



City of Westminster

Housing & Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting:	4 th March 2024
Title:	Provision and Management of Temporary Accommodation
Report of:	Sarah Warman, Strategic Director Housing & Commercial Partnerships
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Cllr Liza Begum, Cabinet Member for Housing Services
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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Temporary Accommodation is the form of housing that Westminster City Council (WCC) provides to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and who are eligible for assistance under the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- 1.2 The issue of increasing demand for Temporary Accommodation (TA) is common across the capital with London Councils reporting annual homelessness presentations up by 19% across London at Q2 - 2023/24.
- 1.3 Westminster has seen an annual increase of 40% in households approaching the Housing Solutions Service for assistance and a 50% increase over the year in placements into TA. The main factors that contribute to the demand are:
 - The high rent levels in Westminster and the surrounding areas of London which are significantly above the local housing allowance (LHA) rates and affordability level for many of the people who are now presenting to the Housing Solutions Service (HSS).
 - The limited social housing in Westminster, which reduces the options for permanent rehousing and the move out of TA for many households.
 - The impact of welfare reforms, such as the benefit caps and the level of rent households can afford who claim benefits.
 - The increase in homelessness due to the cost-of-living crisis, landlords leaving the private sector market or increasing the costs of rent above the threshold families and individuals can afford.
- 1.4 Sourcing good quality private sector properties whether to prevent homelessness or for TA in the current market is very challenging. The demand for TA has outstripped the supply of suitable accommodation and has thus required the use of hotel and self-contained apartment accommodation charged on a nightly rate to meet the Council's statutory obligations.
- 1.5 As a result the Council is facing significant challenges and costs in providing TA and supporting the households to move on to permanent housing. The impact on TA occupation increasing during the year is due to several factors detailed in this report.
- 1.6 The provision of TA is a significant financial risk for council, because of the significant gap between the costs of TA currently and the income we receive through the government set TA subsidy regime.

- 1.7 The pressures outlined throughout this report have driven a significant in-year budget pressure for 2023/24. At Quarter 3 the outturn for TA was projected to be higher than budget by £26.1m (with a range of £25.0-£27.7m for the best- and worst-case scenarios).
- 1.8 The 2024/25 budget position is predicated on a need to source additional units of TA to meet the increased demands set out in the paper, end the use of expensive nightly booked corporate hotels and apartments and the loss of existing leased provision.
- 1.9 The Council is taking a proactive and strategic approach within a clearly defined governance structure to address the demand for TA and to improve the quality of accommodation and the prospects of the households in TA. This is detailed at section 7.7 of the report.
- 1.10 Our plan to address the TA pressures consists of the following main actions:
- Directly purchasing properties for use as TA as set out in section 7.3
 - Increasing the supply of suitable properties by working with private landlords, Registered Providers, and other partners to secure more leases and agreements for temporary accommodation.
 - Reducing the demand for TA by preventing homelessness and supporting households to access advice and support earlier in the process and to enable the current system of financial incentives to be broader and more accessible in the early prevention of homelessness to help households ahead of a crisis situation.
 - Improving at pace access to TA and social housing through our void processes, improving turnaround times of this accommodation being off-line and available to let this includes a review of our minimum standards to speed up void works.
 - Reducing the cost and length of stay in TA by managing the placements and allocations more efficiently and effectively. We will use a more transparent and fair system, prioritise the most vulnerable and urgent cases, and review the cases regularly.
- 1.11 This report provides an overview of the statutory duties of WCC to provide TA, the pressures from increasing demand and challenges in identifying and securing supply, the financial cost pressures to WCC and the plans for the future delivery.

Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

The report describes the supply and demand for Temporary Accommodation, how the accommodation is sourced, the make-up of the stock and standards delivered, and households supported.

The Committee is asked to consider how accommodation to meet housing need can best be delivered in the future and how the Committee continues to monitor and review our temporary accommodation strategy and practice, reviewing options that innovative and delivers sustainable solutions to meet the needs of our homeless households and to reduce the expenditure of this provision to the Council.

2. Policy Framework

2.1 The policy framework that determines how TA is allocated reflects the challenges in securing accommodation, which is affordable to households on low incomes, both in Westminster and across London. The Council's overall strategy remains to increase the supply of good quality accommodation available for households in housing need, maximising the availability of this in Westminster and across London.

2.2 WCC has a statutory duty to provide Temporary Accommodation (TA) to the following groups of people where the applicant's immigration status entitles them, and they are:

- People who are homeless and have a priority need, such as families with children, pregnant women, or people who are vulnerable due to age, disability, or other factors with no alternative accommodation that is reasonable to occupy
- People who are threatened with homelessness and have a priority need, and who are cooperating with WCC to prevent or relieve their homelessness.
- People who have a local connection to Westminster (or no local connection elsewhere)

2.3 WCC also has a statutory duty to provide suitable TA, which means that it must meet the needs and preferences of the household, be affordable, be a suitable size, in a reasonable location and comply with health and safety standards.

