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## Foreword

A good home is the foundation of a good life. High quality housing is vital to health and wellbeing and is an essential part of ensuring strong, safe, and thriving communities.

Many people aspire to own their own home, but the U.K. is facing the biggest housing crisis in generations, meaning more people will be renting and for longer. The private rented sector is playing an increasingly important role in meeting housing need. Too often though private renting is unaffordable, unstable, and subject to poor housing conditions and bad management. The market in Waltham Forest must work for residents.

*Tackling the housing crisis head on* is a key borough mission in *Mission Waltham Forest*. The Waltham Forest Private Rented Sector Strategy will take forwards a new deal for private renters. It will act on the challenges facing private renters by improving affordability of homes, increasing tenancy security, and working more closely with landlords to provide secure, quality homes.

We are committed to standing alongside private renters and to working with responsible landlords who provide quality homes to improve standards. We will take robust enforcement action where it is needed against rogue landlords that rent out poor quality, hard to heat properties at an expensive price and blight the lives of tenants.

Too often, tenants' experiences hinge on their relationship with their landlord and many renters feel powerless to put things right, feeling too frightened to raise a complaint. We want to change that and put power back in the hands of tenants, improving the experience of private renting in our borough by driving up standards.

We will support private sector tenants in knowing their rights, helping them to access help where required to live safely and securely in their homes.

Wherever we live, we all want a safe and secure home for ourselves and our families.

Together with residents., landlords and partners, we will make a difference and ensure the private sector is a safe, stable, and accessible housing option for everyone who calls Waltham Forest home.

**Cllr Ahsan Khan: Deputy Leader and Housing and Regeneration**

**Cllr Khevyn Limbajee: Portfolio Lead Member Community Safety**

# BACKGROUND

## 1. A mission focused strategy for accelerating change

Our Private Rented Sector Strategy for 2024-2029 builds on the significant work already underway to improve conditions for private renters in Waltham Forest. We have made significant strides in addressing challenges through innovative housing initiatives, such as our new Housing Sustainment Team, licensing schemes, and a proactive approach to enforcement. We celebrate these achievements as a foundation for even greater progress, recognising the dedication and hard work that has already benefited renters across the borough.

Our mission now is to go further- with a renewed emphasis on breaking down silos across the council to foster closer collaboration between departments, from homelessness prevention to private sector licensing, to the climate emergency response, and neighbourhood improvement. By strengthening these connections, we can better tackle both the immediate challenges and the deep-rooted structural issues that renters face.

At the core of this strategy is *Mission Waltham Forest*, which places health equality and wellbeing at the forefront of our vision for transformational change and commits us to *tackling the housing crisis head on*. By embedding a mission-based approach in our Private Rented Sector Strategy, we are committed not only to improving housing standards but also to addressing the broader social and health inequalities experienced by private renters. Our work is about more than just regulating the sector; it is about creating secure, sustainable homes that support the health and prosperity of all our residents.

We will be enhancing the use of data and information sharing to make our services even more effective. By streamlining communication between the Public Health and our Private Sector Housing and Licensing team, we will ensure that issues identified by health professionals—such as unsafe or unhealthy housing conditions—are swiftly referred for enforcement action. At the same time, the Licensing team will actively refer vulnerable residents to the social prescribing team, ensuring they receive holistic support for their wellbeing, from health advice to GP referrals.

This strategy celebrates what we have already achieved while setting out an ambitious vision for the future. It is mission-focused and dedicated to securing a new deal for private renters, ensuring that every action we take delivers not only immediate solutions but also long-term transformation. We are committed to going above and beyond in our efforts to build a private rental sector that is fairer, healthier, and more secure for everyone in Waltham Forest.

## 2. Resident Experience

Waltham Forest has an estimated 28,500 privately rented properties, making up 28% of all housing. The private rented sector has grown steadily over the last decade, both in numbers and as a proportion of overall stock and is the fastest growing form of tenure in the borough.

This Private Rented Sector Strategy has been developed because, whilst much of the sector in Waltham Forest is well run, well managed, and of good quality, the adverse impact on individuals, families, and communities is considerable when it is not.

Through this strategy, we want to achieve good quality, safe and secure housing for Waltham Forest residents. To do this requires all the powers and resources available to the council and our partners and must be a partnership endeavour.

