

TITLE OF REPORT - Hackney Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-22

Key Decision No – FCR Q.58

**CABINET MEETING DATE
(2019/20)**

24 February 2020

CLASSIFICATION:

Open

**If exempt, the reason will be listed in the
main body of this report.**

WARD(S) AFFECTED

All Wards Affected

CABINET MEMBER

Councillor Rebecca Rennison

Cabinet Member for Finance and Housing Needs

KEY DECISION

Yes

REASON

Affects two or more wards

GROUP DIRECTOR

Ian Williams - Group Director of Finance and Resources.

1. CABINET MEMBER'S INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Rough sleeping is life-threatening, with the average life expectancy for rough sleepers just 45 for men and 43 for women. We know we have to act quickly and effectively to ensure people are given the support they need and a pathway into sustainable accommodation.
- 1.2. We made the manifesto commitment to work to ensure that no one needs to sleep rough on the streets of Hackney and this strategy sets out the steps we are taking to implement this.
- 1.3. We will work across the three strands of prevention, outreach and pathways to reduce the number of people who find themselves sleeping rough and to ensure those that do are supported off the streets as quickly as possible.
- 1.4. We will deliver this strategy in partnership with our statutory and voluntary sector partners, in particular working closely with, and reporting into, the Homelessness Partnership Board. This brings together Council departments, public bodies and local charities to provide oversight and strategic direction to work addressing homelessness in the borough.
- 1.5. We are already seeing the impact of investment we have made in services, with our most recent annual count recording a significant drop in numbers, recording just 14 people sleeping rough in Hackney on that night. However, we know that is still too many and our job will not be done until no one is sleeping rough in the borough.
- 1.6. We know the tragic consequences of failing to support individuals off the streets. Our failure to successfully engage Musa Sevimli, who was a known rough sleeper in Hackney, and support him off the streets led to his death in 2019. There will be a full Safeguarding Adults Review into Musa's death to identify what we could have done differently, and any opportunities missed that could have saved him. This will look both at our rough sleeping services, and also more widely at other services and bodies that had a duty to help Musa. Once we have the review's findings and recommendations we will review and refresh this strategy to ensure these are implemented.
- 1.7. We owe it to Musa and to every person who finds themselves sleeping rough to make sure we have the services and support in place to help people off the streets and into secure accommodation. These are our most vulnerable residents and we cannot fail them.

2. GROUP DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION

- 2.1. Since 1999 successive Governments have made a commitment to tackle rough sleeping, and the publication of the MHCLG's Rough Sleeping Strategy in August 2018 is a continuation of that process. However, despite this commitment rough sleeping remains an issue both nationally and locally.

- 2.2. Rough sleepers in Hackney are among the most vulnerable groups in the Borough. Many have mental health issues or have high support needs, a consequence of dependence on alcohol and drugs, and while they make up only a small percentage of homeless households within the borough, the resources required to provide protection, care and support are considerable.
- 2.3. Rough sleeping also significantly impacts the wider community. There are rough sleeping hotspots across Hackney, which have become associated with anti-social behaviour and which can entice other vulnerable and disruptive individuals on to our streets. The existence of rough sleepers, street drinkers and aggressive beggars together has a negative impact on local areas, and generates complaints from residents and businesses.
- 2.4. It is therefore a key priority for the Council to seek to end rough sleeping in the borough. However, 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 we must also ensure that effective support networks are in place to prevent new rough sleepers moving onto the streets.
- 2.5. 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 remains necessary to produce a separate but complementary strategy document giving the issue focus, priority and impact.
- 2.6. This strategy recognises and builds on the excellent work that the Council, voluntary and statutory sector are already doing to prevent and tackle rough sleeping. 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 of no one sleeping rough on the streets of Hackney.

3. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 3.1. That Cabinet approves the draft Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-22

4. REASONS FOR DECISION

- 4.1. In August 2018 the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) published the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy. Within the strategy is a requirement for local authorities to update their Homelessness Strategy to include an additional focus on responding to Rough Sleeping.
- 4.2. Hackney had already preempted this requirement by publishing its own Rough Sleeper Strategy in 2016. The Council had already identified that rough sleeping within the borough warranted a stand alone strategy to

complement the strategic vision highlighted within the Council's Homelessness Strategy.

