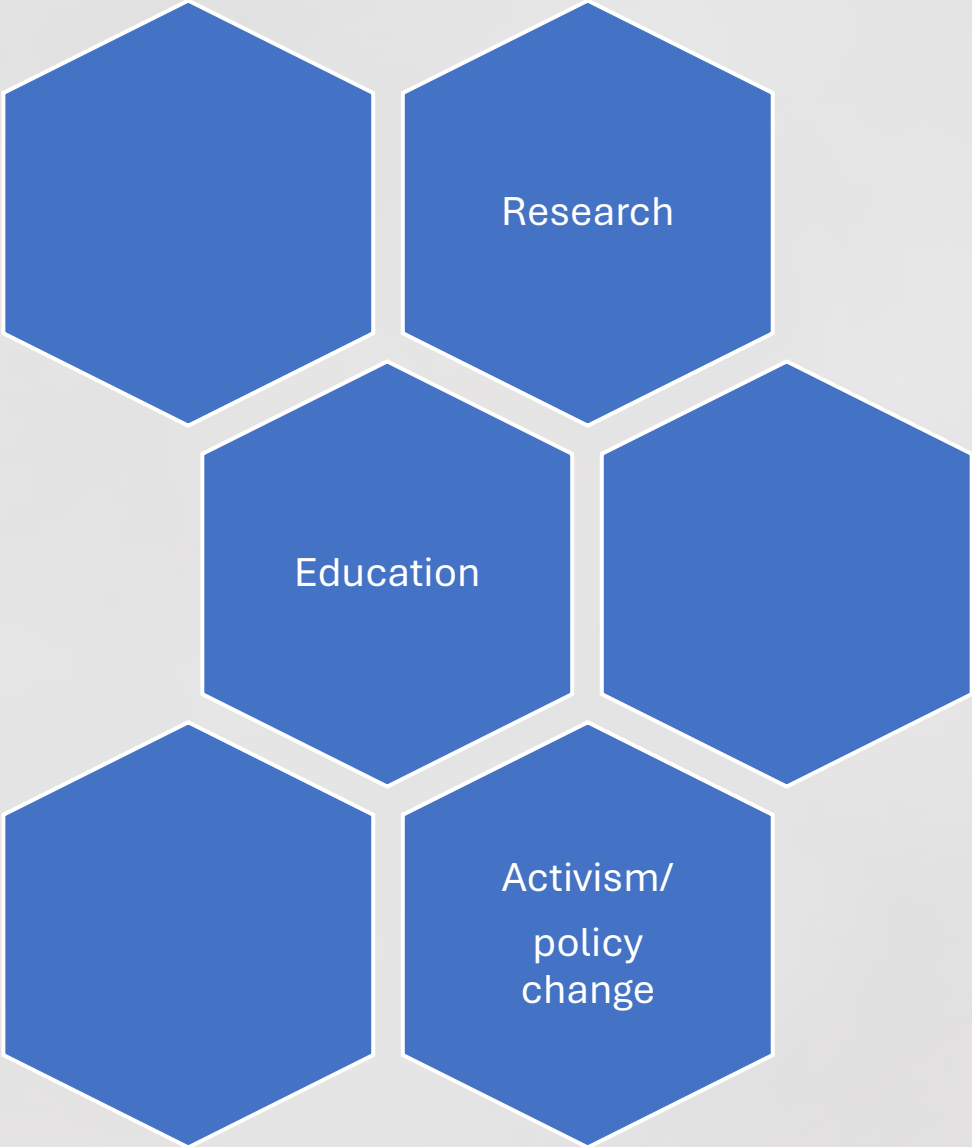


Homelessness applications: barriers to finding in-person help and the impact on hospitals

