



Richmond Housing and Homelessness Strategy

Executive Summary

2021 – 2026

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Foreword

Richmond Council was in the process of reviewing and refreshing its Housing and Homelessness Strategy when the Covid-19 emergency impacted in March 2020. Whilst this paused our progress in undertaking this review, what has struck me is how our key aims and objectives are more relevant than ever, with lockdown highlighting the need to focus our efforts to better meet the housing needs of Richmond residents. This Strategy is our opportunity to make firm commitments to build on the gains and approaches developed during lockdown to better serve our residents and communities.

Decent housing is fundamental to supporting the health and wellbeing of residents, building vibrant communities and supporting the local economy. We understand the challenges faced by Londoners when it comes to securing a good quality and affordable home. As the most expensive outer London borough to buy and rent, and with relatively few social homes, residents of the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames (LBRuT) face particular challenges.

The coronavirus pandemic has put these challenges into sharper focus and, whilst the principles underpinning the Strategy have not changed, certain actions have been accelerated as the Council worked to protect the most vulnerable in our communities, including rough sleepers and our older residents.

Building on our strong track record in tackling homelessness the Council successfully implemented the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, embracing the opportunity to improve services with a shift of focus to early intervention and homelessness prevention. Tackling rough sleeping has been a longstanding priority for the Council and the coronavirus pandemic provided the impetus and – crucially – Government funding to work rapidly to assist the Borough’s rough sleepers into accommodation. The Council has committed to doing all it can, through its Covid-19 recovery plan, to prevent rough sleepers returning to the streets by working with partners to explore all available options for an offer of accommodation and providing a support package which meets the full range of rough sleepers’ needs.

Around 900 new homes are needed every year until 2033 to meet local demand. I and the Liberal Democrat administration are determined that many more of these homes are affordable housing which better reflect our planning policy objectives and requirements. We know we need to intervene so that, as well as using our own land to build, we will work with local private registered providers (PRPs), landowners and private developers, taking innovative and flexible approaches to deliver more housing across a range of tenures to meet the needs of local people.



*Councillor Jaeger, Deputy Leader
and Vice-Chair of Adult Social
Services, Health and Housing
Committee*

More and more people in the Borough are renting privately and we will continue to work with private sector landlords to ensure housing is of a good standard and tenants are given a fair deal, taking robust action against rogue landlords where necessary. We have committed resources to working proactively to bring longer term empty properties back into use as affordable housing, a new initiative which has far-reaching benefits.

We are committed to supporting the needs of vulnerable residents and the Strategy sets out how we will work with partners to ensure that appropriate support is in place so that people can access suitable housing. In recognition of the changing national and boroughwide demographics we have set out our strategy for meeting the needs of older residents, ensuring they are supported to remain independent and, as their needs change, have access to suitable housing and support.

In 2020 we celebrated the 125th anniversary of the development of Manor Grove in North Sheen, London's first council housing. We're hugely proud that this pioneering social reform happened in our Borough. I know that we too have a responsibility to do all we can through effective partnership working, maximising available resources and taking an innovative and ambitious approach to improve the housing options for all Borough residents, now and in the future.

Councillor Liz Jaeger

*Deputy Leader and Vice-Chair of Adult Social
Services, Health and Housing Committee*

Introduction

The Housing and Homelessness Strategy sets out the Borough's plans for housing and homelessness services for 2021 – 2026. The previous Strategy covered 2018 – 2023; this has been refreshed now to ensure that the Council's housing objectives reflect current challenges and respond to significant developments in the sector including new legislation. The Strategy focuses on four key themes, each of which play an integral part in providing good quality, affordable housing:

- Delivering affordable homes; new supply and redevelopment of existing social housing stock
- Addressing housing market pressures, preventing homelessness and increasing housing options: Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026
- Ensuring good quality homes; providing choice, standards and quality for renters
- Supporting the needs of residents, working with care and support services to provide quality housing options

The Housing and Homelessness Strategy sits under the Borough's [Corporate Plan](#) and complements and informs other strategic plans, such as the [Local Plan](#), [Community Safety Plan](#) and [Children and Young People's Plan](#)¹. The Council has declared a climate emergency and published the [Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy 2019 – 2024](#) and [Air Quality Action Plan 2019 – 2024](#). The Strategy builds on existing strategic housing documents including the [Tenancy Strategy 2019](#) and the [Intermediate Housing Policy Statement 2017](#).

. It also fulfils the five-yearly requirement to produce a Homelessness Strategy and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The evidence base for the Strategy includes the Housing and Homelessness Review 2017, the [Strategic Housing Market Assessment \(SHMA\) 2016](#) which identifies the scale and mix of housing in the Borough and unmet need and the [Local Plan](#).

The Strategy has been developed in consultation with stakeholders including residents and local voluntary sector partners during a four-week consultation period.

