Lewisham's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020–2022

Easy read version

Our vision for Lewisham

What is homelessness?

Someone is homeless if they have nowhere to stay and are living on the streets. This is known as 'rough sleeping.'

You can also be homeless even if you have a roof over your head, for example, if you are staying in a temporary home like a hostel, or staying with friends or family because you don't have a home of your own. People can also be homeless if they are unsafe in their own home.

Homelessness and rough sleeping is happening all over the country. More and more people are living in temporary homes or sleeping on the streets.

Homelessness in Lewisham

Homelessness is a problem in Lewisham. More people are becoming homeless. **These are the reasons why:**

- The cost of private renting (renting from a private landlord) has increased at a faster rate than that of people's incomes
- The costs of buying a home have increased at a faster rate than that of people's incomes
- There are not enough social homes in Lewisham for all the people who want them.

About 2,500 households come to us every year because they are homeless, or because they are at risk of homelessness. This is usually because their landlords are ending their tenancy, or because they are no longer able to live with their family and friends.

Rough sleeping is increasing too. We have worked with almost 200 rough sleepers across Lewisham in the response to COVID-19. This number is bigger than in previous years.

We expect that homelessness will continue to increase because of COVID-19.

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The strategy

A strategy is a plan. This is our plan to work towards ending homelessness in Lewisham.

This strategy lasts for two years. This is because COVID-19 has caused a lot of uncertainty. We will create a longer-term strategy during these two years.

We have grouped our strategy into five subjects, or themes, which include

1. **Preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity** with the most appropriate level of support
2. **Supporting people to access a stable and secure home**
3. **Supporting rough sleepers** to enable access to services and accommodation
4. **Adapt and being agile in our service deliver**y to support residents impacted by COVID-19
5. **Strengthening partnership working**

We also have five core ideas on how homelessness can be prevented, as outlined below:

1. Homelessness cannot be prevented by just housing services. We have to work with other groups, e.g. the NHS, community groups and other services to prevent homelessness
2. We are more likely to prevent homelessness if we help people at an earlier stage
3. We believe that it is more important to help people find secure and long-term homes over insecure temporary homes
4. We will make sure that we put the needs of people first in allwork that we do
5. We will plan our work with people who have experienced homelessness to make sure that we understand their needs.

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Priority 1: Preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity with the most appropriate level of support

We need to prevent households from becoming homeless as soon as we can.

Where we are

We are already working to prevent homelessness by:
- Giving people advice in our housing options centre
- Working with landlords or friends and family to prevent them from evicting people
- Finding suitable and affordable private rented homes for people who are threatened by homelessness
- Using our supported housing and other programmes to help people into housing
- Working with other groups and services to find more options for housing.

What we will do

We will do more by:
- Improving our customer services
- Working more with groups and services to help prevent homelessness earlier on
- Using the information we have to help us see when people might be in housing need
- Improving the work we do in the community to help people in need
- Making our financial support offer easier to access
- Improving the work we do with landlords and friends and family to prevent them from evicting people.

What we are aiming for

We will make sure that the things we do will lead to:
- More prevention of homelessness
- Ending homelessness for more people
- Fewer households put into temporary homes.

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Priority 2: Supporting people to access a stable and secure home

Everyone deserves a stable, secure and affordable home.

Where we are

Some of the work we already do includes:

- Giving financial help to prevent or end homelessness for people
- Helping people to take action to solve their own housing needs
- Finding properties to rent privately
- Referring people into supported housing
- Not putting families into short-term housing where they have to share kitchens and bathrooms with others
- Placing homeless families into social housing
- Improving standards in temporary housing.

What we will do

We will do more by:

- Helping people to find their own private rented homes
- Finding our own private rented properties that we can rent out to households
- Working with landlords to increase the amount of private rented homes available
- Asking landlords to offer longer tenancies
- Finding more options for temporary housing
- Using less shared and nightly paid temporary housing
- Making sure our policies are as good and fair as they can be
- Making sure supported housing is available for people who need it
- Making sure we can help young vulnerable people in housing need
- Making sure we can help those fleeing violence.

What we are aiming for

We will make sure that the things we do lead to:

- Ending homelessness for more people
- Making more homes available for those who need them
- Ensuring that fewer households are put into temporary homes.
- Ensuring that fewer families put into temporary housing where they have to share kitchens and bathrooms with others
- Helping more people to leaving supported housing into settled homes.

