

<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Sub-Committee	21/04/2021
<b>Subject:</b> Statutory Homelessness Annual Summary Report 2020/21	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	1, 2, 3
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>If so, how much?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	<b>For Information</b>
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## Summary

This report is to provide information to Members on the challenges and successes of the past financial year in providing statutory homelessness services at the City of London Corporation.

One of the main challenges explored in this report is the significant rise in the number of people accessing statutory homelessness services in the City of London, and the adjustments we have made in the service in order to provide advice and information to an increasing number of individuals and households while maintaining our statutory duties.

This report also aims to explore future challenges that may arise as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic as we move into 2021/22.

## Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

## Main Report

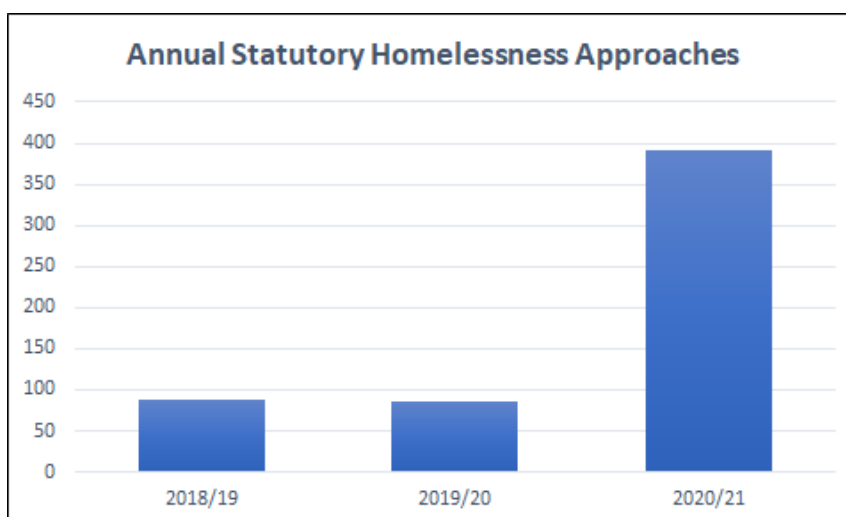
### Background

1. The statutory homelessness service area at the City of London Corporation has undergone significant changes in 2020/21 in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the financial year commencing at the onset of national lockdown measures.
2. While 2020/21 has not seen any large or notable legislative changes nationally with regard to assessing homelessness, it has seen the statutory homelessness service area make a number of necessary adjustments to cope with the changing landscape around COVID-19 and Government lockdown measures, and in an effort to ensure that all applicants approaching the City of London for homelessness advice and assistance could expect the same level of service that they received in previous years.
3. We have seen that one of the major effects of the pandemic for the service has been a large increase in the number of individuals and households approaching for advice around their housing situation. Numbers have risen to levels that the City has not seen previously.

### Current Position

#### Challenges to the service in 2020/21

4. City of London Corporation saw an immediate increase in the level of approaches following lockdown measures being introduced by the Government in March 2020. This trend continued throughout the year, peaking in February 2021 during the third national lockdown.
5. On average, since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) in April 2018, City of London Corporation has seen an average of 86 statutory homelessness approaches per financial year – as per data from 2018/19 and 2019/20.
6. In 2020/21, in comparison to the previous two years, we saw approach figures significantly increase, as below:



7. City of London Corporation noticed a changing profile of applicants seeking assistance, particularly the initial surge of people already experiencing homelessness, including hidden forms such as sofa surfing. This demonstrated the scale of households who were living in precarious situations and would not have been included in homelessness data.
8. As the pandemic continued, we saw a further increase in applicants approaching for housing assistance due to fleeing domestic abuse and relationship breakdown under pressure of lockdown.
9. While the 'Everyone In' initiative was a significant success and welcomed by the City of London Corporation, this did have an impact on the availability of already limited quality temporary accommodation, as move on options became scarce across London.
10. As a result of the increasing approaches, and the 'Everyone In' initiative, we have seen temporary accommodation usage increase from an average of 31 placements per month during 2019/20 to 37 in 2020/21 (see paragraph 28). This is also the cause of City of London Corporation suspending temporary accommodation evictions since the start of the pandemic, where possible, to ensure all applicants had the opportunity to self-isolate, adhere to social distancing advice and increase the possibility of securing permanent accommodation in the Relief duty stage.

