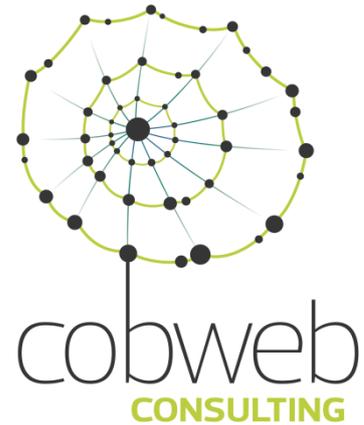




THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF
KENSINGTON
AND CHELSEA



LOCAL HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

January 2022

Executive summary

Introduction

1. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Council (RBKC) commissioned Cobweb Consulting to carry out a Local Housing Needs Assessment (LHNA) in April 2021. The context was that the Council had commenced a New Local Plan Review. The intention is to adopt the New Local Plan in 2022-23, and a Local Housing Needs Assessment is required to form part of the evidence base for the New Plan.
2. The commission required the evidence to be presented in the form of five specific outputs.

Output 1 – current and future trends

The proportion of the population in different age profiles

3. RBKC has lowest population of any London borough (except City of London), and it is forecast to only increase by 2% by 2040. This can be compared to the London-wide population projection of 12%. RBKC also has the smallest spatial geography of any London borough, and it is also the most densely populated.
4. The number of residents aged 65 or greater is projected to increase by 13,911 by 2040, a 54% increase; within this, an 82% increase for those aged 75 or more and a 131% increase for those aged 85 or over is projected.
5. By 2040 those aged 65 or more are expected to comprise 25% of RBKC's population, up from 16%; over the same period, the proportion of the population aged under 25 is expected to reduce from 25% to 20% and that of the 35 to 64 group, to reduce from 59% to 54%
6. **In combination these demographic changes will place increasing strain on the ability of the local workforce to support an aging population.**

The types of household

7. The greatest increase will be in two-person households aged over 65 (35% increase), followed by one-person households aged 65 plus (34%).
8. The youngest households – 16- 24 – will experience decreases of 11% (couples) and 12% (singles).
9. Most significant will be a stripping away of the number of households with children – over 1,000, a 7% decrease, especially among mature households. By 2040 RBKC will have lost 13% of its younger households.
10. **The Dependency Ratio – a simple measure of the burden working age households will have in supporting others – is projected to rise from 53 to 67.**

Current housing stock

11. Stock make-up is dominated by smaller homes, with 38% one beds (including studios and bedsits) and 33% two beds. Only 29% of homes are three bed or larger. This makes housing of families difficult, although the make-up of the stock is helpful in housing an aging population.
12. Some 44% of the stock is under-occupied, particularly (though not exclusively) in the owner-occupied sector. There are clearly opportunities here to make more effective use of the stock.

13. Flats and maisonettes form the overwhelming majority (85%) of the built form, with the paucity of houses and bungalows also making it difficult to house families.
14. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of homes were built before 1900; while the owner-occupied and higher end private rented sector is likely to be in good condition, there may be issues with conditions, repairs and maintenance in the lower end of the PRS and especially among HMOs.
15. There are also issues around accessibility for older and disabled people because of the design of the older stock.

Tenure composition

16. **We estimate that now the private rented sector houses 44% of residents**, a higher figure than that in the 2011 Census (36%) and the 2015 SHMA (38%), and the largest single sector in the borough. There are some indications that the PRS has now plateaued.
17. The growth of the PRS has mainly been at the expense of owner-occupation, which now stands at 29% (down from 59% in 2011). The social rented sector has remained relatively steady over the last 10 years, at 23%.

House prices and affordability

18. RBKC is the most expensive borough to buy a home in London and England. The current median price is £1,317,500, and lower quartile is £735,000. COVID appears to have had little impact on price levels.
19. However, there has been a gradual reduction in the number of transactions since 2016.
20. The most commonly accepted measure of affordability is the relationship between median house prices and median earnings of residents in an area. It now stands at 26 (i.e. median house prices are 26 times median earnings). The lower quartile relationships are similar.
21. **On both these measures RBKC is the least affordable borough in London, by some distance.**

Prime and super-prime markets

22. In common with Westminster, RBKC saw a slight decline in demand and prices in the five years up to 2020. Apart from a miniboom at the end of the first lockdown, the decline continued into 2021.
23. There then were signs of a revival, which commentators thought likely to continue when pent up demand from foreign buyers was released when travel restrictions were eased.
24. **But the long term future will depend on the working through of the pandemic and the post-COVID economic and tax environment, as well as the working through of Brexit and other international factors.**

Empty homes, second homes and Airbnb

25. **One in eight homes in RBKC are empty or second homes, making a total of 11,802 unused homes. This is the highest rate in England, and (apart from Cornwall) the highest number. Numbers of both empty and second homes have increased sharply over the last few years.**
26. While it is clear that foreign investors use RBKC properties as wealth-holding vehicles, there is also evidence that UK investors do the same.
27. **While Airbnb is a useful resource for the tourist economy, there is concern that of the 6,129 listings for accommodation in RBKC, 77% are described as entire dwellings** – not just a room or a share in someone else's home. This is the second highest number in the capital and represents 7% of the housing stock.

