

Rough Sleeping Strategy – Principles and Essential Elements

This paper sets out Homeless Link’s position on the key principles and the essential elements that any cross-Government strategy on rough sleeping should include.

Key Principles

Homeless Link would like the strategy to be based on the following ten key principles:

1. **National and Local Leadership and Accountability** on ending rough sleeping. This should involve a truly **cross-government commitment** with clear structures to ensure that all departments embrace their role in preventing and tackling rough sleeping and take action where policies are causing rough sleeping. At a local level for there to be named responsibility at political and officer level and for **local homelessness strategies** to include specific actions on how local authorities and their cross-sector partners propose to end rough sleeping in their area.
2. A commitment to addressing the **structural factors** that have caused the rise in rough sleeping, including action on housing supply, reducing poverty and welfare reform.
3. A recognition that rough sleeping is closely linked to **poverty, inequality and long-term disadvantage** and, as such, ensuring the Rough Sleeping Strategy links in with the wider Government work on these issues.
4. A commitment to improving the **data and evidence base** on rough sleeping and effective interventions and to promote and share learning and practice.
5. A commitment to meaningful **co-production** so that effective solutions to ending rough sleeping can be developed and delivered through the active involvement of those with lived experience of rough sleeping.
6. Recognition that many people sleeping rough experience multiple needs and that a **coordinated, multi-agency partnership approach** is needed in every local area, driven by leadership from national and local government.
7. Recognition of the **contribution of voluntary sector homelessness services** in effectively tackling rough sleeping and ensuring these services are adequately resourced.
8. A commitment to **personalised interventions**, which recognise individuals’ strengths and take account of their previous experiences.
9. An **equalities and diversity informed approach**, which recognises that rough sleeping among women tends to be different from men and that other cohorts, e.g. migrants, young people, BAME and LGBTQ rough sleepers may require different responses and interventions.
10. Recognition that **enforcement measures should only ever be used as a last resort** and with an associated offer of accommodation and support.

In implementing the Rough Sleeping Strategy there should be built in a cycle of evaluation, review, learning and renewed actions so that it continues to meet the needs of people sleeping rough in every area over time.

Key Elements of the Rough Sleeping Strategy

Homeless Link believes that ending rough sleeping requires action, interventions and investment across four main areas.

1. Preventing people from sleeping rough in the first place – No One Arrives on the Street

Homeless Link welcomes the focus on homelessness prevention introduced by the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) but believe that more can be done to prevent rough sleeping. The Rough Sleeping Strategy can improve prevention by including action on the following:

- Urgent action and investment to increase the supply of low cost housing - with a priority to tackle those areas where there is the greatest housing pressure and highest rough sleeping numbers. In addition, measures are required to make the private rented sector a more suitable tenure for individuals who have experienced rough sleeping including improving quality, security and affordability. There is also a need to develop interim housing solutions to more immediately tackle the housing crisis, for example, greater use of empty homes and viability of modular housing schemes.
- Measures to create an effective welfare safety net, which has been significantly eroded in recent years, with urgent action required on the following: the Government to conduct a review of the impact of welfare reform on rough sleeping, including changes to entitlements for migrant groups, as recommended by the National Audit Office; removal of the freeze and addressing the shortfalls in Local Housing Allowance rates and market rents so that they reflect the reality of the local rental market; review Universal Credit (UC) identifying the barriers for rough sleepers and improving design and delivery of UC so that it effectively supports rough sleepers.
- Ensure rough sleeping prevention is a shared responsibility across Government and embedded across key departments, e.g. Department for Work & Pensions, Ministry of Justice, Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Home Office and Department for Education. The focus should be on implementing a 'prevention first' approach, incorporating adequate investment and a 'duty to prevent' for the NHS, prisons and other statutory services, with robust monitoring of whether this is effective.
- Increased focus and investment on interventions that prevent rough sleeping at key transition points, e.g. young people leaving care; people discharged from hospital and other long stay institutions and people leaving prison.
- Prevent rough sleeping among women escaping violence including provision of women-only accommodation and for women with complex needs.
- Commit to monitoring the impact of the HRA on rough sleeping and promoting good practice on rough sleeping prevention interventions.
- Increase provision of effective mental health and substance misuse services.
- Roll out of No First Night Out principles and approach across England and ensuring that individuals do not have to sleep rough to get verified or to access support.

