

Coventry Partnership Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024

1 Preface

- 1.1 The Rough Sleeping Strategy and its Action Plan are reflective of and intrinsically linked to the Council's Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2019-24). The two strategies need to be considered and delivered in tandem. The Housing and Homelessness Strategy sets the vision for housing in the city and our priorities. Under Theme 1 it describes developing measures to tackle rough sleeping and support vulnerable people who are (or are at risk of) rough sleeping and understanding the reasons for non-engagement.
- 1.2 The successful delivery of the Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan is not in the Council's power alone. Therefore, a One Coventry partnership approach is the only way that we will be able to ensure successful realisation of our vision, therefore the strategy will need to be owned, supported and delivered by ensuring effective collaboration and partnership working.
- 1.3 The government defines rough sleeping as being a person who is 'bedded down' (sleeping/trying to sleep) or 'about to bed down' in the open air or another place not designed for habitation. This will include being on the street, in a doorway, park, derelict building, bus/train station, tent or car. A person's housing status is not relevant; the key criteria is that they have been found 'bedded down'/'about to bed down' in a place where someone ordinarily wouldn't try to sleep.
- 1.4 Very few people choose rough sleeping as a permanent lifestyle option. Many people will have held tenancies or been supported in specialist housing but have been unable to sustain or manage accommodation provided. This is often due to complex life experiences such as loss of job, family breakdown, bereavement, periods in care or prison, and serious health issues, or personal lifestyle choices such as substance misuse, criminal behaviour or street culture activities. These issues can often lead to a harmful cycle of multiple exclusions from services.
- 1.5 Rough sleeping is the most visible and acute form of homelessness. The life expectancy of long-term rough sleeper is 47yrs compared to 77yrs for the general population. Rough sleeping is emotive, and it generates public interest, which can be both negative and positive. Witnessing people sleeping rough can evoke negative feelings, which generate uncomfortable, challenging questions for individuals, as well as organisations.
- 1.6 Those affected most by rough sleeping are often hard to engage with, defensive, do not welcome intervention and often have deep rooted mistrust of statutory

organisations. However Rough sleeping is not in a single statutory function's ability to resolve. Partnership, joint accountability and responsibility are required.

2 Background

National

- 2.1 The Government requires Local Authorities to undertake a local Rough Sleepers count or estimate annually and to report the outcome to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
- 2.2 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government reported that “the total number of people counted or estimated to be sleeping rough on a single night in 2018 was 4,677. This was down by 74 people or 2% from the 2017 total of 4,751 and was up 2,909 people or 165% from the 2010 total of 1,768. The number of people sleeping rough increased by 146 or 13% in London and decreased by 220 or 6% in the rest of England. 64% were UK nationals, compared to 71% in 2017, 22% were EU nationals from outside the UK, compared to 16% in 2017, 3% were non-EU nationals, compared to 4% in 2017. 14% of the people recorded sleeping rough were women, the same as in 2017; and 6% were aged 25 years or under, compared to 8% in 2017.¹
- 2.3 The street counts, evidence-based estimates, and estimates informed by spotlight street counts aim to get as accurate a representation of the number of people sleeping rough as possible. Accurately counting or estimating the number of people sleeping rough within a local authority is inherently difficult given the hidden nature of rough sleeping. There are a range of factors that can impact on the number of people seen or thought to be sleeping rough on any given night. This includes the weather, where people choose to sleep, the date and time chosen, and the availability of alternatives such as night shelters.
- 2.4 The Government has made addressing rough sleeping a priority. It has committed to halve rough sleeping in this Parliament and to end it by 2027. In August 2018 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published the Governments Rough Sleeping Strategy. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-rough-sleeping-strategy>)
- 2.5 The National Rough Sleeping Strategy is based around three ‘pillars’:
 1. To prevent new people from starting to sleep rough.
 2. To intervene rapidly when people start to sleep rough to help them off the street.
 3. To promote a person's recovery once they are off the street to build positive lives and not return to rough sleeping.

