

CITY OF LONDON ROUGH SLEEPING COMMISSIONING PROJECTS – SITE OPTIONS

Purpose of paper:

- To update on progress with identifying sites
- To seek a steer on the current options being considered

Introduction:

Development funding has been provided to expand the service offer for rough sleepers and make achieving the strategic goal of ending rough sleeping within the Square Mile more likely. Two of the key projects being developed with this funding are an assessment centre and a high support hostel. Revenue funding is available until the end of March 2025 and £1m of capital funding has been allocated to support leasing/purchase costs and/or refurbishment costs.

Officers have been looking at potential sites for these services over the past three months – including those brought forward by providers, those offered up by the Diocese or those suggested by Members or officers in the City of London.

This paper provides an update on the work to identify suitable sites and the intended procurement route to establish the services.

Assessment Centre:

This service is intended to be a venue to which street outreach workers can bring rough sleepers from the Square Mile where they can be accommodated, assessed, have their immediate physical and health care needs attended to and be supported to develop a route off the streets that is particular to their circumstance and needs.

Data about rough sleeping in the Square Mile suggests we need a facility that can accommodate 10-15 people at any time, is open to admissions 24/7 and has an average length of stay of 28 days. The hope is that many people would be reconnected to accommodation in their home areas much quicker than this. There is a strong desire to host the assessment centre within the Square Mile and we have prioritised looking for buildings here.

Given the short length of stay, assessment centres have often provided camp beds for residents but COVID-19 precludes this going forward. We are considering pods/partitioned rooms for our assessment centre. There are many on the market that are easy to assemble, cost-effective and have been designed for this purpose and we have already checked with Public Health as to the best design in terms of infection control (ie: degree of separation needed and ease of disinfecting).

The outreach team's effectiveness is limited by the lack of emergency accommodation and, as the number of rough sleepers continues to grow across London, the need for an assessment centre becomes more acute. The intention, therefore, is to set up something urgently for a period of 12-18 months using a waiver to the usual competitive procurement requirements while we secure a longer term building (assuming the short-term premises we obtain are not suitable for a longer term use) and undertake the competitive tendering exercise we need to do to award the longer term contract during this period. Legal and Procurement colleagues have advised that the simplest and safest way to award the short term contract is to vary the outreach contract recently awarded to Thames Reach so that they can run the assessment centre for us. It's also a good fit strategically to do it this way.

We have considered the following buildings for the assessment centre:

Name	Location	Benefits	Disadvantages	Status
East India Dock Rd	Tower Hamlets	Good size	Not in the City Already valuable as currently used Provider lacks experience Limited office and shared space	Ruled out
Hackney Rd	Tower Hamlets	10 bed hostel with good communal facilities	Not in the City Included within larger project, which would need to be used as well Lack of certainty on the part of LBTH as to whether it's available or not Previous locality issues around anti-social behaviour	Ruled out
Old Fire Station	Islington	Good size, lots of flexible space on the ground floor	Not in the City Would only be available as part of purchasing the whole site (using the rest of the space as a hostel) and the building is old, inaccessible and needs work and isn't suitable for the hostel	Ruled out
St Mary-At-Hill church	City of London	Good size, lots of flexible space on the ground floor Accessible Immediately available High ceilings would support cubicles Good location Office space on site Needs limited refurbishment	Issue of partitioning/ventilating the space needs exploring Lack of showering facilities – would need to install temporary showers or refit bathrooms as wet rooms (or both)	Possible
St Mary-At-Hill flats	City of London	Good location Good size	Prohibitively expensive Not accessible for those with mobility issues Space not very flexible	Ruled out
Booth House	Tower Hamlets	n/a	Not in the City In very poor state of repair Not clear how we would make partial use of the building and what plans there are for the remainder of the (large) hostel	Ruled out

Riverside Camberwell	Southwark	Purpose built former sheltered housing scheme, good size	Not in the City Wrong end of Southwark Next to vulnerable older persons' housing scheme	Ruled out
Snow Hill Court	City of London	Good location Good size, assuming all space can be brought into use Lots of flexible rooms/space that could be partitioned or have cubicles installed Some outside space Available immediately	Needs extensive refurbishment – in some places the refurb is cosmetic, in others structural Issue of ventilating the space needs considering May be expensive as a long term facility, though landlord is willing to negotiate lengthy rent free period if we refurbish	Possible
Peter Bedford project	Hackney	Available fairly immediately. Social landlord	Not in the City Too small (only room for 8-10 pods) Communal kitchen and bathrooms are shared with another organization using the building No room for extra showers	Ruled out

We are currently focusing our attention on two of the venues listed above – a disused suite of offices on Snow Hill Court and St Mary-At-Hill church. Both were suggested to us by the Diocese. Both will require fitting out with pods/cubicles if we decide to use them and both will need some work to improve bathrooms/toilet facilities. The church is potentially ready to move into with only cosmetic changes needed whereas Snow Hill Court would require more extensive improvements as parts of the building we would want to use are in a dilapidated state.

We have visited both sites twice – the second time with Thames Reach accompanying us – and we are now at the stage of making more detailed design determinations and estimating costs and timescales for works. It may be that we use both sites – the church as an interim centre and Snow Hill Court as a longer term facility. A further paper will bring forward one or both of these options in more detail should we seek to take either premises forward. In the meantime, we continue to look for alternative sites.

