

Rough Sleeping Strategy - Local Government Association briefing

13 August 2018



The Rough Sleeping Strategy sets out the Government's strategy for halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027. It was published on 13 August 2018.

The full document is available on the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) [website](#), as is a new [prospectus](#) for the Government's £50 million Move On Fund. The Government has also announced its intention to publish a delivery plan in the autumn, to refresh the strategy on an annual basis, and to follow this strategy with another, which addresses other forms of homelessness.

This briefing is not a comprehensive review of the measures announced in the Strategy; instead, it summarises the main announcements of relevance to local government and sets out the Local Government Association's (LGA) initial response. The LGA's press release responding to the strategy is available on the [LGA website](#).

SUMMARY

- The Government has published a Rough Sleeping strategy led by a cross-Departmental homelessness taskforce and alongside a period of engagement with an Advisory Panel that included the LGA, councils, and a number of homelessness service providers and partners.
- The Rough Sleeping Strategy includes some encouraging proposals that reflect the recommendations from the LGA-chaired Prevention Task and Finish Group, such as a renewed focus on the role of local homelessness strategies, and the piloting of Somewhere Safe to Stay schemes for people at immediate risk of sleeping rough. Importantly, it emphasises the importance of targeted prevention, enabled by all parts of government coming together.
- However, local government's ambition is greater than the Rough Sleeping Strategy, which lacks substantive measures to ensure that fewer people reach the point of crisis – namely, a reversal of welfare reform measures and a step-change in the supply of social housing. Moreover, the strategy has a heavily centralised approach, introducing numerous, nationally-controlled and disparate pots of funding. This stops short of giving local authorities the strategic influence needed for them to effectively tackle all forms of homelessness in a coherent, joined-up way.
- There have also been indications from the Secretary of State that half of the £100 million committed within the Strategy has been announced previously; the other half will be re-prioritised from existing budgets within MHCLG.
- The LGA will work with the Government to take forward proposals. We will continue to push for an ambitious vision that recognises local government's role in ending rough sleeping, by making local homelessness strategies the vehicle through which funding flows and strategic decisions are made.

Briefing

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CHAPTER ONE: THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

The strategy has set out the following commitments:

- Use the Rough Sleepers Initiative to support work in local areas to improve the recording of rough sleeping by Autumn 2018
- Ensure that people's lived experience of rough sleeping can feed into future updates of the Rough Sleeping Strategy
- Plug evidence gaps and pilot new approaches to inform plans for wider roll-out

CHAPTER TWO: THE 2027 VISION – PREVENTION, INTERVENTION, RECOVERY

This chapter sets out the government's vision for ending rough sleeping, which covers:

- Prevention
- Central and local government to work hand in hand with charities and businesses to prevent rough sleeping
- Intervention and recovery in 2027 - a rapid rehousing response
- The role of social investment in 2027

CHAPTER THREE: PREVENTION

Getting the basics right

- Extend the review of the Homelessness Reduction Act to cover other relevant homelessness and rough sleeping legislation, including the Vagrancy Act and Care Act. This will report by March 2020.

Shining a light on performance and stronger accountability

- Work with local authorities to update their local homelessness strategies by winter 2019. These strategies, which will be rebadged as homelessness and rough sleeping strategies, will be reported to MHCLG, include annual action plans, and be expected to meet expectations set out in guidance
- Consult on the use of local Homelessness Reduction Boards, convening local agencies in order to improve accountability for ending rough sleeping at the local level
- Support Health and Wellbeing Boards in Rough Sleeping Initiative areas to feed into the development of local homelessness strategies, e.g. through having local housing authorities sitting on Health and Wellbeing Boards
- Ensure that Safeguarding Adult Reviews are conducted when a person who sleeps rough dies or is seriously harmed
- Work with the LGA to develop, by summer 2019, a comprehensive package of sector-led support to enable local authorities to meet their homelessness duties
- Undertake research into workforce challenges and opportunities in Housing Options teams in order to inform future policy approaches

The LGA view

The LGA has argued that local homelessness strategies should be the crucial vehicle through which local authorities deliver a coherent, personalised and stable offer of support to vulnerable people. These measures go some way towards achieving this, and we particularly welcome the opportunity to work with MHCLG to ensure that local authorities have the necessary support to become leaders in

tackling homelessness.

However, these measures, when taken with the rest of the strategy, stop short of enabling local homelessness strategies to organise services in a joined up and coherent manner. Instead, local authorities will be required to undergo competitive, nationalised bidding processes to fund each new local intervention they wish to offer, minimizing their impact and capacity to plan and deliver a long-term strategy that succeeds in ending homelessness.

