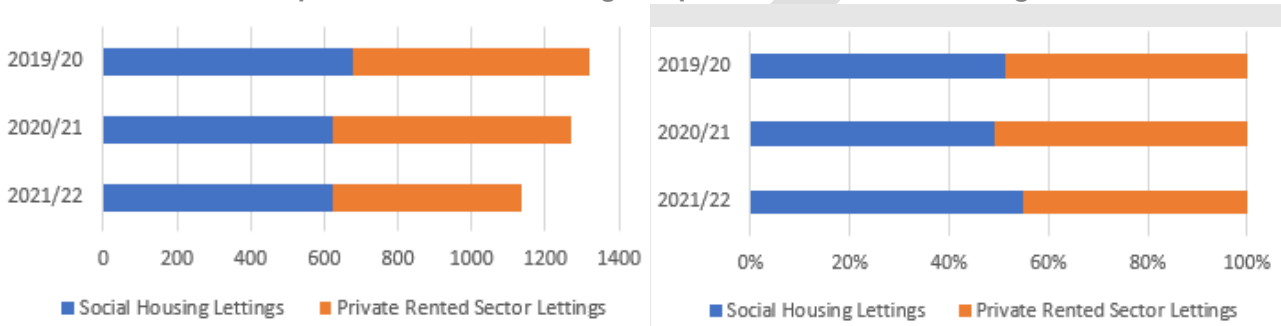
Eviction levels reduced significantly during the pandemic; however, the lifting of the eviction ban in June 2021 coupled with financial challenges such as rent increases in the face of rising mortgage rates and the cost-of-living crisis creating even greater affordability issues, we expect to see the number of households presenting as homeless increase and potentially rapidly accelerate. We may see the proposed Renters Reform Bill introduced to Parliament in 2023, which is expected to ban Section 21 'no-fault' evictions alongside abolishing arbitrary rent review clauses and rights to challenge unjustified rent rises. It is hoped that these will give greater security for families who are able to afford their rent, however we must wait to see whether the legislation will impact on homeless applications.

The Localism Act 2011 allowed councils to discharge their housing duty to the private sector, and Barnet has benefited from this increased flexibility. However, the cost of private sector leases is increasing due to the competition for properties and overall rise in market rents, which in Barnet are now slightly higher than pre-pandemic levels. Although we offer incentives to landlords to help

secure affordable accommodation for homeless households, it is proving more difficult and more expensive to do so.

One of the reasons for Barnet’s success in bringing down the numbers in temporary accommodation to a 10-year low in 2022 was strong access to the private rented sector (PRS), with nearly 50% of lettings being made across the past three years; however, Barnet is experiencing a continuing contraction of the PRS, and the number of lettings made each year is reducing. From a peak of 82 PRS placements in November 2020, the number each month has been below 50 since November 2021, and was a low of 20 in December 2022. The general contraction in the private rented sector is impacting the supply of temporary accommodation, and we expect to see more landlords looking to sell or not renew leases due to the financial challenges that many face.

Proportion of social housing and private rented sector lettings



To maintain its present level of prevention and relief, Barnet will need to continue to access a significant amount of private rented sector accommodation and work with private landlords to support households at risk of homelessness into sustainable tenancies, and it is likely to become increasingly challenging to source over the next 5 years due to affordability and supply. Demand for affordable housing and temporary accommodation is rising and along with the supply of social housing contracting the provision of private rented sector accommodation has diminished.

There is a reduction in properties coming onto the market at LHA rates as landlords are able to achieve greater rents elsewhere, and we are also seeing an increasing number of benefit-capped tenants who cannot afford PRS rents. There is additionally rising competition for PRS temporary accommodation, with other boroughs often offering higher incentives to PRS landlords in addition to other benefits such as rent in advance. With these challenges, Barnet is likely to increasingly rely upon emergency accommodation. There is a real risk that these imbalances will worsen and lead to a major crisis.

**Benefit and welfare reforms**

There has been a reduction in the real value of benefits, and few private rented temporary accommodation or move-on properties are now affordable to households on benefits. Households also face challenges due to long waits for Universal Credit payments, and the disproportionate impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the poorest households. The freezing of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates since April 2020 means that at an average rent of £1,505 per month, which is higher than most other boroughs in Outer London, most rents in Barnet are above the LHA rates.

High housing costs that far exceed the Local Housing Allowance and a lack of suitable accommodation, including a contraction of the private rented sector, mean that we increasingly have to house families outside of Barnet, and in the current environment we recognise that this may become increasingly likely. We know that placing households in temporary accommodation away

from the borough can lead to challenges including having to resettle away from work, schools, and support networks, and we are committed to supporting households to minimise the disruption. The shortage of temporary accommodation in Barnet, similarly to other London boroughs, is also affecting the number of households placed in emergency accommodation, and whilst we will continue to work to avoid families being placed in B&B accommodation for more than six weeks, we recognise that this is also becoming increasingly challenging in the current housing market.

Since 2018/19 we have seen an increase in the proportion of homeless applicants aged 16-39, with a particular increase in those aged 16-29. Barnet, like other local authorities, facing a significant challenge to finding affordable shared housing for homeless households under 35. The Shared Accommodation (benefit) Rate is lower than the LHA rate, which leaves tenants with large shortfalls to make up that make it very challenging to find shared accommodation in the area.