2. Rapid action when people arrive on the streets – no one new to the streets should spend a second night out

To ensure a rapid effective response to getting new rough sleepers off the streets, the strategy should include:

- Investment and roll out of multi-disciplinary outreach services to ensure robust personalised support for rough sleepers. Individuals in every local area should have access to outreach support and specialist mental health and substance misuse workers, delivered through pooling of health and homelessness budgets.
- Pool funding from MHCLG, DHSC Public Health England and NHS England for specialist emergency treatment (mental health and/or substance misuse) for people sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough, along with improved access to community treatment and recovery services.
- No Second Out Night services in areas of highest rough sleeping based on a reviewed and updated set of standards, to ensure a fast route off the street for those new to rough sleeping.
- Set a standard for Local Connection waiver so that anyone sleeping rough or at imminent risk of sleeping rough can access emergency and short-term accommodation and support.
- Increased investment in StreetLink to ensure the public can effectively refer rough sleepers to local services.
- Ensure every local authority has in place an emergency accommodation response for rough sleepers. This emergency provision should then have a role in identifying the most effective service for individuals to move on to, e.g. independent tenancies, short or long-term supported housing, Housing First, etc.

- Provision of legal advice and emergency accommodation for non-UK migrant rough sleepers to ensure no one is left destitute on the streets in England.

3. No One Lives on the Street

The longer someone spends living on the street, the more complex their needs can become. The focus needs to be on removing the barriers that keep people living on the street for longer, including the supply of suitable accommodation, adequate benefit entitlement and access to mental health and substance misuse treatment and support. The Rough Sleeping strategy should include the following:

- Every local area should have a co-ordinated multi-agency response for people sleeping rough with the most complex needs. Local agencies should have a shared understanding of who has multiple needs, clear mechanisms to identify and refer people and a cross-sector partnership that can ensure provision of flexible, practical, personalised and coordinated multi-agency support to individuals, (The MEAM Approach areas exemplify this - www.meam.org.uk).
- Good quality and effective short-term supported housing has a critical role to play in successfully moving people away from rough sleeping. This provision requires increased investment with a secure and sustainable funding base to cover not only the housing costs but also the costs of the wide range of support provided. The Government should ensure that any future funding mechanism does not jeopardise this provision for rough sleepers.
- Review local authority funding for rough sleeping services to ensure adequate and sustainable funding for effective rough sleeping services. This should involve taking steps to support the development of longer term joint funding and commissioning of rough sleeping services to ensure integrated packages of support are available for rough sleepers.
- For those with complex needs, the Government should scale up a national Housing First programme in every local authority area including capital investment and long-term revenue funding for the ongoing multi-agency support element, which is critical to the success of the model.
- Continued provision of high quality long-term supported accommodation for those people with complex needs who prefer congregate living to Housing First.
- The Rough Sleeping Strategy should include an action plan setting out how the Government will improve and invest in mental health and substance misuse services for people who are rough sleeping. The Department of Health and Social Care, Public Health England and NHS England should set out the investment and resources they will provide to ensure that mental health, substance use and community support services are easily available for rough sleepers, while on the streets and after moving into accommodation, whether supported or independent.

4. No One Should Return to the Streets – Recovery and Move On

Helping someone who is sleeping rough to build a better future is not just about providing a roof. It is also involves providing the right support to help them regain their health, find employment and deal with other issues. Too often people who have left the streets leave their accommodation and return to the streets because the right support is not in place. To ensure people do not return to the street the Rough Sleeping Strategy should identify a range of permanent housing solutions for former rough sleepers accompanied by personalised packages of support and adequate support for housing costs through the benefits system. The strategy also needs to include:

- Access to a range of appropriate and affordable housing options to enable successful move on from rough sleeping. For those with lower support needs: a focus on advice and financial assistance, e.g. deposit and rent in advance) to access a property, support into employment and a lower level of on-going tenancy support. For those with medium support needs: provision of accommodation with effective floating support tailored to individual need. For those with high and complex needs: provision of Housing First and long-term supported housing with appropriate multi-agency support.

- Expand the Clearing House model to boost the supply of Housing Association housing for former rough sleepers.
- Action to improve standards, quality, affordability and security in the private rented sector so that this tenure can be an appropriate and effective housing option for rough sleepers.
- Provide a resettlement/ floating support package for every former rough sleeper moving into an independent tenancy, which offers flexible, personalised non-time limited support including support to overcome isolation and achieve integration into their local community, by building relationships and networks where they live.
- For those moving on and who require ongoing support from health, mental health, social care and/or criminal justice agencies, it is critical that this support is still available, and provided in an integrated, coordinated and holistic way.
- Investment in skills and employment support programme targeted at people moving on from rough sleeping to improve their opportunities to find and sustain work.

April 2018