

# Rough Sleeping Strategy

2019 - 2024



**Reading**  
Borough Council

Working better with you



# Cabinet Member Foreword

Reading is known as a prosperous town with high employment, a skilled workforce earning above average salaries and a thriving hi-tech economy. Thousands of visitors flock to the town every week for a shopping trip, a meal out, to meet friends in a bar, enjoy a live show or to catch a film at the cinema. However, it does not take long to realise that not everyone is able to enjoy a share of the town's apparent wealth.

Rough sleeping is the most visible form of homelessness and it has been a growing issue for towns and cities across the country in recent years. Reading has a good track record of supporting rough sleepers and a recent greater focus on preventing homelessness has started to reverse that trend. The Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 - 2024 builds on what has been achieved so far and sets out how the Council and its partners aim to continue to drive down rough sleeper numbers in the future.

There are many different reasons why people end up on the street and our strategy has to be flexible and comprehensive enough to adapt to individual needs. The cost of living in Reading and the shortage of affordable accommodation can put people at risk of losing their homes and our Housing team have been successful in securing extra government money to prevent and relieve rough sleeping.

Prevention is always better than cure but for those who do find themselves sleeping rough, Reading offers a wide range of support services with our partner organisations St Mungo's, Salvation Army and Launchpad Reading. We also work with a number of charities, community-led and faith groups. Early intervention is essential to avoid those people at risk of sleeping rough from habitually returning to the streets and initiatives such as No First Night Out are designed to address that.

A number of individuals who sleep rough have a complex range of issues such as mental ill-health or drug and alcohol dependency which can be a barrier to them engaging with support services. Behaviours often associated with rough sleeping, such as begging, anti-social behaviour, drug activity and street drinking, are cause for concern for residents, businesses and visitors to the town and the Council and police are aware of this.

The best way of addressing this problem is to make sure individuals can access the treatment and support which is on offer and we work closely with the police and St Mungo's outreach team to make sure people know where they can get help and encourage them to keep up treatment. This work will be helped further with the introduction of Street Support Reading network which connects people and organisations locally. The app and web page is a one-stop shop for people to find out where to go for housing advice, accommodation, financial help, food banks, meals, health services and much more.

It also suggests ways members of the public, voluntary organisations and businesses can help homeless people, including a link to Street Link where you can let the Council know if you are concerned about someone sleeping rough in the area. This is a great example of different organisations working together with the Council to tackle rough sleeping. We know we cannot tackle rough sleeping on our own and members of the public, who we know feel strongly about the subject, also have an important part to play.

Our aim is to halve the number of rough sleepers on Reading's streets by 2022 and to achieve zero by 2027, in line with national targets. We are confident our Rough Sleeping Strategy will put us on course to achieve this and bring us closer to an end to rough sleeping and all the harm it does to those affected.



**Cllr John Ennis**  
Lead Member for  
Housing



**Cllr Graeme Hoskins**  
Lead Member for Health,  
Wellbeing and Sport



**Cllr Tony Jones**  
Lead Member for  
Adult Social Care



**Cllr Sophia James**  
Lead Member for  
Neighbourhoods and  
Communities

# Strategy Contents

Executive Summary.....	5
1. Reading's current rough sleeping context.....	6
2. What we want to achieve in Reading.....	14
3. Our priorities.....	18
Glossary.....	32



# Executive Summary

Rough sleeping is harmful and those experiencing it will likely be facing several disadvantages (often referred to as 'multiple disadvantage') that they require support with before moving from the streets into long-term independent living. People sleep rough in Reading for various economic, local and individual reasons. This strategy explores these reasons and acknowledges that no single factor is responsible; that they are not exhaustive or mutually exclusive, neither are individuals exonerated from their own action or inaction. Many people sleeping rough will experience different combinations of issues at times in their lives which result in them sleeping rough. Where there is no single reason for its cause, there is no single resolution.

Rough sleeping numbers increased year-on-year, both nationally and in Reading, between 2010 and 2017. In 2018, there was a decrease. In Reading this was by 19% from 31 down to 25; nationally this was by 2% from 4751 down to 4677. A reduction in numbers is positive, but Reading will continue to utilise Council funded outreach and accommodation services and monies successfully obtained through bids to the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) Rough Sleeping Initiative and Rapid Rehousing Pathway funds.

The following principles will underpin the strategy's delivery:

- **Knowing there is a long-term, sustainable option** for anyone sleeping rough
- **Innovation:** Creative responses and making the most of existing resources
- **Strategic local leadership:** Accountability and cross-borough working
- **Partnership working:** Everyone having an important role

The strategy's key objective is to reduce rough sleeping by half, to 15 individuals or fewer, by 2022 and to eliminate it entirely by 2027 in line with central government targets.

The Council's strategic priorities around rough sleeping are:

## Priority 1: Early intervention and prevention

To prevent those who are vulnerable to sleeping rough from moving towards entrenched and harmful behaviours and lifestyles by intervening as early as possible

## Priority 2: Recovery and community integration

To ensure that recovery underpins tenancy sustainment as part of a holistic approach to homelessness prevention

## Priority 3: Rapid intervention

To intervene rapidly when prevention has been ineffective and homelessness is unavoidable

## Priority 4: United support and enforcement action in Reading

To approach rough sleeping in a way that supports individuals, but that also protects Reading's resident and business community from the effects of any associated anti-social behaviours

## Priority 5: Provision of information and alternative ways to give

To provide steer to our local communities in how they respond to people who are sleeping rough by providing sufficient and accessible information, support and guidance around how we collectively and individually support vulnerable people

# 1. Reading's current rough sleeping context

## Why do we need a Rough Sleeping Strategy in Reading?

We have no qualms in saying that rough sleeping is significantly harmful to people that are experiencing or have experienced it. It comes with considerable human and financial costs; the ultimate cost being loss of life. Loss of life can happen whilst living on the streets or a short or significant amount of time after someone has been accommodated having slept rough. Although there are many other contributing factors, the short and long term negative effects of rough sleeping on someone's life expectancy are evident.

People who are rough sleeping will likely be facing multiple disadvantages and experiencing a combination of problems alongside homelessness. This includes substance dependency, contact with the criminal justice system and mental ill health; not to mention stigma, discrimination,

isolation and loneliness. They often fall through the gaps in services and our universally accepted processes. This makes it harder for them to address their issues, to recover and go on to lead fulfilling lives. People who sleep rough will consistently or intermittently come into contact with many services across housing, healthcare, criminal justice, social care, addiction, the voluntary sector and the community. The cost to public services alone is disproportionately high. This is often because services, by their very design and nature, can be inaccessible for those who are most disadvantaged and sleeping rough consequently they will often access services in an unplanned way and in crisis. It has been estimated that someone rough sleeping long term can cost public services as much as £16,000 a year compared to £4,600 for the average adult<sup>1</sup>. It is vital that we work across sectors to create services that can be person-centred and that are accessible and flexible in meeting the needs of our rough sleeping population. In Reading we must aim to improve outcomes for individuals but also, at a time where all partners are experiencing financial pressures, to reduce costs.

The short and long term effects of rough sleeping on someone's life expectancy are evident

## What does our strategy seek to do?

We have clear and genuine aspirations to halve rough sleeping numbers in Reading by 2022 and to eliminate it by 2027 in line with national targets. The Council cannot do this alone. It must work with its partners and those with lived experience of rough sleeping to drive forward change and align agendas and resources across our statutory, voluntary and community sectors. We will provide strategic leadership to undertake this cross-sector approach so that

our partnership is committed to the principles identified in this collaborative strategy. This is also, as reflected in the national targets, a long-term endeavour that requires sustained commitment if we are to achieve our ambition of eliminating rough sleeping on our streets.

Reading's current Homelessness Strategy (2016 - 2021)<sup>2</sup> identifies the overarching strategic principles and objectives that the Council is working towards to address homelessness in a wider context. Our Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 - 2024 sets out the strategic vision that Reading Borough Council and its partners will adopt to meet the needs of people who are currently rough sleeping, who are at risk of rough sleeping, and who have previously slept rough in Reading. The two strategies are inextricably linked, however, our Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan focus specifically on:

- people rough sleeping finding a way off the streets into sustainable accommodation
- helping those currently and formerly sleeping rough to rebuild their lives
- preventing people from returning to rough sleeping, sustaining change and preventing people from sleeping rough in the first place, where possible

Our Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan, which will be the backbone of delivering this strategy, will be developed and delivered collaboratively with partners.

## What our strategy is not...

Rough sleeping is not a crime nor, by its nature alone, is it anti-social. Within our strategy we do not assume that anyone rough sleeping is connected with anti-social behaviours or criminality such as street drinking or begging. In Reading we know that some people seen begging or engaging in anti-social behaviours and crime are not sleeping rough. We also know that a number of the people seen begging on the streets of Reading have access



We have clear and genuine aspirations to halve rough sleeping numbers in Reading by 2022

to accommodation. We recognise that a different, yet interlinked, strategic response is required to tackle these issues effectively. Our Rough Sleeping Strategy does not detail a strategic approach to tackling street based anti-social or criminal behaviours, including begging. However, our priorities include protecting our communities from the negative impacts of rough sleeping whilst remaining focused upon supporting people rough sleeping away from the streets. Our strategy is not a Housing Strategy and again, although clearly interlinked, it does not seek to resolve the shortage of affordable housing in Reading – this is addressed through the borough's Homelessness Strategy and a new Housing Strategy.