Housing applicants face further affordability challenges due to welfare reform including the benefit cap, which makes it harder for those affected to pay their rent and meet their living costs. As of August 2022, 2,392 residents in Barnet were in receipt of Universal Credit and were benefit-capped, and 206 residents were in receipt of Housing Benefit and were benefit-capped. In 2021/22, 4.7% of housing applications (99 in number) in Barnet were from residents who were benefit-capped.

### **Meeting diverse and complex needs**

We know that some groups are disproportionately affected by homelessness and the housing crisis, and the shortage of suitable affordable housing most significantly affects those in need of larger, family-sized homes and those who need an accessible home. Whilst the number of households on the housing needs register decreased slightly from April 2022 to December 2022, there was an increase in those in Band 1 (the highest priority band) and with direct offers and Band 2, and a reduction in those in Band 4, including those in Band 4 who are living in suitable long-term temporary accommodation.

In Barnet we also see that ethnic minority households are disproportionately affected by homelessness, particularly Black and Black British households which represented 23.3% of all cases in 2021/22 compared to Barnet's Black or Black British population of 7.9% in the 2021 Census, and Mixed or Multiple Ethnic households which represented 9.2% of all cases compared to a population of 5.4%. Key reasons for this include the distribution of debt as seen amongst those approaching Barnet Homes, and the role of unemployment, low income, and lack of resource to public funds. We also know that disabled people are 2.4 times more likely to become homeless in Barnet, with mental ill health as the largest disability presenting to Barnet Homes. Reasons for this include established links between mental health, traumatic experiences, and rough sleeping, as well as mental ill health being both a cause of homelessness and the result of homelessness.

There can be several barriers to accessing services to prevent homelessness as a result of the diverse and complex needs of those most affected. For individuals who are disabled, those with mental ill health, and those who are financially vulnerable, digital barriers are critical and can limit individual's ability to complete applications and access support. For those from ethnic minority backgrounds there can be language barriers, and these households are more likely to have no recourse to public funds which makes it difficult to access support.

Supporting rough sleepers off the streets is challenging. Rough sleepers are frequently highly mobile and have a range of different and often complex needs. Mental health problems are often a barrier to rough sleepers leaving the streets, and often lead to them returning to rough sleeping.

Adopting psychologically- and trauma-informed approaches and partnership working are essential to achieving success in supporting rough sleepers off the streets.

**New administrative responsibilities and duties from the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017**

The statutory duties for councils to house were extended in 2017 in the Homelessness Reduction Act, which prioritised a preventative approach to homelessness. Changes in legislation since the 1970s have helped local authorities to tackle homelessness and provide temporary accommodation for those who need it most, however in the last five years in Barnet we have seen levels of homelessness increase and growing pressure on the systems in place to provide support and accommodation.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 places a duty on local authorities to provide anyone at risk of being homeless within a 56-day period with advice and support. Prior to the implementation of the Act in April 2018, Barnet did not routinely capture information on the numbers approaching the council for assistance with the prevention of homelessness. In 2018/19, Barnet Council received 2,608 requests for assistance. The largest increase, due to the changes introduced through the Act, was in single person households which made up 49% of all those applying for assistance.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 placed duties on local housing authorities to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness in their areas, and to provide homelessness services to all those who are eligible. The Act also introduced a duty on specified public authorities to refer service users who they think may be homeless or threatened with homelessness to the housing options team. This is intended to ensure services are working together effectively to prevent homelessness by making sure people's housing needs are considered when they come into contact with public authorities.

From April 2018 to February 2023, Barnet Homes' Housing Options service received 1,422 referrals under the duty to refer or from partner organisations that do not have the duty; however, whilst we are seeing high numbers of referrals, the quality of these referrals has not been consistent and there is further work to do to support partner agencies to provide more detailed information to allow a swifter response.

## Priority 1: Prevent homelessness.

We will focus on identifying those who are most at risk, tackling the root causes of homelessness, working in partnership to ensure early intervention and 'upstreaming' this where possible, preventing recurring homelessness, and improving awareness, advice, and information.

### Our aims are to:

- Work in partnership to prevent households from becoming homeless;
- Encourage interventions from public sector partners and community and voluntary sector organisations that have early contact with households at risk of homelessness and are able to advise them to approach the council;
- Make advice and information available for residents to access services that may help prevent homelessness;
- Prevent recurring homelessness;
- Continue to improve our use of data to understand how homelessness is affecting particular groups, including those with mental ill health, those with disabilities, those affected by domestic abuse, those leaving hospital, care leavers, veterans, ex-offenders, and other groups that may be disproportionately affected.

### Working in partnership to prevent homelessness

To achieve our objectives in preventing homelessness, we need to work successfully in partnership. We will continue to strengthen our practical arrangements to ensure a continued commitment to joint working to prevent homelessness and improve outcomes for those at risk of or affected by it.

Barnet is a member of the North London Housing Partnership, a strategic umbrella organisation that brings together housing and homelessness managers working within six North London local authorities: Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey, Islington, and Westminster. Through this partnership we look at how to make best use of our collective housing stock and have a strong track record of successfully applying for funding to deliver frontline services where gaps have been identified. The partnership has provided a strong voice for North London in representing members' views on consultations and calls for evidence, as well as commissioning research into the cumulative impacts of government policy and the financial implications of additional homelessness prevention duties.