- 4.3. Our existing strategy runs until 2020 and it was therefore time to refresh and update our strategy, while also factoring in the national Rough Sleeping Strategy by MHCLG. This refresh also coincides with the review and refresh of the wider Homelessness Strategy and supports a consistent approach across both strategies.
- 4.4. The Council has made considerable progress in tackling rough sleeping despite the particularly challenging backdrop; a lack of suitable affordable housing stock, the significant cuts in central Government funding for health and support services and the ongoing reform of the welfare state that has seen housing support for low income households reduced considerably.
- 4.5. Hackney saw a 4.7% decrease in rough sleepers between 2017/18 and 18/19 from 171 to 163. This goes against the London wide trend which saw a significant increase in rough sleeping, with numbers up 18% from 7,484 to 8,855. Over the last year Hackney's decrease is out of synch with our surrounding boroughs, with Newham, Islington, Waltham Forest and The City of London seeing significant rises in rough sleeping, which are amongst the highest in London.
- 4.6. This refreshed strategy seeks to build on this successful work and meet the Council's ambitions of:
 - 4.6.1. stopping people from becoming homeless and sleeping rough through providing timely information and advice, appropriate accommodation and support options,
 - 4.6.2. delivering services which can engage with all local rough sleepers and assess their full range of needs; ensuring that street activities are responded to in an effective and proportionate way, and
 - 4.6.3. providing accommodation options which are sustainable and support rough sleepers to improve their health and wellbeing and employability while developing independence and resilience.
- 4.7. The Rough Sleeping Strategy has been fully reviewed to reflect the new priorities outlined in the Government's rough sleeping strategy, and to take stock of the progress towards our goal of ending rough sleeping in the borough. It allows the Council to highlight the enhanced provision of services for rough sleepers across the borough, especially around street outreach. And to provide a strategic framework to measure future performance and service delivery.
- 4.8. The document forms part of Hackney's new overarching approach to homelessness and rough sleeping as a combined Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. However given the particularly negative impact rough sleeping has on individuals it is felt that producing a distinct

document is still appropriate to ensure the issue is given sufficient focus, priority and impact.

5. DETAILS OF ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 5.1. The MHCLG national Rough Sleeping Strategy requires that the Council ensure that our homeless strategy pays due regard to rough sleeping and is rebadged as a homelessness and rough sleeping strategy.
- 5.2. The Council did consider combining the Rough Sleeping Strategy into the Homelessness Strategy as a single homelessness document, but we believe having a separate document will help publicise the importance of preventing rough sleeping, and highlight the services that are available.
- 5.3. While a combined strategic approach is important in ensuring constructive monitoring of the effectiveness of current service provision and the direction of future activities as appropriate, this distinct strategy document provides a framework for 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.
- 5.4. Without a more focused statement there is a potential for duplication, gaps in provision and miscommunication.

6. BACKGROUND

- 6.1. Rough sleeping represents homelessness at its starkest; where some of the most vulnerable persons in our community end up furthest from the support they need and in a downward spiral. Rough sleepers are vulnerable to mental illness and severe health problems. Being on the streets is life threatening, with individuals at risk of an early death.
- 6.2. Without early help, dedicated outreach, support and engagement it is unlikely individuals will leave the streets. Therefore the Council is determined to act early to alleviate the immediate risk of rough sleeping, and to support those already on the streets to connect into appropriate services.
- 6.3. Across London rough sleeping figures have hit a record high with 8,855 people recorded as bedding down on the capital's street last year. Although such a steep increase has not been reflected in Hackney this strategy is a manifestation of our commitment to do more, and have a clear action plan to reduce and end rough sleeping wherever possible.
- 6.4. There are two main ways to monitor the extent of rough sleeping in Hackney; the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) 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.

- 6.5. CHAIN data for Hackney indicates that rough sleeping numbers in the borough have been relatively stable since 2014/15. The number of verified rough sleepers for 2018/19 is only slightly higher than that for 2014/15 despite the severe challenges caused by welfare reform and lack of affordable housing options. More importantly over the last full financial year Hackney saw a 4.7% decrease in rough sleepers on our streets, which goes against the London wide trend which saw a significant 18% increase.
- 6.6. The annual street count is a snapshot of the numbers of rough sleepers on one night nationwide in every local authority area via a count or estimate. The most recent count in November 2019 for Hackney identified 14 cases of rough sleeping on Hackney's streets. This is a decrease from 23 cases identified the previous year, which suggests our proactive work is having an impact.
- 6.7. However the success to date is not only due to work undertaken by the Council, but the work of a much wider partnership across the statutory and third sector. Going forward this strategy cannot be delivered by the Council in isolation and requires the wider partnership to be actively engaged.
- 6.8. A prolonged period of rough sleeping is likely to have a severely detrimental impact on someone's mental and physical health. The average life expectancy of a homeless man is 45 years and for a woman only 43. The longer someone spends on the streets the greater the negative impact on their physical health and the increased likelihood of them experiencing issues with their mental health and substance misuse. Rough sleepers are also around 17 times more likely to be victims of violence than the general population. Women are particularly vulnerable, with around a quarter having been sexually assaulted whilst sleeping rough
- 6.9. There is a correlation between rough sleeping and street activity but it is not codependent. Most people asking for money on the street are not rough sleepers. However, begging or other street activity can follow a period of rough sleeping. Street activity can also increase the risk of street homelessness for people who are in accommodation, especially for those people with substance misuse needs.
- 6.10. This strategy also seeks to support Hackney's hidden homeless population. This includes people who are sofa surfing, living in squats, tents or motor vehicles and those sleeping on public transport. Hidden homeless people are likely to include particular groups: young, single people without dependent children, young LGBTQI+ people and those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), especially asylum seekers.