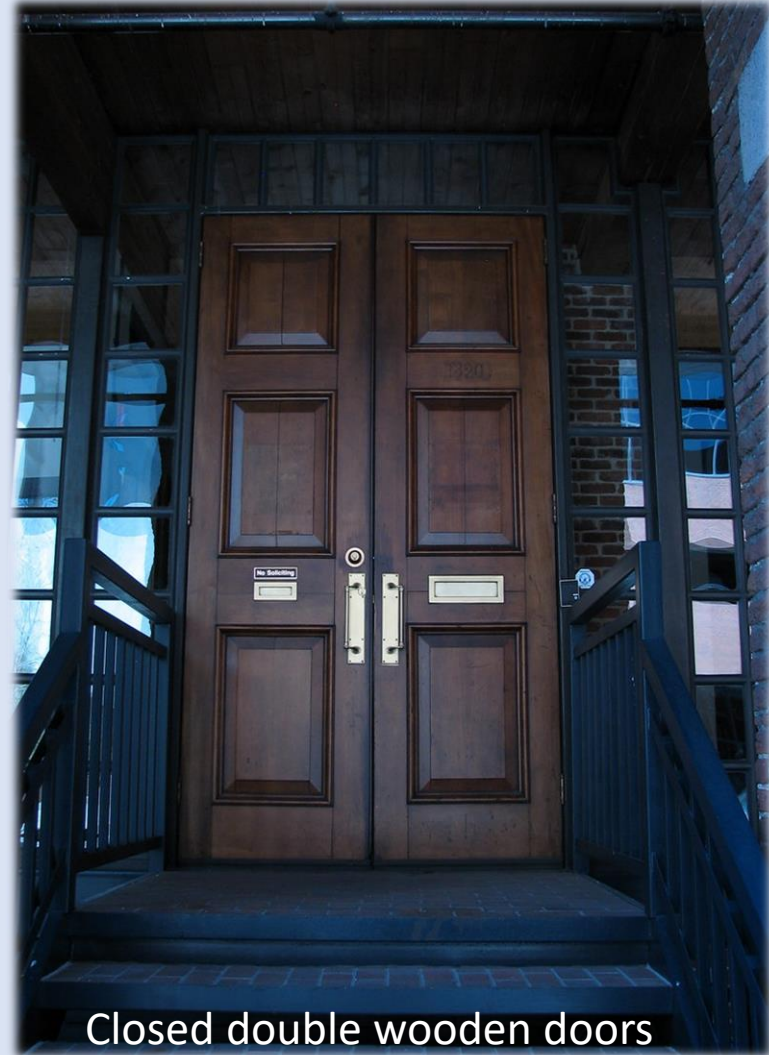
Jo Underwood (King's Legal Clinic)
and
Hannah Piggott (King's Policy Institute)
October 2025

An exercise in combining:



Digital exclusion and homelessness – the ‘closed door’ problem

- Through clinic housing advice networks, we discovered that many councils in London are no longer seeing homeless applicants face to face.
- Councils are instead preferring online forms or phone applications.
- Significant numbers of people are being turned away from getting help.



Closed double wooden doors



Accident & Emergency →

Advisers told us that homeless applicants were presenting at hospitals, usually with varying medical needs, but also so they could see the hospital homeless team and get face to face housing help.

A red A&E sign on a brick wall

Digital exclusion and homelessness – the ‘closed door’ problem

- How do local authorities support homeless applicants who need **face-to-face assistance to make a homeless application?**
- If people cannot access support, do they **visit A&E departments** to access support?
- What **impact** do closed door practices have:
 - on those accessing support through A&E
 - on hospitals who support homeless patients?



