Overview

This cross-Government strategy recognises the reductions that have been made in rough sleeping, and aims to re-energise government to end rough sleeping by 2012.

The strategy looks to local areas to take the lead, as local knowledge is needed for local solutions, but also sets out support that central government will give to enable local areas to act. The strategy focuses on:

- what has worked, as well as future risks and challenges
- more flexibility in providing housing options
- the importance of tackling worklessness
- the needs of specific groups, such as migrants
- the importance of empowerment for building capacity and confidence

This briefing concludes with comment about the role of local leadership, and the implications of the removal of ring-fencing of the supporting people grant.

Background

The current strategy builds on the work of the first rough sleepers strategy, Coming in from the Cold, in 1999. Since then, the Government introduced the Homelessness Act 2002, in which local authorities were given a duty to prepare homelessness strategies with a focus on prevention. More than a Roof in 2003 focused on the wider impact of relationship, health and economic issues. Local authorities have over the years had a range of targets relating to homelessness, including the reduction in use of B&Bs for families with children and the use of temporary accommodation.

Now, with Local Area Agreements and the reduction in national targets for local authorities, these targets have been replaced. Instead there are 10 national indicators with relevance to homelessness:

- Supporting People indicators (141 and 142)
- Accommodation indicators (143, 145, 147, 149)
- Employment, education and training indicators (144, 146, 148, 150)

Communities and Local Government published a discussion paper in April 2008, Rough...
Sleeping Ten Years On. An analysis of the responses to that discussion paper has been published alongside the strategy.

The current strategy does not compel local areas to tackle rough sleeping, and does not introduce any new requirements. Rather it trades on the expectation that all local areas will share a moral commitment to eliminating the conditions that lead anyone to sleep rough, particularly as the economy worsens.

This strategy focuses on adults. Issues relating to children are addressed in the Young Runaways Action Plan published in June 2008 by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (see link for briefing).

Current position

A target was set in 1999 to reduce rough sleeping by two thirds. This target was met early, based on the one-night count methodology that has been used since 1996. This methodology only provides a "snapshot" but continues to be used because it is a consistent benchmark, if not a full picture. The latest count (up to June 2008) was 483 nationwide.

Better information is provided by the CHAIN database, which records all transactions between homeless services and people sleeping rough in London. This database suggests there are 3,000 people sleeping rough in London in the course of a year. Of these, about 150 have been on and off the streets for years.

Who sleeps rough?

- 87% are male
- many have problems with drugs (41%) alcohol (49%) and mental health (35%)
- increasingly they are from accession countries (20%)
- recently, fewer are former members of the armed forces (down to 7% from up to 25% ten years ago)
- also fewer are children (only three people recorded in 2008, but children may not have contact with services when they run away)

Why do people sleep rough?

- poverty, debt and unemployment leading to stress and family breakdown
- health issues, including mental health and addictions
- transitions, like leaving care, prison or hospital
- difficult childhoods that make it difficult to sustain relationships
- migration
- lack of support network or not knowing how to access support

Key risks for the future

Economic upheaval and continuing pressure on the housing market will place increased strain on families. There is also the risk of increased repossessions. At the same time, the ageing population is putting considerable pressure on housing, health and social care services.

Actions on services

Housing
Local authorities are encouraged to strengthen the interventions that prevent rough sleeping by:

- learning from the Enhanced Housing Options Trailblazers
- expanding access to rent bond schemes for single homeless people
- linking to projects set up under the Home Office funded Mentoring and Befriending scheme
- encouraging and supporting people to find flat or house shares through local classified advertising
- putting in place effective routes into private sector accommodation for those not in priority need
- having interim solutions for those immediately at risk

**Commissioning**

Best practice and support that is, or will be, available to commissioners includes:

- Multi Area Agreements for commissioning in areas where needs for services are low
- a new Prevention Mapping Toolkit - using the experience of people who have slept rough to identify points for intervention
- A New Directions index - being developed to identify people with chaotic lives and multiple needs
- Emergency accommodation has been reviewed and commissioning and provision will be further developed
- Move-on Plans Protocol - clarifying need for different kinds of private rented, hostel and supported housing
- 300 additional units of leased Move-on accommodation
- Leading Places for Change - the leadership programme for the homelessness sector

**Worklessness**

The report highlights a range of actions across several departments to encourage an increased focus on helping homeless people to break out of worklessness. This ranges from projects linking Jobcentre Plus with homelessness agencies, providing better information tailored for people who have experience of sleeping rough, the Spark Challenge which helps homeless organisations become self-sustaining businesses and programmes like 'Giving Real Opportunities for Work' which helps homeless people get into work in the homelessness sector.

