



Homeless Link

Principles for Rough Sleeping Outreach



Acknowledgements

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How have these principles been established?

The principles are based on the views and experiences of people working in rough sleeping outreach services at the point of their development, as well as people with direct experience of homelessness. This included consultation with the Rough Sleeping Lived Experience Forum, a group of people with direct experience of homelessness and rough sleeping. This group shares DLUHC's goal to end rough sleeping and improve the lives of those supported by homelessness programmes nationally. Whilst there is little research into the delivery of outreach services in England, literature about good practice for outreach work in the UK and overseas has been incorporated.

This document details the core principles required for designing and delivering rough sleeping outreach services in England.

This is not an exhaustive list but can be used by new and existing outreach services to review policies and practices. Visit the Homeless Link website for further guidance and resources.

What is rough sleeping outreach?

In homelessness services, outreach refers to the assessment and support which takes place where people are sleeping rough. Rather than workers being confined to building-based services and rigid opening hours, outreach offers a flexible approach to support people who are rough sleeping, with the ability to target the most marginalised people.

What is the purpose of outreach?

We asked people currently working in outreach, as well as people with direct experience of rough sleeping, what they felt the purpose of outreach was. Key themes from this discussion are summarised as:



The Principles



Principle 1: Outreach services play a leading role in the contact, assessment, and support of people sleeping rough in their area

This means...

- Outreach proactively works to end homelessness.
- The outreach service is the authority on who is rough sleeping in the local area and their support needs.
- Outreach workers are knowledgeable of local service provision and the routes out of homelessness.
- Outreach teams maintain accurate information about people sleeping rough, and their needs.



Principle 2: Interventions are timely and purposeful

This means...

- A clear referral system is in place for voluntary organisations, local authorities, and the general public.
- Outreach shifts are conducted regularly, based on intel, and in a way that means people will be found.
- There is a rapid assessment of needs, with established pathways for support.
- Immediate risks, including extreme weather, and safeguarding concerns are responded to appropriately.



Principle 3: An active engagement approach is used by staff for as long as is needed

This means...

- Working creatively and persistently with those that do not readily engage with support: working at a pace set by the client.
- Individuals facing higher barriers into services are consistently contacted and supported by the outreach service.
- Being proactive about building trusting relationships, acknowledging that this can take time.
- Meeting people where they are – physically, and in relation to their journey away from rough sleeping.
- The service adopts a philosophy that there is always potential for positive change, regardless of the length of time someone has slept rough.



Principle 4: Person-centred support and advocacy is provided

This means...

- Providing assessment and support that considers an individual's needs holistically.
- Outreach workers effectively advocate on behalf of their clients to overcome barriers to accessing services and support.
- Adopting a flexible approach: making the service fit the individual instead of trying to make the individual fit the service.
- Taking a tailored approach to the situation and person: respecting each individual's unique journey and valuing their diversity.



Principle 5: Verification is not a barrier to advice and/or support

This means...

- Acknowledging that a traditional verification process does not serve all groups of people.
- Applying professional judgement and a multi-disciplinary approach when 'verifying' someone as rough sleeping.
- Providing advice to anyone who states they are rough sleeping.



Principle 6: The service is trauma-informed and seeks to reduce harm

This means...

- People feel respected, in control, valued, and listened to.
- Staff are accountable to people by being transparent and delivering the actions that have been agreed, but not over-promising.
- Individuals are supported to identify their strengths and goals where possible and are active participants in determining the support they need.
- A harm reduction approach is adopted.



Principle 7: There is close partnership working with other agencies

This means...

- Genuine, effective, joint working with other organisations to provide wrap-around support and avoid duplication.
- The service is embedded within a network of organisations that are working together to end rough sleeping.
- Professionals from other sectors participate in outreach shifts, bringing services to people.



Principle 8: There is a focus on staff safety, wellbeing, and development

This means...

- Infrastructure is in place to ensure the physical safety of staff whilst on shift.
- A robust induction period for outreach workers, including core training to ensure staff feel confident and safe to do their job well.
- Staff have access to regular supervision, reflective practice and debriefs.
- There is a diversity of knowledge and experience amongst staff teams, including people with direct experience of homelessness.

What We Do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.



Homeless Link

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