This Executive Summary presents the key challenges, priorities and overarching actions of the Strategy. For more detail, including a full list of actions, see the Strategy.

¹ The current Children and Young People's Plan covers the period 2017 – 2020 and will soon be refreshed



THEME ONE:

Addressing housing market pressures,
preventing homelessness and increasing
housing options: Homelessness and
Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021 - 2026

The scale of homelessness in the Borough presents a significant challenge and requires a substantial investment in time and resources to prevent homelessness where possible and support often vulnerable households by providing alternative housing options or temporary accommodation. High property prices and rents mean that, for many people facing homelessness, independently finding a solution to their housing problem is not possible.

The Coronavirus Act 2020 introduced measures to ensure no-one loses their home as a result of the pandemic by suspending all current eviction proceedings and blocking new applications for possession as well as introducing a six-month notice period for the majority of possession claims. It is anticipated however that, with the pause on evictions now having ended, homelessness may increase particularly if steps are not taken to bolster the homeless prevention response across the piece including through the provision of a functioning and timely Universal Credit system.

Homelessness Prevention

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA 2017) includes a strengthened duty on Local Authorities (LAs) to prevent homelessness through earlier interventions for all households facing homelessness, regardless of any longer-term statutory duty that may subsequently be accepted. Single people who may not be owed the full rehousing duty are now entitled to enhanced levels of advice and assistance to sustain their current accommodation or, if this is not possible, to secure alternative accommodation. During 2019/20 the Council assisted 60 households at risk of homelessness by securing suitable affordable accommodation in the local private rented sector or supporting them to remain in their current home.

We will:

- Significantly increase homeless prevention interventions. This will include the Council providing additional resources to improve its capacity to prevent homelessness with

recruitment to additional posts taking place in 2020/21.

- Develop improved links with landlords in the private rented sector with the aim of working together to prevent homelessness and increase housing options. This will include continuing to offer a generous package of incentives to local landlords who work with the Council.
- Provide alternative housing options and opportunities including in the private rented sector where homelessness cannot be prevented.





Providing Appropriate Accommodation

During the period of the previous strategy the Council maintained the use of temporary accommodation at a relatively stable level although 2019/20 saw an increase in placements which is forecast to continue in 2020/21 due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the economy leading to more homeless applications. The Council has been successful in maintaining over half of placements within the Borough or neighbouring borough, with the remaining in other areas of London.

The Council operates two hostels in the Borough providing a total of 50 bed spaces for both single and family households. This level and type of provision is kept under review and further procurement of accommodation considered where necessary.

The Council is committed to ensuring the adequate provision of refuge provision through continued commissioning of providers. There are currently two refuges in the Borough, providing 15 bed spaces. Female rough sleepers who have been victims of domestic abuse can access the Borough's specialist refuge for women with particularly complex needs for whom traditional refuge accommodation would not be suitable.

We will:

- Provide enhanced housing options for homeless households and those at risk of homelessness through use of all resources available to the Council.
- Minimise the use of nightly paid temporary accommodation, reduce expenditure in this area and reinvest in preventative services.
- Work with SPEAR and other partners to ensure refuges and hostels meet the needs of homeless households in the Borough, in terms of available bed spaces and type of accommodation.
- Provide suitable temporary accommodation that meets the needs of households and vulnerable groups, including rough sleepers. This will include bringing forward proposals to improve the Council's existing hostel stock and investigating the potential for the Council to secure a portfolio of Council owned self-contained temporary accommodation stock.

Supporting Vulnerable Groups

A whole systems approach is necessary to address homelessness, particularly when working with those with complex needs requiring a multi-agency response built on effective collaboration with partners. Homelessness is not only a housing issue but is often a result of relationship breakdown, domestic abuse, poor mental health, substance misuse and worklessness.

Complex needs mean that vulnerable groups, including rough sleepers, require intensive personalised support to achieve and sustain settled accommodation. Since 2012 the Council's Resettlement Service has helped over 1,200 people to maintain their tenancies through a combination of drop-in advice sessions and individual intensive support including support to claim benefits, set up utilities and household budget plans.

We will:

- Ensure vulnerable groups have access to support to maintain their tenancy from the Council's Resettlement Service and through continued commissioning of Citizens Advice Richmond.
- Continue to support the work of the Homelessness Forum which brings together statutory and voluntary agencies operating across the Borough to discuss issues and share best practice.
- Ensure that protocols relating to youth homelessness and mental ill health are working effectively, monitoring these to ensure that they enable all statutory responsibilities to be met and appropriate accommodation and support is provided.

