



City of Westminster

Cabinet Member Report

Decision Maker:	Cllr Antonia Cox, Cabinet Member for Public Protection & Licensing Cllr Rachael Robathan, Cabinet Member for Housing
Date:	23 June 2017
Classification:	For General Release
Title:	Rough Sleeping Strategy 2017-2022
Wards Affected:	All
Key Decision:	This is a key decision and was registered on the forward plan on 05/10/16
Financial Summary:	<p>The council currently directly spends c.£6m on rough sleeping services such as outreach and accommodation. This is supplemented with resource from other services, primarily City Management services, which interact with individuals who are or have been rough sleeping.</p> <p>This strategy provides the overarching direction and context within which future decisions will be made on issues relating to rough sleeping but does not itself have direct financial implications.</p>
Report of:	Director of Policy, Performance and Communications

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The council has updated its Rough Sleeping Strategy and the new strategy is proposed for adoption to cover the years 2017-2022.

- 1.2. The new strategy has been developed based on a robust evidence base, extensive engagement with stakeholders and a full public consultation on a draft strategy in autumn 2016.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that the Cabinet Members approve the adoption of the Rough Sleeping Strategy 2017 – 2022 set out at appendix 1.

3. Reasons for Decision

- 3.1. The above recommendation is put forward because it is in the interests of the council to clearly set out our approach to the important challenge of rough sleeping in the city.
- 3.2. The approach set out in the strategy has been developed over an extended period of time, with input from a large number of stakeholders and therefore represents a robust and balanced approach to rough sleeping in the context of the council's legal authority and financial situation.

4. Background, including Policy Context

Overview of the new strategy

- 4.1. The new strategy builds on Westminster's experience as the local authority with the highest number of rough sleepers in the country, whilst placing this fact in its proper context. Most notably, we are clear that, in tackling rough sleeping on our streets, Westminster manages a national and international issue, many of the drivers for which tend to be outside of our control.
- 4.2. The strategy makes a clear distinction between the issues of rough sleeping and street-based anti-social behaviour or criminality. We do not assume that rough sleepers are always connected with anti-social behaviour, or that they engage in criminality such as begging. A large number of people seen begging, engaging in anti-social behaviour or crime on Westminster's streets during the day-time are not rough sleepers and a different response is required to tackle such problems effectively.

- 4.3. A separate dedicated plan is currently under development, in partnership with the Metropolitan Police, to tackle on street anti-social behaviour and criminality which is of significant concern to residents and businesses.
- 4.4. Our overarching ambition in the strategy is to 'deliver a significant reduction in rough sleeping and address the harm it brings to individuals and communities in Westminster'. Experience shows us that many of the factors driving rough sleeping in Westminster are entrenched, enduring and are unlikely to be fully resolved before the end of this strategy in 2022. In addition, minor changes in national and international policy or conditions can have a direct impact on rough sleeping in Westminster. For this reason we do not propose an overall target for numbers of people sleeping rough in Westminster as part of the strategy
- 4.5. Our strategic approach is based on the premise that rough sleeping is fundamentally harmful and dangerous for the person sleeping on the streets, and the longer someone stays on the streets, the more harmful and dangerous it becomes, both for the individual and the wider community.
- 4.6. Within this context, our primary focus is to stop people from escalating up this harm scale, intervening as early as possible to stop dangerous patterns of behaviour developing and combining. As such, the strategy sets out three priorities which we believe will help deliver our ambition. These priorities broadly follow the chronological journey experienced by individuals who find themselves sleeping on Westminster's streets.
 - Priority a) Where it is possible for us to do so, prevent people from rough sleeping in the first place.
 - Priority b) When people do end up on the streets, provide a rapid response, support people to rebuild their lives and stay off the streets for good.
 - Priority c) Protecting communities from anti-social behaviour associated with rough sleeping and intervening to stop dangerous behaviour.
- 4.7. Each priority is supported by an action plan set out in full as part of the strategy itself.
- 4.8. Although there is not a simple link between statutory homelessness and rough sleeping in Westminster's context, it is also important to note that the council recently published new policies on homelessness. The aim of these policies is that people will spend less time in unsettled temporary accommodation and will

instead receive a quicker, more settled offer of housing, with support where appropriate.

