

Reducing rough sleeping in West Berkshire:

A plan to ensure no-one has the need to sleep rough

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1. Background

West Berkshire is committed to reducing homelessness of all types, including rough sleeping which represents the most visible and also extreme form of homelessness.

No individual chooses to become homeless and rough sleeping can be attributed to a wide range of factors. Individuals who are entrenched rough sleepers will often have complex needs and may lead more chaotic lifestyles than the wider cohort of homeless households.

The Government published its Rough Sleeping Strategy in August 2018¹ with a commitment to halving rough sleeping by 2022, and ending rough sleeping by 2027. To support this aim, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) awarded the Council Rough Sleeper Initiative funding of £211k for 2018/19 and £265k for 2019/20 to deliver a range of interventions to prevent and relieve rough sleeping. Further funding of £103k has been awarded for 2019/20 through MHCLG's Rapid Rehousing Pathway to provide additional interventions to support rough sleepers into sustainable accommodation.

This plan has been subject to consultation with the Homelessness Strategy Group – a stakeholder group of homelessness charities, registered providers, and homelessness service providers, working across West Berkshire. This plan has also been subject to consultation with MHCLG as part of their oversight of the Council's actions in respect of the Rough Sleeping Initiative.

2. Defining rough sleeping

Rough sleeping is defined by Government as:

'People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments).

People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or 'bashes'²).³

The definition does not include people accommodated in hostels or shelters, people on campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes or organised protest. Squatters are excluded from the definition as are Gypsies and Travellers.

It is important to note that the definition of rough sleepers also excludes those individuals who are at risk of rough sleeping, for example people who are so-called 'sofa-surfing' or 'homeless at home' who remain at high risk of sleeping on the street and therefore becoming a rough sleeper. This can often be misunderstood when considering rough sleeping statistics.

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733421/Rough-Sleeping-Strategy_WEB.pdf

² A 'bash' is a makeshift shelter often comprised of cardboard boxes

³ <https://www.gov.uk> – Homelessness data: notes and definitions

3. Measuring rough sleeping

Nationally rough sleeping has risen year on year since 2010⁴, and although the position in West Berkshire has fluctuated over the same period – and has reduced significantly since a peak in 2014 - the level of rough sleeping remains a concern.

Table 1 – Rough sleeping in England and West Berkshire since 2010

Area	Year								
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
England	1,768	2,181	2,309	2,414	2,744	3,569	4,134	4,751	4,134
South East	310	430	442	532	609	827	956	1,119	956
West Berkshire	5	6	11	8	23	15	14	20	18

The level of rough sleeping across West Berkshire for the period 2015 to 2018 has shown a strong correlation to the level of rough sleeping across both the South East and England as a whole. This suggests that West Berkshire is not experiencing a localised problem as has been suggested by some local observers who suggested in 2018 that West Berkshire ‘now appears to be experiencing an unprecedented rise in rough sleeping...’⁵

Across Berkshire there is no clear picture in respect of the level of rough sleeping in each local authority area with varying levels likely to be attributable to geographical location, the presence of transport hubs associated with town centres, and the provision of support services for rough sleepers.

Table 2 – Rough sleeping across Berkshire, 2017 and 2018

Local authority	Number of rough sleepers		Number of rough sleepers per 1,000 households	
	2017	2018	2017	2018
Bracknell Forest	6	19	0.12	0.39
Reading	31	25	0.47	0.38
Slough	27	29	0.49	0.53
West Berkshire	20	18	0.31	0.27
Windsor and Maidenhead	11	11	0.18	0.18
Wokingham	10	7	0.16	0.10

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-in-england-autumn-2018>

Table 1: Street counts and estimates of rough sleeping, by local authority district and region

⁵ Healthwatch West Berkshire – Homeless and Rough Sleepers Report 2018 –

<https://www.healthwatchwestberks.org.uk>

4. Our priorities

West Berkshire Council is committed to reducing rough sleeping and ensuring that no-one has the need to sleep rough.

This plan sets out how the Council, working with its partners, will achieve this challenging goal through 5 key priorities:

- 1) Delivering targeted support and accommodation services that meet the needs of rough sleepers
- 2) Providing innovative solutions to assist entrenched rough sleepers leave the streets
- 3) Improving the health and well-being of rough sleepers
- 4) Preventing residents at risk of rough sleeping from needing to sleep rough
- 5) Tackling the negative public perceptions surrounding rough sleeping

5. **Priority 1 - Delivering targeted support and accommodation services that meet the needs of rough sleepers**

There are a wide range of reasons that result in individuals sleeping rough. As such a 'one size fits all' approach will never guarantee positive outcomes for rough sleepers and due to often specific needs, may actually result in the individual disengaging and becoming more entrenched as a rough sleeper. The use of co-production techniques to engage service users and partners is essential to design services that deliver effective and sustainable outcomes.