At a sub-regional level, the partnership has been effective in working with Barnet and the other boroughs to secure funding for a range of housing and homelessness initiatives, including:

- New to the Streets, a rapid response project for new rough sleepers in North London to which Barnet referred six clients between October 2020 and October 2021.
- Supporting access to the charity RAMFEL (Refugee and Migrant Forum of Essex and London) to provide immigration and legal advice for vulnerable migrants who are rough sleeping, which assisted 13 cases from Barnet between April 2022 and December 2022.
- Establishing the North London Multi-Disciplinary Rough Sleeping Hub, the first joint sub-regional rough sleeping service in the country. It works with all client journeys away from rough sleeping, and as of the beginning of February 2023 8 clients from Barnet had been accepted into the service.



- Providing high-quality training to Barnet's trainee Housing Needs Officers and Housing Needs Officers to enable them to deliver effective frontline homelessness services.
- Implementing a Nightly Paid Accommodation project, which at a pan-London level has achieved an 11% reduction in placement costs and £1.7m in savings.

The Barnet Group's BOOST service provides homelessness prevention support in the partnership work it does with Citizen's Advice, which funded an Outreach Adviser within the service, and close working with the council's Revenue and Benefits service and Capita. The service also provides support on food security, a digital inclusion network, and participates in the Prevention and Wellbeing forum in partnership with Adult Services, the DWP, and voluntary and community sector partners. BOOST's work with the DWP Jobcentre Borough Relationships Manager has also helped to connect claimants at risk to housing advice, and to provide information and training about housing to jobcentre staff in Barnet. We will continue to focus on partnership working through the BOOST service to provide additional homelessness prevention support across the borough.

The Housing Options service will work with our public sector partners to support them to make homelessness referrals meaningful, including delivering briefing sessions on the Duty to Refer, with the aim of delivering greater responsiveness to those who are in need.

Through the Rough Sleeping Operational Group, Barnet Homes will continue to meet on a weekly basis with our partners Homeless Action in Barnet and Together in Barnet to take a case-based approach to reviewing what is currently happening on the streets, reviewing any vacancies within shelters, and understanding any blockages or challenges. This approach has been in place since 2020, originating as a measure during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we have benefitted from the improved communication it enables.

Whilst the end of a social housing tenancy is not a frequent reason for becoming homeless (0.1% of all homeless presentations in 2021/22, down from 1.8% in 2018/19), we will work in partnership with registered providers within the borough to build improved pathways and promote early intervention.

### **Ensuring information on housing options is easily accessible**

Information is key to prevention, and we want to ensure everyone has access to information before they are at the point of crisis to help them make informed decisions about the choices available to them. We know that our partners in the public sector as well as in the voluntary and community sector have early contact with households at risk of homelessness, and we need to ensure they are equipped with the right knowledge and information about housing options and homelessness and to encourage those at risk to approach the council for support. We will work closely with partners, including exploring options for delivering briefings, advice, training, and face-to-face engagement to help them understand the basics on homelessness and rough sleeping, the pressures regarding supply and demand, and how they can support us to meet our aims.

To build our understanding about whether at-risk households are aware of the services the council could provide to prevent homelessness, we will undertake a survey of those approaching as homeless to understand their experience and how well-informed they are, and will use this information to make targeted improvements where possible.

In 2021, Barnet undertook a disproportionality study which led to the formation of a Tackling the Gaps: Fighting Inequalities group to address inequalities in the borough. Alongside this, a Homelessness Prevention and Insight Project was carried out to better understand disproportionate

representation within those approaching as homeless. The project examined the prevention of homelessness across services in Barnet and was intended to increase understanding about who is most affected by homelessness. In addition to undertaking a desktop review of 22 services across the council, the project also engaged with customers and reviewed their experience, including through customer journey mapping workshops, the collection and analysis of case studies and complaints, and completing interviews to understand customers' experience of their journey to Barnet Homes and potential improvements to services.

The project highlighted high representation of those from a Black or Black British background, and high representation of those who are disabled, with mental ill health being the most common disability in those presenting to Barnet Homes. Reasons for this disproportionate representation include established links between mental health, traumatic experiences, and rough sleeping, as well as mental ill health being both a cause and result of homelessness. The Homelessness Prevention and Insight Project has identified particular communication needs for those groups disproportionately affected by homelessness, including digital and language barriers. We will use the information from this project to make improvements to advice and communication, including working with partners wherever possible to improve the support available with form-filling.

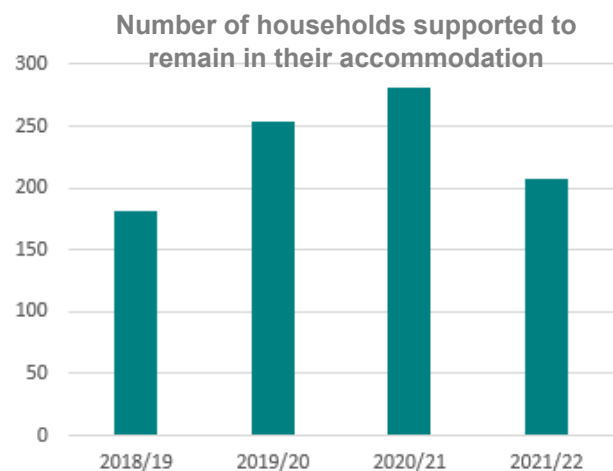
We will improve the housing advice we provide online, and keep our communications under review to ensure they are accessible and inclusive. We will continue to work collaboratively across all departments and Barnet Homes as part of a wider Resident Experience programme to improve access to services and support at the 'front door', particularly for those presenting with multiple needs as a result of their circumstances. We expect many residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to be positively impacted by our work to identify and refer those who can benefit from our digital inclusion skills programme and laptop donation scheme, which will help residents to gain essential skills and tools required to get online, enabling those who wish to access services online to do so.

