

## Appendix C

### Meetings with internal officers and partners

#### Meeting with senior officer in housing solution on 24 October 23

The key issues raised were lack of social housing supply, Weak private rented market, Expensive housing within Camden. Not far off having to look outside of London for affordable options. They expressed that London has seen 400% increase in TA, in North London it's 700% up in B&Bs.

The LHA rates have not been increased for a significant period of time while the rent continue to rise making private sector unaffordable and increasing homelessness. Incentives to private sector landlords aren't working anymore – with councils now having to pay shortfall between LHA and actual rent. Local authorities are in effect acting as DWP.

Despite the challenges, the officers informed us of the current key interventions in place to manage the level of homelessness:

- **Tenancy Sustainment Team** supports people in the PRS to remain in tenancies. 90%+ sustained.
- **Specialist roles focused on target groups** such as hospital and prison discharge roles, partnership with DWP and sub-regional funding means they have proactive role in the job centre (prevention)
- **Same officer throughout the process** less trauma on the residents
- **Less number in TA** Camden facing a significant overspend on TA but comparatively less when compared with some other London boroughs.
- **Legal partners** advocate for residents and can help to get messages out for the Council.
- **Community partners** useful because they know who managers are and can escalate or intervene if needed. Some really successful work, such as with specialist mental health outreach
- **Funding** is a key challenge and NHS funding is in a dire situation. Short-term funding is not within local authority control – so the question is how we can design services around this.

#### **Challenge faced by Camden**

We were told that separating preventative work from dealing with crisis so that staffs can focused on cases – questions over how this can be extended and strengthened.

They need a wraparound level of support including CAMHS, children's services, education, housing and other services.

#### **Officers would like to in an ideal world**

Prevent more people from becoming homeless, Work on the PRS – stop or prevent evictions; increase PRS availability.

Increase social housing supply to accommodate people on the housing register; lobbying on housebuilding, such as legislating with private developers about social housing rates.

Government funding for LAs is key – to improve own stock; building regulations are good but there is no funding available to meet newly imposed regulations.

LHA needs to be reviewed – property in London is not affordable to people on benefits  
Service Charges – providers have found it very difficult to get direct payments of service charge for people on UC. DWP regs allow for this to happen technically but in practice it doesn't happen. Massive pressure on supported housing providers rent accounts.

Funding certainty – rough sleeping initiative funding falls off a cliff in 2025 and central government haven't made any promises beyond this; health funding is similar with short-term funding settlements.

### **Meeting with Public Health Camden on 26 October 23**

Public Health Consultant, Camden Council

Officer for Homelessness System Transformation, Camden Council

#### **Aspect to homelessness**

Commissioner provider NHS, drug and alcohol. Work closely with officers in the health and wellbeing department.

#### **Approaches to homelessness work**

Important to get trauma-informed and gender-informed approach across all services. It's very important to ensure that services are flexible. They feel the Team Around Me is a good approach and seems to have received good early feedback. She advocated for the passport (Personal Health Record) idea for residents as a way of freeing up capacity of practitioners by reducing paperwork.

#### **Effectiveness of multi-agency working**

Officer said they have high-level sponsors and a Programme Board including senior people within NHS.

#### **Challenges faced**

Cultural change to some officers as they are not used to having face to face with resident- Juggling to make pot of money work effectively.

#### **Area for improvement**

Looking at all services for improvement. To get main services up to skill, Create a space where all partners of Camden come together to talk about homelessness. Lobbying to keep homelessness on people's mind. They would like us as councillors to be flying the flag for the importance of working on homelessness across conversations we have.

#### **Ideal world**

A budget for homelessness that is not short term.

Getting the right support to prevent person being homeless.

Lobbying around bringing funding down to local authorities in coherent pots would be helpful.

### **Meeting with 20 Residents at Broadhurst Hostel on 31 October 23**

#### **Their journey from being homeless and experience in temporary accommodation.**

Most residents said that it was not easy to know who to contact when they were experiencing homelessness. Some contacted the council on the phone and was advised to go online, some were assisted by citizen advice bureau. Cases that were emergency homeless, did not complete form before being placed into temporary accommodation.

**Form Completing** Some residents said the online form was difficult to navigate and complete due to language barrier, not having a pc or laptop and other reason. They mentioned that they got help from Doorstep to complete forms and continue to get support from them to explain letters received from the council.

**Communication** was a key area raised as a concern. Most of the residents confirmed that they don't hear from their housing officers for many months. They said once the council has

received relevant paperwork from them, they don't hear from them for a long time. Most of the residents said they have been at the hostel over a year and hardly receive any visits from their officers. Some said they can't get hold of their officers, some don't know who their housing officer is or who they need to contact as many officers playing different roles are assigned to them- move on officer, prevention officer etc.

**Being in temporary accommodation** most residents said that they did not receive support from their officers, and they only get rent arrears letters. They mentioned officers do not engage with them when they visit the office attached to the hostel. some mentioned that some officers are bias depending on the relationship between resident and officers. Most confirmed that the only support received is from Doorstep who is not part of the hostel. They receive translation through them, they support them with writing to the council and explaining any letters received from the council. they help them to complete relevant forms that they believe their housing officer should be assisting with. Some residents said that they needed more support and believe their officers could have assisted in ensuring that they were referred to relevant teams that could have given them support. Some residents said they have multiple needs, mental and physical and those that have fled war.

**Time in Hostel** Most of them said they were advised that they would be in the hostel for a certain period of 6 months but some of them have been there over 3 years and more. 3 residents gave more detail of how long they have been at the hostel- one mentioned that they have been at the hostel since 2013, one of her children was in year 8 and have now finished university. One resident said that they have been moving from one temporary accommodation to another and their daughter have moved school 8 times. Another resident said that they were diagnosed with serious medical condition 3 years ago, the roof fell on them 3 years ago but was not given enough points to move to a settled accommodation. They mentioned they were issued an eviction letter for non-communication. Most resident feel they have been offered inappropriate temporary accommodation, such as hostels whether there are men or people with complex needs.

**Perception** some of the residents felt that the officers that interviewed them did not believe their story of being homeless at the initial stage until they provided paperwork. They felt some lack sympathy, empathy and were dismissive and not appreciating that some may have language barrier/disabilities. They said the tone of some officer were rude.

#### **Area of improvement**

- Most resident said they would have preferred a paper form that they can physically complete.
- Want officers to be visible and contactable.
- Want officers to work with them and signpost them to relevant team that can support their multiple needs.
- Want to be move on from the hostel.

