

COVID-19 & Homelessness Transition Frequently Asked Questions

Last updated: 3 July 2020

This document collates information about the national situation relating to transition/next steps following the COVID-19 emergency response.

For more detailed local practice guidance on transition see:

www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/COVID19_HomelessnessTransition_LocalPractice_v2_1.pdf

For FAQs on specific issues in the March-May period, see:

www.homeless.org.uk/covid19-homelessness

Our focus is on individuals and couples without dependent children in their household e.g. people sleeping rough, using day centres and night shelters, in hostels or supported housing, as well as those who are hidden homeless, for example in squats or sofa surfing.

These FAQs do not cover wider sector issues e.g. staffing, charity finance.

We will update this document as new information emerges. Please check Homeless Link's 'Homelessness and COVID-19' resource page for the most recent version. You can also download our Resources list, which links to different sources relevant to service delivery. All documents available here: www.homeless.org.uk/covid19-homelessness

If you have a question that is not yet covered, or if you can answer or add to a question, please email tasmin.maitland@homelesslink.org.uk or your usual Homeless Link point of contact.

Let's end homelessness together

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COVID-19 and Homelessness Transition

Frequently Asked Questions

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Produced by

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What is the Public Health guidance on next steps?

There is currently no specific published Public Health England guidance for homelessness settings. Local public health officials should be working with homelessness agencies and, in some cases, there is written guidance and protocols that have been developed locally.

For Day Centre services, general guidance was published on 30 June for community facilities such as village halls and other multi-purpose buildings used by the public, and this will be of some use in the absence of specific guidance.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities

Homelessness agencies should use the available health guidance on infection control (including hygiene and social distancing) and ask for support from your local authority's public health team. If there is no support from public health, please raise this issue with the Homeless Link Partnership Manager for your region, and we will help you to broker the relationship.

For a comprehensive list of public health guidance for clinical and non-clinical settings, most of which is applicable to any location, see the Healthy London Partnership website:

www.healthylondon.org/resource/homeless-health-during-covid-19/

Homelessness services can complete a quick registration on the Future NHS Collaboration workspace to join the 'Homelessness and Inclusion Health Covid-19 Response' group. This is a space to share good practice with health professionals and homelessness sector staff, as well as questions and discussions: <https://future.nhs.uk/system/home>

Who is on the Government's Taskforce?

On 2 May, MHCLG announced that Dame Louise Casey would 'spearhead' a Government taskforce on rough sleeping during the pandemic. On 26 May, a press release said "The taskforce will work with local government, charities, businesses, faith and community groups, and other public sector partners across the country on plans to ensure rough sleepers can move into safe accommodation once the immediate crisis is over." A number of partners, including Prince's Trust and Business in the Community, were announced as 'partner[s] with the Taskforce'.

It appears that the Taskforce is not a single body or meeting, but describes Dame Louise Casey and her team at MHCLG who will then work with other groups (charities, business, local authorities, faith groups etc) to deliver on the commitment to move people on from Covid-19 emergency accommodation.

It appears that other expert groups, such as the Rough Sleeping Advisory Group chaired by the Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing, are not part of the Taskforce but are informed by the work of the Taskforce.

What is the Government's position on moving people out of COVID-19 emergency accommodation?

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) leads on the government's response to homelessness in England. The current Conservative Government made a manifesto commitment to end rough sleeping, a commitment that has since been reaffirmed by Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick MP and the Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing, Luke Hall MP. Prior to COVID-19, the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) has funded responses to rough sleeping through grants to local authorities. In the March 2020 budget, there were announcements on funding for 6,000 accommodation units to help people move off the streets, as well as for support around substance use.

MHCLG have made a number of announcements during the pandemic about housing for people who have been sleeping rough or staying in services such as night shelters. These have included: directing local authorities to provide suitable accommodation in order for people to self-isolate and follow infection control procedures; encouraging day centres to close to avoid groups of people congregating; and that nobody should return to the streets from emergency Covid accommodation.

