

Forty-Ninth Report of Session 2019-21

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

COVID-19: housing people sleeping rough

Introduction from the Committee

On 26 March 2020 the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (the department) launched its Everyone In initiative. Everyone In required local authorities to take urgent action to house people sleeping rough and those at risk of rough sleeping in order to protect them and stop wider transmission of COVID-19. This was in recognition both of the greater vulnerability of this population, given the prevalence of underlying health conditions, and the practical barriers to self-isolating within communal shelters. By mid-April, 90% of the then estimated population of people sleeping rough had been made an offer of emergency accommodation, often staying in hotels that had been block-booked by local authorities. In the first wave of the pandemic, the deaths of only a relatively small number of people sleeping rough, and those who had been rough sleeping, were linked with COVID-19 (16 people as of 26 June 2020). By the end of January 2021, there were 11,263 people staying in hotels and other emergency accommodation, and a further 26,167 people who had been helped to find more settled accommodation.

Based on a report by the National Audit Office, the Committee took evidence, on 25 January 2021 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The Committee published its report on 17 March 2021. This is the government response to the Committee's report.

Relevant reports

- NAO report: [Investigation into the housing of rough sleepers during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) – Session 2019-21 (HC 1075)
- PAC report: [COVID-19: housing people sleeping rough](#) – Session 2019-21 (HC 934)

Government responses to the Committee

1: PAC conclusion: *The Everyone In initiative succeeded in its objective of protecting public health in the first wave of the pandemic, averting more than 20,000 infections.*

1: PAC recommendation: *The Department should, in seeking to learn lessons from what made Everyone In a success in the first wave of the pandemic, assess what additional staff capacity it needs to be able to sustain its response and its support for local partners, as the pandemic continues.*

1.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Target implementation date: May 2021

1.2 In March 2020, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (the department) rapidly pivoted resources to respond to the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, including moving staff capacity to support *Everyone In*. As well as civil servants, the department also has a team of expert advisers who work directly with local authorities and their partners on their homelessness and rough sleeping work. The department regularly reviews staffing capacity in line with ministerial priorities and to ensure that the right people and skills are in the right parts of the organisation to make the biggest possible difference to communities and local partners. This includes ending rough sleeping and reducing homelessness.

2: PAC conclusion: *The Department still does not have a plan for achieving its target of ending rough sleeping by 2024, and risks failing to capitalise on the successes of Everyone In.*

2: PAC recommendation: *The Department must, before summer recess, publish at least a draft strategy for how it will achieve its goal of ending rough sleeping by 2024. This should set out its definition of 'ending' rough sleeping, how it will measure and report progress in achieving and maintaining this goal, and the capacity of supported and affordable housing required to reduce the flow of people onto the streets towards zero for the long term.*

2.1 The government disagrees with the Committee's recommendation.

2.2 The government disagrees with the Committee's recommendation, although it will be important to ensure sufficient time for the development of the new strategy and to align with the forthcoming 2021 Spending Review.

2.3 The government is fully committed to ending rough sleeping within this Parliament and has already made considerable progress in the last few years to reduce rough sleeping. Much of this work provided the capacity to deliver the *Everyone In* response both locally and nationally. The [department's annual statistics](#) published on the 25 February 2021 show the number of people sleeping rough fell for the third year in a row, the largest decrease since these were first recorded in 2010 and a 43% decrease since 2017.

2.4 Nonetheless, the department is clear that to end rough sleeping there is a need for further cross government action to address the underlying causes of rough sleeping. The department will be working with partners across government and the sector to build on recent progress and consider what more needs to be done to end rough sleeping. The department will consider the role of health, policing, prisons, immigration, welfare, and employment, alongside housing and how the department will build on the already significant success of *Everyone In*.

2.5 As the Committee suggests, the department will consider a definition of what it means to end rough sleeping, including information about how this goal will be measured and evaluated.

3: PAC conclusion: *The size of the rough sleeping population and those at risk of rough sleeping is far higher than the snapshot the Department is relying on, exposing the inadequacy of its current approach to data collection and reporting.*

3: PAC recommendation: *To support proper accountability, the Department must ensure it continues to publish its monthly data on numbers of people sleeping rough. Drawing on this information, it should report back to this Committee on a quarterly basis on its performance against its target for ending rough sleeping.*

3.1 The government disagrees with the Committee's recommendation.

3.2 The department has so far published [five snapshots of the data](#) (as at May, September, November, December 2020 and January 2021).

3.3 This is a relatively new data source which must continue to be carefully considered and analysed. The department's focus remains on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuring that our data is used to help inform policy decisions.