**Meeting with Parent Support and Advocate, Doorstep Homeless Families Project on 2 November 23**

### **Aspects of homelessness faced in Advocate's work**

They said that Doorstep is based within the hostel, and they provide services for the residents. They do things like providing free laundry, a creche and some youth provision for older children (although they are fundraising to continue this as the funding recently ended). They noted that the type of homeless families which come through are mixed, such as eviction, a move by social services for shelter and safety (e.g. DA, home crises), coming from the hotel system, and Ukrainian host families coming to an end before alternative accommodation has been found. Some of these people are second generation Camden (e.g. where they've become overcrowded in existing properties). Others can be transferred from other provisions and hostels.

### **How Parent Advocate seeks support for their clients and how this is handled by the Camden housing team**

They said that often clients come to their after they have been offered a property, but they feel it is unsuitable. A VCS worker would then meet with them, look through all the paperwork, check their suitability requirements, and check whether everything has been properly covered in the Camden assessment. They gave the example of a child's Special Educational Needs not having been properly taken into account in terms of factors like travel times to a suitable education provision. They gave a further example of a family with a mother who worked in Paddington, the family lived in Edmonton (Enfield) and the child who was on a professional course in Hampstead. When they tried to communicate with the council over this the Council were unresponsive and then said that the Council claimed they had declined the property when all they had done was ask for a review. They then got a solicitor involved, and the letters that Doorstep had prepared were sent to the review team who reversed the decision immediately to issue an eviction notice.

There have been other times when they've made an enquiry, and the officer has quickly updated the paperwork with it being a good experience. They said it really depends on the officer in question.

They said they feel the level of evidence and proof required is often excessive and comes down on the side of not believing people. They cited an example of a family who survived bombing in Aleppo and had been in the UK for a few years and couldn't sustain a number of tenancies. Following a more social work-style assessment they uncovered PTSD from bombing, past kidnappings, and losing multiple properties. Yet none of these factors were picked up by housing team. If Camden had known this history, they could have got additional Home Office funding for the family which they missed out on for not having looked into this history properly. There was a further factor in this case of not speaking English. Their child has been permanently excluded from school following their EHCP needs not having been met. This has further impacted the situation. Their other child is also in a similar position. They have family Early Help Teams involved for the children. These chaotic factors are exacerbating the situation in the house and making it very hard for them to sustain situations. They need a wraparound level of support including CAMHS, children's services, education, housing and other services. They have been offered somewhere in another borough, but they feel that Camden need to take their responsibilities as a Borough of Sanctuary seriously and house them here, taking into account the particular personal circumstances.

They said the hostel really impact SEN children and they have a lot of SEN children at the hostel.

we asked about how consent works in the hostel. The VCS worker noted that all families consent to their involvement, and this is shared with all relevant services. They showed us the file where these are kept.

### **Most common areas of frustration and key themes that Advocate feels are important in how Camden supports homeless residents**

They gave an example of a case involving DV where Camden tried to move a mother to a different borough to live with a man despite being of the same ethnic background presenting the risk of him being able to find out information about her and re-traumatising them. This was eventually accepted but only after a fight.

They noted there have been significant issues with the points system. Violence and harassment points only last for 6 months, so when there is silence from housing this makes this extremely difficult.

They feel the points system in general is messy and there is no clear or transparent explanation around how the system works.

They said when families have been in the hostel for many years, sometimes 10+ years, they don't accumulate points, but if they stay with family in the community then their points do accumulate. There have been many examples of removing points once families have settled which they feel undermines the idea of having points in the first place. They feel this is a false sense of security because the family could then be evicted shortly after all their points have been removed for finding "security".

They noted that they now have a line to the MP because of the difference it makes to have the MP involved in making an enquiry. It was noted that it is concerning how much difference having MP involvement makes as opposed to decisions being correct in the first place.

It was noted that there have been examples where officers have emailed families at 11pm at night and that there are often issues with the attitudes of officers in how they deal with families.

They said it often comes up that people really struggle to move out of the hostel (where they cannot own furniture) in terms of getting the furniture/items they need to move on to other properties. They have found Camden to be inflexible with this, and also in terms of setting up debt repayment plans with people instead of leaving them stuck within a hostel.

### **Additional support for Doorstep that the VCS feels would be helpful**

They said that Camden used to fund Doorstep until 2013 when cuts were made. Their work is limited and means they can't work as extensively as they would like. The VCS is doing more than advocacy – they are doing fast tracking for ESOL for which they have an agreement with Camden Learning, they go into schools for exclusion risks, they do significant referral work. They do a lot of work to support Camden but don't have the financial support to sustain it. They worry about families who are currently in hotels who don't get the same support as families in hostels.

They would also like Camden to be more communicative with the teams in their own borough. For example, Early Help are often only got involved at a late stage once it's too late for them to do anything. They feel housing need to change the culture to be able to work with everyone across all services, and to respect the views of people in services outside housing too.

They noted that frontline staff must be embedded within the strategy development process throughout. The VCS worker wants to ask how many of the frontline staff get to be involved in the development of policy development.

### **Positive and a negative real-life examples of using the Camden systems**

They said the benefits team are brilliant and they noted that the manager is particularly good. They are good at looking at people's housing situations and helping them make affordable payment plans. They are responsive and very quick. They said the Tackling Poverty team were also responsive in terms of looking at how to advertise their work more widely. Both of these teams they feel are good at working with the voluntary sector, whereas the housing department more widely hasn't adapted to this – e.g. it requiring solicitors to get involved before they take it seriously.

They feel that the housing system itself is bad. They said the first form is relatively simple, but people can be waiting significant amounts of time to hear back. They said the worst system is the medical points system, where it is very difficult to get responses.

They noted they used to be a type of panel where decisions could be challenged and they could present to this panel, but they don't have this anymore. They noted that the system does not work for "anomaly" cases which don't work exactly inside the boundaries of the policies. These cases often get stuck in having to go via councillors and MPs.

### **What an 'ideal world' system would look like**

They said the law states that social and medical need should be viewed equally when determining housing need. Due to housing shortages, the VCS worker noted that these factors are often overlooked.

They feel the system should prioritise the most vulnerable, assess them accurately at the beginning and capture all the factors all the way through. Where there are complex factors beyond a simple housing need, there needs to be a proper way of processing this as part of the route through the Camden process. This needs to be completely multi-agency.

They said that even though you can't solve wider cost of living or housing supply issues, you can ensure you respond to the most vulnerable.

They said they wanted officers to be visible and present in the community. They noted that more people in the council are working from home than in the voluntary or education sectors, for example, and this leads to a big disconnect between officers and the residents.

### **We asked if there should be a cap on the amount of time that people should be staying in a hostel.**

They said no more than 3 years and that anyone above 5 years should be getting direct offers, as these people are raising their children in traumatic circumstances which has big knock-on impacts.