2.4 The function for determining homelessness duties and the provision of TA is carried out under contract by the Housing Solutions Service (HSS) delivered under contract by the Residential Management Group (RMG) whose parent company is Places for People.

2.5 When a household is placed into TA following a homeless application there are two types of accommodation provided.

- Stage 1 accommodation is generally offered to households who require somewhere else to live whilst HSS try to relieve their homelessness and pending an assessment of a homeless application. It is short-term emergency accommodation which allows for a comprehensive assessment of the household circumstances so that the Council can prevent homelessness wherever possible and consider whether it has a full statutory housing duty under housing legislation. Much of this emergency

accommodation the Council has had exclusive availability for some time with the owners. However, the pressures on supply of all accommodation has increasingly led to the use of short-term nightly booked accommodation for longer periods to meet emergency need and until suitable longer-term accommodation is available

- Stage 2 accommodation is longer term, more settled TA which is provided where we are unable to relieve homelessness and we have a main homelessness duty until the household moves into social housing. This accommodation is either leased from private sector owners through RP partners, directly from private management organisations or purchased directly by the Council.

2.6 The policies that determine how properties are procured and allocated are:

- The annual *Supply and Allocation of Social housing Report* reviews the demand for and supply of social rented housing and low-cost home ownership and considers supply and demand projections for the coming year, The report sets out projected supply and the proposed allocation of social housing for the next year. This reflects the demand from homeless households for social housing.
- The *Accommodation Placement Policy* prioritises homeless households in three location Bands (Band 1 is Westminster and adjoining boroughs, Band 2 is Greater London and Band 3 is anywhere outside Greater London.) Given the limited supply of properties the criteria for Bands 1 and 2 were based around health and welfare needs which were agreed with Adults, Children's Services and Counsel. This needs-based approach helps to ensure those with the highest welfare needs have the best chance of remaining in Westminster with every household having a Personal Housing Plan as a legal requirement.
- The *Accommodation Procurement Policy* sets out the challenges in obtaining sufficient TA, which is affordable to households (within benefit levels) and to the Council (within TA subsidy levels). It includes an action plan to provide sufficient accommodation to meet demand and the principles the Council will follow when procuring private sector properties.
- The Housing Allocations Policy is currently under review with a four-week consultation seeking feedback from residents, stakeholders and other interested parties. A revised policy will be launched later in 2024.

