LONDON BOROUGH OF HACKNEY

Rough Sleeping Strategy   2020-2023

Equality Impact Assessment

STEP 1: DEFINING THE ISSUE

1. Why are we putting in place a Rough Sleeping Strategy?

1.1. The issue of people sleeping rough has become more acute with a notable increase in the number of people sleeping on the borough's streets. Rough sleeping severely impacts on an individual's life chances, with a significant risk of falling into crime and addiction, and vulnerability to mental illness and severe health problems.

1.2. Rough sleepers in Hackney are among the most vulnerable groups in the borough. People present with mental and physical health needs, often exacerbated by dependencies on alcohol or drugs. In many cases, people will have experienced severe and multiple disadvantages throughout their lives.   While they make up only a small percentage of homeless households within the borough, the resources and expertise required to provide protection, care and support are considerable.

1.3. It is therefore a key priority for the Council to seek to end rough sleeping in the borough. To do this not only requires co-ordinated action to assist those already on the street to find and sustain accommodation in the long term, but also to ensure that effective support networks are in place to prevent new rough sleepers moving onto the streets.

1.4. Tackling rough sleeping is an implicit part of our overriding Homelessness Strategy. However, such is the extent of the negative impact it has on the individuals affected and the community as a whole, it is felt necessary to produce a separate but complementary strategy document giving the issue focus, priority and impact.

1.5. This strategy recognises and builds on the considerable work that the Council, voluntary and statutory sector are already doing to prevent and tackle rough sleeping. We recognise that there are still too many people living on the streets of Hackney and that there is a continuous flow of people finding themselves homeless. With early intervention, holistic support to those who need it most, and clear pathways back to secure housing, we can prevent rough sleeping and move towards our overall objective that no one will have the need to sleep rough in Hackney.

1.6. It is a statutory requirement that we have a homelessness strategy that includes rough sleeping but we have chosen to go beyond this and produce a stand-alone Rough Sleeper Strategy.
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2. Who are the main people that will be affected?

2.1. The standard definition of rough sleeping by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is "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."[1]

2.2. However, the Rough Sleeper Strategy covers a wider definition including not just those living and sleeping on the borough's streets, but also those who are at high risk of sleeping rough, or are using insecure, unsustainable or unsafe accommodation, for example:

- Those sleeping rough within Hackney (the legal definition).
- Squatters who were previously or are at risk of sleeping rough.
- Sofa surfers who were previously or are at risk of sleeping rough.
- Those living in motor vehicles (not including Travellers).
- Those living in tents (not including campers, protesters or Travellers).
- Those currently supported in hostels who were previously sleeping rough.

2.3. There are two main ways to monitor the extent of rough sleeping in Hackney; the CHAIN (Combined Homelessness and Information Network) data, which tracks the cumulative number of individuals sleeping rough across the year, and the annual rough sleeper count, which is a snapshot of the numbers on one night in November nationwide.

2.4. The CHAIN figures show fluctuations in the total number of individuals found rough sleeping in the borough between 2015/16 (148) and 2018/19 (163). In November 2019 the borough's annual count identified 14 persons sleeping rough on that night.

2.5. Most rough sleepers are single individuals who often face barriers to obtaining housing support due to being classed as non-priority under current legislation. This means they are not owed a housing duty by local authorities. Many have issues with mental and physical health, as well as substance misuse. The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018 increased the level of support available to single persons but the housing duty itself remained unchanged.

STEP 2: ANALYSING THE ISSUES

3. What information and consultation have you used to inform your decision making?

3.1. There are two main ways to monitor the extent of rough sleeping in Hackney; the CHAIN (Combined Homelessness and Information Network) data and the annual rough sleeper count:

[1] Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG): https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-data-notes-and-definitions

3.2. CHAIN (Combined Homelessness and Information Network) - The CHAIN database is a GLA commissioned system managed by St Mungo's, a third sector organisation that works with the single homeless. It monitors rough sleeping across London and counts the total number of verified individual rough sleepers across the year (those that have been seen sleeping rough by outreach teams).[2]

3.3. The Annual Rough Sleeper Count - Conducted by the Council every November, this provides a very important snap shot of how many individuals are sleeping rough on one night in Hackney. Intelligence is taken beforehand to identify where rough sleepers may be bedding down. Annual counts are conducted using methodology set out by the government in 2010: "Evaluating the Extent of Rough Sleeping: A new approach."[3]

