

Working together to end Rough Sleeping

Task Team: Final Report January 2019



Home is the secure base for the whole of life.

Without this, people are unable to lead settled lives, maintain employment and provide an environment that will help their children escape poverty. Prolonged periods of homelessness can develop or exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, such as substance misuse and mental health conditions, which destabilise family and support networks. - *The Centre for Social Justice, March 2017*

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The Task Team

The City of Wolverhampton Tackling Rough Sleeping Task Team is made up of representatives from:

Wolverhampton City Centre BID

Public Health, City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC)

Recovery Near You

Wolverhampton Drug Service User Involvement Team (SUIT)

Refugee and Migration Centre (RMC)

West Midlands Police

Wolverhampton Homes

Housing and Homelessness Services, CWC

Community Safety, CWC

City Health, CWC

Supported by the West Midlands Combined Authority Homelessness Task Force and chaired by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Roger Lawrence



Joint Foreword

By **Cllr Roger Lawrence**,
Task Team Chair,
Leader of the City of Wolverhampton Council

Rough sleeping is not an issue unique to Wolverhampton. Homelessness charities continue to report the number of people sleeping rough in England to be growing year on year, having increased by over 169% since 2010. Between 2014 and 2016 the number of vulnerable people sleeping rough in our city more than doubled.

Deeply concerned by this rapid increase, I used my 2017 City Address to Full Council to identify tackling rough sleeping as a corporate priority requiring a holistic and cross-cutting approach. In response the Council and city partners joined together to establish a multi-agency Task Team. Our shared belief was, and continues to be, that delivering real and sustainable change to end rough sleeping involves us all working together: public bodies, voluntary groups, the business sector, faith groups, the wider Wolverhampton community and our regional partners - with those experiencing rough sleeping fully engaged and at the heart of what we do.

It is this working in partnership, illustrated in the 'Task Team achievements' section of this report, that has enabled us to develop a more accurate understanding of the local picture. We have used this intelligence to pilot

innovative and collaborative ways of working to proactively support many more people who are either sleeping rough, or at risk of rough sleeping, access and sustain a tenancy.

We are not complacent however, challenges remain, as we successfully engage people sleeping rough in the city we also see new people arrive. Local, regional and national policies all need to align, so that rough sleepers are not simply moved around the country. At the same time the impact of insecure tenancies, hidden homelessness and austerity continue to drive rough sleeping numbers at a national level, and inevitably this has a regional and local impact. We understand that not all street drinkers or street beggars are themselves sleeping rough. Combatting anti-social behaviour in city centres, in a way that does not penalise genuine rough sleepers, also remains a priority, as does understanding and tackling what is driving these street behaviours.

These challenges, while complex and difficult, must not be a reason to refrain from taking continued action however. The strategic leadership of the Task Team has enabled new ways of working to tackle rough sleeping in our

city. While its work has now concluded, these new ways of working have become embedded in our practice and will continue to be taken forward by the Council and its partners.

Finally, I would like to thank the wider Wolverhampton community. Your generosity has meant that over £14,000 has been raised through the Alternative Giving Campaign, 'Small Change for a Big Change' since it was established in 2016. Food, toiletries and sanitary products continue to be regularly donated to our city food banks. Our voluntary sector organisations in the city, including P3, The Night Shelter, St. George's Hub, RMC, the Good Shepherd, Recovery Near You, SUIT, the Homelessness Forum, and the many individuals who volunteer their time to work with people on the streets, ensure the most vulnerable in our city have a sanctuary and can be helped to address problems with addiction and access mental and physical health care.

All of this is a tribute to our city and our ability to come together to ensure the most vulnerable can have a viable and long-lasting alternative to sleeping rough.

A place to call home - Mark's story

My name is Mark and I'm 38. I was in a relationship and that just fell apart. I then went to live with my sister as I had nowhere to go, I got into the wrong crowd and started using soft drugs and bit of cannabis, then I took speed, used to inject it, I watched my mates use heroin and I hated what I saw, the speed dried up and I thought I would try it, don't know why but I did.

