HOMELESSNESS REVIEW

2019

Brent

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Executive Summary - key findings of the review

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Approaches to the housing needs service have significantly increased since the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act and forecasting predictions show that this increase is likely to continue.

Successful initiatives have reduced the use of Temporary Accommodation 10% year on year for the last 5 years, but Brent remains above the London Average; a sign that households may be presenting themselves for support too late, when the range of initiatives aimed at preventing homelessness will be less effective.

The ending of an assured-shorthold tenancy in the private sector is still the most common reason for why people are approaching our services for support. This is reflective of regional statistics, and is likely to be linked to the wider housing supply and affordability crisis across London.

Rough sleeping is on the rise, and our data suggests that Central and Eastern European individuals are proportionately over-represented in Brent's rough sleeping population, so it is important to consider how we are providing the right advice and support, particularly with the impact of Brexit still being uncertain.

Specific groups are emerging in our data as being more at risk of homelessness (e.g. BAME households). It is important that we unpick why this is the case, and consider what could be done to more effectively prevent this.

Brent has a number of successful support services in place, however feedback from partners and service-users that it is not always clear what support services are available, who they are delivered by or how to access them.

Feedback from key partners has identified a lack of specialised support services tailored to individual circumstances (e.g. LGBTQ individuals, sex workers, and those with no recourse to public funds).

Communication between Housing services and other teams or partner organisations was highlighted by service-users as being inefficient with the handover of cases not always being smooth. Service users have expressed a clear wish to only to have to tell their story once.

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Introduction

1.1 Under Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002, every local authority in England has a duty to formulate a strategy for tackling homelessness[1]. In order to appropriately inform this strategy, a comprehensive homelessness review must take place[2] which looks at:

- The current and likely future levels of homelessness within the local area;
- The activities which are carried out for preventing homelessness as well as securing accommodation or providing support for those who are, may become or have been homeless; and
- The resources allocated to these activities.

1.2 This year Brent will publish a standalone strategy aimed at preventing homelessness and tackling rough sleeping, as previously the borough's priorities around this have been set out within the overarching Housing Strategy.

1.3 This review took place between February 2019 – September 2019 with input from staff across the housing needs service, external partner organisations via the Homelessness Forum and service-users as part of a qualitative research project. This review also included desktop analysis of the data we hold, alongside published regional and national statistics. The review includes insight into the current picture of homelessness in Brent and acts to inform the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2020 – 2025.

Performance against previous objectives (Housing Strategy 2014 – 2019)

2.1 In 2014, Brent published its most recent Housing Strategy which set out the direction and priorities for the housing service as a whole across a five-year period. The below table highlights the objectives within this strategy that aimed to tackle homelessness and progress against them.

2.2 *Objectives for tackling homelessness (as set out in the Brent Housing Strategy 2014 – 2019)*

Objective	Evidence
Reduce homelessness acceptances to below the London average by 2019	**The London average for homeless acceptances for quarter October to December 2018 was 59. In Brent, we accepted 73 households as statutorily homeless during this period.** The implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has increased focus on prevention and relief duties. Teams in Brent have been restructured to better suit the new statutory duties with a particular focus on providing prevention driven services. The success of this new prevention focus, alongside numerous prevention driven interventions (see 6.1) is translating into a reduction in the number of people reaching crisis point (as seen in the decreasing number of statutory homeless acceptances in Brent). West London Prevention of Rough Sleeping Scheme has been established following a successful bid for MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) funding. A regular Homelessness Forum has been established with the aim of

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[1] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/7/section/1
[2] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/7/section/2

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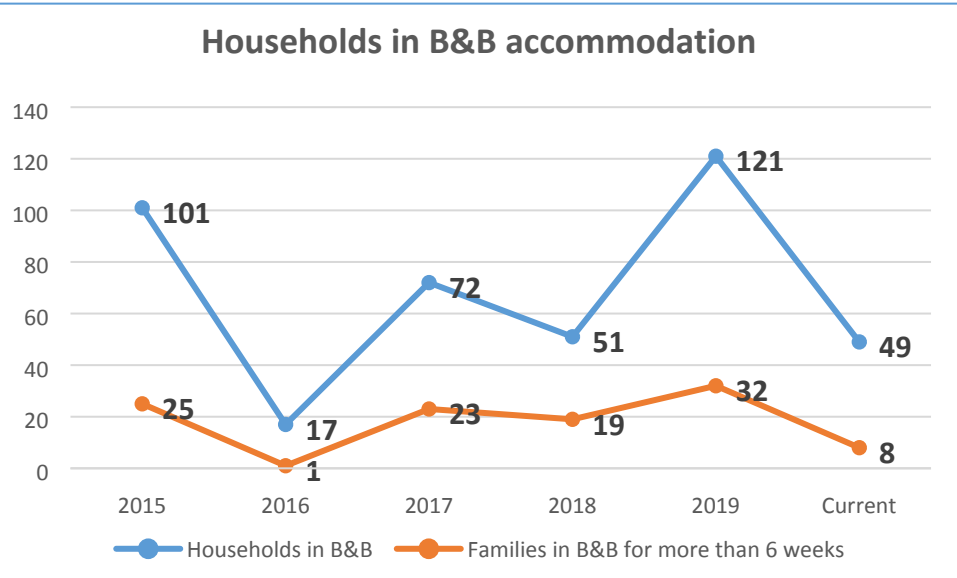|	strengthening partnership working across the borough, bringing statutory and voluntary organisations together to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.
Minimise the use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation and eliminate the use of non-self-contained B&B for more than 6 weeks	**In the last 5 years there has been as 63% reduction in the number of households starting placements in B&B accommodation in Brent, going from 752 placements in 2014 to 275 in 2018.** **232 B&B placements ended in 2018, of which approximately 50% had been there longer than 6 weeks.** The number of households in B&B with shared facilities has been unstable for the last five years for various reasons such as the introduction of the HRA. However, in Brent we have seen a reduction in the last year and the reduction has been even sharper in the first five months of this financial year. **Last five years:** **First 5 months of this financial year:**

Reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation to at least the London average by 2019	**The London borough average for households in temporary accommodation in December 2018 was 1,778. Brent had 2,302 households in temporary accommodation in December 2018.** The overall number of households in TA has reduced by 10% year on year for the last 5 years. The number of households in TA as at September 2019 is 2088. Although this is not below the current London average, this has significantly decreased from 3,161 in March 2015, and Brent has gone from having the highest number of households in TA to the 7th highest**.**
Make effective use of tenure flexibility, allocations and nominations to meet need and support mobility	A revised Allocations Scheme has been published following a review and statutory consultation with key stakeholders. The revised scheme gives priority to existing Council tenants who require a transfer, to move to any new build properties that are developed on their estate. It also gives priority to homeless households living in temporary accommodation on a major regeneration estate, as well as moving away from a quota system to an Accommodation Panel to provide maximum flexibility to help meet those households with support needs. A greater focus has been given to the Council's under-occupation initiative ('Moving to a Smaller Home'), with a dedicated Estate Regeneration Options & Under-Occupation Officer post created in October 2018. Over 100 under occupiers have been consulted and provided with information regarding the different options and incentives available to them. This more tailored approach has resulted in an increase of tenants transferring into small homes that better meet their needs, while freeing up larger homes for homeless families living in Temporary Accommodation. In the last 12 months, a total of 21 households have been successfully rehoused into smaller properties. This freed up 1 x 6 bedroom house; 2 x 5 bedroom houses; 3 x 4 bedroom houses; 16 x 3 bedroom properties and 9 x 2 bedroom properties. A Social Housing Mobility scheme has also been developed which supports tenants who otherwise would not meet the requirements of the allocations scheme to be eligible for priority to transfer to another property that is closer to their employment or closer to care needs/responsibilities.

Data taken from internal systems and https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics

2.3 In early 2019, Brent published its new [Borough Plan](), focused on building a better Brent for those who live, work in or visit the borough. A number of priorities for services across the council are set out in this plan, the below relate directly to the housing and homelessness services:

- To reduce the number of households living in temporary accommodation;
- Deliver 5000 new affordable, good quality homes over the next five years;
- Early intervention and prevention of homelessness via support services;
- Contribute to better health and wellbeing for homeless households; and
- Increase satisfaction with services through resident involvement.

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National, regional and local context

Homelessness

3.1 Throughout the last strategy period, central government has maintained its emphasis on prevention when it comes to homelessness. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 being the most notable homelessness legislation of recent years - bringing with it the introduction of robust, statutory prevention and relief duties for local authorities – has cemented this prevention focused approach to tackling homelessness across the country.

3.2 Although still relatively new legislation, the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (which came into force in April 2018) is already being acknowledged. A survey carried out as part of Crisis' Homelessness Monitor 2019 found that approximately 70% of local authorities across London have introduced new prevention and relief services since the implementation of the Act and almost 80% believe it has enabled a culture shift to a more 'person-centred' approach[3].

3.3 Since the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has come into force in Brent, there has been a significant increase in people approaching the Council for advice and/or support relating to their housing situation. However, main duty homelessness acceptances have reduced by 27%, evidencing the effectiveness of the prevention and relief work that is happening under this new legislation.