28. There are definitional overlaps between second homes, empty homes and Airbnb, so it is difficult to be precise on overall numbers. However it is clear that there is a substantial amount of unused or underused stock in the borough.

Outputs 2 and 3– Evidence on the need for Community Housing within the Borough and likely requirements for different types and sizes of homes over the plan period

29. Evidence of the need for Community Housing within the Borough and likely requirements for different types and sizes of homes over the plan period were examined using a spreadsheet-based model based on the requirements of National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG). This was an amended version of the model previously used in the 2015 SHMA and its 2019 Update.

Overall affordable housing need

30. In summary, there is a requirement for an additional 1,018 affordable dwellings per annum. How this figure was derived and its components are discussed below.

Backlog and newly arising need

31. Backlog affordable need (unmet need at the present time because of homelessness, concealed and overcrowded households, and other high priority needs) was estimated at 2,506 dwellings. All backlog need cannot be met immediately so a backlog quota of 334 dwellings per annum (which would allow all current backlog need to be met over the next 7.5 years) was included in overall need. The timescale for meeting backlog need has been shortened since the 2019 Update as the Council wished to give a higher priority to this group.
32. Newly arising need (as a result of future household growth) was estimated at 1,288 dwellings per annum, based on the 2019-based central lower migration projection variant produced by the Greater London Authority, with a small addition for new need arising from existing households. Some newly-arising need can be met through the market
33. The annual total of need in the Borough was therefore 1,622 dwellings (1,288+334). This is before taking account of supply, and of the need that can be met in the market.

Incomes and affordability

34. An up-to-date estimate of the distribution of gross household incomes in the Borough was made based on Paycheck data purchased from the company CACI. This data was adjusted, as from a comparison with other sources it was felt to underestimate the proportion of households in income bands below £25,000 per annum. The data was used as the basis for the production of estimates of the income distribution of households in need, as distinct from the incomes of all households.
35. Assumptions were made about the maximum proportion of gross household income which should be devoted to housing costs. In the lowest income bands below £25,000 it was assumed that a maximum of 25% of income should be devoted to housing costs. This provided a distribution of the housing purchasing power of households in need.
36. To assess the proportion of households unable to afford market housing, threshold costs were determined for a series of housing options. These were (a) entry level market rents (taken to be the lower quartile private rented sector rent) (b) The average London Living Rent for the Borough published by the Greater London Authority (taken to be indicative of the costs of a range of intermediate housing options) (c) the London Affordable Rent, also published by the

Greater London Authority (taken to represent the rent level for Social Housing let at Affordable Rent levels) and (d) the current rent for Social Housing Let by the Borough (taken to be the lowest-cost Social Rented housing available).

37. On the basis of a comparison of these cost thresholds with the purchasing power of households in need, it is estimated that **1,293 households (80% of the 1,622 households in need) are unable to afford any form of market housing, leaving 20% who could afford to enter the private market.** Given the high costs of housing in the Borough, this is unsurprising.

Affordable need by type

38. Taking the 1,293 households who cannot afford to enter the private market, 374 (29%) are estimated to be able to afford to pay a London Living Rent or another intermediate option such as shared ownership or First Homes with costs below the lower quartile market rent level. A further 329 (25%) can afford a London Affordable Rent. Some 251 (19%) can afford a Social Rent at levels currently charged for the Borough's social housing stock. 339 households (26%) cannot afford even this cost, despite the availability of housing benefit, and would be obliged to spend a higher proportion of their income on housing costs than the 25% maximum assumed in these calculations. In total, 46% of households in need which cannot afford market housing require dwellings let at current social rent levels and many of these will need to devote more than 25% of their incomes to housing costs even when housing benefit is considered.
39. There is a significant affordable housing supply from relets and other sources which needs to be deducted from these gross needs to provide an estimate of the net annual need for affordable housing. **This reduces need by 275 dwellings to 1,018 dwellings per annum.** As a result of taking account of affordable supply, an increased proportion of affordable need (35% rather than 29%) is in the form of intermediate tenure housing, and less net need (38% rather than 46%) is in the form of social rented housing.
40. These estimates should not be treated as exact. The model assumes a maximum proportion of income to be spent on housing which some households may not wish to adhere to. In addition, the thresholds set for the cost of each type of housing have some households marginally above or below them so relatively small adjustments would affect the proportions who can afford each type of housing.