Anyway, used a bit of coke for a bit, whatever was cheapest really and then it was cheaper to get heroin so I started to inject it. At first, I thought this was alright, take coke then use heroin to bring me down. I didn't really like the after effects and how it used to make me feel like a zombie but once I had been on it that was it really – the point of no return I suppose.

After a while I could see what using the stuff was doing to my family so I left my sister's, I knew a few people and would stay on my mate's sofa.

My mate was taken to prison so I couldn't stay in his flat and was chucked out, I didn't know who to ask for help and due to the drugs didn't really care anymore.

I then started to sleep rough on the streets and at first it was a bit scary, I realised then that I had no one and nowhere to go. I was on my own.

I met someone who I became friends with and he showed me the ropes and we stuck together to feel safer, I used to sleep behind buildings to keep out of the way then I thought what if something happened to me, nobody would know I was there and that scared me so I started sleeping next to one of the big shops in town, it was dry, it felt like I had my own bedroom.

A woman used to come and bring me bacon sarnies in the morning; there were nice people that would ask me how I am. But then there were times at night that people used to come up to me and be horrible and shout abuse at me, try to take my blankets away.

Once I got over the fear it was alright, you go into survival mode. I was still using drugs, I used more drugs on the streets just to block away the pain, I felt I was not worth anything, needed to block the worries away, I felt more secure on drugs it made you not think about anything.

Oh, and I forgot to tell you I had a dog - Molly – it's harder to find somewhere to live when you have a dog – people used to say just get rid of the dog and you can get a flat.

It's easy for people to say that but I had nothing – but I had my dog, she had had a rough start in life, she's my baby, my life, something of mine, the only thing I've got so there was no way I would leave my dog Molly – and I believe it would also kill her if she left me – we have a bond. I felt like I would never get in anywhere as I had a dog.

I had support from Paul every day and I know he tried all the time to find me somewhere, every now and then I would see Richard from the council with P3 and Amy and David from the police – they really tried to help, constantly trying to convince me to accept help.

I think I had given up hope until one day they told me that P3 would accept dogs - I had had enough so I took the offer.

When I came to P3 I was a bit scared and to be honest a bit embarrassed, I stunk, I had not showered for a long time, there were young lads who I thought would think I was a tramp.

I showered, had something to eat and felt so much better - like a human being again, like I was someone.

That first night I slept, it was the first night of real sleep. On the streets you are semi-conscious all the time as you don't know what's around you, I used to tie my dog to my wrist.

Now that first night Molly was sprawled out too, she looked happy, we were relaxed, I felt safe, I had hope, things were getting better. I know there is no magic wand, I want to move forward.

In secure accommodation knowing the support is there is everything, my mental health has not been good and I need that support, I can speak to someone. I am attending my appointments, trying to move forward, I hope to be drug free one day.

I just want to be comfortable, I want to live in my own home but feel that I will need lots of support and the right kind of support, when I want it.

I have this self-destruct button I think, that's what drugs do – I don't know what it is you go so far then backwards, I feel like I don't deserve things to be better – I've got to get through that.

I would love to be in work or be in a situation to start work but I'm scared – real life is so difficult, it's like starting over as a teenager again.

Supporting people like Mark to enable them to access and sustain a tenancy has been at the heart of the work of the Task Team. This has involved seeking to understand how people become homeless and what new approaches we can collectively develop to both respond to and prevent rough sleeping.

A new approach

Where we live, and in what type of accommodation we live, makes a fundamental difference to our mental and physical health and wellbeing. It is our aspiration that everyone in Wolverhampton should have a safe and secure place to live and call home.

People become homeless for many different reasons and can be homeless in different ways, for example, sleeping in shop doorways, moving around between friends and family (often called sofa surfing), or staying in temporary accommodation. Rough sleeping is therefore part of a much bigger picture, but people who sleep rough are particularly vulnerable.

The government define rough sleepers as "people sleeping, or bedded down, in the open air such as on the streets, or in doorways, parks or bus shelters; people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats)."¹

People sleeping rough are more likely to die young, with an average age of death of 47 years old and even lower for homeless women at 43, compared to 77 for the general population, 74 for men and 80 for women.²

Often people living on the streets in our city have experienced trauma, abuse, addiction and mental health problems, and in many cases living on the streets only exacerbates these difficulties. Enabling someone to break the cycle of homelessness means addressing these difficulties at the same time as finding them suitable accommodation. It also means acknowledging that this can be a difficult process that necessarily requires person-centred support.

