

**LONDON BOROUGH OF
MERTON**

**DRAFT HOMELESSNESS
& ROUGH SLEEPING
STRATEGY TO 2025**

FOREWORD

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DRAFT

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1. HOMELESSNESS – CAUSES & EFFECTS

For many people, homelessness comes at the end of a long line of crises. It begins with personal crises such as relationships breakdown or abusive home life so they are unable to stay in their homes, or when they suffer ill health or loss of employment, affecting their ability to maintain their homes. The root causes of homelessness can go back even further, as many homeless persons have severe chronic problems such as mental illness, substance misuse issues, physical disabilities and poor health. Many have a history of offending often linked to childhood delinquency. Those who play truant at school or have been in care are also at higher risk of homelessness.

Alongside personal crises, another key contributor to homelessness is a lack of affordable housing. Housing cost has been rising significantly faster than household income, with average house price gone up by 77% in London over the last 10 years (Land Registry HPI), up from £266,837 in November 2009 to £472,232 in October 2019. Over the same period, average house price in Merton had increased by 84%, from £280,931 to £516,101.

Average private sector rent has also increased by 37% across London over the last 10 years (from £1,265 to £1,727), with a 39% increase in Merton over the same period, from £1,109 per month to £1,542 per month. There are suggestions that private sector rent could rise by 4.8% year on year. This means that the average weekly rent in Merton could increase to £1,775 per month by 2022.

A lack of affordable social housing options has resulted in many households having to rent their homes in the private rented sector, with many private tenants facing homelessness when their tenancies come to an end, often after only six months or a year due to most Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs) being issued are for durations of 12 months or less. The Government's Welfare Reform may also lead to increased homelessness unless households receive support in managing their reduced income.

In turn, homelessness is not just a housing problem, as not having a home can affect all areas of life. For example, it can have adverse effects on a person's educational attainment, and can lead to a deterioration of their physical and mental health and chances of recovery. It often acts as a barrier for people to access employment and training, and to health and other public services. This can have huge cost implications for public services, not to mention the immense personal costs to those experiencing homelessness.

2. THE CASE FOR A HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

There is a statutory requirement for local housing authorities to publish a homelessness strategy. The *2002 Homelessness Act* sets out the following for local authorities:

- Power to carry out a review of homelessness in their areas and keep it under review;
- Duty to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the review
- Ensure strategy is consistent and have links with other local plans with relevant partners committed to supporting delivery
- Consult other local or public authorities, voluntary organisations and service users before adopting or modifying the strategy

With the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, local authorities will need to take into account the additional duties in the 2017 Act, when conducting a review of homelessness and in formulating a new strategy.

Local authorities also has a duty under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to take appropriate steps to improve the health of local people, including people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, therefore the strategy needs to be coordinated with the Health & Well-Being Strategy and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). The Act also requires social services authorities to take into account their homelessness strategy when exercising their functions.

A homelessness strategy also provides a framework for the council to fulfil the Public Sector Equality Duty set out in the Equality Act 2010 towards homeless households. The duty requires local authorities and other public bodies to prevent discrimination and promote equality of opportunity, taking into account the needs of people with protected characteristics, including people from Black & Minority Ethnic Communities (BME), vulnerable young people and older people, people with disabilities, pregnant women. Certain households with protected characteristics, such as BME households, are more likely to experience homelessness, therefore public bodies need to ensure that services and policies are accessible to all and meet different people's needs through their homelessness strategy.

With rough sleeping on the increase, the government published their first Rough Sleeping Strategy in August 2018, which includes a pledge to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and to end it by 2027. With the launch of the strategy, the government also launched the Rough Sleeping Initiative Fund to help local authorities reduce rough sleeping in their area. To ensure that local authorities are taking appropriate actions, the strategy includes a requirement for local authorities to update their homelessness and rough sleeping strategies.

As well as fulfilling the statutory duty set out in the 2002 Homelessness Act, producing local homelessness and rough sleeping strategies also makes business sense for local authorities, as effective local strategies can:

- provide information on the scale and nature of homelessness in the area;
- identify the additional accommodation and support required to meet those needs;
- identify the services needed to prevent homelessness occurring or recurring;
- identify the resources currently available to meet these needs;
- identify additional resources required;
- involve other public, voluntary and private agencies in partnership work;
- spread best practice among agencies

The lack of an effective homelessness strategy may also have huge cost implication for local authorities and other public services as well as for the individual. Past review undertaken by the Government (2012) had estimated the gross annual cost of homelessness to be between £24,000 and £30,000 per person, with a total annual gross cost of up to £1billion. This includes benefit payments, health costs in supporting homeless persons with mental health, substance abuse or alcohol dependency problems, and costs to the criminal justice system from crimes committed by the homeless. Crisis had also published a research report (2015) showing the cost of rough sleeping to be c.£20,000 per person per year, as opposed to the cost of successful intervention at c. £1,400. It is however much harder to quantify the human cost associated with

homelessness due to social isolation, barriers to accessing education, training and employment, which often lead to poor physical and mental health and negatively impact upon general health and well-being.

3. RESPONSIVENESS OF MERTON'S HOMELESSNESS & ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY

The government has brought in significant legislative and policy changes relating to homelessness in the last few years., most notably the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which places a new homelessness prevention on local authorities to assist people ‘threatened with homelessness’ and triggers earlier work to prevent homelessness. For people with a local connection, local authorities also have a new relief duty to take reasonable steps to secure accommodation, if prevention work has not been successful or if people are already homelessness.

The government has also announced a raft of new measures through the Rough Sleeping Strategy published in August 2018, with the aim of halving rough sleeping in England by 2022 and end it altogether by 2027. The delivery of the Strategy is backed by £100 million funding made available to local areas, through funding programme such as the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI), Rapid Rehousing Pathway (RRP), PRS Access Fund etc., and will focus on Prevention, Intervention and Recovery.

It is unclear at the time of publication what further policy changes will be introduced by the newly re-elected Conservative government. Although the legislative programme announced through Queen’s Speech 2019 was silent on homelessness, further changes could be brought in subsequently. National policies are also influenced by wider world political and economic factors. As agent of delivery for many of the government’s new initiatives, we need to be prepared for new government policy initiatives that are likely to require more than just step changes, and be ready to implement change and mobilise new projects quickly. In addition, our ability to respond to homelessness also very much depend on what resources are made available by the government.

In view of this, Merton Council recognises that our new Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy needs to be responsive to national policy changes and new government initiatives over the next three years. In order to achieve this, we have developed an Action Plan that supports the strategic objectives set out in this strategy, which will be reviewed every 6 months by the council and our partners, to ensure that appropriate new actions can be discussed and put in place in order to respond to changing needs, to fulfil any new statutory duties that the government may bring in, and to meet new government strategic objectives that will help improve provisions and services for households facing or experiencing homelessness.

4. OUR VISION

Merton Council is committed to preventing and reducing all forms of homelessness and supporting those in need. Our vision is to reduce the number of households becoming homeless through this strategy, supported by prevention work delivered by the council as well as by our key partner agencies, by making best use of the homelessness and rough sleeping funding provided by the government. There will be improved engagement with private landlords and supported housing providers, leading to increased housing options for homeless families or single rough sleepers, and there will be better support to help clients sustain their tenancies.

We will see improved links with support services that will result in more clients recovering from substance misuse and the trauma they had suffered in their lives, and more clients with improved physical and mental health. There will also be improved access to education, training and employment opportunities, helping more people to lead independent lives and to prevent homelessness or repeat homelessness.

5. SETTING THE PRIORITIES

In formulating new Merton's Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy covering the period up to 2025, the council has consulted a range of partner organisations, and a consultation event was held in October 2019. Around 50 local partner agencies attended the event, including representatives from homelessness housing providers such as the YMCA, SPEAR and Evolve, registered providers, faith organisations, charitable foundations, other public sector agencies as well as council officers from social care, public health, mental health, Safer Merton etc.

The Group agreed to adopt the 5 priority areas set out below for our new Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy, to ensure that the new strategy will have the right focus to address needs identified in Merton.

- Priority 1 – Preventing Homelessness
- Priority 2 – Access to Suitable Housing Options for Homeless Households
- Priority 4 – Sustainable Solutions for Rough Sleepers
- Priority 3 – Pathway for Young Single Homeless
- Priority 5 – Assistance for Other Vulnerable Clients

This Strategy also highlights that homelessness is not just a housing problem, but is linked to health, education, training & employment, financial management as well as involvement in crime. Partnership and multi-agency working is therefore key to the delivery of positive outcomes and a cross-cutting theme across all 5 priorities of this Strategy.

CHAPTER 2 - CONTEXT

1. The NATIONAL & LONDON PICTURE

STATUTORY HOMELESS

Homelessness acceptances in England had been steadily increasing since 2009-10, following a period of decreases between 2003 and 2010. Between 2009-10 and 2016-17, homelessness acceptance had gone up by 48% from 40,020 to 59,090 households (Source: MHCLG). There has since been a 4% drop to 56,600 households in 2017-18. In London, the increase in the same period was far more significant at 91%, from 9,460 to 18,060 homeless acceptances. Like the rest of England, there was a drop in 2017-18 to 15,470 households

Latest available Government figures show that 80,720 households were in temporary accommodation at the end of April 2018, a 5% increase from 77,220 the year before, or a 46% increase from 55,320 in April 2013. Estimates by Shelter shows that nearly 85,000 households are likely to be staying in temporary accommodation as of March 2019, with around 135,000 children being part of these households.

More than two-thirds (69%) of these households were placed by London boroughs, which have seen the number in temporary accommodation risen from 40,230 in April 2013 to 55,440 April 2018 (with 88,140 children), a 38% increase. Of these, 5,750 households were living in non-self-contained Bed and Breakfast or hotel accommodation, a 27% increase compared to April 2013 (4,540).

ROUGH SLEEPING

Rough sleeping has been steadily increasing over the last decade. Although a small reduction was reported in 2017-18, this has proved to be only temporary. The Government Statistical Release published in February 2019 revealed that 4,677 people slept out across England on a single night based on an official count / estimate in autumn 2018. This represents a 165% increase from the 2010 total of 1,768, although there was a slight drop of 2% from the year before. Of the 4,677 rough sleepers, 22% were people from EU countries (up from 16% in 2017) and 3% were non-EU nationals. 14% of the people recorded sleeping rough were women, and 6% were aged 25 years or under.

The number of people rough sleeping in London had increased by 13% between 2017 and 2018, and accounted for 27% of all people sleeping rough in England in 2018, up from 24% in 2017. There is evidence to show that the increase of rough sleepers across London was due to EU expansion since 2004. Since then citizens from A8 countries: Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Hungary and the Czech Republic, have been allowed to come to work in the UK but many have limited or no access to social provisions and benefits. A2 nationals (Romania and Bulgaria) have also been free to work in the UK since January 2014. With the UK leaving the European Union in 2020, there will be changes to immigration rules, although it is hard to predict how 'Brexit' will impact upon the number of EU nationals rough sleeping in the UK.

While Government data only shows the extent of rough sleeping on a single night, the Pan London CHAIN (Combined Homelessness and Information Network) agency database managed by St Mungo's (funded by the GLA) provides information on the number of people found rough sleeping over the course of a year. In 2018-19, 8,855 people were recorded on CHAIN as verified

rough sleepers (i.e. seen bedded down by outreach teams) across London, an 18% increase from 2017-18, following an 8% decrease between 2016-17 and 2017-18.

2. LEGISLATIVE & POLICY CHANGES

There have been a number of legislative and policies changes introduced by the government since the Housing Act 1996 which sets out statutory provisions to prevent and address homelessness under Part 7, and the Homelessness Act 2002 which stipulates a more strategic approach to tackling homelessness.

The Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 also extended the priority need categories to 16 and 17 year olds, care leavers aged 18 to 20, those who are vulnerable due to time in care, the armed forces, prison or custody, and to those fleeing from violence. In this section, we have provided a summary of the key changes that impact on the level of homelessness and what public authorities are required to do to deal with homelessness.

HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION ACT 2017

The HRA brought changes to the way homelessness advice and assistance is provided. It broadens the responsibility of the Council and changes the legal definition of threatened with homelessness and triggers earlier work to prevent homelessness. It also requires the council to take reasonable steps that are likely to help the household to secure accommodation, for example considering the provision of a rent deposit.

All households, whether they are single, couples or families will receive appropriate advice and assistance regarding their housing circumstances. This means that single people and couples without dependants are likely to benefit more from the extended advice and assistance than they would have done prior to the introduction of the Act.

However single households and couples without dependants will still need to demonstrate a priority need and be considered “vulnerable” to be owed a full housing duty and be eligible for an offer of interim or temporary accommodation.

A Duty to Refer also came into force in October 2018, which stipulates that certain public authorities (such as the NHS) must notify a local housing authority, if they believe that one of their service users may be homeless or at risk of homelessness and agrees to the referral.

There is also a new duty for local authorities to complete an assessment to identify the housing and support needs of clients, and work with them to develop a personalised Housing Plan which sets out actions or reasonable steps that would be taken by the authority to try and prevent or relief homelessness. However, local authorities will be able to discharge their prevention and relief duties if applicants unreasonably refuse to co-operate with the agreed course of action. In addition, care leavers can claim a ‘local connection’ to the area that they have been accommodated in.