Breakdown of need by type of affordable housing

<i>Type of demand</i>	<i>Before supply</i>	<i>After supply</i>
Social rent	46%	38%
London Affordable Rent	25%	27%
London Living Rent/intermediate	29%	35%
	100%	100%

Affordable need by bedroom requirements

41. These estimates of need were also broken down by bedroom requirements. Looking at net need (after deducting the supply of affordable housing from relets and other sources, 16% of need is for studio or one-bed accommodation. **The largest proportion of need (44%) is for two-bedroomed accommodation. 28% of need is for three bedrooms and 12% for four bedrooms.** The requirement by number of bedrooms is broken down by type of affordable housing in an Annex Table to the main report.

Breakdown of need by bedroom size

<i>Bedroom size share</i>	Studio/1	16%
	2	44%
	3	28%
	4	12%
	Total	100%

Market housing by bedroom requirements

42. To complement the estimate of affordable dwelling size requirements, estimates were made of the requirement for dwellings of different sizes in the market sector. To address the high levels of underoccupancy in the market sector in the Borough, **35% of new market dwellings should have one bedroom, 40% two bedrooms, 20% three bedrooms and 5% four or more bedrooms.** This profile is broadly similar to the current breakdown in the market sector.

First Homes

43. Since the 2015 SHMA and the 2019 update, the government has developed First Homes as an additional form of affordable housing, with local authorities required to produce 25% of affordable housing in this form. At a discount of 30%, the maximum market price of a potential First Home would be £600,000, which is likely to limit choices to one-bedroom or possibly two-bedroom units. Assuming a mortgage of 90% of the discounted price and limiting any loan to a maximum of 30% of household income indicates that an income of £71,700 per annum would be required to access a First Home at this price level, in addition to the deposit. Although 438 households (27% of those in need) have an income at or above this level, only 221 (14%) require a one or two-bed unit – the remainder would require a larger dwelling. **On the basis of this, there is no evidence of an overwhelming need for this product in the borough.**

Changes since the 2019 update

44. The overall level of net affordable need (1,018 dwellings per annum) estimated in this study is 3% below the 2019 estimate of 1,052. This results from (a) changes to the data sources used to introduce more up to date data from the Housing Register (b) a shorter period assumed to meet current backlog need, thereby placing more emphasis on those households in need at present rather than those which will or might form in the future (c) a fall in the projected number of future households and (d) increases in the threshold costs of different types of housing since 2019.

Output 4 – Housing for Older People

Context

45. A greater proportion of those older people requiring some form of care and support have higher physical, mental health and dementia-related needs than in previous decades; and they are entering care-based accommodation later in life, in their 80s and 90s
46. Older age groups are significantly more affected by ill-health and disability than other groups which impacts on their housing requirements
47. By 2040 older groups are expected to account for 25% of households, rising from a base of 16%; whereas working age households reduce by 8%, from 83% to 75%.
48. Older owner-occupiers may be able to solve their accommodation needs in the open market, through downsizing
49. A range of housing related services is required, to promote independence, mobility, reducing care costs, prevention of falls and ill-health, and reducing demand for inappropriate adaptations
50. This includes new provision of Extra Care and other forms of older persons accommodation.

Supply and demand

51. We estimate there are currently 1,863 units of specialist older persons housing available in RBKC, including 299 with residential or nursing care, and 81 social rented Extra Care units
52. Based on GLA commissioned research we estimate that **an additional 16 care / nursing places are required every year between 2017 and 2029**. As far as we are aware there are no RBKC forecasts.
53. As regards sheltered and Extra Care provision, forecasts based on demographic prevalence modelling indicate that future requirements by 2040 call for an additional:
 - **549 social rented affordable sheltered housing units**
 - **2,291 private leasehold sheltered housing units**
 - **132 social rented affordable Extra Care units**
 - **265 private leasehold Extra Care units**
54. This amounts to **3,237 additional units in total**, which would imply an annual programme of **62 units per annum** over the next 20 years
55. However, these figures should be treated with a degree of caution. The perception of strategic service commissioners is that demand is lower than expected from demographic modelling. The likelihood is that there are some specific local RBKC factors at work, in that many older residents are wealthy, and can / do / will make their own arrangements, be it in situ care, adaptations, or private provision. However, there will also be demand from older

private renters, not all of whom will be wealthy, as well as existing aging social sector residents.