It is for this reason that a central aspect of the approach developed in Wolverhampton has been the bringing together of Public Health, Housing and outreach agencies, via an operational group, chaired by the Director of Public Health. This group has enabled partners to come together to share intelligence and coordinate activity.

People who sleep rough are highly mobile, often crossing city boundaries and dipping in and out of rough sleeping. Understanding who is living on the streets and why, at any given time, is therefore particularly important, as is the ability to offer an immediacy in terms of coordinated response.

As the Task Team concludes its work this operational group will take forward and embed the learning, good practice and positive partnership working the Task Team has championed. We will do this through a focus on prevention and intervention via the Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2018-2022 and its associated action plan, and through the roll out of the West Midlands Combined Authority 'Housing First' pilot, which involves working with entrenched rough sleepers to help them sustain a tenancy. We have already piloted the Housing First methodology to enable six individuals, with a history of prolonged rough sleeping, off the streets and into a home.

Furthermore, Health & Wellbeing Together, the name for the City of Wolverhampton Health and Wellbeing Board, will take on the role of having strategic oversight of this activity, working in partnership with Housing Options, Prevention Services and Wolverhampton Homes.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-data-notes-and-definitions>

² https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/236799/crisis_homelessness_kills_es2012.pdf

Task Team achievements

Over the last year, the Task Team's multi-agency approach has transformed the way rough sleepers are supported in the city. We have actively strengthened our prevention focus leading to an increase in the number of people being accommodated by P3 growing from 73 people in January 2017-18 to 118 in January 2018-19. These are single people, or couples, who were either already sleeping rough or, in the case of the majority, at risk of rough sleeping if no intervention had taken place.

We have bucked the national trend by not seeing an increase in the number of people sleeping rough in 2017 and 2018 as measured by the annual count - a national snapshot that takes place on a designated date and using a specific methodology set by government. This is in contrast to many other areas in the country that have continued to see a marked increase in rough sleeping.

In addition, our detailed monthly partnership outreach data has provided us with a more accurate account of the local picture and so allowed us to respond more effectively to spikes in need. The impact of this multi-agency approach has enabled a person-centred approach to pro-actively accommodate many more people with the numbers of people sleeping rough in the city dropping to a low of 12 at the beginning of the year from a high of 33 in April 2018. Although there is an inevitable fluctuation as people are accommodated or new people arrive in the city.

How has this been achieved?

A joined up and strategic approach

- The multi-agency Task Team, chaired by the Leader of the Council, has **raised the profile of rough sleeping in the city and galvanised a city-wide response.**
- The rough sleeping operational group, chaired by the Director of Public Health, has brought together **over 20 organisations meeting frequently** to share intelligence, agree next steps and carry out joint work on the streets, including coordinated days of action.
- The Task Team has overseen the implementation of a **refreshed Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2018-2022 and allocations policy** in order to support the council to deliver a preventative homeless service in line with the new duties set out in the Homelessness Reduction Act. This includes a clear message of intervention and prevention and access to quality accommodation.
- The Task Team and operational group have worked with and will continue to work with the West Midlands Combined Authority to tackle rough sleeping as part of a **coordinated regional response.**
- The Wolverhampton Anti-slavery Partnership, has taken on board the recommendations contained in The Passage '**Understanding and Responding to Modern Slavery within the Homelessness Sector**'

within the City of Wolverhampton Council and Wolverhampton Anti-Slavery Partnership action plans. This includes recommendations around training, awareness raising, and the importance of partnership working to combat both homelessness and modern slavery, monitoring of suspected occurrences of modern slavery, and specific guidance on victim identification and support which will be created and disseminated to homelessness organisations within the city.

