

Bring Everyone In again: lessons and leadership for lockdown two to prevent a homelessness crisis

This briefing outlines our call for a second Everyone In scheme, backed by funding, in order to protect the health and safety of people experiencing homelessness during the winter lockdown. It also presents findings from our membership surveys, collected over recent weeks and months, which demonstrate why this is so crucial to the health of the homelessness sector and the people we support.

The ‘Protect Programme’ does not go far enough. A second Government directive is urgently required to provide local services with the guidance and resources they need to ensure that everyone, regardless of their immigration status, has a safe place to stay during the ongoing public health emergency.

The first ‘Everyone In’ scheme was a huge achievement of which the sector should be proud. According to Government reports, over 29,000 people were given a safe place to stay and together we undoubtedly saved many lives.¹²

Local health and homelessness services worked together to wrap support around these individuals, engaging many for the first time and successfully maintaining very low Covid-19 infection rates. Our members stayed open, we collaborated closely with local authorities and we showed an amazing ability to rapidly adapt services to ensure everyone was supported.

Since then, with the support of the Next Steps and Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programmes, we have mobilised to move people on where possible and to offer longer-term solutions.

However, recent data and intelligence from frontline services paint a worrying picture as we enter the winter lockdown. For many, funding has run out and demand is rising, putting their ability to provide adequate safe, self-contained accommodation in doubt. In addition, restrictions on homelessness assistance, particularly for people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), mean that many of the most vulnerable will not be able to get the essential support they need, placing them at risk of exploitation and illness.

The recently announced Protect Programme has offered an additional £15 million to help some areas cope in the coming months.³ However, while welcome, this top-up is insufficient both in terms of scope, funding and clarity of direction to local authorities.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/funding-allocated-for-3-300-new-homes-for-rough-sleepers>

² <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2020/sep/covid-19-emergency-homeless-accommodation-saved-hundreds-lives>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/jenrick-launches-protect-programme-the-next-step-in-winter-rough-sleeping-plan>

Key messages:

- Homeless Link member surveys found that **current funding levels are not enough** for local authorities to support people experiencing homelessness over the winter period.
- Almost half of respondents to a CEO survey (44%) said that they were **not confident** that plans are in place to avoid the need for night shelters.
- As we enter another lockdown, reports of **rising rough sleeping** and **lack of options** for people with NRPF compound this picture.
- **Urgent action is needed now to deliver Everyone In 2.0.** Government must provide local services with the guidance and resources they need to ensure that everyone, regardless of their immigration status, has a safe place to stay during the ongoing public health emergency.

Where are we now? Winter capacity and rising demand

Homelessness services and commissioners have been preparing as best they can for the tough winter ahead. A Homeless Link survey of homelessness professionals in October found that local areas are exploring novel options to source accommodation, including student accommodation, vacant council buildings and in one case, emergency pods.⁴ While Homeless Link welcomed the most recent funding announcements and the advice that night-shelters should be used as a last resort only,⁵ we are concerned by survey findings that the traditional supply of shelter spaces has not been replaced by adequate self-contained units.⁶

Almost one third of professionals surveyed (32%) reported decreased capacity for delivering Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) this winter and for those in areas who would apply for winter funding, almost half felt that it would not be sufficient to carry out planned activity. Respondents reported serious concerns about the cost of obtaining additional B&B and hotel rooms, as well as the lack of available spaces and reduced staff capacity due to Covid-19 measures.⁷

In addition, another survey of our members in October found that for most, the ability to meet the scale of need was their greatest concern this winter (61%), followed by the challenge of keeping their services COVID-safe (51%).⁸ Alarming, almost half of respondents (44%) said that they were not confident that plans are in place to avoid the need for communal night shelters.

Two homelessness sector CEOs described their concerns about demand outstripping capacity to support:

“There are plans in place but for only 32 beds. We estimate close to 100 rough sleepers this winter.”

⁴ An online survey was sent to local authority homelessness professionals involved in SWEP provision. The data is based on 84 responses from across the country. 81 responses were from local authorities and the remaining three were from homelessness support providers (two commissioned and one non-commissioned). We asked them about their provision during the winter of 2019-20 and their plans for this coming winter 2020-21.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rough-sleepers-to-be-helped-to-keep-safe-this-winter>

⁶ Homeless Link SWEP survey (October 2020)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ An online survey questionnaire was sent to CEOs of Homeless Link members in October 2020. The data is based on 140 responses. Respondents came from across the country and represent a wide range of service types and organisation sizes.

“Our local authority has said it will not need to use church night shelter style emergency accommodation this winter. We suspect the reality will be different, especially if any SWEPs are declared. Numbers of rough sleepers in our town are already rising, even before the lifting of the eviction ban really starts to have an impact on rough sleeping, and we expect the ongoing impact of Covid will cause further increases in homelessness.”

“The streets are once again full.” – rising demand and the ‘Springtime spike’

Compounding concerns about capacity and availability of safe accommodation, are reports of a new wave of rough sleeping and ever-increasing demand.