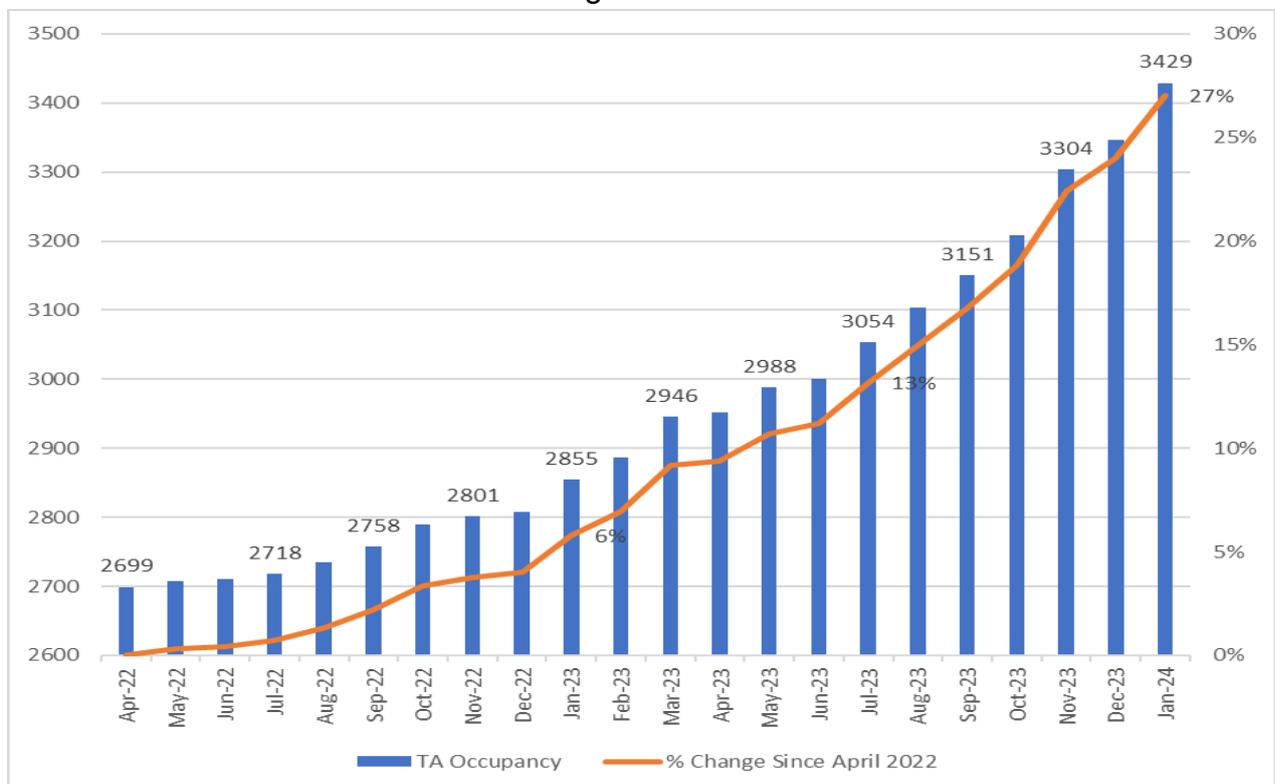
3. Temporary Accommodation Demand

3.1 Westminster continues to experience demand for accommodation as replicated across London as the epicentre of the national homelessness crisis. London Councils estimate that 1 in 50 Londoners are now homeless, with a rapidly escalating homelessness crisis being driven by structural changes within its private rented sector.

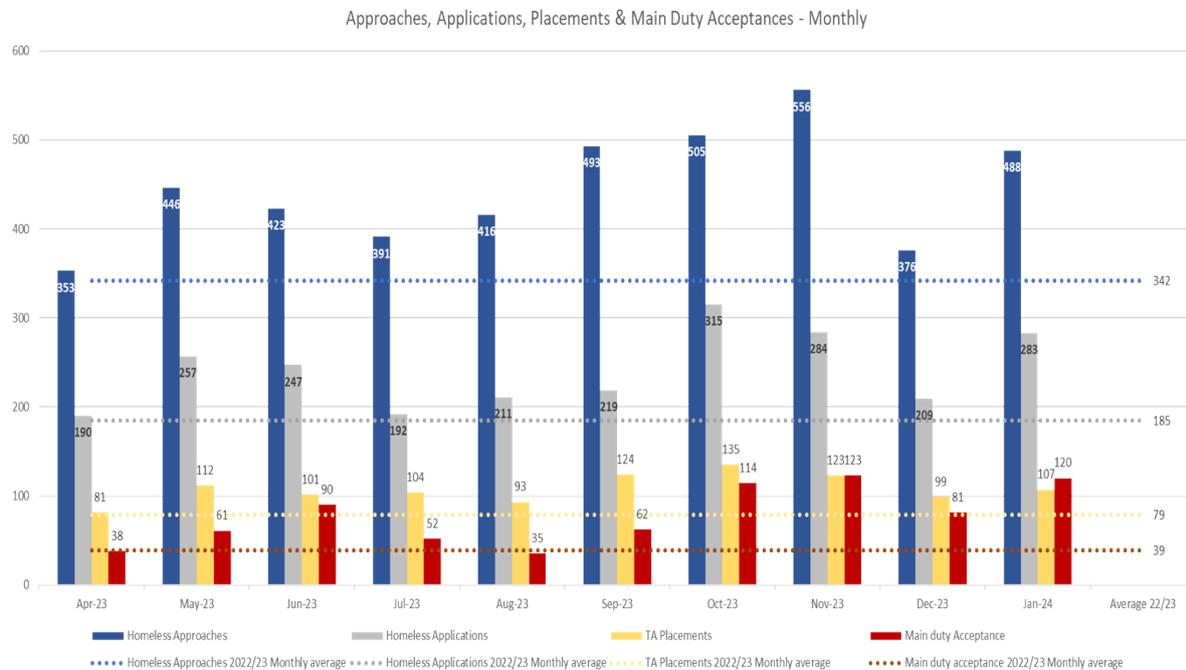
3.2 London Councils report that new private rented sector lets are down 41% compared to the pre-covid average (because tenants are staying longer in properties) and landlords appear to be exiting the market and rents are now more than 20% higher. In addition 17 boroughs surveyed reported that the number of landlords serving notice on TA properties had increased from less than 500 in September '21 to over 8000 in September '23.

3.3 The demand for TA is complex. Most, but not all, households who approach WCC as homeless are placed into TA. This excludes those cases where we can negotiate additional time to stay or prevent homelessness where someone is staying with friends or family or privately renting. In addition to this a very small number will not be provided TA pending a full decision, but this is exceptional.

3.4 The chart below sets out the change in total TA since 2022.



3.5 The information detailed at chart 1, highlights that in January 2024, TA numbers had reached 3429 households reflecting the increasing number of households in housing need who approach the Housing Solutions Service (HSS). This is currently a 27% increase on TA occupation compared to the same period in 2023.



3.6 The Chart above shows the number of households in terms of the numbers of households who approach HSS for assistance, the number of homeless applications, the number of placements into accommodation of new households and the number of households accepted as homeless.