- The leader of the Council has worked partnership with Local Government Association and other Councils to **lobby government for policy change on supporting rough sleepers with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)**. In addition, partnership work with the West Midlands Combined Authority will continue going forward through contribution to a regional bid in April 2019 to seek to access funding earmarked for NRPF support by Government in the 2018 National Rough Sleeper Strategy.
- The Task Team has developed a **referral process to waive the fee for anyone sleeping rough**, born in Wolverhampton, to request a copy of their birth certificate.
- Voluntary sector partners are working with National Express as part of a **regional pilot to secure free bus passes**, distributed via partner agencies, to people sleeping rough in the city, thereby enabling them to travel to access medical appointments, support services, job interviews etc.
- The Council has overseen the use of **multi-agency visits co-ordinated through the Responsible Authorities Forum** to licensed premises identified as selling alcohol to persons that were already drunk and/or alcohol dependent, potentially including rough sleepers. The premises were given advice on how to spot signs of alcohol dependency and their

legal obligations under the Licensing Act 2003 to refuse to sell alcohol to persons that are already drunk.

- The Director of Public Health and Wolverhampton Safeguarding Independent Chair will be contributing to **national work focussed on rough sleeping and adult safeguarding**.

Provision that's more comprehensive and responsive

- The Public Health led operational group now carries out **monthly rough sleeping counts** to maintain an accurate picture who is sleeping rough in Wolverhampton.
- The Council has recommissioned its 'out of hours provision' following a successful pilot to ensure **rough sleeper outreach is available on four nights a week up until 11pm**.
- **A multi-agency rough sleeper team has been launched** in a prominent location in the city centre involving officers from Wolverhampton Homes, West Midlands Police, outreach services, including treatment service providers and the antisocial behaviour team.
- The Council has commissioned an **extra 10 emergency unit of single person's accommodation** provision - including increased provision for women.
- The Council facilitated a partnership meeting between the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the voluntary sector, enabling four local organisations (P3, RMC, Good Shepherd and St Georges Hub) to secure **£374,000 over two years**

from MHCLG for targeted outreach activity. This has enabled the appointment of an additional outreach officer, additional in reach worker and focus on meaningful activity sessions and migration support.

- The Council has secured approximately **£9000 regional funding for the development of specialist accommodation for entrenched rough sleepers with complex needs** through the innovative Housing First pilot in Wolverhampton, in conjunction with Wolverhampton Homes and West Midlands Combined Authority.
- Our multi-agency working has enabled West Midlands Police and the Wolverhampton Anti-Social Behaviour Team to develop **an approach to enforcement with action taken only when individuals refuse to engage multiple times** and taken in a manner that provides targeted support alongside enforcement.
- The Task Team has **piloted a new way for people sleeping rough, or at risk of rough sleeping, to access support for training and employment** via tailored referral process involving housing, police and local voluntary organisations. So far 31 individuals have registered with Wolves at Work (a Council-led partnership bringing together employers, jobseekers and training & education providers), giving them access to a dedicated work coach who provided drop-in sessions at three locations in the city. Four people have been supported into employment and learning from the pilot is now shaping provision going forward.
- The operational group held two successful **multi-agency 'days of action'** in June and November 2018. This involved over 20 organisations co-ordinating outreach activity across the city with the aim of identifying rough sleepers and enabling them to immediately access

accommodation and support. It has also enabled partners to test new ways of integrated working. Days of action have now become an annual activity overseen by the Public Health led operational group.

A city-wide approach

- The Task Team has **promoted the street link reporting app: <https://www.streetlink.org.uk/> and P3 helpline: 0800 107 6753**, to enable partners and members of the public to notify outreach agencies where people are sleeping rough and in need of assistance.
- The Task Team has worked in partnership with the city centre BID to support the development of the **Alternative Giving Campaign, 'Small Change for a Big Change, which has raised over £14,000** through collection boxes located around the city, including business support, with JLR, Casino 36 and Sainsbury's all raising approximately £1400 each. Funds raised have been used to support rough sleepers to access emergency accommodation, clothes and food, at short notice and in circumstance of dire need until other more sustainable support is put in place. By giving spare change to the Alternative Giving Campaign, in place of street beggars, the public can ensure rough sleepers receive support, particularly in an emergency. The Alternative Giving website is also being refreshed this year to enable online donations.
- The local business community has been engaged to donate time and money to support work with rough sleepers through a successful business event in April 2018, attended by 30 businesses. This led to the recruitment of trustees to enable **the Alternative Giving Campaign to become a registered charity, 'Business Backing Big Change'**; laying the

foundations for business to play their part in addressing rough sleeping, both through donation of funding and volunteer time.