Each individual, therefore, requires a person-centred approach that considers individual needs which are often complex and are inextricably linked to the rough sleeping lifestyle. This principle has underpinned the Council's 'Making Every Adult Matter' (MEAM)⁶ project which works to ensure people with multiple needs are supported by effective and coordinated services, and empowered to tackle their problems to reach their full potential and contribute to their communities.

Action 1.1 – Deliver services to rough sleepers using a person-centred approach

In a minority of cases individuals are excluded from accessing services due to previous behaviours that present an unacceptable level of risk to accommodation or service providers. In these cases, it is essential that the Council works with our partners to secure alternative service provision so that services may be accessed as appropriate.

Action 1.2 – Review individual cases where exclusion to services is identified and work to secure alternative provision

In some cases, individuals who are rough sleeping do not feel able to access services delivered by the Council within the Council offices. Individuals may, for example feel

⁶ Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) is a coalition of national charities – Clunks, Homeless Link, Mind and associate member Collective Voice. Together MEAM represents over 1,300 frontline organisations across England

uneasy entering large buildings, or may feel excluded by virtue of their clothing or appearance. The Council acknowledges this and already supports outreach services that provides a point of access direct to rough sleepers within the community, however there is an opportunity to improve this offer and reduce unnecessary required visits to Council office locations.

Action 1.3 – Review processes requiring rough sleepers to visit the Council offices to access specific services

The Council works closely with a wide range of partners to deliver complimentary support and accommodation services to the rough sleeping community, and this partnership working is invaluable in the goal of improving individual's life chances. This work is largely co-ordinated and reviewed by the Homelessness Strategy Group at which all partners are represented.

Action 1.4 – Continue to support and contribute to the Homelessness Strategy Group and its operational groups

The Council is currently delivering a range of initiatives through the Rough Sleeper Initiative funding by central government following a successful bidding process, and it is important that the Council remains active in bidding for new funding streams to further reduce rough sleeping as they become available.

Action 1.5 – Review opportunities to bid for future funding streams to address rough sleeping as they become available

6. Priority 2 - Providing innovative solutions to assist entrenched rough sleepers leave the streets

Entrenched rough sleepers are often characterised by multiple complex needs including addictions and other challenging behaviours. These needs are often negatively impacted by sleeping rough and any personalised pathway to independence should include support and assistance to address the specific complex needs alongside a tailored accommodation offer.

Action 2.1 – Continue to work with partners to deliver the 'Housing First' pilot project to provide accommodation for rough sleepers with multiple and complex needs

Action 2.2 – Explore opportunities with partners to extend the 'Housing First' pilot to provide additional accommodation solutions with targeted support for rough sleepers

Where an individual is particularly negatively impacted by substance misuse and addiction, it is unlikely that any accommodation offer would be sustainable until the individual has commenced on a recovery pathway (see below).

7. Priority 3 – Improving the health and well-being of rough sleepers

Homelessness has a direct impact on the health and well-being of residents and this is particularly the case with rough sleepers who often experience the extreme health and well-being impacts. It is well documented that the average life expectancy of the homeless (including rough sleepers) is significantly reduced from that of the population as a whole, with life expectancy reduced to 47 and the average age of death being 44 for men and 43 for women, compared with 76 years and 81 years for men and women within the population as a whole⁷.

This can be due to a wide range of issues, however rough sleepers in particular struggle to access routine health care where general practitioners and dentists require addresses for registration and are often unable to access appointments due to barriers accessing transport. Lifestyle issues present additional challenges attending appointments on time, and the cost of prescriptions can be prohibitive.

Action 3.1 – Review the effectiveness of the Health Outreach Liaison Team (HOLT) drop in sessions to provide health care outcomes for rough sleepers

A particular health and well-being concern for homeless individuals is the differing causes of mortality, with accidents (including drug overdoses), suicide and liver disease representing over half of all deaths unlike the population as a whole⁸.

Action 3.2 – Explore opportunities to offer and fund specific recovery programmes for rough sleepers with an on-going and persistent history of substance misuse and addiction

8. Priority 4 - Preventing residents at risk of rough sleeping from needing to sleep rough

The cohort of individuals rough sleeping at any point in time will vary as individuals accept temporary accommodation options and recovery pathways etc, however there are further individuals who are especially at risk of becoming rough sleepers who are actively staying with family and friends and sleeping under cover wherever possible. These individuals are often referred to as 'sofa surfing' or being 'homeless at home'.

Action 4.1 – Promote the range of advice and assistance available to those at risk of rough sleeping, including but not limited to the ability to approach the Council as being threatened with homelessness

Single people at risk of rough sleeping are particularly negatively affected by the limited supply of shared accommodation (i.e. rooms within a house in multiple occupation with shared facilities) available across West Berkshire which is affordable to those in receipt of welfare benefits.