The Ministry has tended to focus on those people who were known to be sleeping rough prior to emergency accommodation being provided due to the pandemic, approx. 6,000 people, although the total figure of people in Covid emergency accommodation has been given as 15,000, which includes a wider group of people who were hidden homeless or newly homeless.

Timeline of MHCLG announcements¹

❖ 25 March

[Letter from Minister Luke Hall](#) to hotels on providing accommodation to support key workers and vulnerable people – this clarifies that hotels being used to prevent homelessness are excluded from business closure regulations.

❖ 27 March

[Letter from Minister Luke Hall](#) to local authorities on plans to protect rough sleepers. The 'Everyone In' letter directed local authorities to house everyone by the end of the week, including people with no recourse to public funds. It set out principles and actions:

"This should be done by taking the following programme of actions:

1. Convening a local coordination cell to plan and manage your response to COVID and rough sleeping involving the local authority (housing, social care and public health) and local NHS partners together. This would then report in to wider local COVID structures.

¹ [www.gov.uk/search/news-and-communications?organisations\[\]=ministry-of-housing-communities-and-local-government&parent=ministry-of-housing-communities-and-local-government](https://www.gov.uk/search/news-and-communications?organisations[]=ministry-of-housing-communities-and-local-government&parent=ministry-of-housing-communities-and-local-government)

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2. Seeking to stop homeless people from congregating in facilities such as day centres and street encampments where there is a higher risk of transmission
3. Urgently procuring accommodation for people on the streets if you have not already done so – MHCLG will support you to do so if you are struggling to procure sufficient units
4. Triaging people where possible into three cohorts driven by medical advice: those with symptoms of COVID19; those with pre-existing conditions but without symptoms; and those without any of the above.”

There has not been a formal announcement to end these arrangements.

❖ 23 April

[Letter from Dame Louise Casey](#) (the Prime Minister’s advisor on rough sleeping) to local authority homelessness managers and rough sleeping coordinators – updating on 5,400 people housed and encouraging them to continue this work: “we should continue to use this time to focus on those most in need on and off the streets. With such uncertain times, there will be people who come to you needing help and we need to continue to protect them from the harmful effects of Covid-19.”

❖ 2 May

[Announcement](#) that Dame Louise Casey would “spearhead” government taskforce on rough sleeping during the pandemic.

❖ 7 May

[Government announces](#) it will “bring forward legislation to give domestic abuse victims ‘priority need’ access to settled housing”

❖ 23 May

[Announcement](#) bringing forward into 2020-21 capital funding for 3,300 of the 6,000 new supported homes announced in the budget, along with revenue funding for substance use and mental health support. This announcement also references £700,000 funding from Dept of Education to LAs to support care leavers at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping and references plans by YHA, YMCA and some Universities to offer use of their accommodation as interim accommodation.

❖ 26 May

[Press release](#) in which Dame Louise Casey named partners from employment and faith groups as part of a call on community partners “to help with COVID-19 rough sleeping crisis”. The announcement cites the number of people homeless or at risk of homelessness housed in the Covid-19 response as 15,000.

❖ 28 May

[Letter from Luke Hall to local authority Chief Executives](#) ‘Moving onto the next phase of accommodating rough sleepers’.

This said “we must continue to focus on ensuring accommodation and support arrangements can be managed safely to protect the most vulnerable, including those

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with complex needs. At the same time we need now to start planning next steps for accommodating and supporting people to move on from emergency accommodation”.

It asked that they “continue to be health-led, working with health partners to take a clinical health-led response to the ongoing risk of Covid-19 during the next phase.”

Local authorities are encouraged to “carry out individual assessments and take decisions on who you can provide support to, which would include providing accommodation to vulnerable people sleeping rough.” Local authorities are encouraged to “adopt positive practice in safeguarding”.

In regards to NRPF, the letter states: “The law regarding that status remains in place. Local authorities must use their judgment in assessing what support they may lawfully give to each person on an individual basis, considering that person’s specific circumstances and support needs. You will already be used to making such judgements on accommodating individuals who might otherwise be ineligible, during extreme weather for example, where there is a risk to life.”