Figure I
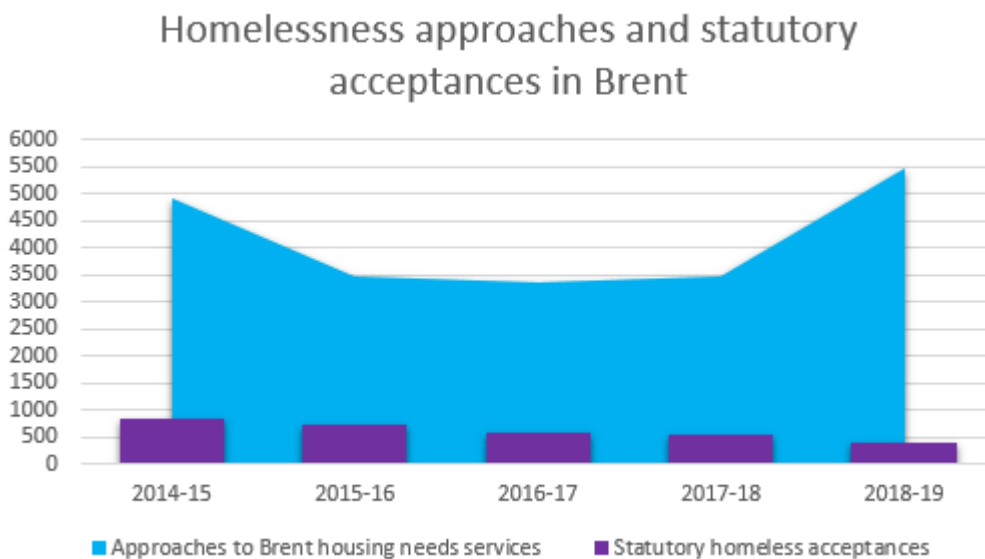
3.4 In the year 2018/19, approximately 70% of all approaches to Brent Council homelessness services were resolved under the new prevention or relief duty, around 10% received the main housing duty and approximately 20% fell under 'other' i.e. were found to be ineligible, contact was lost or their application for support was withdrawn.

3.5 The recent MHCLG Rough Sleeping Strategy highlighted the importance of improving our understanding of how individuals might experience rough sleeping differently depending on their personal circumstances or demographic information. Specific emphasis is placed on the

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[3] https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2019/

experiences of LGBT individuals and the importance of effective support being provided by front-line services, as young people identifying as LGBT are more likely to find themselves homeless than their non-LGBT peers[4].

3.6 In Brent we are seeing an increase in individuals identifying as LGBT approaching the Council for advice and/or support regarding their housing situation. In the last year, 294 people approaching for housing advice identified as LGBT (just over 5% of those approaching), this is 8 times more than it was last year when only 28 identified as LGBT (just under 1% of those approaching). While this is striking, it may be the result of greater willingness to disclose this information, as the proportion of those who answered "prefer not to say" has reduced by a similar scale over recent years.

Figure II

Sexuality and approaches to Brent housing needs services
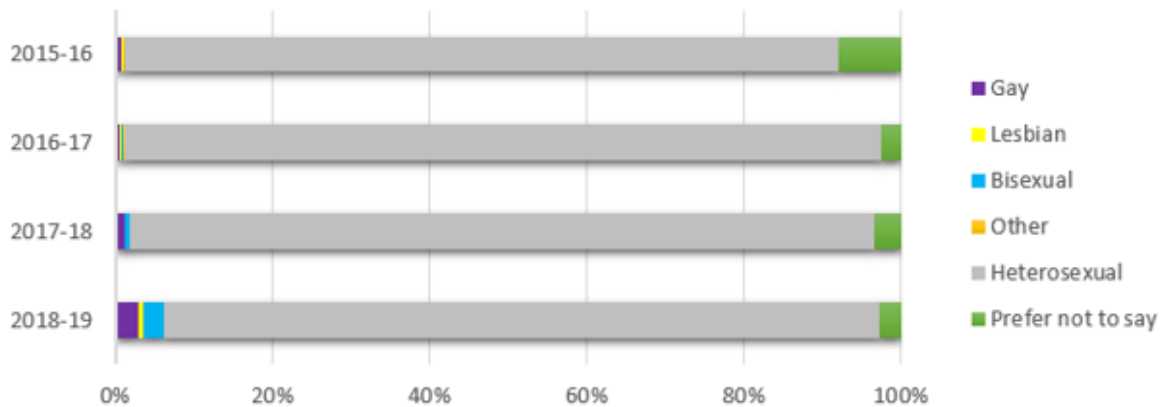
3.7 In Brent we are seeing a high proportion of black ethnic minorities approaching for advice and support with their housing situation, this is particularly significant when compared to general population data (population data taken from 2016 GLA projections).