The review of local homelessness strategies will also need to be funded by MHCLG, to ensure that it does not undermine local authorities' existing commitments to meet their duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act and for other homeless groups. It is important that these measures do not further confuse accountabilities, or lead to central Government trying to micro-manage hugely complex issues and services from a desk in Whitehall.

The LGA will work positively with councils and the Government in developing a sector-led support offer, helping councils to continually innovate and improve services to deliver good outcomes in the face of significant challenges.

Better data

- Establish data pilots as the first step towards developing an integrated outcomes framework for homelessness and rough sleeping services
- Monitor links between homelessness and health, through testing the inclusion of housing status in new NHS data collections

The LGA view

We are pleased to see that the strategy has taken forward two of our recommendations: to move towards a cross-departmental effort to monitor the impact of actions on homelessness, and for NHS services to collect data on housing circumstances and homelessness.

However, an outcomes framework forms only part of the picture, and the LGA has argued that Departments should go further by developing a joint action plan, which explicitly acknowledges the role each Department has in preventing homelessness, defines success in the context of each Department, and reports annually on progress using a defined outcomes framework. We will continue to advocate for this more comprehensive and rigorous approach, which is needed if we are to make significant progress in ending rough sleeping.

The health service

- Request that NICE produce guidance to support targeted homelessness prevention work, integrated care and recovery across the NHS
- Fund research to inform improved hospital discharge processes, and promote learning from this research in the Rough Sleeping Initiative areas

The LGA view

Hospital discharge is a key point at which there is insufficient support, which in turn increases immediate risk of rough sleeping, and so we are pleased to see attention given to this important issue in line with our recommendations. However, we would have liked to see this Strategy go further than the promotion of good practice, and require the NHS to work with councils to ensure every patient has suitable accommodation and support on leaving hospital.

More broadly, the LGA has argued for a comprehensive review of strategies and frameworks to better plan for housing with health, including a review of Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships' plans to improve health outcomes for populations at risk of homelessness. This would provide a more rigorous, strategic means for local authorities to meet their ambitions – and legal duties – to tackle rough sleeping.

Prisons, probation and the criminal justice system

- Invest £3 million over two years in two pilots in resettlement prisons in England, to support offenders who have been identified as being at risk of rough sleeping on release.
- Develop a pilot for residential women's centres for female offenders in five sites across England and Wales. This will be accompanied by a wider National Concordat on Female Offenders, setting out how local partners can work to support women with multiple and complex needs.

The LGA view

The LGA recognises the importance of prison as a key transition point at which the risk of rough sleeping increases greatly. As such, we would have preferred to see more substantive measures, including: the introduction of a Housing Resettlement Service in every resettlement prison and youth justice secure estate, and an obligation on Governors to introduce integrated transition plans for all prisoners, supported by multi-agency partnership protocols.

Welfare

- Develop a quantitative, predictive model of homelessness and rough sleeping, which can be used to assess the impacts of government policy and interventions on levels of homelessness
- Gather evidence from local authorities and the homelessness sector on challenges around affordability in the private rented sector
- Develop policy options for post-2020 when the current Local Housing Allowance freeze ends

The LGA view

The LGA has consistently argued for welfare reforms to be reviewed. We are therefore pleased to see the government commit to reviewing future policy interventions in terms of their effects on homelessness, which lends credence to this important issue.

However, in light of existing evidence of the impact on homelessness, we are arguing that welfare reforms – including the current rates of Local Housing Allowance – should be reviewed immediately. Local housing authorities should also be given the resources to support vulnerable claimants at risk of homelessness, including full access to information about Universal Credit claims, and better accessibility of Universal Support.

CHAPTER FOUR: INTERVENTION

- The Rough Sleeping Initiative will receive up to £45 million for 2019/20. Its work will be extended from the 83 local authorities with the highest levels of rough sleeping to other areas where local authorities demonstrate commitment to tackling rough sleeping.
- There will be new funding for rough sleeping navigators, to support people sleeping rough to access local services.

- There will be up to £17 million of new funding for a new Somewhere Safe to Stay pilot in 15 locations around the country with high levels of rough sleeping. This will build on learning from the No Second Night Out programme to support people new to rough sleeping, as well as people identified as being at risk of sleeping rough, through the provision of assessment centres offering bespoke advice and support.
- In partnership with local authorities, providers, hostel residents, and other stakeholders, there will be a review of hostels focussed on capacity, quality and outcomes commencing in Spring 2019.
- The government will work with the sector to deliver new training to the hostel workforce

The LGA view

We welcome the Strategy's adoption of our recommendation to pilot a Somewhere Safe to Stay offer in 15 local housing authority areas. This will have an immediate impact on numbers and provide rigorous testing of potential implementation issues, such as demand, the impact of having insufficient move-on accommodation, and possible pressures on temporary accommodation. We would like to see a clear national definition developed to ensure proper evaluation of the model, including a thorough understanding of local circumstances, and again reiterate the importance of local homelessness strategies as a vehicle through which to achieve this. We will work with government to take this forward.