**Health and Social Care**

Despite the Government's health policy focus on reducing health inequalities, homelessness agencies still report that people with multiple needs can find it difficult to access services, including registering for services and treatment for mental health and alcohol problems. The primary focus to tackle this will be in strengthening local, regional and national commissioning, including new tools to pick up the needs of rough sleepers in needs assessments and new research into the impact of childhood trauma and evidence of interventions that can help on the road to recovery.

**Migrants**

There has been a significant increase in migrants from Eastern Europe both sleeping rough for short periods as well as some who enter a spiral of decline into life on the streets. CLG and the UK Border Agency have a programme of work to minimise the risk of migrants
ending up on the street, including the roll out of new Local Immigration Teams from January 2009, reaching all parts of England by 2011.

**Actions on empowerment**

As well as actions focused on providing services, the strategy focuses on actions to support communities in how they support vulnerable people, and actions to give vulnerable people more choice and control in moving on and enjoying a fulfilling life.

Actions to achieve this involve:

**Using the web to promote local services and resources** - potentially through DirectGov, there will be a new web resource of local services as well as information for the public on volunteering and making donations.

**Community training for local people** - there will be a new training package for community and faith-based groups to strengthen skills and knowledge.

**Personalised services** - there will be further work to build on lessons from individual budget pilots and other innovations to see if self-directed support can help some of the most marginalised people who have been, up to now, unwilling to accept the help on offer.

**Promote involvement and active citizenship** - through promoting an ethos of user-led services, encouraging voter registration among rough sleepers and testing the potential of peer advocacy as a model for use in hostels.

**Actions for delivery**

**Performance information**

The rough sleeping counts provide a snapshot of progress, but also an opportunity to be proactive. Local authorities that don't do a count will be encouraged to keep in touch with CLG to ensure they can respond should needs arise. For authorities doing a count, there will be a new 'Street Needs Audit' which will standardise information and also collect more information about individuals and action plans in place to help them. There will be a consultation on these changes.

Investigations will be made on the possibility of linking databases across the country, and local authorities will be encouraged to have a phone number to report street activity.

**National and regional coordination**

There will be new Champions on rough sleeping. Local authorities who want help in implementing their homelessness strategies will be able to tap into the Champions as well as Homeless Link Regional Managers.

For London there will be a new London Delivery Board led by the Mayor of London.

**Comment**

There are a number of positive angles in this strategy. Firstly, it deals very explicitly with the issue of the rough sleepers count. The one-night count is well recognised to not represent an accurate picture of the extent of rough sleeping. This strategy makes it very
clear that the Government is aware of this, and that the benefit of the count is in tracking
trends, not in providing a complete picture. Actions to develop more linked databases like
CHAIN will be a useful step.

Secondly, the strategy is very strong on getting the balance right between local delivery and
national support. Complex issues like rough sleeping must be led by local authorities with
their partners to provide local solutions based on local knowledge. The only prescription in
the strategy is a commitment to consult on better audits and data, which is an area where
standardisation is a help rather than a hindrance.

In that regard, the strategy places a considerable amount on trust in local authorities to
prioritise ending rough sleeping. As well as well established responsibilities for social
housing, councils now have increased responsibilities for tackling worklessness, and joint
strategic needs assessment. Councils are better placed to lead the cross-cutting and
flexible response that is needed, but this will greatly depend on local leadership and
initiative. This is particularly true with the removal of ring-fencing for the Supporting People
Grant in 2009.

Rough sleeping charities like St. Mungo's have criticised the strategy for not being clear
enough about what will be done to end the reality of people with severe mental illness
ending on the streets, and expressed concern that local delivery will fall short of central
ambitions. It is incumbent on local government to avoid criticism by maximising use of all
resources being made available and being proactive in communicating any barriers to
regional resource teams.

Additional Information

Covers

- Adult social care
- Skills, Training, Economy, Environment, Regeneration (STEER)
- Housing
- Equalities, Social inclusion, Community cohesion
- Democracy, Governance, Councillor issues, Standards board, Neighbourhood
governance, Regional governance, Local government information
- Corporate management, Audit and Inspection, Evaluation, Targets, Procurement
- Community planning and well-being
- Community involvement, Partnerships and LSPs, Voluntary sector

Question

Send Feedback for this briefing

Related links

- Responses to consultation
- Strategy document - No One Left Out

Related briefings

- Young Runaways Action Plan
- Joint working between housing and children's services - preventing homelessness
and tackling its effects on children.

- **Homelessness Good Practice: New DCLG Review**
- **Scrutiny of homelessness policy and strategy: new guide**
- **Tackling Homelessness: Housing Corporation consultation**

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