56. While most of the requirement will be for one-bedroom accommodation, it should be noted that the proportion of older households with two or more members is forecast to increase at a faster rate than that of single older adults
57. **Provision should therefore be made for some units to have additional bedrooms, for reasons of health, privacy and the accommodation of carers.**

Specialist and overall housing requirement

58. Assuming the availability of specialist accommodation, it is projected that around 48 homes per annum are freed up for other use by older people moving into specialist accommodation. This could include a supply of family accommodation depending on tenure and planning input.

Output 5 – Housing needs of different groups

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

59. The HMO sector is estimated to comprise some 8,244 properties, 21% of the private rented sector (PRS). Of these some 3,584 (43%) are traditional shared properties and 4,650 (57%) are converted properties with multiple flats sharing common parts
60. HMOs serve a complex role in London and the RBKC PRS. Although traditionally seen as poor quality, low rent accommodation for singles and young people, since the 2008 credit crunch, recession, lack of mortgage availability and escalating house prices, investors and landlords have increasingly upmarketed and improved the quality of HMOs to cater for professionals on reasonable earnings, but not enough to enter the owner-occupier market
61. Geographically, HMOs are concentrated in the southern, wealthier wards in RBKC
62. This is not to deny that there is still a sub-strata of poorer conditions and probably lower rent HMOs in RBKC. A recent report noted that 66% of shared house HMOs were likely to have serious health and safety hazards
63. Rents on HMOs are likely to reflect lower quartile PRS rents. This means that a four plus bedroom HMO would likely be rented at £4,983 per month.
64. Looking at average earnings for key workers, it would need a group of five key workers on higher incomes (nurses, social workers, teachers, firefighters, police) paying 40% of their income to be able to afford this rent
65. The authority is concerned that a number of landlords are converting HMOs into studio or 1 bed flats, to the detriment of overall lower rent housing supply. There is some evidence for this from planning data. A reduction in the number of bedsits in HMOs will jeopardise the ability of the authority to meet its housing delivery targets and reduce the stock available to lower income single people.
66. However, there is still a substantial pool of shared house HMOs, and few of the larger ones have been converted. There are no signs that the rate at which new mandatory (larger) HMO licences are being applied for has slackened.
67. **We conclude that the authority should closely monitor the patterns of rents, conversion applications, registrations, ASB and student development, to find a balance between supporting lower-cost HMOS and accepting the role they have in housing higher earning but non-owning groups.**

Build to Rent (BTR)

68. There are now 82,734 BTR London homes either built, under construction or at the planning stage, making up 43% of all purpose built private developments
69. They are owned and managed by private companies and incorporate in some cases living spaces, concierge arrangements, parking facilities, roof gardens, gyms, restaurants and bars.
70. Residents have three years security
71. However, there are currently no BTR schemes in RBKC, so assessing their role and value is difficult. Rent levels tend to be around 11% higher than PRS median rents (noting that these charges pay for the amenities noted above as well as the rents), which implies that monthly rents could be:
 - Studio - £1,443 pm
 - 1 bed - £2,092 pm
 - 2 bed - £2,983
 - 3 bed - £4,649 pm
 - 4 plus bed - £7,937
72. We have researched whether these standard rents would be affordable to key workers in RBKC (putting aside the 20%+ tranche of such developments that are earmarked for truly affordable rents).
73. **Our assessment is that even the best paid key worker households would be unable to afford even the smallest BTR property without spending more than 40% of their incomes, and given this and the existing predominance of the private rented sector in the borough, there is no evidence that BtR should be a policy priority.**
74. **The view of the authority, which we consider justified given the shortage of affordable and sub-market rented accommodation, is that 35% of units in a scheme should be Community Housing (under the terms of the authority's Community Housing Supplementary Planning Document).**
75. Within these, schemes should provide at least 30% Discounted Market Rent Homes at an equivalent rent to London Living Rent, with the other 70% provided at a range of genuinely affordable rents, preferably social rents. It should be noted that the London Plan required Discounted Market Rents to be at London Living Rents, and that the other 70% should be at genuinely affordable rents (Policy H11).
76. We should note that all the social housing providers we interviewed did not think BTR was viable in RBKC.

