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Lewisham's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy – 2026-31

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Executive Summary

Lewisham, like many Local Authorities, is facing an unprecedented homelessness emergency. Rising costs for private housing, a shortage of family size homes, continuing welfare restrictions, and cost of living pressures have combined to increase the risk of homelessness for many residents.

Compounding this crisis, Local Authorities have endured a long-term reduction in their financial resources since 2010 and continue to pay more simply to meet their statutory duties. London Councils' total expenditure on homelessness in 2024-25 was £2.025 billion, or £5.5 million per day – increasing from £1.586 billion in 2023-24. Despite this expenditure, a large proportion is spent on insecure and often poor-quality temporary accommodation, the cost of which has risen by 75% over the last five years.

Despite these systemic challenges, Lewisham has continued to support thousands of residents experiencing housing insecurity. We have reduced the number of households living in temporary accommodation, maintained our statutory duty to protect families from prolonged stays in unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation, expanded our supply of council-owned temporary accommodation, and strengthened our partnerships with a wide range of organisations that support vulnerable residents.

The council has a statutory duty, under the Homelessness Act (2002), to conduct a review of the nature and extent of homelessness in the borough every five years and to develop a strategy setting out:

- how services will be delivered in the future to tackle homelessness; and
- the available resources to prevent and relieve homelessness.

Our most recent Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy ended in 2026. This Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy sets out our approach for the next five years. It has been developed through consultation with our own frontline staff, our partner organisations who work to house and support homeless households, and people who are or have previously experienced homelessness.

What we know about Homelessness in the borough - findings from the Homelessness Review

Below is a summary of key data points from our Homelessness Review.

Drivers of Homelessness

- Lewisham has a divided economy, particularly between residents commuting out of the borough and residents working within it.
- Long term economic issues have driven homelessness nationally and are pronounced in Lewisham.
- The borough has a high share of local services / retail work, with a large amount of part time & casual work, and our productivity rate is one of the lowest in London.
- Some national changes to the welfare system will positively impact on homelessness, while others (including the LHA freeze and the Benefit Cap) are not expected to change. As of February 2025, 1,605 households were subject to the benefit cap.
- Overall affordability of PRS housing in Lewisham is a significant challenge, with around 6.1% of shared rooms and 7.3% of one bed homes affordable within the Local Housing Allowance.
- According to research by Savills and Trust for London, the overall number of PRS listings has significantly shrunk between 2018-2024. Lewisham is in line with this trend, with a ~22% reduction
- As of Q2 2025, 39% of prevention cases and 19% of Relief cases were opened due to the end of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST)
- Friends and Family eviction account for 35% of both prevention and relief cases. These types of evictions can span many root causes, including younger people asked to leave by parents, and sofa surfers staying with friends and family after leaving their original settled accommodation.
- Domestic abuse accounted for 3.3% of prevention cases and 8.3% of relief cases.

Core Statutory Homelessness Statistics

- Our Homelessness Prevention Rate has remained broadly static, moving from 45% in March 2025 to 44% in February 2026.
- However, our Relief Rate has increased significantly, from 26% in March 2025 to 43% in February 2026.
- As of Q3 2025, our Rough Sleeper services recorded 50 people sleeping rough over a month (+31 against the national average), and 19 sleeping rough in a single night (+14 against the national average).
- Statutory homelessness data does not capture all homelessness. Based on Crisis research on hidden homelessness, Lewisham may have over 1,000 residents who are homeless but not known to Council services, with sofa surfing likely to be the most common form of hidden homelessness.

Temporary Accommodation

- 1 in every 53 residents in Lewisham live in TA. This is the 12th highest rate nationally.
- Of these households, 80% are families with children. This is significantly disproportionate to the national (64%) and regional (67%) average.
- Our numbers of households and children in TA are continuing to decline, going from 2,706 in February 2025 to 2,384 in February 2026.
- Similarly, the number of households in nightly paid TA continues to decline, from 1,343 in February 2025 to 989 in February 2026.
- We have successfully maintained our statutory duty to prevent families with children from living in B&B accommodation for over 6 weeks.

Equalities

- Nationally, young people (from 18 to 44) are at a greater overall risk of becoming homeless. This trend broadly holds in Lewisham; however, Lewisham has a slightly higher incidence of older homeless households (particularly in the 55-64 age range).
- Single people form around half of all prevention cases, with a moderate weighting towards single men. Single mothers are the most common household containing children, outnumbering couples and larger families with dependent children.

