

City of London Corporation

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2027

1 Introduction

Homelessness is a crisis that can have a profound impact on the lives of those affected. Within the Square Mile, homelessness is most obviously seen on our streets, but it is an issue that is wider than rough sleeping – including those hidden from view who may sleep on a friend’s sofa, or those housed in accommodation which is unsafe or severely overcrowded.

The groups most likely to experience homeless are the most vulnerable in our society with related mental and physical health issues within single person households. However, anyone can experience homelessness and those who have been in care, experienced exclusion from school or college, the criminal justice system substance misuse, victims of domestic abuse and non-UK nationals are all over-represented within homelessness statistics.

As well as these referenced groups, this strategy relates to those homeless whether they are individuals, couples, households with children or without.

The City of London Corporation is committed to prevent or end the homelessness of those seeking our help. Whichever route brings people, families, or children into our services, we aim to act swiftly and effectively with compassion, fairness and respect.

We spend more than £4 million each year to deliver the services, support and accommodation to prevent or resolve homelessness. This strategy provides the priorities to focus our delivery and investment going forward, to shape our services and guide our decision making to deliver our vision, that:

Homelessness is brief, it does not reoccur, its impact on the individual, families and children, and our communities is minimised, and it is prevented where possible.

To secure this vision, we have identified four strategic priorities:

1. **Providing rapid, effective and tailored interventions** to minimise the duration of homelessness, prevent the loss of accommodation and prevent the crisis of street homeless leading to the harm of long-term rough sleeping
2. **Securing access to suitable and affordable accommodation** by maximising access to a range of housing options, delivering more homes; providing supported specialist housing accommodation for those with support needs
3. **Working collaboratively** with other agencies including the voluntary and Business Improvement Districts to reach across traditional boundaries and support those facing homelessness or are rough sleeping and deliver a consistency of service across service and local authority boundaries

4. **Supporting beyond accommodation** to provide support alongside appropriate accommodation to secure better outcomes, enhance employability, support recovery and prevent repeat homelessness

These priorities provide the framework for our strategy to deliver better outcomes for individuals, and more efficient and effective services. They will be underpinned by a 5-year Service Development Plan that will be continuously refreshed, so that it remains responsive to political, policy and economic change.

2 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

This strategy is shaped and responds to the drivers of national and regional policy, and the interface with a range of City Corporation strategies and responsibilities.

2.1 National

The UK Government sets the legislative framework for preventing and addressing homelessness. Since 2017 the UK government has acted to strengthen legislation, to shift the focus to prevention, and to reduce the barriers to help for specific groups such as those, including children, who experience domestic violence and those who have served in the armed forces. Legislation gives local authorities the primary role in responding to homelessness. It is backed by significant funding in the form of Homelessness Prevention Grant.

The Government is also committed to end rough sleeping in this parliament. To meet this commitment, the Government has published a cross-government strategy, *Ending Rough Sleeping for Good* which introduced several initiatives and funding so that local authorities, voluntary, faith and community sectors can intervene swiftly when someone is sleeping rough.

These commitments include funding to local authorities in the form of the Rough Sleeping Initiative Grant, and programmes to increase the supply of supported accommodation.

The government has also expanded its Rough Sleeping Drug and Alcohol Treatment Grant Programme, with the scheme providing funding for substance misuse treatment services for people sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough.

2.2 Regional

The Mayor of London has set out his vision and priorities for tackling the shortage of affordable housing across London, and its links to homelessness in his London Housing Strategy. The strategy highlights the importance of prevention and the need to address the root causes of homelessness to drive forward effective prevention work.

He is committed to ending rough sleeping and has established the Life Off the Streets Executive Board – of which the City Corporation is a member – to work in partnership with organisations across London to monitor the effectiveness of interventions in tackling rough sleeping and identifying further interventions.

2.3 Local

The City of London Corporation is the governing body of the Square Mile, dedicated to vibrant and thriving City, supporting a diverse and sustainable London within a globally successful UK.

