

Housing Strategy 2021 - 2026 A home for all



Introduction

Islington Council is committed to make Islington fairer, creating a place where everyone, whatever their background, has the same opportunity to reach their potential and enjoy a good quality of life. We are doing this through our four priorities: homes, safety, jobs and opportunity and environment.

Despite the challenges which the COVID-19 pandemic and continuing government cuts have brought to our community, our vision remains the same: to make Islington fairer.

Good quality, safe and affordable housing is a vital component to live well and we will continue to strive for decent secure and genuinely affordable homes for all.

We have delivered over 800 new genuinely affordable homes for local people and built the largest number of council homes in Islington for 30 years, but we know that the shortage of genuinely affordable housing continues to be a real concern for Islington residents and we share those concerns.

- We will continue our ambitious building programme, ensuring new council homes and other new affordable homes are prioritised for local people
- We will continue to be an excellent landlord and freeholder to over 36,000 homes
- We will continue to invest in our buildings and keep residents safe, ensuring we comply with the regulatory framework for building safety
- We will crack down on rogue landlords and ensure that residents living in our own housing receive a top class service.

The strategy context

We are delivering our services within a national context of major cuts to public spending, including housing investment, welfare and housing reform which present significant challenges to delivering our local priorities.

Spring 2020 brought about an unprecedented time for all Councils across England and Wales when faced with the Covid 19 global pandemic and, like other boroughs, the focus for Islington moved rapidly to crisis response mode. In housing, we focussed our efforts on Everybody In and adapted our housing services where possible.

Since the publication of our last Housing Strategy, there have been further changes to the national and local policy landscape, including the introduction of Universal Credit and the Homelessness Reduction Act. England and in particular London is facing a housing crisis with the lack of genuinely affordable housing and the price of renting and buying

increasing at a rate that outpaces the cost of living and real household incomes.

Welfare reform, particularly the implementation of Universal Credit, has made it more difficult for our tenants to sustain their tenancies. We know that residents are finding it harder to pay their rent and manage their finances since the changes and while responding to the emerging needs of our residents during the pandemic, we have recognised that vulnerable and disadvantaged groups were most heavily impacted and disproportionately affected by the imposed lockdown restrictions.

Brexit coming into force in January 2021 brings additional uncertainty to the operating landscape through disruption to business supply chains and potentially affecting the financial prosperity of our communities.

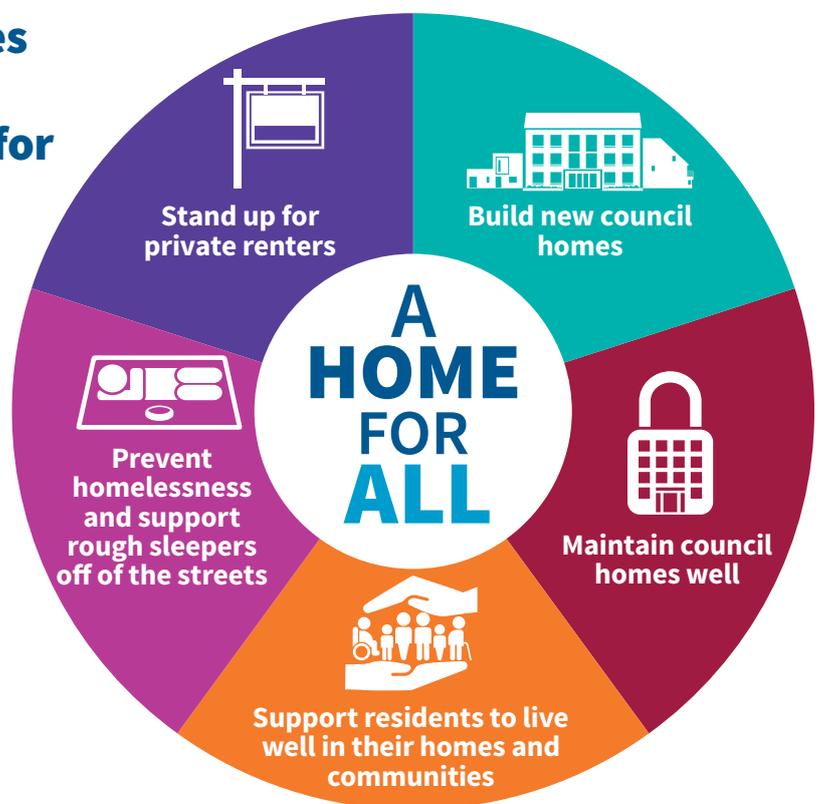
The Grenfell Tower Inquiry is still underway. We are committed to work with our residents to implement the recommendations resulting from the vital lessons learnt from the fire and continue to ensure we comply with the regulatory framework for building safety.