## What legislation and national commitments are in place to support people sleeping rough?

In April 2018 our main housing legislation, the Housing Act 1996, was considerably reshaped by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017<sup>3</sup>. This has redefined how we and all local authorities should respond to people who are immediately homeless or who are threatened with homelessness within 56 days. We now have increased responsibilities to prevent and relieve people's homelessness. There is also a legal duty for public bodies, such as hospitals and

<sup>1</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/417230/150325\\_Addressing\\_Complex\\_Needs\\_-\\_final\\_publication\\_amended.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/417230/150325_Addressing_Complex_Needs_-_final_publication_amended.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/1235/Homelessness-Strategy-2016-2021/pdf/Appendix\\_1\\_-\\_HOMELESSNESS\\_STRATEGY\\_2016-2021\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/1235/Homelessness-Strategy-2016-2021/pdf/Appendix_1_-_HOMELESSNESS_STRATEGY_2016-2021_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/13/contents/enacted>

prisons, to refer people to the local authority's Homelessness Prevention Service when they are at risk of homelessness.

The Care Act 2014<sup>4</sup> introduced an emphasis on the need for services to work collaboratively to improve the health and wellbeing of our communities.

The MHCLG published its own national Rough Sleeping Strategy<sup>5</sup> commitments in August 2018. This strategy has committed to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending rough sleeping entirely by 2027. The MHCLG have provided additional funding to local authorities under the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) and Rapid Rehousing Pathway (RRP) for 2018/19 and 2019/20 to help realise their pledge. As a local authority and as part of a wider partnership committed to addressing rough sleeping in Reading, we are committed to working with the MHCLG in striving to achieve this.

### What do we mean in Reading by the term "rough sleeping"?

Within our strategy the term "rough sleeping" is used to refer to people who are sleeping or bedding down in the open air. Places where

people rough sleep vary widely but can include doorways, streets, benches, parks, sheds, car parks, tents or other make-shift shelters. We acknowledge that rough sleeping is not the only form of homelessness but it is often the most obvious and distressing manifestation of homelessness that people see.

The term "hidden homelessness" is often used to describe people who find themselves homeless but who have managed to find temporary options with family, friends or acquaintances. These options can be short-lived and precarious and can be an early indication that people are rough sleeping intermittently or that they may rough sleep in the future.

Our strategy uses several other technical terms that have been defined within a glossary on page 32.

### Why do people sleep rough and why Reading?

People sleep rough for a variety of reasons including affordability of housing and changes to Local Housing Allowance, welfare reform and income benefit sanctions<sup>6</sup>. We note that a number of local authority areas with the highest

numbers of people sleeping rough nationally are in the South East<sup>7</sup>. National homelessness charity, St Mungo's, cite lack of affordable housing as a key factor for high rough sleeping numbers. Many of those sleeping rough have mental or physical ill-health, or have drug or alcohol dependencies, so funding cuts to services supporting these needs have had an impact<sup>8</sup>. Sometimes people face a complex mix of these factors, on top of more difficult family backgrounds than most. These issues can contribute to someone becoming homeless or their progression towards rough sleeping can be escalated, or caused by it. Many people who had traumatic experiences during childhood sleep rough. For some people, these experiences put them at risk of sleeping rough from an early age. Some people say that their early experiences led them to become dependent on drugs or alcohol while still in their teens. No one factor is responsible; nor are they exhaustive or mutually exclusive, nor are we saying that individuals are not responsible for some of their own actions or inactions and the consequences

Many people who sleep rough had traumatic experiences during childhood

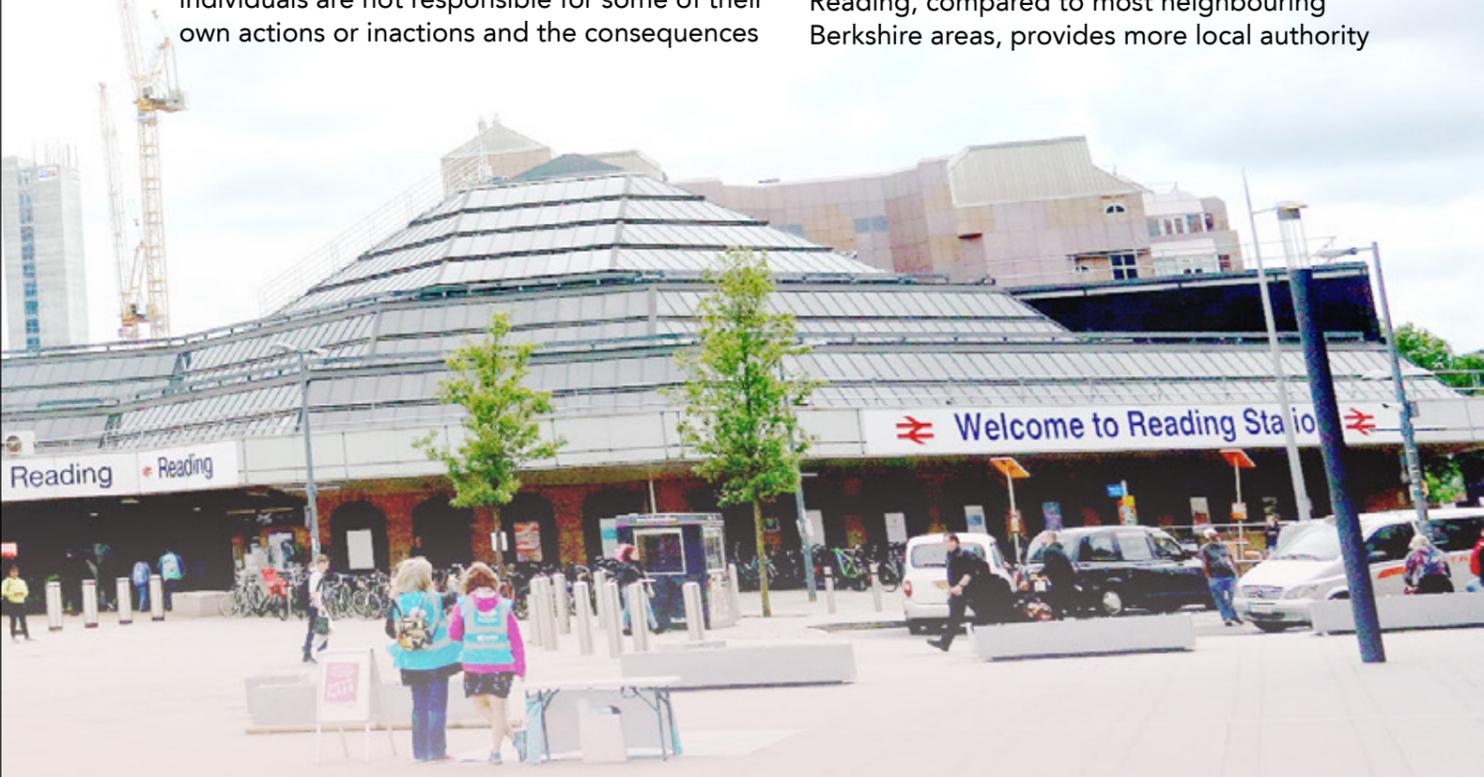
that ensue. However, we are able to say that many people sleeping rough will experience different combinations of these issues at times in their lives which culminate in them sleeping rough.

### Reading as the 'heart' of Berkshire

We know that Reading is a place which attracts people who are sleeping rough in the South East. Reading is a wealthy and vibrant town with one of the busiest transport hubs outside of London that many people pass through everyday. Reading is seen as the 'place to go to sleep rough' in Berkshire. People sleeping rough are drawn to Reading by the prospect of obtaining illegal substances or undertaking criminal activity. This includes begging which can be lucrative in the area, and which is perpetuated by the abundance and generosity of Reading residents, people travelling in to the town for leisure or work and by a strong night time economy.

### Availability of services

Reading, compared to most neighbouring Berkshire areas, provides more local authority



<sup>4</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/contents/enacted>

<sup>5</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/733421/Rough-Sleeping-Strategy\\_WEB.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733421/Rough-Sleeping-Strategy_WEB.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/webinar-catchup/budget2015>

<sup>7</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/775089/Rough\\_Sleeping\\_Statistics\\_2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/775089/Rough_Sleeping_Statistics_2018.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/6428/All-papers/pdf/161205allpapers.pdf>

funding towards support services to prevent and relieve homelessness for single people and couples. In addition to outreach, accommodation and support services commissioned by the Council, Reading has substantial faith and voluntary sector provision and support for people sleeping rough including a day centre, regular food and handouts of other necessities. This substantial provision appeals to those sleeping rough in and around Berkshire as well as further afield. It can attract and then sustain rough sleeping from other boroughs where they know they can be supported and have a hot meal. This means that some people sleeping rough in Reading do not have any local links here and this does limit what the Council can realistically do to prevent everyone from sleeping rough from the outset. It also makes reconnections, particularly to surrounding Berkshire boroughs, more difficult.

Some people sleeping rough in Reading do not have any local links here and this does limit what the Council can realistically do to prevent rough sleeping from the outset

### People can be unable or unwilling to secure accommodation

There are some people rough sleeping in Reading who do not have complex support needs, but do not access accommodation for other reasons. People often find themselves in this situation because their immigration status means that they have No Recourse to Public Funds so they cannot claim Housing Benefit. Whilst they may work in informal or low paid jobs, they might choose to send the money they earn to relatives in another country rather than use it to pay for accommodation whilst in the UK. This can pose exposure to unintended risks, for example getting drawn into drug or alcohol dependency and entering a longer term cycle of exploitation, dependency and rough sleeping.