They noted that properties the council are buying back are then staying as temporary accommodation for significant amounts of time, and that they feel people from the hostels should be moved into these properties.

### **We asked if people know how many points they have in general and how it works with points being wiped off.**

They feel there is something that isn't right with the system. For example, there are people who are supposed to get 100 points when they are made homeless and end up in the hostel but get fewer points than this without explanation. They noted the system is not transparent. Even though the criteria is published, this appears to be being applied inconsistently.

They said the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme is an interesting example of this because all arrived at the same time with similar circumstances but got very different levels of points.

**We asked if there was an imbalance in who ends up in the hostel from the perspective of race and equalities.**

They said there is a disproportionately high representation from BAME and white working-class communities. They also noted that there is an unrealistic expectation for people who can't speak English to find their own properties without appropriate support.

**We asked if there should be an officer for the hostel who is sometimes based there.**

They said there is an officer allocated to the hostel, but there is variable success with that.

**Meeting with Head of Young People and Family Services (Inner London), CNWL NHS Foundation Trust on 14 November 23**

**Effective partnerships**

Homelessness has a broader definition in NHS services – they take into account home security, sofa surfing, those in temporary accommodation, those in hostels out of borough (eg 150 families in Englands Lane accommodation from Southwark)

They think there's been improvements in relationship with the Council – such as presenting to the transformation board. They still meet with Camden and other partners around groups such as the Afghan refugees.

They have homeless advisors in housing centres and a homeless health visiting team (only 1.6 people). They've reported a better relationship with Reception teams in hostels. They also have pathways for young people which include housing.

**A more positive case study is based on good communication.**

They were asked about how to manage having a good inter-LA working relationship – e.g. on Englands Lane where health visiting comes from local health services, but residents are from Southwark.

Noted it's also very important to have a lead professional – regardless of which professional this is. They said they haven't got a list of movers in and out of the borough since covid, despite getting it before that.

Protocols and policies are not always followed. They noted escalation routes are not always clear and they would like to see this clarified and improved.

They said the other improvement they would like to see is for housing to 'Think Family' – aka if they see a female on the street they need to think about if there's children or a future child. They are looking at a passport solution which could be very helpful on this. They feel the Camden hostel reception staff have been given very good feedback by health professionals. Move On housing officers have been helpful and have been good at contacting the health visiting teams. The key workers in the young parent hostels work very closely with the health visiting service. Family workers providing more practical support are widespread and they work a lot in partnership with social care. There is lots of good practice where families are known about.

They said that one of the most complex things for staff and families is navigating the whole system as it is very complex. They felt this could be clearer on the website in terms of how this all fits together.

**Negative case study**

22-year-old which came in as a referral. Information is not heard through housing department but hear through other agencies like midwifery, ED, call from social care. There isn't a robust notification system with housing department, and this would be their biggest ask.

They had referral in from midwife about young mother with young child at a hostel. They remained at the hostel from anti-natal care. Was moved quickly from Camden to another borough. Social Worker (SW) contacted the Health Visitor to say that they were trying to move all of her things on the bus. They encouraged her to stay where they were due to poor quality of new accommodation. They went into labour and went back to the hostel. Was evicted and placed in a hotel – went to a baby unit in another borough. They could have avoided the various moves.

### **What would they like to see?**

They said they needed a formal notification process for families moving in and out of the LA – as they do with other parts of the LA like early help.

They also want a formal escalation process.

They also think there should be a regular multi-disciplinary meeting – especially more visible and accessible in children centres – so it's regular and not dependent on the housing officer. They would like to see housing make a commitment to some of the workstreams that they don't always come to.

They would also like an agreement with the privately-run hostels – especially in terms of an assurance about communication with their responsible authority.

They said there should be more integrated training to support staff awareness and understanding across services – e.g. trauma informed knowledge of housing officers and equally in the other direction. Leeds is a good case study for this by working with magistrates in the courts.

They noted that housing is at the basis of so many cases. Unless this can be addressed then families struggle to make progress in other areas.

### **Meeting with Rhyl Community Primary School on 16 November 23**

DSL/Learning Mentor for EYFS/KS1, Inclusion Support Team, Rhyl Community Primary School

Children and Family Support Worker, Inclusion Support Team, Rhyl Community Primary School

### **Aspects of homelessness faced in their work**

They said it has become more prevalent in the last year or so. It's often people served with Section 21s and being evicted by landlords. At school, they are often asked to help to complete forms, or to use the resources in school like photocopiers.

They noted that contacting housing is extremely slow for them.

### **How they support parents and how this is handled by the Camden Housing Team**

They said there had been a couple of examples of quick responses where families were quickly placed into accommodation, but on other occasions there has been a lack of communication – such as not replying to requests or giving families updates about where their application is at. They said parents often come to school as the conduit for help. They will then liaise with family support workers who can help with this.

They noted that because of the slowness of response, parents come to them but there's isn't much they can do. It's usually a case of her emailing housing and there not being much response.

They noted it has been very difficult to know who to link in with on housing issues.

Challenges as part of the application process include language barrier, applicant confidence in presenting their situation as well as no other services to support the process.



They said the form online is fine, but the challenge is getting people to bring the correct documents.

### **Views on support given by Camden Housing to homeless residents**

They said communication could be better – in terms of clarification, telling families what is next etc.

They noted that there isn't enough support in place for families once they are placed in a hotel and – again – there is little communication about next steps apart from being asked if they are willing to move out of Camden.

They noted that when families are always being moved around hotels, they are noticing declining attendance from these students, due to changes in location and the financial strain of getting to school – especially as families can't cook effectively in hotels. The Holiday Inns have been as far away as South London and East London.

### **Views on whether the pathways are transparent and inclusive**

They said they feel it isn't and that is why parents come to them for help.

They did note that there had been a couple of cases where there has been a quick response. They noted that there was one example of a woman being asked to leave within a day from the hostel, the other Council involved said they didn't have a duty of care anymore, and it was only her family support worker and supportive staff at school who were able to advise her. In the end Camden picked it up and it felt like Southwark trying to wash their hands of the case. They said Camden were reluctant to take the case on but did eventually as there was no other option. They are now living in hotels. The switch between one Local Authority to another and this seemed to be the cause of a poorly functioning system and pathway.

### **Additional support or information they would appreciate as an organisation**

They said that it would be helpful to have a housing officer attached to the school. They said this could be someone attached to their cluster of four primary schools ("135"). This would reduce the level of searching for a different officer each time via a generic front door pathway.

They said it's all about having clear points of communication. They said they have coffee mornings, wellbeing groups and a space to give advice for families.

They said it could be a drop-in session where there was an officer who was there at the school and could speak to families in-person.