#### Positive outcomes for the service in 2020/21

11. Despite walk-in services being suspended at Guildhall due to lockdown and social distancing measures, we have taken the opportunity to increase ways to access the service. In April 2020, we made the option to self-refer available online. This means that we were able to receive referrals directly from our housing software system and therefore respond quicker. Alongside this, for the first time we made the option of a phone assessment available to applicants. This reduced waiting times for appointments and reduced footfall to the Guildhall during the initial lockdown. We have continued offering phone assessments and the online self-referral tool as our main point of access to the service. We believe this has contributed to the service being more accessible to those who need it, or those who just require initial advice and information. To date, individuals and households have responded well to this new way of working and this increased flexibility is something we hope to retain moving forward.
12. Following summer 2020 and weeks of consistently high levels of approaches, we increased capacity within the service with an additional member of staff. This member of staff was tasked with providing a triage service for all approaches, which would determine homelessness, eligibility and local connection (for households that are already homeless) before passing the case to the Advice and Homelessness Officers for a full housing needs assessment.
13. By introducing triage to the service, we have been able to provide free advice and information at the first point of contact to more people than we have in previous years. While not all approaches progressed to a full housing needs assessment, many more

potential applicants were able to receive bespoke advice for their housing situations and housing options.

14. During 2020/21 we have seen more positive outcomes than in previous years since the introduction of the HRA. The HRA encourages local authorities to find suitable housing solutions in the Prevention or Relief stages, where possible. In 2020/21, we created more Private Rented Sector housing solutions via the City's Rent Deposit Scheme (RDS) and No First Night Out (NFNO) than in 2019/20. This has been a particularly challenging area during the pandemic, with restrictions on viewings and searching for affordable private rented properties during a time of so much financial uncertainty for many applicants. This year we have seen an increase of 40% in successful usage of the RDS and from referrals to the NFNO project. This means we have seen more households successfully move into permanent housing before they reach the main duty stage, which could have seen them living in temporary accommodation for many months, or sometimes years.
15. During the past year we also saw an increase in housing register outcomes for individuals and households known to the statutory homelessness service. In 2019/20 we saw two outcomes where a household was able to secure permanent accommodation via the housing register. In 2020/21, in a year that only saw 48 lettings overall, we managed to achieve six offers of suitable, permanent accommodation in social housing.
16. Further to this, we have seen a decrease in waiting times for offers of permanent accommodation via the City's Housing Register. In 2019/20, we saw an average wait time of 15 months between main duty being accepted and a final offer being made under Part VI Housing Act 1996 (as amended). Despite a slight delay early in 2020/21 due to lockdown restrictions and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen a reduction in average wait times to 13 months. While this is not a vast amount of time, it is significant in reducing the amount of time households are waiting in temporary accommodation for a permanent housing solution, and is an area where we hope to continue to see reductions in the future.
17. There have been positive effects despite the pandemic in terms of greater collaboration. We have acknowledged better collaborative approaches in a way of working across statutory and voluntary services, with existing partners such as the NFNO team, and through fostering new working relationships with AnyVan, our removals and storage provider, and with new and existing temporary accommodation providers, in responding to the increased demand for emergency placements during the pandemic.
18. The most significant intervention that the Government made was the instruction to bring 'Everyone In' or provide emergency accommodation for everyone rough sleeping, at risk of rough sleeping, or in accommodation where they could not self-isolate throughout the pandemic. This intervention had a tangible impact on saving lives during the pandemic, with infection rates and deaths among people experiencing homelessness at extremely low levels compared with international figures.