It is also positive that there will be increased funding to enable local authorities to support rough sleepers into accommodation. However, we believe that local authorities are best able to tackle homelessness where they have the power and resources necessary to increase the supply of local housing options into which rough sleepers can be supported. We will continue to argue for the relaxation of a range of Housing Revenue Account restrictions, including borrowing and the use of Right to Buy receipts.

People who sleep rough from outside of the UK

- There will be a new £5 million fund to help local areas develop support for non-UK nationals who sleep rough. This will complement the £100 million Controlling Migration Fund, which will reopen in the summer.
- There will be an additional Rough Sleeping Support team who will provide targeted casework to support and resolve the immigration status of non-UK nationals who are sleeping rough

The LGA view

It is good to see the announcement of additional resource to improve advice to applicants from outside the UK who are sleeping rough. We have also argued for this advice to be underpinned by an improvement in the available support, including for refugees to have accommodation upon determination of right of residence in the UK, and the ending of the Right to Rent policy. The current lack of this support has a significant human cost, as well as increasing the burden on local authorities to support people who currently have no recourse to public funds.

Meeting the health needs of people who sleep rough now

- £2 million in health funding in 2018/19 to test models of community-based provision designed to enable access to health and support services – including mental health and substance misuse services - for people who are sleeping rough

- A request of NHS England to spend up to £30m on health services for people who sleep rough over the next five years

The LGA view

It is positive that the Strategy includes our recommendation to introduce funding to ensure that vulnerable adults can access vital mental health, drug and alcohol, and social care services.

We have also argued for an integrated fund, which brings together health care funding with social care, housing and homelessness to specifically end rough sleeping and reduce health inequalities. The announcement of £30 million on health services for people sleeping rough goes some way towards achieving that, and we will work with government to help ensure that local homelessness strategies are used as a vehicle for the funding's delivery.

We would also welcome confirmation of whether this will be additional funding for the NHS, or whether it will come from existing resources; given that the NHS will not be mandated to divert this funding, it is unclear as to whether it will have the desired impact without extra resources being made available.

CHAPTER FIVE: RECOVERY

- From autumn 2018, there will be an evaluation of the Housing First pilots in Liverpool, Manchester and the West Midlands, informing wider roll-out.
- The government will explore an exemption from the Shared Accommodation Rate for the three government-backed Housing First pilots
- £50 million of the government's recent £100 million Move-On Fund will shortly become available to areas outside England, with the launch of a [prospectus](#) by Homes England. Bids will be for both the capital funding to build homes and the funding to provide tenancy sustainment support
- £135 million from dormant accounts has been allocated to social investment, with the majority being spent on housing for vulnerable people, and the rest on new models of community funding.
- A new Supported Lettings Fund of up to £19 million, which will fund flexible support and tenancy sustainment in homes provided exclusively for people who sleep rough. This will allow local areas to create local schemes along the lines of the London-based Clearing House initiative.
- A review of housing-related support services commencing in September 2018
- The £20 million Private Sector Access Fund, which was announced in the 2017 budget, will be focused on supporting schemes that help single homeless people and families
- A new fund to support the set-up of local lettings agencies, to provide homes and advice for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- £1.2 million of outcomes payments for the Rough Sleeping Social Impact Bond programme, to enable local authorities to meet demand for projects funded through this programme.
- A new programme of work involving Jobcentres: a work coach homelessness expert to act as a single point of contact in every Jobcentre; for Partnership Managers to lead on building effective partnerships with housing and homelessness services; improved guidance for work coaches; the sharing of learning from the partnership between Newcastle Jobcentre Plus and Newcastle Local Authority

The LGA view

We are pleased to note the inclusion of several of our recommendations, including

a new programme of work involving Jobcentres, and the widening of exemptions from the Shared Accommodation Rate restriction. Moreover, it is positive that the Strategy demonstrates a clear recognition of the importance of the wider provision of housing, support, and wider infrastructure in ensuring that nobody returns to rough sleeping.

However, as part of a coherent, rigorous approach to tackling rough sleeping, we would have preferred to see any additional funding targeted at supporting homelessness and rough sleeping prevention being routed through Local Homelessness Strategies. We believe that this is the most effective way to ensure that local delivery agents from every Government Department can make a significant contribution to local efforts, particularly as it is local authorities who are subject to legal duties to monitor, prevent, and reduce homelessness.