We recognise a person's experience of their home and how they feel about it can significantly impact their health and wellbeing, and quality of life. Poor housing undermines people's life chances across a whole range of areas and is one of many underlying systemic barriers to people maximising their potential. The council's commitment to tackling inequality is at the heart of everything we do and our vision for a more equal borough encompasses housing and improving housing security and standards, including in the private rented sector. Improving housing conditions, particularly in the private rental sector, can help to reduce poverty, mitigate the impact of climate change, and contribute towards a healthier, happier, and more equitable society. This means that now, more than ever, addressing poor housing conditions and instability in the private sector in Waltham Forest is vital and urgent.

This strategy presents areas of focus for the council to support the private rented sector, using its legal powers, duties, and relationships.

### **3. National and local context**

Renters are now on the front line of the housing crisis. High rents have been pushed to new extremes by a combination of post-pandemic demand, supply shortages, and rising interest rates. Rents in London have increased much faster than earnings, meaning the capital is the least affordable places to rent in the country. The average private rent in Waltham Forest increased by 42% between 2011 and 2019. In 2023, the average rent in Outer London was £2,264 per month – up by 13% on the previous year. This is disproportionately impacting young people in our borough. 60% of residents aged 16-24 rent privately, compared to only 18% of those aged 50-64.

There were an additional 3,500 households living in the Private Rental Sector as of June 2023, in comparison to 2013 in Waltham Forest making it the fastest growing form of tenure in the borough. Increased demand has caused rents to rise above inflation resulting in severe cost of living challenges for renters. A broken market has direct consequences for the health and wellbeing of the borough's residents. The charity Shelter found that over 1 in 5 renters' nationally reported that housing issues or worries were making them feel physically unwell. Research recently published in the British Medical Journal suggests being a private renter has a greater effect on biological age than being unemployed (adding about 1.4 weeks of ageing per year), obesity (about 1 week), or being a former smoker (about 1.1 weeks).

Our most recent resident insight survey told us that negative mental and physical health impacts from housing are most commonly mentioned by already marginalised groups including black women, less affluent residents and residents with a limiting illness or disability.

#### **Build to Rent**

Build to Rent (BTR) is becoming an increasingly popular option for developers. BTR homes are homes developed and built specifically for the rental market, rather than to sell. There are already a range of BTR developers present in Waltham Forest. This includes Fizzy Living in Blackhorse Road and London and Quadrant PRS in St James St. The British Property Federation states that the sector is set to grow nationally from 76,800 to over 380,000 by 2032. The average age of people looking to move into a first home in the UK was between 25 and 35 years old in 2016, but now the average first-time buyer is 37 years old – meaning BTR is often targeting this younger market.

## 4. How the strategy was developed

This strategy has been developed through engagement with residents, landlords and a wide range of council officers, including frontline staff in Housing, Homelessness, Private Sector Housing and Licensing, Public Health, Planning Development Management, the Climate Emergency and Behavioural Change team and partners.

The strategy draws on and is shaped by the considerable evidence received through our Affordable Housing Commission, the Institute for Health Equity Report: 'A Fairer and Healthier Waltham Forest: Equity and the Social Determinants of Health in Waltham Forest for Waltham Forest' and builds on the learning from our Housing Sustainment team. It is aligned with the Waltham Forest Housing Strategy: Good homes as the foundation for a happy and healthy life and our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

Through our work in developing our overarching Housing Strategy, we spoke to residents to understand local people's experiences of living in Waltham Forest, private renters' experiences, and our residents' priorities for change. This included in-depth conversations through focus groups, and targeted activities with landlords, younger people, older people, and people receiving support in relation to their housing situation.



### 4.1 The Affordable Housing Commission

In June 2023, we established the first ever borough Affordable Housing Commission. Chaired by the Chief Executive of Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association, Geeta Nanda OBE, the Commission brought together a panel of eight independent experts to advise us on what more the Council could do to tackle the housing crisis in Waltham Forest.

The Commission recognised Waltham Forest as a leader in the delivery of new housing in London but recognised that the situation for residents in the private rented sector is getting worse.