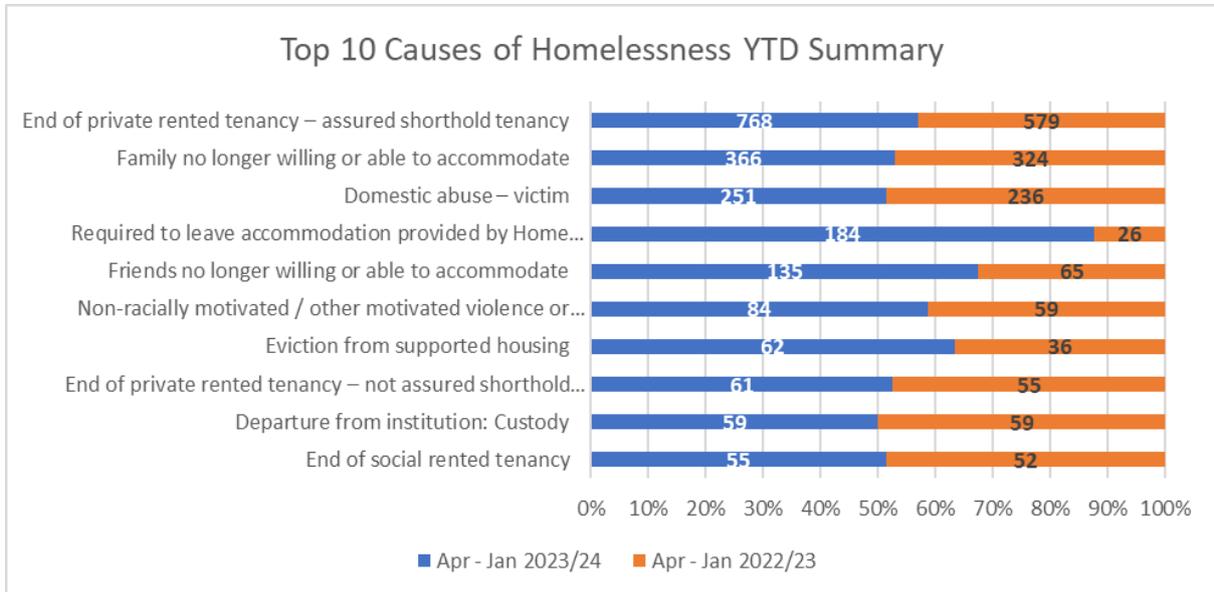
3.7 The dotted lines show the comparable numbers for the 2022-23 and highlights:

- **Approaches** are up 40% since last year on average each month.
- **Applications** are up 45% since last year on average each month.
- **Placements** are up 50% since last year on average each month.
- **Acceptances** are up 171% since last year on average each month.

3.8 The demand for TA has been increasing over the years, due to a number of factors such as welfare reforms, rising rents, lack of social housing etc. The three principal causes of homelessness remain as the loss of a private sector tenancy, friends, and family unable to continue to accommodate and households escaping domestic abuse.

3.9 The largest growth cause of homelessness is where individuals achieving

asylum have been asked to leave home office hotels. This now sits as the fourth main reason for homelessness approaches and has increased over the last year from 26 households a quarter homeless as a result of being required to leave Home Office accommodation to 184



3.10 The principal routes to move out of TA is into social housing. Properties are allocated in line with the Council’s Housing Allocations Scheme with applicants bidding for properties through Choice Based Lettings. The majority of moves of homeless households into social housing will be into smaller units of studios and one beds which accounts for over 60% of available lettings each year. During 22/23, 275 households with a homeless duty moved from TA into social housing and we project to complete 252 moves into social housing at the end of 2023/24. This is against the more than 600 households accepted as homeless during the year as set out in the chart above

3.11 A key focus of the work of HSS continues to be to prevent homelessness whether by challenging private sector evictions, supporting households to find and move into alternative accommodation, work to maintain existing living arrangements and using specialist supported housing services. Typically 50 households are prevented from becoming homeless each month.

4. Temporary Accommodation Supply

- 4.1 There are currently 3429 households occupying TA. These properties are managed by 32 different provider organisations with just over 40% in-borough.
- 4.2 As set out above the requirement for TA to meet the Council's statutory duties has increased significantly whilst the availability of private sector accommodation to meet this has reduced. This is true for local authorities across London who all report significant pressures across their homelessness services. London Councils recently reported to Council Leaders across London that while some of the policy interventions from the November 2023 Autumn Statement will help, much more needs to be done (at greater pace and scale) to address the growing crisis.
- 4.3 Most TA properties are leased for periods of 3-5 years and are generally renewed where demand continues, and properties meet standards. Legal services are currently working to update all agreements. The financial arrangements are set out in section 6 of the report with the principal advantage being that the Council has the ability to offer management and guaranteed rents (albeit below market levels.)
- 4.4 As set out above TA includes stage 1, short-term emergency accommodation used for households who present as homeless and require TA whilst their application is assessed. Much of this emergency accommodation the Council has had exclusive availability for some time with the owners. However, the pressures on supply of all accommodation has increasingly led to the use of short-term nightly booked accommodation, including commercial hotels and apartments for longer periods to meet emergency need and until suitable longer-term accommodation is available. This comprises c. 30% of TA stock
- 4.5 Stage 2 accommodation is longer term, more settled TA which is provided where we are unable to relieve homelessness and we have a main homelessness duty until the household moves into social housing. This accommodation is either leased from private sector owners through RP partners, directly from private management organisations or purchased directly by the Council.
- 4.6 The table below sets out the ownership arrangements for TA