Figure III

Ethnicity and approaches to Brent housing needs services

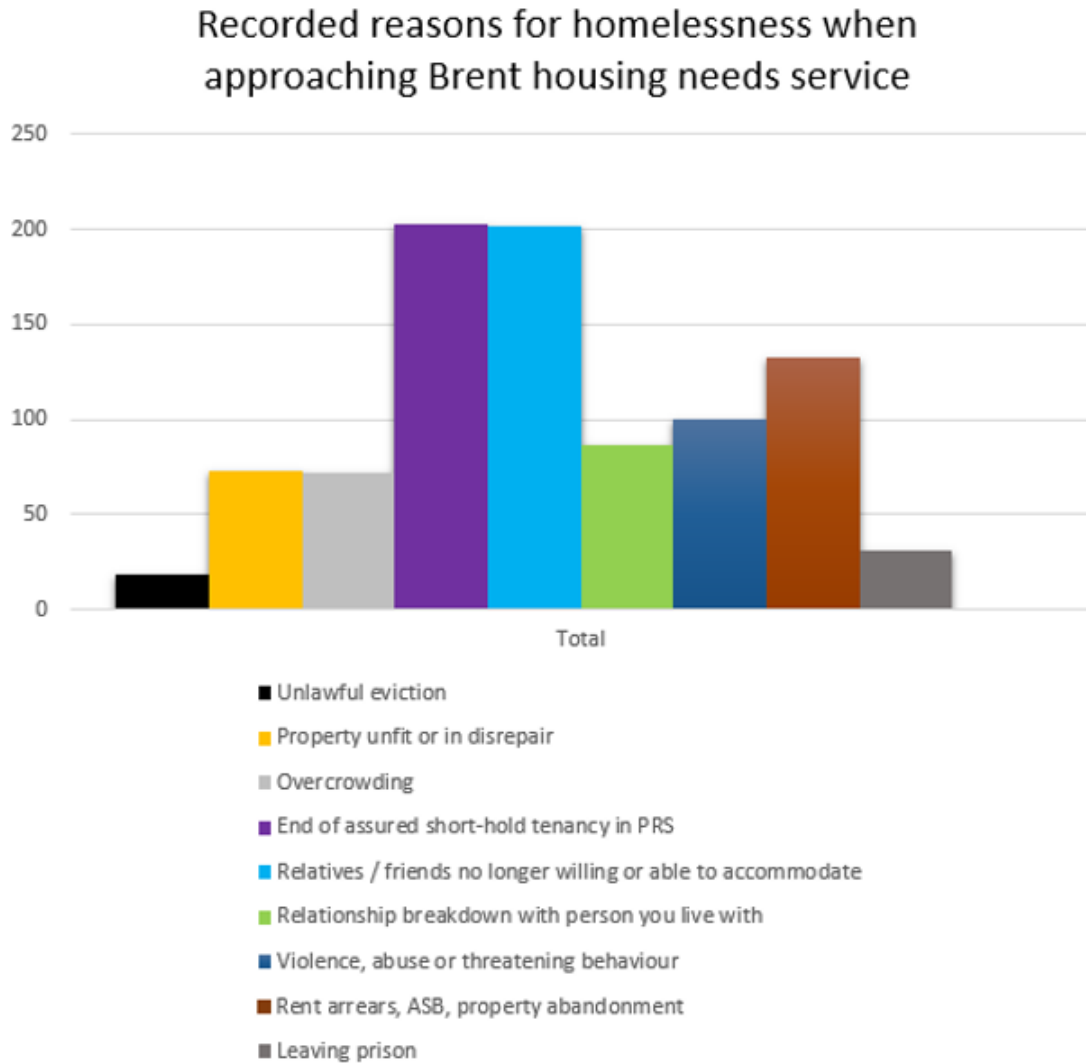---

[4] https://www.homeless.org.uk/supporting-lgbtq-people
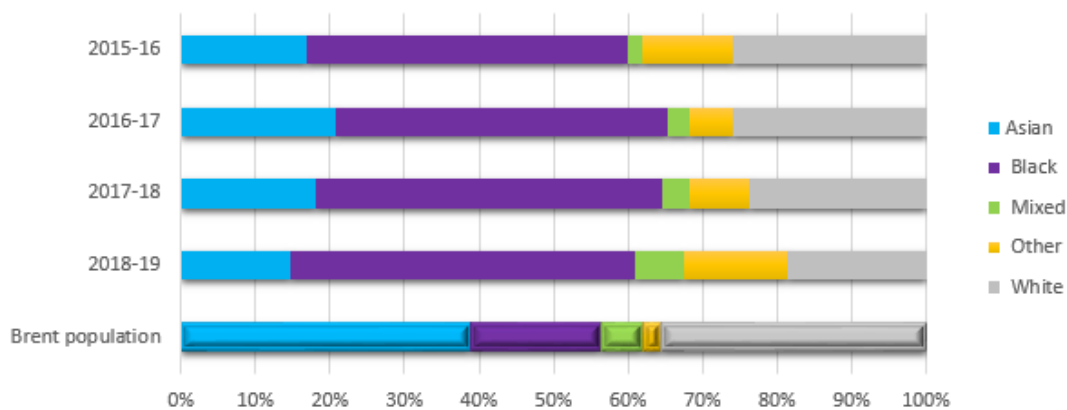
3.8 In 2018, the GLA published their London Housing Strategy, which sets out the Mayors vision and priorities for tackling the housing crisis across London. In relation to homelessness specifically, the strategy highlights the importance of prevention, and the need to address the root causes of homelessness in order to drive forward effective prevention work.

3.9 The below graph shows the main reasons for homelessness that have been identified in Brent for 2018/19 approaches to the service. **It is important to note that due to data quality issues, the below data is reflective of a small sample and is therefore only indicative.**

Figure IV

Recorded reasons for homelessness when approaching Brent housing needs service

- Unlawful eviction
- Property unfit or in disrepair
- Overcrowding
- End of assured short-hold tenancy in PRS
- Relatives / friends no longer willing or able to accommodate
- Relationship breakdown with person you live with
- Violence, abuse or threatening behaviour
- Rent arrears, ASB, property abandonment
- Leaving prison

3.10 Ending of an assured short-hold tenancy and relatives no longer being willing or able to accommodate are found to be the most common reasons for homelessness across most London boroughs. The above data is reflective of those figures reported in the GLA Housing Strategy for across London. Within the cohort of those made homeless by the end of an assured shorthold tenancy are those who have stated that their landlord is doing so in order to sell the property, or because of a belief that they can achieve a higher rent, indicating that this is likely to be linked to the wider issue of the housing and affordability crisis across London.