The council is a landlord to over 40% of Islington’s population who live in social housing, the third highest percentage in London and comprising more than 36,000 properties. Our **Allocation Scheme** (which can be viewed at: www.islington.gov.uk/housing/finding-a-home/council-housing/how-we-allocate-housing) outlines how our social housing is allocated ensures that those who are in most housing need, for example who are severely overcrowded or whose home is unsuitable for health reasons or who are homeless are housed as quickly as possible. We remain committed to securing lifetime tenancies, as this provides settled homes and sustainability for communities.

This strategy is underpinned by our key corporate strategic programmes to transform the way the council works with the community, rebuilding a strong local economy, building homes for our residents and striving for a greener future in which systemic racism is rooted out.

Our Housing Strategy is supported by an Action Plan and is aligned with the Housing Business Plan and the Housing Asset Management Strategy. Islington’s Core Strategy sets out the strategic vision for the delivery of affordable housing, employment spaces, community facilities, the improvement of the built environment and climate change. Our ambition and priorities align with the Mayor’s London Housing Strategy that wants every Londoner to have access to a good quality home that meets their needs and at a price they can afford.

Our five housing priorities support the council's commitment to fairness for local people

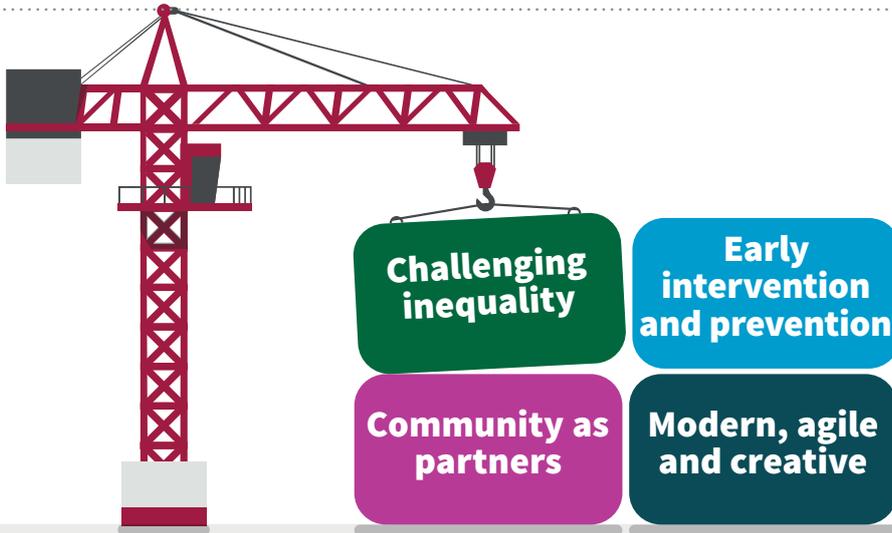


Housing is committed to the ‘Make a Stand’ pledge

‘Make a Stand’ is a public commitment to take action to support victims of domestic abuse. The safety of survivors and their children are dealt with quickly, sensitively and effectively and are signposted to appropriate specialist agencies. It is embedded in our housing policies and supported by senior managers across housing.

Building Team Islington

The council's four principles focus the way we are working to achieve our housing priorities: Challenging inequality, community as partners, early intervention and prevention, modern, agile and creative.



Challenging inequality

- Challenge inequality, racism and injustice through Housing's position as an employer, strategic leader and service provider / commissioner as set out in the council's corporate Challenging Inequality Programme.
- Empower residents to look after their own homes and be active in their community by providing access to advice and interventions relating to housing, jobs and money and health and wellbeing.
- Improve how we use our housing data so we can match services to housing need.

Community as partners

- Work with the London Fire Brigade to ensure all homes in Islington are safe.
- Consult with residents and other stakeholders, such as tenant organisations throughout the new build process.
- Engage with residents and Experts by Experience to inform and improve our services and priorities.