OTHER LEGISLATION IMPACTING ON HOMELESSNESS

Localism Act 2011 – Changes to local authority’s homelessness duty were brought in through this Act, with Section 148 and 149 of the 2011 Act amending Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, where the duty to secure accommodation under section 193(2) of the 1996 Act can be brought

to an end with an offer of suitable accommodation in the private rented sector of a minimum of 12 months' Assured Shorthold Tenancy, without the applicant's consent.

Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 – The Order came into force in November 2012, and deals with the suitability of location of all accommodation secured under Part 7 of the 1996 Act, including temporary accommodation. It sets out circumstances in which accommodation is not to be regarded as suitable for a person for the purposes of a private rented sector offer under section 193(7F) of the Housing Act 1996.

Welfare Reform since 2013 - Homelessness charities has blamed welfare reform changes for fuelling the continued rise in homelessness. These included the capping in 2013 of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates to the thirtieth percentile of private sector rents, and a benefit cap limiting the total amount of welfare benefits, with further reduction introduced through the Welfare Reform & Work Act 2016, to a maximum of £23,000 per year for working families in London. The introduction of the Housing Benefit 'Single Room' rate (2012) has affected many single persons under the of 35, and the 'under-occupancy rule' (2013) has reduced social housing tenants' housing benefit entitlement if their homes are deemed too big for their needs. From April 2018, the LHA Cap was extended to social tenancies (for tenancies signed from April 2016), and to supported housing tenants from April 2019.

All these changes are already making it harder for households to access and to maintain their tenancies. And with Universal Credit now fully rolled out in Merton, there are no longer separate payments of housing costs through Housing Benefit, making it even harder for households to budget for rent payments out of their single means tested benefit payment.

Statutory Safeguarding Duty - Under the Care Act 2014, local authorities and other organisations now have statutory safeguarding duties towards adults with care and support needs, and are required to promote their wellbeing in their safeguarding arrangements. It is also a legal requirement for all public care agencies, including local authorities, the Police, NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), the Care Quality Commission (CQC), housing, service providers etc., to co-operate and work in partnership, with local authorities leading on a Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB), to take proportionate steps where there are signs of abuse or neglect.

The Housing & Planning Act 2016 – This provides a statutory framework for the delivery of starter homes at discounted market price for first-time buyers, and brought in a new initiative to speed up housing delivery and provides greater certainty of development potential of residential sites for developers, through the introduction of Planning Permission in Principle (PiP) under Section 150. Legal requirements governing the assessment of housing and accommodation needs of the community are also simplified.

The Immigration Act 2016 – The Act prevents illegal immigrants in the UK from accessing housing, extending a Right to Rent scheme introduced through the Immigration Act 2014 in some parts of the West Midlands, to the rest of UK from 1 February 2016. Private landlords, letting agents and homeowners who let properties are required to undertake document checks to ascertain prospective tenants' right to be in the country. This also applies to landlords who sub-let or take in lodgers. Failure to do so will result in a penalty of up to £3,000.

The Housing White Paper 2017 – Set out plans to reform the housing market and boost supply of new homes, with a £2.3bn infrastructure fund to provide 100,000 new homes in high-demand areas, and £1.4bn to deliver 40,000 extra affordable homes. There is a commitment to ban lettings agents from charging fees to tenants, and proposed changes to planning rules giving new powers for LAs to crack down on land banking, reducing the start on site time from a maximum 3 years to 2 years from when planning permission is granted.

CASE LAW

Vulnerability and ‘Priority Need’

In May 2015, the Supreme Court considered the conjoined appeals of 3 cases – **Hotak v LB Southwark, Kanu v LB Southwark and Johnson v Solihull MBC**. All 3 cases concerned whether or not applicants for assistance under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 were “vulnerable” for the purposes of s189(1) (c) therefore had a priority need for housing.

The Supreme Court judgement raised 3 issues that local authorities will need to take into consideration when reviewing homelessness cases:

- Vulnerability under s189 is a relative concept, therefore local authorities need to consider if a homeless applicant is significantly more vulnerable than many others in the same position
- Local authorities should consider the services and support which would be available to the applicant on a predictable and consistent basis if he were homeless
- The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) is complementary to local authorities’ duty under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, and reviewing officers are required to consider if a homeless applicant is vulnerable as a result of any “protected characteristics” such as disability, when taken together with other features

Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy

A Supreme Court Judgement in April 2015 known as the Westminster Judgement has ruled that temporary placements of homeless households by councils outside their boundaries were unlawful, unless housing was not available closer to the local area. The Court reiterated the statutory duties for local authorities to provide homeless households with suitable accommodation, which “so far as reasonably practicable must be within their area”, under sections 206 and 208 of the Housing Act 1996. Local authorities also have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children when arranging temporary accommodation.

Following the Judgement, local authorities must produce a policy on the procurement of accommodation that is “approved by democratically accountable members of the council. Local authorities must now also provide evidence of a search for suitable accommodation inside or near to their local area, before placing homeless households outside their local areas.

The Council aspires to place homeless households in borough as far as is reasonable practicable. The Council is also committed to limit the use of B&B in accordance with the Homelessness Suitability Order 2003 , which sets a limit of six weeks for how long families, pregnant women and single persons under 18 years old can legally be placed in B&B accommodation

3. GOVERNMENT FUNDING

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION FUNDING

New Burdens Funding - The government has estimated the 'New Burdens' cost for local authorities to implement the Homelessness Reduction Act to be around £73m over 3 years, and allocated an additional amount for local authorities in high-pressure areas such as London to manage the transition to the new duties. Local authorities were given funding over 3 years from 2017-18 to 2019-20 to help fulfil their new duties under the Act. Merton's was given just under £438,000 to support implementation of the Act over 3 years.

Homelessness Prevention Funding - The government has continued to award homelessness prevention for local authorities up until 2020 through the Homelessness Prevention Grant. Merton Council was awarded just under £400,000 each year for 4 years, and further funding of just over £400,000 for 2020-21 has now been confirmed.

Flexible Homelessness Support Grant - In 2017, the Government replaced the Temporary Accommodation Management Fee with a Flexible Homelessness Support Grant, allowing councils to pay for a full range of measures to prevent households from becoming homeless in the first place, rather than restricted to sourcing and managing temporary accommodation for those already homeless. Just over £577 million were allocated to local authorities between 2017-18 and 2019-20. Although this grant provides the flexibility for local authorities to prioritise prevention services, this is not new money, and replaced the Temporary Accommodation Management Fee previously funded through the DWP. The amount of funding allocated to Merton for the 3 year from April 2017 to March 2020 was £1.6 million, and the government has now confirmed funding of just over £700,000 for 2020-21.

Range of Measures to address Homelessness - Various other funding initiatives were introduced by the Government over the last few years, many of these support projects run by voluntary sector organisations:

- DCLG Homelessness Change Programme to improve hostel provision for single homeless people, including rough sleepers
- Homeless Hostel Investment (£40m) - capital funding by the Department of Health for over 60 projects – extending the Homelessness Change Programme with an additional focus on improving health for vulnerable young people (2015 to 2016) through the Platform for Life programme, with time-limited tenancies linked with participation in work, further education or vocational training
- "Youth Accommodation Pathway" – joint work with the voluntary sector to help young people remain in the family home where it is safe to do so and offers tailored support for those that can't
- Cabinet Office Fair Chance Fund (£15m) - a payment by results programme targeting young, homeless people (18 to 24 year olds), to help reduce long-term benefit dependency, health problems and offending
- STRIVE (skills, training, innovation & employment) pilot - funding and support to homelessness charities Crisis and St Mungo's over 2 years to give vulnerable homeless people in London the right skills and training to get into work
- £13 million for Crisis - to help single homeless people, including priority groups such as recovering drug users and ex-offenders, to find stable, privately rented accommodation

ROUGH SLEEPING FUNDING

MHCLG Funding Programme 2016 - The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) launched three separate funding pots in October 2016 – Rough Sleeping Grant, Homelessness Prevention Trailblazers, and Entrenched Rough Sleepers Social Impact Bond. Through a successful joint bids with Sutton Council for a Rough Sleeping Grant, an outreach service run by Spear was jointly commissioned to cover both boroughs from April 2017 to March 2019, along with HMO accommodation used as assessment beds / staging post for rough sleepers. The council also employed Housing Coaches in Merton to work with households at risk of homelessness, through the tri-borough Trailblazer Project with Kingston and Sutton.

Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) 2019-2021 - With our annual rough sleepers count / estimate increasing from 5 in November 2017 to 23 in November 2018, Merton Council became eligible to apply for the MHCLG's Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI Year 2), and was successful in obtaining funding for a Merton outreach team for one year from April 2019. RSI funding also enabled the council to appoint a Rough Sleeping Coordinator to help in our effort in reducing rough sleeping and provide continuation funding for the 4-bed assessment / staging post accommodation in Merton. The MHCLG has just confirmed further funding for 2020-21 which will enable the council to roll over all 2019-20 services, and to appoint a Specialist Mental Health Outreach Worker.

Rapid Rehousing Pathway 2019 - The government has launched a number of other funding programme to help local authorities tackle rough sleeping. Merton Council was successful in obtaining funding through the Rapid Rehousing Pathway to employ a Navigator and a Tenancy Sustainment Officer, to work intensively with individuals throughout their journey to independence.

Cold Weather Funding 2018 & 2019 – Last winter, the MHCLG launched a new Cold Weather Fund to help get rough sleepers off the street during the coldest months of the year and into shelters or other short-stay accommodation while they are being assessed. For winter 2019, the MHCLG is also providing funding to assist certain rough sleepers from EEA countries with no recourse to public funds, but meet criteria under the Government's Suspension of Derogation initiative. The GLA has also launch a Winter Programme which funds shelters to assist rough sleepers for 3 months in early 2020.

Homelessness Transition Fund – £20 million to fund national roll out of No Second Night Out and support hotline and web service 'Streetlink'

FUNDING FOR SUPPORTED HOUSING

Supported housing is a lifeline for many homeless people, particularly young people, those fleeing domestic violence and those with mental or learning disabilities who require a period of support and assistance before moving on to semi-independently or independent living. However, for some time supported housing providers had faced financial challenges. Firstly, there is the rent reduction for all social housing, which also applies to supported housing in the social sector, where a 1% rent cut will be applied to all new tenancies from April 2017, but the government has since confirmed that this will change from 2020, when housing providers will be able to increase rents by consumer price index plus 1% every year until 2025. This will give social housing providers as well as tenants the security and certainty they need.

The long-awaited government response to their two consultations on future funding for supported housing was published in August 2018. This helps end the uncertainties faced by many supported housing providers, as the government's original proposal to fund only core rent through the welfare system with a limited pot given to local authorities to fund additional housing needs costs would have made about 40% of existing schemes financial unviable.

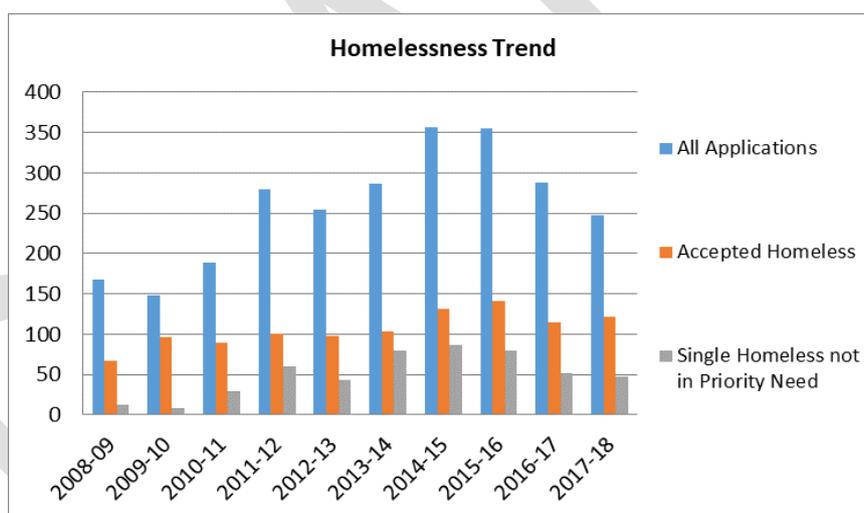
As well as agreeing that both core rent and additional housing needs costs of all supported housing schemes, including "Short-Term Supported Housing", would continue to be funded through the welfare system, there are plans to undertake a review of "Housing Related Support" looking at the relationship between housing benefit eligible charges and costs for "support". The government also wishes to consult on and implement a "robust oversight regime" to ensure provisions offer quality and value for money.

