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| Committee: Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Sub-Committee | Dated: 01/10/2020 |
| Subject: Credible Offer Policy | Public |
| Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services | For Information |
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Summary

This report introduces the City of London's draft Credible Offer Policy for rough sleepers. The policy is designed to ensure that an equitable, effective and transparent approach is taken in the delivery of service offers to rough sleepers. The policy will be used to guide the work of our commissioned services, including the City of London Outreach team and Assessment Service.

The report establishes the need for a Credible Offer Policy, describes the process of review and sets out some key features within the policy.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report and recommend the policy advance to the Department of Community and Children's Services for approval.

Main Report

Background

1. It is common practice among outreach teams and assessment services across London to make offers of support and assistance designed to end a period of rough sleeping. Local authorities that commission rough sleeping services will almost certainly expect the work of their commissioned providers to focus on solving an individual's homelessness, rather than any actions that could sustain it.
2. Single Service Offers were introduced to London's rough sleeping sector at the time No Second Night Out (NSNO) was commissioned by the Greater London Authority (GLA). These offers are arrived at after a period of assessment by trained assessment and referral staff.
3. The concept of a single offer was designed to ensure that clients temporarily accommodated in basic environments such as NSNO assessment hubs did not

become stuck, therefore slowing the progression of casework for others and reducing the availability of NSNO to other outreach teams.

4. The service making the offer is usually invested in the offer being taken up; therefore, it is usually in the interest of the service to make an offer agreeable to the rough sleeper.
5. While the concept of service offers has been widely adopted for many years, the interpretation and delivery by local authorities and commissioned providers has varied.
6. The City of London expects its commissioned services to work toward ending an individual's rough sleeping. Despite this, we have a disproportionately large number of street-attached rough sleepers with lengthy histories of homelessness.
7. This characteristic is borne out through GLA data available for 2018/19 where 62% of all rough sleepers in Greater London were new to rough sleeping that year. In the City for the same period, this figure was just 15%.
8. Clear and viable service offers are essential to new rough sleepers, and rough sleepers who are already known to services. New or 'flow' rough sleepers should be aware of their options as soon as possible to minimise the risk that more complex behaviours, such drug and alcohol misuse, take hold. For longer-term rough sleepers, it may be more about challenging unwise decisions or addressing unmet needs.
9. Our Pop-up Hubs (and, more recently, our City of London Assessment Hub) have added a crucial element to our 'off the street' offer. These assessment settings are open to anyone found rough sleeping in the Square Mile and provide a safe and dignified space for our assessment staff and Outreach team to arrive at service offers.
10. In April we launched our COVID-19 contingency accommodation at the Youth Hostel Association (YHA) site at St Paul's. In line with the Government's 'Everybody In' call to local authorities, this service is available to anyone rough sleeping in the City, regardless of their eligibility, recourse to public funds, or connection to the City of London.
11. Currently the YHA is accommodating 35 guests, and we estimate that it could accommodate as many as 105 guests over the remaining eight months of the COVID-19 Recovery Plan. While we have not yet witnessed the increase in 'flow' rough sleeping numbers that many other Central London authorities have seen, we should expect numbers to rise as the Square Mile returns to normal.
12. The City's approach to making service offers is broadly in line with that of other local authorities and the GLA. However, it is inevitable that inconsistencies creep in to practice, and our commissioned services sometimes lack clarity about the nature of the offer they can make.

13. The Credible Offer Policy is designed to offer a reference point to City of London officers and commissioned providers to ensure that best practice is always applied. This is applicable to our COVID-19 Recovery Plan and all future work with rough sleepers carried out by our commissioned assessment and outreach services.

Current Position

14. A consultant with particular expertise in homelessness and rough sleeping sector commissioning and strategy has been engaged to assist us with our COVID-19 planning and Growth Programme work streams.

15. Included in this work package was the development of a Credible Offer Policy, which can be found at Appendix 1.

16. Key features of this policy include a definition of what constitutes a Credible Offer, and an explanation of how the policy should be operationalised.

17. The Policy indicates that a Credible Offer should:

- provide access to accommodation (hostel room, shared or self-contained housing, supported or independent) that meets the housing and support needs of the individual for at least the next six months
- provide access to accommodation that is affordable
- provide access to accommodation that is safe and sustainable, given the individual's support needs and circumstances
- provide access to accommodation in an area where the individual has, or can develop, social capital
- be discussed in detail with the individual rough sleeper so that the limitations, advantages and disadvantages of the offer are understood
- include all necessary support to take up the offer of accommodation (for example, travel costs, moving costs, being accompanied)
- where relevant and/or required by the accommodation provider, include an identified longer-term move-on option.

18. To ensure that a degree of objectivity was incorporated into the policy's design, we took the step of engaging Homeless Link to review the draft document and make recommendations. This can be found at Appendix 2.

19. A summary of the Homeless Link findings:

'The City's draft Credible Offer Policy provides a comprehensive approach for all rough sleepers, which is aligned with relevant national and local legal requirements and strategic aims around rough sleeping and supported with adequate resources. Discussions with comparators indicate the City's approach is in line with practice in these areas.'

20. Homeless Link made six recommendations, and all have been addressed in the final draft attached to this report (Appendix 1). A further point establishing the difference between a 'credible offer' and an 'initial offer' as part of a 'route off the

street' as also been included. The additional passages have been temporarily highlighted in the draft policy.

21. A quick reference guide to this policy will be drafted at a later stage as a companion document.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

22. The Credible Offer Policy meets the following points in the City of London Corporate Plan:

- Contribute to a flourishing society:
 - People are safe and feel safe
 - People enjoy good health and wellbeing
 - People have equal opportunities to enrich their lives and reach their full potential.

23. The Credible Offer Policy meets the following points in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019–23:

- Everyone should have a route away from rough sleeping
- The impact of homelessness is reduced
- No one needs to return to rough sleeping.

Conclusion

24. Our commissioned services successfully apply a rapid assessment and referral approach to rough sleepers; however, the current COVID-19 crisis has forced us to reassess how clear, equitable and efficient this process is.

25. Our Growth Programme and, in particular, the new Assessment Service will benefit from a clear decision-making platform to ensure consistency and good practice.

26. The development of a Credible Offer Policy has benefitted from external review to ensure that the guidance therein is aligned with best practice elsewhere.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – City of London Credible Offer Policy (Draft)
- Appendix 2 – Review of City of London Rough Sleeping: Credible Offer Policy (Homeless Link)

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