Early intervention and prevention

- Build and promote resilience in our communities through prevention and early intervention and working with statutory and voluntary partners in the community.

- Work with the London Fire Brigade and jointly with housing providers to ensure all homes in Islington are safe.
- Enable residents to remain in their homes by maximising use of Disabled Facilities Grants in the private sector.

Modern, agile and creative

- Effectively invest in and manage our council housing to provide safe and secure homes, offering our residents value for money and quality by bringing our services in-house; support the council's Net Zero Carbon Programme through improving energy efficiency in our housing stock.
- Adapt to the needs of our residents through our ways of working and by streamlining our internal processes, using technology to deliver an excellent service to our residents and tailored services for those who need additional support.
- Enable our customers to self-serve as much as possible and support digital connectivity on our estates through high speed broadband connection.
- Ensure that we support the council's wealth building priority by having an active input into Islington's economy through our housing apprenticeship scheme and the use of local suppliers.



Priority 1: Build new council homes - increase the supply of genuinely affordable homes in Islington

Our ambitions

To turbocharge the building of new genuinely affordable homes in the borough, including 550 council homes for rent providing new homes for our residents and making improvements to our estates that benefit everyone in the locality.

To work with residents and give local people first dibs on new homes through our local lettings policy.

To use our existing housing stock efficiently by helping our tenants downsize to more suitable properties.

Why this matters

We know that a secure and decent place to call home plays a huge part in both wellbeing and long-term life chances. Many households waiting for council housing will not be made an offer of accommodation because of the lack of supply.

As demand for social housing is high and increasing it is important for us to make the best use of the homes that we already have.

Overcoming the challenges

Islington is a small, densely populated borough and land is scarce and expensive so we maximise our opportunities to build and fund new social homes by using our housing estate land.

There is extreme pressure on genuinely affordable housing resulting from the unaffordability of the private housing market. This leads to a considerable number of households living in unsuitable housing and unmet demand for social housing as characterised by a council waiting list of over 14,500 households. Building new homes and supporting our under-occupying tenants to downsize to more suitable properties helps free up and increase the numbers of family sized homes to help alleviate the nearly 3,000 households, we know are in overcrowded housing.

Building is disruptive for residents, so we consult throughout the new build process, use innovative construction methods to minimise disturbance and make sure that schemes improvements benefit all estate residents.

Achieving our aims

We have built or supported the delivery of over 800 new genuinely affordable homes for local people and now we are building or supporting others to deliver over 1,900 genuinely affordable homes: 550 will be new council homes for rent by 2022 - the biggest new build programme in Islington for a generation.

New homes are being built across the borough - we are building around 40 each year now and plan to grow to around 150 each year through our ambitious programme.

We build homes to a high standard, including homes for resident with particular needs and we have won design awards for our developments. Our local lettings policy gives local residents priority for the new homes we build, particularly those living in homes that does not meet their current needs.

We work creatively with an emphasis on design to improve the locality - building new community centres, improving green spaces by designing out antisocial behaviour, adding cycle parking, providing play spaces and improving lighting.

We are supporting the council's net Zero Carbon Programme by reducing emissions in our developments – including renewable energy sources, meeting high insulations standards and installing efficient heating and hot water systems.



Our under-occupation scheme has helped over 700 council tenants to move into smaller, more manageable homes releasing family-sized properties for overcrowded households.

Over the past 5 years, we have recovered 584 properties through investigating tenancy fraud and illegal occupation to ensure that social housing is used fairly and reallocated the recovered properties to families in housing need.

Building a Fairer Islington: The Redbrick Estate – award winning homes



Award:

2019 The Planning Awards
Planning for Affordable
Housing.

We work with architects to create high quality homes and communities for our residents. On the Redbrick Estate we are building 55 new homes for 191 local people all for social rent including 6 fully accessible homes.

The development also provided a new community centre, improved safety and lighting across the estate, more trees, a youth centre, a new dental surgery, and connected the estate to a cheaper, greener local heat network.



We have placed **18** Islington residents onto new build apprenticeships. **1** apprentice will be employed for every **10** new homes we build. Our apprentices are Islington residents and receive training during their paid 12 months apprenticeship.