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CHAPTER 3 – HOMELESSNESS IN MERTON: AN OVERVIEW

1. LEVEL OF HOMELESSNESS IN MERTON

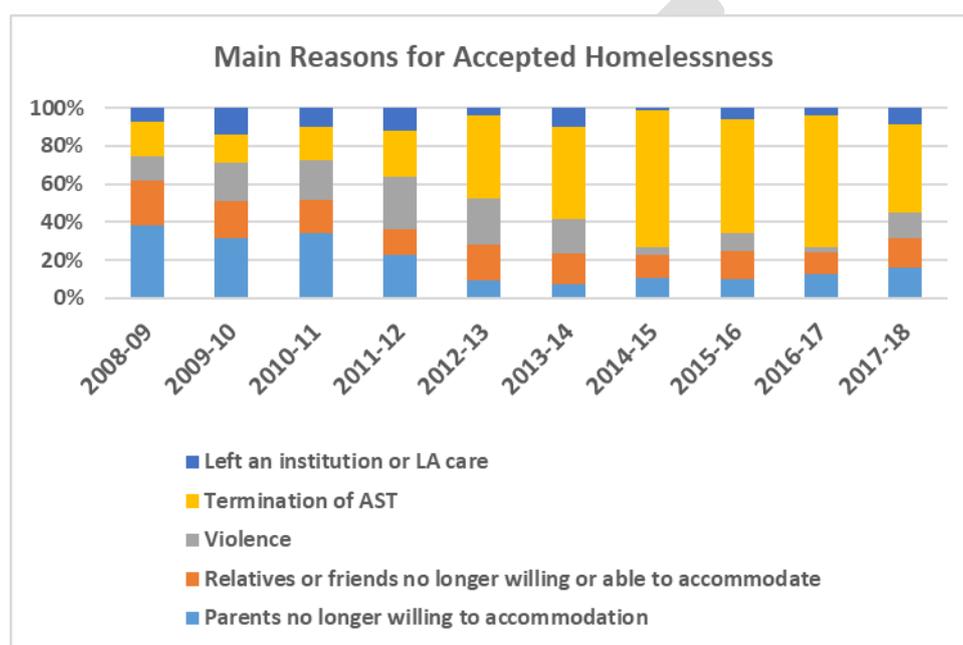
- Homelessness in Merton is amongst the lowest in London, and has the lowest number of accepted homeless cases.
- Homelessness applications has been steadily increasing over many years in Merton but this trend began to reverse from 2015-16. There was a 19% drop in applications between 2015-16 and 2016-17, and a further 14% drop in 2017-18.
- The number of homelessness acceptances (where the council has the duty to rehouse) also peaked in 2015-16 with 141 cases, a 47% increase from the 2009-10 level. The number of acceptances has since dropped although they made up an increased proportion of all applications - 49% in 2017-18 compared to 40% or below between 2011-12 and 2016-17.
- At the start of 2008-09 only 12 (7%) applicants were found to be non-priority homeless, but by 2015-16, the number of non-priority homeless had risen to 80 (23%) but started to drop again from 2016-17.



- Following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2017, local authorities are required to capture more detailed client information via the HClic system, therefore case information can no longer be obtained from the old P1E system from 2018-19.
- HClic data shows that in 2018-19, a total of 843 households approached Merton Council for homelessness assistance, and 96% (806) of these were owed either the prevention or relief duty by the council. Of these, 617 were owed the Prevention Duty and 189 owed the Relief duty. Prevention work with the 617 households is still ongoing and we will monitor the impact of this the level of homelessness, as compared to the 465 prevention cases and 248 homelessness application in 2017-18.

2. REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS

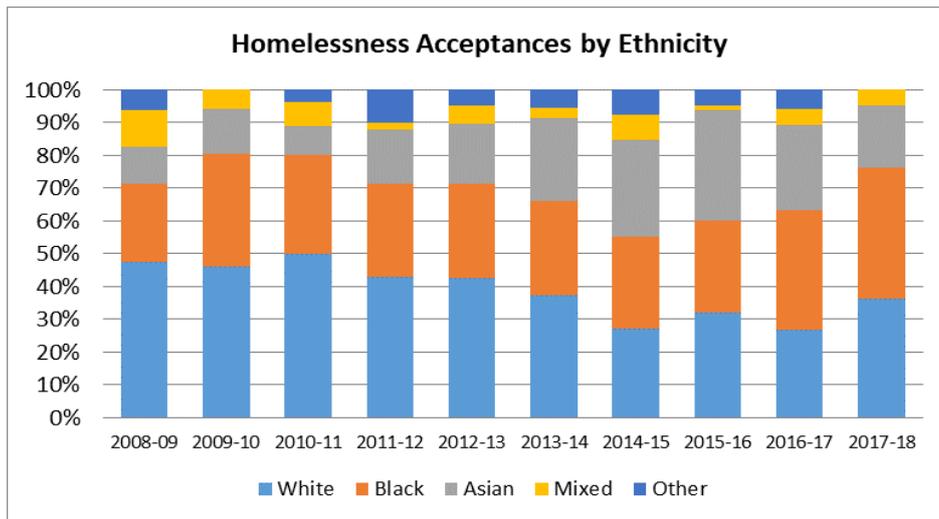
- The chart below shows that Terminations of Assured Shorthold Tenancies had been increasing since 2009-10 and became the main reason for homelessness, making up more than 60% of homelessness acceptances cases in 2016-17. However, in 2017-18, these cases dropped sharply to 38%, although this could be due to data moving across to HCLIC part way through the year.
- Conversely, while in 2008-09 parental evictions and those by relatives / friends accounted for over half of accepted homeless cases (51%), the proportion of these cases had been steadily dropping since then, but rose again in 2017-18.



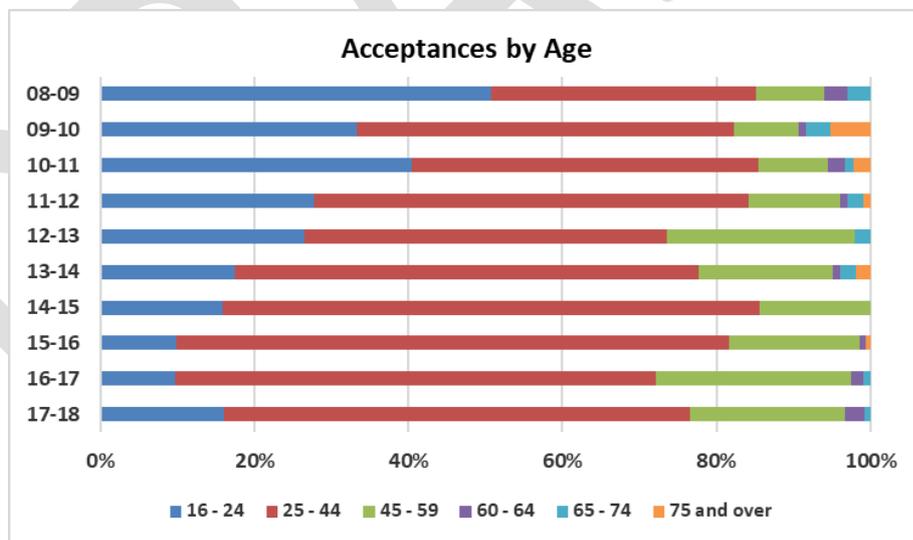
- HCLIC data for 2018-19 confirmed that evictions by relatives and friends are on the rise again making up 37% (297) of all cases owed either the prevention or relief duty, compared to 28% (228) Termination of AST cases. Unlike P1E data which showed homeless cases but not prevention cases, HCLIC figures include both prevention and relief cases.

3. PROFILE OF HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS

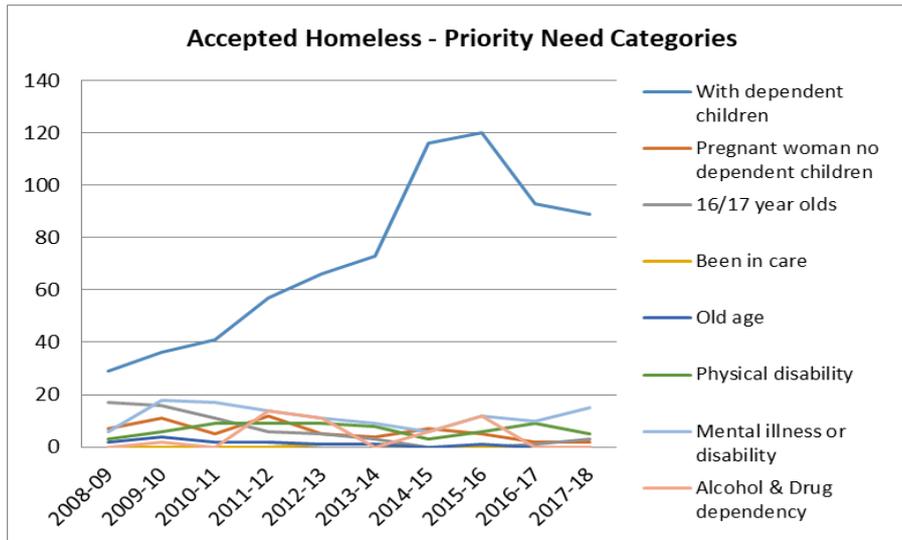
- Homelessness applications from Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) households had increased from 52% to 67% of all homelessness applications between 2008-09 and 2016-17, well above their 30% representation amongst all Merton households and 55% representation on the Housing Register.
- The chart below shows the proportion of BME households accepted as statutorily homeless had been steadily increasing since 2010-11, from 50% to a high 73% in 2016-17, although in 2017-18 the proportion had dropped down to 62%.



- The chart below shows that the proportion of young people aged 16-24 accepted as homeless by Merton Council has seen a steady decrease since 2010-11, falling from 40% of all acceptances in 2010-11 to 10% by 2016-17, but on the rise again to 16% in 2017-18. There was also a clear drop in the proportion of older households being accepted as homeless, with no one aged 60 and over accepted as homeless in 2014-15, and only a few cases in each of the following 3 years (2, 3 & 4 cases respectively) in this age group.
- By contrast, the proportion of acceptances for the 45-59 age-group had increased from 9% to 25% between 2008-09 and 2016-17 but dropped back to 20% in 2017-18. The 25-44 age-group makes up 61% of all accepted cases in 2016-17, up from 34% in 2008-09.



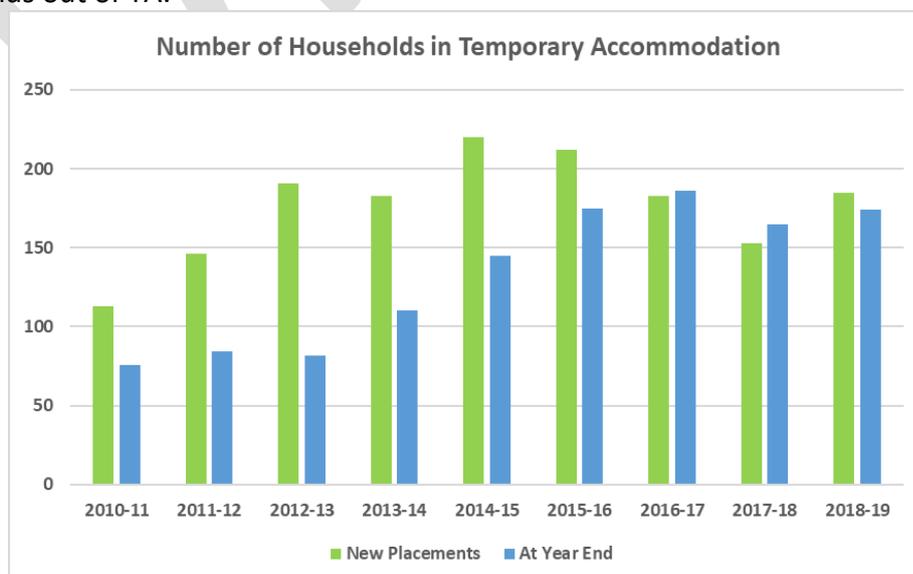
- The increase in the proportion of homeless applicants aged 25-44 and aged 45-59 being accepted as homeless is due to the continued increase of families with dependent children, although this trend began to reverse from 2015-16 (see chart below). Over the last 5 years, there has been a steady drop of other household types, such as those with mental health problems or substance dependencies, being accepted as homeless, although households with mental health issues had risen again in 2018-19.



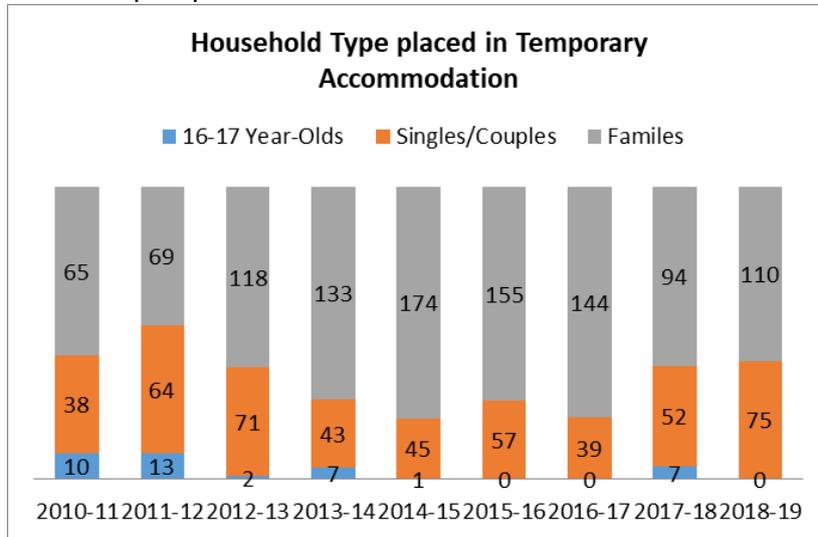
- The proportion of homeless applicants from A10 countries had increased over the years, from only 1 in 2008-09 to 12 of all applicants in 2015-16, but then dropped back to 4 in 2016-17. The majority of A10 applicants were from Poland, making up just over two-thirds (67%) of all A10 applicants. Data are recorded differently on HCLic, which show that in 2018-19, 13% of the 806 households assessed as being owed either the prevention or relief duty were from EU countries, and 12% were from the rest of the world, with UK households making up three-quarter of cases.

4. HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

- The number of households newly placed into TA had doubled between 2010-11 and 2014-15, reflecting the increase in homelessness applications and acceptances. Since then the number of new placements into TA began to fall, although the 'snapshot' figures at year end did not see a corresponding fall, with 174) households staying in TA at the end of March 2019. The number of households staying in TA at a particular point in time (e.g. year-end) remaining high, despite the fall in the number of new placements, can be attributed to the shortage of affordable housing, leading to delays in moving households out of TA.

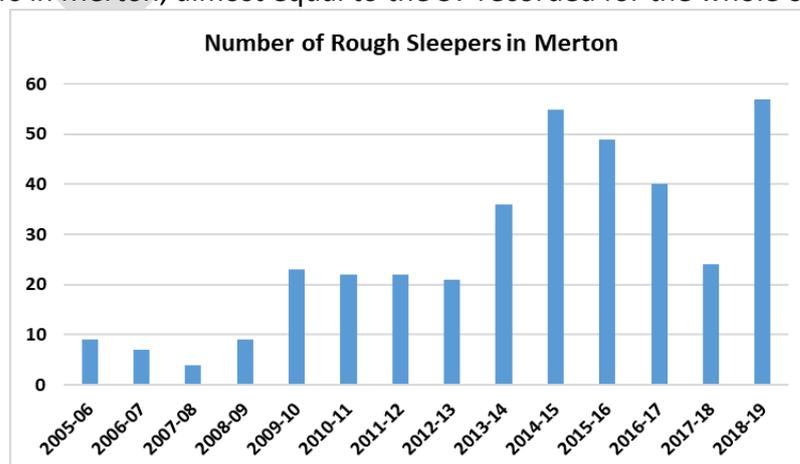


- Families were making up an increasingly large proportion of households placed in TA up until 2016-17, but since then family placements in TA had decreased in both number and proportion. Conversely, single homeless persons and couples placements saw a sharp increase from 39 in 2016-17 to 75 in 2018-19. No 16-17 year-old were placed into TA since 2014-15 except 7 placements in 2017-18.



5. ROUGH SLEEPING IN MERTON

- Merton’s annual Rough Sleepers Estimates show a significant increase in the number of rough sleepers found in Merton on a ‘typical’ night in winter. The first official Estimate in 2009 only found 2 rough sleepers, and the number remained a single digit until 2017, when 23 rough sleepers were found in a single night in December 2018. Although these estimates only provide snapshots of rough sleeping on a particular day during the winter period, they do reflect the big increase in the number of rough sleepers reported to the council over the last 10 years.
- The Combined Homelessness & Information Network (CHAIN), managed by St.Mungo’s, is a multi-agency database which records information on all rough sleepers come into contact with outreach services. The chart below shows the number of rough sleepers found in Merton over the course of a year. It had been steadily increasing since cases were first recorded in 2005-06, until 2014-15 when the number began to drop, before increasing sharply in 2018-19. In the first 2 quarters of 2019-20, CHAIN has recorded 56 rough sleepers in Merton, almost equal to the 57 recorded for the whole of 2018-19.

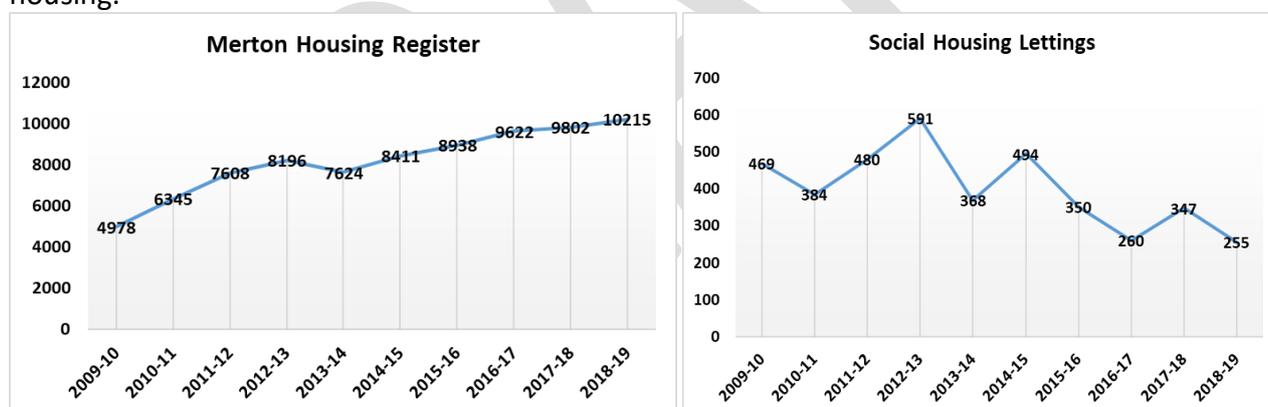


- The majority of rough sleepers were male. In 2018-19, only 4 of the 57 rough sleepers recorded on CHAIN were female. 44% of rough sleepers recorded in 2018-19 were UK nationals, and another 44% were Eastern European nationals with the remaining 12% from the rest of the world. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of rough sleepers were between the age of 26 and 55. 16% were older rough sleepers aged over 55 and 10% were younger ones aged between 18 and 25.
- In 2018-19, outreach workers were able to undertake full assessments for 34 of the 57 rough sleepers. Of these, 47% had alcohol misuse issues, 29% were drug users, and 41% had mental health problems.
- The CHIAN figures only show rough sleepers verified by outreach services. There were other rough sleepers reported to Merton’s multi-agency Rough Sleeping Case Panel who were not officially recorded on CHAIN, so the true extent of rough sleeping is likely to be higher than that shown on CHAIN.

6. HOUSING SUPPLY FOR HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS

The shortage of social housing in Merton is particularly acute when compared to many London boroughs, as only 14% of Merton housing stock are social housing. The number of homes available for let to households on the council’s Housing Register or Waiting List has also been falling while the number on the Register continues to rise.

As at April 2019, there were 10,215 households on the Register, but only 255 homes available for let in 2018-19. Of these, only 232 homes were let to households not already living in social housing.



- The council’s Allocations Strategy set a target of letting 58% of all available social homes to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness on the council’s Housing Register. In addition, another 25 social homes were made available to young people at risk of homelessness through a special quota, to provide move-on accommodation for homeless young people in supported accommodation, and to house Looked After Children (children leaving care) as well as children at risk
- There are nearly 170 units of supported housing in Merton available for young single homeless people, young people at risk, care leavers, and for vulnerable young mothers. These included a ‘first-stage’ direct access MASH hostel (Merton Action for Single Homeless) with intensive support for 16 young people, and up to 80 units at the YMCA which provides low-level support only. The remaining are ‘second-stage’ accommodation managed by Evolve which supports young people to live semi-independently with links

to training opportunities. Social Care services also procure accommodation for Looked After Children (Care Leavers) and Young People At Risk

- There are also 100 units of supported housing and semi-independent accommodation for homeless persons with other support needs such as mental health problems and learning disabilities, those fleeing from domestic violence and offenders / ex-offenders. Frail elders who are homeless can access Sheltered or Extra Care housing schemes run by housing associations

7. HOMELESSNESS AND THE HOUSING MARKET

As outlined in the introduction to this Strategy, one of the main underlying causes of homelessness is a lack of affordable housing, alongside personal crises. Housing cost is rising faster than household income, leaving low-income households as well as many mid-income households unable to buy or even rent their own homes in the open market.

Average house price has gone up by 77% in London over the last 10 years (Land Registry HPI), up from £266,837 in November 2009, to £472,232 in October 2019. The increase in average house price in Merton over the same period was even higher at 84%, increasing from £280,931 to £516,101 by October 2019. This upward trend began to reverse in Merton towards the end of 2018, with average house price dropping by 1% between November 2018 and October 2019, although it is not possible to predict if this downward trend will continue now that there is a new majority government to take things forward.

Average private sector rent has also increased by 37% across London over the last 10 years, with a 39% increase in Merton over the same period, from £256 per week to £356 per week. There are suggestions that private sector rent could rise by 4.8% year on year. This means that the average weekly rent in Merton could increase to £410 by 2022.

The table below shows the gap between average open market rent, and the current weekly Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Rate, in the 4 main postcode areas in Merton. The SMA / CRA postcodes broadly fall within the Outer South London Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA) the SW19 & SW20 postcodes roughly aligns with the Outer South West London BRMA.

Average Weekly Rents March 2019 & LHA Rates 2018-19 (£)

	1 Bed Market	1 Bed LHA	2 Beds Market	2 Beds LHA	3 Beds Market	3 Beds LHA	4 Beds Market	4 Beds LHA
Outer South London BRMA								
CR4	227.08	177.41	276.69	223.40	351.69	279.14	445.85	354.71
SM4	233.77	177.41	291.23	223.40	356.08	279.14	395.31	354.71
Outer South West London BRMA								
SW19	290.08	216.06	363.92	280.60	472.85	336.96	653.54	429.53
SW20	286.85	216.06	330.69	280.60	442.62	336.96	678.23	429.53

Source: London Rental Statistics

The table above shows the huge gap between average rent levels and LHA rates in all areas of Merton for all bed sizes. Households needing family-sized accommodation are hit the hardest.

While the shortfall for renting a 1-bed home in the SW19 would be around £74 a week, the gap for renting a 3-bed home in the SW19 area would be as high as £136 a week. Even for families renting a 3-bed home in the cheapest CR4 area of Merton would need to use £72.55 of their benefits income to cover rent payments.

With total benefits capped to £23,000 per annum or £442 a week for London households since November 2016, including housing costs, it would not be possible for homeless households on benefits or low income to afford average market rents and they would need to look for cheaper homes to rent. The table below shows lower quartile market rents, which still exceed LHA rates in all areas and for all bed sizes.

This shows the difficulties faced by both homeless households and by the council in securing affordable accommodation in the private rented sector. Homeless families with children face the stark choice of keeping up with their rent payments or feeding their children out of their capped benefits payments. For example, a family renting a 3-bed home with lower quartile rent in the CR4 area would need to pay £334.62 on rents out of an income of £442, leaving them with just over £100 a week to live on.

Lower Quartile Weekly Rents March 2019 & LHA Rates 2018-19 (£)

	1 Bed Market	1 Bed LHA	2 Beds Market	2 Beds LHA	3 Beds Market	3 Beds LHA	4 Beds Market	4 Beds LHA
Outer South London BRMA								
CR4	210.00	177.41	253.85	223.40	334.62	279.14	415.38	354.71
SM4	216.46	177.41	276.92	223.40	346.15	279.14	368.23	354.71
Outer South West London BRMA								
SW19	265.38	216.06	321.92	280.60	415.38	336.96	530.77	429.53
SW20	250.38	216.06	300.00	280.60	414.69	336.96	506.54	429.53

Source: London Rental Statistics

CHAPTER 4 – STRATEGIC PRIORITIES TO 2025

PRIORITY 1 - PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

Merton's Approach

The number of accepted homeless households in Merton is amongst the lowest across London boroughs, due to our success in homelessness prevention through housing advice, helping over 500 households at risk of homelessness every year until 2015-16 to find housing solutions, and continued to help over 450 households since then. Prevention measures undertaken by the council also include legal advocacy, nominations to supported accommodation, crisis intervention, mediation & conciliation, Sanctuary scheme and mortgage and rent rescue etc.

Many of households threatened with homelessness are given additional priorities for social housing and re-housed through Part VI of the Housing Act 1996, thus preventing them from becoming homeless. Nominations to permanent social housing under Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 accounted for one-third (33%) of prevention cases in 2016-17. 26% of prevention cases were provided with legal advocacy and 18% were given help to access housing solutions in the private rented sector, including help with a rent deposit. One in ten cases were assisted into other types of accommodation such as supported housing or hostel accommodation.

Outcomes to Date

The council and its partners have achieved the following outcomes in recent years:

- **Prevention through Housing Advice** - The council's Housing Options Team has prevented about 4,200 households from becoming homeless in the 8 years to 2017-18, making significant contributions in maintaining the relatively low number of households in temporary accommodation. The number of 'prevention' approaches had been on a downward trend since 2013-14. However, with the introduction of the Homelessness Prevention Act 2017, which has extended the definition of "threatened with homelessness" from 28 to 56 days, prevention cases were by a third (33%), with 617 owed the Prevention duty in 2018-19.

	Homelessness Prevention Cases
2010-11	513
2011-12	560
2012-13	529
2013-14	565
2014-15	558
2015-16	561
2016-17	458
2017-18	465
Total	4,209
2018-19	617 owed prevention duty

- **Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer Project** – In 2016-17, Merton Council was part of a successful tri-borough bid obtaining close to £1 million over 2 years through the government’s £20m Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme. The joint bid with Kingston and Sutton councils was one of 28 successful bids out of a total of 122. Merton Council delivered elements of the project that were specific to local needs, with a team of Housing Coaches to support households identified as at risk through ‘upstreaming’ work with partner agencies. Households who could not be prevented from becoming homeless at an early stage were provided with assistance on housing advice and homelessness applications where appropriate.
- **SPEAR Homeless Health Link Project** - The council worked with partners to reduce non-housing risk factors, by increasing referrals to the Homeless Health Link Project run by SPEAR, which provides a signposting service to GPs and dentists, as well as making referrals to CMHTs and drug & alcohol services. Clients with mental health issues can be assessed by the project’s own Mental Health worker. It can also trigger safeguarding alerts for domestic violence and other cases. The project has assisted 130 clients to date covering 5 boroughs (Kingston, Merton, Richmond, Sutton & Wandsworth).
- **Rent Deposit Scheme & Tenancy Renewals** - Over 1,700 households have been assisted into the private rented sector since 2003. Over the last 4 years, we have increased our focus and effort on maintain existing tenancies. As well as securing over 200 new tenancies for households who were homeless or facing homelessness, we also assisted 93 households in securing an extension / renewal of their tenancy agreements.
- **Welfare Reform Project** - Following the introduction of the Benefits Cap in 2013, the council set up a Welfare Reform Project providing support to affected households through assistance with budgeting and help for individuals to get into employment. The project helped prevent 225 families from becoming homeless, and has supported 229 into work.
- **Transforming Families** - In response to the Government’s Troubled Families initiative to ‘turn around’ up to 400,000 families with troubled lives across England between 2015-16 and 2019-2020, the council has been working with families with the aim of reducing incidence of youth crime, anti-social behaviour and offending; maximising school attendance and engagement, and integrating / reintegrating parents into employment. This initiative should in turn help reduce the risks of these families becoming homeless.