3.4 The department will update the Committee on its progress towards ending rough sleeping regularly.

4: PAC conclusion: *The Department has provided a number of different funding streams to local authorities to cover the pandemic response for people sleeping rough, but many are short-term and reactive, and the Department does not have a cohesive longterm funding plan for its commitment to end rough sleeping.*

4: PAC recommendation: *To inform the review of its strategy, the Department should reassess the level of funding required to meet its target of ending rough sleeping and align all individual streams of funding for tackling rough sleeping to this end. This should address the importance of multi-year funding certainty for local authorities and the voluntary sector. In doing so, it should state how it will assess the long-term value for money of its spending on rough sleeping and homelessness, focusing on interventions which do most to reduce the long-term public costs associated with both rough sleeping and housing people in temporary accommodation.*

4.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Target implementation date: Winter 2021

4.2 This year alone the department have committed over £750 million to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping. In responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the department has sought to make sure that local authorities have the resources they require to support rough sleepers as the pandemic has evolved. That has meant that there have been more short-term funding streams in 2020/21 than usual. However, the department recognises the value of streamlining funding streams where possible to improve efficiency and minimise burdens on local authorities and voluntary sector partners. The department has, for example, combined the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and the Homelessness Reduction Grant into one funding stream in 2022 to help local authorities manage local homelessness pressures: The Homelessness Prevention Grant. Funding for the Rough Sleeping Initiative in 2021 includes funding to support rough sleepers from the pandemic and throughout the winter, consolidating several funding streams.

4.3 The department will work across government to consider the support that is required to end rough sleeping, including financial and non-financial aspects. Decisions on future funding will be a matter for the 2021 Spending Review, and this will consider the long-term value for money of the departments spending.

4.4 The department's evaluation programme continues to assess the impacts of homelessness and rough sleeping policy, building on the high-quality evaluations that have been delivered over the last few years, such as the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) impact evaluation. The Rough Sleeping Questionnaire has allowed for a more robust approach to considering how these impacts relate to social outcomes, by giving an insight into the service use and individual and social harms associated with sleeping rough. Over the medium term, the use of linked administrative data will give new insight into how people sleeping rough interact with public services. The department is committed to using these tools and insights to improve the department's assessments of value for money in the appraisal and evaluation of its policies.

5: PAC conclusion: *The Department has provided mixed messages to local authorities on how to support people sleeping rough who have no recourse to public funds and has no long-term plan for those who have been taken into hotels.*

5a: PAC recommendation: *Within two months the Department should a) publish details of its agreed plans with the Home Office to address rough sleeping and immigration issues together.*

5.1 The government disagrees with the Committee's recommendation.

5.2 The government is fully committed to ending rough sleeping. The department will be working with partners across government to build on recent progress and consider what more needs to be done to end rough sleeping, which will consider the role of immigration policy and practice.

5.3 This will build on work, such as the Rough Sleeping Support Service, which has been established by the Home Office to help destitute individuals access support and resolve their immigration status.

5.4 In the meantime, the department continues to work with the Home Office on all other immigration issues affecting rough sleepers.

5b: PAC recommendation: *Within two months the Department should b) provide clear guidance to local authorities on what this means for the support they offer this cohort, including those staying in hotels under Everyone In.*

5.5 The government disagrees with the Committee's recommendation.

5.6 The department has and continues to work with local authorities regarding support that can be offered to those individuals with a no recourse to public funds (NRPF) attached to their immigration status. Ultimately, these are locally elected councils and it is a matter for them to decide based on their local circumstances.

5.7 On [28 May 2020](#) and 8 January 2021, the department wrote to all chief executives of local authorities making clear that the rules as to eligibility relating to immigration status, including for those with NRPF, have not changed. The department's position remains that local authorities must continue to use their judgement in assessing what support they may lawfully give to each person on an individual basis, considering that person's specific circumstances and support needs. The department is clear that the responsibility for making individual judgements lies with local authorities, as it has done for many years.

5.8 This legal position is applicable to support offered to individuals with NRPF both within and outside of hotels under *Everyone In*.

6: PAC conclusion: *It is uncertain whether the Department will meet its objective of providing 3,300 homes for people sleeping rough by the end of March 2021.*

6: PAC recommendation: *The Department should write to us within two months on the progress it is making in securing 3,300 homes under its Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme, and include details on how it will ensure the availability of the supported and affordable housing required for people to move into, once their stay in these homes comes to an end.*

6.1 The government agrees with the Committee's recommendation.

Target implementation date: May 2021

6.2 The Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme represents the biggest ever government investment in move-on accommodation for rough sleepers. The department welcomes the opportunity to report progress on the delivery of 3,300 homes under the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme and will provide further details on the routes out of the provision into other forms of housing. The department will write directly to the Committee within the specified time frame in the recommendation.