Priority 2: Maintain council homes well - providing safe, comfortable homes and estates

Our ambitions

To invest in our estates and buildings providing safe and comfortable homes for our current and future residents.

To provide a high quality, in-house responsive repairs service to our tenants and good value home ownership services to our leaseholders.

Why this matters

We are a landlord to over 36,000 Islington households and are committed to providing our tenants and leaseholders with good quality, affordable services. We manage over 25,200 tenanted and 10,700 leasehold properties with estimates that 40% of these are sublet. The council's PFI partner, Partners for Improvement in Islington manage over 6,200 tenanted and leasehold properties and a further 2,900 properties are managed by Tenant Management Organisations.

We know that the standard of the repairs and maintenance service has the biggest effect on tenants' quality of life. Residents are also concerned about the safety of their homes and anti-social behaviour in their communities.

Only 13% of the borough's land is green space, the second lowest proportion of any local authority in the country.

Overcoming the challenges

Government policy over the last decade has inflicted significant cuts to our budgets and we have to prioritise how we use our limited resources in the most effective and efficient way. We are committed to keeping our residents safe, adhering to regulations regarding fire safety, gas servicing, electrical and water systems testing programmes alongside investing in and improving our council housing stock for current and future residents. Meeting enhanced safety standards will increase the challenge of providing services on a tight budget.

The council has committed to taking a lead in tackling the climate emergency through the achievement of net Carbon Zero in Islington and the homes we own are a key component of this commitment which should benefit our residents both now and in the future.

We deliver our own repairs service to ensure we can deliver high quality, responsive services and value to our residents and we are in the process of bringing 4,000 street properties under direct council management by 2022.

Achieving our aims

We work with the London Fire Brigade to continue our programme of fire safety improvements and to comply with all of the recommendations from the public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire.

We communicate with our residents to help them stay safe in their homes and carry out estate inspections of communal areas to keep our homes and estates hazard free, where necessary by enforcing tenancy conditions and by regularly visiting our vulnerable residents to ensure they are safe.

Our strategic programmes set out to tackle damp problems and improve the energy efficiency of our buildings.

We reduce fear of crime through the operation of CCTV and concierge services and aim to reduce levels of crime and anti-social behaviour on our estates through intervention and partnership with the police and local community. Our community safety teams work to tackle knife crime and take stronger action on perpetrators of gang violence and domestic violence and abuse (DVA). We will support survivors of DVA, harassment and gang violence and are seeking to demonstrate this by attaining the best-practice housing DAHA accreditation across our services, our commitment to tackling this underreported crime.



Priority 3: Support residents to live well in their homes and communities

Our ambitions

To build strong, meaningful and person-centred relationships with our residents, enabling staff to intervene early, appropriately and effectively and to provide specialist interventions for those with multiple and complex needs.

To work with colleagues across specialisms and alongside our voluntary community partners to create sustainable resilient communities, where people have a sense of belonging and feel that they want to participate in their local community.

Why this matters

Our housing and estates have an important role in shaping healthy places, preventing ill health, supporting residents into work and tackling child poverty. As a large landlord, we have an opportunity to act to provide intervention and support to our tenants in the life challenges they face and we work within four themed areas to support and deliver our housing management services to council tenants and leaseholders: Intervention; belonging; health and wellbeing; jobs and money.

Our commitment to fairness includes providing a safe place for all and we work alongside our partners to champion diversity and support the council's Challenging Inequality programme.

Overcoming the challenges

Household incomes, particularly those of lower income families, have failed to keep up with increases in the cost of living over recent years. Additionally, welfare reform, in particular the implementation of Universal Credit and benefit freeze, has made it more difficult for our residents to pay their rent and manage their finances. Tenants and residents most at risk of financial exclusion, homelessness or loss of employment are supported to maximise their income, move in to work or towards work, sustain their tenancies and access their legal rights through high quality independent and impartial advice.

Our staff recognise where we can intervene to help our residents remain independent and maintain a good quality of life by; preventing accidents in the home, increase mobility, avoid costs of residential care, prevent falls and other health interventions, and reducing repeat spend on numerous hospital admissions.