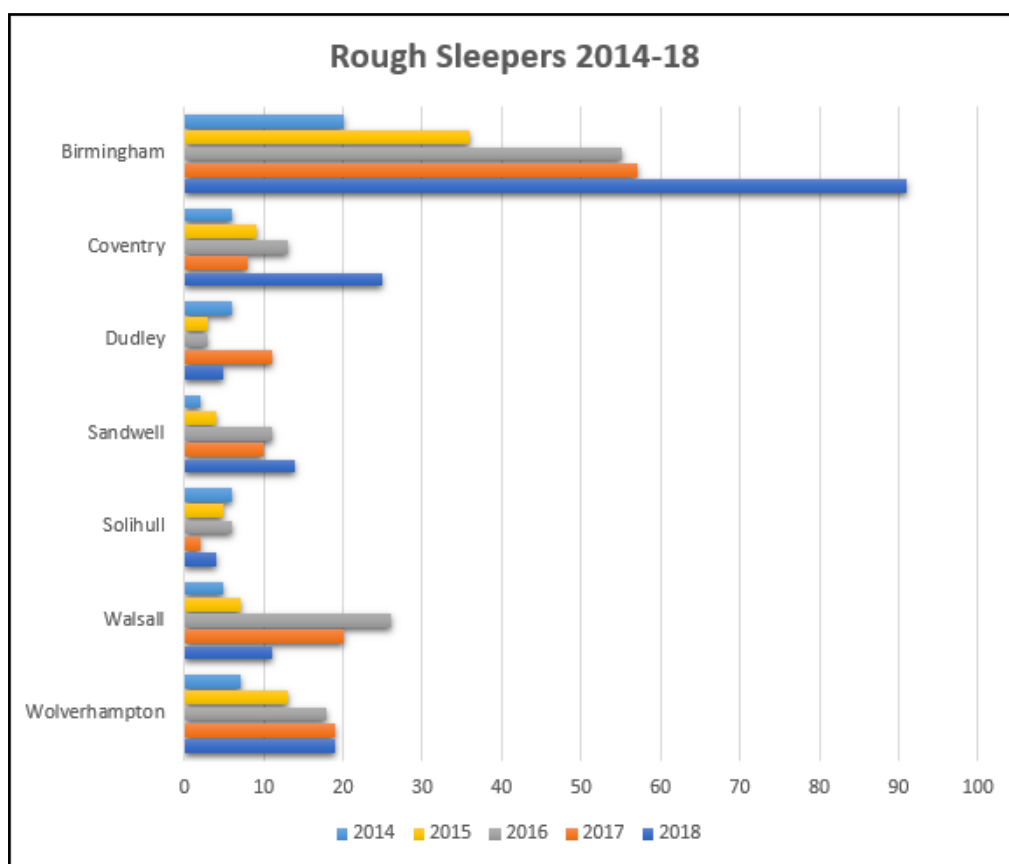
¹ 1.0 Source: MHCLG Rough Sleeping Statistics Autumn 2018, England (Revised)
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/781567/Rough_Sleeping_Statistics_2018_release.pdf

- 2.6 The national strategy emphasises the importance of local authorities forging strong partnerships with other public services, the third sector, the business sector, community groups, the public, people with lived experience of rough sleeping and current rough sleepers to tackle rough sleeping. One of the requirements is that individual councils and partners should develop their own Rough Sleeping Strategies and Action Plans by December 2019.
- 2.7 It also highlights the importance of the role of health services in tackling rough sleeping because of the high proportion of rough sleepers who suffer from mental ill-health, physical ill-health and addiction issues, the challenges rough sleepers face in accessing mainstream health services and the adverse health outcomes of sleeping rough including reduced life expectancy.

Coventry

- 2.8 Coventry has seen a significant increase in the number of rough sleepers since 2014. Official figures demonstrate there has been an increase in numbers from 6 in 2014 to 25 in 2018. This represents a 316% increase in rough sleeping in Coventry over the last 5 years.