They said they are a community school now which ranges from birth to pre-secondary school age, including baby weighing and other non-education related services. They've used the school as a warm space and work closely with Good Work Camden and job services on Queen's Crescent. This could be a model for how housing could slot into this.

### **How things would look in an ideal world**

More social housing! But in the meantime, good communication and a point of contact for the school – even as simple as them being given advice as a school on how to advise parents. They find it frustrating when families are advised to go to Citizens Advice, and this never makes a difference.

They also feel language barriers are a very big issue and a lack of understanding of what people are being told. They've got some multi-lingual teachers who are able to help out with families and this has made a big difference, but sometimes the Council have been unwilling to loop in people like this.

### **More positive experiences with housing**

An example was shared regarding the impact of moving families between hotels regularly and how this can trigger individuals' mental health conditions. In this case a positive working relationship with the Council and knowing who can support enabled the family to secure a tenancy quicker than usual. Having confidence to present their own case and whole family need was also sighted as helpful to gain a resolution.

### **Meeting with Hopscotch Programme manager on 20 November 23**

#### **What aspects of homelessness they face**

They support Mainly Violence against women and girls (VAWG) for homeless and a few welfare rights cases. They get mainly women and often with children.

They get self-referrals and professional referrals e.g. Safety Net. The women need to be supported to flee to a safe space like refuges or temporary accommodation. Often council places people in B&B or hotels, especially on Fridays.

#### **Effectiveness of multi agency working**

Multi agency working is good in principle but often not a good experience. The same approach is applied to everyone regardless of their circumstances which doesn't take trauma into account or vulnerability. There is a lack of awareness on these issues.

Communication is poor and emails are not responded to unless everyone is copied into the email, but they wouldn't get back if it was just hopscotch or the client.

They often end up phoning housing and often people are not informed with the details of the case when they speak to them, and the correct information isn't on the system. You're often speaking to a different person each time and having to tell the stories again. It doesn't lead to collaborative communication. It can feel like talking to a brick wall.

They said multi agency working was much better pre covid, but since then they have been going downhill within housing. Lots of meetings are still held remotely whereas it was in-person before - and this doesn't work with more vulnerable or difficult to access clients, especially those without access to IT skills. Even more generally they just find it harder to communicate with staff than before covid and it's harder to get replies.

They feel housing has a better line of communication with the NHS than places like Hopscotch.

Hopscotch has a brilliant relationship with schools and feel they do a great job supporting families.

They have asked their staff, and they couldn't think of a single good example on housing.

They have often had to escalate to senior management.

They feel social services could be more understanding and trauma informed about the barriers faced by the women and their children. They said they do try to be supportive.

They said the Police can be helpful.

Hopscotch feels that housing staff need more training or mentoring to help them understand what joint agency working really looks like. They said it would be helpful to be able to sit down and talk with housing officers but it's too hard to get hold of them.

#### **Transparency and inclusiveness of system**

They don't think they work either from perspective of supporting women often from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

Information sharing is minimal, and they have to chase extensively for any update. They said MARAC can be helpful for information sharing.

They feel the online form system can be confusing and lengthy. They aid people with language barriers, limited IT skills or learning disabilities it's hard to login and use the system alone. They often have to chase up with housing Allocation when points have disappeared from the system for example. They feel the system works for the professionals but not service users.

### **Additional support or information helpful for their service**

They would like there to be a specific referral pathway for abuse survivors, ideally with a specific team attached and a specific number they can liaise with.

They would like there to be staff trained specifically in DV and this area. It's important people understand principles of DV like coercive control and what to consider in these housing cases. It would also be helpful if there were other specialist teams, e.g. from mental health. Many of the service users feel they're not treated with dignity and respect, and this could help that.

In general, they need significantly better communication. Too much of their time and resource goes into chasing housing, and this really frustrates their staff.

### **Positive and negative real-life examples**

Woman who historic DV and was a victim of sexual violence from a young age. They had a lot of complex needs, mental health issues and substance misuse issues. They used to live by themselves since separating from their abusive partner. They helped her report matters to the Police as well as acting as advocates with the NHS and GP, there were 3 advocates supporting them working on different elements - supporting in office, getting medication and contacting housing. Housing Officers were able to place them in hotels but for 1 night only. Advocates were unable to reach housing who weren't replying for week after week. They escalated this and were also consistently unable to assist the client with information due to lack of information sharing.

### **What in an ideal world would good look like**

They feel staff need to be better trained from the top level downwards. People need to understand trauma and multiple disadvantages to work with people effectively. They feel there is currently a real lack of empathy which doesn't work when supporting the most vulnerable.

They think there needs to be a whole system approach that is led from the top.

They think the teams need to be nurtured and mentored with staff with good experience in some areas allowed to mentor other staff with less experience. They want staff to be able to work effectively with VCS organisation.

### **Meeting with housing Solicitor Camden Community Law Centre on 21 November 23**

#### **Aspects of homelessness faced in work**

They said it's mainly helping people to access advice, help them make applications, challenge refusals (e.g. s102 reviews). They haven't had any court cases against Camden recently, although this is possible if necessary.

They sometimes get walk-ins off the street asking about homeless assistance and have contact points in the Housing team they could go to off the back of this.

### **Effectiveness of partnership working between Camden and other agencies**

They said when it comes to getting urgent assistance for someone who is street homeless, they find that it works relatively well.

They said they only usually interact with Camden Council and not so much other partner agencies.

They said when they communicate with Camden at letter before claim stage, they will correspond either with housing or the legal department. They usually go to housing managers first before they get to this point.

They said there have been some examples where people have been helped to reduce their arrears as part of the prevent duty, and this has been very helpful, however they would like to see more support available from the prevention team on this. He'd like to see more Discretionary Housing Payments if it's within budget. They felt it'd be helpful to have a list of estate agents which accept universal credit as often on PHPs it says just look at Zoopla etc, but this isn't realistic on UC.

### **Areas for improvement**

They noted that many people are placed in TA like hotels where they are only extended on the day of the booking ending. There is often a lack of information between Camden and CCLC at times like this and they've had homeless people downstairs in their office at 6pm not knowing where they're going to be placed next.

### **Transparency and inclusiveness of system**

They said there is often a lack of understanding about what is happening. They said people often don't know the long-term plans for them and how long they are due to be accommodated at a particular hotel or what the next stage will be for them – people find this very stressful.

People who are subject to the benefit cap often find this difficult and need to be advised on how to come outside of this.

They think it'd be useful to explain how bidding for housing works outside a complicated 50-page document.

Some LAs have policies on who will be given particular types of properties – it would be good for Camden to explain how decisions are made.

They said they tends to use their own resources to explain the process to people and will try to tailor them to people – e.g. a specific eligibility argument. Often people want more info on DHPs and points.