Achieving our aims

We are improving and expanding our online services, making it easier for residents to interact with us and at the same time we are developing and creating apprenticeships and training opportunities for young people with our housing contractors and supporting care leavers on their journey to independence. This joins up council, NHS and voluntary sector services in local neighbourhoods to address more complex issues experienced by residents.

We have redesigned our Homes and Community Service to meet the varying needs of our residents with our intensive tier offering a higher level of support for those in crisis or with more complex issues to resolve, whilst our targeted team deliver everyday functions quickly and efficiently for residents. We will use these daily contacts that we have with our residents to Make Every Contact Count and are embedding this in our way of working, so we can recognise and act when loneliness or social isolation are impacting on people's lives. This approach enables us to both safeguard and support our most vulnerable tenants whilst providing efficient transactional services.

We are developing a programme of resident engagement to seek feedback from service users and use Experts by Experience to help co-design our services and ensure that our residents have a voice in their housing service.

We are helping tenants across the private and social housing sectors to understand the welfare changes and their impact on them. Helping maximise incomes, provide access to help and advice. We are supporting the council's commitment to jobs and opportunity for all by supporting local residents to move into work through the iWorks programme and creating apprenticeships and training opportunities for young people with our housing contractors and supporting care leavers on their journey to independence.

We are building strong links with health agencies to help reduce accidents in the home and improve housing conditions for older people. This will include using the disabled adaptations programme to encourage independent living and expanding our Trusted Assessor Scheme with occupational health and the repairs service to improve housing conditions for older people.

We fund the VCS Advice Alliance and other voluntary groups to ensure we have a sustainable model of VCS delivery.

We are revitalising community centres across Islington, ensuring that they are attractive, well-managed spaces, valued by the local community. Working with voluntary and community sector organisations, we will ensure these community centres host high quality services, activities and events that reflect the needs and interests of Islington's diverse community. This provision will enable residents to come together with a common purpose, improve wellbeing, learn new skills, get help and support, promote social connection, and help people to resolve difficulties.

We are initialising programmes to implement 5G networks and fast broadband connections to our housing estates.



Delivering our fire safety responsibilities

We take our responsibility for our residents' safety very seriously and follow all the guidance issued by the Government and London Fire Brigade to ensure that properties in Islington are compliant with all of the recommendations from the Grenfell Tower public inquiry and any changes to building regulations.

Taking action – resolved significant fire safety issues including removal of ACM, consideration of potential risks, costs and issues of likely changes to regulations so that we are prepared for any changes in legislation, piloting new safety approaches.

Investing in our buildings - £74m to improve the fire safety of our buildings by installing interlinked fire alarms, emergency lighting works, front entrance and communal doors, bin storage areas and an annual electrical testing programme.

Communicating with residents – we publish our Fire Risk Assessments on the council's website and use a variety of communication methods

to get information to our residents including targeted work with vulnerable residents.

Working in partnership – work with Partners for Improvement in Islington who manage street properties and housing associations to encourage good practice. Monitor compliance of the landlords of other tall buildings across the social and private sector to ensure they are taking action to remediate safety issues where required.

Providing solutions - support residents and visitors to keep communal areas clear and safe by providing 82 estate cycle storage facilities and converting 9 garages into 27 storage sheds.



Priority 4: Prevent homelessness and support rough sleepers

Islington had seen a reduction in main duty homeless acceptances over the five years since the last strategy (168 in 2018/19) until 2019/20 where there was an increase to 302. The acceptances are coupled with successful preventions of 341 in 2018/19 and 511 in 2019/20.

Prior to the **Everybody In** programme over the pandemic, we maintained a relatively low level of rough sleepers in comparison to our neighbouring boroughs through positive partnership working.

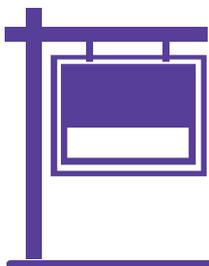
We take a preventative approach to dealing with homelessness and work jointly across council departments, across the sub region and with partners to provide tailored support and advice for people who are homeless and help them to find secure accommodation; prevent homelessness and work towards eliminating rough sleeping.

Our teams in Housing Needs work with homeless households with a clear objective to ensure households spend no more time in temporary accommodation than necessary and we work to break the cycle of rough sleeping with people who often have complex needs through our Housing First project.

