

# UPDATE REPORT - REVIEW OF HOMELESS PREVENTION AND THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

<b>Committee name</b>	Residents' Services Select Committee
<b>Officer reporting</b>	Adam Stephenson
<b>Papers with report</b>	None
<b>Ward</b>	All

## HEADLINES

In June 2025 Cabinet received and welcomed the final report detailing the major review conducted by the Residents' Services Select Committee which considered Homeless Prevention and the Customer Journey. This report provides a progress update on the implementation of the recommendations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:

- 1. Notes the progress in implementing the Committee's recommendations relating to the major Homeless Prevention and Customer Journey Review.**

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1. During 2024 the Council's Residents' Services Select Committee undertook a major review of homeless prevention, with a particular focus on the residents' journey through the system and experience of customer service. The Committee's primary aims were to identify ways to improve the experience of those presenting as homeless, to better manage their expectations, enhance satisfaction, streamline processes and ultimately provide improved support to prevent homelessness. The Committee was mindful of the need to find cost effective, workable solutions to improve performance going forward. In June 2025 Cabinet accepted and resolved to implement the Select Committee recommendations. Key findings included:
  - The importance of prevention and early intervention in addressing homelessness
  - The need for improved communication and empathy from housing officers
  - The necessity for better systems and technology for case handovers
  - The challenges faced by victims of domestic abuse in accessing housing support
2. The Review was carried out at a time of immense pressure for homelessness services. Since 2022/23, homelessness presentations and demand for Temporary Accommodation (TA) have more than doubled, alongside continued increases in housing costs. The number of households in nightly-paid TA is forecast to stabilise at approximately 1,000 in 2026/27, with an estimated cost of £30m, even with the existing mitigations and service improvements in place. Without these mitigations and a service restructure, TA costs are projected to increase by a further £6.7m in 2026/27.

3. Since completing the review, interim management arrangements have been in place and work has been underway to take forward the following Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Action Plan Workstreams:
  - 1: Increase prevention and reduce new TA placements
  - 2: Increase access to alternative housing options
  - 3: Reduce the cost of TA
  - 4: Increase move-on into social housing
  - 5: To deliver the MTFS programme through service modernisation
4. Workstream 5 includes a significant investment being made to restructure the service. The current service structure, which has remained largely unchanged since 2016, has not evolved in line with rising demand, legislative developments, or the increasing complexity of cases. This has resulted in:
  - Unsustainably high caseloads, averaging approximately 60 per officer against a target of 30
  - A continued reliance on agency staff
  - Significant financial pressures
5. The existing structure is no longer sufficient to effectively manage demand, deliver MTFS savings, meet statutory obligations, transition to a more proactive, prevention-focused and data-led service providing high quality services.
6. A new organisational structure is proposed and is being consulted on until 24 April 2026 to ensure the service is fit for purpose from 2026 onwards. The proposal includes an increase in staff and is designed to strengthen leadership, enhance operational capacity, and support long-term financial sustainability.
7. The proposed structure introduces enhanced senior leadership which will strengthen oversight and accountability, improve governance and data reporting, improve stability replacing interim leadership arrangements with permanent roles, and enhance supervision and decision making.
8. An increase in frontline staff will enable a reduction in caseloads towards a target of 30, improve preventions activity and earlier interventions, enable faster and more consistent decision-making and is a precursor to further enhancing outcomes and experience for residents. The introduction of clearer service pathways (e.g. Families and Specialist teams) will also support more consistent case management and improved support for complex cases.
9. Additional benefits from the proposed restructure are:
  - Strengthened Private Rented Sector (PRS) Function – significant expansion of PRS procurement and Home Finder functions
  - Enhanced TA Management – dedicated and expanded teams to improve operational oversight and resilience
  - Expanded Allocations Service – strengthened team to reduce backlogs, improve policy compliance and decision-making and improve customer experience
  - Modernisation and Strategic Capacity – dedicated modernisation and strategy functions to support the transition to a more data-driven and compliant service

10. The Cabinet meeting on 19 March 2026 approved Hillingdon's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2026 – 2030 following a statutory homelessness review and consultation with residents, staff and partner organisations. Cabinet will receive annual progress updates. The strategy places prevention at its core, recognising that preventing homelessness is the best outcome for residents and the most sustainable way to manage TA pressures. It has a strengthened focus on resident centred services, early intervention, access to safe and sustainable housing, clearer pathways for rough sleepers and vulnerable residents and improved use of data and performance monitoring. The Homelessness Strategy has taken account of the findings of the Select Committee Review of Homelessness Prevention and the Customer Journey and these have been reflected in the Vision and Strategic Priorities and elsewhere in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

### Our Vision for Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

*“Putting residents first: a compassionate, preventative and empowering approach to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping, with access to appropriate accommodation and support.*

*We envision a borough where homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring. Our commitment is to put residents first, ensuring that every individual facing or at risk of homelessness is treated with respect, dignity, and empathy.*

*We will prioritise prevention, intervening early to stop homelessness before it starts, and we will support people to help themselves, building resilience and independence through tailored support and opportunities. We recognise that appropriate accommodation and support are fundamental to achieving lasting solutions and enabling people to rebuild their lives”.*

We will deliver this vision through:

- **Respectful, person-centred and trauma informed services** that listen to and involve residents in shaping their own solutions.
- **Early intervention and prevention** strategies that tackle the root causes of homelessness.
- **Provision of safe, suitable, and sustainable accommodation**, matched with the right level of support to meet individual needs.
- **Sound financial management**, ensuring that resources are used effectively and sustainably to maximise impact.
- **Empowerment and partnership**, helping residents build the skills, confidence, and connections they need to thrive.
- **Collaborative working** across council departments, voluntary sector partners, and communities to create a joined-up response.

### Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategic Priorities

1. Resident focussed homelessness services
2. Early and sustained prevention of homelessness
3. Support access to safe suitable and sustainable accommodation
4. Targeted housing pathways for single homeless, rough sleepers and other groups
5. Modern, data-led and cost effective services

11. The development of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is aligned with the MTFS workstreams. The Strategy implementation, MTFS workstream delivery and the completion of the Service Restructure will provide the direction, governance and capacity to

carry out the Select Committee Review recommendations. Progress to date is shown in the following section.

### Select Committee Review Recommendations and Progress Update

<b>Enhancing Resident Experience</b>	
1. All staff to refer to those applicants who approach the service for help as 'residents' rather than 'customers' or 'clients'.	This has been adopted across the service.
2. Create a clearer Residents' Charter: a more accessible guide explaining each stage of the homelessness support process for new applicants, from intake to case closure. This guide will set expectations, reduce confusion, and address common questions. Consider new technologies for instant translation requirements.	Development of a Residents' Charter has been included as an action in our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy which was approved by Cabinet in March 2026. This will be completed during 2026/27. The service uses a translation service.  Case processing targets are now embedded in the service.
3. Reconfigure the Housing Reception Centre to provide a more welcoming and empathetic environment within existing budget plans.	The service is transitioning to a more proactive appointments based system rather than the previous reactive service.
4. Continue unannounced random checks/management oversight of calls and correspondence ensure a high-quality, professional, empathetic, and resident focused service.	The service is operating on this basis.
5. Continue to gather feedback from residents regarding homelessness services using a simple anonymous feedback form.	This will be established during 2026/27.
6. Actively promote the current suggestion box system to encourage staff to submit suggestions for improving service efficiency and resident interactions.	The suggestion box system is publicised periodically to encourage staff suggestions for improving services.

<b>Managing Expectations and Process Efficiency</b>	
1. Consider incorporating ways to help applicants check their eligibility online for assistance before applying formally. Preventative avoidance can stop unnecessary applications from those who are not entitled, saving time and resources for both the applicants and the Council.	The Council's web pages have been updated to incorporate additional information regarding homelessness and housing options.  These will be reviewed again over the coming year.
2. For applicants in the process, to avoid processing delays, to explore the possibility of using automated text reminders for appointments and deadlines.	This is not done at present but will be kept under review.
3. Explore the feasibility of introducing a self-check-in system for applicants at reception linked to service transformation.	This will be considered in line with budget availability.

<p>4. Continue to review and update current documentation, guides and resident facing processes in relation to eligibility, case preparation and action planning.</p>	<p>The first priority within the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is Resident Focused Homelessness Services, reflecting our commitment to deliver homelessness services that are compassionate and empowering and to be responsive to the needs of our residents.</p> <p>Our Strategy has three goals under this priority:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents are clear about their rights and responsibilities and are respected, understood and supported</li> <li>• Staff are equipped to provide excellent services</li> <li>• Strengthening Partnerships</li> </ul>
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<b>Staff Support and Training</b>	
<p>1. Ensure all Housing staff receive regular casework supervision and promote current Staff Welfare policies.</p>	<p>This is part of our working process. Team management has been increased to provide the capacity to do this and is being further strengthened as part of the current restructure.</p>
<p>2. Consider implementing a comprehensive peer support and training programme in collaboration with a partner organisation. This programme should include access to peer mentors with lived experience of homelessness and offer refresher training to staff. The training should also incorporate 'walk-in-my-shoes' sessions to build understanding and connection with residents.</p>	<p>A comprehensive training programme will be implemented as part of the modernisation programme and restructure.</p>
<p>3. Create a learning set of resources for staff to encourage the sharing of good practice.</p>	<p>This will also be implemented as part of the modernisation programme and restructure.</p>

<b>Partnerships and Collaboration</b>	
<p>1. Build on existing partnerships and further develop these with local organisations to create a wider support network for residents to access.</p>	<p>A Homelessness Forum was held 9 February 2026 as part of the consultation for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. This will continue to be held on at least an annual basis.</p> <p>The modernisation programme and restructure will build on existing partnership arrangements.</p>
<p>2. Assign named officers to be liaisons for relevant partner agencies for accountability and, to aid effective communications going forward, introduce a generic email as the primary contact and communication tool</p>	<p>This will be done as part of the modernisation programme and restructure.</p>

between them and the Council.	
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## **PERFORMANCE DATA**

The following Key Performance Targets are included for Strategic Priority 1 of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy – Resident focussed homelessness services.

- Number of Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints and resolution time
- Number/percentage of reviews upheld
- Number/percentage of triage cases over 14 days
- Number/percentage of relief duty cases over 56 days
- Number/percentage of cases with Personal Housing Plan
- Annual Personal Housing Plan review for main duty cases

## **RESIDENT BENEFIT**

Implementation of the review recommendations will improve the experience of residents when they approach the Council for help in relation to homelessness.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

[Select Committee Review Homelessness and the Customer Journey](#)

[Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2025](#)

[Hillingdon Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026 to 2030](#)