3.11   In December 2017, Brent commissioned Cambridge University to undertake a detailed piece of research into affordability of accommodation within the borough, which is published on our Open Data Platform[5]. The findings were stark; that 50% of single people, 56% of couples with one child, and 91% of lone parents with one child could not afford the Local Housing Allowance rent for the appropriate sized property in North West London.
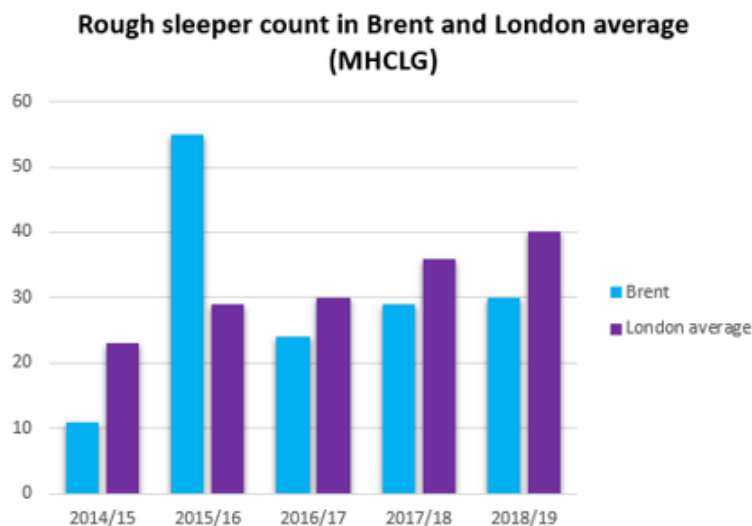
Rough Sleeping

3.12   In 2018, the MHCLG published their Rough Sleeping Strategy[6] which, backed by £100 million of funding, outlines their aim to half rough sleeping by 2022 and end it entirely by the year 2027. This strategy sets out a three-pronged approach:

- *Prevention* – Understanding the indicators that can lead to rough sleeping and providing timely support to those at risk of it;
- *Intervention* – Supporting those who are already rough sleeping to access support that is tailored to their individual needs and circumstances and;
- *Recovery* – Helping people to find a safe, secure home and live independently.

3.13   Gaining a thorough and accurate understanding of the number of people sleeping rough within a local authority area is inherently difficult given the often hidden nature of rough sleeping. There are a range of factors than can impact on the number of people seen or thought to be sleeping rough on any given night e.g. the weather, time of year, availability of alternatives such as hostel space or night shelters etc.

3.14   Official statistics on rough sleeping are produced once a year by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), based on a single night snapshot count carried out by local authorities across the country. The below graph shows the results of Brent Council's official rough sleeper count alongside the London average over the last five years[7].

Figure V

Rough sleeper count in Brent and London average (MHCLG)

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[5] https://data.brent.gov.uk/dataset/affordable-housing-products-in-brent-and-their-affordability-to-target-client-groups

[6] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-rough-sleeping-strategy

[7] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness

3.15   A more comprehensive set of rough sleeper monitoring data is the Greater London Authorities CHAIN (Combined Homelessness and Information Network) system, managed by St Mungo's. These CHAIN reports present information about people seen rough sleeping throughout the year by outreach teams in London.