They said they doesn't usually use the online portal and instead sends emails directly.

They said Camden is one of the few LAs where a DHP application is a PDF instead of an online form, so this would be something to change. They said t's difficult for people without a printer and it's tricky to fill out online.

They noted that the website is only in English, and they are not sure if homelessness applications can be submitted in a language other than English.

### **Additional support and information that would be useful for their service to better support residents**

They said it would be useful to have more contact details for how to make an urgent application if someone is street homeless. They think this part of the website could be improved. There isn't clear information about who is owed what duty or what the process is for people in different situations. It doesn't explain the process of what Route of the Streets does or how quickly someone will get back to you, for example. It's also not clear about distinctions between homeless applications vs contacting Route of the Street in the first instance – who should do what?

They emphasised that they do have good contact points within Camden already and they do almost always get a response to an urgent email.

There have been a few occasions where they've had to phone the out of hours line and that was not on the website – so this would be helpful to have a better set of information of what to do out of hours. This is a key issue for him at the moment.

### **A positive example of supporting someone through the service**

They said that they were working with someone who left London to see a family member. They got back to Stansted airport, and they were homeless. They contacted Camden and they accommodated that very same day. They had contact directly with one of the managers who helped him sort this all out quickly – and this is another reason he doesn't use the online process.

### **A negative example of supporting someone through the service**

They said the poor process around not extending hotel bookings is very stressful. They had had situations where officers hadn't replied and there was another day where Camden's credit card stopped working and a few clients were made homeless that day because of this, with the last one accommodated around 11pm whilst the new credit card was found. They think it shouldn't be left to the last minute and should be sorted out the day before, especially when people are owed duties that are 36-days plus and there isn't a question of this lapsing. They have also had a slow experience where it took about 5 months to get a subject access request file despite the fact it was supposed to take max 56-days.

### **What an 'ideal service' would look like**

Much higher LHA rates, higher benefit cap and more social housing!

They would like the website to be clearer with more and better information.

They said when phoning the out of hours line and you can be waiting on the phone for 25 minutes, then wait for someone to call you back before getting an answer. So, this can take 2-3 hours to get a callback. This can be difficult if someone doesn't have a phone for a callback or doesn't speak English, meaning sometimes they must stay in the office until very late.

They said staff turnover is a challenge because they must have the same conversation with multiple people and keep explaining the case – and where subsequent officers have misunderstood the case. This can slow cases down.

### **Meeting with New Horizon on 28 November 23**

Head of Youth Work, New Horizon Youth Centre

Head of Housing, New Horizon Youth Centre

Director of Operations, New Horizon Youth Centre

They said they work with 16–24-year-olds experiencing homelessness in London. This could be for any reason from family breakdown to gang involvement to care leavers and people coming out of asylum contingency hotels. It could be rough sleeping, hidden homeless, sofa surfing. They noted that hidden homelessness among young people means that often the true level of homelessness in this age bracket is underestimated.

They said those under 18 are for advocacy services but it can take a lot of advocacy to get them matched with the right LA and the right support. This is less than 10% of the cases they work with. Some of these children are Camden children.

### **Effectiveness of partnership working**

They said they are a member of the Camden Youth Partnership and part of the Camden Advice Network who fund a post with them which is useful.

They work to be part of the youth offer where possible to bring voluntary community sector (VCS) into the network. It's also useful to network with other youth provisions in the borough – for example, they have a good relationship with Coram's Field.

They said that the experience of connecting all the different partners around a young person can be quite challenging. It can take a lot navigating. For example, a couple of years ago they were working with a young person who had a network of organisations around him. They were rough sleeping and had Horizon, Focus MH services, Camden housing, GP in Camden. But was placed in temporary accommodation in Sydenham which meant the network fell apart and these services couldn't work with him. This led to the case falling apart in the end.

They said this would be an area for improvement because it creates barriers to engagement. There could be more thinking on how to put floating support in place for those outside the borough.

They had pulled data on care experienced children showing they're not always supported as priority need, meaning they often end up in VCS.

They noted that a lot of people find out about their services proactive by looking online, but there are also referrals from teams like the Leaving Care Teams.

They were asked about the transition from children to adult services. They said it can be very difficult to advocate for children who are about to turn 18 in a few weeks and to get services moving quickly enough. It can also be difficult to do retrospective cases.

They said that across the board pathway planning varies especially if they have had multiple workers or lived across multiple places. So often young people aren't completely aware of their entitlements. This is compounded when English isn't their first language.

They work with lots of children who have had social work or CAMHS intervention which has been dotted throughout their childhood. Often, it's the case that as soon as a child hit 18 the social work stops and it's challenging to get this picked up by adult social care with a proper transition.

### **Relationship with Camden Housing**

They said they've had good relationships with senior people in children's and housing departments, so it's a case of making sure this is kept up to date.

They asked if there could be a way to get a key point of contact and route of escalation which is positive and productive.

They said that with them and other VCSs it could help to have a regular meeting with them so they could raise specific cases as well as reflect more generally on the service. They agreed that escalation routes can be challenging. They said on a practical level – lots of housing workers don't have mobile phones which they can share, so it's hard to be able to pick up the phone to them. It's then hard to build a relationship as can't always get through to the person you have been working with through the general line, and often numbers are from withheld calls.

They said it would be useful for them to do a briefing/info training session around young person's homelessness. They can do this training. They said they have sometimes had champions within their housing support teams in other Local authorities who are specialist in young people. They have been trained in youth work principles and other relevant skills whilst also balancing statutory requirements.

### **Transparency and inclusiveness of the system**

They said that Duty to Refer is a simple process, but it's difficult to get in all the subsequent supporting documentation within the required amount of time when people are street homeless. They said they feel the forms tend to require professional support for people who

would struggle to do them on their own, especially people with a second language. They said they feel it's important to be able to do this face-to-face (as used to happen in housing assessment sessions) and now that things are more remote this doesn't happen – which makes not having phone numbers a real challenge.

They said there are a lot of forms and feels there is room for streamlining these. Sometimes you've filled out one and then you get an email back with 8 Word attachments to fill out – then you need to download, save, fill out and send back. Then often questions are repeated – especially in forms like the Pathways Form. This is hard for people without support workers.

They said they always go directly through the official routes in the first instance so that cases are allocated properly. And there isn't an alternative to this in terms of there not being face-to-face or specific phone lines to go through.

### **Additional support/information that would help them support young people faced with homelessness**

They said they empathise with how stretched services are, but it would be useful to know up-to-date statistics (eg number of temporary accommodation properties available and other challenges the council is facing) so that they can better manage young peoples' expectations. This would be a helpful partnership approach. They said Hackney council had done a similar thing and it was helpful. It could also be helpful to know where the stock is of housing.

