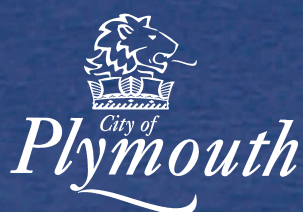


Plymouth Rough Sleepers Strategy

Summary 2006 - 2009

Plymouth City Council



www.plymouth.gov.uk



www.plymouthpath.org

Community Services
Directorate

Foreword

Homelessness is an important issue in Plymouth.


In recent years, we have taken a fresh look at the causes of homelessness, invested in homelessness prevention and identified better ways of working.

I know that there is still much to be done to reduce social exclusion and ensure that all members of our community have the opportunity of a decent home. This strategy marks an important step towards finding enduring solutions to the range of problems experienced by rough sleepers in Plymouth.

This fresh approach builds on the excellent work that has been done and acknowledges that the problem of rough sleeping can only be properly addressed by everyone working in partnership.

We will improve access to primary health care, housing advice, training schemes and employment opportunities, creating an environment in which rough sleepers are encouraged to consider alternative lifestyles.

Although it is essential that we provide the necessary support and encouragement for people who express a desire to alter their current lifestyle, we must also engage with those who are not yet able to contemplate change.



Councillor Mark King
Portfolio Holder for Housing and Supporting People
Plymouth City Council

About this strategy

This strategy covers the whole of Plymouth and reflects the aspirations of Plymouth City Council and the commissioners and providers of local services.

It builds on the excellent work that has already been done in the city, and includes targets to reduce the number of rough sleepers and improve the life chances of people who are homeless and sleeping rough.

Everyone agrees that sleeping rough is not an acceptable option for the citizens of Plymouth, and that we must all work together to tackle homelessness, reduce social exclusion and ensure that rough sleepers are actively encouraged to engage with the services that can help them off the streets.

The Rough Sleepers Strategy complements other strategies in the city, particularly those relating to housing, community safety, health and well-being.



A fresh approach

With its emphasis on multi agency working and the integration and co-location of services, the strategy reflects Plymouth's fresh approach to rough sleeping and our assertion that sleeping rough is not a lifestyle that the city will sustain.

As a city, Plymouth will continue to address rough sleeping, improve services and actively seek to reduce, and ultimately end, rough sleeping. As well as learning from the best practice of others, we will actively involve service users in the planning and monitoring of services.

It is hoped that the rough sleepers strategy will eventually be incorporated into a comprehensive street population strategy for Plymouth dealing with street drinking, begging, rough sleeping and street-based drug activity.



Strategy summary

The strategy gives comprehensive information about the rough sleeping situation in Plymouth and the way in which agencies have responded to it.

This summary focuses on the new developments in the strategy and the ways we are working together to improve and expand the services available.

Responsibility for monitoring the implementation and impact of the rough sleepers strategy will rest with the RSI Steering Group and the Homelessness Forum.

The main aims of the rough sleepers strategy are to:

- ◆ **Reduce the number of people sleeping rough to as close to zero as possible, and maintain the figure at five or less; and**
- ◆ **Increase the options and life chances of rough sleepers.**

We will achieve this through effective joint working, assertive outreach, improved information sharing, a unique identification system, and by helping homeless people to access suitable accommodation (or reconnect them with other areas they have left but now wish to return to) as quickly as possible.

Support services (including mental health, drugs and alcohol, and primary healthcare) will be helped to engage more effectively with rough sleepers and to establish closer links with housing and support providers in order to reduce the incidence of rough sleeping in the city.

The development of a fully integrated multi agency advice, assessment and support service for rough sleepers, comprising all of the core service providers, will not only help get rough sleepers off the streets but also assist tenancy sustainment and minimise the number of people returning to the streets.

A city-wide identity system (with a database accessible to all providers) will improve information sharing, ensure continuity of service, and provide rough sleepers with a better, more co-ordinated advice and support service.