One of the key recommendations of the Affordable Housing Commission and the Housing Strategy was to develop a dedicated Private Rented Sector Strategy to act on both the structural and immediate challenges facing private renters, and to adopt the housing recommendations outlined in 'A Fairer and Healthier Waltham Forest' to contribute to tackling health inequalities and prioritise landlord engagement to improve conditions for private renters.

## 4.2 Building a Fairer and Healthier Waltham Forest

Our Response to the 'A Fairer and Healthier Waltham Forest: Equity and the Social Determinants of Health' report produced by Sir Professor Michael Marmot and the Institute for Health Equity (IHE) was published in March 2024.

### 4.2.1 Marmot Vision and Principles

Our vision for building a fairer and healthier Waltham Forest is to ensure that all residents, whoever they are or wherever they live, will have an equal opportunity to live a healthy and fulfilling life. Maintaining good health and well-being involves more than just accessing excellent healthcare services; it also requires addressing the conditions in which people are born, grow up, live, work, and age — including housing.

### 4.2.2 The Healthier Homes Marmot Accelerator Area

The Waltham Forest Marmot response identified healthier homes as a key 'Accelerator Area' for focused action. Private renters often have poorer quality homes, rising rates of eviction, and spend the highest proportion of their income on housing. This forces many PRS tenants to live in substandard homes, with some reluctant to report issues for fear of eviction or rent rises that may result from essential repairs.

In Waltham Forest, our Private Sector Housing and Licensing team has been effective in using regulation to drive up standards, tackle anti-social behaviour and reduce fuel poverty. By putting health and wellbeing at the heart of our approach, we will build on this positive work to tackle more unsafe and illegal renting practices, improve housing quality, and help at-risk renters to stay safe and well in their homes. Our delivery plan includes specific actions to achieve these ambitions.

## 4.3 Tackling the Climate Emergency in Waltham Forest

In April 2019, Waltham Forest declared a Climate Emergency. Domestic homes within the borough are the biggest emitters of carbon dioxide, totalling 48% of the borough's emissions. 60 per cent of Waltham Forest's private sector homes were built pre-1919, in comparison with only 25 per cent of England's private sector homes.

The financial investment required to retrofit properties means large-scale change is problematic without regulatory intervention from central government or a significant shift in landlord attitudes and behaviours. It has been difficult to incentivise landlords locally to retrofit and decarbonise their privately rented homes. The scale of the challenge is evidenced by the fact that we recently advertised a 0% loan at our Private Rented Licensing Landlord Forum which had no uptake.

Waltham Forest's Fuel Poverty Group will continue to play a crucial role in supporting residents in the Private Rented Sector by reducing energy costs and improving energy efficiency, addressing both fuel poverty and the climate emergency. Currently, 38.2% of homes in fuel poverty in Waltham Forest are privately rented, and 21.4% of people living in these homes are classified as fuel-poor. As of 2022, we have the 4th highest rate of fuel poverty among the 33 London boroughs — a situation we recognise must improve. Fuel

poverty is heavily prevalent in areas of the borough with a high concentration of PRS properties.

PRS tenants may see their home as temporary, therefore, they are less likely to invest in energy efficiency measures themselves or ask their landlord to do so. This is why it is important for the council to continue to ensure that landlords improve the energy efficiency of their rented homes, which is more essential than ever in the context of rising energy prices, legal obligations, and the increasing prevalence of fuel poverty.

Retrofitting and decarbonising the entire private rented sector is one of the most challenging actions in addressing the climate emergency, but it is crucial to achieving our goal of net zero carbon emissions in the borough by 2030.

## OUR STRATEGY FOR CHANGE

### 5. Our vision

***We recognise that homes provide a foundation for residents to live a happy and healthy life. As part of our mission to tackle the housing crisis head on, we will ensure that Waltham Forest has a well-managed and equitable Private Rented Sector, with good quality, safe and secure homes, where landlords and tenants are all aware of their rights and responsibilities and are properly supported by the Council.***

### 6. Our outcomes framework

Taking into consideration the context at both a national and local level, the Council is focused on achieving the following outcomes which aim to deliver our vision for the Private Rented Sector. These outcomes are aligned to our Waltham Forest Housing Strategy: Good homes as the foundation for a happy and healthy life:

Long-term outcome	Intermediate outcome
1. Homelessness and rough sleeping are prevented so they become rare, brief, and non-recurrent.	A. Early intervention and support are improved.
	B. Residents who are homeless or threatened with homelessness are empowered to make decisions which are right for them.
2. Residents can access homes that meet their needs as their circumstances change.	C. Increasing the supply of different types of homes so that residents can stay in Waltham Forest throughout their lives.
	D. Renting is an attractive and secure long-term option.