We will use a 'no wrong door' approach to housing advice in collaboration with our public sector and voluntary and community sector partners, and we will develop a shared approach to signposting, referrals, and homelessness triage. As part of this, we will review the impact and outcomes of our Domestic Abuse One Stop Shop, as well as good practice across the sector, to inform a review of a potential model to co-locate statutory and VCS services to prevent homelessness.

**Supporting residents facing eviction to remain in their homes**

Barnet has a strong track record of preventing homelessness by supporting people to remain in their current accommodation, with 207 in 2021/22 and 281 in 2020/21.

We will continue to provide financial interventions where necessary to support people to remain in their homes. In 2021/22 870 awards of Discretionary Housing Payment were made, with a total value of £2,076,712. 30% of these payments were made to council or temporary accommodation tenants. The Crisis Fund also spent £300,111 in 2021/22 to support households to move to new, suitable accommodation.



This successful prevention work is likely to become more challenging over the coming years due to the present environment, and we will explore innovative ways to prevent homelessness in different ways, keep people in their homes, and manage homelessness demand.

To ensure a comprehensive approach to improving conditions in the private rented sector and try to reduce the number of homelessness applications to the council due to poor housing conditions, including damp and mould, in 2023 we will recruit an additional Housing Enforcement Officer to the Private Sector Housing Team. This new role should enable the tenants applying for rehousing to be prioritised for an inspection, as well as more rapid engagement with landlords around improvement, so that the tenancy can be maintained where possible. This should help improve the living conditions of tenants in the private rented sector, and in cases where tenancy sustainment cannot be achieved it will enable Barnet Homes' Housing Options service to progress homeless applications more quickly where the grounds for approach are suitability due to damp and mould.

### **Continuing to improve our use of data to target interventions at the groups at highest risk of homelessness**

We will make further use of our data and insight from customers, including that gathered in our Homelessness Prevention and Insight Project, and information from our partners, including the specific triggers, risk factors, and causes of homelessness at different points in people's lives, to identify groups likely to be at risk of homelessness so that we can develop targeted action and improve prevention. This includes recording and analysing data on diverse needs such as homelessness among LGBT+ residents in Barnet.

By improving our collection of and analysis of data, we will be better able to work with groups at risk of homelessness to give them access to tailored support early, including those from ethnic minority backgrounds, survivors of domestic abuse, those with mental ill health, those leaving hospital, and those leaving prison.

We will continue to work in partnership across a range of services to continue the work of the Homelessness Prevention and Insight Project through the Insight and Intelligence Hub's Homelessness Analysis Project. This will ensure an insight-led approach to prevention through early identification and quantitative investigation into at-risk groups, including exploring how the population requesting support with housing has changed over the past 18 months and the reasons for this. Our aim is to be able to more proactively identify potentially at-risk and vulnerable households, using the information held across the council, before they approach as homeless or at risk of homelessness, so we can upstream our prevention work wherever possible.

Since 2019, there have been 5,243 repeat homelessness applications (38% of all applications received), and 954 repeat admissions into temporary accommodation (32.1% of all admissions). We will use the information we hold on these cases to understand if there are steps that could have been taken to prevent their return to homelessness and/or temporary accommodation, to identify opportunities to deliver earlier intervention.

## Priority 2: Ensure a sufficient supply of accommodation.

We will focus on accessing social housing and the private rented sector, making effective use of the council's housing assets, continuing to try to reduce the use of temporary accommodation, bringing empty properties back into use, and looking to address specialist needs including supported housing, domestic abuse, and accessible properties.

### Our aims are to:

- Find ways to increase the supply of accommodation to meet the needs of people who are or may become homeless, including through:
  - Delivering new council housing and enabling the delivery of other social housing across the borough
  - Working to provide a range of suitable accommodation for different needs, including private rented sector, shared accommodation, supported housing, and domestic abuse refuges.
  - Tackling over- and under-occupation and empty homes, and bringing empty properties back into use
  - Supporting households with accessibility needs to continue to live an independent life at home through the use of grant funding.

### Delivering more social housing in Barnet

We will take forward our plans to boost the supply of social housing across the borough through our Housing Strategy and the provisions of Barnet's Local Plan, working in partnership wherever possible to meet the needs of residents. We aim to increase the supply of social housing not only by delivering new council housing, with a target of delivering 1,000 new genuinely affordable council homes, and enabling the delivery of other new social housing across the borough, but also by tackling over- and under-occupation through our Fresh Start initiative as well as bringing empty homes within the borough back into use. For more information about how we will deliver the right homes in the right places, please see our Housing Strategy 2023-28.

### Ensuring a range of accommodation is provided to meet housing needs

To ensure there is an adequate supply of suitable accommodation within the borough, we are currently heavily reliant upon the private rented sector. However, already-high market rents continue to rise, and there is a risk that private landlords faced with requirements to bring properties up to sustainability targets as well as a potential new Decent Homes Standard may find that they are unable to do so. We are already seeing an impact on the availability of private rented sector properties. Our reliance on the private rented sector is not sustainable in the current market, and so we need to think differently about how we ensure the right supply of accommodation. We must remain open to innovative solutions, including exploring opportunities for the council to acquire additional accommodation. We will also continue to, wherever possible, offer opportunities to split large households with a high bedroom need into two smaller households where they are willing to do this.

