

Kerslake Commission evidence submission

London Borough of Southwark

1. Thinking about the response to rough sleeping during the pandemic, which measures, policies, practices or joint working do you think worked well and why?

Southwark Council answered the Government's call to bring "Everyone In" during the first wave of the pandemic in Spring 2020, providing emergency accommodation to hundreds of rough sleepers or people at risk of sleeping rough. This included 46 out of a cohort of 54 entrenched rough sleepers who were known to have been sleeping rough in Southwark for more than three years prior to the pandemic. The Everyone In policy meant the council could adopt a purely housing-led response with little of the hurdles that legislation or budget limitations entail in normal times. In particular, not having to enforce 'Recourse to Public Funds' or local connection rules meant that the council could offer support to people usually ineligible. The policy resulted in there being long periods in the first wave of the pandemic when the number of rough sleepers in Southwark was in single digits, despite new rough sleepers moving into the borough on a regular basis. This achievement shows what can happen when central government gives local and regional authorities the resources and powers to end rough sleeping.

2. In contrast, which measures, policies, practices or joint working do you think have not worked well and why?

While Everyone In was in many ways a successful policy, a lack of clarity and formal guidance about it from the Government hampered its effectiveness in the long-term. In particular, the failure to announce an 'Everyone In 2.0' for Winter 2020/21 was a major missed opportunity by the Government to consolidate the progress on rough sleeping made during the first wave of the pandemic. Everyone In should have been extended for the duration of the pandemic, with adequate funding, formal guidance and support provided to local authorities by central government. Instead, it was left to councils to implement their own plans, effectively leaving rough sleepers at the mercy of a postcode lottery during a pandemic. Southwark Council worked successfully with local partners to implement a winter homelessness action plan, which has included 35 self-contained rooms for homeless people, including 15 for those with no recourse to public funds, as well as accommodation for when the 'Severe Weather Emergency Protocol' is activated in London. In addition, while central government gave the impression that councils would be fully reimbursed for their costs related to

housing rough sleepers during Everyone In, it is not clear that this will be the case, particularly for the temporary accommodation costs of former rough sleepers who are ineligible for public funds. At current levels of occupancy, our temporary accommodation commitment for rough sleepers with no recourse to public funds will exceed £1 million this financial year. It is likely that Southwark Council, along with other councils in a similar position, will have to cover such costs with no reimbursement from central government.

3. Please describe the specific challenges, and opportunities, in the next phase of the Everyone In programme and helping people to move on from hotel accommodation.

Former rough sleepers who were housed during Everyone In, and who do not have access to public funds under immigration rules, are ineligible for housing benefit. This makes it very difficult for the council to help them into longer-term accommodation. Their temporary accommodation costs are borne by the council, typically with no compensation from central government. A further challenge is the failure of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) to cover rents at every room size in Southwark. As of January 2021, the gap between LHA rates and the average advertised monthly rent for a room in a shared house is £184.90; for a one bedroom property the gap is £370.14. The benefit cap also limits how much support people can receive, exacerbating the gap between benefits and private rents. The Government's decision to cut Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) budgets for 2021/22 in England and Wales by £40 million or 22% is very disappointing, as Southwark Council spends 100% of its DHP budget on homelessness prevention, much of which is spent topping up the shortfall between LHA rates and private rents. A lack of adequate and long-term funding from central government also makes it difficult for councils to plan their homelessness prevention work, particularly in the face of upcoming challenges, such as the end of the eviction ban in the private rented sector.

4. And finally, what do you think needs to be put in place to embed the good work that developed during the pandemic, or improve upon it?

The Government should consider any or all of the following policies if it is serious about ending rough sleeping by 2024: suspending NRPF rules for former rough sleepers who have been housed during the pandemic; raising LHA rates to meet the median of private rents in any given area; scrapping the benefit cap, at the very least for former rough sleepers in areas where private rents are high, such as London; and increasing DHP budgets in line with demand for homelessness support in each local authority area. Central government should give councils adequate multi-year funding, both in the local government finance settlement and in specific pots of money targeted

at homelessness prevention, to allow councils to plan in the long-term to end rough sleeping. Rapid rehousing approaches (including, among other pathways, Housing First) should also be encouraged by the Government.