3. Every home in the borough is healthy, safe, and affordable to heat.	E. Health conditions relating to poor quality homes are reduced.
	F. Housing in Waltham Forest is warm and helps the borough to reach net zero by 2030.
4. Development enhances neighbourhoods and supports stronger, fairer, and safer communities.	G. Communities are proud of where they live and feel safe.

## 7. Delivering our outcomes

### 1. Homelessness and rough sleeping are prevented so they become rare, brief, and non-recurrent

The Council is committed to supporting our residents directly. Due to the cost-of-living crisis, lack of affordable Private Rented Sector accommodation in London, and many households being impacted by the government's benefit cap, homelessness in Waltham Forest is becoming more prevalent. Reflecting on the importance of this, we need to work in a more joined up way across the Private Rented Sector and our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Services and partnerships to prevent homelessness, so that it becomes rare, brief, and non-recurrent.

#### A. Early intervention and support are improved.

Evidence received through the Affordable Housing Commission showed that the precariousness of the Private Rented Sector is undermining tenants' health and wellbeing, meaning that we need to find and maximise opportunities to protect and improve the health of our private rented sector tenants, such as delivering better mental and physical health impacts for residents by avoiding the trauma and upheaval of being made homeless. Prevention is also more cost effective than the relief of homelessness – enabling limited Council resources to go further.

#### Stronger Communities

Improving early intervention supports our cross council *Stronger Communities* approach building strength and capability in our communities. This strategy goes towards our efforts to hard wire prevention and inclusion across the system. By supporting those at risk of tipping into crisis, we are delaying and preventing the need for acute and often costly services later down the line and narrowing inequalities. Stronger Communities evidences both a human and financial benefits for residents, the council and its partners.

We will improve early intervention and support by using our new Housing Sustainment Team to identify and work with households at risk of homelessness before they reach a point of crisis. The team's focus is currently and will continue to be on families within the private rented sector, particularly those who are impacted by the government's benefit cap. The team provides advice and assistance across a wide range of issues including benefits, employment, and health that enable them to sustain their tenancies. This new team is

working closely with other Council departments to identify and reach out to those most in need, working on a range of issues.

## **B. Residents who are threatened with homelessness are empowered to make decisions which are right for them.**

Empowerment is best described as a process which supports people to enhance their capacity to be informed, make choices, and transform those choices into actions and outcomes. We want to help residents to help themselves. We will do this by ensuring the advice and information we provide is factual, easily accessible, and readily available.

We recognise that we cannot tackle this challenge alone. Our partners in the voluntary and community sector do incredible work to support residents directly and prevent homelessness in our communities. We will build on this by more clearly articulating the current support offer for residents living in the private rented sector. We will also use our commissioning power to ensure our advice and support partners are fully focused on homelessness prevention and tenancy sustainment.

## **2. Residents can access homes that meet their needs as their circumstances change**

New Local Housing Allowance rental homes and Intermediate homes (such as the Shared Ownership and Discount Market Rent homes specifically aimed at key workers) will be key to supporting residents that are living in the private renter sector and are either:

- not eligible for social housing.
- struggling to afford rising private rents.
- locked out of home ownership.

## **C. Increasing the supply of different types of homes so that residents can stay in Waltham Forest throughout their lives.**

In addition to addressing the impacts of high demand, we are committed to working to increase supply. Increasing the number of Build-to-Rent homes is a key strategic tool identified in our Local Plan 2020-2035 to address the supply-demand imbalances that have driven the rent spikes of the last eighteen months and improve affordability in the longer term. Developments such as Fizzy Walthamstow and the Mall have been successful in delivering much needed new Build to Rent developments in the borough. We will work to understand, and strategically plan for how the Council and its delivery partners can directly increase the supply of new homes for rent in the borough.

