

Rough Sleeping Statement of Intent

Introduction

Rough sleeping is particularly acute in Westminster, and we manage by far the highest number of rough sleepers in the country. 1,698 people were seen rough sleeping in Westminster during 2021-22 (down from 2,757 in 2019/20), this is 20% of all rough sleepers in London. There are circa of 200¹ people are sleeping rough on Westminster's streets on any given night, more than double the next highest borough.

Half of the people sleeping rough in Westminster are new to the street (851 in 2021-22). 17% sleep rough intermittently, this means that they are not new rough sleepers, but have not been recorded rough sleeping enough times to be deemed living on the streets. This group includes rough sleepers who do so periodically, such as street drinkers and organised begging groups. 33% of rough sleepers in Westminster are living on the streets which is up from 26% in 2019/20. These individuals are also referred to as entrenched rough sleepers or at risk of becoming so.

We know, both from experience and available data, that we experience 'hotspots' in the city which can change but have broadly remained the same in recent years. The exact combination of reasons why an area becomes a 'hotspot' is complex and difficult to predict but factors such as availability of services, relatively safe and dry areas to sleep, presence of existing rough sleepers and access to drug markets tend to coalesce to create a hotspot. In recent years, the most notable hotspots in Westminster have been Victoria, Marble Arch, the Strand and Piccadilly.

Rough sleeping has a significant human cost. People who sleep rough experience some severe health inequalities and their wellbeing is poorer than the general population. Sleeping rough can also worsen social isolation and increase barriers to education and work. Significant numbers of people who sleep rough experience mental ill health, substance misuse and poor physical health. Access to support for these needs is also more difficult for rough sleepers, for example, many who are sleeping rough report being unable to register with a GP practice because they have no fixed address.

Of the people seen sleeping rough in London in 2017 to 2018, 46% had physical health needs and 50% reported mental health needs. People who experience rough sleeping over a long period are, on average, more likely to die young than the general population. Evidence suggests that mental ill-health can make moving off the streets and into accommodation more challenging.

Helping people transition from sleeping rough not only supports the individual but will help relieve financial pressures on public services. An entrenched rough sleeper has been estimated to cost the public an average of £20,128 per year through demands placed on public services.²

Westminster City Council and our partners continue to demonstrate national leadership in the delivery of rough sleeping services, investing millions each year to provide both accommodation and support services, to ensure every rough sleeper in our city receives the best individually tailored route away from the street. The significant success of our rapid response interventions means that most people who find themselves sleeping rough do not spend a second night on the streets. However, the volume and specific challenges we manage here are unlike any other. We also manage a highly transient population of non-UK national rough sleepers who have little or no support needs

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-rough-sleeping/health-matters-rough-sleeping#:~:text=People%20who%20experience%20rough%20sleeping%20over%20a%20long%20period%20are,from%20injury%2C%20poisoning%20and%20suicide.>

² [Cost of homelessness | Crisis UK | Together we will end homelessness](#)

but sleep on our streets for different reasons; a high number of 'returners' (habitual rough sleepers who may disappear for periods but periodically return to sleep in Westminster); a core of long-term entrenched individuals; in addition to a number of people who have accommodation and are receiving support but due to complex needs return to the streets during the day.

There is more we, our community, and our partners want to achieve together. Working closer than ever before with DLUHC to deliver on the Government's commitment to end rough sleeping, this year we will further embed the lived experience and voices of our service users to help us take a system wide view of service delivery - and build a new multi-disciplinary model of governance (across Housing, Voluntary Services, Health, Safeguarding, and Enforcement) with shared ownership and accountability.

Westminster continues to address the root causes of homelessness and rough sleeping by investing additional funding in developing new homes earmarked for rough sleepers, achieving grant funding via the GLA and DLUHC to increase the supply of affordable housing in Westminster. We will continue to work closely with the GLA, London Councils and Pan London authorities to further support and develop the mayor's 'Life Off the Streets' programme, to lead and support initiatives to help people rough sleeping off the streets and to rebuild their lives.