By improving agencies' access to appropriate and ongoing training we will ensure that they are better equipped to provide rough sleepers with the help and support they need in order to move into accommodation and off the streets.

We will work to improve rough sleepers' access to services with an expectation that rough sleepers will engage with those services. We will refine and re-focus services to meet needs, where appropriate, and will limit the support available to those who are not prepared to engage.



A strategy for continuous improvement

The Rough Sleepers Strategy provides details of the changes and improvements we are planning to make, through excellent partnership working, in order to achieve and maintain very low levels of rough sleeping in Plymouth.

Street Outreach Team

During 2006/07, we will be establishing a Street Outreach Team that involves not just the Path Outreach team and the Approved Social Worker (already linked to Path), but also the active participation of the street wardens, the police, the drugs services, and local advice and support providers.

The aim of the Street Outreach Team is to make contact with rough sleepers, link them in with local services (including health, housing, training and employment), and offer them an alternative to their current lifestyle.

As part of a bigger Street Outreach Team, Path's Outreach team will be able to forge closer links with other street-based services in Plymouth. Although the Outreach Workers will continue to go out as before, they will be able to call more easily on the support of other agencies to provide specialist advice and support, as required, for the rough sleepers they come across.

All members of the Street Outreach Team will take part in monthly 'mini counts' of rough sleeping, to establish the nature and extent of the problem, assess the effectiveness of the strategy, and identify the need for further changes.

Directory of services

To assist joint working and make it easier for people to refer rough sleepers to the appropriate sources of help and support, the Rough Sleepers Co-ordinator will produce a comprehensive directory of the core services available for rough sleepers. Published in September 2006, the directory will provide an invaluable resource for managers and workers in the city.

Severe weather provision

The Rough Sleepers Co-ordinator will ensure that a robust plan is put in place, by September 2006, to meet the housing and support needs of rough sleepers when severe weather warnings are received.

Regional working

In recent years we have noticed that an increasing number of people sleeping rough in the city have been directed to Plymouth because of the services available here. Although understandable, this means that people are being displaced from their local communities and support networks. It has also placed a considerable strain on local housing and support services.

It is essential that in future such referrals are appropriate and well managed, and that people are not simply sent to Plymouth to sleep rough but are helped, instead, to access suitable accommodation and support networks.

To this end, the Rough Sleepers Co-ordinator will co-ordinate cross regional working, negotiate appropriate referral policies and actively monitor referrals from other parts of the South West region.

Re-engaging with services

To assist rough sleepers who have been excluded from services, the Rough Sleepers Co-ordinator will work with service providers and the RSI Strategy Group to identify a suitable model for assessing and managing risk in order to enable those rough sleepers to re-engage with services,

For those rough sleepers who pose the greatest risk and whose needs cannot safely be accommodated within existing service provision, we will develop an appropriate model for meeting their needs in a different way. Case conferences (requiring the participation of all agencies involved with the client) will be convened for the purpose of planning services to meet the person's needs.

To prevent rough sleepers from returning to the streets, the Rough Sleepers Co-ordinator will be working with service providers to develop new guidance on how to deal with people who are at risk of being excluded from services.

Together, these measures are designed to avoid repeat homelessness by ensuring that people are referred to other housing projects (as an alternative to returning to the streets) where they have breached their conditions of stay. They will also ensure that, even when people are on the streets, they continue to work with services with a view to addressing their needs and preparing them for coming off the streets.



Assertive working

Plymouth City Council and the Police will work with Path and other stakeholders to prevent rough sleeping at Devil's Point and the Bretonside Bus Station, by making them 'no go areas' for rough sleepers.

This is part of the city's commitment to the local community, and provides evidence of Plymouth's fresh approach to rough sleeping and our assertion that sleeping rough is not a lifestyle that the city will sustain.

Training

Access to, and take-up of, training for workers is integral to maintaining and improving standards and sharing good practice.