We will work on increasing the supply of suitable rented homes, including concluding a second joint venture to increase supply to enable the council to discharge its homelessness duty by finding residents permanent homes in the PRS. We will also work on developing a PRS Procurement Strategy to explore further joint ventures and ways of maximising social lettings in new builds.

We will provide annual updates on the number of local people benefiting from new delivery; and progress on providing accessible private rented homes for the borough's key workers.

## **D. Renting is an attractive and secure long-term option.**

We will be a Council that is on the side of renters. A broken rental market is reducing choice and eroding security of tenure. The risk of eviction can contribute to feelings of anxiety and the inability to feel settled at home. If it becomes law, the Renters Rights' Bill will begin to address this by scrapping "no fault" evictions. However, we know that many renters in our borough cannot afford to wait for this, and we will continue to work with landlords with our licensing powers and our landlord's forum to make renting as attractive an option as possible in the borough.

## Landlord Engagement

The Council recognises that many private landlords operating in the borough take their responsibilities seriously and provide well-managed rented homes that are maintained to a good standard and we want to work with and support those landlords.

We will continue to adopt a light-touch approach to the administration and enforcement of our large-scale property licensing schemes, minimising the administrative burden on landlords and agents that are compliant, and providing advice and assistance through various means including e-newsletters and landlord forums. We will continue to take robust enforcement against landlords who do not meet their legal obligations, disrupting criminal business models and refusing licences for landlords judged not to be 'fit and proper', providing a level playing field for the majority of landlords who provide a good service for their tenants and who make the necessary investment in managing and maintaining rented homes.

Our licence fee structure incorporates discounts that benefit the landlords of homes that have the best energy efficiency characteristics, which particularly benefits the buoyant and important build-to-rent sector in Waltham Forest.

## 3. Every home in the borough is healthy, safe, and affordable to heat.

### E. Health conditions relating to poor quality homes are reduced.

Around 70% of our time is spent inside our home. This is often higher at various stages of life, when living with certain health conditions or when environmental factors, including extreme weather, require us to shelter at home. We need to think beyond the 10,000 homes that the Council is solely responsible for. There are urgent challenges facing residents renting privately. Left unchecked, a broken private rented sector will erode standards and undermine tenants' power and choice. We are committed to working with landlords to improve the quality of PRS homes and our delivery plan sets out how we will use our asset and health data to improve referral pathways for both licensing enforcement and health support by *Making Every Contact Count*.

We will continue the work of our Damp and Mould Taskforce which is ensuring a holistic corporate response to damp and mould, tackling both the causes and symptoms of damp and mould in homes of all tenures. Our taskforce has delivered awareness campaigns to landlords and tenants and has also secured funding for innovative solutions to address damp and mould. Our regulatory team will continue to work with landlords to ensure that damp and mould is dealt with efficiently in the PRS and to take any necessary enforcement action against those landlords that do not take the corrective measures to improve their tenant's property standards.

Data from the English Housing Survey showed that homes in the private rented sector are more likely than homes in other sectors to fail the Decent Homes Standard. We must meet the government target of reducing non-decency in rented homes by 50% by 2030. For a home to be 'decent' landlords must:

- Ensure homes are free from the most serious health and safety hazards, such as fall risks, fire risks, or carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Ensure homes do not fall into disrepair, addressing problems before they deteriorate and require more expensive work.
- Ensure renters have clean, appropriate, and useable facilities which are updated when they reach the end of their lives.
- Ensure that rented homes are warm and dry and adequately ventilated.

In May 2020, Waltham Forest's Selective Licensing scheme was introduced in 18 of the borough's 20 wards, for a 5-year period until April 2025. The scheme seeks to improve

conditions in the private rented sector and address the significant and persistent problems with antisocial behaviour from some tenants in this sector. It also provides an ongoing opportunity to improve the quality of homes and the experience of tenants living in them, not only by tackling poor conditions but by supporting residents to access other support. In 2024 we consulted on extending our Selective Licensing scheme for a further 5 years and if approved by government our new scheme will commence in May 2025.

Through this, the team has carried out over 8,000 audits/inspections and improved close to 2000 properties to date. The team also carried out formal actions via prosecution or civil penalties in more than 200 cases.