Table1 – The increase in the number of rough sleepers on a yearly basis since 2014 across the West Midlands Combined Authorities



- 2.9 Table 1 compares the City with the West Midlands Combined Authority. The increase in the City is a greater proportional increase than that of the West Midlands Combined Authority in general, which has seen an increase of 128% over the same period.
- 2.10 The last official count for Coventry was in November 2018 and as illustrated in the above table there were 25 rough sleepers. Latest local intelligence suggests that the number of rough sleepers in Coventry has increased to 58 in July 2019.
- 2.11 We also know we have a cohort of individuals in the city that are not what would be defined as a genuine rough sleeper according to the definition. Instead, they are begging on our City streets to sadly supplement their income to support their lifestyle choices. Often these individuals have a tenancy or are in temporary or hostel type accommodation. This cohort can often distort people's perceptions of the wider issues and complexities around rough sleeping.
- 2.12 The British Legion report that the number of ex-service forces personnel who are rough sleeping is increasing. In Coventry, this group is not currently a significant number or concern. We are however committed to ensure they do not become a significant proportion of the rough sleeping cohort and we will ensure services are accessible and those working with rough sleepers understand the needs of this group.

3 Introduction to the Rough Sleeping Strategy

- 3.1 The delivery of the Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan will directly support the Council plan and wider outcomes of the Council's partners including those related to community safety, protecting our most vulnerable people, health and wellbeing and social inclusion.
- 3.2 The Rough Sleeping Strategy and action plan, though independent documents, are intrinsically linked to the Council's Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2019-24). The Housing and Homelessness Strategy sets the vision for housing in the city and our priorities in terms of addressing housing need for all in terms of access and sustainability as well as supply. The successful delivery of the Housing and Homelessness Strategy will help to ensure that the actions needed to address the challenges regarding rough sleeping are achieved.
- 3.3 In line with the National Rough Sleeping Strategy, as a partnership we have designed our vision and defined our actions to work with rough sleepers using the 3 areas described as the **3 core pillars**:
- To prevent new people from starting to sleep rough.
 - To intervene rapidly when people start to sleep rough to help them off the street.

- To promote a person's recovery once they are off the street to build positive lives and not to return to rough sleeping.
- 3.4 It sets out our ambitions for the City over the next 5 years and details our aspirations. It highlights the need for all key stakeholders to work in partnership to provide a holistic approach to supporting rough sleepers and eradicating rough sleeping. With the collective aspiration being that the Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan will be owned and delivered as a partnership in the City that promotes a common understanding that eradicating rough sleeping is everyone's role, both statutory and non-statutory, by working together to address the challenges we face.
- 3.5 Our action plan will support how we address the wider community's misconception and understanding about those who are genuinely rough sleeping. It will ensure businesses, stakeholders and members of the public know what to do if they encounter someone who is sleeping rough, what services are available and how collectively we can support rough sleepers whilst ensuring that our best intentions do not perpetuate the cycle that many of our rough sleepers find themselves in.

4 Current Position

- 4.1 We have seen an unprecedented increase in the numbers of rough sleepers in our City, as previously described in 2.8. This includes an increase in females with complex needs and lifestyles and needs that are not met by domestic abuse services and those with no recourse to public funds.
- 4.2 Through dialogue with partners and former rough sleepers we know that, alongside the increase in numbers, the complexities of the people sleeping rough have also changed with a large proportion having substance misuse and or mental health needs. Coventry City Council and its partners work hard within their limited resources to support those who are at risk of rough sleeping. However, the current provision is not able to meet the increase in demand. This coupled with austerity measures regarding reductions in other areas of public services, disproportionality low Local housing allowance (LHA) rates in the city in comparison to private sector rents, a lack of affordable accommodation as well as the roll out of Universal Credit have all contributed, and will continue to do so, to the increase in those who find themselves with no other option than sleeping on our City's streets.
- 4.3 Across Coventry, we have a range of services that are currently working tirelessly to address the challenges the City is facing. Some of these are public funded and there are a number of others which are provided on a charitable basis.
- 4.4 The Council has recently secured external funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to fund 3 posts to specifically

work alongside our commissioned Assertive Outreach service, to help identify and support rough sleepers in Coventry into recovery, with one of the posts specifically working to identify, support and facilitate recovery of those rough sleepers with no recourse to public funds. These services went live in July 2019.