3.16   According to CHAIN data, throughout 2018/19 248 people were seen rough sleeping across the borough of Brent. This is a 24% increase when compared to 2017/18. The majority of those seen this year had not been seen rough sleeping in Brent previously, however approximately 30% were returners to street homelessness or had also been seen rough sleeping in the previous year. The graph below shows this in comparison to 2017/18.
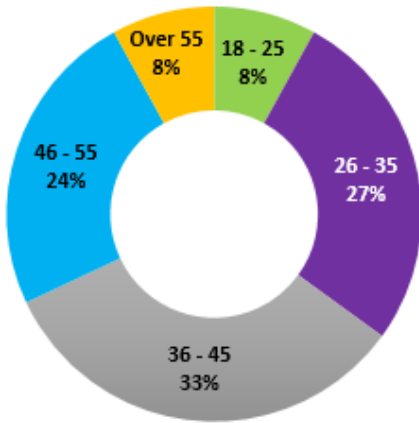
Figure VI
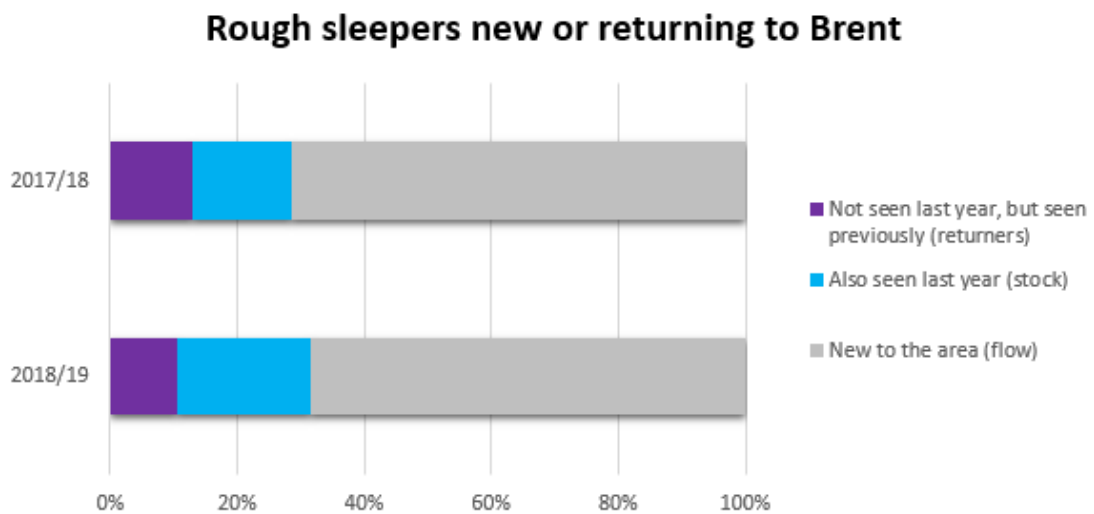
3.17   The below graphs detail demographic information relating to the rough sleeping population in Brent, as reported in CHAIN data for 2018/19. Of particular significance is the large proportion of rough sleepers who are Central and Eastern European individuals. Considering the uncertainty of Brexit and the impact this may have on access to services, it is important to consider how the service can provide the right advice and support at the right time to prevent homelessness.

Figure VII
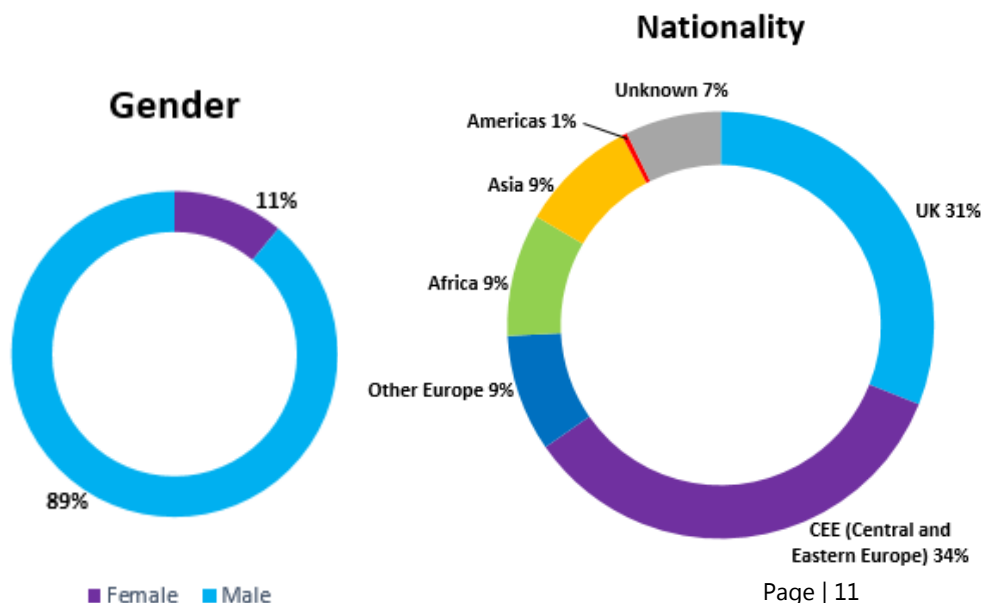
Age

Predicting future homelessness

4.1 Accurately projecting homelessness figures for a local authority area is complex, as these numbers can fluctuate as a result of a range of interconnected factors, from economical to environmental. However, carrying out work to predict what future levels of homelessness might look like is useful in order to support the service to effectively plan for, budget and manage demand as well as efficiently allocate resources.

4.2 The below graphs depict historical data around approaches to the housing needs service in Brent and statutory homelessness acceptances. A moving average technique has also been used in order to develop a 3-year future forecast for these figures. Forecast data has been established using only post-HRA figures.