Large-scale purpose-built shared living (co-living)

77. There has been increasing interest in developing large-scale purpose-built shared living schemes, also known as 'co-living'.
78. They are essentially hotel rooms with added amenities with room size standards as low as 14 sqm; lettings are on a licence basis, so security of tenure is minimal.
79. The London Plan has a policy to improve security of tenure in co-living schemes but does not require any affordable housing element.
80. There are none in RBKC as of yet. In existing London schemes rents start at £1,085 per month and range to £1,647 depending on the size of the room / studio.
81. Assuming these rents applied in RBKC (and they are likely to be too low as they apply to a scheme in Willesden), someone would need to be earning £32,550 per annum, if 40% of earnings were to be put into accommodation costs.
82. This means that they would be unaffordable for most key workers.

83. **Further research would be needed to assess viability, affordability and potential demand. But on present evidence it does not seem to be a suitable policy priority for RBKC.**

Self-Build and Custom-Build

84. Authorities are obliged to keep a Self-Build register and, if there is demand, to provide serviced plots to meet demand
85. The RBKC Self-Build Register has been open since 2017. At the moment it holds 112 entries.
86. Only 39 applicants currently reside in the borough. However, at the moment the authority does not capture any information on other local connections, such as employment or family ties. The rationale for this is that as there is so little land available and so many higher competing priorities, the authority is unlikely to be able to provide any serviced plots
87. **Given the low demand we do not consider self-build should be a policy priority.** However we do suggest that the authority develop a two part Register, to assess relevant demand and demonstrate that they have done so more thoroughly.

Student accommodation

88. There are around 34,000 students at the main higher and further education institutions in RBKC. Imperial College is the largest single one, with nearly 20,000 students. The other large institution – North Kensington College – is undergoing a major redevelopment, and (pre-COVID estimate) was expecting to expand by 3,000 students.
89. Over half Imperial students – 56% - are overseas students, and 43% are postgraduates. These two groups are more likely to be able to access more expensive and larger private rented accommodation than undergraduates.
90. The only University-specific purpose built student accommodate (PBSA) in RBKC is that owned by Imperial College. They own 1,069 units in halls of residence inside the borough, plus another 1,774 in other parts of West London. Rents range from £112 to £316 per week. At the moment North Kensington College has no PBSA plans.
91. The vast majority of students will be expected to find their own accommodation, mainly in the PRS. Given the high rents in RBKC, the vast majority of Imperial students will reside outside RBKC. North Kensington College is different, in that it is highly focussed on the very local community, and most students and staff already live in the close area.
92. The impact of COVID is making the forecasting of future student numbers unclear, but the long term trajectory of applicants to Imperial has seen a 45% increase in intake between 2011 and 2020, and applications were up by 11% by January 2021.
93. Of possibly more long term importance is Brexit, where already nationally we have seen applicants from the EU are down by 40%.
94. As far as we are aware, Imperial has no plans to increase its PBSA, and may indeed be divesting older PBSA. Using this divestible stock, there may possibly be opportunities for collaboration between Imperial and North Kensington, if North Kensington does consider some PBSA in the future. **While it remains important to ensure that existing affordable student accommodation remains affordable, there is little indication for the need for additional PBSA, especially if it would be at the expense of other forms of affordable accommodation.**
95. The other relevant factor is that the 2021 London Plan firmly embeds affordability and nomination arrangements into future PBSA development, and if either institution do decide to develop further they will need to work within that framework.

Households with disabilities

Context

96. Across the country 1.9M households have a member whose home needed some form of adaptation because of disability. Only 25% of dwellings in England had features that made them 'visitable' to people with a physical disability.
97. Specifically looking at wheelchair accessible accommodation, 4% of households used a wheelchair. Of these those 75% are aged 60 or over, including 20 aged 85 or over across England.
98. As regards RBKC, as noted in the 2015 SHMA, 12% of the population is likely to have some form of long-term health problem or disability. 4% of residents class their health as poor or very poor

Demand in RBKC

99. In RBKC some 361 households on the Housing Register have some form of mobility-related requirement, although only a small minority express the need for fully-wheelchair accessible accommodation.
100. Using modelling based on academic research and English Housing Survey data we estimate that unmet need for wheelchair accessible accommodation in RBKC amounts to 405 units. It is likely that a number of these will be making private arrangements for suitable accommodation, and will not appear on the Housing Register, so we can be reasonably confident about both these figures.

Supply in RBKC

101. The authority keeps an Accessible Homes Register covering social housing stock in RBKC. About a third of the stock has been surveyed so far. There are slightly over 300 units of wheelchair accessible and lifetime homes on the register, plus another 2,500 assessed as easy access or step free.
102. According to CORE returns, 226 wheelchair accessible social housing dwellings were let between 2015 and 2020 (160 general needs, 66 supported). We found that:
 - 92 lettings went to those with no disability related housing requirements
 - 70 lettings went to those with lesser mobility requirements
 - 26 went to those that did require fully-accessible wheelchair accommodation
 - We have no information on the remaining 38
103. In the same period 28 households that need fully-accessible accommodation were let homes to a lesser standard
104. There can be a number of reasons for this apparent mismatch (discussed in the main report).

