

## How many rough sleepers has Westminster helped off the street?

Covid-19 has dramatically changed the picture of rough sleeping day by day. Since the Government's call to get rough sleepers off the streets, our outreach teams have helped around 250 rough sleepers into Covid-19 emergency accommodation in Westminster, so they can social distance and self-isolate if necessary. This is likely to be one of the biggest operations by a local authority in the UK.

## Where are they being accommodated?

The accommodation is a mix of hotels and serviced apartments across Westminster.

As with many rough sleepers, the people in this emergency accommodation are likely to be among the most vulnerable in our society and we have a duty to safeguard them during this crisis. We are working with partners, including specialist nurses to ensure everyone is medically triaged before being housed, and Westminster has dedicated accommodation in other locations for those showing symptoms and requiring more medical attention or needing to be in isolation.

## How are the people in emergency accommodation being fed and looked after?

For the people who have taken up offers of accommodation, there is a huge logistical operation in place every day to keep them safe, fed, stocked with medical supplies and other essentials. Everyone coming into accommodation receives a welcome pack containing essential toiletries and other items and toiletries are provided as required after that.

People housed in our emergency accommodation are receiving three meals a day and dietary requirements are taken into account when allocating meals. Going forward, we are really grateful to two of our partner agencies, The Passage and Connection at St Martin's, who will be donating meals and handling our food supply. We are also working with volunteers through our Westminster Connects service to get meals delivered.

## What other support are people being given?

We have experienced staff and security who are working seven days a week at hotels and apartment buildings. We are also working with our charity partners to provide outreach to those who are most vulnerable. Everyone in accommodation is allocated a case worker and has access to our partner organisations including specialist medical support from the NHS through our partnerships with CCGs, the Homeless Health Service, Cardinal Hume Medical Centre and the Great Chapel Street Medical Centre.

## What is happening to anyone who has mental health issues or is drug or alcohol dependent?

We are still providing all of the services we usually offer to help rough sleepers with mental health or addiction issues. During this crisis, we are working with partner agencies, such as Turning Point, to help anyone who is alcohol or drug-dependent which will allow rapid assessment and prescribing on the day, for example. We are also offering services including counselling to overcome drug and

alcohol addiction and to help anyone at risk of withdrawal symptoms. We also have mental health support from the Joint Homelessness Team providing in-reach to hostels and hotels.

## How is the council ensuring that anyone in emergency accommodation is sticking to the government's COVID-19 rules?

We have experienced staff and security who are working seven days a week at hotels and apartment buildings. We have also written to everyone in emergency accommodation to remind them that they are staying in private accommodation and must obey the rules, particularly around limiting the spread of the virus by social distancing and self-isolating. There are also posters put up in buildings we have procured that take into account English may not be a first language and people's literacy skills.

Anyone found to be endangering the health of others, and failing to heed warnings about their behaviour, will ultimately face the threat of eviction. Given that our priority is to try and keep people safe and off the streets to protect them from the Covid-19 outbreak, this would very much be seen as the last resort after all other avenues have been exhausted.

## How is the council staying in touch with people who are self-isolating in a room or apartment?

We have received a donation from Tesco Mobile of 200 pay as you go mobile phones with credit that helps us to stay in touch with anyone who is self-isolating in a room or apartment.

## Is the council working in partnership with others?

Very much so – the Tesco Mobile donation is just one example of the fantastic response we've received from the wider community to help us to feed, provide clothes and medical goods and other essentials to some of the most vulnerable people in Westminster. This includes not only council workers but also our Hidden Network partners, faith organisations, local businesses and volunteers from the Westminster Connects service.

[Learn more about rough sleeping and our 'hidden network' campaign](#)

## What will happen to the people in emergency accommodation when the lockdown ends?

We will do all we can to find appropriate support and routes away from the street for as many people as we can.

## Why are there still people on the streets of Westminster?

Every day, our outreach teams are out on the streets talking to rough sleepers in very difficult circumstances, and working to bring them into accommodation wherever they can, although we are finding a significant number of people who are refusing to engage with us at all.

Also since the lockdown, we have seen an increase of people arriving on the streets of Westminster with no prior links to the borough. This may be because they are newly homeless since losing their job or tied accommodation or were sofa surfing or insecurely housed before the outbreak. This has placed a huge demand on our services, but we are aiming to help as many people as we can in these difficult times.

## What should people do if they see a rough sleeper on the street and are concerned about their welfare?

If you are concerned about someone sleeping rough please alert StreetLink using their app, or via the [StreetLink website](#). This alert will help local outreach teams try to connect with those you are worried about.

## What does Westminster City Council do to help rough sleepers every day of the year?

We currently spend almost £8million a year – more than any other local authority – on supporting rough sleepers and helping them off the streets and into accommodation.

We commission over 400 supported housing bed spaces, an assessment centre which can sleep up to a further 40, and a night centre which can support up to 80 people. We also have 25 emergency bed spaces available in supported housing for those discharged from prison or hospital or who are so vulnerable that they require an immediate route off the streets.

We also offer a range of housing and outreach support services to support vulnerable people to maintain their independence and prevent rough sleeping, homelessness and unnecessary hospital admission. Services include day centres and hostels for rough sleepers, specialist supported housing services for people with mental health problems, learning disabilities and young homeless people and 'floating support' services to support people to maintain their independence in their own home. Services also include counselling to overcome drug and alcohol addiction, befriending services and employment and skills training.

[Learn more about rough sleeping and our 'hidden network' campaign](#)