We have a separate [Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy](#) which builds on collective experience and achievements to date and sets out how we intend to maintain our solid foundations, to support the further development of our capacity to meet the challenges we face, within available resources.

Our support for homeless people

Over the last 2 years, our award-winning early intervention service has prevented **529** households in North London from becoming homeless, by taking referrals from concerned GPs, social workers and others in the community and supporting residents to get their tenancies back on track.



Priority 5: Standing up for private renters

Our ambitions

We want to see a private sector that operates good standards of management and provides good quality affordable accommodation to meet current and future housing needs. Our vision is of a private housing sector that people choose to live in rather than a sector that people become forced to live in.

Why this matters

The private sector makes up a third of Islington's housing and must contribute to the availability of high quality, safe, warm and well-maintained homes. Demand for housing across London is at an all-time high. Many landlords are good but poor property conditions and poor services from landlords and unfair renting practices continue to be a significant problem to private renters in Islington

The health and wellbeing of people, particularly vulnerable people can be improved through ensuring housing in the private sector is in good condition and safe.

Overcoming the challenges

We can take action against landlords where there are issues around the condition or safety of the property; over 500 complaints are received each year and our actions result in the improvement of over 300 private rented homes each year. We build relationships with private landlords who work with the council to improve housing conditions, to let homes at affordable rent levels and work with the private owners, including houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs), as well as other social landlords of residential buildings to ensure that the buildings meet fire safety requirements using our enforcement powers where necessary. For example over the 4 year period from September 2014 to August 2018, a total of 698 enforcement notices were served in relation to private rented sector properties.

We will tackle rogue landlords, using our powers and publicising successful enforcement action to communicate to landlords and reassure tenants that poor standards and unacceptable behaviour will be addressed.

Achieving our aims

We have introduced a borough-wide HMO property licensing scheme and single ward selective licensing scheme for all privately rented properties. Going forward our intention is to build upon the success of these schemes by extending selective licensing to other areas of the borough where evidence dictates this is the most appropriate course of action.

Our property licensing schemes will create a clear and level playing field for the private rented sector across Islington and contribute to a clearer regulatory framework across London where market conditions attract rogue landlords to operate, directly supporting the Mayor of London's Housing Strategy.

We will continue to promote high standards of professionalism amongst landlords and managing agents through our Landlords Forum, Islington Lettings and Islington Residential our lettings agencies and accreditation schemes and stand up for private renters through a **#BetterRenting** campaign.

We will monitor standards and take action against rogue landlords and letting agents and any poorly performing housing associations using available enforcement tools and legislation. Where appropriate we will work with the police to address criminal behaviour by landlords and publicise successful enforcement action.

We will publicise the support available to private renters. We will assist them to take action to recover rent through the first tier property tribunal when their landlord or managing agent doesn't comply with the applicable law. We will work with resident organisations to help them identify private tenants who may require support and we will provide outreach services to tenants helping to ensure that those tenants living in poor conditions that aren't able to come forward themselves are found and supported.

We will provide move on options for people in supported housing and provide access to floating support services to help tenants sustain their tenancies. We will continue to reduce the number of people in temporary accommodation and increase supported choice to help people move into a permanent home.

We will support landlords and tenants through our grants programme to make an impactful difference on properties in the borough and bring empty properties back into use.

We will monitor standards and take action against rogue landlords and letting agents and any poorly performing housing associations using available enforcement tools and legislation. Where appropriate we will work with the police to address criminal behaviour by landlords and publicise successful enforcement action.

Tracking our progress and involving our residents

The success of our strategy depends on delivering the accompanying action plan which we will continually track and amend if we need to respond to the council's priorities related to housing and our residents' housing needs.

This strategy was developed just before the Covid 19 lockdown and we have not been able to develop the consultation plan with our residents as we would have hoped. To ensure that our residents views are taken on board, we are now taking a rolling approach to our consultation by focussing with different resident and community groups using more non-traditional and more innovative mechanisms.

The results from this rolling consultation will feed into our ongoing action plan review and may also lead to updates to this Housing Strategy document.

We will be strengthening our focus on performance and resident satisfaction as required by the Social Housing Regulator introduced in the recently published Social Housing White Paper.



Do you need this information in another language or reading format such as Braille, large print, audio or Easy Read? Please contact 020 7527 2000.

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