High support hostel:

This service is intended to be a project where rough sleepers with multiple and complex needs can be accommodated. The City currently has no such facility and the purchasing of beds in other projects/boroughs is not meeting demand, leaving some of our most vulnerable rough sleepers without a suitable supported accommodation option. The hostel will provide accommodation for 1-2 years with a staff team providing a psychologically informed support service supplemented with visiting support from mental health, primary care, domiciliary care and substance misuse services. Residents will be supported to move to longer term accommodation which is suited to their circumstance and needs.

Data about rough sleeping in the Square Mile suggests we need a facility that can accommodate 25-30 people at any time. It is accepted that a purpose built facility (or one that can be adapted) is not likely to be available within the Square Mile so we have widened our search for suitable buildings to the immediate surroundings of the City.

Discussions with Procurement and Legal have determined that the best way of safely procuring a high support hostel is to advertise in a single process for a provider/building combination. It is accepted that there are likely to be few buildings available and the tender process might mean that we end up negotiating with one provider rather than choosing between multiple buildings but this is still considered the best approach. We have already undertaken a market testing event where we invited 20+ of London's current hostel providers to ask them to look for buildings and to be prepared to tender for the service but, thus far, the event has only garnered a single, unsuitable offer.

We have considered the following buildings for the high support hostel:

Name	Location	Benefits	Disadvantages	Status
East India Dock Rd	Tower Hamlets	n/a	Too small	Ruled out
Hackney Rd	Tower Hamlets	10 bed hostel with good communal facilities on the same site as 25 self-contained flats	Locality not suitable, anti-social behaviour complaints drove the council to stop using the premises as a high support hostel previously Layout not suitable – flats at the back have no communal space or staff presence	Ruled out
Old Fire Station	Islington	Good size, lots of space	Location not great – busy junction of main roads Would only be available as part of purchasing the whole site (using the rest of the space as an assessment centre) and the building is old, inaccessible and needs work. Top floor is unusable because of asbestos. Flats are too large	Ruled out
Booth House	Tower Hamlets	n/a	In very poor state of repair Not clear how we would make partial use of the building (100+ rooms currently) and what plans there are for the remainder of the building	Ruled out
Riverside Camberwell	Southwark	Purpose built former sheltered housing scheme, good size	Not in the City Wrong end of Southwark with poor transport links, not likely to be popular with rough sleepers	Ruled out

Grange Road	Southwark	<p>Good location (2 miles from Guildhall)</p> <p>Purpose built</p> <p>Good size – 32 rooms (9 in an annex and 23 in main hostel)</p> <p>Good garden</p> <p>Quiet street</p> <p>Available fairly immediately</p> <p>Owned by St Mungo's, an experienced hostel provider</p> <p>Southwark decommissioned the service and seem to be disinterested in using it to the full</p> <p>Annex/hostel layout would support City's needs to separate some of the older rough sleepers from the more chaotic younger ones</p>	<p>Next to vulnerable older persons' housing scheme</p> <p>Council may be hostile to the provider changing use as they still wish to operate a MH project on the site</p> <p>Needs some cosmetic improvement</p> <p>Needs more space for staff to work with residents (provider planning to build something in the garden)</p> <p>Need to ensure Southwark are okay with use – some risks for them around importing needs to the borough</p> <p>Accessibility – annex only has stairs</p>	Possible
Thrale St	Lambeth	<p>Good size, 25 beds</p> <p>Former care home so fairly accessible</p>	<p>Local authority hostile to us using the site</p> <p>Provider not very experienced with rough sleepers but doesn't want the building used by anyone else</p> <p>Previous use as a hostel saw a lot of neighbor complaints, site backs onto a school</p>	Ruled out

We are currently focusing our attention on the Grange Road building. We have visited, discussed potential use of the site with the provider (they are very keen) and are making plans to approach Southwark to test their willingness to have us run a support service for City rough sleepers from the site. Assuming that Southwark are content, we could potentially move quickly with the accelerated procurement process described above. The building would require decanting before we could begin to use it but most of the residents in occupation have low support needs and would require PRS flats rather than more complicated move on arrangements. We could support this process to gain quicker access to the building.

We are looking at costs and building management arrangements that would be required by St Mungo's were we to use the building. Assuming this does not throw up anything prohibitive, we would move to start the tender process as soon as Southwark give us the green light.

Support sought from partners:

We are discussing the lay-out, set-up and operating regime of the assessment centre with Public Health colleagues. As there will be shared space and sleeping in cubicles/partitioned rooms, we need to be sure that airflow and ventilation is to a safe standard and that we have sufficient space and facilities for testing, isolating and minimising risk associated with 'high touch' areas and other shared spaces. We will similarly seek their input around the high support hostel – though the risks are lower given that rooms are self-contained.

We are discussing the surveying of sites and the leasing arrangements with the City surveying team and, as stated, the procurement approaches have been cleared in meetings with Procurement and Legal colleagues.

Once we are clearer on which sites we are seeking to bring into use, we will also have discussions with community safety, social care and revenues and benefits. We will also discuss health, primary care, substance misuse and mental health support needed from partners for both projects.

Next steps:

1. Continuing to assess the viability of the sites which seem most likely to meet needs
2. Continuing to look for alternative sites that may prove more suitable
3. Developing detailed service specifications and related procurement documentation so we are ready to move as soon as a building is determined suitable
4. Continuing to seek expert input from colleagues, partners, providers
5. Bring back a detailed paper once sites have been chosen to seek permission to move forward with those specific sites