Whilst we will explore other options to maintain a supply of affordable accommodation, we will work to ensure a continued supply of suitable private rented sector properties. Barnet Homes' Housing

Options and Let2Barnet teams will work closely to understand the impact of any changes to the landlord incentive scheme and keep this offer under review in light of changing circumstances and challenges in the housing market.

As part of our efforts to increase the availability of suitable temporary accommodation against the challenge of a contracting private rented sector, we will explore the viability of delivering innovative forms of housing, for example modular or pre-fab homes, on vacant sites that have been earmarked for development in the borough that would otherwise remain underused in the short to medium term.

There is presently higher demand for wheelchair-accessible homes than are available. Our Housing Strategy 2023-28 includes our plans to increase the supply and to encourage developers within the borough to help us ensure presently unmet need within the borough is addressed.

### **Ensuring adequate provision of accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse**

Barnet provides a range of support for survivors of domestic abuse; however, based on the 1975 Violence in Marriage Select Committee's recommended ratio of 1 refuge space per 10,000 people, Barnet requires a total of 39 refuge spaces and currently has 24 available. Our refuge provision is very reliant on funding, and so it is hard to future-proof. We will apply for any funding that becomes available in order to secure additional provision of refuge spaces within the borough.

### **Ensuring an adequate supply of accommodation for care leavers**

Barnet remains an expensive place to live, and for young people leaving care private rent levels are typically unaffordable. Barnet Homes will work closely with Children's and Family Services to explore innovative solutions to the challenges in securing suitable, affordable accommodation for this group, including reviewing options for delivering shared accommodation.

### **Delivering supported housing to meet needs in Barnet**

Through our Adult Social Care services, we will establish a steering group to engage with residents to identify any gaps in housing provision and ensure identified areas are relevant to residents. Barnet Homes will also work closely with Adult Social Care to ensure specialised housing needs are understood and delivered within the programme of increasing the supply of affordable accommodation. We will look to set up a multi-service working group aimed at reviewing existing supply and housing stock and levels of need, to explore in partnership what we need more of and how we can increase the supply of supported housing for older and disabled residents.

### **Seeking funding to meet diverse needs within the borough**

We will consider opportunities to bid for funding from central government or the Greater London Authority to deliver more housing within the borough, including the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme to deliver homes and support services for people who are sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough, and Housing working with Adult Services to bid for funding to deliver supported accommodation wherever possible and where a need is identified.

We will also explore any opportunity to seek additional funding from the Greater London Authority to enable increased delivery of accommodation for care leavers, particularly where it may be possible to offer rents at social or London Affordable Rent levels.

### Priority 3: Provide support for people who are or have been homeless.

We will focus on working in partnership to provide support, including for single people at particular risk, rough sleepers, families, survivors of domestic abuse, and households in temporary accommodation. This includes housing-related support and personal support including with domestic abuse, mental health problems, drug and alcohol addiction, poverty, debt, and unemployment.

#### Our aims are to:

- Work in partnership to provide support to people who are, or may be at risk of becoming homeless and those who have been homeless and need support to prevent them becoming homeless.
- Provide appropriate housing-related support and personal support to prevent or reduce homelessness, including for rough sleepers and those who are at particular risk such as care leavers, ex-offenders, veterans, survivors of domestic abuse, people with mental ill health, and people leaving hospital.

#### Identifying support needs and developing personalised housing plans

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 introduced a duty for housing authorities to assess an applicant's case and develop a personalised housing plan that is tailored to include specific, personalised housing advice and support. Barnet Homes develops these based on assessments of applicant's needs, and we will keep these plans under review to enhance them wherever possible, including exploring the potential to introduce additional information to signpost applicants to support services and information.

#### Working in partnership to provide support

Barnet has achieved great success through close working of the Housing Options service with the BOOST service, The Barnet Group's employment, benefit advice, skills, and wellbeing project. We will continue to make referrals to help those who are, or may be at risk of becoming, homeless with income maximisation support, employment advice, and money and debt advice.

Single homelessness applicants have often experienced most trauma, and often fail when left on their own. Currently there is insufficient supply of supported accommodation in Barnet, so we will explore the potential to deliver a revised approach for this group. Barnet Homes and Adult Social Care will work together to explore opportunities to bid for funding to procure additional supported accommodation for single homeless applicants who cannot live independently. If this accommodation is obtained, Barnet Homes will evaluate the viability of creating a move-on protocol with Adult Social Care and Adult Mental Health, and will explore options to address the lack of move-on options for this vulnerable group of people.

Many at-risk households experience challenges in maintaining their tenancy once they are settled in accommodation, and there is a high risk of tenancy failure. We will work in partnership to develop pre-tenancy training that is tailored for people who have never rented before or are at most risk of repeated homelessness.

Some households will not be eligible for housing assistance under the Homelessness Reduction Act due to their immigration status. Where this is the case, advice will be given on their housing options, and if there are vulnerable members in the household such as dependent children or adults with significant mental or physical health needs, referrals will be made to Children's and Family Services and Adult Social Care. Children's and Family Services will assess whether any duty is owed to the

household under section 17 of the Children Act 2004 and Adult Social Care taking into account sections 22-23 of the Care Act 2014.