Tackling Rough Sleeping

There were 175 new rough sleepers verified during 2019/20. Maintaining local services targeted towards preventing and alleviating rough sleeping is a longstanding priority for the Council and it continues to commission SPEAR to operate such services. A recent review of SPEAR clients highlighted the complex nature of rough sleepers' needs. 95% of people living in SPEAR supported accommodation have a mental health problem, 60% have an alcohol or substance misuse problem and 30% have a significant physical health issue. Since April 2015, Homeless Health Link service has supported over 370 homeless people, with 92% recording improved physical health and the use of A&E ambulance call outs reduced by 15%.

Since 2018 the Council has successfully bid for Government grants totalling £1,317,562 to fund additional rough sleeping services until March 2021. As a result, the Borough's rough sleeping pathway and offer to rough sleepers has improved significantly. The Council has also received approximately half a million pounds of Government funding to introduce a four-year Housing First scheme in the Borough.

The Government's national Rough Sleeping Strategy identifies the need for a holistic approach with a focus not only on housing issues but other factors which may contribute to someone ending up sleeping rough. The Strategy sets out three themes that LAs must focus on to work towards the Government's target of eradicating rough sleeping by 2027: prevention, intervention and recovery. During the coronavirus pandemic over 80 rough sleepers were provided accommodation and the Council has committed, through its rough sleeper Covid-19 recovery plan, to explore all available options regarding an offer of accommodation and to ensure the full range of support is in place to help people remain off the streets.

We will:

- Achieve a sustained reduction in the levels of rough sleeping. This will be through continued focus on homelessness prevention, effective intervention and support.
- Work with voluntary and statutory partners to assist rough sleepers off the streets and into settled accommodation. Through continued commissioning of SPEAR the Council will ensure the necessary outreach services and accommodation pathway provide an effective framework to do so. The new strategic rough sleeper coordinator role will work with voluntary and statutory partners to improve and enhance services and secure funding to achieve this.
- Ensure the full range of often complex needs of rough sleepers are met through personalised support. Trial a Housing First type approach.
- Continue to implement the Covid-19 recovery action plan to ensure rough sleepers housed during the pandemic have access to multi-agency support and to explore all available options regarding an offer of accommodation.



THEME TWO:

Delivering affordable homes; new supply and redevelopment of existing social housing stock

The Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2016 identifies an overall housing need of between 895–915 homes per annum until 2033, with 50% being affordable housing. Whilst not all housing demand can be met in the Borough it is recognised that the development of affordable housing should meet a range of needs.

The challenges of providing affordable housing in the Borough cannot be underestimated. More than two thirds of LBRuT is protected by Open Land or Conservation designations meaning that development is often focused on smaller sites and proposals are necessarily constrained by planning policies which seek to retain the Borough's distinctive character. Land availability for residential development is further restricted by high existing use values. Despite increased levels of grant funding, it remains difficult for PRPs to compete with private developers to obtain sites for 100% affordable housing.

Reforms of the planning system recently proposed by the Government may further challenge the delivery of much needed affordable housing. The proposals risk undermining the local affordable housing pipeline through changes such as raising the affordable housing threshold on smaller sites and replacing Section 106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy with a new value-based charge for developers. The Council will engage with the consultation process for the proposed reforms, making a robust argument for avoiding changes which negatively impact on affordable housing delivery nationally and locally.

Limited opportunities necessitate a flexible and innovative approach to supporting the development of affordable housing in the Borough. The Development Delivery Agreement (DDA) with Richmond Housing Partnership (RHP) is an example of the Council's dynamic approach to the way its grant funding is utilised. The DDA approach can be replicated with other local housing providers

including housing associations and charitable providers and involves the Council and in this case RHP investing their resources to help secure sites for affordable housing development and to provide funding to support a higher level of affordable development on privately owned sites.

We will:

- Work proactively with PRPs, private developers and the GLA to increase the delivery of affordable homes including building a pipeline of 1,000 affordable homes to be delivered over the next 10 years.
- Deliver a range of affordable homes that meet the needs of local residents and workers. This will include developing housing offers for local key workers, improved supported housing and seeking to secure homes directly including providing rough sleepers with stable and long-term housing.
- Make best use of financial assets and resources, both Council, housing association and charitable sector, to deliver more affordable housing. This will include on Council owned sites seeking a minimum of 50% affordable homes and aiming to achieve significantly higher than this where possible, and supporting RHP in its plans to regenerate Ham Close.
- Through the Council's housing and planning policies support PRP development to deliver 100% affordable housing schemes.

34.6% of households in the Borough rent their homes, 22% from a private landlord and 12.6% from a PRP. Whilst much of the private rented sector is of good quality the Council is committed to maintaining a robust private sector regulatory service and will intervene where basic standards are not met, and in 2018/19 carried out 395 formal inspections and hazard assessments in privately rented homes across the Borough.

Building safety is a top priority with the Council working to ensure fire safety checks to housing stock across the Borough are undertaken and that all stakeholders remain informed of changes to regulations and legislation. The Council supports PRPs' programmes of retrofitting sprinkler systems in its sheltered housing schemes and two high-rise blocks and its ongoing programme of works to prevent the spread of fire and smoke.