### How many people rough sleep in Reading and how does this compare to the national picture?

To help us identify those who are rough sleeping and enable us to respond to their needs, we commission a Rough Sleeping Outreach Service that assertively responds to referrals; undertakes flexible and varied on-the-street shifts; and who are able to visit 'hotspot' areas in Reading.

The St Mungo's outreach service utilises a database that is bespoke to Reading called OPAL and they keep ongoing lists of people who have been found rough sleeping, who are known to intermittently rough sleep or who have been reported by the public or partners as rough sleeping.

Each year we are required by central government to undertake an annual count of the number of people that sleep rough in Reading on 'a typical night'.

This figure is provided to the MHCLG who then compile and publish a national snapshot of this data. Since 2016 Reading have chosen to complete a physical count rather than an estimate in order to include cross-sector partners and be as transparent as possible in our methodology and outcomes. We also monitor the effectiveness of homelessness support services we commission throughout the year.

According to latest national figures, collected in the autumn of 2018 and published in January 2019, the number of people estimated or counted as sleeping rough on a single night was 4,677. This was down by 74 people (or 2%) from the 2017 total of 4,751 and was up 2,909 people (or 165%) from the 2010 total of 1,768 when national monitoring began. Since 2017, the number of people sleeping rough increased by 146 (or 13%) in London and decreased by 220 (or 6%) in the rest of England. London accounted for 27% of the total number of people sleeping rough in England. This is up from 24% of the England total in 2017. Further analysis of 2018's figures can be accessed through the MHCLG's report *Rough Sleeping Statistics Autumn 2018, England*<sup>9</sup>.

Figure 1: Annual national rough sleeping numbers and year-on-year % change since 2010



	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Nationally	1,768	2,181	2,309	2,414	2,744	3,569	4,139	4,751	4677
Percentage change from previous year	-	+23%	+6%	+5%	+14%	+30%	+16%	+15%	-2%

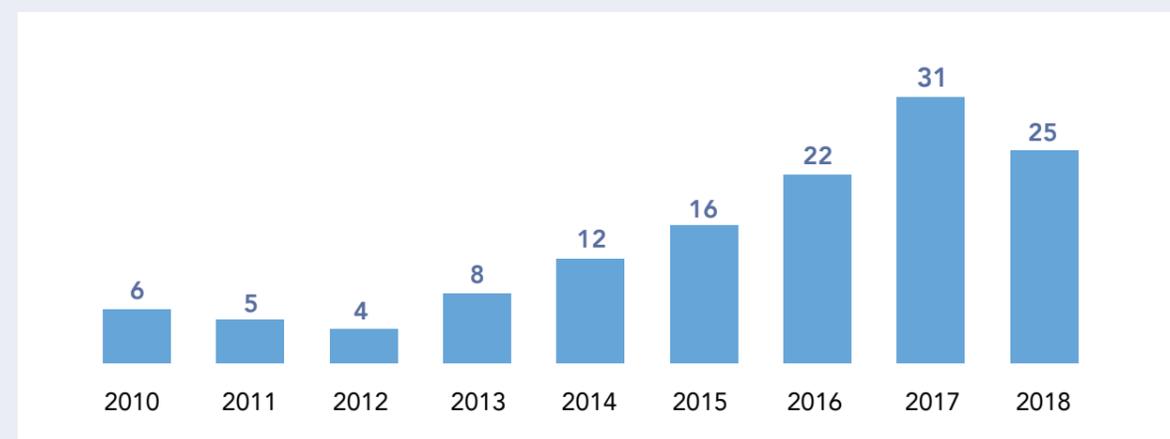
Alongside the national picture, here in Reading we have seen year-on-year increases in numbers between 2010 and 2017. Our 'typical night' figure for 2018 showed a reduction from 31 down to 25 (-19%). We know that whilst a reduction in numbers is positive our overall aim, in line with the national pledge, is to reduce rough sleeping to zero in Reading by 2027.

Figure 2: Reading's annual rough sleeping numbers and year-on-year % change since 2010



	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Reading	6	5	4	8	12	16	22	31	25
Percentage change from previous year	-	-17%	-20%	100%	50%	33%	38%	41%	-19%

Figure 3: Graph to show annual rough sleeping numbers for 'a typical night' in Reading since 2010



<sup>9</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/775089/Rough\\_Sleeping\\_Statistics\\_2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/775089/Rough_Sleeping_Statistics_2018.pdf)



### How do our numbers compare with our Berkshire neighbours?

Reading is one of three Berkshire authority areas to receive money from the Rough Sleeping Initiative's (RSI) initial wave of funding. The RSI was launched in March 2018 and has been targeted at 83 local authorities with high numbers of people sleeping rough, based on 2017's rough sleeping figures. An evaluation of the RSI will be published in late 2019 to help understand the impact of the range of activities in these areas on the number of people sleeping rough. It was mandatory for all RSI funded authorities to undertake a physical, MHCLG verified count, rather than an estimate. For 2018, we compare to our neighbouring authorities as follows:

Berkshire authority	2017 submission	2018 submission	Actual number	Increase/decrease
Reading*	31	25	- 6	- 19%
West Berkshire*	20	18	- 2	- 10%
Slough*	27	29	+ 2	+ 7%
Wokingham	10	7	- 3	- 30%
Windsor and Maidenhead	11	11	No change	No change
Bracknell	6	19	+ 13	+ 217%

\* Denotes Berkshire authorities in receipt of first wave of RSI monies

■ Street count ■ Estimate

## What do we know about the demography and needs of people sleeping rough in Reading?

### Rough sleeping count data

By looking at trends since 2016, we can say that we have seen a slight increase in the number of women sleeping rough, from five in 2017, up to six in 2018, and that our rough sleeping population are getting older, where approximately half of those found were aged 36 or over. Proportionally, those found rough sleeping without a local connection to Reading remained the same at around 3 in 10; with those without recourse to public funds at around 1 in 8 people found.

Rough sleeping has tended to move away from the town centre and towards outer lying areas of Reading. This could be attributed to agencies in Reading beginning to address begging behaviours and abandoned belongings via a joint support and disruption approach in the immediate town centre. A small number of people were found bedded down on both the 2017 and 2018 count nights. Most of those found on both years had a cyclical experience of rough sleeping where they had held accommodation in the 12 months between counts, but had returned to rough sleeping when that accommodation had broken down.

### Homeless Health Needs Audit

People sleeping rough often feel marginalised and experience mental and physical ill health. In 2017, with our statutory and community sector partners, we undertook a Homeless Health Needs Audit<sup>10</sup> with people who were single or part of a couple without dependent children, who were homeless in Reading. This included people who were rough sleeping and sofa surfing, as well as living within supported accommodation, refuges or in emergency accommodation such as bed and breakfast.

Key findings from this snapshot showed that 80% of homeless people in Reading self-reported having mental ill-health with many stating that their homelessness was a contributing factor; that they had difficulty accessing mental health services (due to waiting times, inconsistency, and concurrent substance dependency issues); that they would rather have face-to-face support; and that specialist trauma services would be beneficial. The snapshot showed that people's top three longer-term physical health needs were (1) joint aches or problems with bones/muscles; (2) heart problems or chronic breathing problems; and (3) dental/teeth problems. 73% of respondents advised that they were dependent upon drugs, alcohol or both. Over half of those who told us they were using substances said that they were doing so as a means to cope with their mental ill-health or past trauma in their lives.

Many of the people sleeping rough in Reading have a dual diagnosis – this means that they suffer from mental ill-health as well as being drug or alcohol dependent. Substance dependency can affect their ability and motivation to access mental health services. It is often linked to criminality and difficulties budgeting or maintaining an income. Most of the referrals we receive into our supported accommodation services are from prison or probation services.



<sup>10</sup> <https://www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/homeless-health-needs-audit>

## 2. What we want to achieve in Reading

Our clear overriding aim is to end rough sleeping in Reading and this must be an approach that prevents rough sleeping in the first place, intervenes rapidly for those who are new to the streets and provides creative and flexible responses that enable recovery and housing stability and sustainment.

The health and lifestyle factors of those sleeping rough detailed in this strategy have a huge bearing on the services we provide – particularly for those sleeping rough who get stuck in a ‘revolving door’ of rough sleeping that makes recovery extremely difficult. Some people will abandon accommodation services that are available to them because it’s perhaps not the right service or the right time for them to make changes in their life. We recognise that it is unacceptable for someone to keep accommodation where they are putting others at a significant risk of harm through their behaviours, but also that dealing with the issue through eviction will most likely mean a vulnerable person who has formerly slept rough, moving to another supported accommodation unit or back to the streets. We want to stop the cycle of rough sleeping that people get stuck in. It is disheartening, creates and embeds feelings of failure within individuals and supporting staff/volunteers and is an ineffective use of our resources.

Reading has a diverse and committed community that cares deeply about homelessness and rough sleeping. This is demonstrated by the range of peer-led and volunteer-led initiatives that are already operating in the area – such as food handouts, food banks and emergency bed spaces. We hear loud and clear that individuals and groups within our community want to be involved in finding and providing solutions that end rough

sleeping and homelessness. Without these groups, many more people would experience and suffer from the harm caused by rough sleeping.