Its Corporate Plan 2018-2023 seeks a flourishing society in which:

- 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
- Communities are cohesive and have the facilities they need

This strategy supports the delivery of that plan, and both contributes to and is supported by the delivery of a range of strategies and plans including the *Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy*, the *Local Plan*, the *Safer City Partnership Strategy*, the *Violence and Women and Girls Strategy* and the *Department of Community and Children's Services Business Plan*.

3 Background

Homelessness describes a range of situations that include those described by legislation, and situations we might recognise as homelessness such as sofa surfing or in its worst form, rough sleeping.

Government legislation describes a household as homelessness where:

- they have no accommodation they are legally entitled to occupy, either in the UK or overseas
- they have accommodation but cannot secure entry to it
- they have accommodation designed or adapted to be lived in that consists of a 'moveable structure' (such as a caravan, mobile home, or canal boat) but they have nowhere to put it
- they have accommodation but it is not reasonable or suitable to continue living there

Somebody is threatened with homelessness if:

- they are likely to become homeless within 28 days
- they have been giving a valid notice (known as a Section 21 notice) to leave a property, and that notice will expire within 56 days

Local authorities have a legal responsibility to support people and families who are threatened with homelessness or who are homeless. As well as the 1996 Housing Act, this strategy has also been informed by the following national legislation.

- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Armed Forces Act 2021

- Children Act 1989

These four Acts add to existing legislation and strengthen the response to tackling homelessness. They explicitly state that a person who is homeless as a result of being a victim of domestic abuse is classed as being in priority need, as well as those who previously served in the regular naval, military or air forces.

The picture of statutory homelessness in London highlights the challenges local authorities in London are facing, with rising demand and cost for housing, temporary accommodation and homelessness and rough sleeping services. The average cost of privately rented accommodation has risen by 5% in the 12 months to May 2023 up from an increase of 5% in the 12 months to April 2023. (Office for National Statistics, 2023). The average private rent in London was £2039 per month which is beyond the means of many families. This is also true of properties for purchase within London, particularly with higher mortgage borrowing rates and the price of housing means that secure home ownership is out of reach for many individuals and families within London, and places more pressure on the rental market, which has increased rent prices. This has placed acute stress on the budgets of many households within London and has increased the number of individuals or families presenting to us for homelessness assistance or tenancy and social housing support.

Applications for homelessness in London have risen by 54% between 2013 and 2023 and UK Government statistics show that in 2022, 59% of people in temporary accommodation across England were in London.

The number of people seen sleeping rough in London is also increasing. In 2023, the GLA reported that the number of people sleeping rough in London has increased by 9% compared with 2022. The figures show that 3,272 individuals were sleeping rough in the capital from April to June 2023, compared to 2,998 individuals from April to June 2022. Of those 84% were male, and half were UK nationals.

3.1 The City

With London's smallest population, the City Corporation deals with the lowest number of approaches for homeless assistance – having a duty to assist 29 households in 2022/23 - and has the lowest number of households placed in temporary accommodation in London.

With over 500,000 jobs supported within the Square Mile, it is unsurprising that the majority of those seeking homelessness advice, information and assessment are connected to the City through work.

In 2022/23 512 people approached the City Corporation for help because of the risk of experience of homelessness – an increase of 16 per cent on 20/22. In the same year, 129 households were placed into temporary accommodation over the course of the year – an increase of 20 per cent on 2021/22.

In 2022/23 outreach services recorded 482 people sleeping on the streets of the Square Mile – the sixth highest level among London's local authorities. Half of those sleeping rough were new to the streets – having no record of street homelessness anywhere in London.

Among those homeless on the streets 38 per cent had long term histories of rough sleeping and 17 per cent had returned to street homelessness. The profile of those sleeping rough in the Square Mile has moved towards a younger, more complex cohort with higher support needs.