Figure VIII

Forecasted approaches to Brent homelessness services

Figure IX

Forecasted statutory homeless acceptances in Brent
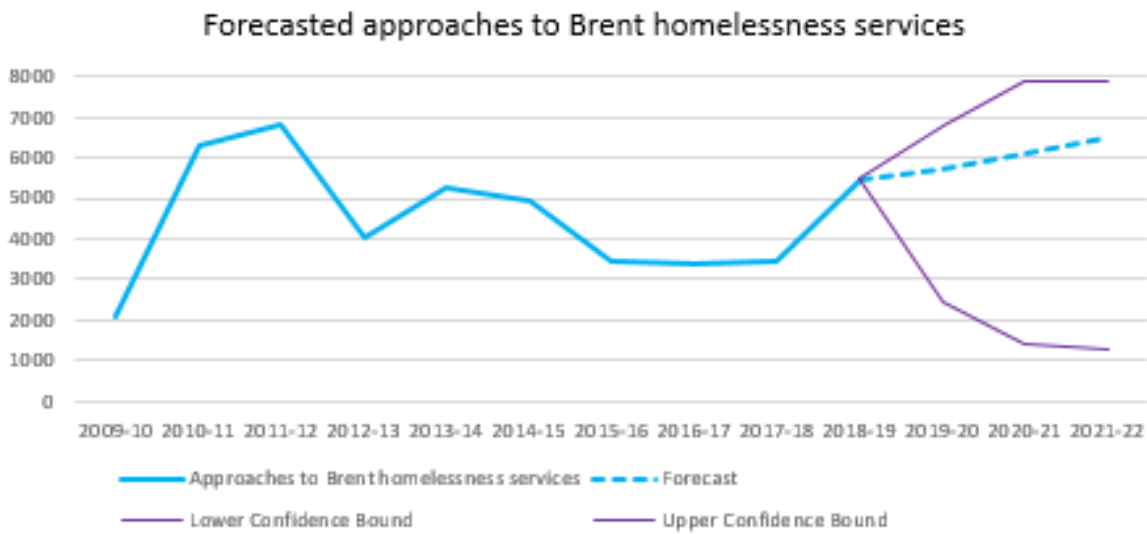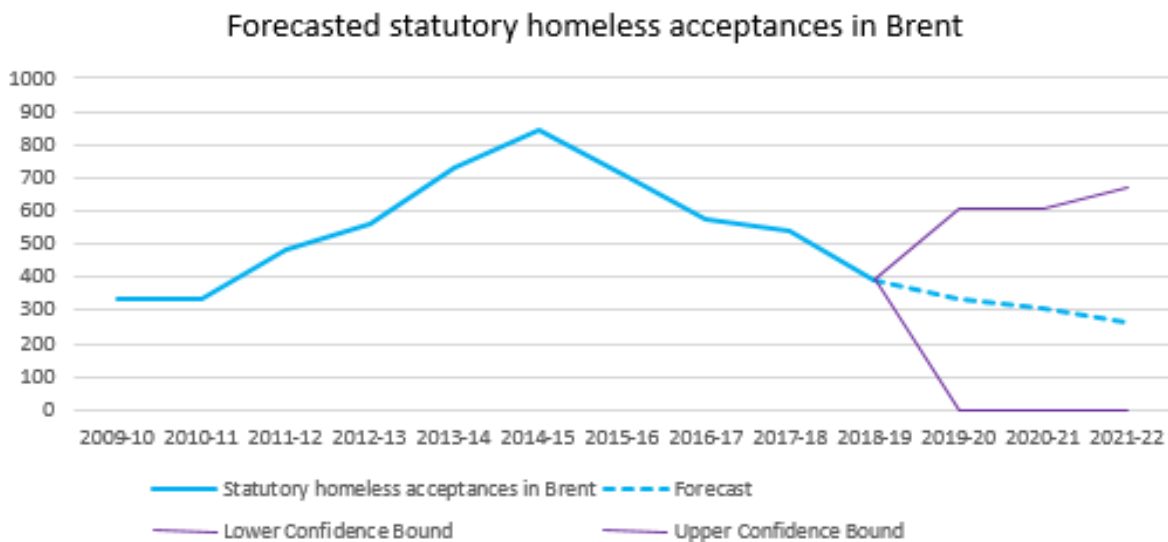
4.3 The forecasting data suggests that approaches to the homelessness services at Brent Council are likely to sit between 4000 and 5000 per annum over the next 5 years, following an increase in the past year after the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Statutory homeless acceptances are predicted to sit between 400 – 500 per annum over the next 5 years.

Homelessness services and initiatives in Brent

5.1 Ensuring that there is adequate and effective support and advice services available across the borough is key to tackling homelessness, from both a preventative and responsive perspective. Appendix 1 provides a list of the services available with:

- The lead organisation providing the service or initiative;
- Whether the main aim is to provide support, secure accommodation or prevent homelessness;
- Who it is aimed at (i.e. families, single homeless individuals etc.);
- Where resources / funding originate from; and
- Key challenges / suggested improvements.

5.2 Cutting across all of this are our housing related support services, which provide both accommodation based and floating support to individuals with low level vulnerabilities such as young people who may be living independently for the first time, or those with substance dependencies or mental health needs. In Summer 2019 we carried out a fundamental review of all housing related support, and one of the key findings, which has been echoed by discussions at our homelessness forum, is the need for a single referral process no matter what initiative or service an individual may subsequently receive.

Gap analysis of services with the Homelessness Forum

5.3 In 2018, Brent Council worked with organisations across the borough to set up the Homelessness Forum. The aim of the forum is to bring key partners together to improve services and end homelessness and rough sleeping in Brent.

