

Committee:	Dated:
Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Sub-Committee	29/06/2020
Subject: Rough Sleeping COVID-19 Summary Report	Public
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
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Summary

The current COVID-19 pandemic has presented public bodies and commissioned providers with an unprecedented challenge. On 22 March, the Government formally announced its social distancing policy, and on 26 March the new COVID-19 Taskforce launched the 'Everyone In' initiative to support local authorities in helping rough sleepers to access accommodation.

This report sets out a summary of the action taken in supporting rough sleepers through the adaptations and additions to our service delivery, the benefit of partnership work with the Greater London Authority (GLA), and some indications of the impact of this work.

To date, 110 rough sleepers have been assisted in some way, most with immediate and safe accommodation.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. The Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) indicates a general decline in rough sleeping numbers within the Square Mile across 2019 (see figure at Appendix 1).
2. In the third quarter of financial year 2019/20, a total of 145 individual rough sleepers were seen bedded down by the City of London commissioned Outreach team.

3. In January 2020, a total of 45 individuals were counted as part of our bimonthly street counts.
4. The first UK cases of COVID-19 in the general population were reported towards the end of January and infection rates escalated throughout February and March.
5. Towards the end of February and the beginning of March there was an indication that COVID-19 posed a significant risk to those rough sleeping, particularly in densely populated areas such as the City of London, due to its rapidity of infection and the indicated effect on those with pre-existing health conditions.

Current Position

Change in approach

6. From 1 March, 2020 the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Department began operating under 'crisis' measures to support the protection of Rough Sleepers from the COVID-19 outbreak.
7. Despite the fact that our Outreach service has been operating with diminished capacity, we have been able to sustain a tempo of outreach shifts at least comparable to other times. The timing and objectives of shifts have differed to ensure maximum impact and, for a short period, night-time shifts were suspended for safety reasons (since reinstated).
8. Our approach included ensuring that everyone had the ability to isolate from others to help reduce the infection rate.
9. Known rough sleepers within the Square Mile were immediately triaged and placed into one of three distinct cohorts:
 - those who did not present as having an increased medical vulnerability to the effects of COVID-19
 - those who presented as having an increased vulnerability to the effects of COVID-19, including those with significant physical health issues, those who presented as vulnerable due to age, and those who it was felt had significant support needs related to mental health and substance misuse which would affect accessing healthcare or their ability to isolate safely
 - those who presented with symptoms of COVID-19.
10. Our initial approach ensured that offers were made as immediately as possible for those presenting at an increased risk to COVID-19; this included booking hotel provision, temporary accommodation placements, supporting to access already available accommodation, and expediting referrals into hostel spaces within the City of London pathway.
11. Due to the use of a shared sleeping space and in line with Public Health England (PHE) guidelines, we closed the Winter Assessment Service at the end of March

and placed all individuals resident at the service in hotel accommodation procured by City of London officers.

12. During this period, we worked with Doctors of the World, who had begun delivering street health services in the City of London during late 2019, to increase the number of outreach shifts they delivered.

13. We implemented an additional weekly multi-agency meeting to focus on ensuring that rough sleepers were offered suitable services, were monitored effectively in relation to any health/medical needs, and that challenges across the system could be worked through to ensure the efficacy of our aims. This meeting has operated throughout the crisis period and is still operative. Partners involved include, (though are not limited to):

- Health partners (East London NHS Foundation Trust and Doctors of the World)
- Substance misuse partners
- City of London adult social care
- City of London Police
- Community Safety
- St Mungo's (as commissioned outreach provider)
- Parkguard.

Work with the GLA and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

14. On 26 March, MHCLG launched its 'Everyone In' initiative requiring Housing Authorities to ensure that provision was available for every rough sleeper. As part of this, individuals were to be triaged and placed into three distinct cohorts. This request mirrored actions we had already taken (as set out in paragraph 9).

15. On 30 March, the GLA opened the first of a number of block-booked hotels, including the entire Travelodge London City in Middlesex Street. Our bookings within this provision were migrated to the GLA, with all individuals placed by ourselves being maintained by the GLA.

16. Throughout the end of March and beginning of April, the GLA increased provision available for local authorities to access emergency accommodation for rough sleepers, including hotels with increased levels of support in place for the most chaotic/street attached rough sleepers from across London

17. A significant number of individuals were placed by City Outreach into GLA provision during this time (33 individuals had entered GLA accommodation by the close of the first week of April); this included both individuals known to the City as rough sleepers and a relatively high proportion of individuals not seen rough sleeping within the Square Mile before.

Increased scope in response to increased demand

18. Throughout April we continued to book hotel provision to ensure that rapidly accessible placements were available for rough sleepers met by outreach.
19. To address the needs and requirements of individuals with higher levels of street attachment, (a number of whom refused offers of GLA provision), we arranged emergency short-term accommodation based at the Youth Hostel Association (YHA) London St Paul's site. We utilised our existing contract with Providence Row Housing Association to deliver the Winter Assessment Service to bring 24/7 support into the provision. This service began operation from 17 April.
20. The YHA site comprises 48 rooms varying from one bed to 10 beds and 20 bathrooms. As a result, we are occupying 19 rooms, 18 of them single occupancy and another set aside for a couple or siblings. This brings the capacity to 20, each of which has access to a designated bathroom.
21. Catering facilities are not available to us, however, staff have access to a microwave and tea/coffee-making facilities.
22. Food is provided by a combination of foodbank deliveries, food vouchers and meals provided by the City of London.
23. Cleaning and security personnel are provided by existing contracts held by the Corporation. These contracts have been varied accordingly.
24. The licence agreement is for an initial three-month period, and we are currently in negotiation with YHA and City of London departments regarding an extension of this arrangement.
25. Our partners, as set out in paragraphs 12 and 13, have access to the site and continue to provide support on a scheduled and one-to-one basis.