With funding from World Jewish Relief, the BOOST service employed a Ukrainian Employment Support Worker in 2022. This funding is expected to be renewed for a further year, and an additional post will be created due to the demand in Barnet and the success of the approach to date. This service will continue to make contact with Ukrainian refugees in the borough to make assessments, identify English as a Second Language needs, sign up individuals for support, convert foreign qualifications into UK equivalents, and broker jobs and support individuals into work. In February 2023, there were 40 Ukrainian refugees taking part in the programme, and of these 13 had qualifications equivalised by the UK National Information Centre, 13 had been supported into work, 3 had started their own business, and 4 were participating in volunteering work.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Barnet Homes led the Domestic Abuse One Stop Shop, a successful drop-in advice service for survivors of domestic abuse, female genital mutilation, force marriage, rape and sexual violence, sexual exploitation, prostitution, honour-based violence, stalking, and harassment. This multi-partnership service brought together multiple agencies to provide support and advice, including health advisors, police, solicitors, domestic violence and abuse specialist agencies, and local women's aid and rights organisations. There have been challenges in delivering a remote service during and in the aftermath of the pandemic, and in February 2023 a face-to-face one stop shop was reinstated. We will continue to work with partners to provide essential advice and support to those who need it.

Some London boroughs have been able to put in place multi-disciplinary teams, for example to support hospital discharge through early assessment of housing needs and identifying support to reduce the likelihood of readmission. We will review good practice and explore the potential to put in place an approach in Barnet that provides coordinated support to address residents' multiple needs.

### **Supporting recovery and independence through a personalised and trauma-informed approach**

We will continue to provide tailored and flexible support for single people who are at particular risk of becoming homeless. In 2022, our Homelessness Prevention and Insight Project recommended that we can better help vulnerable customers by applying a trauma-informed approach to our work. As part of this, we are delivering training for staff on trauma, the effects of trauma, how to avoid moral injury, compassion fatigue and burn out, how to support customers who have experienced trauma.

Additional Trauma-Informed Practice training has been developed for Barnet Homes' Housing Options service to support them to enact the service delivery training, focusing on maintaining their wellbeing and looking after themselves when working with customers affected by trauma. Barnet Homes is also working in partnership with Adult Social Care to set up a renewed approach to supervisions for front-line staff to give them the opportunity to talk about cases, discuss good and bad outcomes, and support each other. We will continue to provide support and training for our staff to help them deliver appropriate services to customers who have experienced trauma and look after their own wellbeing, to help ensure positive outcomes are achieved.

### **Supporting rough sleepers**

A range of services are provided within the borough to provide support and accommodation to rough sleepers, and we will continue to work with our public sector and voluntary and community sector partners to improve outcomes for those who have experience of rough sleeping.

The Barnet Homes-led BOOST service will continue to provide free and accessible support for any resident, including employment support for rough sleepers through two Rough Sleeper Support Workers. BOOST also provides access to staff from Barnet Homes, Barnet Education and Learning Service, Discretionary Housing Payments, and Future Path. In 2021/22, the Rough Sleeper Support Workers worked with 29 clients, all of whom were EEA Nationals, supporting five into work and assisting with benefit claims and seeking settled status. We will explore opportunities for BOOST to provide location-based employment support for rough sleepers.

We will explore how a 'Housing First' project could be successfully implemented within Barnet, with the aim of taking a more holistic, preventative approach to tackling homelessness by providing immediate access to a settled and secure home for homeless people with complex and multiple needs, as a starting point to help tackle their non-housing needs by then introducing appropriate wrap-around care and support services.

There is a lack of longer-term supported accommodation for rough sleepers and single person households with medium to high support needs in Barnet, and it is difficult for rough sleepers to access supported accommodation through Adult Social Care due to the high thresholds for assistance. Following initial placements in short-term supported accommodation, it can be challenging to secure sustainable longer-term accommodation for a number of reasons, including standard temporary accommodation not being suitable for those with complex needs, a lack of engagement sometimes with the floating support that is offered through the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme, and difficulty with tenancy sustainment for some rough sleepers due to anti-social behaviour and rent arrears. These challenges can result in support needs not being met, a decline in health, and a risk of returning to the streets. We will explore options for delivering additional supported accommodation to support rough sleepers and single person households with medium to high support needs. Services would offer longer lengths of stay and more intensive support to build an individual's independent living skills. We will need to ensure there is a clear move-on pathway as part of each person's supported journey towards greater independence.

It can be difficult to maintain communication with rough sleepers as they do not always have access to a telephone, they may relocate which makes it difficult for the Rough Sleeper Team to find them again, and some rough sleepers simply are not able to prioritise maintaining good communication with Barnet Homes due to the challenges they are facing in their lives. Poor communication causes delays to rough sleepers receiving the support they need, and if the housing process takes a long time to complete the risk of disengagement increases. We will continue to explore ways to overcome this challenge, including monitoring the success of Barnet Homes' initiative to purchase cheap mobile phones for rough sleepers, and working in partnership with refuges to provide communications and information to those who are in short-term accommodation.

The rough sleeper severe weather emergency protocol (SWEP) aims to get rough sleepers off the streets during periods of below-zero night-time temperatures by providing emergency accommodation. Barnet Homes has a strong track record in managing demand when SWEP is activated, and in the past has not had to use rest centres due to excellent relationships with and access to a large number of temporary accommodation providers. Over both the December 2022 and January 2023 SWEP periods, Barnet accommodated 19 individuals. In light of the current housing market and pressures on supply and cost, there is a risk that in future it will be more challenging to secure sufficient accommodation to meet needs without needing to provide rest centres. We will keep our approach under review in anticipation of periods of colder weather, and will look to take further steps such as block-booking accommodation and exploring other options if circumstances make securing temporary accommodation challenging.