5.4 As part of the homelessness review, The Homelessness Forum ran a gap analysis session which aimed to take a snapshot of homelessness services available across the borough and identify where any gaps in services are evident. Key outputs from this gap analysis session were:

- There is a lack of access to secure, affordable housing across Brent, specifically in the private rented sector;
- More training and educational opportunities for those who are experiencing homelessness would be beneficial, with the specific aim of supporting individuals into employment to address affordability;
- Communication with service-users and information available on online portals should be reviewed in order to ensure it is clear, consistent and accessible. An overview of services in place across the borough should also be made available;
- A more joined up approach to case handover is needed between different services and/or organisations. Effective communication is key to ensure trust is maintained; and
- There is a lack of specialised services aimed at specific cohorts i.e. LGBT individuals, sex workers and those with no recourse to public funds;
- There is a perceived lack of support for those with mental health needs who are not eligible for secondary mental health services;
- There is a lack of opportunities for social interaction for those who are rough sleeping, peer support or 'buddy' services as well as increased day facilities could help.

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5.5 Independent of this exercise, the Homelessness Forum set up two task and finish groups to look at two groups whose needs they felt were not adequately addressed by existing services;
- The migrant homeless population
- Homeless individuals with complex and multiple needs.

5.6 The complex needs subgroup was set up in April 2019 and is comprised of Council Officers and a variety of key partners including support providers, drug and alcohol services, and Mental Health. The group have been supported by Crisis and the Performance, Insight and Improvement team, and together have co-produced a proposal for a multi-agency panel to take an action learning approach to this cohort of individuals; seeking to understand the real root causes of their needs, to foster creative and holistic solutions, and to broker and embed new ways of working between the agencies that support these individuals.

Service-user experience of support available to rough sleepers

5.7 In early 2019, Brent Council carried out some qualitative research to understand the experiences of rough sleepers, and the barriers to them entering settled accommodation. 11 in-depth interviews and two focus groups were carried out with current and previous rough sleepers, and support staff from Crisis. Interviews were also carried out with support workers. Key findings from this research are set out below.

5.8 The demographics of the service-users that took part in this research are as follows:

- 11 males and 4 females, single non-priority homeless;
- Aged between 30 – 65;
- White British, Black British, Black Caribbean, EU Citizens and non-EU migrants; and
- Most had complex needs e.g. mental health issues, suffered from addiction etc.

5.9 Finding 1: Often these service-users have experienced severe personal crises.

A number of service-users involved in this research stated that they were suffering from addiction (alcohol and/or drugs) and/or were dealing with significant mental health issues. Some participants had experienced relationship breakdowns and/or a close family bereavement which they felt had contributed to their homelessness, often leaving them with no local support network. A small percentage had travelled to the UK as a result of civil war.

5.10 Finding 2: Those who are rough sleeping often lead chaotic lives and find it difficult to access services.

Participants highlighted the lack of certainty in their day-to-day lives when rough sleeping and how this can make accessing services difficult. Support workers noted that those who find it difficult to access these services are often the people who need them the most.

5.11 Finding 3: Current Brent communications and IT 'digital first' approach is not always accessible to those who are homeless, specifically for those with severe and complex needs.

Support workers noted that the 'digital by default' approach is often not helpful, as those who are experiencing homelessness usually find it difficult to access a computer. Participants also highlighted that some aspects of the online services are not very user-friendly. It was also noted that sometimes communications sent out in letter format are unclear and difficult to understand for service-users, leading to further confusion and distrust in the process.

5.12   Finding 4: There is a lack of joined up, information sharing across homelessness and related services in Brent.

Communication between different teams and/or partnering organisations was highlighted as sometimes being a problem. Application processes were highlighted as being repetitive and time-consuming. Ensuring that the right information is shared at the right time is important for making sure the process is as simple and easily managed as possible.

5.13   Finding 5: There is a lack of clarity around what services are available and from which organisations in Brent.

Support workers noted that there is sometimes a lack of knowledge and/or communication around what services Brent and its partners provide, where they are and who can access them.

Key Findings

6   The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has placed a number of new statutory obligations on authorities, and has cemented a prevention focused approach which Brent has embraced, resolving 70% of all approaches under the new prevention or relief duties.

6.1   Approaches to the housing needs service have significantly increased since the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act and forecasting predictions show that this increase is likely to continue.

6.2   Successful initiatives have reduced the use of Temporary Accommodation 10% year on year for the last 5 years, but Brent remains above the London Average; a sign that households may be presenting themselves for support too late, when the range of initiatives aimed at preventing homelessness will be less effective.

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6.4   Rough sleeping is on the rise, and our data suggests that Central and Eastern European individuals are proportionately over-represented in Brent's rough sleeping population, and it is important to consider how we are providing the right advice and support, particularly with the impact of Brexit still being uncertain.

6.5   Specific groups are emerging in our data as being more at risk of homelessness (e.g. BAME households). It is important that we unpick why this is the case, and consider what could be done to more effectively prevent this.

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