Property Ownership*	In Borough		Out of Borough	
	Families	Singles	Families	Singles
Properties leased from Registered Providers (who have leased them from the PRS)	414	80	232	46
RP and voluntary sector owned**	325	88	52	0
Privately Sector Providers (e.g. directly owned blocks and individual properties and leases of single units)	111	134	998	566
Directly purchased units	152	11	147	12
Regeneration Areas	44	22	0	0
Total	1046	335	1429	624

* Total numbers of households in TA vary and the reports set out in this paper do show small differences in total numbers according to when the chart was developed; all are recent and there are no significant differences in total numbers

** There are also a range of specialist hostels and supported housing for rough sleepers, single homeless, people with mental health problems, young people etc. together with the street outreach services working with current rough sleepers to support them into accommodation. This hostel and supported housing provision is commissioned directly by the Council, using its own and central government funding and is not within the remit of this paper, reflecting its specialised role. At the same time every individual is able to make a homeless application to a local authority, each is assessed according to personal circumstances and many single people living in TA have long histories of homelessness.

4.7 Registered Providers that supply TA to the Council are principally:

- Notting Hill Genesis who primarily lease accommodation in borough from private landlords.
- A2 Dominion who own properties purchased generally in 1990s and early 2000s specifically for use as TA.
- Places for People through RMG as providers of the Council's Housing Solutions Service also have a specific function to source and manage some TA. As a result, RMG leases predominantly out of borough properties from private landlords for use as TA.

4.8 Private Management companies that either lease accommodation from the private sector for use as TA or own properties directly for use as TA, located principally out of the borough e.g., AJ Bush, Theori, Steff and Philips.

4.9 Owners of standalone blocks of accommodation, leased to the Council for TA, e.g. Centrica pension fund own Newman Street block, Abbotts emergency accommodation in Willesden.

4.10 Voluntary sector organisations who own properties for use as TA e.g., Look Ahead on Southwark Bridge Road.

4.11 The challenges of sourcing additional supply, the reduced availability of private sector accommodation for TA households to move into and the increasing

demand pressures set out above has led to increasing use of commercial apartment and hotel accommodation which currently comprises c. 285 households.

4.12 The table below lists the largest suppliers of longer-term TA which comprises over 75% of total stock.

Landlord	Units
Notting Hill Genesis	400
WCC Owned TA (inc. regen areas)	386
AJ Bush	350
A2 Dominion	348
Stef & Philips	274
RMG Ltd	243
Theori Management	239
Centrica	76
Housing Britain	73
Westminster Community Homes	55
Total	2444

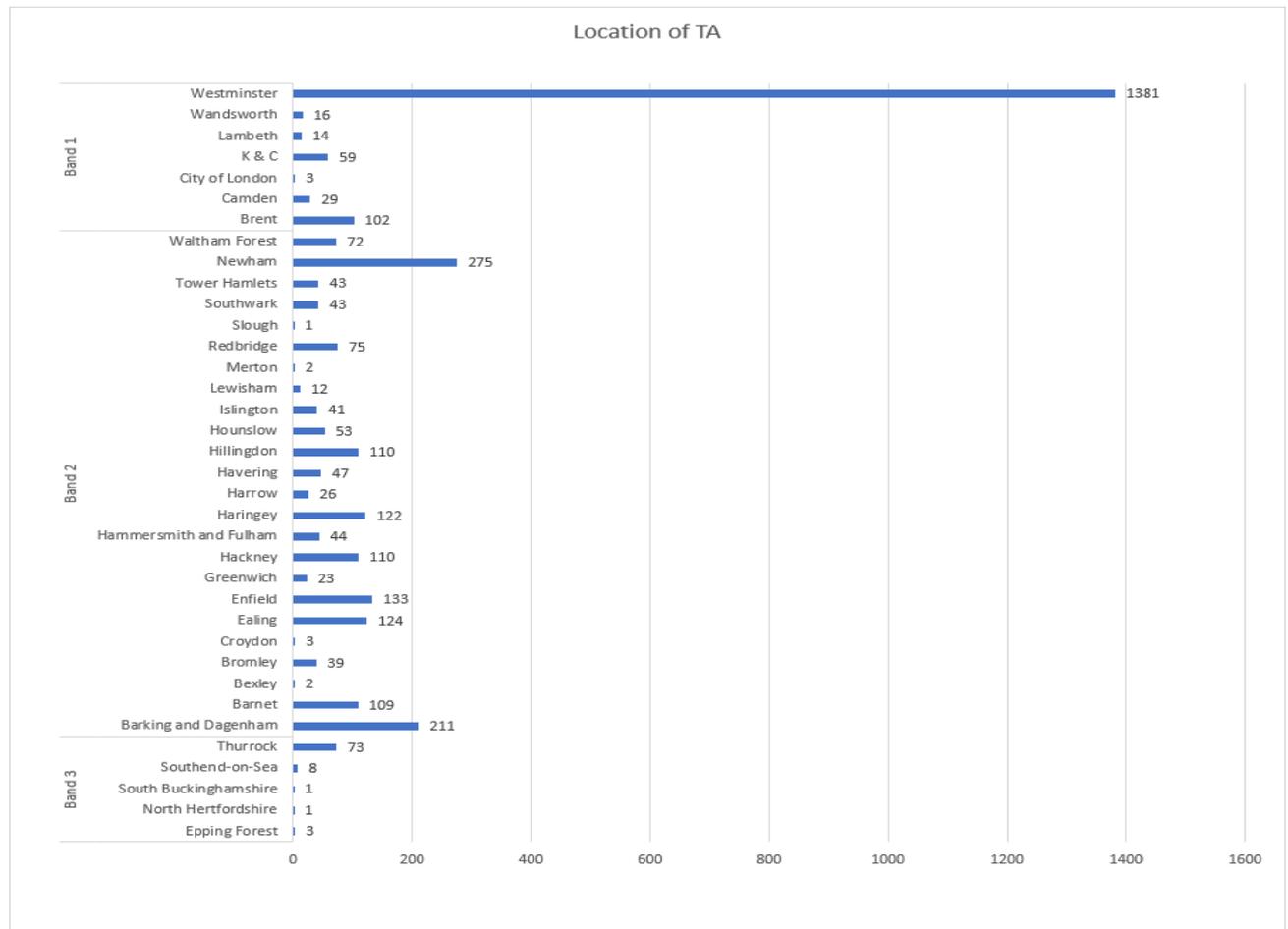
4.13 The following table breaks down current TA by property size. Most TA is family sized units, 2-bedroom properties accounting for over 1500 units and over 1100 properties being 3 bed or larger.