Where issues exist such as street drinking, begging, drug misuse, and anti-social behaviour, it can be challenging to identify where rough sleepers are committing these behaviours. Community Safety will work in partnership with Barnet Homes' Rough Sleepers team to undertake joint visits and identify where rough sleepers are participating in these activities so that support can be provided.

The Rough Sleeper team currently undertakes twice-weekly early morning outreach, with drug and alcohol support from Change Grow Live. Whilst a range of services can be provided through this partnership working, there is presently a gap in accessing support from mental health professionals to jointly assess clients on the street. The Mental Health team will work in partnership with Barnet Homes to explore potential improvements to the outreach support for rough sleepers. As part of this, we will monitor the success of the newly created dual-diagnosis psychologist within Change Grow Live, which will be able to make referrals to specialist mental health services, to understand if this successfully addresses this gap.

### Supporting care leavers

Whilst youth homelessness is not a particular concern within Barnet, young people who are leaving care are at greater risk of homelessness, and we have a responsibility to ensure they are settled in suitable accommodation and have adequate support to help them sustain their tenancies and maintain employment, education, or training.

It is important that young people leaving care are adequately prepared and supported to live independently and that suitable accommodation is available to them. Barnet Homes will continue to work closely with Children's and Family Services to ensure appropriate support and advice is provided to young people leaving care to prevent them from becoming homeless, including ensuring the joint protocol between Barnet Homes and Children's and Family Services continues to work effectively, and to support care leavers to be tenancy ready. Older young people are increasingly entering care due to risks associated with gangs and county lines drug-dealing networks, and Barnet Homes will explore with Children's and Family Services how we can increase the supply of safe accommodation and support.

The Barnet Group's BOOST service will also continue to provide support for care leavers. In September 2022, BOOST provided funding of £45k from the Household Support Fund towards care leavers' utility costs, and in November 2022 provided a grant of £5k to the Onwards and Upwards care leavers hub.

In early 2023, Barnet's Care Leaver's Housing Protocol was updated to reaffirm the council's corporate parenting role to meet the needs of children in care and care leavers. The protocol affirms the need to assess children in care's housing need before they leave care, and to work to meet their housing need under the council's Housing Allocation Scheme, avoiding the homelessness assessment route wherever possible. The protocol acknowledges that care leavers, like all young people, may make mistakes; however, there will be no situation where the council will discharge its corporate parenting responsibilities or housing duty to care leavers by deeming them 'intentionally homeless'. Barnet Homes and Children's and Family Services will work closely to deliver the protocol, and will keep it under review to ensure its effectiveness.

### Supporting survivors of domestic abuse

In response to levels of housing need and the complexities of domestic abuse cases, Barnet Homes created a Domestic Abuse Team in October 2022 with funding from the Mayor's Office for Policing

and Crime (MOPAC). The team provides enhanced support to survivors of domestic abuse and their children. The team manages the most complex and high-risk housing cases for domestic abuse survivors, from the initial assessment of survivors' and their children's needs to their placement in safe accommodation, to their move-on and resettlement in long-term accommodation. Housing Needs Officers within the team co-create move-on/resettlement plans with survivors, and hand hold them through the housing application process.

Small caseloads of up to 20 cases gives them capacity to provide increased support to survivors of domestic abuse. At each point, floating support is available to support individuals through their recovery and resettlement pathway. The team aims to support up to 120 adults in the initial year of funding. Barnet Homes will keep the workings of this new service under review to ensure it operates as effectively as possible and delivers positive outcomes for those who access it, including placement in safe accommodation and resettlement in suitable long-term accommodation.

We have allocated funding for floating support officers within Barnet Homes' Domestic Abuse Team in recognition of the demand for support in this area. These officers will work with domestic abuse survivors from initial contact until after they move on into safe, long-term accommodation. This vial support will help survivors to access domestic abuse services, and provide a consistent, supportive presence to aid the recovery of those who face complex issues and additional barriers.

Barnet Homes is partnering with the Against Violence and Abuse charity to work with survivors of domestic abuse, services, and partners within the borough to improve housing and homelessness support for women survivors of gender-based violence. Against Violence and Abuse will recruit, train, and support women with lived experience to change policy and practice in the borough. We will explore any further opportunities to work in partnership with the voluntary and community sector and apply for any funding that may become available to deliver further services and support to survivors of domestic abuse.

Barnet will continue to provide its Sanctuary scheme to provide security measures to enable domestic abuse survivors to stay in their home if they want to and it is safe to do so. We will also continue to provide Minerva women's refuge to ensure safe-accommodation-based support for homeless women and their children fleeing domestic abuse and approaching Barnet Homes, including those with particular needs arising from their protected characteristics. The refuge is run in partnership with Solace Women's Aid, and supported 27 women and 14 children in 2021/2022.

Barnet Homes will continue to train its Housing Needs Officers on domestic abuse and homelessness as well as the new provisions under the New Domestic Abuse Act 2021. We will also continue to explore the option of dispersed accommodations for survivors of domestic abuse.

### Supporting people leaving hospital

Building on the recommendations from Barnet's Homelessness Prevention and Insight Project and conversations between Housing Options and health partners in the NHS, Barnet Homes has secured £50k from the council's Prevention Fund to recruit a Health and Housing Navigator on a 12-month pilot. The pilot is designed to reduce delayed discharge from hospitals and improve housing pathways for vulnerable customers coming from mental health trusts and hospitals in the borough. The post-holder Health and Housing Navigator will take on a small complex caseload to support people who experience housing difficulties whilst in hospital.