## **F. Housing in Waltham Forest is warm and helps the borough to reach net zero by 2030.**

Tackling poor health outcomes and addressing the climate emergency are intrinsically linked. By improving the quality and energy efficiency of the borough's housing stock, we are not only reducing carbon emissions, but also making each home healthier and more affordable to live in. Through our Climate Action Plan, we have set an aspirational target for 80% of homes in Waltham Forest to have achieved an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) B by 2030. Homes in the private rented sector will play a significant role in achieving this. Waltham Forest has some of the most inefficient housing in London, reflected by 16% of households living in fuel poverty. The vast majority of these are private homes, but there are also opportunities to ensure homes in the private rented sector are warm, energy efficient and free from damp and mould.

With the upcoming increase to the energy bill price cap from 1 October 2024, average household energy bills are expected to rise by around 10%, intensifying the pressure on residents. This highlights the growing importance of the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES), a legal requirement ensuring that most rental properties meet a minimum energy efficiency rating, although the current requirement is only that homes are EPC E or above and there are exemptions. As energy costs rise and fuel poverty worsens, MEES plays a critical role in protecting residents from excessively high bills. The government is currently considering raising this standard to EPC C or above, reflecting the need for stronger action to reduce energy consumption and support sustainable living.

We recognise that we need to do more to enforce MEES regulations or to pursue alternative action using HHSRS powers under the Housing Act where higher standards can be achieved. Our enforcement efforts are focused on making sure landlords meet these requirements, with key performance indicators centred on reducing damp and mould as well as improving respiratory health. Properties rated EPC C or above are significantly less likely to suffer cold-driven illnesses from damp and mould, which are closely linked to resulting in respiratory issues. By targeting compliance, we aim to improve the overall health and well-being of residents while also advancing our climate and energy goals.

The Council will also be engaging with residents, helping them push for their landlords to make changes, and continuing to invest in energy efficiency advice and capital works for PRS tenants through our HEET programme. In addition, the Housing and Climate Emergency and Behavioural Change services will work together to implement a retrofit route map, setting out the steps that private rented tenures can take to improve energy efficiency.

## **4. Development enhances neighbourhoods and supports stronger, fairer, and safer communities**

### **G. Communities are proud of where they live and feel safe.**

We want residents to be proud to rent in Waltham Forest. Residents have told us how strong family connections, community networks and proximity to green spaces are amongst the main things people treasure about living here. However, we know that what makes Waltham

Forest a great place to live is being undermined by concerns about community safety. More than four in ten residents say that crime and fear of crime is their top concern.

## **Community Safety**

Private rented housing will play an important role in delivering a safer Waltham Forest. We will work with the police and other partners to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour, listening and acting with communities to identify and respond to their local concerns. Community safety depends on residents, landlords, the police, the council and other partners working together and building trust. We recently held a Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Neighbourhood Policing on the important question: How can the Police build trust with all communities and make your area feel safer? The Assembly gave local people including residents in the PRS the opportunity to deliberate and make recommendations on how neighbourhood policing can be improved. Waltham Forest Council, in partnership with the Metropolitan Police Service, wants to ensure that all its communities have a stronger voice in how local policing is delivered.

## **Safer Streets in the Private Rented Sector**

Building on the success and lessons learned from the 2023 'Safer Streets' pilot, Waltham Forest Council is embedding key elements of this initiative into the PRS to create safer and more resilient communities. By working in partnership with Landlords, the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) team, and the police, we will aim to strengthen the safety and wellbeing of PRS residents through:

- **Proactive Resident Engagement**

Ongoing door-knocking and drop-in sessions will give PRS residents a platform to raise safety concerns and engage directly with local services. This continuous dialogue builds trust and ensures a quicker response to emerging issues.

- **Joint Presence with Key Partners**

A coordinated, visible presence of ASB teams, and the police will be established in key hotspots. This collaboration will act as a deterrent to criminal activity and strengthen relationships with residents.

- **Support for Vulnerable Tenants**

Learning from the pilot, we will proactively identify vulnerable tenants who may be at risk of exploitation from gangs or "cuckooing." Early intervention measures will be put in place to protect these individuals and prevent victimisation.

- **Community Engagement and Insight**

We will leverage the existing community involvement to gain a deeper understanding of safety challenges across the private rented sector. This area-wide picture will guide our efforts in creating safer, more cohesive neighbourhoods.