- 4.5 As a City we are part of the combined authority's Housing First pilot, whereby we have received funding to support up to 109 rough sleepers over the next 2 years. Housing First is designed to provide secure, appropriate accommodation to entrenched rough sleepers alongside the required wrap around support, so that the individual can transition from the street to a settled home. The first recipient of this service was during September 2019.
- 4.6 Alongside the funded provision, there are a wealth of charitable and voluntary services available in the City, including but not limited to; a Winter Night Shelter, Foodbanks, STEPS for Change (a multi-agency drop in service), community-based outreach and several services that provide information and advice through charitable funding. We also have a buoyant, committed faith sector that offers and provides a wealth of information, support and guidance to people rough sleeping or inadequately housed.
- 4.7 There is already exceptional commitment, passion, drive and innovation across the City to support and help our rough sleepers off the street. However, we recognise we need to be doing more, and in a more joined up way to ensure our actions are 'SMART' if we are going to meet our own and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government aspiration to eradicate rough sleeping by 2027.
- 4.8 Sadly, there are individuals who position themselves to look like rough sleepers and display what can be described as aggressive begging and on occasions more serious criminal activity in public places. Though our main priority is to support rough sleepers off the street and into recovery by providing alternatives in terms of places to go when they are moved on, we also recognise that there will be at times the necessity to use enforcement powers to manage situations that are of an antisocial or criminal nature.

5 The Vision

- 5.1 Coventry is going through a period of change of where it will be in the spotlight; City of Culture 2021, European City of Sport 2019 and being a host city for the Commonwealth Games in 2022. We have exciting plans to change the City Centre – but over the last 10 years our funding from government has been halved, meaning we must change what we do and how we do it. We know we can't do this alone and we're lucky to have strong partnerships with businesses, community organisations and local people that are already helping us to deliver services differently. For us to be able to deliver our own and central government's aspiration of eradicating rough sleeping by 2027, the strong partnerships we have in the city will be key.

5.2 Our approach to housing and homelessness in the city is going through a period of change. We have a new Housing and Homelessness strategy that was adopted in the spring 2019; we are re-designing our housing related support services, with the new provision being in place by April 2020, and we are re-modelling our approach and provision of temporary accommodation. We have never been better placed in terms of commitment, skills and passion across the city, both internally and externally, to be able to really change the lives of people who live on our streets.

5.3 Our vision for the city and rough sleepers is simple:

We will eradicate rough sleeping in Coventry

And we will do this by:

As a city working creatively and collectively to prevent people from having to sleep rough and ensuring that every individual person who is sleeping on the street will receive support and advice to secure and maintain, safe suitable accommodation with the aim of eliminating rough sleeping in the city in 2022.

6 What do we need to do as a Partnership to achieve our vision for the City?

- 6.1 The Partnership have identified a range of long term actions/priorities that will help us achieve the City's vision; the priorities and actions are not the city councils alone and will be owned and delivered through the partnership.
- 6.2 Alongside our long-term priorities the Partnership have identified some key short terms actions that will be fundamental to delivering our longer-term vision and strategy. As a partnership, our immediate focus is to understand who our current genuine rough sleepers are, why they are rough sleeping and the complexities around this and what they need to support them into recovery.
- 6.3 Commissioned outreach services alongside other non-funded street outreach and intervention services, as well as our own Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government funded provision will be focusing in the immediate term on intelligence gathering – by understanding the reasons for and the needs of our current rough sleepers we will effectively be able to deliver our aspirations and priorities as outlined below for the longer term.

To prevent new people from starting to sleep rough

- 1. Early universal advice and information to seek to prevent people from needing to sleep rough will be available to all.
- 2. As a City we will develop robust discharge pathways to ensure that no-one leaves hospital with nowhere to go.
- 3. As a City we will ensure there are similar processes in place for those leaving prison.

