

Subject: Rough Sleeping Update

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18 February 2022

Purpose of the briefing note

To provide the Committee with an update on the rough sleeping service and funding allocated during 2021/22.

1. Background

1.1 Westminster City Council invests c. £7m annually (not including Government funding or other external funding sources) in services designed to:

- Prevent rough sleeping
- Access rapidly those sleeping rough for assessment and triage
- Provide a wide range of high-quality accommodation with support
- Deliver a rapid response during periods of cold weather or other emergencies that also lead to sustained moves off the streets
- Develop and deliver pathways out of rough sleeping services into the community
- Deliver a wide range of complementary mental health, substance misuse, primary healthcare etc. services that reflects the needs of rough sleepers
- Sustain those moves through delivery of community-based services and access into employment

1.2 Westminster attracts a disproportionate number of people sleeping rough from across the UK and internationally because of its central location and access to transport hubs. The perceived safety of the area due to its 24-hour nature, the reopening of the City and hospitality is now reporting consistent numbers of rough sleepers since the lifting of lockdown restrictions started and raising the opportunity for some rough sleepers to take up begging opportunities once again.

- 1.3 Historically approx. 50% of WCC rough sleeping street population are non-UK nationals, with the largest numbers identifying as Roma. These groups are often not eligible for statutory services, will refuse voluntary offers of support, and sleep on the streets or in tents as an economic housing choice. There continues to be concerns arising from the risks of amplified criminal behaviour in some hotspot areas of the borough.
- 1.4 For rough sleepers who are willing to engage with our providers, everyone will have a personal tailored plan to identify how they can move away from rough sleeping and sustain this move. Many people who find themselves sleeping rough do not spend a second night sleeping out, but these services are provided to a highly transient population of rough sleepers some of which will not engage with services.

2. Scale of the challenge and progress update

- 2.1 At the peak of the Covid 19 pandemic in August 2020, **266** rough sleepers were accommodated in the 'Everyone In' programme of which **198** clients moved on to sustainable accommodation from their emergency hotel placements.
- 2.2 Seeing the pandemic as an opportunity to deliver considerable interventions the Council and our providers are continuing the work to reduce the number of people sleeping rough and enhance services for them and those at risk of sleeping rough.
- 2.3 The teams continue to focus on prevention, and the pathway from the streets and into accommodation with support, recognising that while some people can be assisted back to their accommodation or into private rented tenancy, others will benefit from bespoke housing options with specialist support in place.
- 2.4 During 2021, services have established more effective offers for newer rough sleepers arriving in the city. These reductions year on year have primarily been made possible by the necessity to revolutionise first stage offers made to rough sleepers, ending large mass night shelters, and delivering a more psychological assessment model at the earliest stage of a client's engagement.
- 2.5 In the last year, Westminster City Council in partnership with our providers, have supported over **650** rough sleepers into accommodation directly from the street. These accommodation options include assessment centres, cold weather provision, supported reconnections and the private rented sector.
- 2.6 However, there is still work to be done, especially in the large cyclical migrations of rough sleeping seen at certain times of the year, and for those that experience the most severe and multiple disadvantage. The critical role for the public, residents, and businesses to play in reporting rough sleepers and developing a safer and fairer City for All to ensure our services can react quickly and help people off the streets.

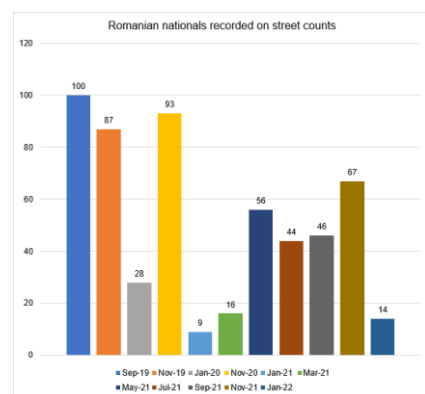
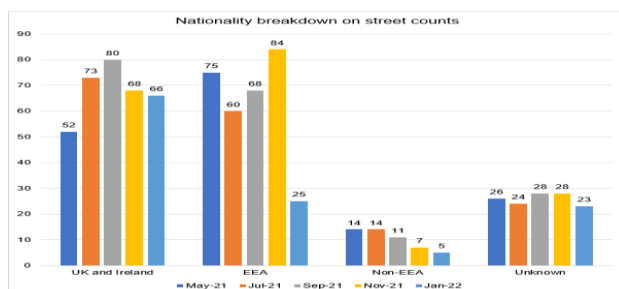
2.7 We recognise that numbers of rough sleepers in Westminster, although reducing, are high and the drive to reduce this is reflected in our strong ambitions for the future. This includes funding applications to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) during February 2022 with the submission of our next phase of Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI 2022-25), which is a 3-year, multi-year funding package that will allow us to better plan services and maximise efficiencies. The funding awarded to authorities will not be announced until early May 2022.

2.8 So far in 2021/22 the Westminster St Mungo’s Street Outreach Service (SOS) has undertaken **5** street counts. In 2021/22 street counts have averaged of **166** rough sleepers, this being a **13%** reduction compared to the **190** average across the **7** counts in 2020/21. Of the rough sleepers who provided nationality information in 2021/22, **48%** were from the UK & republic of Ireland, **44%** were EEA nationals and **8%** were from the rest of the world.