The letter requests initial plans be returned for 11 June “in a co-production process” with the MHCLG team, with some local authorities being given an earlier deadline of 4 June. We understand a pro-forma was provided to LAs to capture consistent information, referred to as the ‘Rough Sleeper Next Steps and Recovery: Initial Plan’ form. It says the form is designed to assist with Next Steps planning for those who have been accommodated in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and captured information on:

- Cohort size and needs
- Proposals for interim and move on accommodation
- Where existing resource can fund move-on options (e.g. Rough Sleeping Initiative Year 3)

❖ 31 May

Statements from the Communities Secretary, [Robert Jenrick](#), and the Prime Minister’s advisor on rough sleeping, [Dame Louise Casey](#). These statements reiterated the previous announcements on numbers of people housed (5,400 ‘known rough sleepers’ included in the 15,000 total), the commitment to supporting move on and avoiding a return to rough sleeping. They repeated the announcement of funding for 6,000 homes and support costs.

❖ 23 June

[Press Release](#) announcing £105m funding to LA’s for funding interim accommodation for those accommodated under everyone in.

❖ 24 June

[Letter from Luke Hall](#) to Local Authorities

www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-letter-from-minister-hall-to-local-authorities-on-funding-support-for-those-in-emergency-accommodation-and-eea-rough-sleepers

This letter sets out details of the £105 million funding to be made available to LAs for arrange of interventions to support move on of those in hotel and emergency accommodation including PRS moves, family reconnections or extending/procuring

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interim accommodation. Also sets out that a further £16 million in funding will be made available this financial year to tackle the substance dependence treatment needs of this population (bringing the total to £23 million) to ‘help to build on and maintain the engagement people have had with substance dependence services whilst in emergency accommodation as they move into safer, long term accommodation’.

Finally, the letter also includes announcement of suspension of the EU derogation scheme nationally until 31 December 2020 to give local authorities the discretion to offer some EEA nationals who are not in employment and who have no recourse to public funds, access emergency accommodation and support for a period of up to 12 weeks.

❖ 25 June

Email to Local Authorities from Dame Louise Casey. This email titled ‘Covid-19 Rough Sleeping Taskforce – Update’ reflects on achievements so far, includes thanks to those involved and references the £105m funding. It says to LAs ‘The MHCLG team will be working with you immediately on the next steps as to how we will allocate this funding along with the £433 million in Move On funding’. The email also confirms extension to the suspension of EU derogation and the additional £16 million funding for substance misuse which has been brought forward.

❖ 25 June

[Response to Select Committee Report](#) which includes responses to the recommendations in the original Select Committee Report and summarises the Government’s actions to date to get ‘everyone in’ and to minimise rough sleeping moving forward. In response to a recommendation for more Housing First provision, the Government says this could form part of a next steps strategy and that the revenue for 3,300 homes for rough sleepers could potentially be used for Housing First, although evaluation of the three pilot areas funded by Government is yet to be published.

While MHCLG has led the Government’s homelessness response to Covid-19, it is important to note the cross-departmental action which has been taken and which is further required to enable people to be accommodated in the long term from Covid-19 sites. Some of the key measures, and further steps needed, are outlined in Homeless Link’s transition policy paper: www.homeless.org.uk/everyoneinforgood