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- Relief cases have a stronger weighting towards single households, with a stronger weighting towards single men. Single mothers remain the most common household type with children.
- Black / African / Caribbean / Black British households are significantly more likely to experience homelessness (52% of prevention and relief duty cases), both when compared against regional and national homeless cases¹, and as a proportion of all Lewisham residents². Inversely, white residents are significantly less likely to experience homelessness. Other ethnic groups experience homelessness broadly proportionally to their total population in Lewisham.
- Many households in full time work are also receiving UC, 33.9% of all UC recipients in Lewisham are in full or part time work (around the average for England), and this figure is likely to be larger among the homeless cohort.

¹ Black / African / Caribbean households make up 12% of all prevention & relief cases nationally, and 31% across London.

² 26% of 2021 Census respondents in Lewisham were Black / African / Caribbean.

What our residents / partners / frontline staff told us

Residents told us that: -

“There should be more opportunities to speak to people face to face, not just by phone. We need information about how the system works the whole way through, not just at each individual step”.

“A lot of information about the homelessness system is passed around by word of mouth, between homeless people. Signposting is mostly a list of services, and a lot of them have closed or have the wrong information, staff don’t always know what services are out there”

“Often you will be waiting a long time for an initial homelessness assessment, if you’re not already rough sleeping”.

“Navigating the triage process can be really challenging, especially if you don’t have someone to advocate for you”.

“Landlords [providing Temporary Accommodation] know that they can raise the rent, and the Council has to pay it”.

“Being homeless is inherently traumatic – it’s not just traumatic if you have a recognised support need”.

Frontline Staff and Partners told us that: -

“The levels of need for rough sleepers are extremely high and getting worse, mental health is one of the biggest issues for homelessness in Lewisham. There is a big gap in access to psychological therapy for homeless people, and this can cause tenancies to fail when people are housed”.

“Our challenges are mostly about demand – we’re seeing 3 or 4 new people every day”.

“Some staff don’t have information on the support options available to people, and the belief that there’s no support out there can be self-reinforcing. “

“There are some fundamental problems with language barriers. People are handed paperwork in English, and don’t understand when a duty has been accepted or refused”.

“We regularly have to escalate issues, and there isn’t a clear escalation process”.

“Prevention can get sidelined when services are at capacity and firefighting. There’s a hidden cost to homeless people going round and round”.

Vision

Our vision is to create a borough where homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring.

This strategy has been structured around five key strategic objectives, which reflect the Council's priorities based on our evidence review and what we heard from residents, partners and staff, and detail how we will meet our Outcomes Framework targets.

These strategic objectives are: -

- 1. Tackle rough sleeping and prevent homelessness**
- 2. Increase standards and enforcement within the Private Rented Sector**
- 3. Improve the quality of our temporary accommodation.**
- 4. Increase Lewisham's supply of long-term accommodation.**
- 5. Work in partnership to support residents to live independent, healthy and sustainable lives.**

The Council cannot tackle homelessness alone. Success will require continued partnership with residents, government, housing associations, public services, voluntary organisations and neighbouring boroughs. Through this strategy we are committing to ambitious, measurable action to improve outcomes for residents, reduce the use of temporary accommodation, increase housing supply, and ensure that every person facing homelessness has access to the support they need.

Theme 1 – Tackle Rough Sleeping and Prevent Homelessness

Summary

Any period of homelessness can be traumatic for any individual. For both the wellbeing of our residents, and the resources of the Council, it is better to resolve an individual's housing situation before they become homeless. While our homelessness relief rates have improved significantly, our prevention rates have remained mostly static. The Government has been clear that they expect Local Authorities to prioritise prevention work, and it is therefore core to this Strategy that we transition our Housing Needs service from being crisis driven to being prevention driven.

Homelessness legislation is complex, and homeless households are too often left without adequate information to understand their rights and make decisions about their housing options. Our feedback has found that service users often feel unclear around their legal rights and how their case will progress, and lack full information on the housing options available to them. In many cases, this may lead to opportunities to prevent homelessness being missed due to a lack of information.

Every person sleeping rough is one too many. Our aim is to be among the best performing of our statistical peers at preventing rough sleeping, to contribute to the Government's target of halving rough sleeping over the course of the Parliament, and to achieve a borough where rough sleeping is rare, brief and non-recurrent.

We know that the level of support needs for people sleeping rough in Lewisham is continuing to increase over time, and that demand is continuing to increase. To face this challenge, our rough sleeping service must accommodate these higher needs, both within the service and through better joint working with health and social care partners.