3.4. From the outset, we have sought to ensure that those with experience of rough sleeping and those engaged in providing support to rough sleepers had a say in the development of this strategy. Part of this process was to seek their understanding of why and how it occurs, the experiences of those who live on the streets and what support is available to them to relieve their situation

3.5. During 2019, Homeless Link were commissioned to review the Rough Sleeper Strategy and engaged with service users, our key partners and the members of the Single Homelessness Forum who were invited to give their views on our approach to help us achieve our objectives, and the responses received form part of the basis for this Strategy. Included within the consultation process were Crisis, Homeless Link, St Mungo's Broadway, Thames Reach, Hackney Winter Night Shelter, plus representatives from public health services, housing providers, the probation service, housing charities as well as Hackney Council's Housing and Social services.

4. Equality Impacts

4.1. What positive impact could there be overall, on different equality groups, and on cohesion and good relations?

4.2. Work on tackling rough sleeping in Hackney will require that a number of borough wide partnerships, initiatives and strategies already in place are utilised to provide a holistic approach that meets the objective to ensure no one has the need to sleep rough in Hackney.

The priorities for achieving our objective will focus on:
• Prevention - averting people becoming homeless and ending up rough sleeping through the provision of timely advice options and alternative accommodation;

• Outreach - Delivering services to assess the needs of those sleeping rough, and ensuring a robust and proportionate approach to managing the street population;

• Pathways - Delivering sustainable housing outcomes including reconnection, pathways to independence, options for training and employment and better health outcomes

http://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports
[3] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6009/1713784.pdf

4.3. The Rough Sleeping Strategy will facilitate constructive and meaningful dialogue between Council departments and with those groups working in the borough to support people sleeping rough who are not currently connected to the support structures available. The impact on the protected groups has been identified as follows:

4.3.1. Age –two thirds of rough sleepers are under 45, with around one in ten under 25. There is some evidence that the age profile for rough sleeping is getting younger. The strategy seeks to join up provision for rough sleepers to ensure they are directed to the most appropriate solution.

4.3.2. Disability – Although there is little data on disability levels among rough sleepers, it is generally acknowledged that individuals sleeping rough are more likely to suffer from mental health issues and there is also an increased likelihood of alcohol and drug dependence. The strategy co-ordinates the support services available to ensure rough sleepers can access both medical care and mental health services.

4.3.3. Ethnicity – Around 52% of rough sleepers in Hackney are White, 26% were identified as Black, 10% as Asian and 7% of mixed race. The remaining 5% were of Chinese, Arab or other origin. Two thirds of the rough sleepers identified on CHAIN are UK Nationals. The number of persons sleeping rough that originate from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) countries at 11% is below the London wide figure of 21%.

4.3.4. Gender - Rough sleepers are overwhelmingly male, however, at 19% Hackney has a marginally higher proportion of female rough sleepers than the London average of 18%. Female rough sleepers are particularly vulnerable and warrant specific attention to prevent abuse and this has been recognised within the strategy through support for Hackney Winter Night Shelter's dedicated women only shelter, the Pause and Open Doors projects and Hackney Council's Domestic Abuse Intervention Service (DAIS). The Action Plans to support the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategies will provide specific action points to help prevent women becoming homeless, to provide access to provision of safe and secure emergency accommodation and minimise the risk whilst on the streets.

4.3.5. Sexual orientation – The sexual orientation of rough sleepers was not recorded on the CHAIN but we know from working with partners like Stonewall Housing, many young people will have been thrown out of home, or otherwise excluded from housing because of their sexuality. Anecdotal evidence suggests that LGBTQI+ individuals represent a small but significant proportion of rough sleepers. The Rough Sleeping Strategy identifies the benefit of early intervention on preventing rough sleeping. The Action Plan will identify how the specific risks for LGBTQI+ residents can be addressed to prevent rough sleeping in the first instance and mitigate the dangers for those sleeping on the street. We do not consider that the Rough Sleeping strategy will have an adverse impact on the grounds of sexual orientation.