What funding has Government made available?²

- ❖ 17 March
[£3.2 million emergency support](#) for people sleeping rough during coronavirus outbreak. This was made up of maximum individual allocations to LAs based on their level of rough sleeping indicated in the Counts and Estimates snapshot. LAs must claim reimbursement for their costs up to their maximum allocation.
- ❖ [19 March](#) & [18 April](#)
Two announcements, each of £1.6 billion for councils – funding for a range of needs including social care, with no ring-fenced amount for homelessness although both mention that the funding can be used to strengthen services for homeless people and for ‘getting rough sleepers off the streets’.
- ❖ 2 May & 7 May
[£76m](#) for survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, vulnerable children and families, and victims of modern slavery. £10m of this funding as [grant programme](#) for domestic abuse charities.
- ❖ 14 May
£6 million financial assistance for homelessness charities, distributed via Homeless Link’s [COVID-19 Homelessness Response Fund](#)
- ❖ 26 May
[Funds announced](#) in March budget brought forward and support funding increased - £433m for 6,000 housing units/support. £160m for 3,300 units/support in 2020-21.
- ❖ 23 & 24 June
£105m for interim accommodation/move on interventions of which 85m is new funding and £16m brought forward money for substance misuse to supplement existing bringing substance misuse funding for 20/21 to £23m

² [www.gov.uk/search/news-and-communications?organisations\[\]=ministry-of-housing-communities-and-local-government&parent=ministry-of-housing-communities-and-local-government](https://www.gov.uk/search/news-and-communications?organisations[]=ministry-of-housing-communities-and-local-government&parent=ministry-of-housing-communities-and-local-government)

What is the role of Local Authorities in the next steps?

Local authorities deliver or commission most homelessness services in England, and the configuration of services depends on local decision-making. In areas with regional authorities, such as the Greater London Assembly or Greater Manchester Combined Authority, there may also be sub-regional commissioning of homelessness services. There are also independent homelessness charities and local community, faith and activist groups that do not receive council funding but play an important role in responses to homelessness. Local multi-agency meetings that bring these different groups together, for example to avoid duplication and make best use of intelligence, are an important feature of effective local homelessness responses. LAs should be working with partners and through these multi agency groups to share progress and plan next steps.

The MHCLG has funded targeted projects in local authorities through the Rough Sleeping Initiative and the £3.2m allocated to reimburse LAs spend on Covid-19 emergency housing in March. Local authorities have been responsible for deciding how to allocate the additional £3.2bn Government funding announced in March and April for wider council responsibilities such as social care and which could include homelessness services.

LAs should now be working on assessments of the longer term housing and support needs of individuals that have been accommodated and delivering move-on to meet these needs. Announcements from MHCLG have included reference to 'co-production' of the next phase of Covid-19 action, involving the MHCLG advisor teams working with local authorities to design service responses.

How many people will be supported to move on in the next phase?

MHCLG initially used the figure of 5,400 people – 90% of those known to local authorities as sleeping rough – in several statements. However, on 26 May the press release about Dame Louise Casey’s taskforce gave a higher figure of 15,000 people in Covid emergency housing. MHCLG responded to a request for clarification of these figures:

“Initially we focused our data collection on understanding how many people were in unsuitable accommodation and living on the streets, and tracked that cohort to ensure that they were all made offers of suitable accommodation, leading to a figure of 5,400.

However, we understand that rough sleeping is a complex issue, and were aware that local authorities were also dealing with people who were new to the streets, and many who were threatened with rough sleeping and living in precarious housing conditions. For this reason, we worked with them to understand the number of people they were assisting to prevent the spread of Covid-19. This includes rough sleepers, those in shared sleeping spaces, and threatened with rough sleeping. This is how we reached the figure of 15,000. This figure includes the original cohort, and demonstrates the amazing work of local authorities throughout this crisis.”

MHCLG have since published a data table: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/coronavirus-covid-19-rough-sleeper-accommodation-survey-data-may-2020

While Government announcements have set out their intention that nobody will return to rough sleeping, there are indications of a difference in approach towards people known to be sleeping rough, and those who have been given emergency housing because they were at risk of sleeping rough (for example, where sofa surfing arrangement had ended, family relationships breaking down, evictions etc).

Luke Hall’s [letter of 28 May](#) suggested people might move back in with friends and family, or return to their country of origin. The letter recommends that local authorities “carry out individual assessments and take decisions on who you can provide support to”, suggesting that local authorities will not necessarily continue to house everyone who is now in Covid accommodation.