Conclusion

105. **The Housing Register appears to reasonably reflect accessible accommodation need, and development plans should reflect those requirements.** A careful watch on appropriate lettings performance by social housing providers is required to ensure that wheelchair accessible dwellings are let to appropriate applicants.

Reablement

106. Reablement is a scheme to provide a stepping stone for those leaving hospital (and other institutional environments) to return to their home environment. It aims to reduce the length

- of hospital stays, rebuild confidence and skills, maximise ability to be independent, avoid readmission to hospital or a premature move to a care home.
107. It also aims to give more time for social services to conduct assessments and reduce NHS costs.
 108. The RBKC scheme has three units where referrals can be assessed and can go through six-week reablement programmes, before returning to a home environment.
 109. To date there have been 24 admissions for the assessment and reablement programmes, and the team's analysis is that 80% of service users have seen a reduction in the care required on leaving the programme.
 110. Although the scheme is thought to provide an important gap in service provision, a number of issues have arisen. These include:
 - The absence of exit strategies for participants, which has led to substantially (doubled) time in the scheme
 - Consequently inability to admit more hospital referrals, which will discourage hospitals from further referrals
 - Linked to this, a concern that hospitals are discharging patients too quickly under streamlined pandemic procedures, which has contributed to the silting up of units
 - The low number of units in the scheme, meaning there is a lack of flexibility.
 111. **We suggest an early review of what appears to be a fundamentally sound scheme, in order to address the issues above.**

Existing and potential hostel users

112. The brief asks the researchers to look at the supply of 'hostel-like' accommodation for existing and potential hostel users, particularly referencing homeless people and victims of domestic violence. It also asks for trends in the provision for those with lower support needs – young vulnerable people and other socially excluded groups, and rough sleepers.

Vulnerable young people and socially-excluded groups

113. The 2015 to 2020 Supported Housing Strategy identified a range of groups needing a range of support, from relatively low levels to multiple and complex needs, and commissioned provision accordingly, around 530 units plus 100 floating care units.
114. As regards young people specifically, the approach has been to prioritise those with higher vulnerability, through family eviction, leaving care environments and leaving prisons. This has meant diverting resources devoted to those with lower support needs, which had been identified as being surplus to requirements.
115. The results of the new strategy has been the creation of around 95 places specifically for young people including 59 places in schemes for young people with complex needs who might be considered particularly vulnerable and 432 places for socially excluded single people – which would include young people leaving care and at risk. The category also includes rough sleepers, refugees, those with mental health, drug and alcohol misuse, offenders and those at risk of offending, single people with other support needs, and people with HIV/AIDS.

Rough sleepers

116. Until the 'Everyone In' initiative launched in 2020 in the wake of COVID and lockdown, the number of (reported) rough sleepers in RBKC had risen steadily over the last five years, reaching a peak of 316 in 2019-20. The numbers dropped to 271 after Everyone In was launched but this still amounted to the second highest level since records began

117. What the Everyone In programme did highlight and confirm was that the official street count of rough sleepers consistently under-estimated the extent of the issue. Everyone In rehoused 37,000 rough sleepers across the country, compared to the 2,688 that appears in official counts. While it is likely that some rough sleeping was the result of COVID – for example, people being evicted or temporary arrangements such as sofa surfing being curtailed – it is likely that many were existing rough sleepers not being counted.
118. The authority has a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 which focusses on preventing rough sleeping occurring and supporting rough sleepers into suitable accommodation. It also suggests that Housing First may be a way forward.
119. While the projects commissioned under the Supported Housing Strategy and the rough sleeping strategy may have some impact, **the winding up of Everyone In and the longer-term structural features of the RBKC housing economy make it likely that rough sleeping will continue to increase.**

Domestic abuse

120. RBKC employ the Angelou partnership to provide support and advocacy for those facing domestic abuse, and commissions Hestia to provide 19 refuge places.
121. The services are both well-used, and COVID has encouraged people to come forward. The services are becoming more accessible to those who had not used them before. But there is concern that some cases are 'slipping through' without support. There is a particular need for a pan-London reciprocal housing agreement to ensure that if people need to be housing out of the borough for reasons of safety, this is made possible.
122. The concern is also that concern is that as we come out of lockdowns, the focus on domestic abuse may not be as much as it has been during lockdown and some of that funding will come to an end. **The authority should be aware of this and ensure that service provision remains at least at current levels.**
123. As with other groups needing affordable rented accommodation, women and families facing domestic abuse are disadvantaged in RBKC because of the absence of available stock, including the absence of larger units. **This should be acknowledged in future planning and housing strategies.**

Service personnel

124. Between 2015 and 2019 25 households comprising service personnel or reservists injured in the line of duty were rehoused by the authority. Four required wheelchair accessible accommodation; seven were statutorily homeless.
125. **In view of the relatively light demands from this group, there are no indicators of significant demand that require policy change.** However, it should be noted that 10 rough sleepers identified in RBKC had experience of the armed forces – this should be taken on board when planning support and outreach activity.

