

Kerslake Commission evidence submission

Thames Reach

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?

Good initial response with cooperation between central and regional government, and public health colleagues. Nature and urgency of the crisis meant that some longstanding issues were resolved (possibly temporarily), for example the closure of rough sleeping hotspots in Stratford shopping centre and Heathrow airport. Relaxation of the 'hostile environment' towards non-UK rough sleepers meant that this group were able to access accommodation (Nature of the accommodation offer, no rent or service charge), little or no conditionality meant that some people who had previously been reluctant took up accommodation. For some of this group this was undoubtedly positive, and being 'in' allowed then to work towards a life away from the streets. Many people accommodated in London were in real housing need, but were not rough sleeping, or were very new to rough sleeping. Some of this group have been able to use the support and routes into accommodation and employment provided through the programme to access more secure accommodation. Hopefully this means that they will have increased their accommodation security and will be more resilient to future challenges. Good rapid provision of a range of longer term accommodation with support funded through the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP). Some good examples of health responses, although these were more effective when they built on existing local partnerships. Helpful identification of Charity staff as 'essential workers', and subsequently the inclusion of this group as priority 2 staff for vaccination and subsequent priority given for homeless people. Local responses to the 'Everyone In' initiative has meant a better local Out of Hours response for local boroughs for (particularly new) rough sleepers in some boroughs, however this is inconsistent, both from borough to borough and sometimes from night to night in the same borough.

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

It is understandable but the suspension of 'business as usual' has been problematic and has meant that after the initial lockdown, people latterly may spend longer on the street, and also wait much longer for a resolution of their homelessness. Partly this is because facilities like the No Second Night Out

(NSNO) hubs have closed in response to Covid guidelines, but also because staff have had to focus on the staffing of emergency accommodation. It has been particularly difficult to access higher support accommodation, because the lack of move on (housing providers suspending lettings), meant that move on from these settings was significantly reduced. We welcome the additional emergency accommodation made available to people who could not claim benefits (because they had no recourse to public funds, or had not established their rights in this area); as well as the flexibility around local connection that we saw in the earlier stages of the pandemic. However long periods in this accommodation could be institutionalising, and meant that there was less emphasis on developing the skills needed to live independently. This in turn has made the process of resolving homelessness when housing resources became available more difficult. This has been complicated by inconsistent local authority approaches to managing offers of alternative accommodation, and by initial delays in identifying routes out of emergency accommodation (see above). Uncertainty about and mixed messaging to non-UK nationals who are unlikely to be eligible for recourse to public funding and in many cases will find it difficult to find legitimate work has had the effect of encouraging this group to stay in emergency accommodation while it is available, rather than take up options such as reconnection with their country of origin. We are concerned that this group in particular are likely to end up as rough sleepers when the accommodation closes

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.

The response to the pandemic through the RSAP and Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) has meant that new move on resources have been developed in record time. However the emergency nature of the response has meant that there are multiple accommodation routes and an inconsistent approach to their use. This can mean that some individuals receive and refuse multiple suitable offers of accommodation, while others have limited access. One solution is specialist move-on teams, who understand the options and who can help people navigate them as well as providing practical support to help move on. At present this work is done by a range of ad-hoc 'move on teams', 'navigators' funded by local authorities with Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) funding, and street outreach staff. As a result people needing accommodation do not necessarily have advice around the full range of accommodation available;

and may understand the consequences of the decisions they are making (for example around refusing offers). The nature of the response means that much of the accommodation that has been made available is temporary and provides relatively low levels of support. There is a danger that this perpetuates the precarious accommodation situations that led to individuals losing their accommodation as a result of the pandemic. There remains a need for more higher support accommodation, .Many existing hostels need improvement or replacement, and it is important that there is investment of both revenue and capital in this area to ensure high-quality Covid- secure accommodation, and sufficient staff capacity to quickly move people on into more permanent options. There has been limited take-up of the RSAP and NSAP programmes by mainstream housing associations. While we recognise it has been difficult for these organisations to respond at pace during a pandemic, it is disappointing that they do not see this work as central to their mission.

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?

In London around 50% of people who are seen on the street are non-UK nationals. While some of this group will have or be eligible for support (either through settled status or because they are asylum seekers), many will not, and will not be in a position to work to support themselves. As a homelessness agency we are frustrated that government policies mean that there are few options for this group. We do not have answers for what is a political problem, and we are concerned that the pandemic and the response to it will mean that there are more people who will become entrenched rough sleepers. It is important that we aren't distracted by the (hopefully) exceptional events of the past year or so from a focus on ending street homelessness. As well as strengthening the response to street homelessness when it occurs – particularly around a quick resolution to street homelessness and the provision of emergency accommodation and support, particularly for people with complex support needs - we do need to improve the work that we do to prevent street homelessness. We know how to do this, one aspect of austerity has been the reduction and decommissioning of locally funded tenancy sustainment and prevention services that were able to intervene before homelessness occurred. Where these were effective they had many of the same characteristics as successful street outreach work- a willingness to seek out people who were at risk of losing their accommodation and a preparedness to assertively

engage and build relationships with people who had poor previous experiences of services. In many cases these people are already in contact with existing statutory services, but the support they receive from these services is often piecemeal. Good tenancy support can coordinate these interventions and improve their effectiveness.