### **Positive and negative real-life examples**

They said they had a case with children's services recently where there were real challenges getting the case transferred to Camden from Hackney council, and it took a very long time to get him to an assessment stage. All whilst this was happening, the person was still rough sleeping. It took going to a solicitor to get them housed in temporary accommodation. Without the advocacy they may still be rough sleeping.

They gave a case example of a child who grew up in Camden and was rough sleeping for a long time. They were eventually able to bid on a property and are housed in social housing, but there was a long process of back and forth with Camden about points and the points they should get. It took making complaints and a lot of advocacy to getting to these points. They feel more transparency would have been helpful. It was, however, a successful outcome in the end and they live and work in Camden.

They said they are working on a case at the moment where it has been bounced around multiple boroughs. They feel that often decisions are not given, instead of being given pending review with emergency accommodation if necessary – instead cases can just be reviewed. They said it can be difficult to get statutory duties followed across the board in multiple local authorities due to the lack of temporary accommodation stock, but it makes it difficult for young people to engage and remain hopeful in the process.

They said that the lack of floating support can create difficult situations, such as a person they were working with who was placed in a hotel, serious substance misuse and mental health concerns, and due to it being a hotel there was no support like you might get at a hostel. They noted this can be setting people up to fail, especially young people – so support around helping them to maintain the temporary accommodation would help.

They said they would extend this point to giving them further support around the housing benefits system and complex systems and that people have had their duties removed due to lack of understanding of these issues in the past due to issues this has caused.

They said if there was youth-specific temporary accommodation with a trauma-informed set of staff, then this would be amazing, and they feel this is exactly what is needed. They said more youth training within housing prevention teams would be very helpful.

### **What a system would look like in an 'ideal world'**

They said that other local authorities have their own commissioned outreach teams that work out of their housing service to avoid going through too many third parties. They have this in Lambeth and Islington, where it's more embedded into the housing service.

All agreed more temporary accommodation stock is needed, although acknowledged this is a systemic issue.

They said they often pay for extremely short-term accommodation for young people (eg a backpacker's hostel) whilst assessments take place. They feel there is scope to do more of this.

They re-iterated the need for face-to-face interactions and assessments. It's made a huge difference when this has happened in the past.

They said they weren't aware of any networks across local VCSs which would be helpful (although this does exist informally to an extent in terms of communicating between organisations)

### **Meeting with Age UK Camden on 28 November 23**

Information Advice Manager, Age UK Camden

Care Navigation and Social Prescribing Manager, Age UK Camden

Head of Operations, Age UK Camden

### **Aspects of homelessness faced in their work**

They deal with people who are sofa surfing and street homeless, as well as people who are in need of sheltered housing. They support 18+ as long as they have a Camden GP.

They said in the Info Advice service they support people who are 50+ and they do get people who are homeless access this service. the information advice manager said he was speaking to a 69-year-old the other day who was made homeless when their employer died –they were employed as a carer. They said this is a common situation where carers lose employment and become homeless.

They said they get a lot of requests from GPs to help people who are sofa surfing or on the street.

### **Effectiveness of partnership working**

They said they have good communications and relations with Adult Social Care, but it is very different with housing. They said they don't get answers and their teams get very frustrated with this.

They said they recently had a case where they made contact with homelessness prevention managers regarding a vulnerable gentleman who hadn't had a response for over 6 months. They still haven't had a response and even having included in managers they are still not getting a reply. They are completely stuck with it.

They said that the Sheltered Housing team in Camden work best with them. They work very closely together and often speak to each other pre-referral, and clients are often extremely surprised by how good the team are. However, they said the wider housing team is extremely difficult and it's impossible to get through to people. They said they have time restraints on how long they have with clients and it's impossible to make progress. They said that the reporting of repairs is very difficult for older people – especially how things are done online now. They said that the housing benefit and council tax teams are also very difficult to



get hold of – it's often 45 minutes to get through to someone on the phone before being told they need to send an email anyway. They said it's become much harder since lockdown. They said that the service needs to be made more accessible to Camden citizens. This is not only for older people but also for people where English isn't their first language. They wished there were direct lines for advice agencies to speak to Camden staff, even if there can't be this direct line for members of the public. This goes for all departments they work with. They said that with Adult Social Care they have someone who picks up calls and issues on a certain day and it would be useful to have a similar system with housing.

### **Transparency and inclusiveness of the system**

They said the system is not inclusive and the teams have become very hard to reach, not only for residents but also for professionals. They said they don't get answers or timescales. They said that at the moment to get around the fact that people struggle with the online system, they might meet clients at the GP practice and get online with them there. They said the issue is not the reporting of the homelessness itself, but more about the communication. They said the difference with the Sheltered Housing team is that they have direct telephone numbers and phone you call back if you miss them. They said that the repairs system also doesn't work for people.

They said for people without access to the internet or a computer can't report repairs in the first place, so they are reliant on professionals to help them do this.

They said the Camden Advice Network involving 12 agencies always comes up with the same problems from different angles.

They said he feels the completing the form online is easy to find on the website and the form itself is easy.

### **Long-term support from Camden Housing**

They said similar issues arise where it involves a lot of chasing and it being very difficult to get responses. They said that once they do get responses back it can still be a frustrating process, especially for them as professionals trying to access the housing system from the outside.

They said it would be useful for them to be able to see the progress of cases using an online system so they can track progress.

They said they are doing a pilot with the DWP which has provided them with an escalation pathway that they can use when they are not getting responses. This would be extremely helpful, especially as they don't have time to spend hours and hours chasing. This process should be productive and not too combative.

They said that given the shortness of staff this should be communicated to manage expectations.

### **Additional support or information that would be helpful to better support homeless people**

They would like someone from the housing team to come and explain to them what the procedure is from the council's side of exactly how the homelessness process works and how it works with the support being given. They only know at the moment to refer people via the website, but very little beyond this. They would like them to also give their advice on how Age UK could best support homeless residents coming through.

They said a few years ago they had a presentation from someone from the homelessness prevention service and it would be useful to update on this.

They said that they were able to have direct contact with people from the homelessness prevention service after they gave the presentation because they got their emails, and this was very helpful with cases, but now these people have left they no longer have a direct link.

### **Positive and negative real-life examples of using the Camden system**

They said that in some cases they do get quicker answers – it depends on the complexity on the case. They said they had a gentleman on the street with his dog just before Christmas last year. It was reported to the homelessness team and within a few days he was given a hostel which also allowed the dog to stay with him.

They mentioned a carer who was living in Camden for 27 years caring for an older person who had then died, resulting in them sofa surfing. They said they had people housed within months previously which they felt was good.

### **What good would look like in an ‘ideal world’**

They said that it is important that the service is accessible – particularly more effective communication both with residents but also with other professional agencies like Age UK.