Case Studies

- **Lisa** approached the council’s Housing Options Service as she has been asked to leave home by her mother due to her pregnancy. Having determined that there was a real threat of homelessness, the Housing Options Service agreed to place Lisa in the priority groups band (Band B) under the council’s Allocations Policy, on the basis that she continued to reside with her mother until she is successful in bidding for a property. Lisa stayed a further two months with her mother and was then successful in bidding for a one-bed flat.
- **Sanjay** and family were served with a notice to leave their private rented tenancy. An Options Adviser examined the notice served and determined that it was not legally valid. The Adviser contacted the Landlord to inform him of this, and discovered that his reason

for seeking possession was a shortfall in housing benefit. The Adviser then made a successful application for discretionary housing benefit and as a result the landlord agreed to renew the tenancy for another year.

- **Anna** was fleeing violence from an ex-partner from her housing association home and approached the council for assistance. After hearing her options she decided to accept the Sanctuary scheme which provides added security measures to her home such as a toughened front door, panic room and MASCOT alarm, thus enabling her to continue to stay at the home she has lived in for a number of years.

New Challenges & Opportunities

Merton Council has responded well to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which introduced a new duty for local authorities to take reasonable steps to prevent people from becoming homeless earlier if the person is at risk of losing their home. There will also be a new duty to relief homelessness by taking reasonable steps to help households secure accommodation if their homelessness cannot be prevented.

The council had already implemented many prevention measures such as mediations with landlords and rent deposits for the private rented sector successfully for many years, but with additional funding resources from the government, there are now opportunities to review existing measures to see what work best, and to consider introducing new measures that will help prevent homelessness.

Additional resources are essential as local authorities are faced with various external factors that are fueling an increase in the number of households threatened with homelessness. One of these factors is the roll out of Universal Credit, which could lead to homelessness episodes unless vulnerable households are provided with appropriate support. The introduction of fixed-term tenancies by registered providers (RPs) since 2012 may be another factor, although several larger RPs have announced in 2019 their intentions to stop issuing fixed-term tenancies. RPs that still have fixed-term tenancies in place will need to provide adequate support to their tenants well in advance of renewal dates, to ensure that the end of these tenancies will not result in homelessness episodes.

Tackling the underlying causes of homelessness is also key to homelessness prevention work. At the heart of the government's Homelessness Reduction Act is the recognition that reducing homelessness is not just about getting people off the streets, but also about stopping people from becoming homeless in the first place. This concept was clearly set out in its report ***Making every contact count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness***, which highlights the fact that homelessness often comes at the end of a long line of crisis, and many homeless persons already had numerous interactions with public and voluntary sector services with opportunities missed. It is therefore essential that cross-service working between councils, charities, health services and the police etc. is improved, to focus on earlier support for people likely to become homeless, by:

- Tackling troubled childhoods and adolescence
- Improving health
- Reducing involvement in crime
- Improving access to financial advice, skills and employment services
- Pioneering innovative social funding mechanisms for homelessness

Consultation Outcomes

Set out below are the feedback we have from partner agencies through our October 2019 strategy consultation event:

What works well?

- DWP's Homeless Outreach Worker attends Faith in Action Drop-In sessions weekly
- DWP's Work Coaches working with homeless clients
- DWP's discretionary Direct Payments to landlords
- School Advisors on homelessness
- Registered Providers (RPs) making early referrals of tenants at risk of homelessness

What are the gaps?

- Working with Registered Providers' expectation of Rent Rescue
- Education on GDPR and data sharing
- Insufficient specialist support for mental health clients
- Need a register of support agencies and what they do

What should the priorities be?

- 'What to do' guide on evictions in plain language and simple steps with links
- Develop a Homelessness App
- Needs joint training across sectors and organisations
- Set up Forum across all groups
- Undertake research on various client groups

Key Actions to 2025

Fulfilling the New 'Prevention' & 'Relief' Duty

Merton Council is responding well to new duties set out in the Homelessness Reduction Act, with data monitoring in 2018-19 showing a big increase in prevention cases and a corresponding fall in homeless cases owed the Relief duty.

We will build on this success and continue to reduce homeless cases by assisting households with prevention measures.

Tenancy Renewals through Rent Deposit Scheme

We will continue to assist homeless households and those at risk of homelessness in accessing the private rented sector through the Rent Deposit Scheme, sourcing accommodation through incentive payments and rent deposit guarantee, as well as providing tenancy sustainment support. We will build on our success in the last 4 years in helping households renew or extend their private rented tenancies at the end of the initial fixed-term Assured Shorthold Tenancy period.

Homelessness Forum

Following the hugely successful Strategy Consultation Event for Merton in October 2016, organised by London Plus Project and attended by nearly 60 partner organisations from the public and voluntary sectors, it is clear that there is an appetite for multi agencies to continue to work together and deliver outcomes for clients. We will set up a Forum where partner agencies can share experiences and ideas, monitor the agreed actions of this Strategy, and to agreed further joint actions to ensure that the Strategy will be responsive to legislative and policy changes.

Joint Cross-Sector Training

The council will work with London Plus to meet the training needs of local homelessness agencies, by organising tailored training in Merton. The council will also link local homelessness agencies to training offered by organisations such as Homeless Link and Shelter, and will encourage take-up by arranging sessions to take place locally where possible.

Better Links with Health Services

Merton Housing will work closely with the council's Public Health Team to ensure synergy between the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and the Health & Well-Being Strategy, as well as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) undertaken jointly by Public Health and the local Clinical Commissioning Group.

Information for Households facing Homelessness

With severely limited social housing supply in Merton, the council will produce a guide on the reality of homelessness, where to get help when faced with homelessness including a directory of local agencies, and what to do when faced with evictions. We will also explore the development of a Homelessness App, initially with national or Pan London homelessness organisations.

Delivering Tenancy Strategy Objectives

The council will monitor RPs adherence to objectives set out in Merton's Tenancy Strategy, to assess if reviews of fixed-term tenancies are taken in a timely manner, and if sufficient support are provided to tenants in preparing for the end of fixed-term. We will monitor if decisions on whether or not to renew tenancies are in line with Tenancy Strategy objectives, to ensure that fixed-term tenancies do not lead to homelessness.

PRIORITY 2 – ACCESS TO SUITABLE HOUSING OPTIONS FOR HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS

Temporary Accommodation, Social Housing & Private Renting

To help meet the housing needs of homeless households and to fulfil our statutory duty, the council arranges temporary accommodation for certain households awaiting a decision on their homelessness applications. The council uses mainly self-contained accommodation in Merton as temporary accommodation through entering into a contract with one single private provider and spot-purchasing through other providers, although some households are placed into bed and breakfast accommodation where no self-contained units are available.

For households in priority needs accepted as statutorily homeless, many are re-housed through the council's Allocations Policy into social housing owned by housing associations. However, local authorities can also discharge their homelessness duty through a suitable private rented offer without the applicant's consent, following changes brought through the Localism Act 2011.

The private rented sector (PRS) is an important source of housing supply for homeless households, as the shortage of social housing in Merton is particularly acute with only 14% of Merton housing stock being social housing. The number of 'social' homes available for letting to new tenants is continuing to fall, with only 255 homes available in 2018-19, compared to 10,215 households on our Housing Register. Of the 255 homes, only 232 were available to new tenants with the remaining 23 let to households transferring from another social housing tenancy. The continued fall in social housing supply means that fewer homeless households are able to access social housing. The chart below shows that the number of social housing available to homeless households has been falling.



Successful placements in the PRS also helps prevent many households from becoming homeless in the first place, and minimise length of stay for those who are already living in temporary accommodation awaiting a homelessness decision. Merton has an established Rent Deposit Scheme which has been in place since 2003 which assists homeless households in accessing the private rented sector.

Outcomes to Date

The council and its partners have achieved the following outcomes in the last few years:

- **Secured TA Supply** – The council has recently entered into a 10-year agreement with our TA provider in Merton, thus securing a supply of 81 units of TA exclusively for Merton households for the next 10 years.
- **Allocations Strategy** - The council prioritised homeless households through our Allocations Strategy, letting above 46% of social homes available for rent to households under threats of homelessness, and another 20% to accepted homeless households, to ensure that the limited supply of social housing is used to meet the greatest housing need in Merton.
- **Rent Deposit Scheme** - The council has been making best use of the private rented sector through the Rent Deposit Scheme (RDS) since 2003. Up until March 2019, the council had assisted over 1,700 households in accessing the private rented sector. As well as securing over 200 new private sector tenancies for homeless clients in the last 4 years, the scheme also helped 93 households to renew or extend their tenancies after the initial fixed-term has ended.
- **Forum and Accreditation Training for Private Landlord's** – The council runs a Private Landlords' Forum which meets at least once a year. Through this forum, the council promotes its Rent Deposit Scheme and provides landlords with information on latest legislative changes and initiatives for the private rented sector, to help promote good practice in the sector. The council also organises Accreditation and CPD (continuous professional development) courses for private landlords and estate agents.

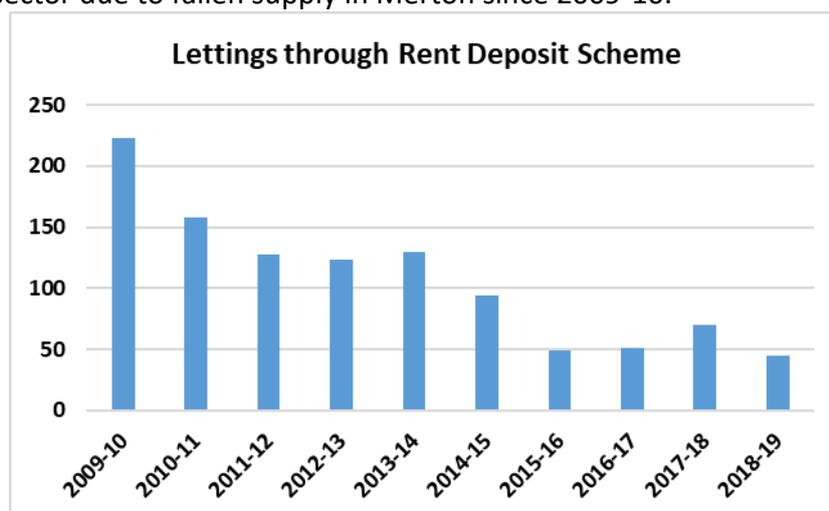
New Challenges & Opportunities

It is increasingly difficult to increase the supply of new build affordable homes in Merton, with less development grant funding available, the requirement to reduce rent by 1%, and the housing benefit cap to LHA rates for social tenants, all making it harder for developing RPs to make new schemes financially stack up.

The new Conservative Government's new legislative programme announced through the Queen's Speech 2019 did not include housing, and the party's manifesto did not cover any proposed changes to address the financial viability issues linked to affordable housing development. Instead, the focus seems to be on promoting schemes like Help to Buy and its Equity Loan scheme, stamp duty reduction for First-Time Buyers, and extending Right-to-Buy for housing association tenants.

Accessing the private rented sector has also proved increasingly challenging. Despite the increase in size of the private rented sector in Merton, growing from 17% of all housing stock in 2001 to 27% in 2011, only a small number homes are available to households in housing need, due to the caps in housing benefit rates that no longer match what the high rents that landlords could easily get in the buoyant market for working professionals. The roll-out of Universal Credit is reducing further the number of landlords willing to let their homes to benefits claimants, as many landlords are not aware the option of receiving rent payments direct if tenants were in

arrears. The chart below shows a clear drop in the number of households assisted into the private rented sector due to fallen supply in Merton since 2009-10.



As the supply of social homes continue to dwindle in Merton, and with fewer private landlords in Merton willing to accept homeless households who are in receipt of housing benefit, in particular those in receipt of Universal Credit, it is likely that these households will need to consider moving out of Merton. The council will also need to consider securing supply outside of the borough when placing households into temporary accommodation or when discharging homelessness duty through the private rented sector.

When faced with out-of-borough placements options, the council will continue to take into consideration the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012, which deals with the suitability of location of all accommodation secured under Part 7 of the 1996 Act, including temporary accommodation, and also the April 2015 Supreme Court Judgement regarding the lawfulness of placing homeless households outside of local areas.

Consultation Outcomes

Set out below are the feedback we have from partner agencies through our October 2019 strategy consultation event:

What works well?