### Supporting people with mental ill health and/or physical health inequalities

There are challenges to ensuring access to appropriate support for people who are homeless and experiencing challenges with their mental health. We expect trauma-informed training to deliver improved support to those within this at-risk group, in addition to the Health and Housing Navigator providing support for vulnerable customers. Furthermore, the newly recruited dual diagnosis psychologist working within the Change Grow Live service will add capacity to deliver interventions to people who are homeless and have a combination of substance misuse and mental health issues. Barnet Homes will also work in partnership with Adult Social Care and specialist Mental Health services to identify ways to improve access to mental health services for those who are homeless.

### Supporting families

Barnet Homes is represented at the Domestic Abuse Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) to which high-risk and complex cases of domestic abuse are referred and discussed. The domestic abuse MARAC is held weekly and there is now a faster turnaround between referral of high risk and complex domestic abuse cases and multi-agency risk review and implementation of risk reduction safety plans. We will continue to ensure housing officers benefit from the regular training provided by MARAC.

Barnet Homes' floating support domestic abuse officers work with women who are frequently excluded from mainstream services and/or find it hard to engage with support. The service provides outreach activity, trauma informed approach and flexible 1-1 support, and will continue to provide support to those who are most at risk.

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is a joint arrangement between Social Services and Barnet Homes that aims to ensure families' safeguarding risks are identified at an early stage. Schools, Health, the Police and the council all submit referrals through this route, and weekly meetings enable partners to review MASH referrals to determine what additional support a family may need. We will continue to support the MASH and will monitor its outcomes to ensure its effectiveness.

### Supporting ex-offenders

Barnet Homes has secured funding of £332k from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities' Accommodation for Ex-Offenders (AFEO) programme. This funding has been used to secure two Floating Support Officers and a part-time Lettings Negotiator from April 2023, as well as provide an enhanced incentive payment for private rented sector landlords. We expect over the two years of funded activity to increase access to private rented sector tenancies for ex-offenders who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, with an additional 66 ex-offenders to be rehoused and supported to sustain their tenancies and reintegrate into the community.

### Supporting households living in temporary accommodation

We will continue to remind residents living in long-term temporary accommodation that they should update Barnet Homes if their circumstances change, to ensure their level of housing need is clearly understood.

We will continue to ensure temporary accommodation is in a good state of repair and meets requirements. Barnet Homes' compliance programme inspects all properties in use on a rolling basis. Barnet Homes is also part of a pan-London temporary accommodation inspection service called Setting the Standards, which inspects all studios, houses in multiple occupation, and shared facility B&Bs in use, and refers any serious issues to the borough's Environmental Health department for enforcement or action.

### Supporting refugees and asylum seekers

We are committed to continuing to be responsive to the needs of and supporting and empowering refugees and asylum seekers within the borough. In January 2023, Barnet made a public commitment to work towards becoming a Borough of Sanctuary. This means that we will work with our statutory partners, the voluntary and community sector, and faith groups to make sure that those feeling displacement and persecution are welcomed and able to integrate well into and thrive in Barnet. A key challenge for us in this area is securing suitable housing, particularly for very large families. We will work with our partners including the private rented sector to meet the housing needs of refugees, and we will look to secure available funding from Central Government to support this work.

DRAFT

## Next steps

This Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy sets out Barnet Council's vision for preventing homelessness and supporting those who face or are at risk of homelessness. It describes what we want to achieve and focuses in particular on the significant changes that are necessary for our success.

It will be used to support our other housing-related strategies, such as the Housing Strategy and Adult Social Care's Right Homes Strategy, as well as other council strategies and plans including the Barnet Plan, the Children and Young People's Plan, the Adult Social Care Reform Plan, and the Right Homes Strategy.

It also sets out the issues on which we will campaign and lobby central government and advocate for the rights and needs of our residents where new funding, laws, or powers are needed to make a positive difference to people's lives.

Our commitments under the themes of this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy show, in broad terms, how we will implement the strategy. While it describes a number of specific initiatives that are already underway or are planned or have the potential to be explored, it does not offer every detail of how our objectives will be achieved. In some cases, we do not have all the answers, and want to consult further with residents and partners before we finalise our plans and put them into action.

We will develop action plans where needed and will report regularly on progress and how our aims are being put into practice. We will apply for funding wherever possible to help deliver improved outcomes for residents, and where further investment is needed to improve or develop services this will be considered through individual business cases. The actions we will take will need to be flexible and responsive to emerging needs and new homelessness-related circumstances over the five years of this strategy. Delivery is not just a matter for the council, but will also involve partnership with residents, public sector partners, and the voluntary and community sector. There is also a central role for Barnet Homes, the council's housing management organisation.

We will continue to set targets for our services within Barnet Homes' annual Delivery Plan, through which we will be able to monitor the impact of our work and take a flexible approach to dealing with the housing and homelessness crises.

Despite the unprecedented challenges we face to tackle the homelessness crisis, this strategy sets out a positive, proactive, and innovative approach to how the council, its partners, and residents can work together to achieve our aims. Whilst there is no easy solution to all the challenges we face, and our delivery of this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will not resolve the many causes and impacts of the housing and homelessness crises, we are confident it will help improve our position and deliver positive outcomes for many of Barnet's residents.

### VERSION CONTROL

Version	Date	Author	Comments
0.1	17/01/23	Laura Giles	