Bed size	Out of Borough	Westminster	Total
Studio/ 1 Bed	518	260	778
2 Bed	811	716	1527
3 Bed	427	303	730
4 Bed	222	78	300
5 Bed +	75	21	96
Total	2053	1378	3431

It is noted that 40% of Westminster's TA is located within the borough and the table below breaks down the current provision by borough. 85 properties are located outside of London, principally in Greys (in Thurrock, Essex) and have

been in use for over 7 years. The provision of accommodation outside of the borough is reflective of the limited availability of private sector housing, particularly family sized, available to be leased and purchased for use as TA. Where we place out of borough there is floating support scheme, set out in section 9

Temporary Accommodation by location



5. Temporary Accommodation Inspections and Standards

- 5.1 The provision of all TA must be suitable for homeless households in terms of size, cost, and location and is a statutory requirement for all local authorities. Every unit must comply with the TA Standards and all the TA Providers are required to meet these standards.
- 5.2 Once a property becomes void as a re-let and let, the TA Provider must confirm that the property complies with standards and as part of the procedure, a certificate of supply is submitted to Housing Solution Service including property details e.g. gas/ electric certificates etc. Providers are also required to take photographs/ videos of vacant properties before letting.
- 5.3 Once a property is let, there is a requirement that properties are inspected by the provider organisation on a regular basis. Such inspections require arrangements to be made with and the consent of the tenant and provides the opportunity both for the household to raise issues they have and for the supplier to identify and address issues.
- 5.4 The Council has adopted the Setting the Standard (STS) grading and inspection system as a Pan-London approach to ensure TA, specifically Bed and Breakfast (B&B), Hostels, Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) and studio apartments used by local authorities meet minimum quality standards. The project links together a dedicated central inspections team, with a purpose-built STS IT system to share data across the participating authorities.
- 5.5 The benefits of the programme include annual inspections ensuring that all properties meet a suitable and safe property standard across London, properties are suspended from use until the provider can demonstrate the requirements have been met, official accreditation with the Setting the Standard's guidelines and Performance reports on outcomes.
- 5.6 Officers also receive details of inspections undertaken across other boroughs which is helpful in seeing any quality issues elsewhere for organisations supplying Westminster with properties and whether issues with property quality are more widespread
- 5.7 As part of the HSS contract, there is a team of inspection officers that annually inspect properties per year. This team also responds to specific enquiries and complaints (in addition to the response by the provider organisation themselves).

5.8 In the first three quarters of the year, the HSS inspection team completed 624 inspections. Following the Setting the Standards property inspection grading system each property is graded A-E with grades D and E considered unacceptable and requiring urgent or immediate resolution. The outcome of these inspections are:

Grade A: 52

Grade B: 78

Grade C: 385

Grade D: 46

Grade E: 3

5.9 This means that 8% of inspections failed to meet acceptable standards. Of these failed inspections 21 units had mould and damp listed as the primary issue, 8 units (16%) had fire safety issues (for example free standing cookers missing chains to walls, missing smoke/ fire detectors); and the remainder (41%) were grouped under general property conditions such as window disrepair.