- Merton Council's Rent Deposit Scheme
- Incentive payments, deposit guarantee and Discretionary Housing Payments for private landlords
- Improved working relationship between Housing and Children's Social Care, and also mental health services
- Spear floating support and post tenancy support and other tenancy sustainment work

What are the gaps?

- Lack of tenancy sustainment for HMO occupants
- Lack of good quality housing options for families
- Move-on accommodation can be isolating
- Chaotic families falling through the gap, some would benefit from permanent low level support
- Insufficient specialist support for mental health clients
- Issues with Universal Credit payments

- No recourse to public funds
- Directory of private rented sector landlords

What should the priorities be?

- Recognise the risk to mental health if basic needs are ignored
- Better incentives for private landlords by providing floating support or tenancy sustainment
- Incentivise private landlords to improve housing standard and to address poor quality housing
- Information sharing on property availability needs improving

Key Actions to 2025

Maximise New Supply of Affordable Housing

The council is reviewing the affordable housing targets set out in our Core Strategy 2011 through the development of our new Housing Strategy, which is being drafted at present, taking into account the latest London Plan requirements. The current targets require 40% of new housing to be affordable where schemes have 10 or more units, and a 20% target for sites below 10 units. The provision of affordable housing should have a 60/40 split between rented homes and intermediate housing. The council's Future Merton Team are also working with Clarion Housing in the planned regeneration of 3 housing estates – High Path, Ravensbury and East Fields, to maximise the provision of affordable housing.

Review Interim Housing Placement Policy

Following the Supreme Court Judgement on placements of homeless households outside of local authorities own boundaries, Merton Council has produced an interim policy which sets out circumstances where households could be placed out of the borough. The council has implemented this new policy in 2016-17. Outcomes of the pilot will be reviewed before a 'fit-for-purpose' permanent Housing Placement Policy is developed and adopted.

Accommodation Inspections

Merton Housing will continue to undertake periodic inspections of all temporary accommodation used by the council to ensure they meet health and safety requirements and are free of hazards. If the TA we use in borough is part of an HMO (Houses in Multiple Occupation), our Environmental Health Team will visit the properties to identify possible hazards and to specify to the landlords what work are required to ensure their properties meet all safety standard. We will liaise with other councils regarding inspections of properties located in other boroughs, and will work with London Councils and the West London Housing Alliance to develop and implement Setting the Standard.

Rent Deposit Casework Panel

Merton's Housing Division is developing a prioritisation system of cases for assisting homeless households into the private rented sector, depending on the urgency of the case e.g. bailiff warrant, possession orders, homeless at home etc. This will help make best use of available supply in the private rented sector, and will also help reduce the use of temporary accommodation or limiting the length of stay in this type of accommodation.

Better Engagement with Private Landlords

The council will consult with private landlords to identify the necessary incentives that need to be put in place that will encourage them to let their properties through the council for

households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The council will continue to hold annual Private Landlords Forum meetings, with the aim of ensuring landlords are up-to-date with latest legislative changes, and to promote good standard by increasing the number of accredited landlords in Merton. The council will also provide at least 2 training courses annually for private landlords, offering discounted rates to accredited landlords and estate agents.

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PRIORITY 3 - PATHWAY FOR YOUNG SINGLE HOMELESS

Homeless Young People

There are many factors that cause homelessness amongst young people. Amongst those who approach the council for assistance, conflict with their families is often the immediate cause of their homelessness. Many are from low-income households and have experienced problems at home that included family breakdown, drug and alcohol abuse, violence or neglect. The young people themselves also often have a range of problems other than homelessness, such as drug and alcohol abuse, mental health problems, problems at school, as well as gang or criminal activities. For these reasons, many of them are not ready for independent living and will need help and support to put them on a pathway to independence.

There has also been a noticeable drop in the number and proportion of young people approaching Merton Housing for homelessness assistance since 2010-11, particularly those under 18 years of age. This came about after the Southwark Judgement in 2009, which has fundamentally realigned the housing responsibilities for homeless 16 and 17 year olds. The House of Lords ruled that the duty placed upon local children's services under the Children Act 1989 cannot be circumvented by referrals to the housing authority, and those with accommodation need will be regarded as Looked After Children (LAC) and be provided with accommodation under Section 20 of the Children's Act 1989

Young single homeless people aged 18 and above approaching the council for assistance are placed on the council's Housing Register under Band B for those 'Under Threat of Homelessness' and Band E for 'Accepted Homeless'. The table below shows the number of young single homeless people aged 18-25 on our Housing Register is on a general downward trend. The downward trend was likely to be linked to more young people being provided with accommodation through social care legislation.

Homeless Households on Housing Register (Band B & Band E)

Age Band	April 2014	April 2015	April 2016	April 2017	April 2018	April 2019
18-25	102 (36%)	70 (23%)	92 (23%)	79 (18%)	83 (20%)	73 (18%)
26-30	54 (19%)	65 (22%)	78 (19%)	82 (19%)	63 (15%)	68 (17%)
31-35	126 (45%)	47 (16%)	69 (17%)	80 (18%)	70 (17%)	64 (16%)
36 & Over	0	118 (39%)	169 (41%)	201 (45%)	196 (48%)	198 (49%)
Total	282	300	408	442	412	403

Supported accommodation for young single homeless persons in Merton are provided by Spear, Evolve (previously known as Grenfell) and the YMCA. Spear runs the MASH Hostel providing 'first-stage' intensive support for homeless young people, with Evolve and the YMCA providing 'second-stage' accommodation which supports young people to live semi-independently with links to training opportunities.

Outcomes to Date

- **'Homelessness Change' Hostel Improvement** – Merton Council has invested nearly £800,000 in refurbishing and extending the MASH (Merton Action for Single Homeless) direct-access hostel for young single homeless people in line with the Government's 'Homelessness Change' principles, which promotes inclusion. Through the improvement work, the hostel was also extended to almost double its previous capacity, from 9 to 16 units. The hostel provides 24-hour on-site support for young people, and a Keyworker is assigned to work with each young person to help them plan a pathway which could include access to education, training and apprenticeship.
- **Reviewed Supported Housing for Young People** – The council has completed a comprehensive review of Housing Related Support Services (HRS) in 2019-20. Through this review, the council identified inefficiencies in services for all clients groups and negotiated new contracts with providers that will deliver 'more for less'.
- **Social Housing 'Quota' for Young Single Homeless** – Despite having only a few hundred social homes available for let each year, the council has set aside a 'quota' for young people to ensure that the most vulnerable single homeless people and care leavers can access social tenancies. 10% (25) out of the 255 lettings in 2018-19 were allocated to young applicants on Band D of the council's Housing Register.
- **Y Cube** – The Y Cube is an innovative way of providing affordable housing for single people by using pre-fabricated construction method which is far cheaper and more efficient than conventional on-site construction. YMCA has completed the first Y Cube Project in the country in Merton in 2015, which provide 36 units of accommodation for single people, half of these will be occupied by single homeless people nominated by the council, with the remaining units used by the YMCA as move-on accommodation for residents of their main hostel.

Case Study

Like many young people, **Emily** has many friends and gets on well with other. However, she had relationship problems with her mother and also suffered from occasional domestic violence. She felt as if she was being treated differently from her siblings and her relationship with her mother eventually became irreparable and she was asked to leave home.

Emily was referred to the MASH hostel run by SPEAR, and was given support by staff and offered counselling as she needed emotional support. While living at the hostel, Emily participated in life skills training and is able to manage on a budget. Emily aspires to a career in Fine Arts, so MASH staff liaised with the council's social care team to help her secure financial support to attend college, and to purchase all the art supplies she needed for her course. With the financial and emotional support, Emily successfully obtained an Art and Design Diploma in 2016 at Croydon College and received a distinction. She then went on to Sheffield University to study Fine Arts, with MASH staffing providing her with supporting in completing her application.

Whilst at the MASH hostel she put together a book called Freedom, Beat and Body Language which contained a range of thought provoking photographs which she had taken and developed herself. This piece of work earned her a distinction for her College Diploma. Emily is determined and hardworking who has direction, and goals. Although her troubled home life had disrupted

her plans, she was able to get back on track with support from MASH as well as social care staff. She has succeeded in her goal in going to university, and can now look forward to a bright future career in Arts.

New Challenges & Opportunities

Supported housing plays a key role in assisting homeless young people to find their feet and become independent, helping them access education and training as well as apprenticeship and employment, and to become tenancy ready. The sector had faced some uncertainties with the government review on the Future of Supported Housing, the requirement to reduce rent by 1% each year for 4 years, and its proposal to cap entitlement of housing benefit for supported housing residents to LHA rate from April 2019.

There are now more clarities and certainties to how supported housing are going to be funded, with housing providers being able to increase rent again from 2022 by consumer price index plus 1% every year for 5 years, and the government announcement that the proposed cap to LHA rate will not be implemented. Following two consultations on future funding for supported housing, the government concluded in August 2018 that the welfare system will continue to fund both the core rent and additional housing needs costs rather than devolving the funding of additional housing needs costs to local authorities with fixed-size pots. This has ended uncertainties for many supported housing providers and give both providers and tenants more security.

As well as facing the financial challenges posed by these external changes, supported housing providers in Merton for young single homeless people, care leavers and children at risk have just entered into new contracts with Merton Council, following a review of the Housing Related Support services funded by the council. These new contracts present opportunities for the council and our providers to improve services for homeless young people.

Consultation Outcomes

Set out below are the feedback we have from partner agencies through our October 2019 strategy consultation event:

What works well?

- Supported housing providers offering a range of employment and training support
- Social housing 'quota' for young people ready for independent living

What are the gaps?

- Lack of suitable move-on options leads to silt up of supported housing for young single homeless persons
- Lack of support in move-on accommodation can result in repeat homelessness

What should the priorities be?

- Floating support / tenancy sustainment for young people to enable them to move on and prevent lengthy stay in supported housing, and to help prevent repeat homelessness

Key Actions to 2025

New Supported Housing Contracts Monitoring

The council funds a total of 169 supported housing units for young people. Of these, 80% or 134 units are designated for young single homeless people, which include 16 units in the MASH

Hostel. There are 28 units for young people at risk such as care leavers and 6 units for teenage parents. The council's newly appointed Contracts Monitoring Officer will undertake regular monitoring of contract performance to ensure quality and value for money.

'MASH' Hostel

The hostel improvement project has increased the capacity of the council's hostel for single homeless young people from 9 bed-spaces to 16, and extended the maximum age of residents from 21 to 25. Following a review of Housing Related Support Services, Spear has been awarded a new 3-year contract in 2019, ensuring that the increased number of residents in the scheme are kept safe and are provided with the appropriate level of support. A review of all policies and procedures will be undertaken in 2020 to ensure that they are appropriate for the expanded scheme.

'Pathway' Model

The council will work with supported housing providers to create a 'Pathway' for homeless young people into independence, by increasing the number of young people engaged with an accredited training programme and / or employment services, linking into opportunities offered by registered providers such as Clarion and Moat, as well as initiatives by Merton Partnership's Economic Well Being group. The council and its partners will also work towards increasing the number of 'second-stage' move-on accommodation for those ready to move from intensive supported accommodation, through procurement in the private rented sector.

Extending Network of Agencies working with Young People

The council will build on the partnership working base already established through the Young Persons Nomination Panel, extending membership of the panel beyond housing providers and youth / social care agencies, by engaging other services that work with young people, including schools, community youth organisations, health groups and criminal justice service etc., including to identify young people at risk of homelessness who need early intervention.

Improve Monitoring of 'Pathway' Outcomes

The council will work with supported housing providers through the Young Persons Nominations Panel to better record the positive outcomes achieved by young people at the end of the supported housing stay, including training and employment, housing as well as health outcomes, to help assess the effectiveness and cost benefits of different interventions.

Floating Support for Young Single Homeless

The council has commissioned a new Floating Support Service to assist all vulnerable people, including young single homeless people who need support in their move-on accommodation to help them sustain their tenancies and reduce repeat homelessness.

PRIORITY 4 – SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS FOR ROUGH SLEEPERS

Tackling street homelessness involves 2 distinct challenges. There is the challenge to meet rough sleepers' day-to-day need for a shelter, and that of finding lasting solutions to their difficulties by getting them back not just into homes, but also helping them improve health and back into employment, and to help them sustain their accommodation. This will require housing, health, social care and other statutory and voluntary sector agencies coming together to work collaboratively.

Rough sleepers can be particularly 'hard-to-reach', as they tend to move around different sleep sites making it hard to track them down. Even when located, many are unwilling to engage with any agencies, particularly statutory agencies. Merton Council and our partner agencies have had to work to a large number of entrenched rough sleepers, and the problem is exacerbated by the lack of designated hostel and supported accommodation, with agencies trying to assist rough sleepers while they continue to sleep rough, without the stable base that they need to help them recover.

There has also been a rise in the number rough sleepers with support needs. Due to their level of need, many of these clients are often not ready to live independently and are in need of help and support from a number of agencies, e.g. drug, alcohol and mental health services. For these reasons, agencies need to work together to share intelligence and to ensure the rough sleepers are linked to appropriate help and support.