Summary of the consultation process

- 4.9. A full public consultation took place between 26 September and 4 November 2016.
- 4.10. The proposals contained in the draft strategy consulted on in the autumn had already been developed with input from key organisations in both the voluntary sector and wider public sector, although the strategy was solely a Westminster City Council document.
- 4.11. The consultation involved a number of different forms of engagement tailored around the needs of different stakeholders.
- 4.12. At the start of the consultation period direct correspondence was sent to all key stakeholders ranging from resident groups, amenity societies, businesses and BIDs to voluntary sector organisations and partner public sector agencies. More than 30 different organisations were written to and Councillors, council staff and local MPs were also provided with information on the consultation and invited to respond.
- 4.13. All stakeholders were directed to a dedicated questionnaire on the Open Forum website to respond, but were also able to respond to the consultation face to face by way of additional activity noted below, by post or electronically via a dedicated email address.
- 4.14. All consultation documentation was available online via the council website and Open Forum, as well as in hard copy as appropriate and required.
- 4.15. During the consultation period, officers attended a number of pre-planned events such as the Open Forum Public Meeting on 6 October and other Open Forum pop-ups. Officers also promoted the consultation through existing partnership arrangements such as the West End Partnership, the Safer Westminster Partnership, the Westminster Provider Network and BIDs meetings.
- 4.16. In response to a low number of responses from businesses after the first three weeks of the consultation period, officers visited hotspot areas, including Victoria and the Strand to spend time talking to businesses about the strategy directly.

This generated an increase in responses to the online questionnaire and provided an extra layer of qualitative feedback.

- 4.17. Residents from the Westminster Cathedral area also requested a dedicated meeting to discuss their experience. Officers attended this and an agreed written summary of the meeting formed part of the responses considered as part of this document.
- 4.18. A dedicated workshop was held with key voluntary sector organisations, both those currently commissioned by the council to deliver services and those that are not.
- 4.19. Officers also took a tailored approach to consulting with service users and worked with support workers to ask specific questions in an appropriate format.
- 4.20. On 7 November, the strategy and initial feedback from the consultation process was discussed with the Housing, Finance and Corporate Services Policy and Scrutiny Committee and the recommendations of the Committee were as follows:
 - That the strategy increases its focuses on improving rough sleepers' health and well-being, with a particular focus on addressing mental health issues.
 - That there is greater reference in the strategy to the importance of Pan-London working and connections with the Mayor of London's rough sleeping strategy.
 - That further consideration to be given to whether different targets should be set for non-UK/Irish nationals to reflect that rough sleeping by this group in Westminster raises distinctive issues.
- 4.21. All of the above have been considered and addressed in various ways. Responses were provided by the relevant Cabinet Members to the Committee Chairman
- 4.22. Overall 417 people or organisations were engaged with via a number of channels, although there may be a small amount of duplication in these numbers where people were spoken to face-to-face as well as submitting a written response for example.
- 4.23. We received 131 online responses to the questionnaire and 5 hand written responses. The majority of responses were from residents but we also received an encouraging number of responses from workers in the city, businesses and voluntary sector groups. This has to be placed in the context of the fact that

Westminster has close to 250,000 residents, 47,000 business and we support 697,000 jobs in the city. The findings are not therefore strongly statistically significant in the context of all those who use the city but the consultation did not intend to engage everyone and instead we sought to give everyone a fair chance to take part and we were successful in engaging those with strong opinions on the matters at hand which is considered good practice in terms of consultation delivery.