3.2 Our strengths

- A commitment to deliver comprehensive services that has been backed by a significant growth in funding by the City Corporation
- Quality services, co-located with social care, that deliver advice, guidance and assessment that is accessible through an inclusive range of channels
- Spot purchasing of interim accommodation allowing us to search in or as close as we can to the areas where a homelessness applicant last resided to help maintain links with support networks and services where possible
- Provision of specialist and enhanced services – such as a dedicated homelessness social work, enhanced tenancy sustainment and “Housing First” accommodation
- Integrated and tailored response to street homelessness that goes beyond accommodation to support those who sleep rough to sustain a life away from the streets
- The learning and success of our “everybody in” approach during the pandemic evolved into an “in for good” approach to prevent a return to the streets
- Successfully securing external funding and partnerships to strengthen our approach and expand services
- Committed partnerships with neighbouring local authorities, the City and Hackney Health and Care Board, City of London Police and the voluntary sector

3.3 Our challenges

- Housing insecurity and homelessness is increasing, and the wider economic context would suggest this will continue in the period ahead
- Increasing demand places pressure on our services and budgets, and is increasing London wide competition for - and the cost of - temporary accommodation
- The diversity of need we respond to – including from those fleeing domestic violence, those from the LGBTQI+ community, those with uncertain migration status and youth homeless - is growing and more evident
- Secure, affordable housing options are severely limited and constrain the timely move-on from our hostel and interim accommodation provision
- Many of those homeless on our streets are very transient – moving across service boundaries and interrupting service interventions
- Housing solutions are predominantly beyond the boundaries of the Square Mile and the statutory remit of our wider services
- Access to primary care for those homeless on the streets is limited by location of provision

- Some of those homeless on our streets can be associated with anti-social behaviour or other criminality – as victim or perpetrator – causing concern to those who live, work in or visit the City
- Services that play a vital role in preventing homelessness and sustaining life away from the streets – including mental health services and voluntary sector services – are facing significant pressures

4 Progress since the last strategy

Since the last Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy in 2019, the City Corporation has delivered new initiatives to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping. These include:

- a pilot for a safe and secure accommodation project for women fleeing domestic abuse to help address violence against women and girls (VAWG)
- a high support hostel to provide 29 additional beds, securing a more effective response to rough sleeping
- funding for a tri-borough “staging post” hostel for those street homeless to relieve pressure on assessment and emergency placements
- a Rough Sleeping Mental Health Programme (RaMHP) in partnership with East London Foundation Trust (ELFT)
- a Homeless Health Coordinator to deliver a dedicated work plan to improve the health of rough sleepers
- a new partnership with Guy’s and St Thomas’ to provide clinical in-reach to Grange Road hostel
- an extended substance misuse offer to those who have left street homelessness and been accommodated beyond the Square Mile
- improved Homelessness & Rough Sleeping web pages to provide enhanced information and advice

5 Developing this strategy

This strategy has been developed through consultation with key stakeholders, including those who have experienced homelessness and those who remain homeless in the City.

This process has identified the four key priorities, set out in the section below. For each priority, we set out what the implementation of this strategy will achieve in addressing that priority, and what will be done to secure those achievements.

6 Priorities

6.1 Priority 1: Providing rapid, effective and tailored interventions

By focusing on the prevention of homelessness before it occurs, we recognise that early interventions are important to minimising the duration and preventing homelessness. We believe that for this to be the most effective, these early interventions should be personalised to provide the most appropriate response in conjunction with the City of London Housing department.

Case Study – City of London Corporation Women’s Project

The City of London opened its first dedicated women’s accommodation project in April 2023. The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) introduced new requirements for local housing authorities to have safe accommodation available to any applicant on approach where domestic abuse is the reason they have given for leaving their home. Recognising the national and regional shortage of affordable, suitable accommodation, The City of London commissioned an existing housing provider to refurbish a 6-bed housing in a London Borough. Security was upgraded and its location is kept confidential to protect anonymity of residents. To date, the City Corporation have placed 6 women using this project.