Action 4.2 – Explore opportunities to facilitate the delivery of additional shared accommodation within the district targeted at those individuals at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping

⁷ www.ONS.gov.uk – Deaths of homeless people in England and Wales: 2013 to 2017

⁸ ibid

The council is committed to ensuring that everyone at risk of sleeping rough can access accommodation so that there is no need to start sleeping rough. This 'No first night out' approach has been delivered by the Council for several years through the provision of hostel accommodation to prevent rough sleeping.

Action 4.3 – Continue to deliver a 'No first night out' service to those at risk of sleeping rough for the first time

9. Priority 5 - Tackling the negative public perceptions surrounding rough sleeping

Rough sleeping is the most visible manifestation of homelessness and is often associated with individuals seen begging on the streets of the district. While this can be the case, in some cases the generosity of residents is abused by those who are not rough sleeping and have accommodation in which they live.

Where residents donate money direct to rough sleepers or other individuals there is a risk that this income is used to fuel addictions and may not contribute to supporting the individual towards independence, and it is far more beneficial if donations are directed to agencies that provide support and assistance to rough sleepers.

Action 5.1 – Explore the opportunity to launch an awareness campaign across the district to educate residents on the risks associated with direct donations and to promote donations to partner agencies working with rough sleepers

West Berkshire has seen the use of tented encampments by rough sleepers in specific areas and this has resulted in negative perceptions of rough sleeping, has increased levels of entrenched rough sleeping, and has attracted individuals to the area seeking to exploit others. To ensure that future encampments do not result in negative impacts for rough sleepers an encampment policy will be developed.

Action 5.2 – Adopt an encampment policy that sets out the degree of tolerance that will be used in respect of future rough sleeper encampments, alongside the legal enforcement mechanisms that will be used when appropriate to displace encampments

There is a poor perception within the rough sleeping community regarding the accommodation options that are available to them, and this is impacting on its effectiveness. Further consultation with rough sleepers to establish real concerns and identify potential barriers to accessing accommodation services can assist future service delivery of supported accommodation.

Action 5.3 – Undertake consultation with rough sleepers to identify barriers to accessing accommodation options and review services accordingly

10. Action planning

The action plan set out in Appendix 1 below details the actions that will be delivered through this plan, including key timelines and responsibilities. The Council will regularly review the operation of this plan, along with the associated actions to ensure that progress continues to be made towards achieving our priorities.

Appendix 1 – Action Plan

Ref	Action	Officer	Outcome	Performance measures	Others involved in delivery	Risk Management		Date
						Risk	Mitigation	
Priority 1 - Delivering targeted support and accommodation services that meet the needs of rough sleepers								
1.1	Deliver services to rough sleepers using a person-centred approach	HPM	Building on the MEAM approach, individual clients are assigned specialist housing options officers who will provide consistent support and work with partners to deliver targeted services to secure an agreed pathway to independence.	Reduced number of rough sleepers	MHCLG	Staffing resources	Delegation to other staff	31/10/19
1.2	Review individual cases where exclusion to services is identified and work to secure alternative provision.	HPM	All individuals are provided with a relevant and appropriate accommodation offer that takes into account exclusions and any other relevant risks alongside MEAM support.	Reduced number of individuals sleeping rough who are excluded from service accommodation provision	N/A	Challenges securing suitable housing	Engage with housing partners to increase housing options	31/10/19

Ref	Action	Officer	Outcome	Performance measures	Others involved in delivery	Risk Management		Date	
						Risk	Mitigation		
1.3	Review processes requiring rough sleepers to visit the Council offices to access specific services	SHOO	Required visits to council offices replaced with outreach interventions	Increased outreach interventions for service users	N/A	Staffing resources	Delegation to other staff	31/10/19	
		SHOO	Processes streamlined to reduce the number of customer contacts required	Reduced attendance at council offices		Staffing resources	Delegation to other staff	31/10/19	
1.4	Continue to support and contribute to the Homelessness Strategy Group and its operational groups	HSM/SDRM	Engagement with partners to deliver professional and relevant services targeted at the individual needs and demands of the rough sleeping cohort.	Attendance and contribution at each partnership meeting	N/A	Staffing resource	Delegation to other staff	31/03/20	
1.5	Review opportunities to bid for future funding streams to address rough sleeping as they become available	HRC	Funding bids considered and submitted where targeted towards improving serves to reduce rough sleeping	Bids submitted as appropriate	MHCLG	Staffing resource	Delegation to other staff	On-going	