There will be a need for interim accommodation during the next phase, for example where Covid hotels return to business as usual, once lockdown eases restrictions on travel and overnight stays. The MHCLG press release of 26 May mentioned YHA, YMCA and universities that have offered interim accommodation.

MHCLG announced that £160m funding for 3,300 units of accommodation (plus support) has been brought forward for delivery in this financial year. It is not yet clear what form these units will take and how long it will be before they are available. There have been

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suggestions of modular units and of switching tenure on new builds that had been intended for shared ownership market. These decisions will affect whether people are moved on into longer term accommodation, or moved into a different form of interim accommodation. While transitions may be unavoidable, it is often the case that moves from one place to another increase the risk of abandonment or eviction, affecting how many people successfully move on.

Local areas face different challenges around housing supply and rent levels, which will affect the speed of move on. While the LHA rate has been restored to cover the 30th percentile of properties in an area, this combined with the increase to Universal Credit will take some people above the Benefit Cap level, so move on options will remain unaffordable.

These factors mean that it is unclear how many of the 15,000 people will be supported to access housing.

What happens to people who become homeless during this period?

There has been no change to housing legislation, so where people do not meet the threshold for statutory housing duty there is no legal requirement on local authorities to provide housing. The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) duties to prevent and relieve homelessness continue to apply, however there continues to be variation between local authorities in how this is done. While some local authorities have provided emergency accommodation to anyone at risk during the pandemic (as shown by the 15,000 figure quoted by MHCLG) some councils have applied standard homelessness assessment processes e.g. refusing to house people who didn't have a local connection, even during the first phase of the pandemic.

People continue to become homeless during this period for a range of reasons: loss of employment is a particular concern, along with unscrupulous landlords continuing to evict during the pandemic, also family or relationship breakdown and sofa surfing arrangements coming to an end are common drivers of rough sleeping. Feedback from Homeless Link members suggests that the profile and demographics of people new to the streets has changed during the crisis, as people usually living insecurely have become more visible, including women, young people and workers in the gig economy.

Due to the closure of many housing offices and day services, along with some outreach teams suspending street shifts, some people newly homeless during the pandemic have struggled to present as homeless, especially if they don't have the means to access to telephone or online services.

Personal Housing Plans required from local authorities to deliver their prevention and relief duties under the HRA often tell people to use local sources of support, such as day centres or advice services. At the moment, many of these services are unavailable or highly restricted, and housing officers should take this into account when looking at prevention and relief actions.

What will happen to people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)?

Government announcements have included reference to employment and to reconnection, which may be relevant for EU nationals who have no recourse to public funds, but are permitted to work.

For people from other countries who have no recourse to public funds due to their immigration status, there is no clear plan. Local authorities have been housing people with NRPF in emergency hotels and we wait to see what move on options are included in their plans for the next phase. Many people with NRPF will have previously relied on communal night shelters or sofa surfing, and these options are not currently available.

The letter from Minister Luke Hall to local authorities on 28 May said “I do recognise that these are challenging times and that you may have accommodated people who would normally and otherwise be ineligible for support, making judgements based on risk to life. I wanted to take this opportunity to restate the government’s position on eligibility relating to immigration status, including for those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). The law regarding that status remains in place. Local authorities must use their judgment in assessing what support they may lawfully give to each person on an individual basis, considering that person’s specific circumstances and support needs. You will already be used to making such judgements on accommodating individuals who might otherwise be ineligible, during extreme weather for example, where there is a risk to life.”

Homeless Link alongside many other organisations have called for urgent steps to ensure those with NRPF are still offered accommodation and support. Homeless Link’s recommended steps are outlined in our transition policy paper:

www.homeless.org.uk/everyoneinforgood

Will night shelters re-open?

Night shelters are considered a high risk environment for the spread of coronavirus, as many models involve the close proximity of people when eating and when in communal sleeping areas, as well as having limited access to bathroom and laundry facilities. See Annex 1 of the Pathway COVID-19 Homeless Sector Plan:

www.pathway.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/COVID-19-Homeless-Sector-Plan.pdf

Housing Justice and Homeless Link had been in discussion with Public Health officials about publishing a briefing on shelters and infection control measures in June. This was put on hold in mid-June pending Government communications/guidance, however at the time of writing there has been no further progress.