The Rough Sleepers Co-ordinator will develop and support the delivery of a training programme for people who are working with rough sleepers in Plymouth. This will initially involve an informal audit of the skills and needs of local agencies. A comprehensive programme will then be developed to meet the training and information needs identified in the audit.

Responsibility for monitoring the implementation and impact of the training programme will rest with the RSI Steering Group.

Walk-in centre

Plymouth's Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) has been working with other stakeholders to establish a walk-in centre for delivering drug services for Plymouth residents.

This new service will provide assessment, information and treatment in order to stabilise drug use prior to a referral being made, where appropriate, to specialist treatment services.

Health provision for rough sleepers

It has been agreed with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) that the RSI Strategy Group will gather evidence of the needs and experiences of homeless people with a view to assessing the suitability and effectiveness of health provision.

After establishing what the main issues are for service providers, the PCT will meet with the RSI Strategy Group and the Rough Sleepers Co-ordinator to consider the need for changing the way in which health services are delivered to homeless people, including rough sleepers.

This process is likely to be completed within the next 12 months. Progress will be monitored by the RSI Strategy Group.

Plymouth City Council is also working with the PCT and the Public Health Department to address health inequalities, and plans to produce a leaflet on the rights of homeless people to access healthcare.

Soup run

Plymouth's Soup Run has a key role to play in preventing homelessness and reducing the number of people sleeping rough in the city.

As part of the city's fresh approach to rough sleeping, the role of the Soup Run will be developed to ensure that rough sleepers who use the service are actively encouraged to engage with other local services, consider changes to their lifestyle and take positive steps to come off the streets and move into suitable accommodation.

People who are using the Soup Run but are already living in suitable accommodation will have their needs assessed and will be referred to support services in order to meet their needs and prevent them from losing their accommodation.

By implementing systems that collect the relevant needs information about service users, the Soup Run will be in a much better position to assess the needs of rough sleepers, and others accessing the service, referring them on to appropriate agencies that can build on the work already done.

The new database and procedures will ensure that homelessness prevention work is better focused and that rough sleepers benefit from more positive outcomes. The statistical information collected will also assist our understanding of the number and needs of rough sleepers in Plymouth.

This new way of working will complement the work of the Street Services Team and ensure that rough sleepers are actively engaged at the earliest opportunity.

Conclusion

Plymouth has an excellent track record of working effectively with rough sleepers and this strategy will enhance the work in the city by providing clear direction for the way in which services are delivered over the next three years.

Effective partnership working will provide better outcomes for rough sleepers and, with the increased emphasis on tenancy sustainment and homelessness prevention, levels of homelessness are expected to fall over the next few years.

The services described in this strategy, building on those already in operation, will enable Plymouth to rise to the challenge of reducing rough sleeping to as close to zero as possible and then maintaining these low levels in the future.

Rough Sleepers Strategy

Action Plan 2006 - 2009

Development	Agency Responsible	Monitored by	Deadline
Directory of core services	Co-ordinator	RSI Strategy Group	September 2006
Severe weather plan	Co-ordinator	RSI Strategy Group	September 2006
Street Outreach Team	PATH	PATH / Co-ordinator / RSI Strategy Group	September 2006
Re-engagement policy	Co-ordinator	RSI Strategy Group	October 2006
Leaflet on Rights and Health Care Provision	PCT, Public health	Co-ordinator / RSI Strategy Group / PCC	October 2006
Training development	Co-ordinator	RSI Strategy Group	December 2006
Soup Run development	Soup run / Co-ordinator	Soup run / Co-ordinator / RSI Strategy Group	Ongoing to March 2007
Health Care suitability provision	PCT / RSI Strategy Group / Co-ordinator	Co-ordinator	March 2007
Gates Night Shelter relocation to suitable accommodation	Gates	Co-ordinator / RSI Strategy Group	January 2008
Walk in centre	PCT / DAAT Partnership	PCT / DAAT / RSI Strategy Group	Ongoing

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