- 6.11. London's hidden homeless population is understood to be much larger than that of rough sleepers. The transience of this group in and out of accommodation, their non-engagement with local services and the incompleteness of existing local authority homelessness data make it difficult to accurately estimate their numbers in Hackney. However, homelessness statistics and other recent data enable the following to be stated in relation to London as a whole:
- 6.11.1. On any single night at least 12,500 people may be hidden homeless,
 - 6.11.2. Around 1 in 10 people will experience hidden homelessness in any one year.
 - 6.11.3. 25,000 young people in London have stayed in an insecure or unsafe place because they had nowhere safe to call home. In 2014, 20% of 16 - 25 year olds were involved in sofa surfing – for around half, this lasted for more than a month.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. Identifying expenditure on preventing and tackling rough sleeping is currently impossible given the significant overlap of services directly dealing with homelessness as a whole and other expenditure related to health and to street and community safety.
- 7.2. The Council has been able to bid successfully to a number of funding streams for project funding for activity directly related to rough sleeping, including £350,000 to put in place a dedicated outreach service.
- 7.3. The Council will continue to identify and apply to any funding streams that will allow us to implement the programmes identified within the strategy.

8. Equality Impact Assessment

- 8.1. 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 disadvantage 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
- 8.2. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and the Benefits and Housing Needs Service will regularly assess the ongoing impact of the actions associated with the implementation of the strategy to monitor they do not impact adversely on any particular sectors of the community.

9. Sustainability

- 9.1. The priorities and actions set out in this report have a limited direct impact on the physical and social environment.

10. Consultations

- 10.1. Throughout the process of developing this strategy the Council has met and consulted with service users, people who have had experience of rough sleeping and local agencies who work to prevent and tackle homelessness. The strategy has been designed with our key partners to develop the key aims and priorities.
- 10.2. This conversation with the wider statutory, third sector and voluntary community will continue as services and the strategy evolve, to make sure that they remain appropriate for service users needs and that gaps in service provision are identified and reduced.
- 10.3. The strategy continues to fit into our corporate priorities by ensuring that Hackney remains a place that works for everyone, and that our most vulnerable, those sleeping rough and at risk of sleeping rough, are not left behind.

11. Risk Assessment

- 11.1. The delivery of key elements of this strategy rely on short term funding from MHCLG. There are however no guarantees on the amount of funding that the service will receive in future, or that subsequent bids will be successful. Any significant reduction or loss of these funding streams will require the strategy to be reconfigured to be delivered within internal budgets.
- 11.2. There is a reputational risk to the Council if it is unable to adequately meet the increased service demand and level of need arising from the housing crisis and cuts in other related services. This will lead to increased costs on a wide range of public services including Community Safety, Health, and Social Services.
- 11.3. A significant increase in Rough Sleeping would also indicate that the Council has failed in its corporate and strategic priorities. The council would face negative publicity and media coverage from the increased visibility of rough sleepers on our streets.

12. COMMENTS OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND CORPORATE RESOURCES

- 12.1. This strategy gives the Council a clear direction in tackling rough sleeping in the borough. Failure to respond appropriately to the homelessness crisis could result in continuing pressures on Temporary Accommodation and other service budgets.
- 12.2. There are no direct financial implications to the Rough Sleeping Strategy as the outcomes will be achieved through working with our partners to deliver a range of support services to rough sleepers and through projects funded by external funding streams.

13. COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR, LEGAL & GOVERNANCE SERVICES

- 13.1. Under the Homelessness Act 2002, all housing authorities must have in place a homelessness strategy based on a review of all forms of homelessness within their district. Failure to produce an up-to-date strategy will be open to legal challenge.
- 13.2. In August 2018, the MHCLG published the Rough Sleeping Strategy which included a commitment to "...strengthen local homelessness strategies, and introduce a new emphasis on rough sleeping." All local authorities were required to update their strategies and rebadge them as homelessness and rough sleeping strategies.
- 13.3. As a public authority, the council must take account of the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 and not act in a way which is incompatible with a Convention right.
- 13.4. Under Article 8, any interference with the right to respect for a person's private and family life and home must be proportionate and Article 14 requires that there must be no unjustified discrimination within the scope of human rights on any grounds, such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth, or other status.
- 13.5. In discharging its functions to homeless persons, the council must also have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty in s149 Equality Act 2010. S149(1) provides that, in exercising its functions, a public authority must have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the 2010 Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 13.6. The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

- 13.7. S149(3) provides that having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to (a) remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic; (b) take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it; and (c) encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
- 13.8. S149(4) provides that the steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities.
- 13.9. Section 149(6) provides that compliance with the duties in section 149 may involve treating some persons more favourably than others.

APPENDICES

Rough Sleeping Strategy

Equality Impact Assessment

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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|---|--|
| Report Author | Ross Hatfull 020 8356 3945 ross.hatfull@hackney.gov.uk |
| Comments for and on behalf of the Group Director of Finance and Resources | Michael Honeysett 020 8356 3332 Financial Management Finance and Resources Directorate |
| Comments for and on behalf of the Interim Director of Legal & Governance | Chima Obichukwu 020 8356 4538 Senior Lawyer |