- 4.24. The response to the strategy and individual priorities was broadly positive with the following headline findings from the questionnaire:
- 92% agreed that the three priorities were the right ones.
 - 72% agreed that the targets set were achievable
 - 58% agreed that the targets set were ambitious enough
 - 89% agreed that the objectives set out will help us meet priority 1 – “Preventing rough sleeping and providing a rapid response”
 - 94% agree that the objectives set out will help us meet priority 2 – “Supporting people to rebuild their lives”
 - 81% agree that the objectives set out will help us meet priority 3 – “Tackling anti-social behaviour and keeping the city safe”
- 4.25. Following the consultation process, a number of key issues were identified which either required presentational change and improvement, or warranted a further discussion. These have been addressed in the final version of the strategy as appropriate.
- 4.26. The issue which required the most consideration as part of this process was the extent to which the council should associate rough sleeping with anti-social behaviour and crime in the strategy. This was based on a significant level of feedback as part of the consultation that stakeholders, particularly individual residents and businesses, wanted the strategy to give more detail on how we will deal with issues such as begging and anti-social behaviour.
- 4.27. In response the strategy clearly acknowledges the potential impact of behaviour associated with rough sleeping on communities and sets out clearer actions to address this whilst maintaining appropriate separation between the two issues as highlighted at point 4.2. This allows the focus of the Rough Sleeping Strategy to remain on the need to help individuals off the streets and to rebuild their lives.
- 4.28. Feedback was also received, particular through discussion with key partners, that the nature of rough sleeping is long-term and our strategic outlook should therefore be over a longer time period than the three years suggested in the

consultation draft. As such the updated strategy is amended to cover a five year period up until 2022.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. There are no financial implications arising directly as a result of this decision. Any decisions made within the context set out in the strategy which do have direct financial implications would be the subject of separate approvals where the implications are explored in full.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1. There is no statutory requirement for the council to publish a rough sleeping strategy but the council chooses to do so given the scale of rough sleeping in the city in order to give coherence to our approach and reassurance to stakeholders on the actions we will take to tackle the issue.

7. Equalities Implications

- 7.1. A full Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken. Despite initial screening suggesting that the impacts will be positive on all groups (whether among rough sleepers or the wider community), due to the vulnerable nature of rough sleepers and the significance of the issue in Westminster, it was decided to undertake a full EIA. The EIA is set out at appendix 2.

8. Communications Implications

- 8.1. The issue of rough sleeping can be extremely contentious and as such the launch of the strategy will be accompanied by a robust communications plan to promote the council's approach and the reasons for this.

9. Consultation

- 9.1. Full public consultation was undertaken in autumn 2016 and the detail is set out in this report.

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers please contact: Richard Cressey
rcressey@westminster.gov.uk

For completion by the **Cabinet Members for Public Protection & Licensing and Housing**

Declaration of Interest

I have <no interest to declare / to declare an interest> in respect of this report

Signed: _____ Date: _____

NAME: _____

State nature of interest if any

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(N.B: If you have an interest you should seek advice as to whether it is appropriate to make a decision in relation to this matter)

For the reasons set out above, I agree the recommendation(s) in the report entitled **Rough Sleeping Strategy 2017-2022** and reject any alternative options which are referred to but not recommended.

Signed

Cabinet Members for Public Protection & Licensing and Housing

Date

If you have any additional comment which you would want actioned in connection with your decision you should discuss this with the report author and then set out your comment below before the report and this pro-forma is returned to the Secretariat for processing.

Additional comment:
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If you do not wish to approve the recommendations, or wish to make an alternative decision, it is important that you consult the report author, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Strategic Director Finance and Performance and, if there are resources implications, the Strategic Director of Resources (or their representatives) so that (1) you can be made aware of any further relevant considerations that you should take into account before making the decision and (2) your reasons for the decision can be properly identified and recorded, as required by law.

Note to Cabinet Member: Your decision will now be published and copied to the Members of the relevant Policy & Scrutiny Committee. If the decision falls within the criteria for call-in, it will not be implemented until five working days have elapsed from publication to allow the Policy and Scrutiny Committee to decide whether it wishes to call the matter in.