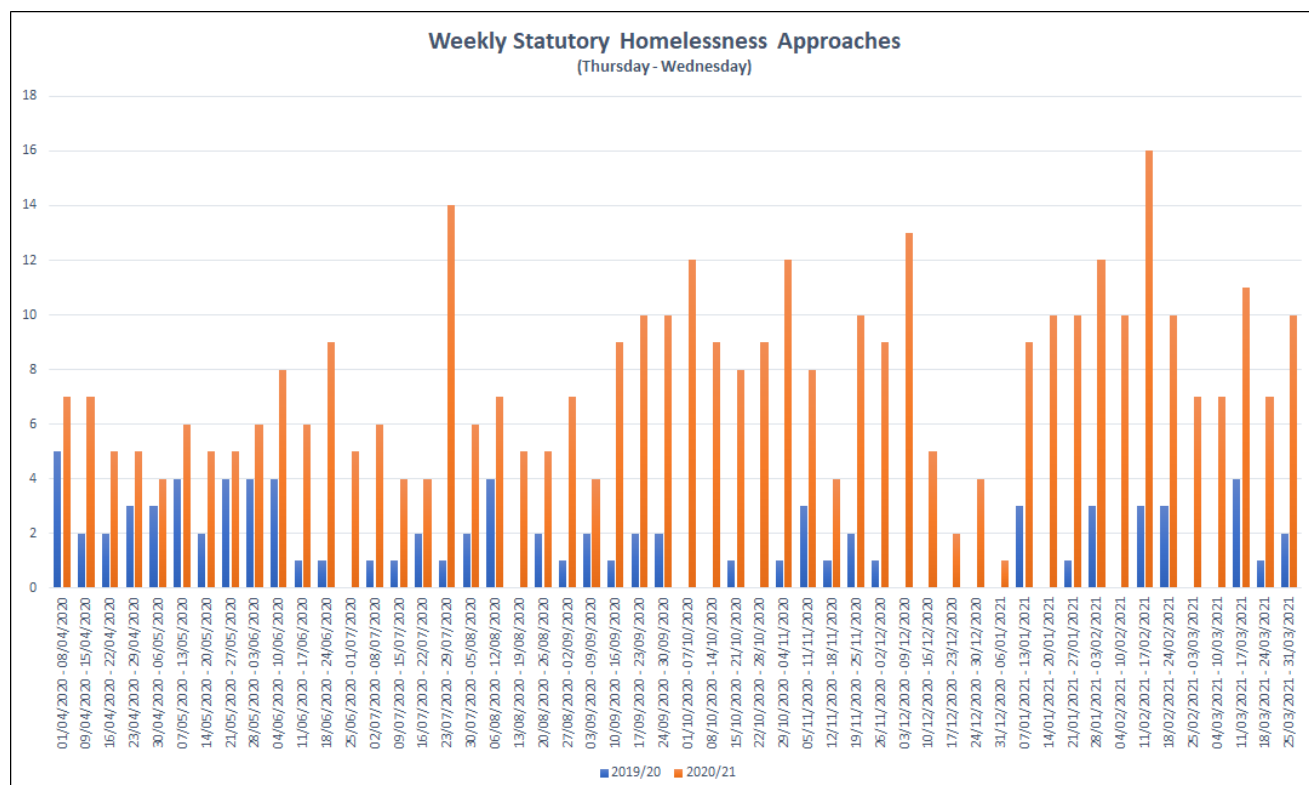
## Future challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic

19. Interventions from Government over the past year have helped lower the number of people at risk of homelessness. However, as we emerge from the pandemic, these interventions are due to end and will have a direct impact on homelessness. The emerging economic impact has started to become more evident as growing rent arrears show the financial strain on households.
20. Most evictions were banned in England at the start of the first lockdown in March 2020, an intervention that has been extended several times during the pandemic, and which is due to end on 31 May 2021.
21. The furlough scheme, and later the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, were introduced to temporarily provide employers with an option to keep employees on the payroll without them working, where the Government covered 80% of wages up to a cap of £2,500. From July 2021, the Government will contribute 70% and employers will have to pay 10% for hours not worked plus National Insurance and pension contributions. In August and September 2021, the Government will pay 60% and employers 20% plus National Insurance and pension contributions. The scheme is due to end at the end of September 2021.
22. Last year the Government increased the Universal Credit standard allowance by £20 a week in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and it removed the 'minimum income floor' to help self-employed people whose income has fallen. These measures are due to end in September 2021, in line with the furlough scheme ending.
23. While these interventions have notably prevented many households from experiencing immediate homelessness during the pandemic, they were only temporary measures. We expect the continued flow of approaches to increase significantly from people who are experiencing homelessness for the first time, people who have been furloughed, and those who are newly unemployed. We expect these approaches to include more households with children, rather than single people who represented most initial approaches from tenuous housing situations, such as sofa surfing.
24. With the increasing approaches and higher levels of temporary accommodation usage, we have seen some strain on some of the administrative aspects of the service. While introducing a triage service and increasing staff resources have managed the vast number of enquiries for advice and information, it has still demanded a large amount of officer time and attention to manage. While all our statutory duties have been fulfilled and cases have progressed correctly, we have seen that areas, for example the temporary accommodation rent arrears process, have not received as much focus as we would have liked. We hope to improve on this as we move away from an emergency response and into a new business-as-usual in 2021/22 and find a better balance overall across the service between statutory casework and other administrative duties.
25. As demand on the service increases, one of the biggest challenges the City of London Corporation faces is the ability to successfully move those housed in emergency

COVID-19 accommodation into permanent and secure housing. The structural barriers that existed before the pandemic, including a lack of affordable housing and changes to the welfare system, have been exacerbated during the pandemic.

## Key Data

26. Throughout the past year, we have submitted weekly reports to London Councils, demonstrating the effect of the pandemic on the service. These reports have shown a clear trend of approaches steadily increasing throughout the year, in comparison to 2019/20. We have seen peaks during July 2020, December 2020 and February 2021:



27. In comparison to 2019/20, we have seen a 361% increase in approaches to the service overall:

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year Total
2019/20	35	21	9	20	85
2020/21	76	93	103	120	392

28. In comparison to 2019/20, we have seen an increase in temporary accommodation usage:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
2019/20	29	26	25	24	27	32	33	34	36	33	35	36
2020/21	38	36	35	33	38	38	38	34	32	36	39	41

## **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

29. There are no corporate or strategic implications arising from this report.

## **Conclusion**

27. The past year has been an unexpected challenge for the statutory homelessness service area, with the beginning of a global pandemic and adjusting quickly to new working arrangements. However, despite this, we have seen some positive outcomes and have been able to build upon previous achievements, even in the face of such an unprecedented number of approaches throughout the year.

28. The statutory homelessness service has been under incredible pressure in 2020/21 – we have seen a record level of engagement with individuals and households, increased demand on our prevention and relief offer in the RDS, and a requirement for more flexible working in order to achieve positive results for the cases we progressed beyond initial advice and information.

29. However, despite these challenges, we have taken steps to ensure that the service was able to continue uninterrupted throughout the pandemic and lockdown restrictions. We feel the changes we have made – for example, online access for everyone, phone assessments and introducing a triage service – will be vital moving forward into a new business-as-usual, and can only enhance the statutory homeless service and the assistance available to all homeless individuals and households who choose to approach City of London Corporation. We hope to see increased use of the RDS, more housing register outcomes and continued reduction in waiting times for social housing as we move into 2021/22.

## **Appendices**

- None

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