As a Council, we are aware of and want to celebrate the fact that community-led groups are able to offer different types of services and more flexible approaches to supporting people sleeping rough than perhaps the rules, regulations, specifications and monitoring arrangements of Council commissioned services are able to offer. Each has its place in preventing, responding to and assisting in the recovery of people who are rough sleeping. Our aim is to build upon existing partnerships and embrace the strengths and capacity of our communities and individual community members in co-producing solutions to prevent and relieve rough sleeping. We intend to work with ‘experts by experience’; people who have slept rough and experienced homelessness and accessed services in Reading. This will enable us, as a cross-sector partnership, to better understand individual customer journeys and experiences and use this learning to inform and improve our approaches and services.

Our actions across services should be a longer-term investment in individuals, not necessarily financially (although this may be important), but in terms of creative, flexible and individual responses that consider that person’s childhood and adulthood experiences and their own personal historical context that inevitably affects their current behaviours. We need to understand an individual so that services across sectors can consider and respond to their needs, whether this is unravelling traumatic experiences, addressing feelings of isolation or building resilience to avoid negative relationships and friendships. Services and their

**We want to stop the cycle of rough sleeping that people get stuck in**

funding tend to be short-term, interventional, ‘task and finish’ and with an ‘end-date’ in mind from the outset. With the most disadvantaged people that end up rough sleeping, we need to think differently in our approach and develop a more open-ended and ‘individually paced’ approach to recovery. This approach should work and move with a person’s ‘present’ situation with support available for as long as is required, without causing dependency; particularly when it comes to supporting with deep-seated trauma and mental ill-health.

We know from experience that investment in the right services and person-centred, bespoke and innovative actions, at the right time,

mean that rough sleeping does not have to be inevitable or become an entrenched behaviour. We know that the interconnected health and well-being factors that drive rough sleeping are entrenched and enduring. We know that addressing these interconnected health and well-being factors requires commitment to a genuine cross-sector approach.

We know that fully breaking down these barriers and creating fully formed and effective responses and full resolution before the end of this strategy in 2024 is highly unlikely. However, we will use this strategy to plan and explain what we can do to stop people rough sleeping in Reading.

### How are we going to deliver?

To be able to deliver our Rough Sleeping Strategy it is important that we establish and underpin it with some core principles. These principles are intended to provide us, the public, partners and stakeholders, with clarity on how we intend to go about delivering our five priorities.

Our principles are:



## Knowing that there is long-term, sustainable option for anyone sleeping rough

We recognise that a 'one size fits all' approach to supporting people away from the streets is inadequate. We intend to be person-centred, both in how we develop ideas and how we deliver them. We know that we have the support of our partner agencies in the belief that anyone who finds themselves sleeping rough, or at risk of sleeping rough, can make a change and create a long-term, sustainable, safer life within a home and within the community.

We are under no illusions that this will always be easily achieved and we know that it can only happen when an individual is ready to engage with the support available. However, we do know that with a bespoke combination of the right intentions, actions, support and timing people can and will get off and stay off the streets; thus benefitting that individual and the town of Reading as a whole. We need to be tenacious and not give up on people.

## Innovation: Creative responses and making the most of existing resources

We are committed to investing in and continuing to invest in services that support people who rough sleep and who are at risk of rough sleeping. We aim to provide support and accommodation services that focus on responding to situations at the earliest opportunity.

It is important that we clarify our current financial position as a Council. We are under significant funding pressures and these will continue over the lifetime of this strategy. Therefore, strategically, we must ensure that our resources stretch further than ever before and looking towards the future, that we use our resources as innovatively as possible to support as many people as possible in rebuilding their lives away from the streets.

Our services to support those sleeping rough and households at risk of homelessness were reviewed and redesigned in line with best practice. In September 2018 we launched new Homelessness Support Services including our rough sleeping outreach service, supported accommodation services and support services to enable people to sustain their tenancies.

**We need to be tenacious and not give up on people**

We've already seen successes in how they are being delivered and we've seen successful outcomes for people engaging with them and we want to build on these. Our services have been designed to offer support when needed, but to enable people to be less reliant on services and to live independently.

## Strategic local leadership: Accountability and cross-borough working

The Council will take a strategic leadership role based on developing and sustaining relationships, influencing, enabling and holding to account where required, necessary and appropriate. We have a clear strategic vision and the actions set out within this strategy are what we consider to be necessary to realise our ambitions in Reading. These actions are far-reaching and will not always be within the gift or necessarily be the responsibility of the Council; however, we have committed to working with partners in identifying where each of their organisations can contribute to the aims and principles within this strategy.

Our response to rough sleeping must be across neighbouring boroughs and with local authorities further afield. People rough sleeping are not interested in hearing about the boundaries that local authority areas set. In tackling rough sleeping, we must work with our neighbouring councils in ensuring that we are working towards realistic and appealing reconnection offers, to ensure that our supported accommodation resources are targeted at those with a local connection to Reading. There is already some effective joint working across Berkshire boroughs; however, we need to improve this and create a wider

partnership that co-ordinates a joined up, communicative response to rough sleeping. This should include identifying and maximising cross-boundary funding bids and opportunities.

## Partnership working: Everyone having an important role

There is a clear imperative for working together: in working with partners across all sectors, we can identify those who are vulnerable more easily, we can provide a joined up response and avoid duplication and crucially we can ensure that people get the right help and achieve better outcomes. The Council are not and cannot be the 'all seeing eye' and gone are the days of the Council being the majority funder of services. However, we can work and want to work alongside partner agencies in the private, public, voluntary, community and faith sectors, and with the general public, in delivering new provisions and helping ensure the most effective use of existing resources. We want to have shared objectives that offer holistic and tailored support for people headed towards, or in the midst of, a homelessness crisis.

Members of the public and businesses are obviously concerned about rough sleeping and are keen to help people sleeping rough in Reading. We are ready and willing to advise businesses, the public and charities on how to make a real difference to the lives of people sleeping rough should they wish to do so. This will include providing information to help our partners make informed decisions about how they can help – for example through volunteering opportunities and where donations can be best utilised.

There are many groups and businesses in Reading responding to rough sleeping by distributing food, drink, clothing, tents and sleeping bags. We have no doubt that this is done with good intentions, however we do know that these kind and well-meaning

gestures can have some unintended consequences. Wherever possible, we want to work with our community in exploring other and new ways to provide supportive, consistent, tailored and co-ordinated responses. We hope that this will include co-producing and meeting gaps in services that the Council do not have the resourcing, or the capacity, to fill.

**We want to work with our community in exploring other and new ways to provide supportive, consistent, tailored and co-ordinated responses**

To maintain oversight, we will work with partners to introduce a dedicated cross-partner strategic group with the aim of including experts by experience, members of the public and working alongside businesses to look at additional funding opportunities.



# 3. Our priorities

For anyone who sleeps rough, whether this is short or longer term, it is harmful, dangerous and can lead to more entrenched behaviours and lifestyles. The longer someone remains sleeping on the streets, the more difficult it can be for them to engage with support services and the more likely it is that substance dependency, begging and linked anti-social behaviours will impact on the community. As their needs increase it can be more difficult to find suitable housing and support for recovery that can sustain them within accommodation and prevent them from returning to the streets.

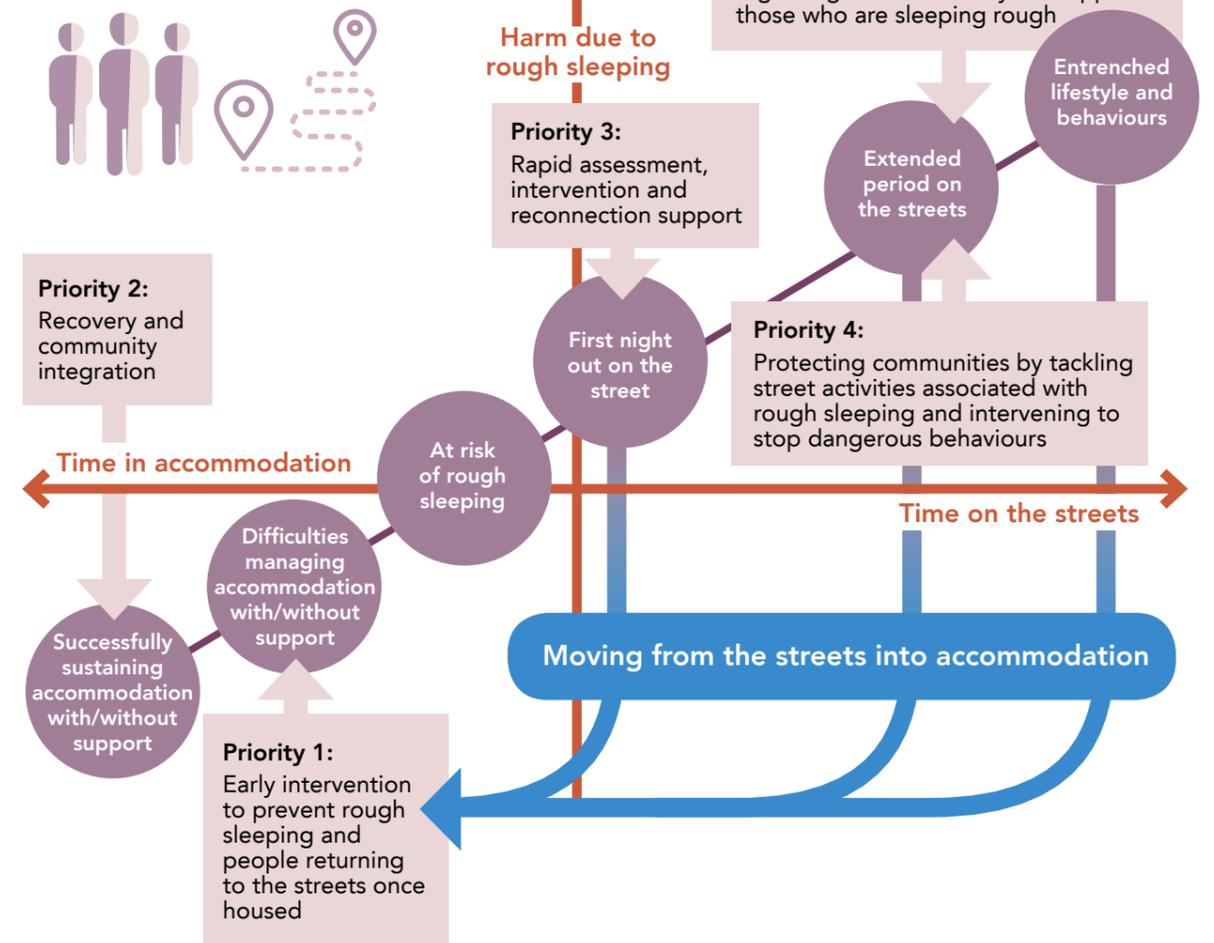
Figure 4 illustrates what we understand to be the journey towards entrenched rough sleeping and associated behaviours. It shows the sometimes cyclical journey of rough