Local authorities and charities, faith and community groups are encouraged to explore non-communal sleeping options alternatives to shelters in their Covid transition planning.

Will day services re-open?

Minister Luke Hall's letter of 26 March asked that day centres were closed to avoid risk of people congregating. A separate letter from Dame Louise Casey, Jon Sparkes (Crisis) and Mick Clarke (Passage) was sent to London day centres asking them to close and redeploy teams to the Covid hotels. Due to these letters, along with a high number of staff and volunteers needing to isolate due to age or underlying health issues, many day centres have been closed since March.

Community centres and places of workshop used for homelessness provision were exempt from the business closure regulations. As a result, some day services have been able to remain open, or to re-open, offering a limited service (e.g. take-away food, only a few people in at a time to access hygiene facilities).

There is unlikely to be a Government announcement asking or permitting day centres re-open, and most receive little or no local authority funding. Decisions to re-open will therefore be the responsibility of individual organisations, hopefully in conjunction with local planning for the next phase. General guidance was published on 30 June for community facilities such as community centres and other multi-purpose buildings used by the public, which can re-open from 4 July, so this will be relevant in the absence of specific guidance for homelessness settings. It includes guidance on cleaning toilets, on capacity and distancing, and on use of space: www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities

The NIHR Health and Social Care Workforce Research Unit at Kings College London have published guidance for adult day centres. While primarily social care focused, it is also relevant to homelessness day centres: www.kcl.ac.uk/scwru/res/ARC-SL/unlock-lockdown

Coordination and sequencing is important to ensure that any change to support from day centre teams currently re-deployed into emergency hotels or providing food delivery doesn't leave people in emergency accommodation without basic support. In some areas, there is a more urgent need for day services to re-open where there are people sleeping rough who have no access to basic facilities and support.

Homeless Link is speaking to Public Health officials about writing guidance for day services. In the meantime, services should work with local public health leads for support to develop plans for re-opening safely and with adequate infection control measures. Health guidance on workspaces, volunteering and general infection control should be cross-referenced. This is likely to include re-designing services to limit numbers or introduce appointment-only provision; continuing phone/online support; and re-configuring on-site services to minimise numbers and distance people in a building at any time, as well as increasing cleaning and providing handwashing facilities and hand sanitiser station

We recommend that providers register with the Future NHS Collaboration workspace to join the 'Homelessness and Inclusion Health Covid-19 Response' group. This is a space to share good practice with health professionals and homelessness sector staff, example documents, as well as questions and discussions: <https://future.nhs.uk/system/home>

What is the plan for hostels with shared facilities?

During the pandemic, people have continued to live in hostels which have single rooms but shared facilities, with the exception of some people in clinically vulnerable groups who were moved into en-suite accommodation. Hostels have introduced additional infection control measures, for example designating each communal bathroom to small groups of residents to reduce the number of people using any one space, as well as frequent cleaning of any communal areas.

Some housing providers and commissioners, along with Public Health, are now looking at the issue of shared facilities. There has always been a case to refurbish hostels in order to meet the needs of residents by providing en-suite rooms as standard, which improves privacy, dignity and safety. In light of the risks presented by Covid-19 this case is strengthened. Initial activity is underway, for example the Mayor of London “is making available capital funding to organisations responsible for homelessness hostels and women’s refuges to make their facilities safer for residents during the Coronavirus pandemic and to make them suited for a post-Covid world. Funding can contribute to remodelling works and is available through the Mayor’s Homelessness Change programme³ until March 2022.”

Healthy London Partnership has collated information for hostels, most of which is also relevant to non-London providers, and includes an informative webinar:

www.healthylondon.org/resource/homeless-health-during-covid-19/

³ www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/housing-and-land/homelessness/developing-new-and-improving-existing-hostels-and-refuges



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.

Let's end homelessness together

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