5.10 Where such disrepair is identified the provider organisation is required to complete the remedial works as a matter of urgency and where this is not completed and/or where it is not reasonable for the household to continue to reside at the property then the household will be moved to an alternative property

5.11 With the Setting the Standard inspections c. 25 – 30% of the total TA stock is inspected a year

6. Funding Temporary Accommodation

- 6.1 TA is managed as a trading account reflecting the model set by government for the provision of TA with the Council paying money to suppliers for accommodation and charging households rent for the property, which can be claimed if the household or individual are eligible from Housing Benefit.
- 6.2 The level of charges to households is through a government set formula of 90% of the 2011 Local Housing Allowance (LHA) subject to a cap of £500 per week. up to 2017 this formula also included a management fee allocation of £40 per week, reflecting the costs of property management. This is now paid through the Homelessness Prevention Grant, which is ring fenced for homeless prevention and TA management activities and is annually paid in lump sum by the Department for Housing Levelling up and Communities.
- 6.3 This formula has remained unchanged since 2011 notwithstanding the increase in private sector market and management costs. As a result, given the statutory duty to provide suitable accommodation and the challenges of sourcing this within the current market, there is a trading deficit on TA, which is a direct cost to the general fund.
- 6.4 When negotiating cost levels with suppliers, the core market advantage the Council has is the guaranteed income from a public body. However, the increasing strength of the private rented sector market has eroded this advantage over time with property owners having a wider choice of tenants.
- 6.5 In addition, larger schemes which provide accommodation for several households e.g. Newman Street which provides 76 self-contained studio units for single households, and Frampton Street (managed by Noting Hill Genesis) with the provision of 24-hour staff cover, reflecting the complex needs of the single homeless and the importance of providing a safe environment. Provision of such management is at an additional cost to the Council.
- 6.6 Most properties are leased for periods of 3-5 years and then renewed. The market has made it increasingly challenging to renew leases on existing properties at the same or on similar terms as when a lease was originally taken out, given the alternatives that owners have and the level of private sector market rents. There are significant challenges procuring affordable TA which meets the needs of larger households, particularly when they have mobility issues.

7 Financial context and strategy for 24/25

7.1 The budget for Temporary Accommodation (TA) in 2023/24 is £17.2m. This is broken down as follows:

Funding Source	£m
General Fund Budget	12.3
Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG)	4.9
TOTAL	17.2

7.2 Westminster uses approximately two thirds of its annual HPG grant allocation to fund the provision of TA (along with any one-off in-year grant allocations).

7.3 The pressures outlined throughout this report have driven a significant in-year budget pressure for 2023/24. At Quarter 3 the outturn for TA was projected to be higher than budget by £26.1m (with a range of £25.0-£27.7m for the best- and worst-case scenarios). This is equivalent to gross expenditure of £93.2m (with £49.5m being recovered in rent).

7.4 As part of its Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), the Council took steps to mitigate the impact of increased spend on TA in order to meet its statutory duty to set a balanced budget for the next financial year (2024/25). This required an assessment of future demand along with the development of a supply strategy to help the Council manage the cost of TA.

7.5 The 2024/25 budget position is predicated on a need to source additional units of TA to meet the increased demands set out in the paper, end the use of expensive nightly booked corporate hotels and apartments and the loss of existing leased provision.

7.6 Taken in conjunction with the existing pressures in 2023/24, the assumptions above require growth of **£38m** to be added to the General Fund budget contribution for TA in 2024/25. This reduces to **£32m** in 2025/26 (due to the full-year effect of exiting high-cost supply arrangements).

7.7 The assumptions above represent a challenging set of deliverables that will need to be closely monitored. In response to this a Temporary Accommodation Strategic Board has been established chaired by the Strategic Director of Housing and Commercial Partnerships with support from the Director of Housing Needs. Membership includes Executive Director, Finance and Resources, Director of Regeneration and Investment and Director of Assets and Investment.

7.8 Temporary Accommodation Supply Pipeline

As above the Council is committed to preventing and reducing homelessness, improving the outcomes for the households in TA and avoiding the use of expensive commercial hotels and apartments. Some of the activities that the Council is undertaking to achieve this include:

7.9 Acquisitions

WCC has been directly purchasing properties for use as TA since 2014:

- Since 2014 289 properties have been purchased, 159 in borough and 130 out of borough at £112.4m
- The 2021 – 27 programme, has been significantly expanded to purchase a further (up to) 270 properties. This brings the total investment to £178.3m, this includes an £85m uplift in budget agreed in 23/24. The number of properties has been calculated based on market analysis carried out by consultants of the available pool of properties (segmented by bedroom size and price point). Using the information and considering anticipated refurbishment (void) costs the Council has determined the number of properties it can purchase at a given price point to achieve the target acquisition total. It should be noted that this target is heavily caveated by changing market conditions and should be adjusted for the inflationary pressures we have observed since the analysis has been carried out.
- All properties to be purchased in or near to Westminster with the catchment area being defined in the [Cabinet Member Report \(decision date 29 December 2023\)](#). Other properties or bulk purchase opportunities can be considered and funded by this budget but will be subject to a separate consultation process with the Cabinet Member for Housing Services.
- The Acquisitions Team is on course to purchase over 65 homes this financial year (2023-24) and a target of 200 homes available to rent in 2024/25
- To support this, procurement for a new void contractor began in late December 2024. Subject to market interest and acceptable bids, a new contractor will be appointed in late April/early May 2024. In the short term, the team (with procurement advice and support) have made use of the Term Partnering contract in place for the Capital Programme to instruct Axis Europe to undertake void works to make the homes purchased occupiable as soon as possible
- Purchase and void work costs require close management to ensure value for money. Market conditions for purchase remain changeable and scarcity of personnel and materials are driving void works costs up

- Aligned to this, a submission for GLA grant funding shas been submitted to support the purchase of 42 homes. Formal confirmation is expected in February 2024.