Outcomes to Date

The council and its partners have achieved the following outcomes over the past few years:

- **Outreach Services** – The council first commissioned an outreach service jointly with Sutton Council in April 2017, funded by a Rough Sleeping Grant by the DCLG (now MHCLG). Following our success in obtaining RSI (Rough Sleeping Initiative) funding in April 2019, the council was able to commission an Outreach Service that covers the borough of Merton only. The team verifies rough sleepers and take new clients to the Pan London "No Second Night Out" Hub, and to provide case-work support for clients.
- **Staging-Post Accommodation** – Since April 2017, the council was able to fund Spear to run a 4-bed shared-house (an HMO) in Mitcham to be used as short-stay accommodation rough sleepers. Occupants are provided with support to help them recover and prepare to move on to longer-term accommodation.
- **Rapid Response Outreach** – With the noted increase of rough sleeping across London, the GLA is funding a Rapid Response Outreach service which aims to reach rough sleeping clients within 24 hours of receiving a referral. The Rapid Response Team (RRT), run by Thamesreach, was launched in Merton in November 2019, providing 7 days a week cover in Merton. The team undertakes verifications then pass on cases to the local outreach team.
- **Intensive Support for Rough Sleepers** - Merton Council has successfully obtained funding for 2019-20 for a Navigator and a Tenancy Sustainment Officer, to provide one-to-one support for rough sleepers. The Navigator and Tenancy Sustainment are

responsible for a caseload of 20 clients with medium to high support needs each, taking the time to build trust and to encourage them to take-up services that will change the lives for the better. Clients are provided with help to access services, find suitable accommodation and to sustain their tenancies,

- **Floating Hub** – St. Mungo’s has brought its successful 2-week Floating Hub model to Merton in November 2019. The 24/7 Hub, funded by the GLA, was run from a council-owned building previously used as a Community Police Station. St.Mungo’s staff worked intensively with the 19 rough sleepers, many of them entrenched, brought to the Hub by Spear Outreach and the council’s Navigator. By the time the Hub closed after 2 weeks, St Mungo’s had managed to move 11 clients into staging-post or other supported accommodation, with a further 4 placed into short-stay accommodation by the council.
- **Winter Night Shelter** – Merton’s Winter Night Shelter has been running for 7 years during the winter months, assisting over 30 rough sleepers each with the help of over 350 volunteers. The shelter provides a positive environment where rough sleepers have to adhere to rules such as not drinking on the premises, and are encouraged to achieve positive outcomes. Each year, on average between 20%-30% of clients managed to secure tenancies in the private rented sector, and between 25%-30% obtained employment while still staying in the shelter.
- **A10 Project** - The Project run by Faith in Action helps clients from Central Eastern European (CEE) countries to integrate through assistance with housing, applications for work licence / ID documents, help to access training / employment and/or benefits, and referrals to support services etc. Close to 500 clients received assistance over the 5-year period, and the number of clients assisted had increased by 119% between Year 1 and Year 5. The proportion of clients who were rough sleepers went up from 13% to 73% during this period. The table below shows project outcomes in the last year.

Housing Outcomes (including placements to YMCA & RPS)	21
Winter Night Shelter Referrals	15
Applications for NIN, CSCS, Passports etc.	54
Jobs Search / Training	73
Benefits Claims	15
Referrals to Alcohol Services	96
Referrals to Health / GP Services	38

- **Rough Sleepers Case Panel** - The Council has worked closely with key partners through this Case Panel since 2009. In the last few years, the Panel has brought together an increasing number of agencies. These include the Police, Probation, Fire Brigade and health services, housing providers such as Clarion Housing, SPEAR, Evolve and the YMCA, as well as faith and community organisations such as Faith in Action, Everyday Church and Merton Street Pastors. The Panel also involves many council teams such as the ASB Team, CCTV Team, Greenspaces, Wardens for Parks, Parking Services, Waste Services etc., to help locate and report rough sleepers to the Panel. The involvement of Park Rangers on the Panel has been cited as an example of good practice by Homeless Link.

- **SWEP** - The council has developed a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) with partners, to ensure rough sleepers are not at risk of dying on the streets during cold weather. Working with agencies on the Rough Sleepers Case Panel, all known rough sleepers are provided with assistance to approach the council for placement into temporary accommodation when the temperature is predicted to be zero degree Celsius.

Case Study

Tony arrived at the Faith in Action Drop In with someone from a local church. He had been sleeping under a tree in a local park for some months and had serious mobility problems that made it almost impossible for him to walk.

The team at Faith in Action Drop-In offered him a warm welcome, a shower and a hot meal. They were very anxious to get him into accommodation as soon as possible and discussed with Merton Winter Night Shelter and No Second Night Out, but, initially, he said that he felt safer staying in the area that he knew. He had support from a local church and his friend, Rose, brought him to the Drop-In regularly. At the Drop-In he applied for benefits and was referred to SPEAR's Homeless Health Link Service who arranged for him to register with a GP and get the medical treatment he needed to regain his mobility.

He moved in to Merton Night Shelter and was swiftly offered temporary accommodation through Merton Council. This enabled him to have the operation he needed to regain his mobility, and gave him the freedom to return to work and move on from his traumatic experience.

New Challenges & Opportunities

Unlike many inner London Boroughs, Merton did not historically have many rough sleepers or at least rough sleeping had not been a big issue in Merton, therefore we did not have the infrastructure such as designated hostels or staffing resources to deal with rough sleeping. With the rough sleeping population increasing significantly in Merton over the last 10 years, it has been a huge challenge for the council to develop services to help tackle the issue. We have since made a lot progress, but with little funding to begin with, it has been a very slow process.

With the introduction of the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy and the big amount of funding associated with the Strategy, Merton Council now have the opportunities to build a team of staff and to develop emergency and short-stay accommodation options for rough sleepers while their needs are being assessed, through various funding programme such as the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI).

A sizeable proportion of rough sleepers found in Merton are rough sleepers from A10 countries, many of them have no recourse to public funds, which poses huge challenges to local agencies when trying to assist these clients. Merton's cohort of rough sleepers also includes many entrenched rough sleepers and people with high support needs. These clients often refused to engage and often assessed to be unsuitable for PRS resettlement due to their high support needs, even when they accept assistance. For example, of the 65 clients assisted through SPEAR's Outreach Project, 30 (46%) issues with alcohol abuse, 15 (23%) have mental health problems, and 11 (17%) have a medical condition or were in poor health.

Consultation Outcomes

Set out below are the feedback we have from partner agencies through our October 2019 strategy consultation event:

What works well?

- The 6-weekly Rough Sleeping Case Panel and a strong voluntary sector
- Outreach work and link between Spear and Faith in Action

What are the gaps?

- Lack of accommodation both immediate and long-term, and no accommodation for prison /probation release and hospital charge clients who are not in priority need
- Referral from services such as prison / probation / hospital to housing too late
- Lack of information regarding statutory services for rough sleepers e.g. GP practices
- Difficulties accessing mental health services
- Little help can be offered to those with no recourse to public funds

What should the priorities be?

- A local assessment hub similar to Pan London “No Second Night Out” hubs
- More HMO places for short-stay
- Housing First provision from a housing association
- Review pathway for older rough sleepers
- Mental health worker for rough sleepers
- An information-sharing group involving key partners to and a data-sharing
- Homelessness Forum

Key Actions to 2025

Deliver MHCLG’s Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI)

In 2019-20, the council receives RSI funding for an outreach service, a 4-bed HMO used as assessment / staging post accommodation, as well as for a Rough Sleeping Coordinator. We will work towards meeting all the targets set in the delivery plan for this project. Moving ahead into 2020-2021 and beyond, indications are that the council will be able to roll over all existing RSI funded services and will have the opportunity to introduce some new services.

Navigation & Tenancy Sustainment Support

The council has appointed a Navigator to work with rough sleepers, co-ordinating their pathways to independence by liaising with appropriate support services, ensuring that our clients keep their appointments, and follow their progress from health and support services, training, education and employment, to more sustainable housing solutions. We also have a Tenancy Sustainment Officer to assist rough sleepers to settle into and remain in their accommodation.

Outreach & Mental Health Support

The council is setting up a service, with funding from the MHCLG, to provide outreach support to rough sleepers, working alongside Thamesreach’s Rapid Response Outreach Team. The council’s service will cover day-time outreach, complimenting the night-time service offered by Thamesreach. In addition, the council’s service will also offer casework support to all clients identified through outreach. Recognising that many rough sleepers experience mental health issues but often have difficulties accessing support services, the council will be appoint a Specialist Mental Health Outreach worker to go out to sleep sites and community services to proactively engage with rough sleepers needing mental health support.

Improve Access to 'Second-Stage' Accommodation

With the government investing in more 'second-stage' accommodation for rough sleepers, the council will work with partner agencies to ensure that Merton rough sleepers have access to any available Pan-London accommodation. The council will also work with partner agencies to identify move-on housing and supported housing providers that can assist rough sleepers, to help increase housing options for this client group.

Improve Access to Services for Rough Sleepers with Substance Misuse and Mental Health Problems

Key agencies on our Rough Sleepers Case Panel are working together to improve access to the WDP drug & alcohol service and the aftercare available at the Mitcham Park supported housing project. WDP will match clients with drug / alcohol addictions with recovery champions, and will undertake outreach work at the Winter Night Shelter.

We will also link up with other projects such as the 'Blue Light' Project, a new project in Merton and Sutton that assists resistant drinkers including rough sleepers, and the Green Light Medical Van, which offers health checks to rough sleepers at rough sleeping hotspots. Clients with mental health problems will be encouraged to use the Crisis Café staffed by mental health professionals and for onward referrals where appropriate.

The council is also appointing a Specialist Mental Health Social Worker, initially to cover the winter months (MHCLG Cold Weather Funding), to proactively approach rough sleepers with suspected to have mental health issues by undertaking outreach work.

'In for Good' Principle for SWEP

Merton is putting in place new procedures for SWEP in line with the GLA's new SWEP guidance. When SWEP is activated following forecast of below zero temperature anywhere in London, the council would mobilise local partners to direct rough sleepers to the council for placement into temporary accommodation. We have also adopted the 'In for Good' principle where rough sleepers placed in temporary accommodation are kept in their accommodation beyond the SWEP period, to enable a Housing Plan to be developed and follow-up actions undertaken.

Winter Day-Time Provisions

The council is launching a day-time 'Hub' for rough sleepers during winter months, at the New Horizons Centre in Pollards Hill, funded by the MHCLG. There is a designated space in the centre available for rough sleepers to use during the day, keeping them safe and warm and enabling support workers to engage with them. Clients are provided with hot meals and are encouraged to join in the services and activities being offered by the Centre. We will seek further funding for future years to ensure that we can continue to provide this service every winter.

'Housing First' Model

Merton Housing will work with homelessness support organisations to explore the feasibility in bringing the Housing First model to Merton, as nationally there is a range of evidence to show that this model is highly effective in supporting individuals with complex and multiple needs and help keep them away from street homelessness. While current models of homelessness accommodation often do not need to sustainable outcomes for rough sleepers, evaluation of the 9 Housing First projects in England showed that between 70%-90% of people managed to sustain their accommodation.

PRIORITY 5 – ASSISTANCE FOR OTHER VULNERABLE CLIENTS

Homelessness legislation provides protection for vulnerable people facing homelessness. Under the Part 7, Section 189 of the Housing Act 1996, “a person who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or handicap or physical disability or other special reason”, such as a woman fleeing from domestic violence or a child at risk, has a priority need for accommodation. The council assesses homeless applicants’ vulnerability as part of our homelessness casework assessment to help determine if an applicant is in priority need.

The number of accepted homeless cases involving parental evictions and evictions by relatives or friends, involving mostly young people, make up 21% of all accepted homeless cases in 2015-16 and 2016-17, up from 17% in 2014-15. 17% of accepted homeless cases in 2016-17 involved people leaving institutional or local authority care, 16-17 year-olds, older people, and those with a physical, mental or learning disability, compared to 11% in 2014-15, although down slightly from 20% in 2015-16.

The council also assist other vulnerable people with their accommodation needs, to help prevent them from becoming homeless through a special register in our Allocations Policy. People assisted through this register includes children leaving care and children at risk, people with mental health issues or learning disability, ex-offenders, and ex-armed forces personnel etc.

Outcomes to Date

The council has put in place additional measures to ensure the needs of vulnerable clients who are homeless are met:

- **Review of Housing Related Support** - Vulnerable homeless clients with specific needs are placed into supported accommodation while they await rehousing. The council has recently completed a review of all supported housing contracts to help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of services for vulnerable clients. There are more than 70 units of supported accommodation for people with mental health problems, with another 44 for those with a physical disability or sensory impairment, 20 for women fleeing from violence and 7 for ex-offenders. In addition, there are over 100 units of supported accommodation for frail elderly. Vulnerable homeless people can access these via referrals to accommodation panels for different client groups.
- **Vulnerable People & Homelessness Review** - The council has completed a review of vulnerable people and homelessness, looking at the supply and demand of temporary and permanent housing for vulnerable homeless clients. The review aims to identify additional suitable supply and other innovative ways of meeting the accommodation need of this client group.
- **Allocations Strategy ‘Quotas’** – A quota is set aside in Merton’s Allocations Strategy for vulnerable clients through Band D of Merton’s Housing Register or waiting list, with a certain number of general need social housing tenancies set aside each year for this group of clients. This helps to ensure that suitable properties are made available to this client group only, and remove the need for these clients to bid against clients who do not have a special need.