- **79%** of the rough sleepers over the course of the year were men,
- **48%** of the rough sleepers were between 18 and 39,
- **44%** of the rough sleepers were between 40 and 59
- **8%** of the rough sleepers were 60+



Table 1 – WCC bi-monthly street counts 2019 – 2022. Please note street counts are a snapshot of ‘one’ night numbers of rough sleepers seen bedded down from 12am



3. Grant Funding

- 3.1 The Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) was first announced by The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in March 2018 and sought to make an immediate impact on the rising levels of rough sleeping.
- 3.2 Grant funding is ring-fenced budgets that restricts funding to the core activities detailed in the allocation specified. Financial controls and all aspect of the overall governance framework will have oversight by the elected member responsible for the programme. Sound systems of internal control and the financial and operational management is in place including the management of risks, overseen with our financial business partners in WCC.
- 3.3 Since 2018, there has been annual announcements of this funding opportunity and for authorities to submit applications. In 2021/22 WCC successful submission detailed below,
- MHCLG RSI4 allocation to WCC 9 months 1 July 2021 to 31 March 2022 of **£4,204,360**
 - This is in addition to the roll over from RSI Year 3 funding that MHCLG agreed for all authorities from 1 April 2021 to 30 June 2021, of **£595,109.00**
 - WCC also received a one-off uplift of **£500,000** in April 2021 to cover the additional emergency accommodation for rough sleepers during the pandemic and the move on and support costs associated to this work

This brings the total sum of additional funding secured from RSI Year 4 for 2021/22 to **£5,299,469** and an increase of **£1,074,349** on our allocation in total allocation of funding in 2020/21.

- 3.4 During this financial year we have funded several services delivered through our commissioned contracts with providers that include expansion of the service offer to women who are rough sleepers, complex needs and often women will also present as victims of domestic abuse, and modern slavery. The service offer this year for women sleeping rough or at risk of rough sleeping has developed a specific provision to meet their needs.
- 3.5 In addition, funding has supported the work to expand our assessment, triage and move-on model. This continues to ensure there is a timely response to the flow of new rough sleepers to the streets of Westminster and working with those in crisis on the streets. This service includes move-on support for rough sleepers who can move from the streets into their own private rented sector (PRS) tenancy. The service so far supported over 100 rough sleepers off the streets into their own tenancies during 2021/22.

- 3.6 DLUHC in November 2021, also requested authorities submit funding applications to manage 'surge' in response to both the increase in rough sleepers and additional allocations to meet winter pressures and the provision of safe accommodation for rough sleepers during severe weather conditions.
- 3.7 Public Health requested authorities stop the use of Night Shelters from 2020 and in early November 2021, this additional funding grant recognised the challenges local authorities may face both because of winter pressures and the expectation to exhaust all options when supporting non-UK nationals with restricted eligibility due to their immigration status. The Winter Pressures Fund (WPF) was made available to local authorities with the highest concentration of rough sleepers, based on the 2020 snapshot figures, and WCC successfully bid and received confirmation of £1.1m funding.
- 3.8 This funding continues to support our work to reduce the numbers of rough sleepers on the streets during extreme weather conditions, targeting the most entrenched rough sleepers who are known to WCC and the extension of emergency accommodation in response to the recent amber and red notifications by the Met office and the unpredictable winter weather conditions.
- 3.9 Westminster continues to work and support the sub-regional approach led by London Councils, and this work at a regional level provides increased opportunities for WCC to collaborate, share services and better respond to the mobility of the client group by working across borough boundaries.
- 4.0 In December 2021, and in response to the rapid spread of the highly communicable SARS-Cov-2 variant, Omicron, it was recognised this presented a particular risk to the vulnerable rough sleeping population. DLUHC announced the Protect and Vaccinate programme a total of £28.1m funding to local authorities in England to support people sleeping rough and critically to boost vaccination rates.
- 4.1 WCC allocation is £2,163,987, for accommodating people sleeping rough and increasing vaccination uptake. Our work with Public Health, NHS and our commissioned providers, faith and voluntary sector organisations continues to support rough sleepers in Westminster to take up the offer to get their vaccinations using this funding to make vaccinations accessible and to help overcome hesitancy.
- 4.2 In 2022, we are now preparing with our DLUHC advisor and our partners the process to develop our longer-term plans to end rough sleeping locally, and how the 3-year RSI funding package available to authorities can be used to support these ambitions. Our RSI 2022-2025 submission will be built on past successes, provide ongoing support to those who need it and continue the work to reduce and ultimately end rough sleeping in Westminster through building sustainable pathways and preventing rough sleeping. The allocation of this funding will be made early May 2022.

4.3 This work continues to be supported by our DLUHC expert adviser who has formed strong partnerships with our team and continues to work pro-actively to support us and to provide challenge and assurance of our local approach. DLUHC confirm their impact evaluation identified that in the RSI initiative in 2018, reduced the number of people sleeping rough nationally by 32%.