

Equality Objective 1 – Minimising disadvantage experienced by rough sleepers

The evidence base for adopting equality objective 1

Hounslow has one of the highest numbers of rough sleepers in London, and this is growing with rough sleepers being pushed from other boroughs, from 24 rough sleepers in 2009/10 to 106 in 2012/13. There are currently 44 *long-term* rough sleepers in Hounslow. Of all London boroughs with no rough sleeper outreach service, Hounslow has the greatest number of people sleeping rough.

There were **at least 106 people seen sleeping rough in Hounslow during 2012/13, 78% (83) of whom were new to the streets**. There are approximately 4 new rough sleepers in Hounslow every week. Numbers have increased significantly in recent years:

Year	Number of verified rough sleepers on CHAIN database
2009/10	24
2010/11	34
2011/12	68
2012/13	106

The **number of rough sleepers in Hounslow has grown from 24 to at least 106 in the last 3 years**. There are currently **44 rough sleepers in Hounslow who are 'entrenched'**, meaning that they have been on the street for more than 3 months. These people have been sleeping rough for a median average of 2 years (range 3 months to 34 years). Rough sleepers are distributed throughout Hounslow.

The entrenched group of rough sleepers are mostly male (92%), older (median 51 years; range 21-78 years), and mostly British or Irish (67%). Most (58%) are willing to engage with services (either always or sporadically), but for those that are not, it is thought to be due to underlying, longstanding mental illness.

Rough sleeping is the **most visible form of homelessness**. With four new referrals of rough sleepers every week to the Council, letters from residents and from the local MP, the lack of action on rough sleepers reflects on the reputation of the council and, individually, on councillors.

Rough sleepers have **considerable health needs**. A sample of 36 rough sleepers in Hounslow showed that at least 31% have an *obvious* physical health need; at least 72% have a mental health need; and at least 42% have chronic substance misuse. However, this excludes a group of Polish nationals for whom language barriers prevent engagement.

The health of rough sleepers could pose a **risk to public health**, for example, due to tuberculosis, HIV, and drug paraphernalia (needles).

There have been recent problems in Hounslow with **rough sleeper 'hotspots'**, for example, in Montague Road, Gunnersbury Park, Boston Manor, which have been

centres of crime and anti-social behaviour. Crime and the fear of crime are detrimental to the council's image and priorities.

Increasing numbers of rough sleepers are coming to Hounslow **due to enforcement from neighbouring authorities**, and the lack of coordinated action to tackle this in Hounslow without an outreach team.

Rough sleeping bears a **considerable cost to the local authority** and other partners, with inappropriate and repetitive use of services due to lack of outreach support, including Temporary Accommodation. There are existing support services for rough sleepers that are not being used due to a lack of engagement. An outreach team working closely with key partners and the voluntary sector would help to remedy this.

There is currently a short-term Rough Sleepers Coordinator post in the council, funded by West London Housing Partnership. There may be many more rough sleepers in Hounslow than those that appear on the London-wide CHAIN database, as there is no dedicated outreach team available to verify the numbers, and the current Rough Sleepers Coordinator does not have time to see all those who present.

Hestia in Hounslow has recently been announced as the winner of Department of Health monies to provide intermediate care beds for rough sleepers and training support to ensure that rough sleepers are not discharged from hospital to the street. The proposed outreach team would align with initiatives such as this to ensure that rough sleepers are supported when they are most vulnerable, and helped off Hounslow's streets.

Action Plan to reduce rough sleeping

The council is taking a number of steps, detailed below to mitigate the disadvantage experienced by rough sleepers

The council plans to commission a dedicated outreach team for rough sleepers that is integrated with existing local services.

- i) The dedicated team would consist of outreach workers and a part-time nurse. It is expected that the outreach team will be provided by a voluntary sector homelessness organisation, subject to tender processes. This approach is supported by national evidence of savings across public services.
- ii) Commissioning a voluntary sector organisation to deliver the proposed service will open up a range of other funding opportunities (e.g. Homeless Transition Fund, GLA funds, Nesta) to prevent and tackle rough sleeping in the borough, which are not currently open to us as a local authority. Furthermore, many voluntary organisations will match funding for an outreach worker where a local authority has provided a team of outreach workers. Further work will be undertaken with third sector partners and health sector to co-ordinate actions including exploring funding opportunities, improved access to health care, housing and social care to minimise the inequalities resulting from rough sleeping.