They feel there should be the ability to speak to a human being.

They said there could be a multidisciplinary team where all the professional agencies came together to discuss and unstick particularly difficult cases in a properly multi-agency way.

Statutory and VCS could be invited.

They said he wants a clearer understanding of housing works – including the options they can give to people who present as homeless to them. Paul said there is a High-Risk Advisory Group which can work well but only around some issues.

They suggested there could be better publicity around Camden of what to do when you're homeless so that people are aware of this information – it's important to do this beyond the website.

The idea of a client passport was asked, and they feel this could be interesting and should depends on each case as to how involved they would get with each person. They said it is very important the citizen is able to control their own information and wouldn't want to take away that control from individuals.

They pointed out that they are an independent service and so it's important that they remain distinct from the council in terms of record sharing. People might not want them to tell the council everything they have told them – as they are an independent and confidential service. It's important to maintain the good working relationships that independent organisations are able to have with, in part due to their independence from the council/statutory services.

### **Meeting with Learning Disability Lead, Camden Carers on 12 December 23**

They have supported around a dozen people who are homeless. They do 'Carers Conversations' (like Care Assessments) with people at risk of homelessness due to having rent arrears. They support people with their caring duties and then refer to other organisations to help with housing.

### **Multi-agency working**

They have found the process very difficult and confusing and feels that lots of carers find it difficult as well. It makes it hard to direct people to the right places.

They said there have been lots of occasions where they have been passed around services when they have found ones which look relevant. They also haven't had a single point of contact when the case is open with housing.

They said that there is often poor coordination between what different services are doing so work may be duplicated. They said people with English as a second language really struggle too.

They work with Camden Adult Social Care and Camden Learning Disability Services, and with them there are individuals who they have developed relationships with who they are able to contact, and there are also duty phone numbers to phone which are useful, but they have said it is very different with housing.

They find it difficult to navigate as a worker, let alone a client. They said the best progress is made when having ongoing emails with housing, but lots of people with additional needs or neurodivergence struggle with this.

They said that when people are asked to physically present, they have supported people with travel money, getting together necessary documentation like addresses, but they can't directly support in-person with this, so people end up going alone.

They have often gone to third party sources, such as Shelter, to get information as a first port of call as opposed to going to the Council.

### **How Camden housing supports residents**

They said mental health is a common theme as well feels a good housing officer can make a really big difference, especially in terms of being understanding around people with additional needs – such as how to interpret behaviours not as anti-social but as a result of additional needs.

They said that although sometimes they have had experience of very good housing officers who have come out to meet people in person, they as had a lot of bad experiences with housing officers who are very difficult to get in touch with. They said the role of the housing officer seems unclear and people struggle to understand how to interact with the role. They said they feel they can be taken more seriously as a professional than as a client, but it's varied.

### **Improvements and additional support or information that would be helpful**

They feel it would be helpful to have a key worker who was coordinating services from a housing perspective, but that links in all the other relevant agencies. They said it would be helpful to have contact numbers or email addresses for key contact points and would be helpful for someone from housing to speak at their team meeting to tell them about how to use the system.

They said there have been situations where homeless people they have worked with have not had access to clean clothes, showers and other hygiene services. This meant it was difficult to present himself well and that he couldn't pick up things like casual work. They mentioned that they were working with a homeless carer last year who had lost their home in a house fire, for example, who had a very difficult experience being put in a hotel which didn't work for carer's needs.

### **What in an ideal world would good look like**

They said that hostel support can be expensive so the cost of this should be lower or free. They feel it would be useful for there to be a multi-disciplinary hub with support for housing and all other relevant service areas. This would also help due to there not being the technology barrier and the ability to have in-person conversations.

### **Meeting with the lead officer for Violence Against Women and Girls on 20 December 23**

They provided documents relating to domestic abuse that gives an overview of all the work happening in housing. We had sight of the Camden's response to Domestic Abuse in housing.

It highlights the work they have achieved in their response to DVA and DAHA accreditation including

- Housing and Domestic Abuse Transformation Plan approved in September 2023
- Developing procedures for domestic abuse and homelessness

The work is being co-ordinated by the Housing Sub-Group of the VAWG Board. Cllr Callaghan chairs the VAWG Board and sits on the Housing Sub-Group.

We discussed bringing an update to Housing Scrutiny Committee in February 24 to give an overview of all the work happening in housing relating to domestic abuse.

### **Meeting with officers for Route of the Street on 4 January 24**

The Route of the Street service is commissioned by Camden. We had a conversation with Camden colleagues who work with Routes off the Streets on the effectiveness of partnership working between Camden Council and other agencies to address homelessness.

The officer confirmed that they work extensively and well with other teams. Even in the new year, they've had contact with teams across the whole council, other services, other boroughs and Volunteering community sector. They also have a multi-disciplinary health/mental health provision within the outreach team. They said this is particularly important because of the multiple disadvantages faced by those experiencing homelessness.

Officer feels they have managed to better cross bridges with other teams so there is less of an 'either/or' approach but a better cross-team working approach. They gave the example of working with the domestic abuse team on clients facing those issues. They have weekly multi-disciplinary team involving services around clients.

Improvement they would like to see -Officer said different organisations and systems have different data and there is a lack of sharing. E.g. C&I NHS Trust doesn't necessarily share data with housing teams. Peoples' journeys across the services can be challenging as well as traumatising for clients to repeat their stories.

There can be misunderstanding across teams around how to deal with multiple disadvantages. E.g. GPs will want appointments not drop-ins, even though that is difficult for some people.

There is only limited accommodation so there can be an issue of expectation management and working collaboratively on this.

Officer said that services have historically been siloed and different people/services have different viewpoints on how to assist. They feel there have been big improvements on this over the last 2 years, including better access to Temporary accommodation, but this hasn't necessarily filtered down to those working on the ground and this needs to be broken down further to create a collaborative working environment.

### **Whether the current process has been successful**

Officers said that there are very high numbers of people with few options and 50% of those rough sleeping has multiple overlapping complex needs.

They feel the service does well in these circumstances, especially as there is a rich array of services in Camden compared to other boroughs (e.g. a GRT team, a women's lead, a day centre).

They feel there is always an attitude of trying to improve. Where it comes to measuring success, it is clear that despite lots of investment the number of people rough sleeping in

Camden hasn't increased and the flow of people rough sleeping hasn't decreased in terms of demand. With that in mind, we need to think about prevention and looking at longer-term interventions.

They are also looking at sustaining accommodation for people coming into rough sleeping – eg having social workers and nurses in floating support teams for PRS accommodation. It's important to prevent people from returning to the street.