4. As a City we will ensure that all agencies are clear and understand their obligations under the Duty to Refer to refer any individual who is homeless or threatened with homelessness to the Councils Homeless Service.
5. Through our multi-agency partnerships, the Partnership will ensure early identification of people at risk of rough sleeping and provide appropriate interventions.
6. The commissioned services will provide support and are accessible to those with complex needs and those who are at risk of rough sleeping.
7. Effective information sharing systems will be in place to enable a rapid response to those approaching crisis.
8. Advice and education regarding the signs, triggers and realities of rough sleeping for the wider public will be available, including in schools, colleges, and health and social care partners.
9. Policy decisions and changes will consider the impact on rough sleepers.
10. Our work with our combined authority colleagues will ensure we share best practice, raise awareness and where the opportunity arises, share resources to tackle rough sleeping across the region.

To intervene rapidly when people start to sleep rough to help them off the street

1. As a partnership we will have a case management approach to those rough sleeping in Coventry, which is shared and signed up to by all partners.
2. We will work collectively to understand the barriers those sleeping rough face in getting off the street. Once we have identified the barriers, we will work cohesively to remove them wherever possible.
3. All our rough sleepers will know what health care provision is available and how to access it.
4. Hot and cold weather provision will be in place and the public will be informed regarding what shelter and provision is available for rough sleepers in extreme elements.
5. We will work as a partnership to develop and provide drop-in and hub facilities in the City, which offer somewhere for rough sleepers to go.
6. Once identified, as a partnership we will work quickly to get rough sleepers into services, ensuring that the accommodation that we offer does not exacerbate their complexities.
7. Community safety and the police will where necessary use their enforcement powers where rough sleepers and their behaviours impact the public and issues and concerns will be dealt with swiftly, consistently and appropriately.
8. The Council will work with Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure effective use of the funding we have received to support those who find themselves on the street.
9. The partnership will work to coordinate all the efforts across the city to ensure we are not duplicating work and interventions with individuals to echo the One Coventry approach.

To promote a person’s recovery once they are off the street to build positive lives and so they do not return to rough sleeping

1. As a City partnership we will maximise the potential that Housing First offers to the City.
2. We will collectively provide a menu of options that best meets their individual needs when transitioning from rough sleeping to a settled home.
3. The Council will build relationships and develop agreements with both RSL landlords and the private rented sector, to support them if they house rough sleepers – including, in some cases, financial support.
4. There will be multi-agency case management approach to supporting a person to sustain their tenancy.
5. All partners will work with the individual so that they understand the consequences of their choice if they return to the streets, including in some cases prosecution.
6. Ex-rough sleepers will be supported to access employment and training opportunities.
7. Ex-rough sleepers will be supported to ensure are receiving full benefit entitlement.
8. Where an ex-rough sleeper has on-going health needs, they will know how they can access health care and any social care support.
9. As a City we will have an alternative giving scheme that provides an alternative for the public who want to give money to rough sleepers who are begging.

7 What Success Will Look like?

7.1 We will know that we are succeeding in addressing rough sleeping through our partnership strategy, if we are delivering our vision under the 3 core pillars. Success cannot be achieved by working in isolation. As we have stated throughout this strategy it is a partnership strategy and the responsibility and the ability to deliver it belongs to us all. We will be asking all key agencies, partners, statutory sector colleagues and the community sector to identify what they can do to support delivery of the Vision (see below) and we will use this to further inform our Action Plan.

7.2 The Rough Sleeping Action Plan will grow and change over time as the environment we are working in is forever changing and shifting.

7.3 But ***As a city we will eradicate rough sleeping***

We will do this by:

“As a city working creatively and collectively to prevent people from having to sleep rough and by ensuring that every individual person who is sleeping on the street will receive support and advice to secure and maintain, safe suitable accommodation with the aim of eliminating rough sleeping in the city in 2022”.

8 Monitoring Delivery

- 8.1 The requirement to publish a Rough Sleeping Strategy sits with the local authority. However, our One Coventry approach means that this is a Partnership Strategy. Accountability and the monitoring and scrutiny of its delivery will be equally through the city Council's internal governance structures and through our partnership forum.
- 8.2 Monitoring and review alongside the scrutiny of the delivery of the milestones will be carried out internally by our own Strategic Housing Board. Alongside this the homelessness partnership forum in the city will also provide oversight and ensure partnership accountability for its delivery.