To deliver this priority, over the next four years we will focus on the following:

- Improve access to rapid ‘off the street’ options for rough sleepers to end rough sleeping events quickly
- Deliver a clear, consistent approach to protect those sleeping rough, our communities and our services from ASB and criminality ensuring our community feels safe for all
- Strengthen our communication methods to improve referral pathways to local providers and outreach services
- Embed co-production with people with lived experience of homelessness when designing or renewing services

Key actions to deliver these include:

- Open a new Rough Sleeping Assessment Centre in the Square Mile (under construction, due to complete in 2024)
- Review and re-commission our frontline outreach services that consider inclusion of best practice examples and input from those with lived experience of homelessness and or rough sleeping
- Implement new Severe Weather Emergency Protocols (SWEP) so these interventions reach more people in an impactful way
- Re-commission the City Advice Service so that all groups of people including residents and young people have access to accurate information and support.

Some of our key measures of success on the delivery of these are:

- Increase in the rate of homelessness preventions
- Increase in referrals received under the Duty to Refer
- Reduction in the number of individuals entering temporary accommodation
- Reduction in the number of individuals sleeping rough during severe weather events

6.2 Priority 2: Securing access to suitable and affordable accommodation

Case Study – High Support Hostel

The City of London Corporation and its commissioned partners conducted research to determine what additional projects could be introduced to have the highest impact in supporting those in our rough sleeping population who have the most complex needs. In November 2022, The City of London Corporation opened a 29-bed high support hostel. This new service occupies a site that was redeveloped from the ground up and designed with psychologically informed principles in mind. The project removes barriers between staff and residents and creates mixed areas for residents and staff to share time and participate in activities.

We recognise that access to suitable and affordable accommodation is central to promoting good health and wellbeing of our service users, as well as being a way off the streets for those rough sleeping. We believe that access to suitable and affordable accommodation needs to be appropriate to the level of need of the client and will help prevent homelessness occurring in the first place.

To deliver this priority, over the next four years we will focus on the following:

- Increase access to safe and suitable accommodation for those fleeing domestic abuse and violence against women and girls (VAWG)
- Work to keep families and children near local services and schools
- Minimise the use of inappropriate temporary accommodation
- Improve options within the private rented sector to support move on
- Reduce the number of rough sleepers returning to the streets

Key actions to deliver these include:

- Maximise our temporary accommodation offer by using targeted support, help with rent deposits and support to sustain long-term tenancies
- Create and implement a temporary accommodation framework for procurement of interim and emergency housing
- Deliver new accommodation solutions, such as increases in the number of available hostel beds and access to social housing in the City of London
- Expand the City of London's Housing First offer to maximise the number of tenancies available to rough sleepers

Some of our key measures of success on the delivery of these are:

- Reduction in the number of households placed in temporary accommodation
- Reduction in the length of stay in temporary accommodation
- Increase in the number of properties available to individuals facing homelessness or are rough sleeping
- Number of commissioned and appropriate hostel beds increases

6.3 Priority 3: Working collaboratively

Homelessness and rough sleeping cannot be solved in silo. Working in partnership with multiple agencies that reach across traditional boundaries is key in supporting those facing homelessness or are rough sleeping. By working in partnership with key services when developing or delivering services, services will be delivered consistently across service and local authority boundaries.

Case Study – Health Community Wellbeing Van

The City of London Corporation’s Health Community Wellbeing Van is a partnership between City & Hackney Public Health, North-East London Integrated Care Board and East London Foundation Trust. This weekly, GP led services brings vital primary care interventions directly to rough sleepers found in the Square Mile. The service operates from a fully converted vehicle and launched in February 2023. The van offers a private consultation space, storage for clinical equipment and signposting resources and facilities for making hot drinks. The van also delivers a range of health and wellbeing interventions to people experiencing homelessness and who are less likely to access traditional healthcare sessions

To deliver this priority, over the next four years we will focus on the following:

- Develop sub regional and pan-borough solutions to homelessness
- Strengthen our engagement with health partners to improve interventions for the most vulnerable
- Maximise the use of commissioned drug and alcohol services, City Advice and psychological services to prevent homelessness
- Deliver an embedded multi-agency response to ASB and criminality to protect rough sleepers and our communities
- Collaborate with Business Improvement Districts within the City of London to build on relations with the business community and improve the sharing of information with employers to tackle persistent issues.