Impact of action

26. Data indicates that there has been a significant impact on the Square Mile's rough sleeping population of the as a response to our action.
27. As of 1 June 2020, data indicates that the outreach service had supported 110 individuals into accommodation. Most of these individuals were supported into new, emergency accommodation made available as part of the COVID-19 response, though the figure also includes individuals supported to access accommodation that was previously available to them, and placements in longer-term accommodation.
28. Of the 110 individuals supported into accommodation by 1 June, 101 individuals remain in accommodation. It is important to note that this figure is derived from information held by the Outreach team, and it is possible that some changes in GLA placements have not been communicated back to our services.

29. As part of our response we have implemented a fortnightly street audit of rough sleeping. The table below represents the dates of the four audits undertaken during the period so far, alongside the number of individuals counted on each audit:

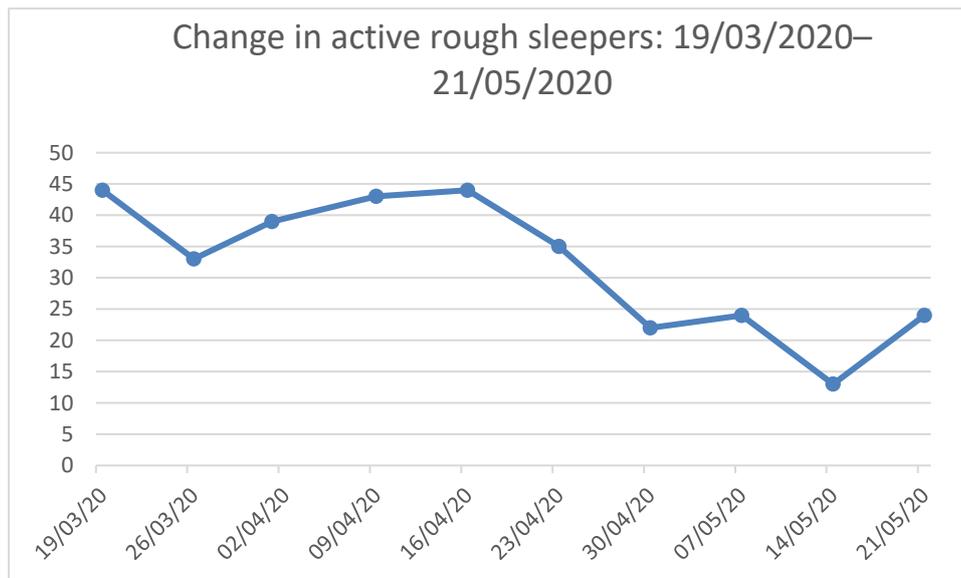
16/04/2020	07/05/2020	21/05/2020	04/06/2020
26	14	13	14

30. All four figures represent a significant decrease from our single-night figures in both November 2019 and January 2020 (41 and 45 respectively).

31. This indicative data represents the lowest level of rough sleeping recorded in the Square Mile for many years.

32. For reference, between 30 and 40 rough sleepers are usually counted on our scheduled bimonthly street audits.

33. The following chart represents the change in rough sleepers within the Authority area, covering each weekly update from 19 March until 21 May.



34. To help us establish that every City rough sleeper has access to the help they need, we have monitored all available support offers across the wider Pan-London programme. Through a combination of the GLA's expanded services and the increase in provision secured by ourselves by 6 May, we had reached a stage where all individuals met by the Outreach team had access to a safe, PHE-compliant, off-the-street accommodation offer. This is something that we are currently able to maintain while GLA services operate.

35. Instances of both confirmed and suspected infection remain very low, with only one confirmed case of COVID-19 infection, and a further seven individuals who had been identified as having symptoms (as of 01/06/2020).

36. Sadly, at the beginning of the pandemic, one rough sleeper who had a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19 was admitted to hospital after becoming unwell while living on the street. Diagnosis was made after hospitalisation. This individual later died in hospital with Coronavirus cited as a complicating factor.

Conclusion

37. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic changed our approach to working with rough sleepers to ensure that we were best able to protect those most vulnerable to infection, and that all individuals rough sleeping in the Square Mile were offered the ability to self-isolate as rapidly as possible.

38. Working with partners in the GLA and MHCLG, we have utilised a broad array of accommodation offers while also observing the clinical principles of cohorting and triage.

39. The YHA London St Paul's site has proven highly effective at ensuring our most vulnerable and hard-to-reach rough sleepers have accepted an accommodation offer.

40. The tempo and coverage of our outreach provision has remained consistent throughout the period.

41. Commissioning specific emergency accommodation within the Square Mile enabled a tailored approach to bring the most street attached rough sleepers into emergency accommodation.

42. Our actions have yielded a demonstrable reduction in single-night rough sleeping figures.

43. For those who have rejected service offers, we have worked with partners to ensure that the welfare of those on the streets is still managed and supported as effectively as possible during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – CHAIN quarterly rough sleeping figures across Q3 18/19 – Q3 19/20

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CHAIN quarterly rough sleeping figures across Q3 18/19 – Q3 19/20