Family housing

126. Demographic projections show RBKC will have fewer young people and households with children over the next 20 years. As loss of 1,171 families is forecast.
127. As well as demographic changes, observers consider that high prices and rents, benefit caps, lack of affordable housing options and lack of larger homes has had the effect of exporting lower income family households out of the borough.

128. **Although in the longer term demand for family housing will reduce, our analysis in chapter 3 shows that 40% of new homes need to be sized three bedroom or more, and the existing backlog means these larger units should be prioritised.**

Private renting households

129. Private renting is the biggest (44%) tenure in RBKC; it has the most expensive PRS rents in London, including even the lower quartile rents (average £1,777 per month)
130. In the past the PRS has played host to a series of niche markets, including a luxury end, young professionals, students, a housing benefit market, a market for the 'working poor' and temporary accommodation for homeless households.
131. In RBKC lettings agents describe the market as 'buoyant', seeing rents starting at under £500 per week. It was noted that rents had fallen slightly, and there were indications that the rapid expansion of the sector had perhaps plateaued.
132. As regards the PRS's role in providing affordable housing, the Local Housing Allowance is below the lower quartile rents for all bedroom sizes, most notable for larger properties.
133. If a measure of shared housing were expected, it means that five single people would need to share a three-bedroom house, and seven people would need to share a five bedroom house to make rents affordable for those on HB. This clearly has implications for HMO formation and overcrowding.
134. We can see clearly that the number of people claiming HB / UC declined rapidly since 2011, indicating that landlords were re-marketing their homes to higher earners. Following the COVID-driven loss of jobs and hours, and the temporary £20 uplift to rates, 2020 to 2021 has seen a huge spike in UC claims.
135. However it would be dangerous to view this as anything but a temporary blip on the long-term withering away of the HB / low rent PRS in the borough
136. The other role the PRS has is supplying temporary accommodation for homeless households for whom the authority has a responsibility. For the last three years the authority has had around 2,000 households in private sector temporary accommodation at any one time (though it should be noted that 1,200 were placed outside RBKC).
137. While the authority does maintain ongoing relationships with 28 landlords (sometimes via housing associations) and has a small portfolio of properties held on corporate leases, **it is recognised that reliance on this is not viable over the longer term because of cost. Research has indicated that the strategy needs to be broadened to include discharge of duty into the PRS, increased use of HMOs and extending out of borough access schemes.**

Care leavers

138. Around 100 children and young people are looked-after in the care system, including an increasing number and proportion of unaccompanied children (asylum seekers predominantly). The size of this group is expected to grow as the National Transfer Scheme displaces children from Kent.
139. Around 20 children leave care every year, and are rehoused in a mixture of independent, low support and higher support housing dependent on need, for an appropriate period, before bidding for social housing.
140. **Collaboration between Family Services and Housing seems to be strong and successful and a number of suggestions for service improvements (not all directly housing-related) were suggested.** These include:
- further development of a move-on support package

- extending access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- developing reciprocal arrangements with other
- the implementation of support recommendations coming from a care leaver consultation carried out by Family Services.

Drug and alcohol abuse

141. The bi-borough Drug and Alcohol Well-being Service (DAWS) co-ordinates specialist support for drug and alcohol abusers. Their agencies provide a range of services including detox, rehabilitation, and psychotherapy. They also undertake outreach in hospitals, courts and schools.
142. All residents in programmes have a key worker, and all have an aftercare plan, which includes future housing requirements.
143. They currently have 564 RBKC residents in treatment programmes and another 1,000 receiving advice and support. They estimate that 15% to 20% will require a new home post-treatment. For some a supported hostel environment, will be appropriate, for others a move out of borough away from 'trigger' factors would be desirable. DAWS accepts that some of their clients will have to use the private rented sector.
144. Some specific housing-related concerns and issues were noted, where support from the housing department is welcomed:
- Some family situations (for example where family members are also substance abusers or dealers) are inappropriate for a client to return to, necessitating alternative accommodation
 - Many long-term clients are poorly educated and have never experienced budgeting, or the skills needed to run a home, so support is needed if tenancies are not to fail
 - A substantial number of clients are homeless, in hostels or sofa surfing; there are no 'dry' hostels, so appropriate rehousing is the basis for a recovery programme.
145. **In terms of the future, DAW's view is that demand for their services is changing but will continue to increase.** In particular a reduction in heroin-based addiction and an increase in party drugs from the internet has been noted, as well as an increase in drug activity related to the night economy and sex working.
146. In parallel, it was observed that people are more willing to ask for help, and the proactive outreach approach by DAWS is also encouraging people to come forward. There will therefore be a knock-on effect on the demand for appropriate housing.