To address this priority, we will:

- Provide comprehensive homelessness assessments that identify the root causes of a person's situation, and support residents to remain in their own home through negotiation, mediation, and enforcement services.
- Review our advice and information offer, with the aim of providing comprehensive and accessible advice to anyone at risk of homelessness in the short or long term. This will include the introduction of a customer journey handout, detailing customers responsibilities and their rights throughout their homelessness case.
- Review our training and induction processes, focusing on ensuring that new Housing Needs staff spend time shadowing our partner services, in order to improve their understanding of the support landscape and what is suitable for each individual.
- Recommission our borough wide Advice Service. The service will be a central referral partner for the new Crisis and Resilience Fund, and we will work closely with them to ensure households at risk of homelessness receive suitable and targeted advice and receive homelessness assessments where required.
- Review our Allocations Policy and seek to remove relevant offer restrictions for victim / survivors of domestic abuse.
- Improve staff training to ensure Homelessness Assessments include all relevant information to ensure that service user's support needs, preferences, and suitable and unsuitable housing options are all captured at the initial assessment stage.
- Adapt our Rough Sleeper Service to accommodate these higher needs. To achieve this, we will work to secure a sustainable funding solution for our Homeless Outreach (START) team, a small multi-disciplinary assessment team which engages and assesses homeless people with severe mental health problems and additional substance misuse or physical health needs.

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- Utilise the Government's new Crisis and Resilience Fund's short term and housing specific elements to prevent homelessness, place households on a more secure financial footing, and prevent rental arrears ending in eviction. We will also continue to operate our existing support schemes for households in the PRS and review our schemes covering rent deposits and incentive payments for landlords to ensure they remain effective.
- Review the take-up and effectiveness of the Intensive Housing Advice and Floating Support Service for households who have recently been housed into the Private Rented Sector, to ensure that we are responding to the increased needs profile of our service users.

Theme 2 – Increase Standards and Enforcement within the Private Rented Sector

Summary

The Homelessness Crisis is, above all, a crisis of affordability. For the majority of homeless families with fewer support needs, the main barrier to preventing and/or relieving their homelessness is a lack of affordable accommodation in the Private Rented Sector.

In 2025, only 7.3% of one bed properties in Inner Southeast London were affordable under Local Housing Allowance (which remains frozen since 2024), and the cost of Temporary Accommodation to councils in London (the majority of which is sourced from private sector landlords) has risen by 75% over the past five years.

Furthermore, it is inefficient for homes in Lewisham to sit empty while over 2,000 Lewisham households are living in Temporary Accommodation. While some private property owners simply require support to bring their home back into use, others who do not engage with the Council will require us to take enforcement action.

We are confident that we have the resourcing, policy and strategy to improve Lewisham's Private Rented Sector, and prevent households from becoming homeless due to the actions of private landlords. We are already operating comprehensive and successful property licensing schemes, which have issued 1,645 HMO licenses and 14,083 Selective Licenses since their inception. These schemes are working to improve the quality, standard and safety of PRS housing and to hold landlords to account for poor housing conditions.

The Renters Rights Act (2025) has also granted Councils significant new enforcement powers where a landlord has acted unlawfully in an eviction attempt (for example, purporting to serve a now-invalid Section 21 notice).

To address this priority, we will:

- Establish a Rogue Landlord Taskforce, which will provide an intensive, place-based focus to identify noncompliant properties and make them compliant to provide safe housing. This taskforce will work by directing our existing enforcement resources to review properties of landlords who have repeatedly been subject to enforcement action and make non-compliance with housing legislation an adverse financial operating model.
- Improve the number and quality of housing options available to Lewisham's tenants, investigate and take enforcement action against noncompliant landlords seeking to illegally evict tenants, and improve the viability of the PRS as a move on option for Lewisham's homeless households.
- Use our influence at a regional and national level to call for rent cap powers to be devolved to the Mayor of London, and for the Mayor to use these powers to improve housing affordability while maintaining housing supply.
- Investigate reports of noncompliant landlords and prevent tenants from becoming homeless where a landlord has acted improperly in attempting to evict a resident. We will achieve this through new working arrangements between our Housing Needs and PRS enforcement teams, and new powers granted to us under the Renters Rights Act.
- Build on our Empty Homes strategy, working to identify privately owned empty homes, apply Council Tax premiums to these homes, and provide advice and assistance to landlords. Where this work has been unsuccessful, we will consider the options available to us, including the use of legal powers such as statutory notices, enforced sale procedures and Empty Dwelling Management Orders to bring empty homes back into use.