How we answered those questions



Freedom of Information requests and informal consultation



Semi structured interviews with hospital staff



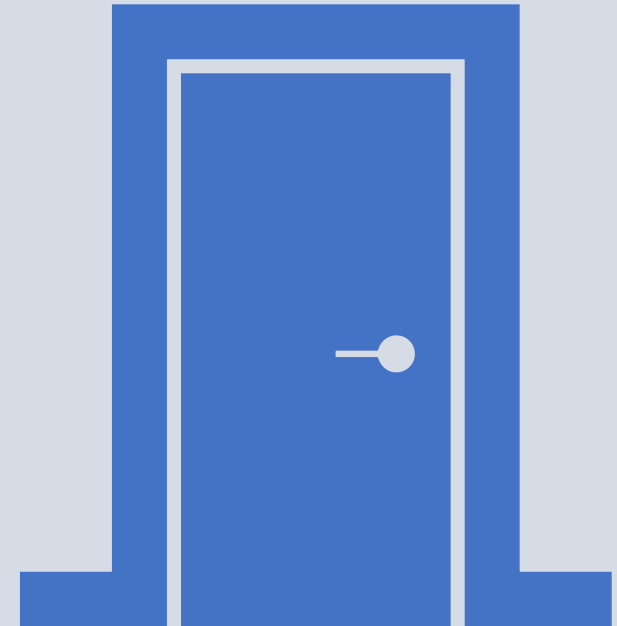
Policy roundtable

Clinic students assisted to bring this together. Attended by hospital staff, local and national policy advisers, housing advisers, national charities