4.3.6. Religion or belief - We do not envisage that there will be any adverse impact on the grounds of religion or belief because of the introduction of the Rough Sleeping Strategy.

4.3.7. Pregnancy and maternity - We do not envisage that there will be any adverse impact on the grounds of pregnancy or maternity because of the introduction of the Rough Sleeping Strategy.

4.3.8. Gender reassignment - We do not envisage that there will be any adverse impact on the grounds of gender reassignment because of the introduction of the Rough Sleeping Strategy.

4.3.9. Marriage and civil partnership - We do not envisage any adverse impact on the grounds of marriage and civil partnership because of the introduction of the Rough Sleeping Strategy.

4.4. What negative impact could there be overall, on different equality groups, and on cohesion and good relations?

4.5. As previously stated, the Rough Sleeping Strategy seeks to bring together the various strands of support provided for rough sleepers. Currently there are a range of different projects and services that both directly and indirectly help to prevent homelessness and help rough sleepers off the street and into suitable accommodation. Responsibility for delivering these programmes falls to a number of different departments across the Council, as well as statutory and voluntary organisations that work in partnership with the Council. The Strategy seeks to draw this provision into a more cohesive and responsive offer.

4.6. The Strategy does not directly advocate the redirection of services or funding. Consequently, we do not envisage that there will be any adverse impact to any of the identified protected groups.

STEP 3: REACHING OUR DECISION

5. The recommended decision

5.1. It is recommended that Cabinet approve the adoption of the Rough Sleeping Strategy. In developing this strategy, we sought the views of our internal and external partners that are engaged in providing support to rough sleepers. The strategy will be monitored by the Hackney Homelessness Partnership Board to ensure it remains relevant and continues to meet the needs of homeless households in Hackney.

STEP 4 DELIVERY – MAXIMISING BENEFITS AND MANAGING RISKS

Equality and Cohesion Action Planning
Please list specific actions which set out how you will address equality and cohesion issues identified by this assessment. For example,
• Steps/ actions you will take to enhance positive impacts identified in section 4 (a)
• Steps/ actions you will take to mitigate again the negative impacts identified in section 4 (b)
• Steps/ actions you will take to improve information and evidence about a specific client group, e.g. at a service level and/or at a Council level by informing the policy team (equality.diversity@hackney.gov.uk)
All actions should have been identified already and should be included in any action plan connected to the supporting documentation, such as the delegate powers report, saving template or business case.]

No	Objective	Actions	Outcomes highlighting how these will be monitored	Timescales/ Milestones	Lead Officer

1	Understand and monitor the profile of single homeless and identify how this client group can be supported at the earliest opportunity	Utilise CHAIN data and reporting tools in Jigsaw to profile existing caseload and new approaches. Report on outcomes and trends. Develop action plan to deliver early interventions.	Monthly reporting and statutory government returns.	Ongoing monthly reporting	Head of Benefits and Housing Needs
2	Mitigate the impact of Brexit on EU Nationals	Monitor nationality data through CHAIN and street counts. Develop appropriate pathway, support and advice to assist EU Nationals to attain legal residency, employment and accommodation or to reconnect to their country of origin.	Quarterly reports to the Head of Benefits and Housing Needs Service. Annual Report to Hackney Homelessness Partnership Board.	Ongoing Quarterly reporting	Head of Benefits and Housing Needs
3	Evaluate the level and causes of both female and LGBTQI+ residents rough sleeping to develop an understanding of the underlying causes.	Record and monitor incidents of female and LGBTQI+ residents rough sleeping and reasons for homelessness. Report on outcomes and trends. Engage with community and voluntary sector partners to develop and deliver tailored solutions.	Quarterly reports to the Head of Benefits and Housing Needs Service. Annual Report to Hackney Homelessness Partnership Board.	Ongoing Quarterly reporting	Head of Benefits and Housing Needs
4	Ensure that rough sleepers with mental health and or dependency issues are identified and engaged compassionately and effectively	Record and evaluate mental health and dependency issues. Report on outcomes and trends. Engage with community and voluntary sector partners to develop and deliver tailored solutions.	Quarterly reports to the Head of Benefits and Housing Needs Service. Annual Report to Hackney Homelessness Partnership Board.	Ongoing Quarterly reporting	Head of Benefits and Housing Needs