Theme 3 – Improve the Quality of Temporary Accommodation

Summary

Our service has made significant progress in reducing the number of households living in TA and finding households long term, secure accommodation. However, we know that despite our best efforts, many households will spend a significant period of time in temporary accommodation.

The impact that staying in temporary accommodation can have on health and wellbeing should not be understated. Research by Shelter has found that two thirds of households reported that living in TA had a negative impact on their physical or mental health, and over two thirds of people have inadequate access to cooking or laundry facilities³.

Many families in Lewisham are housed in Council-owned hostel accommodation with shared facilities. This form of accommodation, while not technically B&B housing, is still not always suitable and appropriate for residents and is certainly no replacement for stable and secure accommodation. While work will continue to move households out of TA into permanent housing, we must also work to ensure that all households living in TA have access to basic amenities, including the 'Five Basics' of cooking facilities, laundry access, Wi-Fi, secure storage, and clear information.

We can control the quality of temporary accommodation through our approach to procurement, the documentation and standards we demand of our TA providers, and our processes to oversee the quality of accommodation and customer services that our TA providers offer.

To address this priority, we will:

- Introduce a Charter of Rights for every household who lives in Temporary Accommodation. This charter will guarantee that households will receive the 'Five Basics' – cooking facilities, laundry access, Wi-Fi, storage and clear information.
- Reduce the numbers of children living in council-owned TA with shared facilities as much as possible and bring our stock of Council-owned TA in line with the overall makeup of families in TA.
- Develop a Temporary Accommodation Procurement Strategy which is fit for purpose for the next four years. Where possible, we will aim to continue purchasing properties from the private market for use as Council provided TA.
- Review our use of private sector leased accommodation, ensuring value for money, with a view towards preferring privately managed units. Additionally, we will continue exploring opportunities for long-term leasing arrangements for TA.
- Improve the procurement process for our nightly paid accommodation through adopting a centralised cross-borough procurement platform and the application of our existing TA lettable standard.
- Improve our advice and communication with residents living in TA, including through our new TA Residents Newsletter, a quarterly residents survey, and a detailed TA guidebook.
- Increase the amount of contact we have with our TA residents, including via phone check ins and in person home visits. We will also standardise and embed the use of our existing suitability matching process among staff.
- Commit to rehousing TA residents who are experiencing domestic abuse within 24 hours, with their consent⁴.

³ [Shelter, Still Living in Limbo, 2023](#)

⁴ (This may include placements into emergency accommodation)

Theme 4 – Increase Supply of Long-Term Accommodation

Summary

Like the rest of London, Lewisham is facing a housing crisis and is experiencing a severe shortage of social housing. Resolving the homelessness crisis is only possible through expanding the supply of genuinely affordable, long-term accommodation.

The shortage of social housing is particularly acute within larger homes for families, and this is reflected in the proportion of larger households remaining in TA for longer. Every unit of social housing that becomes available represents the opportunity for a household in severe housing need to settle and improve their circumstances.

We must therefore explore every avenue to increase the number of available social homes, including housebuilding programs, purchasing housing from the open market, and making more efficient use of our existing social housing.

Housebuilding programmes are currently facing significant challenges, with a rise in construction and labour costs, increased costs of borrowing, and changes to building regulations requiring a higher standard of specification and design. We will respond to these market pressures to ensure that we continue to have a steady supply of new build social housing.

To address this priority, we will:

- Deliver 1,000 high quality, energy efficient social rented homes through our Building for Lewisham programme and acquire homes to use as TA to reduce our dependence on the Private Rented Sector.
- Secure the highest possible grant rates per Building for Lewisham unit from the GLA and MHCLG, emphasising partnership in our procurement approaches, and maximising the effectiveness of our right-to-buy receipts.
- Review our provision and regulation of supported housing as part of the emerging Supported Housing Strategy, which will consider our provision of support for current and future rough sleepers, and people with support needs to ensure that supported housing is appropriate, well managed, and reflects the needs of vulnerable people in Lewisham.
- Develop a referral process for older adults living in TA who would like to be considered for our independent living accommodation.
- Maintain our existing 100% nominations agreements and continue working with our Housing Association partners through our renewed Registered Partnerships Board to ensure that our Allocations Policy prioritise residents experiencing homelessness.
- Work with Housing Associations to free up larger social homes through promoting and reviewing the incentives for our downsizing schemes and increasing the number of right-sizing mutual exchanges.
- Continue to work with private landlords to move residents out of TA into the PRS where we are confident that the accommodation in question is suitable and affordable to the household. We will also review our private landlord incentive scheme to ensure that we will continue to be able to source value for money PRS accommodation.