sleeping we have referred to previously. It pictorially shows that the longer someone has been sleeping on the streets, the higher the likelihood of harm; that the longer someone travels towards an entrenched lifestyle, the further they travel away from recovery and having the skills and desire to sustain accommodation independently and that once accommodated, people who have formerly slept rough still need support to stop them being at risk of rough sleeping again.

We believe that our ambition to reduce and eliminate rough sleeping can be tackled through a strategy based upon five key priorities. Our intention is for our priorities and responses to have an impact at different key points in someone who sleeps rough's journey.



Figure 4:  
**The experience of someone who sleeps rough**



Within the context of Figure 4, our main focus is to prevent those who are vulnerable to sleeping rough from moving towards entrenched and harmful behaviours and lifestyles (Priorities 1 and 2). We aim to intervene as early as possible using tenancy support, recovery and a sense of belonging within a/the community whilst people are within accommodation. These priorities are about stopping harmful behavioural patterns from developing/re-emerging and preventing people from being at risk of and returning to rough sleeping.

Should prevention be ineffective and homelessness unavoidable, then we will intervene rapidly at this point with wrap-around services to find an emergency housing solution (Priority 3).

Rough sleeping should be approached in a way that supports the individual but that also protects Reading's resident and business community from the effects of any associated anti-social behaviours (Priority 4).

Finally, we need to be strategic in the steer we give our community when it responds to people who are sleeping rough in Reading by providing sufficient and accessible information, support and guidance around how we can collectively support vulnerable people (Priority 5). This includes everyone, from those supporting those sleeping rough as a community-led group, to singular members of the public.

# Priority 1

## Early intervention and prevention



Where possible, intervene early to prevent rough sleeping in the first place and prevent people from returning to the streets once housed.

### Overview

We recognise that the best way to tackle rough sleeping is to intervene early. We know that we cannot prevent all rough sleeping in Reading, but we can commit to supporting groups of people who can be identified as being at risk of rough sleeping (or returning to rough sleeping) and intervene earlier.

### Our objective

We aim to:

- Reduce the number of people sleeping rough on the streets of Reading to 15 or fewer, by our rough sleeping count in the autumn of 2022
- Work in partnership to prevent those discharged from hospital, prison or other institutional settings ending up on the streets of Reading
- Ensure that access to and sustainment of income benefits are not barriers to obtaining accommodation for people who are rough sleeping or vulnerable to rough sleeping, through joint working with statutory partners such as the Department for Work and Pensions and our voluntary sector advice providers
- Provide tools and knowledge to the public, professionals and partners to enable them to identify specific triggers, risk factors and causes of rough sleeping at different points in a person's journey towards rough sleeping to ensure that the right services are targeting individuals at the right time
- Improve access to social care, mental and physical health and drug/alcohol services including:

- In-reach support and targeted surgeries for those sleeping rough and those at risk of rough sleeping at the Hub and across other Homelessness Support Services
- Where possible, having flexible and innovative responses to how those sleeping rough obtain and access primary healthcare services, including dental health services
- Breaking down barriers for people who feel that their substance dependency prevents them from receiving support with their mental health
- Peer support groups for those experiencing substance dependency
- Early identification, notification and referral to the local housing authority, prior to hospital discharge, for those sleeping rough and those at risk of homelessness

### Our current approach

In response to the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 in April 2018 and increased responsibilities to prevent and relieve homelessness for all households, in April 2018 we restructured our frontline response to those approaching the local authority for advice and assistance. We introduced a triage team and separate Homelessness Prevention Teams for families and single people so that officers could provide specialist advice to people with differing needs. Prior to this, we piloted a team to focus on early upstream intervention where people are threatened with homelessness prior to 56 days. This team has remained and the intention is for learnt best practice to be rolled out across the wider Homelessness Prevention Teams. We have a dedicated in-house tenancy sustainment team for people at risk of homelessness who are occupying Council stock

and we commission floating support services who work across housing tenures.

From October 2018, a new, easier and compulsory system has been introduced to ensure that statutory services refer all people threatened with homelessness within 56 days to the local housing authority – this is named the 'Duty to Refer' and is via a universal piece of software called ALERT. We have promoted the system widely and so far, we have seen a steady increase in the number of people being referred to us who are at risk of homelessness. In response to these referrals, we have been able to work with households at an earlier opportunity and develop creative Personalised Housing Plans that have prevented several households from becoming homeless who may have otherwise lost their accommodation. We have also developed a suite of leaflets and information to ensure that the public and partners are aware of the new duties and how we can help.

Following a period of public and partner consultation, we remodelled support and accommodation services for people who rough sleep and households that are at risk of rough sleeping and homelessness in Reading. Collectively we refer to these as Homelessness Support Services and these were recommissioned from September 2018. We have introduced several elements of early intervention and prevention within these contracts to ensure that people can be identified as at risk of homelessness as early as possible; to prevent the 'revolving door' of rough sleeping and to sustain as many households within existing accommodation as possible.

### Under new contracts, to support our early intervention and prevention approach, we commission:

- A cross-tenure floating support service including a No First Night Out response
- Three weeks of resettlement support from the street outreach service for people moving from the streets into accommodation
- Eight weeks of resettlement support for

those moving on from supported into independent accommodation

- Where accommodation has been earmarked as available, provision of emergency accommodation for up to seven nights for those being released from prison to prevent cycles of rough sleeping – as agreed by our Access Panel
- Services that will develop and introduce a peer support model within their volunteering teams over the contract period for encouraging initial engagement and then building resilience and longer term positive peer relationships. We know that this is key in maintaining a lifestyle away from rough sleeping and in sustaining independent accommodation within the community

### Operationally we have introduced and will continue with:

- Weekly multi-agency Access Panels to ensure that those at risk of eviction are identified and a partnership troubleshooting approach to prevention is prioritised
- Monthly multi-agency Exceptions Panel to ensure that people who are not ready to move on within commissioned time frames are given additional time with services to enable their longer-term plan and to avoid returning to rough sleeping
- Eight assessment bed spaces within supported accommodation for up to eight weeks. These are aimed at those who are being released from prison or discharged from hospital who have previously slept rough or, where it is uncertain what type of accommodation might ensure they have the best chance of moving away from a cyclical rough sleeping lifestyle
- Funding a part-time post to work with the most multiply disadvantaged individuals in Reading under the nationally recognised Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) initiative which aims to break down barriers and create sustainable solutions for people who experience repeat rough sleeping and recurring mental ill-health, drug/alcohol dependency, offending and homelessness

## Our new commitments

We will:

- Recognise the contribution of voluntary and community sector homelessness services in complementing commissioned services; acknowledging that these services will attract, support and engage with individuals that are harder for us to reach and that in turn, these services will be able to encourage engagement with pre-emptive and early intervention services. This includes developing a suitable and sustainable offer of support and accommodation for people who have No Recourse to Public Funds and those affected by modern slavery and exploitation
- Create a robust communication strategy and plan to include information about services available and new developments in an accessible way by introducing a website and App in Reading that provides relevant and current information to the public, businesses, professionals and partners, thus keeping them informed about services available to those rough sleeping and at risk of rough sleeping and enabling them to confidently signpost into these services
- Co-develop and co-produce an early identification/trigger toolkit for partners to assist with identifying if someone might be at risk of homelessness so that they can be referred for support and assistance at the earliest possible and identifiable point
- Roll out, provide training on and promote the Duty to Refer (ALERT) mechanism to non-statutory partners, across all sectors, that come into contact with people who are rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping so that there is a standard and simple way for professionals and community groups to refer into the local housing authority. We want to make prevention everyone's responsibility
- Introduce a rolling training offer for our volunteer and community sector partners to ensure that they feel confident and able to signpost into appropriate services in a timely way
- Work with our voluntary and community sector partners to identify gaps in early intervention and prevention services for which they might be able to create provision
- Embed No First Night Out principles internally, throughout commissioned services and into places where the wider community may have contact with people who are sleeping or may sleep rough
- Develop opportunities for people with lived experience of rough sleeping to become involved in how we develop our early intervention and prevention response
- Develop a response that works with our neighbouring boroughs and local authorities further afield so that joint working benefits individuals, including identifying and maximising cross-boundary funding bids and opportunities
- Work with partners to create offers of support and accommodation that can engage with individuals with a history of not engaging with services and offers