Rough Sleeping Strategy

In 2017, Westminster Council launched its Rough Sleeping Strategy 2017-2022 (the strategy). The document explained what the Council wanted to achieve over the 5-year life of the strategy and identified three key priorities:

- a) Where it is possible for us to do so, prevent people from rough sleeping in the first place.
- b) When people do end up on the streets, provide a rapid response, support people to rebuild their lives and stay off the streets for good.
- c) Protecting communities from anti-social behaviour associated with rough sleeping and intervening to stop dangerous behaviour.

The strategy set out the approach we intended to take in meeting these priorities. A detailed action plan outlined specific actions we will take. The strategy expired in December 2022.

The Rough Sleeping Strategy sits alongside the statutory Homelessness Strategy 2019-2024. Maintaining a Homelessness Strategy is a statutory duty that is outlined in the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness Strategy must detail, amongst other things, how the authority will address rough sleeping.

The Council has had separate Rough Sleeping and Homelessness Strategies because of the scale and complexity of rough sleeping in Westminster. The Homelessness Strategy outlines the Council's approach to rough sleeping by referencing the Rough Sleeping strategy.

Therefore, if the Rough Sleeping Strategy is allowed to expire there will be an impact on the Council's duty to have a Homelessness Strategy.

As such, it is proposed that Westminster retains the current Rough Sleeping Strategy and uses this strategic framework until a new Rough Sleeping Strategy or revised Homelessness Strategy is launched.

This means that we will retain the above priorities to publish an action plan to set out how we will continue to meet these priorities.

Reasons for Publishing a statement of intent

Since the Council published its Rough Sleeping Strategy in 2017 there have been significant changes in legislation, national policy and the local context, these include:

- **The implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017** – Following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2018 there is recognition that the offer to single homeless people, whether rough sleeping or homeless due to other causes, should be brought together to ensure consistency of offer and approach and ensure that resources are appropriately targeted. There is a clear expectation from central government that, notwithstanding our numbers of rough sleepers, rough sleepers should be subject routinely to the provisions of the Homeless Reduction Act. The 2022 Autumn Statement will also influence services that should be reflected in a new strategy/strategies.
- **National Policy** – In September 2022, the Government launched ‘Ending rough sleeping for good’, a cross-government strategy setting out how the government and its partners will work together to deliver on the government’s commitment to end rough sleeping in this Parliament. It also lays the foundations for long-term system change.
- **A new administration following the 2022 Local Government Elections** – The 2022 Local Government Elections returned Westminster’s first Labour administration. The new administration made a series of commitments in its manifesto that impact on Homelessness and Rough Sleepers. This new direction is now reflected in the new corporate strategy, ‘Fairer Westminster.’
- **The Future of Westminster Commission** - The Future of Westminster Commission will advise the Council on areas of policy that are critical to the future success of the City. It will review and make recommendations on the delivery of key council services to deliver a fairer Westminster for residents. The Commission exists to bring in new suggestions and perspectives, but not to take decisions. It is made up of a core Commission Group with four dedicated work streams, each of which will have its own group of expert advisers to help develop new ideas and policy proposals. The recommendations from these workstreams will have an impact on the strategic direction for homelessness and rough sleeping services
- **Other emerging strategies and policies** – A number of policies and strategies that impact on homelessness and rough sleeping are being developed or launched in 2023/24, including the Housing Allocations Policy and the Council’s first Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy. The impact of these pieces of work should be considered when revising the Rough Sleeping or Homelessness Strategies.

For the reasons outlined above, the Council intends, through this statement of intent, to extend the Rough Sleeping Strategy 2017-2022 strategy through this statement of intent to allow for a more thorough review of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping that will include in-depth research alongside engagement with communities and partners. That review will take place in 2023/24.

Action Plan

The accompanying action plan outlines how the Council and partners will meet the priorities in the Rough Sleeping Strategy until 2024. This plan reflects the allocation and funding to WCC from DLUHC for the use of local authorities to support rough sleeping services within the financial year.