Theme 5 – Work in Partnership to Support Residents to Live Independent, Healthy and Sustainable Lives

Summary

Ending homelessness requires more than providing accommodation. Many residents experiencing homelessness also face challenges related to physical and mental health, domestic abuse, social isolation, trauma, or a lack of support networks.

The relationship between poor mental health and housing insecurity is complex and mutually reinforcing. Mental illness can cause disruptions to a household's income and place strain on relationships, placing stable housing at risk. Similarly, periods of housing insecurity and rough sleeping can be devastating for a person's mental health, and periods of hospitalisation can cause disruption to an individual's living arrangements.

It was a common view during consultation that the level of support needs among homeless households has increased significantly, and that many rough sleepers and residents in supported accommodation are suffering from a lack of accessible therapeutic support.

We will strengthen partnership working across housing, health, social care, registered providers, and the voluntary and community sector to ensure residents receive coordinated and person-centred support. This will include improving information sharing, strengthening support for rough sleepers and victim/survivors of domestic abuse, working with Housing Associations to prevent evictions, and supporting residents to sustain accommodation and live independent, healthy and secure lives.

By working together, we will reduce repeat homelessness and ensure that no resident falls through the gaps between services.

To address this priority, we will:

- Introduce a new information sharing protocol. This will make it easier for us and our partners to share information on service users and their support needs (with the consent of the service users).
- Introduce a formal escalation process for services which are waiting on information or action from the Council's Housing Needs services. This will replace current, less formal escalation routes.
- Convene bi-annual Homelessness Summits, which will be open to anyone interested in attending who is involved in supporting homeless people in Lewisham. We will also launch a renewed Homelessness Forum, which will provide increased opportunities for sharing strategic information on the causes and impacts of homelessness in Lewisham.
- Promote and investigate opportunities to improve collaborative working practices between Adult Social Care and Housing Needs colleagues, including ASC representation at the Homelessness Forum.
- Continue the work of the Ending Homelessness Accelerator Program to end the practice of verifying that a rough sleeper is homeless by arranging to meet them while rough sleeping, and work with our partners to develop alternative methods of confirming that a person requires rough sleeper assistance.
- Use our newly established Registered Provider Forum to develop shared processes for prevention where households are at risk of eviction due to anti-social behaviour, rent arrears, or any other breach of tenancy. We will also develop shared approaches to tackling Domestic Abuse and identifying 'hidden homeless' households.
- Commit to ensuring that effective exit planning takes place in advance of households leaving other institutional contexts, including developing our relationships with prisons, probation services, and hospitals.

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- Reprocore our Sanctuary Scheme, which provides support for victim/survivors of domestic abuse. This includes refuge accommodation, Independent Gender-based Violence advocates, outreach support, and a sanctuary scheme (which uses 'target hardening' to increase a survivor's safety in their own home).
- Take steps to standardise and improve the quality of data we hold on TA residents in line with our directorate Knowledge and Information Management Strategy.
- Notify schools, health visitors, and GPs when we place children in TA, to ensure that children receive the support that they require.

Governance and Monitoring

Lewisham is an ambitious borough, and we will strive for excellence in our Homelessness Services. Central Government has required every Local Authority to set targets for our performance against the Outcomes Framework in the National Plan to End Homelessness⁵.

To reflect our ambition, for most targets, we will aim to reach (or remain within) the highest performing quartile of our nearest neighbours by the end of the Strategy. These targets will be updated annually against HCLIC data.

This overall approach has been taken in order to adopt ambitious targets, while recognising the specific challenges that London faces around preventing homelessness (a significant number of which are beyond the control of Local Government), and ensure that the targets our Housing Needs service is working towards continue to reflect the challenges on the frontline.

Our progress against these outcomes and our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Delivery Plan outlined in Appendix 1 will be monitored by our existing Homelessness Forum. This forum is attended by representatives from public and third sector organisations working with homeless people in Lewisham.

As part of this work, the Forum will receive new terms of reference, based on [MHCLG's model ToR for a Homelessness Strategy Steering Group](#). The Forum will be chaired by Lewisham Council's Director of Housing Strategy and will report back to Mayor and Cabinet and other Council governance bodies via the Chair.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-national-plan-to-end-homelessness/a-national-plan-to-end-homelessness>