Mental health and well-being

147. Over the past seven years well-being scores for happiness, finding life worthwhile and life satisfaction have declined in RBKC. The anxiety score was slightly higher than the London average; rates of depression and of serious mental illness is higher than the London average. This impacts on all age groups – the young, the working aged and older people.
148. The Grenfell Tower fire had a significant and negative impact on mental health and well-being of the community.
149. The authority has six mental health residential projects. One is a registered care home, others are for people with complex and high support needs, (including physical disabilities as well as mental ill health) and are staffed 24 hours a day. There are 33 self-contained supported flats, ten of the 33 are in the care home.
150. One of the main challenges is the type of building in the portfolio, many of which are not suitable for people with multiple disabilities, and also only able to house single people.

151. Because of a shortage of accommodation sometimes it is necessary to place people out of borough. There were 30 such placements last year. Demand is high and voids are rare.
152. It is unusual for service users to move directly into social housing, partly because of shortage, and partly because generally a move into another, less intensive form of supported housing is usually appropriate. Support staff work with social and private landlords but often have to look out of borough as housing costs in RBKC are too high for the client group.
153. Commissioners are very keen to improve accessibility for people with disabilities. The team are disadvantaged in that none of the buildings used are owned by the Council. They are also looking at how to get greater access to the private rented sector.
154. In terms of future demand as people are living longer with complex needs there will be a greater need for people to access a mental health offer and a greater demand for accommodation based services. This makes it essential that the offer continues to be based on move on, rather than permanent, institutionalised accommodation, and means close working with the Housing Department.
155. **It seems clear that mental health commissioners are thinking strategically and long-term about future requirements, and the housing component of this. There seems further scope for liaison and a common approach to dealings with private landlords.** Housing (or the wider authority) may have a role in ensuring that mental health supported accommodation is suitable and of a high standard. But clearly the key relationship must be a good understanding of the need for and provision of general needs housing for those leaving the mental health supported pathway.

Disabled children with additional needs

156. Families with children who have housing-related additional needs or disabilities are supported by a combination of the Housing Department's Health and Disability Team and the Disabled Children's Team (DCT), based in Children's Social Care.
157. The DCT have between 45 to 50 children with the highest degree of needs on their books at any one time. The children have a mixture of ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder), physical, and behavioural issues. Almost all have learning disabilities, and most are non-verbal. The team also provides respite short-breaks to 259 families, who are at the higher end of the range of disability. The voluntary sector agency 'Full of Life' which specifically supports families with disabled children in the borough has around 800 families on their books.
158. All interviewees noted that inadequate housing played a significant role in reducing their clients' quality of life.
159. Both local authority and voluntary sector agencies reported an 'explosion' of children with ASD needing support in the borough. Specific housing needs requirements include:
 - The need for additional bedrooms
 - Concerns about open-plan designs of new homes
 - Concerns about the nature and quality of new build
 - Issues around fire doors
 - Issues around lifts.
160. Other issues included: the slowness and difficulty in getting aids and adaptations done; the difficulty in adapting new-build properties; the absence of (and need for) a specialist integrated community group home, combining living space with facilities and activities, for adolescent disabled children.
161. However, the most significant issue was the shortage of supply of accessible affordable housing, and in particular the shortage of three-bedroom homes.

162. **The Housing Department and DCT consider that they liaise and work together well, within an environment of restricted housing resources. Whilst the fundamental issue is lack of supply, there are a number of measures that could be taken within the existing framework:**

- Flexing allocations policy to give more weight to the need for extra bedrooms for ASD children
- Recognising the additional need for three bedroom homes in planning policy
- Avoiding where possible rehousing disabled children in lifted buildings
- More creative and proactive work on accessibility, design quality and standards for new build, including working with the housing associations and the private sector, who would be building S106 (or equivalent) properties for handover to housing associations.
- Ensuring that local authority voids are adapted for accessibility as far as possible
- Considering further the case for the development of community group home with facilities and opportunities for young adults with disabilities.