National Streetlink data for January-September 2020 show an incredible 82% increase in requests for help from individuals rough sleeping (self-alerts) compared to 2019 (from 5,503 to 10,006), with one quarter still to go. There were almost 13,500 Streetlink alerts from July-September (13,467, a 4% increase on the previous year). London data shows that young people are particularly affected, with under-25s now making up 11% of the capital’s rough sleepers – a historic high and a 47% increase compared to the same time last year.⁹

Without additional measures, the flow of newly homeless people will only increase during the new lockdown and beyond. Like before, the second lockdown will inevitably drive a new wave of unemployment, putting tenancies and informal sofa-surfing arrangements in jeopardy. A post-lockdown survey of our members in August found that over half (53%) saw an increase in demand from people who were homeless for the first time and nearly half (45%) reported an increase in demand from people who were newly unemployed.¹⁰

Our members report that significant proportions of those housed in hotel accommodation have NRPF, ranging from 25% to 70% in some areas, and our August survey found that 40% had seen an increase in demand from people with NRPF. However, uncertainty is widespread about what happens next for this group. Schemes to provide independent immigration advice and employment support have been extremely valuable – and should be built upon – but without clear direction from Government, local authorities have been left uncertain of how they can ensure the safety of this group as the public health emergency continues.

What needs to happen?

As we transitioned out of the first lockdown, Homeless Link and our partners called on Government and local areas to build on these successes and to bring Everyone In For Good.¹¹

While we welcome the measures taken so far, Government must take urgent steps in order to not only ensure that everyone, regardless of their immigration status or any other characteristic, has a safe place to stay this winter, but also to continue to support move-on from emergency accommodation and prevent even more people being forced into homelessness during the ongoing pandemic.

We must also learn important lessons from the first ‘Everyone In’ scheme, which while effective for thousands, did not work for many. It is crucial that we ensure

⁹ <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports>

¹⁰ An online survey questionnaire was sent to CEOs of Homeless Link members in August 2020. The data is based on 104 responses received. Respondents came from across the country and represent a variety of service types and sizes.

¹¹ #EveryoneInForGood – Ending rough sleeping for good after the lockdown. Available at: <https://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2020/may/18/everyoneinforgood-%E2%80%93-ending-rough-sleeping-for-good-after-lockdown>

appropriate separate provision for women and young people, whose different needs and vulnerabilities were too often not taken account of during the first lockdown.¹² For example, our members told us that in some areas, the absence of youth-specific emergency provision meant that young people were placed in hotels with adults without specialist support, putting them at risk of intimidation, exploitation and poor mental health.

In addition, there was huge variation in approach across local areas in terms of gatekeeping assistance, requiring ‘proof’ of rough sleeping and not offering support to people with NRPF. We need clear and timely guidance and communication to maximise the consistency of approaches across local areas and minimise confusion on the ground.

Along with our members, Homeless Link is ready and waiting to do our part to protect the NHS and save lives – including the lives of people who do not have a home to stay in. We call for Government’s support to bring Everyone In again, to implement the lessons learned and to ensure that the great work we have done together so far is not lost.

Urgent actions for Government:

Bring Everyone In. Issue a clear public message to all local authorities, accompanied by guidance, that they should provide everyone without alternatives with Covid-safe - ideally self-contained - accommodation. This should include dedicated pathways and separate age- and gender- appropriate accommodation for young people and women, in order to protect them from further risks of harm, exploitation and trauma, particularly for survivors of violence and domestic abuse.

This should also include the message that everyone who is homeless is eligible for assistance, regardless of priority need, intentionality, local connection, or immigration status.

Cover the cost to local authorities of providing Covid-safe accommodation to everyone who needs it. The message from our members is clear that current funding is insufficient in many areas. It is not tenable for Government to ask local authorities to secure the health and safety of a group at high risk from Covid-19 without providing commensurate funding for as long as it is needed.¹³ At least, local authorities should be given assurance that the extra costs of sourcing self-contained accommodation and providing support over winter will be covered by Government.

Ensure that everyone, regardless of their immigration status, can access the support they need. Ensure access to the EU Settlement Scheme by extending the deadline to apply to account for the difficulties faced during the pandemic and extend funding linked to the suspension of derogation beyond 31 December.

Suspend the Habitual Residence Test, so that European Economic Area (EEA) citizens do not need to prove their ‘right to reside’ to access benefits. We also ask Government to suspend the NRPF condition, so that those currently subject to it can access welfare and homelessness assistance until the end of the ongoing public health emergency.

Don’t push refugees and asylum seekers into homelessness. Extend the move-on period for newly recognised refugees from 28 days to 56 days and stop issuing cessation

¹² Homeless Link. 2020. Preventing youth homelessness after COVID-19: lessons and opportunities from the crisis. Available at: <https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/Policy%20Briefing%20-%20Youth%20COVID-19%20final-2.pdf>

¹³ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600\(20\)30396-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600(20)30396-9/fulltext)

letters until it can be shown that all options have been explored to avoid the person becoming destitute and street homeless.

Reverse dangerous plans for rough sleeping to become grounds for refusal or cancellation of permission to be in the UK. We urge you to reconsider these changes to the Immigration Rules to ensure people are not subject to deportation removal on the basis of not having a home.

We learned from Windrush how dangerous embedding immigration enforcement in public services can be. This policy will create mistrust in homelessness services at a time when they are most needed and place many at greater risk of exploitation and Modern Slavery.

Ensure the welfare system prevents homelessness. Maintain the Local Housing Allowance rate to cover at least the 30th percentile of local rents and the £20/week uplift to UC beyond the financial year 2021/22. Extend the UC uplift to legacy benefits and link annual benefit uprating to CPIH plus 1%. This should be backed up by a commitment to set welfare support rates in the light of regular, independent surveys of the actual costs of living.

This briefing was produced 11th November 2020. For more information, please contact jennie.corbett@homelesslink.org.uk or sue.christoforou@homelesslink.org.uk