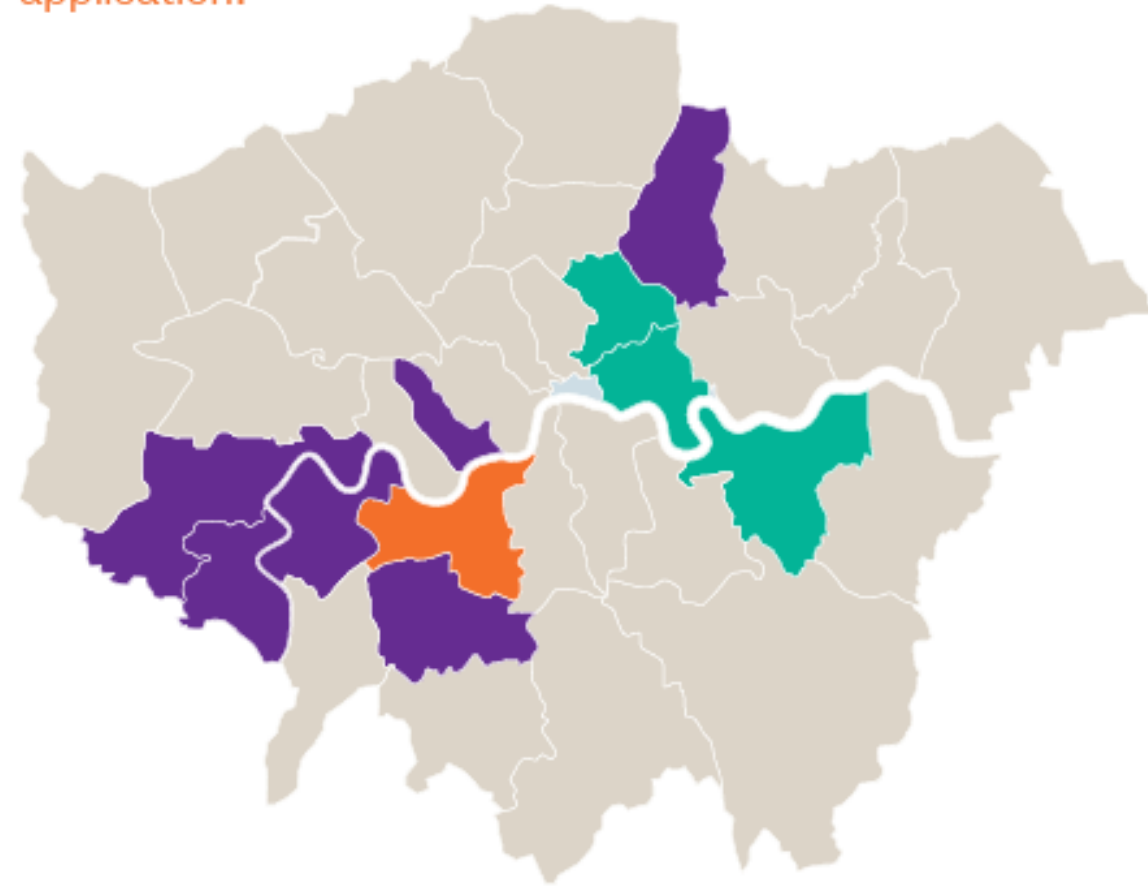
Local Authority closed-door policies

The FOI results revealed that **most people** experiencing homelessness in London **cannot visit their LA in person to make a homeless application**. Instead, most LAs ask people to first get in touch with them by phone, email, or using an online application form.

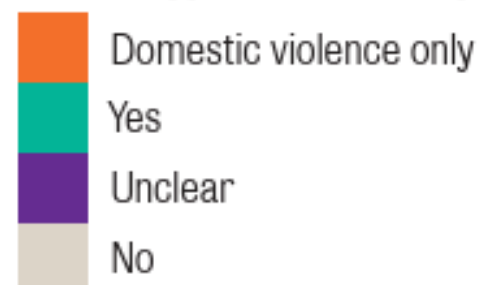
- **24** councils do **not** offer a walk in, in-person service where people can make a homeless application
- Only **3** councils said that applicants could present in person and make an application that day, without needing a prior appointment or online form
- **10** councils require applicants to complete an online form before they can receive further help
- **1** council no longer offers any face to face services
- (**27** out of 33 councils responded)



Is there somewhere I can visit to make a homeless application?



Walk-in application service provision by London Borough

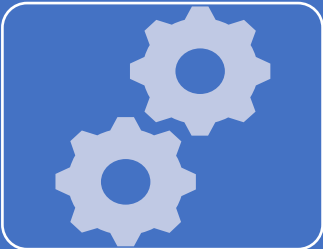


The impact of closed-door policies for applicants



Practical barriers to being able to access support

- Access to working technology
- Navigating a complex application without assistance
- Language and communication barriers



Systemic barriers facing people seeking homelessness support.

- Distrust in a system that repeatedly lets people down
- Those who are especially vulnerable are more likely to be excluded
- Obstacle for those who cannot access statutory support but need advice on where to get help

The impact of closed-door policies for hospitals

- Increase in the number of people attending hospitals who need homelessness support – many of whom have been unable to access help through their LA in the past
- Difficult for hospital teams to support patients in making a homelessness application
- Knock on effects
 - bed blocking
 - unsafe discharges

“If you look at the pattern of referrals, that’s only going up, which implies that people are not able to access the support they need or redress the problems before coming into hospital. So, the inpatient and front doors of hospitals are increasingly overwhelmed by really sick people who shouldn’t have got that sick in the first place. People are seeking help because they can’t get help anywhere else. And people whose mental and physical health are deteriorating rapidly.”

Clinical Fellow, Hospital Homeless Team

From research into education and activism



Clinic research



Report – evidence base – MHCLG are considering.
Development of local ‘home truths’ groups.



Health justice partnership – developing a health
and homelessness clinic

Health and Homelessness Clinic

Students are trained in homelessness law

Work in pairs, attending King's College Hospital A&E dept on a weekly basis

Students work alongside social workers in the hospital homeless team to:

- Assess homeless patients on ward
- Assist with completing homeless application forms and medical forms for local authority housing teams
- Out-patient follow up, checking housing situation is stable and suitable, tenancy conditions being kept

'Home Truths' local groups

Based on the model used by the
Poverty Truth Network:

[What is a Poverty Truth
Commission? | Poverty Truth
Network](#)

Local decision makers, advisers,
experts by experience and
hospital staff come together to
agree local solutions around the
homeless application process

Anyone interested in working together to
pilot a 'home truths' group in their local
area, please contact Jo Underwood.

Thank you

jo.underwood@kcl.ac.uk

hannah.piggott@kcl.ac.uk