By integrating these elements, we aim to enhance safety within the private rented sector and foster communities where residents feel proud of where they live and confident in the measures taken to ensure their safety.

## **Domestic Abuse**

The Domestic Service Improvement Officer leads efforts to implement best practices in supporting survivors of domestic abuse with their housing options. By working with the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) team, we are focused on delivering holistic, trauma-informed support to individuals and families impacted by domestic abuse, specifically those living in PRS properties.

Together, these teams play a crucial role in achieving enhanced accreditation through the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA). This accreditation underscores our commitment to ensuring that housing services in Waltham Forest are equipped to meet the needs of domestic abuse survivors. It aligns with our broader strategy of making housing more inclusive, ensuring survivors feel safe in their private rented homes, and embedding a culture of prevention and early intervention across our services.

By successfully achieving DAHA accreditation, we aim to create safer homes for all including in the PRS, reduce the risk of homelessness related to domestic abuse, and foster neighbourhoods where residents feel protected, supported, and valued. This partnership exemplifies the council's dedication to safeguarding the most vulnerable while building a stronger, more resilient community in Waltham Forest.

## 8. Our Delivery Plan

Our mission-based approach to achieving our shared vision for the PRS in Waltham Forest will require collaborative working across a wide range of council service areas and key partners. Our delivery plan identifies clear timelines and accountable officers for the actions that will deliver each of the desired outcomes we have developed with residents. We will produce an annual update to residents on progress against our delivery plan and review our strategy and objectives as required, particularly if there are significant legislative changes affecting the sector as is anticipated.

## 9. Case Studies

To help us understand how this strategy can be transformative to the lives of residents in the Private Rented Sector we have considered the situation of two of the residents we talked to in the development of our Housing Strategy.

### **Sita's story:**

*"Seven years he's been our landlord and suddenly he's asking for more rent. He's renovated next door and he's getting more money, and he's told us to move. I'm looking and looking, but I can't find anywhere. Whoever can pay more gets the flat, it's very expensive and I cannot afford it, I've been nervous and panicking".*

Sita is one of our residents from our focus groups in the private rented sector that have been looking for alternative accommodation but has been unable to find anywhere. Her household does not reach the income threshold most letting agencies require to rent a property equivalent to the one she is currently in. Sita therefore considers herself and her household to be at risk of eviction.

### **How could our new PRS Strategy help Sita?**

- Our mapping and communication of the support available to tenants in the PRS will enable Sita to better access the statutory and voluntary sector support she needs.
- Our revised service level agreements with providers will mean Sita gets the advice and support she needs when she needs it from our voluntary sector partners.
- Our Housing Sustainment Team can increase Sita's ability to pay higher rents in the short term through income maximisation and benefits advice and support.
- Our Housing Sustainment Team can increase Sita's ability to pay in the longer term by referral to our employment and skills team to improve employment options.
- In the longer term our work through the local plan to increase the supply of different types of homes in Waltham Forest will provide residents like Sita with more affordable options.



### Paul's story:

*"The housing condition is affecting my physical health - including respiratory issues - due to damp and mould. It also causes psychological stress and anxiety, due to feeling unsafe or insecure in your home, or because I'm worried about eviction or having to move."*

Paul is a resident living in private rented accommodation who spoke to us though wone of our focus groups. We know that PRS housing is in significantly worse condition than other tenures in the borough and this is having and effect on the health of many of our residents.

### How could our new PRS Strategy help Paul?

- Our mapping and communication of the support available to tenants in the PRS will enable Paul to better access the statutory and voluntary sector support she needs.
- Our Private Sector Housing and Licensing team will be able to take enforcement action against Landlords who do not keep their properties in decent condition for tenants.
- Our HEET programme will be able to provide Paul with heating and ventilation advice as well as some support with capital costs to help alleviate damp and mould issues in his home.
- Our licensing enforcement officers will be trained to be able to signpost Paul for health visitor support to evaluate the impact of his housing on his health and ensure he gets the medical attention required if necessary.
- In the longer-term better use of health and asset data will enable us to proactively identify properties in the poorest condition and work with landlords to ensure situations like Paul's are not repeated.