7.10 Use of Vacant Regeneration Area Properties

- 99 properties owned by the Council have been identified which are suitable for TA placements on our regeneration sites. These properties are anticipated to be available during 24/25. This accommodation is anticipated to be vacant for at least two years until the sites require clearance and an important source of accommodation to support the pipeline of TA.

7.11 Existing Partnerships

- Through the expansion of provision through existing partnerships the target is to achieve a further 150 properties during 2024/25.
- This will be through a combination of commercial hotel suppliers and registered providers expanding their portfolios on behalf of the Council.

7.12 New Partnerships

- Commercial estate agents are being targeted to secure 75 new leasehold properties during 24/25 with a particular focus on high street estate agents who WCC have not targeted previously.
- Once a household moves into this accommodation WCC will secure a package of support to be provided by existing providers to ensure the tenancy is sustained.

8. The provision of support to households living in Temporary Accommodation

- 8.1 The aim is to secure and place as many households as possible in or close to the borough in line with the TA Placement Policy. The Out of Borough Support Pilot to families in Stage 1, Temporary Accommodation (TA) focuses on the immediate needs of the family caused by relocation. The service will look to focus on issues that may place the security and stability of the family and household at risk, for example, financial capacity, physical and mental health challenges, and domestic abuse but also build familiarity with their new surroundings from locations of supermarkets to localised support.
- 8.2 The offer is designed to develop better multidisciplinary working through the expertise of our existing Housing Solutions Service (HSS) and our contracted Floating Support Service (FSS), ensuring appropriate support to residents in TA as they adjust to their new circumstances enabling them to live more independently.
- 8.3 The household will be supported by a designated family coordinator, who will assess and review the early information of the households' circumstances, consider the cumulative impacts of their placement in TA, location and information relating to their homeless approach, why they have presented to WCC as homeless and to develop a plan to support the settling in process from the offer of TA.
- 8.4 For some households, signposting to local amenities and voluntary services such as CAB may be adequate at this stage of the assessment, but this process may also highlight the cumulative factors of the family's needs, including issues such as travel, health, language barriers, risks of violence and domestic abuse encountered by the adult, all of which together may warrant the family to receive a referral to the SHP Floating Support Service with their consent. If the offer of Floating Support is taken up this will enable increase communication, including face to face and additional support to be put in place ensuring a single point of contact for the family to ensure their support offer is consistent and responsive.
- 8.5 A personal budget -is made available to families to ensure some additional expenses encountered when placement out of borough will be met, and the council can respond to individual circumstances in the early days and weeks of the placement. This is not a financial payment to households but instead provides vouchers to be utilised at a variety of supermarkets. This is to ensure the household's benefits and income is not affected by this source of financial support that will be made available.

8.6 The understanding of the family's circumstances is key to coordinating and recommending actions, so that we can tailor services more easily to the needs of each family. The personalise support can include:

- Provide budgeting advice and income maximisation, including support to obtain Housing Benefit
- Support to access grants and other funding to help families to make applications including food banks, fuel costs etc.
- Support to claim relevant welfare benefits including Universal Credit
- Options for local schools, new placements for children and access to breakfast and after school arrangements for working families.
- Support to access new GPs, NHS registration and services.
- Signposting to voluntary and faith organisations
- Families are allocated a single key point of contact through the coordinator in the HSS to support them while their homelessness application is investigated by HSS, and they settle into Stage 1 TA accommodation.

8.7 Of those that have been placed, 254 families have been contacted by the family coordinator that otherwise would not have been contacted to discuss their personal circumstances, rather than just the progression of their homelessness case work. Of which 73% of those families had two or more contacts to ensure that their support was reviewed on an ongoing basis. There has been in excess of 500 proactive communications to families in Temporary accommodation.

8.8 To address this we have issued £39,500 in vouchers to 217 families at an average of £182 per household. These vouchers have been instrumental to support increasing food costs and provide some respite to families that have incurred additional costs elsewhere.

8.9 Further to this the Housing Solutions Service has strengthened links with Westminster's Housing Benefit officers to make sure that Housing Benefit is in place in all eligible cases.

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact:

Heather Clarke – Director of Housing Needs; hclarke@westminster.gov.uk

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Background Paper: Council's medium-term plan for the next four years and proposes the budget for the 2024/25 financial year.