Officer said they feel they have been good at using the funding that is available to fill gaps, but the challenge is that funding has been short-term (including year-on-year funding from other services like social care and health). ROTS is joint funded by health. All hostels are externally funded and end in March next year. They've learnt a lot about what works, but that doesn't mean they can sustainably fund this.

They were asked if it is possible to get more funding across other services in the longer-term. They said that lots of the transformation programme is focused on commissioning and how we can do this. They would point to pilots as a way of showing the value of funding. They've had influence on Adult Social Care/Health colleagues by doing this. In the past it has been possible through good relationships, so this would be something to build on. The profile of homelessness people in service care has been increased which has helped, as has guidance from the government around joint assessment. It's also important for Directors to have good relationships – eg the joint sponsors as Directors for the transformation are housing and health. Officer said that the pandemic also proved the value of housing people when this took place in the Britannia Hotel. They had buy-in from public health and adult social care to have a multi-disciplinary team there including nurse, psychologist, OT etc. The outcomes for people were quicker and better. Thinking needs to be based on additionality. They have a HOP team (Homeless Health Outreach Pilot) which includes psychologist, nurse, and MH support worker. They have NHS England funding for 18 months. It has worked really well – eg improving hospital admissions, better accommodation outcomes (54 since May) – but it's not been possible to improve that funding. It has been clear that this work is really intensive and improved capacity is required for this (12 per worker).

Officer said that one of the biggest challenges is buy-in from Adult Social Care. They gave an example of it taking a significant amount of time to get a care package for a vulnerable adult (6 months). It often falls to the rough sleeping team to pick those people up whilst we get buy-in from ASC as well as other services. It's often based on personal relationships with workers in other teams who you know are helpful. Building interpersonal relationships is where this has worked best. There is not the level of flexibility built into rough sleeping services that is required to deal with clients in the rough sleeping space – e.g. working outside of work hours.

Officer said the key is getting other professionals excited in helping in this area and feeling responsible. They said 'Team Around Me training' can be helpful for this.

### **Positive and negative real-life examples**

They said a French national was picked up in St Pancras Station. They got the reconnection team involved regarding family. There was concern around his capacity to understand this. They were placed in a holding bay within a pre-existing hostel which is supposed to be 7 days, but they'd been there since April due to the complexity of the case. It was decided they didn't have capacity around decision-making and taking care of himself. ASC got involved whilst they were being referred to the Home Office/Immigration Support. They have full settled status because of this with a proper care package in place from ASC. An officer noted that this highlights someone who was very vulnerable and unwell but was ineligible for homeless prevention. It could have been someone who could have died on the streets but in actual fact they stepped in, and they now have recourse, a care package, with a view to a long-term plan for appropriate supported accommodation due to his age and vulnerabilities.

This was down to the pragmatic and flexible way of the rough sleeping team's approach. They noted those who are not eligible are often at most risk.

### **Key blockages with the transformation project and how councillors could help**

- Ensuring that homelessness is on the agenda.
- Officer said that it's about ensuring additionality is not viewed as an additionality but that there's buy-in across all services – ensuring health and ASC have this on agenda is really key.
- They said it's ensuring there is still some stigma around homelessness being a choice and it's vital that this is challenged. It doesn't take into account the trauma they've been through.
- Officer said that they would value more positive communication around the positive stories that do happen so that it's not always a reactive or negative communications approach. The communications team could be more involved in this.

We wanted to know if they have sufficient staffing capacity. We were told they didn't. they said they spoke to senior colleagues about this, but the issue is more generally how to prioritise rough sleeping as compared to other services. The current funding (2022-25) is limited and decreases each year – including 15.5 members of staff less this year funded as compared to last year. The demand is also increasing at the same time as this. ROTS funding ends in 2 years and was launched in 2018. It is a different world now so there may be further requests for money for ROTS from 2026 onwards.

### **Meeting with Camden Digital officers on 16 January 24**

We had a meeting with the digital team, and they went through the changes they have made to improve the service provided by the Housing team.

They discussed the brief they got from the service:

- To give users the resources to help them,
- Do some more kind of self service because some of it is around understanding your rights, knowing which other organisations you can go to, as well as coming to Camden,
- Promoting Camden resources such as Routes off the Street, Camden Private Renters website,
- Giving users an overview of what to expect in terms of options of Fair homeless and also how to do this.

To start they:

- We did peer view- looked at other what other Councils were doing to highlights gaps. They found gaps around information like- am I eligible? How long might this take? What happens when I apply? Who, when am I going to hear back from the Council?
- Looked across the services that the Council provides and if sign posting effectively to them.
- Talked to contact Camden, talked to the service, we tested with users, we looked at website data and we brought all of that into the work that we did.
- We looked at search terms, check we use language that the users are using, the other thing we did was to look at content silos.
- Worked with the homelessness delivery group and they took printouts of the proposed content, and they sort of handed them out to people who had lived

experience of homelessness and we had a chat and I got them to ask any questions that they had about the content, asked them to highlight anything that wasn't clear so that they knew that I needed to reword it.

They found that:

- The system didn't reflect the user needs and didn't sign post effectively to related content. we saw most contact came from people being evicted or relationship breakdown, young people and domestic abuse.
- The content that we had was a single page that was titled at Risk of being Homeless. it didn't support self-service, as they are obviously lots of different user groups that are homeless.
- They were silos content.
- Terminology and positioning of content- This was particularly around rough sleeping, so when they started working on this, the rough sleeping sat within Community safety and the terminology of it was very much around kind of reporting rough sleeping and the content talked about targeting rough sleeping and putting it in community safety. they were looking for other service information, so things like benefits, cost of living so it it's sort of indicated that there was a gap there that potentially you know we needed to link across different services. We also looked at the complexity of the content and the reading age, and so it's super important reading age, average reading age and nationally is 9 years old,
- Language use- needed to be in plain English.

Work done:

- Create a generic search term.
- Changed section title to reflect that homelessness has a crossover with benefits. had references to adult social care/ children's safeguarding/ piece around domestic abuse.
- Created from the one page that we had to 10 pages. Each page reflects one of the defined kinds of user groups and it's done largely in order of volume. E.g. put in content around s21 notice and tenant rights.
- Added information so that people understand - how long they might have to wait, which manages their expectations.
- Rough sleeping pulled out of the community safety section (it was the wrong place) and placed within the homelessness section which is where you would expect it to be.
- There's a page specifically for older people and homelessness.

## **Conclusion**

- They said that when you search Camden housing website the right information is surfacing to enable residents to make a selection from there.
- Positive impact from creating the new website for housing – the volumes that cut through from the homelessness referral form and the calls that come in has reduced.
- They believe is it important to make sure that what people are looking for is what we're delivering content to, answers that makes sense.