Overcrowding remains a significant issue both locally and regionally and during 2019/20 there were 1,702 applicants with overcrowding points on Richmond's housing queues. Local PRPs must utilize their existing stock effectively through tenancy fraud detection and encouraging downsizing moves. The Council enables local housing offers for downsizing tenants through the delivery of affordable housing developments and, where appropriate, will incentivise such moves by utilising grant to enable rents to be set in line with social rents. Its Tenancy Strategy directs PRPs to protect the tenancy rights of downsizers and to offer fixed term tenancies of at least ten years. This achieves a balance between enabling landlords to make best use of their stock whilst recognising that these longer tenancies bring a reasonable degree of security and encourage stable communities. The Council's social housing extensions programme is also an important tool in alleviating the problem of overcrowding and making the best use of existing social stock by offering financial support to PRPs to extend and convert homes.

Improving the energy efficiency of local homes is an important step in addressing the climate emergency and in alleviating fuel poverty; the Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy provides the framework for work around energy efficiency and other related measures. A key action in the Strategy is the formation of the Richmond Climate Charter which partners, including PRPs, will be expected to sign up to. This will actively encourage members to conduct their activities in an environmentally, socially and economically responsible way. The Council has been successful in a bid for funding from the Green

Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery grant which will be used to improve the energy efficiency of private rented and owned houses in the Borough.

The Council supports PRP residents by offering a Tenants' Champion Service, performed by a local Councillor, for complex complaints resolution.

We will:

- Improve conditions in the private rented sector. This includes through use of statutory powers to intervene where basic standards are not met and, where not constrained by Covid-19 restrictions, the inspection of all HMO accommodation.
- Ensure that PRPs operating in the Borough take a robust response to building safety issues and prepare for the changes to be brought in via the Fire Safety and Building Safety Acts, ensuring residents involvement is central.
- Secure the efficient use of existing housing stock by working with PRPs to encourage and facilitate moves by under-occupiers to more suitably sized housing, delivering local housing offers for downsizing tenants and ensuring the tenancy rights of downsizers are protected through the Tenancy Strategy. To bring empty homes back into use as affordable housing through a new dedicated post.
- Utilise the powers under the Energy Efficiency Regulations to ensure that private landlords meet the requirements and seek to impose financial penalties on those who do not comply. Action the relevant recommendations arising from the Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy. Utilise grant funding where possible to support private landlords to improve the energy efficiency of their properties.
- Improve housing management standards for residents in PRP accommodation through the work of the Tenants' Champion. This includes complaints mediation and engaging with local PRPs to encourage service improvement.



THEME FOUR:

Supporting the needs of residents,
working with care and support services
to provide quality housing options

Practical and financial support is available for households experiencing difficulties as a result of welfare reforms and fuel poverty including through a range of funds such as Discretionary Housing Payments, the Local Assistance Scheme, Cold Buster grants and Warmer Homes grants.

The Welfare Reform Stakeholder Board brings together key internal and external stakeholders working together to address issues arising from changes to benefits.

The Council is committed to assisting older people and people with disabilities to remain living independently in their own home for as long as is appropriate through measures including aids and adaptations and ensuring new homes are built to lifetime home standards.

It is vital that the needs of the Borough's older people are understood and that these are reflected in the housing options available. The Council will ensure that any new accommodation proposed meets the evidential need in the Borough.

The Department is currently in the process of seeking Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation which recognises best practice in dealing with domestic abuse. DAHA's mission is to improve the housing sector's response to domestic abuse through the adoption of an established set of standards.

We will:

- Ensure residents affected by welfare reforms have access to appropriate support.
- Reduce fuel poverty for low income and vulnerable households through grants, referrals to the Wandsworth and Richmond Assessment Point for support, encouraging housing providers to support their vulnerable tenants through the Richmond Climate Charter and supporting partners to access available funding to improve the energy efficiency of homes they manage.

- Ensure that appropriate housing and support is available to enable older people and people with disabilities to maintain their independence. This will include better use of assistive technology and utilising the Disabled Facilities Grant to improve people's current accommodation.
- Support opportunities to improve the housing offer for older people which meets evidenced need, including tenure and level of support, by working with Planning Services and Adults Services to identify the need for different types of housing and support proposals which meet evidenced need.
- Support the development of housing that meets the needs of people with learning disabilities and mental ill health. This includes current schemes with PA Housing and RHP which will provide accommodation for clients with high support needs and learning disabilities respectively.
- Work closely with Achieving for Children to ensure that children and care leavers have access to appropriate support and housing that meets their needs.
- Achieve DAHA accreditation.
- Ensure the Council and partner PRPs play an active role in promoting safeguarding children and adults from harm.