Priority 3: Supporting rough sleepers to enable access to services and accommodation

We need to end rough sleeping in Lewisham. The below factors outline how we are helping to do this.

Where we are
Our current work includes
- Providing 'Housing First' for rough sleepers – this is a project where long-term housing is found for people who have been homeless for a long time
- Working with the community to give rough sleepers the different types of help that they need
- Ensuring that we know who is sleeping rough and where, and offering them support
- Offering health services all over Lewisham to help people who are sleeping rough
- Helping people in temporary housing due to COVID-19 to find longer-term housing.

What we will do
We will do more by:
- Providing more support for people who have been sleeping rough for a long time
- Finding private rented housing to help people off the streets, and supporting them even after they have moved in
- Making sure temporary housing that we offer is safe from the spread of COVID-19
- Improving the work we do in the community to help rough sleepers
- Helping rough sleepers from other countries to get the support they need
- Thinking of all the different backgrounds of people when doing our work, and making sure that we are helping in the best way
- Working better with the NHS and other health groups to make sure that rough sleepers can get the medical help that they need
- Helping people to not go back to the streets after they have been housed
- Making sure that everyone can access help, no matter who they are. ▶

What we are aiming for

We will make sure that the things we do will lead to:

- Fewer people sleeping rough in Lewisham
- Fewer people coming back to rough sleeping
- More rough sleepers moving into long-term housing and staying there
- Helping more rough sleepers reconnect with their families and friends
- Rough sleepers using more health services
- Fewer rough sleepers going to A&E
- Supporting more rough sleepers to reduce the use of drugs and alcohol
- Helping more rough sleepers from other countries to access support.

Priority 4: Adapting and being agile in our service delivery to support residents impacted by COVID-19

We need to be able to respond to the changes and challenges caused by COVID-19. The below factors outline how we are helping to do this.

Where we are
We have already:
- Prioritising the most vulnerable people for housing during the pandemic
- Making sure that people were not being illegally evicted from their homes
- Helping people online and over the phone when our face-to-face service closed
- Making space in supported housing for people who needed it because of the pandemic
- Keeping people in shared housing safe from the spread of the virus
- Helping people sleeping rough by finding them emergency housing during the pandemic.

What we will do
We will do more by:
- Helping rough sleepers from other countries to get the support they need during the pandemic
- Talking to people who are homeless during the pandemic to make sure that we understand their needs
- Always reviewing how well we are doing, and doing better where we can
- Finding longer-term homes for the rough sleepers who we helped during the pandemic
- Working with the NHS and other health groups. With their help, we will make sure that we are keeping our vulnerable customers safe from COVID-19
- Making sure we can help people fleeing violence because of the pandemic
- Increasing the amount of housing that is available to rough sleepers
- Making sure that our shared housing is safe from the spread of COVID-19.

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What we are aiming for

We will make sure that the things we do will lead to:

- Less illegal evictions
- A good service for customers, online and over the phone. We will also make sure that we can provide our services if we are once again in lockdown.
- Housing that is safe from the spread of COVID-19
- Customer satisfaction

Priority 5: Strengthening partnership working

Partners are groups and services across the borough who help us prevent homelessness. We need to work closely with them to better support people who need our help. The below factors outline how we are helping to do this.

Where we are
Our current work includes:
- Asking partners to refer people to us that need help
- Working with the Homelessness Forum. This group includes services from all over Lewisham who can help people in need
- Working with rough sleeping partners to help rough sleepers across Lewisham
- Working with our social housing providers to help prevent their tenants from becoming homeless
- Joining up our own work with the work of social care and health partners.

What we will do
We will do more by:
- Working even closer with partners to reduce people's risk of homelessness
- Working with children's social care to keep children and young people safe and secure
- Working with health and social care partners to respond to the ongoing pandemic
- Working with health partners to improve support for people with drug and alcohol issues
- Working with other councils to increase the amount of housing available
- Working with people who have experienced homelessness to make sure that we understand their needs.

What we are aiming for
We will make sure that the things we do will lead to:
- More referrals of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- Fewer people evicted by the social housing providers who we work with.