## Priority 2

### Recovery and community integration

Ensuring that recovery underpins tenancy sustainment as part of a holistic approach to homelessness prevention



#### Overview

For someone to succeed in sustaining their accommodation we must prevent reversion to former behaviours and detrimental relationships where we know that these can lead to putting accommodation at risk. We know that people have a far higher chance of sustaining their accommodation, for the longer-term, when they are 'underpinned' by recovery and community integration including:

- the right clinical and emotional support in addressing their physical and mental wellbeing at the right time
- a network of strong, meaningful and supportive professional and personal relationships
- feelings of purpose, including relationships in which they feel able to support others, thus creating self-worth and developing self-esteem, and appropriate social networks that are positive, fulfilling and promote emotional resilience
- varied and regular, perhaps even routine, ways to occupy their time, including opportunity for employment, education, training, volunteering and being able to follow passions, interests and ambitions
- feelings of belonging and contributing to their immediate community and wider societal aims

#### Our objective

We aim to:

- Provide a holistic approach to recovery that does not solely focus upon clinical, structured and prescriptive interventions, but upon wellbeing, and purposeful and meaningful occupation of time for those affected by

drug/alcohol dependency; mental ill-health; criminal behaviours and/or homelessness

- Work with partners across sectors to introduce peer-to-peer and mutually beneficial relationships including befriending and mentoring to reduce feelings of loneliness and social isolation
- Focus efforts on recovery at the earliest stage possible to sustain existing life and employment skills and avoid the development of entrenched behaviours

#### Our current approach

In addition to the beds we are funding in our preventative and emergency responses to rough sleeping, we also commission supported accommodation as follows:

- 34 bed spaces at Willow House for up to 12 months for people who benefit from a 24/7 supported housing environment and who are usually experiencing homelessness and one or more of the following: mental ill-health; an offending history and drug and/or alcohol dependency
- 20 bed spaces at Shepton House for up to 12 months, for people who benefit from access to intensive support, but away from a hostel type environment
- 100 bed spaces for people who are working towards independence but who need a level of support before moving into accommodation of their own
- Housing First accommodation and support for up to five individuals at any one time with a specialist support worker to ensure tenancy sustainment. This offer is aimed at those people who have consistently refused to engage with traditional offers of

support and/or accommodation and where previous accommodation options have been unsuccessful, resulting in a repeat cycle of rough sleeping. The premise is that accommodation is offered first and unconditionally; support is offered and engaged with at an individual's own pace

- Launchpad Reading offer access to a programme of social and educational workshops and classes to encourage meaningful occupation of time to those that use their services

We know that the funding and provision of short-term supported accommodation units alone is not enough to ensure that people are able to move on into and sustain a longer-term home. Our supported accommodation provides people with the skills and motivation to recover, with wrap around support and a short period of tenancy sustainment/transitional support, but once this safety net has been withdrawn it is a sense of belonging and purpose that will ensure longer term success. Often when people leave support services they feel out on a limb; that their security and support network has been removed and that they have no-one to turn to – they can feel lonely and unable to cope. Our services have an 'open door' policy for people in crisis, but there is a certain shame people feel in having to re-access services they have essentially 'succeeded' from. Our new commitments seek to provide non-stigmatised access to support through a range of approaches.

As part of new Homelessness Support Services, we have created the concept of a 'Hub' within Willow House and this will provide easy access and a 'one-stop shop' approach for those sleeping rough and those accessing supported accommodation for housing advice; drug and alcohol dependency support; health; benefits and employment and social interaction and support.

<sup>11</sup> Reading currently has Compass Recovery College accessible to those wanting to improve their mental well-being. St Mungo's Recovery College will have a focus upon employment as a tool to relieve and prevent rough sleeping and homelessness.

## Our new commitments

We will:

- Enhance Reading's offer for recovery that focuses on wellbeing and occupation of time by introducing, in partnership with St Mungo's and other sector services, a Recovery College learning programme, based on the principle that learning can be a transformative experience. In a supportive educational environment people will have the opportunity to sample a wide range of subjects and wellbeing activities alongside a diverse group of peer learners. This will be based on two pioneering Recovery Colleges St Mungo's have set up in Bristol and Southwark<sup>11</sup>
- Continue the development of the Hub offer at Willow House to include more statutory services and the 'one-stop shop' concept. This will include developing a robust response for people with No Recourse to Public Funds
- Integrate the Recovery College concept into the wider community to ensure that those on the periphery and at risk of homelessness are not immediately labelled where they are accessing a service 'known' to be frequented by vulnerable people to avoid stigma and promote integration
- Work with drug and alcohol commissioners and West Berkshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to provide flexible and bespoke responses to those rough sleeping and at risk of rough sleeping

## Priority 3 Rapid intervention



When people do end up sleeping rough, provide rapid intervention and reconnection support to ensure that they are offered an appropriate and sustainable housing solution.

### Overview

We know it is inevitable that no matter how much we try to prevent rough sleeping across services, people will still find themselves sleeping rough in the borough. When people do end up on the streets it is crucial that they are signposted and supported immediately.

Early identification and speedy intervention at this point is vital. The public and professionals need to have the knowledge and tools to signpost or notify relevant supporting agencies that are readily available. It is important that we and our partners have the mechanisms in place to provide the public and professionals with the confidence to refer those sleeping rough to appropriate services in Reading. Assertive outreach services are essential in being able to verify and identify individuals and offer immediate support and an accommodation offer to prevent prolonged and sustained periods of time on the streets.

Support from an outreach team must be openly available and unconditionally on offer for those rough sleeping. An offer of housing or support with drug dependency, on one day might be rebuffed; the next day or the next week that same offer might be accepted by that person. A refusal at one point in a person who is rough sleeping's journey should not jeopardise their chances of being offered support at another point. We do need to be clear that each person's offer of support will be different and that those without a local connection, or without recourse to public funds, may not always be receptive to their offer of reconnecting to accommodation in their borough or country of origin.

People that do not respond to offers of support at the beginning of their rough sleeping journey may require time and support from several partners to overcome their multiple disadvantages and their fundamental and interlocking problems. Ideally this would be whilst accommodated, but this is not always possible due to supply or willingness of the individual to accept an offer. Therefore we must keep partnership working at the heart of all responses so that any offer of accommodation encompasses specialist and tailored support over a long period of time to help rebuild individual lives, develop connectivity and a sense of belonging and contributing to the wider community.

### Our objective

We aim to:

- Identify and verify individuals quickly and assess their needs accurately and efficiently
- Offer a personalised and sustainable route away from the streets for every person sleeping rough where that offer must be based on their individual circumstances and must be regardless of their local connection or immigration status

### Our current approach

To support our rapid intervention approach, we commission:

- An assertive rough sleeping outreach team out on the streets of Reading to seek out new people sleeping rough; respond to referrals from partners and the public; and provide opportunities for people rough sleeping to engage with an offer of support into accommodation or with reconnection

- A No Second Night Out rapid response to rough sleeping by providing up to 10 emergency 'foldaway beds' at Willow House for the rough sleeping team to refer into when they find someone sleeping rough for the first time - this includes a period of up to seven days for people without a local connection or recourse to public funds
- A Hub model of support at Willow House which aims to provide a 'one-stop shop' service around housing advice, health and drug and alcohol dependency for those rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping

**Operationally we have introduced and will continue with:**

- An Access Panel that brings managers of commissioned services together to discuss new referrals into services from the streets; priorities for vacancies and any customers that require a multi-agency intervention/ problem solving approach to keep them in accommodation or to consider suitable alternatives that prevent them from rough sleeping
- Robust Key Performance Indicators/Quarterly Returns for all Homelessness Support Services to monitor and review services, with our partners, to ensure that they are overcoming barriers and are able to deliver the best services for vulnerable people
- Extra provision during the winter months including the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) which is a humanitarian response that provides emergency bed spaces for anyone sleeping rough in the Reading borough when temperatures drop to zero degrees or lower for three or more consecutive nights. We are constantly reviewing the weather during the winter and are able to use our discretion around 'feels like' temperatures and wind chill factor. We work with partners to make decisions regarding when we trigger our SWEP response
- Using our outreach service to refer people that have been verified as sleeping rough

into Reading's faith sector run 'Bed for a Night' winter shelter between January and March each year

- New 'follow-me' referral and assessment paperwork, co-produced with referring agencies, to create a more strength-based focus – so that people can tell their story once
- Staff in commissioned services who are trained to offer gender and trauma informed support tailored to individuals to make 'this time' a success for them in moving from the streets into longer term and sustainable accommodation. We understand that the experience of people sleeping rough can be different for each person, but particularly that women, LGBTQ+, migrants, young people and BAME may need different responses and interventions to make their longer-term plan work