- **Sanctuary Scheme** – This is a multi-agency victim-centred initiative which aims to enable households at risk of violence to remain safe in their own homes by installing a ‘sanctuary’ in the home through the provision of support to the household.
- **Vulnerable People Housing Panels** – The Housing Service runs several case panels for vulnerable clients to match their specific needs with suitable accommodation. These include the Mental Health Accommodation Panel, Learning Disability Panel and the Extra Care Panel for older people, which meet regularly to assess needs of vulnerable clients and to identify suitable accommodation for them.
- **CMARAC, MARAC, & MAPPA Panels** – The 3 multi-agency panels manage risks posed to vulnerable people. The Community Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (CMARAC) allows necessary agencies to share information on complex, high risk cases relating to anti-social behaviour and hate crime, enabling earlier interventions leading to better outcomes. The MARAC Panel manages risks to victims of domestic violence through a victim-centred approach, and Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) manage risks of sexual and violent offenders and other offenders that pose a serious of harm to the public.
- **Shared Lives** - Merton Housing runs the ‘Shared Lives’ scheme for vulnerable people with mental health problems and/or learning disability, as well as frail older people. The scheme provides 45 places for clients with special needs to be cared for in carers’ own homes, and can be used to assist homeless persons with special needs.

New Challenges & Opportunities

There is evidence nationally that certain vulnerable client groups are disproportionately affected by the government’s Welfare Reform. Younger people are the primary group affected by benefit sanctions and older people and those with a disability are disproportionately affected by changes to disability benefits. The introduction of the under-occupancy rate also has a bigger impact on disabled people. With housing benefit now being phased out to be replaced by Universal Credit, vulnerable people will face additional challenges in managing their finances.

The government’s review of future funding for supported housing had brought about a lot of uncertainties for supported housing providers. Firstly, there was the rent reduction for all social housing, which also applies to supported housing in the social sector, where a 1% rent cut will be applied to all new tenancies from April 2017, but the government has since confirmed that this will change from 2020, when housing providers will be able to increase rents by consumer price index plus 1% every year until 2025. This will give social housing providers as well as tenants the security and certainty they need.

There were also plans to bring housing benefit for social tenants in line with Local Housing Allowance (LHA) but the proposal was dropped in late 2017. A recent analysis of the impact of the proposed cap of housing benefits to LHA rates for supported accommodation showed that 64% of supported housing schemes in Merton would have become financially unviable had this been re-introduced. The government’s original proposal to fund only core rent of supported housing through the welfare system with a limited pot given to local authorities to fund additional housing needs costs, which would have made about 40% of existing schemes financial

unviable, had also been dropped. With uncertainties of funding now removed, there are opportunities for housing providers to plan new provisions.

As well as the challenge to continue to provide supported housing schemes locally to meet the needs of vulnerable clients, local authority now has added statutory responsibility under the Care Act 2014 to lead local partners in safeguarding adults with care and support needs, and to promote their wellbeing in their safeguarding arrangements. All public care agencies are required to co-operate and work in partnership, and to take proportionate steps where there are signs of abuse and neglect. The council also needs to respond to the challenges posed by the Homelessness Reduction Act, where assistance will need to be provided to homeless clients sooner, including those who are vulnerable, at a time when affordable temporary accommodation in London are in short supply.

Consultation Outcomes

Set out below are the feedback we have from partner agencies through our October 2019 strategy consultation event:

What works well?

- Specialist staff being supported with clinical supervision and reflective practice

What are the gaps?

- Housing association tenants in rent arrears / debts not engaging with officers
- Lack of access to refuge places, especially out of hours and lack of funding for practicalities

What should the priorities be?

- Need all services in one place – One Stop Shop, including links to CAB
- Need more outreach staff to proactively approach clients
- Agree processes with social landlords regarding rent arrears to prevent evictions
- Build better relationship with the government, other services such as Universal Credit
- Peer support – reflective practice / supervision
- Accessible information including list of services with contact number, in various languages

Key Actions to 2025

Improve links with Adults Social Care First Response Team & Safeguarding Adults Board

We are working with all partner agencies to ensure that Adults Social Care's First Response Team is alerted whenever we are concerned about a rough sleeper suffering from abuse or neglect. Links will also be established with the council-led Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) which involves external partners, to include the Police, NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), the Care Quality Commission (CQC), housing providers, as well as support and other service providers, to oversee safeguarding of vulnerable people in Merton as required by the Care Act 2014. The SAB is responsible for a framework for all service providers, including housing providers, to adhere to when they are developing their operational policies and procedures.

Discretionary Housing Benefit

The council will assist vulnerable households affected by the benefits cap, currently limited to £23,000 in London, with discretionary housing benefit to cover the shortfall between their housing benefits and their rent payments, to help prevent homelessness amongst vulnerable clients.

Priority through Allocations Strategy

The council will continue to give priority to rehouse vulnerable people through our Allocations Strategy, by ensuring that an agreed proportion of all social homes available for let are made available to vulnerable households.

Shared Lives

The council will continue to work with carers of the scheme to provide a quality service that meets the Care Quality Commission (CQC) Standard, for vulnerable people such as frail older people, people with mental health problems or learning disability. The council will also seek to recruit more carer to the scheme with the aim of increasing the capacity of the current scheme of 45 places.

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CHAPTER 5 – IMPLEMENTATION OF HOMELESSNESS & ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY

1. RESOURCES FOR DELIVERY

Homelessness Prevention Funding

The government had confirmed funding for homelessness prevention for local authorities up until 2020 through the Homelessness Prevention Grant. For Merton, there is just under £400,000 of funding each year for 4 years, although the grant is not ring-fenced and local authorities are free to decide whether the amount should be set aside for homelessness prevention work. Funding for 2020-21 has recently been announced by the government, and Merton has been allocated just over £1.1 million, made up of the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and a new Homelessness Reduction Grant which aims to enable local authorities to focus more on prevention and relief work.

Merton Council will review the amount of grant funding made available for homelessness prevention measures each year, with a large proportion of available funding likely to be used for securing additional supply for homeless households through the private rented sector. The focus on using the funding to secure supply would increase in order to fulfil the new duty in the Homelessness Reduction Act to provide emergency temporary accommodation for 56 days for homeless households with a local connection becomes law.

Temporary Accommodation Budget

The government has provided 25 local authorities with the highest level of homelessness, of which 22 are London boroughs, with additional funding to provide temporary accommodation for their homeless households. Despite the increase in the number of households placed in temporary accommodation in Merton in recent years, the council is not among the 25 eligible to bid for the additional funding. The provision of temporary accommodation in Merton therefore has to be funded solely through the council's own resources, although a proportion of the cost can be claimed back through the government's housing subsidies. Setting up robust rent collection arrangements with households in temporary accommodation and providing help and support in claiming housing benefit is therefore a key part of our work to help maximize income thus reducing the council's financial liability.

Rough Sleeping Funding

As well as the Homelessness Prevention Grant, the council relies on other external funding sources to deliver essential homelessness services. The council has had many successes in obtaining funding to provide services for rough sleepers. Working with our 6 neighbouring boroughs that were part of the South West London Housing Partnership, Merton had benefited from an Outreach and Resettlement Service provided by SPEAR as well as access to 'staging-post' supported hostel bed spaces.

In April 2017, Merton had successfully led on a joint bid with Sutton and was awarded £357,000 by the DCLG (now MHCLG) to fund an outreach service for both boroughs over as well as run an accommodation-based Assessment Hub in each of the 2 boroughs. In addition, Merton Council also secured funding through the tri-borough Trailblazer Project to employ Housing Coaches to work with households at risk of homelessness and to prevent homelessness earlier.

In April 2019, the council has secured Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) funding to commission an outreach service that covers Merton only and to continue the provision of the 4-bed assessment hub / staging post accommodation. RSI funding also enabled the council to employ a Rough Sleeping Co-ordinator, and there was also funding through the Rapid Rehousing Pathway to employ a Navigator and a Tenancy Sustainment Officer to provide intensive support to rough sleepers. Continuation funding has now been confirmed for 2020-21. Moving forward towards 2022 and beyond, the council will continue to work with the MHCLG in order to harness further resources for services that will help reduce rough sleeping in Merton.

Council's Own Resources

Notwithstanding the budgetary pressure faced by the council in delivering quality service to local people, the council will consider allocating its own resources to improve homelessness provisions in the borough. For example, the council had used almost £800k of its own resources to improve and extend our hostel for young single homeless people, almost doubling its capacity from 9 beds to 16 beds, and has included innovative features in the improved scheme that meet the latest standard and expectations of a modern homeless hostel.

The council also has a Discretionary Housing Benefit funding pot which is used to assist vulnerable households who have a shortfall between their housing benefits and their rent payments, for example where households are affected by the housing benefit cap, which has just gone down from £26,000 to £23,000 in London. This helps prevent households from being evicted from their private rented accommodation due to rent arrears thus preventing homelessness.

2. PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Strategic Partnership Working

The council will host a Homelessness Forum to support the delivery of this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, involving multi-agency partners, including supported housing providers, charitable homelessness organisations, faith groups, as well as statutory agencies such as Social Care, Health, the Police etc.. These partners have already the team assists with the development of the borough's strategic objectives on tackling homelessness and rough sleeping, and will help deliver targets set out in this Strategy Action Plan to help achieve these objectives.

Strategic objectives will be reviewed annually by the team to ensure that this Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy remains fit for purpose and able to respond to newly identified issues and changing needs. The Action Plan will be reviewed 6-monthly by the team to monitor progress of actions, and appropriate new actions will be added in response to any policy changes brought in by the government.

Multi Agency Panels

The successful delivery of this Homelessness Strategy also relies on the work of a number of multi-agency case work panels, each focusing on a specific client group, such as homeless families, single homeless young people and rough sleepers. These case work panels focus on individuals who are facing or experiencing homelessness, identify any support needs they may have through information sharing amongst multi-agency partners, and then collectively agree

on which agencies need to work together to support each individual, with the aim of helping them finding sustainable housing solutions.

A wide range of multi-agency partners are involved in our case work panels. As well as supported housing providers, we work with outreach teams and teams responsible for Green Spaces and Parks, services for young people such as the 14 Plus Team, Insight, My Futures, Youth Offending Team, and support services such as Engage Merton Drug & Alcohol Services, faith groups, as well as the Police, Safer Merton, Probation and mental health services. Case work panels also have links with hospitals, and Information Sharing Protocols are in place to govern the sharing of personal data amongst partners.

Pan London Working

As well as working with statutory and voluntary sector agencies operating in the borough of Merton, the council benefits from linking up with the Pan London services. We already have Thamesreach operating a Rapid Response Service in Merton, and has worked with St.Mungo's in the running of our 2-week Floating Hub. We are also developing a closer working relationship with the Great London Authority (GLA), particularly in relation to our rough sleeping work. With limited resources to deal with rough sleeping, Merton will benefit immensely from additional resources offered by well-established homelessness charities operating across London and by the GLA, and can learn a great deal from their expertise.

3. SYNERGY WITH OTHER NATIONAL, REGIONAL & LOCAL STRATEGIES

We are keenly aware that Merton's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy must not be considered a standalone document. In order to successfully deliver it, the council and our partner agencies will ensure that we have regard to national, regional and local strategies, policies, plans and guidance that are related to homelessness, affordable housing and vulnerable clients.

In fulfilling our duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, we will adhere to the latest Homelessness Code of Guidance published by the MHCLG (February 2018), and will work closely with our MHCLG Advisor on the HRA to deliver the desired outcomes. We will continue to work closely with the council's Future Merton Team with the aim of maximising affordable housing for homeless families and single homeless persons, having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019), as well as the council's suite of Local Plans, which includes the Core Planning Strategy setting out a 15-year vision on regeneration and development in Merton until 2026.

Our work in tackling rough sleeping in Merton is very much guided by the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy (August 2018), and reliant on government funding to deliver services. We will seek guidance from our MHCLG Advisor on rough sleeping on measures needed to assist rough sleepers and to end rough sleeping, ensuring that local outcomes will help meet the objectives set out in the government's Strategy and contribute to actions set out in its Delivery Plan published in December 2018.

We will also ensure that our priorities and actions help meet the objectives of the London Housing Strategy (May 2018). Particularly relevant are the Mayor's policies in relation to

improving the private rented sector, and the programme of work commissioned by the GLA to assist rough sleepers.

With regards to local strategies, Merton's Community Plan is the overarching strategic plan of the Merton Partnership setting out long-term vision and priorities for the borough. Other local strategies and plans that will help meet the needs of vulnerable homeless persons include the Looked After Children's Strategy, Children & Young People's Plan and Safeguarding Adults Strategy. The council also has an Employment & Skills Action Plan which can assist homeless clients on a pathway to independence, and our Health & Well-Being Strategy will help address poor health which affects homeless persons disproportionately. In turn, our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will seek to contribute to the delivery of these strategies.

4. DELIVERY, MONITORING & REVIEW

As well as engaging our partner agencies in delivering actions set out in the Strategy Action Plan, we will enlist their help in monitoring and reviewing of the Plan, through our new Homelessness Forum which will be meeting twice a year. The Forum will have representations from housing providers, faith groups and community centres, drug/alcohol and mental health support services, the Police, health services, as well as officers from various council services. The Forum will be supported by the Housing Strategy Team and will be jointly chaired by the council's Head of Housing and a representative from our delivery partners.

The Homelessness Forum will act as the platform for agencies to get together and review the effectiveness of agreed actions set out in the Action Plan, ensuring targets are met. Partner agencies will be able to discuss how to improve joint efforts in delivering the desired outcomes, and to hold one another to account. Monitoring and review reports of the Strategy and Action Plan will also be presented to the council's senior management teams for discussion and scrutiny.