Key actions to deliver these include:

- Develop and implement a new Youth Homelessness Protocol to improve the holistic approach to supporting young people facing homelessness
- Implement an improved pathway for non-UK nationals who have no recourse to public funds

- Improve the safeguarding of vulnerable adults who are street homeless by developing solutions with the City & Hackney Safeguarding Adults Board
- Amplify key messages through shared communication with Business Improvement Districts within the City of London
- Maximise funding opportunities alongside Business Improvement Districts to increase the use of joint communication campaigns and related activity.

Some of our key measures of success on the delivery of these are:

- Increase in cross-sector buy in to homelessness prevention within the Square Mile
- Reduction in anti-social behaviour reported
- Up take of commissioned services increases
- Improved pathways for those who have no recourse to public funds

6.4 Priority 4: supporting beyond accommodation

We recognise that it is important to provide wrap around support alongside appropriate accommodation for those who are rough sleeping or facing homelessness to enable them to remain in long term accommodation and prevent a return to the streets. By providing wrap around support that is tailored to the needs of the individual, we aim to secure better outcomes, improve health and wellbeing, enhance employability and support recovery, all of which will reduce the likelihood of returning to the streets or homelessness occurring in the first place.

Case Study – Employment and Progression Service – ‘Streets to Work’

The first project of its kind in the City of London, ‘Streets to Work’ launched in February 2023. The project has a remit to work across all our cohorts – vulnerably housed social tenants, residents in supported accommodation and rough sleepers. The service offers individuals the opportunity to build up their skills through education, training and employment opportunities as well as through volunteering. The service offers a mix of one-to-one and group sessions held in the community or at a client’s accommodation. We expect to see the project work with a minimum of 40 people per year, with 15 of these gaining stable employment.

To deliver this priority, over the next four years we will focus on the following:

- Improve health and wellbeing outcomes among those facing homelessness or are rough sleeping
- Improve tenancy sustainment in the private rented sector so clients on the path to recovery remain housed
- Improve the employability of former and current rough sleepers
- Support service users with complex substance misuse needs remain in long term accommodation

- Strengthen feedback opportunities by giving service users a stronger voice to shape the services they use

Key actions to deliver these include:

- Reduce delays in hospital discharge by improving communication with hospital teams
- Expand the support offer available to those with complex substance misuse needs by maximising the involvement of commissioned Pan-London services
- Deliver a clinical space in the Square Mile to provide primary care for those sleeping rough
- Encourage local businesses to employ and train those who have or who are experience homelessness

Some of our key measures of success on the delivery of these include:

- Reduction in the number of people sleeping rough
- Reduction in the number of repeat rough sleepers
- Reduction in delayed transfers of care
- Increase in number of service users entering education, employment or training

7 Implementation and delivery

This strategy is delivered in the context of legislative change – particularly the government’s commitment to fully imbed the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and its commitment to prevention, and the enactment of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

It aligns with the government’s strategy “Ending Rough Sleeping for Good” and with the City Corporation’s participation in the Mayor of London’s Life of the Streets Taskforce and its framework to address the wider determinants of rough sleeping with partners across the capital

In its delivery it supports the City of London Corporation to meet the objectives of its Corporate Plan and is supported by the delivery of the Housing Strategy, Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Safer City Partnership Strategy.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is agreed, renewed, and monitored by the City of London Corporation’s Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Sub-Committee. A detailed service development plan will support the delivering of this strategy and refreshed to reflect service demand and legislative change.