**For 2018/19 and 2019/20 we were successful in bidding for funds under the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) to provide additional support and provision to people rough sleeping in Reading. These funds have enabled us to:**

- Increase the staffing capacity of our outreach service to enable them to work with more individuals over a more varied shift pattern including increased capacity to reconnect people sleeping rough to accommodation in their area or country of origin. The team are now located at the Willow House Hub to provide improved interagency working
- Extend winter shelter provision for an additional month so that it now operates from the beginning of January until the end of March and provide extra staffing resource overnight
- Provide Housing Led emergency bed spaces so that people sleeping rough who have not responded to previous offers can be offered emergency accommodation immediately and for up to six months. A dedicated support worker will intensively support them to establish a suitable and agreeable

accommodation or reconnection offer to prevent them from returning to the streets

- Employ additional staff to support with seeking suitable and sustainable move-on offers from supported accommodation so that increased throughput will create vacancies for people who are rough sleeping

**For 2019/20 we have been successful in obtaining funds under the MHCLG's Rapid Rehousing Pathway (Early Adopters) scheme to trial:**

- 'Navigator' roles who will work intensively with a small group of people sleeping rough to navigate them through to independent living. This ensures that they will have consistent support from the same organisation and support worker
- 'Out of hours' tenancy sustainment officers to work with clients who find it difficult to maintain their tenancies due to personal/ social relationships or being at risk of exploitation

**Our new commitments**

We will:

- Under new Homelessness Support Services' contracts ensure that each person sleeping rough has a Multi-Agency Service Officer (MASO) where clients and professionals have a clear understanding of someone's incremental journey, their end goal and long-term plan for sustainable accommodation and a life away from the streets
- Ensure that commissioned Homelessness Support Services are effective through individual quarterly and overall annual review of services
- Trial a multi-agency 'Pop-Up Hub' in Reading with a focus on making the right offer of support and accommodation to those sleeping rough at the right time. The Pop-Up Hub will offer a very brief, intensive, unconditional cross-sector service in one or

more central 'hot-spot' locations to try and engage with harder to reach groups

- Increased and continued promotion of the national StreetLink campaign throughout the Reading borough amongst the public, businesses and partners as a mechanism to report those who are rough sleeping
- Enabling Homelessness Support Services to focus on community integration including employment, accessing relevant specialist services and health care and increasing social inclusion
- Explore all potential funding opportunities to expand existing services or to create innovative responses for people sleeping rough in Reading; whether these are local authority opportunities or enabling conversations and submissions from charitable and community sector partners
- Maximise the utilisation of the Council's quota queue for people moving straight from the streets into accommodation. This means that in certain circumstances, it is appropriate and possible for those rough sleeping to move straight into social rented properties, with resettlement support
- Work with partners to explore, establish and enable support and accommodation options for people sleeping rough who have No Recourse to Public Funds
- Work with partners to create diverse support and housing solutions for people sleeping rough who historically have not engaged with services and support on offer in Reading

# Priority 4

## United support and enforcement action in Reading



Protecting communities by tackling street activities associated with rough sleeping and intervening to stop dangerous behaviours.

### Overview

When someone ends up sleeping rough, it is often due to complex and intertwining reasons. Childhood and adult life experiences, trauma and choices made by that individual will all contribute. Rough sleeping is highly likely to exacerbate and amplify any existing needs and behaviours, including anti-social activities.

Our experience is that disruptive enforcement action, alongside and linked to offers of support and accommodation, can help drastically reduce the negative effect that anti-social activities can have on the town as a whole.

Any approach that includes enforcement should be personalised and heavily informed by support agencies involved with an individual to ensure that the two are coupled effectively in supporting them off the streets. It should be joined-up, intelligence-led and take into account a wide range of information when deciding whether to use enforcement or not and what action would be most appropriate. The relationship between the Police and other partners is key in coordinating activity and delivering these priorities. Enforcement responses should not be punitive; however, we know that there will be times that we may need to make the difficult decision to take enforcement action against anti-social activities in the interests of individuals, businesses and residents. We have a duty to balance the needs of the individual with the wider needs of the community as a whole and to responsibly assess and manage risks in that context.

### Our objective

We aim to:

- Identify individual offending behaviour and associated risk, to enable multi-agency intervention to protect the individual, public and business community
- Provide a jointly agreed coordinated and measured response to offending behaviour
- Ensure that all intervention includes elements of supporting individuals to access services and/or an assessment of the current support they are receiving

### Our current approach

In 2018 we reviewed our approach to tackling the impact of anti-social behaviour and criminal activity. This led to:

- Early identification and removal of abandoned litter and items associated with begging and rough sleeping. This included communicating the approach with individuals and a warning system to prevent personal items being removed
- A Begging Enforcement Group utilising intelligence on offending behaviour, service engagement and current accommodation/ or pathways to access provision. This group informs enforcement escalation from warning letter to Criminal Behaviour Order and ensures a measured and proportional approach
- Ensuring all "enforcement" officers (Police Officers, PCSOs, Town Safe Officer and Business Inclusion District Warden) include signposting to support services at every opportunity with individuals sleeping rough engaging in anti-social behaviours

- Identifying those most at risk of returning to rough sleeping due to tenancy enforcement action linked to their offending behaviour

Operationally we have introduced and will continue with:

- Our MEAM and Housing First approaches to supporting those who experience multiple disadvantage and who are highly likely to be involved in anti-social activities as well as rough sleeping
- Our Places Solution Group – a multi-agency meeting which includes a problem solving focus on tented or rough sleeping encampments across the town. This group ensures early identification of new encampments with information shared between the Community Safety Team and the outreach service, and co-ordinated and early responses to the removal of encampments, tents or other makeshift shelters, as jointly agreed with homelessness services prior to eviction or removal of abandoned tents and shelters
- Our People Solutions Group – a multi-agency meeting which takes a problem solving case management approach. This group ensures a co-ordinated cross-sector responses to anti-social behaviours to reduce the offending behaviour of multiply disadvantaged individuals or those with high dependence lifestyles. Links are made with exploitation groups and Operation Stronghold to protect those at risk

### Our new commitments

We will:

- As part of our wider communications and training plan, we will provide less obvious internal and external frontline partners who may interact with people sleeping rough, such as parks and recreation, with information to share with people sleeping rough. This will include the support that is available to them and the consequences of not engaging with offers of support or behaving anti-socially

- Continue to encourage Homelessness Support Services and wider partners to work with Echo Tango (our CCTV operators in the town centre) and to adopt the use of TownSafe Radio to improve communications and safety
- Prioritise our Community Safety and Legal Service's responses to encampments in outer-lying areas of Reading
- Maintain our focus on hotspot areas in the borough and ensure enforcement action is implemented where required
- Link the current enforcement and planned activity into the Community Safety Partnership priority group focused on Class A drugs, exploitation and county lines activities
- Explore the option to provide those sleeping rough with a safe place/storage facilities for their belongings where they are engaging with their MASO and are awaiting accommodation

# Priority 5

## Provision of information and alternative ways to give



Providing information and guidance to the community, residents and visitors regarding alternative ways to support those who are sleeping rough.

### Overview

Reading is affluent and has an attractive shopping and social centre - we know that residents and visitors give a lot of money to those who beg on Reading's streets. Whilst begging and rough sleeping are not mutually exclusive, we do know that some people begging are not sleeping rough or that they might sleep rough whilst accommodation is open to them because they will beg until the early hours of the morning during Reading's vibrant night time economy. Students and visitors will generously give money to people directly when they perceive them as vulnerable, living on the streets and when they are told by people on the streets that there are no other options or support available to them. We feel that one of the fundamental reasons for vulnerable people and those sleeping rough being attracted to, and sustained, in Reading is the abundant begging opportunities that Reading provides.

### Our objective

We aim to:

- Keep the public, our community groups, professionals and businesses up to date and well-informed of the vast amount of support that already exists in Reading. We need to have a strong, consistently messaged and shared strategy of communication
- Educate the public and groups outside of the homelessness sector regarding how giving to people that are begging can fuel and exacerbate entrenched lifestyles, which may or may not include rough sleeping, by funding drug and alcohol dependency

- Channel our cross-sector energies and resources in the same direction to develop and implement a co-produced alternative means for people to direct their good will and donations that does not perpetuate rough sleeping, anti-social or begging behaviours in Reading

### Our current approach

Across agencies, we need to work together to effectively and widely promote and communicate the type and level of support that is offered as a collective in Reading to those who are rough sleeping. We know there are several groups offering a lot of support - each group, charity or organisation will promote itself very well through local press, their own websites and own social media platforms. However, there is a need for all of this information to be collated, updated, publicised and promoted in one place. We live in a society that wants easily accessible and understandable information. We have the services in Reading that support people sleeping rough; we need to tell the public, businesses and all our relevant partners about them.

In 2016/17 we created a cross-sector/ partnership Homelessness Forum in Reading and as a result we shared resourcing and undertook our first Homeless Health Needs Audit in early 2017. However, this Forum lost its strategic and operational way which can be typical where there is no strategy to underpin aims and direction. We need to develop a new partnership approach with the input, guidance and support of our homelessness sector partners.