Ref	Action	Officer	Outcome	Performance measures	Others involved in delivery	Risk Management		Date
						Risk	Mitigation	
Priority 2 - Providing innovative solutions to assist entrenched rough sleepers leave the streets								
2.1	Continue to work with partners to deliver the 'Housing First' pilot project to provide accommodation for rough sleepers with multiple and complex needs.	HPM/HRC	'Housing First' model provides suitable accommodation for rough sleepers with complex needs alongside dedicated housing and tenancy sustainment support	10 service users accommodated	MHCLG Housing First partners	Delay in securing suitable housing Poor tenancy sustainment	Increase number of housing providers Review support package and tailor to individual needs	31/03/20
2.2	Explore opportunities with partners to extend the 'Housing First' pilot to provide additional accommodation solutions with targeted support for rough sleepers.	HRC	Feasibility appraisal for extension of 'Housing First' completed	Aspiration to deliver 10 additional units	MHCLG Housing First partners	Limited funding to continue to deliver	Bid for future funding opportunities	31/03/20

Ref	Action	Officer	Outcome	Performance measures	Others involved in delivery	Risk Management		Date
						Risk	Mitigation	
Priority 3 – Improving the health and well-being of rough sleepers								
3.1	Review the effectiveness of the Health Outreach Liaison Team (HOLT) drop in sessions to provide health care outcomes for rough sleepers.	HRC	Service users are supported to access health care	Service users experience improved health and well-being	N/A	Limited funding to continue to deliver	Bid for future funding opportunities	30/09/19
3.2	Explore opportunities to fund specific recovery programmes for rough sleepers with an on-going and persistent history of substance misuse and addiction.	HPM	Service users with complex addiction issues offered the opportunity to attend tailored recover programme	Service users have increased accommodation choices	MHCLG Homelessness Strategy Group	Limited funding to deliver multiple interventions	Bid for future funding Approach other agencies for funding	31/03/20

Ref	Action	Officer	Outcome	Performance measures	Others involved in delivery	Risk Management		Date
						Risk	Mitigation	
Priority 4 - Preventing residents at risk of rough sleeping from needing to sleep rough								
4.1	Promote the range of advice and assistance available to those at risk of rough sleeping, including but not limited to the ability to approach the Council as being threatened with homelessness.	SHOO	Service users are better informed regarding their housing options	Increased take-up of temporary accommodation options	Homelessness Strategy Group	Lack of engagement of service users	Work with partner agencies to increase engagement	31/03/20
4.2	Explore opportunities with partners to facilitate the delivery of additional shared accommodation within the district targeted at those individuals at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping.	HRC	Feasibility appraisal of shared accommodation options completed	Aspiration to deliver 10 bed spaces for individuals at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping	Homelessness Strategy Group	Lack of engagement from partners	Engagement with partners through the Homelessness Strategy Group	31/03/20
4.3	Continue to deliver a 'No first night out' service to those at risk of sleeping rough for the first time	HPM	Individuals at risk of rough sleeping offered hostel accommodation to prevent the need to start sleeping rough	Reduced number of people starting to sleep rough	MHCLG	Increased demand outstrips funding	Re-profile RSI funding	On-going

Ref	Action	Officer	Outcome	Performance measures	Others involved in delivery	Risk Management		Date
						Risk	Mitigation	
Priority 5 - Tackling the negative public perceptions surrounding rough sleeping								
5.1	Explore the opportunity to launch an awareness campaign across the district to educate residents on the risks associated with direct donations and to promote donations to partner agencies working with rough sleepers.	HRC	Awareness campaign launched	Reduced number of people begging in Newbury town centre Increased donations for local partners	Homelessness Strategy Group MHCLG	Limited funding to deliver campaign	Seek to re-profile RSI funding	31/12/19
5.2	Adopt an encampment policy that sets out the degree of tolerance that will be used in respect of future rough sleeper encampments, alongside the legal enforcement mechanisms that will be used when appropriate to displace encampments	HRC	Encampment Policy completed	Encampment Policy adopted	N/A	Lack of resource	Delegation to other staff	30/12/19

Ref	Action	Officer	Outcome	Performance measures	Others involved in delivery	Risk Management		Date
						Risk	Mitigation	
5.3	Undertake consultation with rough sleepers to inform service delivery	SHOO	Views of service users obtained to identify barriers to accessing accommodation options and	90% of rough sleepers surveyed in person	Service users Homelessness Strategy Group	Lack of engagement from service users	Enhance outreach service Work with partner agencies	31/12/19
			Review existing services as appropriate with existing service providers to identify potential service improvements	Increase in take-up of accommodation provision		Financial impact	Review RSI funding	31/03/20

Key: HPM – Homelessness Prevention Manager
HRC – Homelessness Reduction Coordinator
HSM – Housing Service Manager
SHOO – Senior Housing Options Officer
SDRM - Strategy, Development, and Review Manager