### Our new commitments

- Create a truly multi-agency, cross-sector homelessness partnership/social inclusion forum to steer and take ownership of this Rough Sleeping Strategy and subsequently co-developed Action Plan
- Develop an all-encompassing information platform including a website and an App that can provide people sleeping rough; those at risk of rough sleeping, the public, businesses, professionals, students and partners with easy access to information about what support is available to those who are rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping – this will include a campaign that educates about the negative impact of giving money to those who are begging. This commitment must make better use of social media and more informal channels of communication
- Explore the development of an Alternative Giving campaign to sit alongside the provision of information and guidance that would direct people towards opportunities to donate their time or money to charities and community-led projects operating in Reading with those who are rough sleeping/ at risk of homelessness. Any proceeds from this campaign would be directed back into all other strategic priorities and invested in those individuals directly affected by rough sleeping

# Glossary

**Access Panel:** a weekly multi-agency meeting chaired and administered by the Council to review new referrals made for supported accommodation and floating support services and to discuss preventative options for people at risk of homelessness.

**ALERT:** a tool provided to all local authorities in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. It supports partnership working by providing a secure and easy to use platform for making referrals and notifications under the Duty to Refer.

**BAME:** a term used to refer to members of non-White communities in the UK which stands for black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.

**Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG):** created following the Health and Social Care Act in 2012 and replaced Primary Care Trusts on 1 April 2013. Clinically-led statutory National Health Service bodies responsible for the planning and commissioning of health care services for their local area.

**Complex trauma:** may be diagnosed in adults and children who have repeatedly experienced traumatic events, such as violence, neglect or abuse.

**Dual diagnosis:** a term used to describe patients with both severe mental ill-health and chronic substance dependency.

**Duty to Refer:** a legal obligation on certain public/statutory bodies to notify the local housing authority under 213B of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 of anyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness.

**Early Upstream Intervention:** an approach addressing contributing risk factors and circumstances indicating that an individual may end up at risk of homelessness or rough sleeping and initiating support and professional involvement as soon as possible. This may involve working with groups that are known to have these risk factors, who may not currently be at risk of rough sleeping presently, but where certain characteristics and/or lifestyle choices suggest that they could be, and carrying out prevention and education with them to prevent risk from developing.

**Emergency accommodation:** in the context of this strategy this means temporary 'fold-out' bed

spaces and Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEPE) bed spaces or placements. They are used as part of a No Second Night Out response in Reading, located within the Hub at Willow House, to accommodate people sleeping rough. Reading's Rough Sleeping Outreach Service determines who can access them, where verification and local connection/reconnection engagement criteria apply.

**Exceptions Panel:** a monthly panel in which managers that provide accommodation based services, commissioned by RBC, discuss barriers to individuals moving on from their services within their contracted timeframes. A solution focused approach is taken in enabling move on and includes developing and reviewing action plans for clients; considering how to overcome move-on barriers and how professionals can be flexible in meeting the needs of individuals to enable a sustainable move-on.

**Experts by Experience:** people with first-hand experience of rough sleeping and/or homelessness who are able to shape and inform the change and development of services and strategy for rough sleeping and homeless people.

**Gender informed:** considering the experiences, issues and support needs of homeless people specific to their gender and embedding these considerations into practice and methods when delivering support to clients.

**Health and Wellbeing Board:** the forum administered by the Council bringing together key leaders from the health and care system work to improve the health and wellbeing of the local population and reduce health inequalities.

**Homeless Health Needs Audit:** a review, using questionnaires and focus groups, undertaken by groups with an interest in homeless health, including those who have responsibility for improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities.

**Homelessness:** a broad term which includes people who live in unsuitable housing, don't have rights to stay where they are, or are rough sleeping.

**Hidden homelessness:** a term used to refer to people who would meet the legal definition of homeless if they were to make a formal application, but are not represented in the local authority homeless statistics.

**Homelessness Support Services:** the collective name for services commissioned by Housing Needs in Reading to support households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and that includes the following contracts: Rough Sleeping Outreach Service; Floating support service for early intervention, prevention and tenancy sustainment; Intensive and engaging support: Hub and accommodation service and Working towards Independence accommodation service.

**Hotspot area:** an area where an activity is known to happen frequently and/or where lots of people are known to undertake the activity in one specific location e.g. rough sleeping or anti-social activities.

**Housing Benefit:** can help people pay their rent if they are unemployed, on a low income or claiming benefits. This is being replaced by Universal Credit.

**Housing First:** an evidence-based approach to successfully supporting homeless people with high needs and histories of entrenched or repeat homelessness to live in their own homes. The overall philosophy is to provide a stable, independent home and intensive personalised support and case management to homeless people with multiple and complex needs. Housing is seen as a human right where there are no conditions around 'housing readiness' before providing someone with a home. Secure housing is viewed as a stable platform from which other issues can be addressed. Housing is provided 'first' as a matter of right, rather than 'last' or as a reward.

**LGBTQ+:** often used to refer to all of the communities of people who identify themselves by this term. Each letter represents the following: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (or Questioning) - the + encompasses all other terms that people may wish to be identified as in terms of their sexuality.

**Lived experience:** a representation of the experiences and choices of a given person and the knowledge that they gain/have gained from these experiences and choices.

**Local Housing Allowance (LHA):** is used to calculate Housing Benefit for tenants renting from private landlords. LHA rates relate to the area in which you make your claim.

**Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM):** means a coalition of three national charities (Clinks, Homeless Link and Mind) which formed to influence policy and services for adults facing multiple disadvantage and exclusions.

**Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG):** (formerly the Department for Communities and Local Government) is a central government department whose job it is to create great places to live and work and to give more power to local people to shape what happens in their area.

**Multi-Agency Service Offer (MASO):** means a clear overall plan made, in conjunction with clients and the support of providers, which works towards an end accommodation goal. All partners and sectors are made aware of this plan and support the individual to achieve this. The plan may not be to access accommodation in Reading and rather might be to reconnect an individual to their borough or country of origin.

**Multiple disadvantage:** the experience of a combination of difficulties including homelessness, substance dependence, contact with the criminal justice system and mental ill health.

**No First Night Out:** a project working across some local authorities which seeks new approaches to prevent individuals from sleeping rough for the first time.

**No Recourse to Public Funds:** an immigration condition restricting access to public funds, including many mainstream benefits such as welfare and housing.

**No Second Night Out:** a pledge made within a borough, across agencies, sectors and services, which states that no one who is new to the streets should spend a second night out; no one should make their home on the streets and no one should return to the streets once they have been helped off them.

**OPAL:** a complete client relationship and service management system for housing and homelessness organisations to use for client contact monitoring and reporting. This includes production of an on-going list of open and on-going referrals for those individuals who have been found rough sleeping, who are known to intermittently rough sleep or who have been reported by the public or partners as rough sleeping.

**Personalised Housing Plans (PHPs):** an outline of the steps to be taken to prevent or relieve a person's homelessness where they are homeless or threatened with homelessness and are eligible. The 'plan' should be drawn up by the local housing authority as part of its duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. It should be based on its assessment of her/his needs and include agreement on the steps to be taken by

the individual, the local authority and any other parties involved in supporting that individual.

**Pop-Up Hub:** provide a rapid identification and multi-agency interventions to tackle rough sleeping via short bursts of intensive activity, targeting known hot spots and offering a rapid intervention for multiply disadvantaged and excluded people who find it hard to access mainstream services. Usually a hub will link to a town's No Second Night Out response.

**Quota queue:** additional priority given to certain groups in housing need, from different social care groups, within the Council's Allocations Scheme. The number of individual quotas for each queue is calculated on an annual basis. Single homeless people, including people sleeping rough where there are no specific support needs and people moving on from Homelessness Support Services are one of the community groups that can be afforded this priority. A panel determines which individuals are included in this quota.

**Reconnection:** the process by which people sleeping rough, who have links with another area where they can access accommodation and/or social, family and support networks, are supported to return to this area in a planned way.

**Rough sleeping:** a term which refers to people who are sleeping or bedding down in the open air, in places such as streets, doorways, parks, benches or bus shelters, or even in sheds, car parks, tents or makeshift shelters.

**Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP):** the protocol which is implemented during times of severe weather, which at the least will be when the Met Office forecasts three nights or more with a minimum temperature of 0°C or below. The Protocol will also be considered in other periods of severe weather and factors such as snowfall and wind chill will be taken into account. During this period anyone who would otherwise have to sleep rough is offered an emergency bed in the communal areas of supported accommodation buildings. The Reading Protocol is agreed annually and with regard to Homeless Link's guidance at <http://www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/guidance-on-severe-weather-emergency-protocol-swep-and-extended-weather-provision>.

**Sofa surfing:** an informal term that describes the practice of a homeless person staying temporarily with various friends and relatives while attempting to find permanent accommodation.

**Street counts:** one of the means of monitoring rough sleeping by counting all people sleeping rough in Reading on a 'typical' night.

**StreetLink:** a national referral service for the public to connect people sleeping rough with local services.

**Supported accommodation:** accommodation commissioned by the council that provides specialist support (to varying degrees) to people formerly sleeping roughs and other vulnerable people.

**Trauma informed:** a strength based response to the impact of trauma within support delivery by emphasising the physical, psychological and emotional safety of those affected by trauma. This creates opportunities for those affected to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.

**Trauma informed approach:** an approach which supports individuals who have experience of sustained exposure to traumatic events and the symptomology arising from such exposure, which is described as complex trauma and is identified as a particular recurring theme amongst homeless women.





**Reading**  
Borough Council

Working better with you