- The Council has **worked in partnership with voluntary sector providers who distribute food so that the service can be brought indoors alongside advice and signposting services.** This will enable vulnerable people, not all of whom are sleeping rough, to be signposted to appropriate services, and for partners to have a better picture of their needs to inform their intervention and prevention activity.
- The Task Team **hosted a successful voluntary sector event** in July 2018 attended by representatives from 18 voluntary sector/ faith groups, where they discussed the needs of vulnerable clients and how they can be addressed, in particular, opportunities to promote collaboration and avoid duplication. Issues raised at this event are being taken forward by the voluntary sector led Homelessness Forum supported by a Council grant of £5000, which they are match-funding with time and resources.

Conclusion

The primary role of the Task Team was to bring stakeholders together in a task and finish group to pilot new ways of working with the aim of halting the rapid increase in people sleeping rough in Wolverhampton. This has been achieved by focussing on the following priority areas:

- Strengthening partnership working and coordinating activity to enable targeted intervention and a person-centred approach.
- Increasing existing capacity and developing specialist accommodation in conjunction with Wolverhampton Homes and the West Midlands Combined Authority.
- Working in partnership with voluntary and faith groups to help co-ordinate and appropriately target support being provided to rough sleepers in the city, particularly the most vulnerable.
- Promoting and developing the Alternative Giving Campaign so that it can grow from a campaign to a registered charity, thereby increasing its reach and impact.
- Working in partnership to ensure enforcement activity is appropriate underpinned by a commitment to the use of enforcement measures as a positive lever for life-change as opposed to simply moving people round the city or region.

By piloting new ways of working the Task Team has identified best practice, exemplified by its many achievements. As the Task Team concludes its activity, the fundamental changes it has ushered in will continue through the continued work of the operational group, working in partnership with Housing Options, Prevention Services and Wolverhampton Homes. The Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2018-2022 and its associated action plan will also enable partners to further strengthen activity to prevent people becoming homeless and sleeping rough.

While recognising our success all Task Team members and wider partners are clear there is more to do if we are to achieve our aspiration to end rough sleeping in our city. However, by building on the achievements of the Task Team we have put the foundations in place.

Be part of the solution - what can I do?

The people of Wolverhampton have a well-deserved reputation for being compassionate and generous and we have seen this illustrated in many ways during the time the Task Team has been meeting. There continue to be lots of different ways you can be part of the solution to help address rough sleeping as part of a whole city approach:

Voluntary and faith groups

- **Volunteer with an existing service provider**, for example P3 Navigator, to coordinate activity to help people off the streets so that they can find a home and then achieve, and maintain, a healthy lifestyle and successful tenancy.
- **Join the Homelessness Forum**, a network of voluntary sector groups and individuals coordinating the voluntary sector partner approach in the city. www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/homelessness-forum
- **Share information** about activity you currently undertake or would be willing to undertake to support rough sleepers. This could include, for example, working with us to ensure the provision of food reaches the most vulnerable, sharing information about the particular skills your voluntary or faith group collectively possess and would be willing to share – different languages spoken, professional skills etc.
- **Help us to intervene early** by using Street link: <https://www.streetlink.org.uk/> or **P3 helpline: 0800 107 6753** to report anyone sleeping rough that you are concerned about.

Business

- **Make a direct** contribution to enabling a rough sleeper off the streets and into accommodation by committing to donate via your Corporate Social Responsibility to the charity arm of the Alternative Giving Campaign, 'Business Backing Big Change':
www.wolverhamptonchange.co.uk
- **Work with Wolverhampton Workbox** to offer employment, training or mentoring opportunities to help vulnerable people get into and sustain employment.
- **Help us to intervene early** by using Street link:
<https://www.streetlink.org.uk/> or **P3 helpline: 0800 107 6753** to report anyone sleeping rough on land you own on day one.
- **Promote the Alternative Giving Campaign** in your workplace.

Wolverhampton community

- **Donate your spare change to the Alternative Giving Campaign** via the 'Small Change for a Big Change' donation boxes located around the city, rather than street beggars. Or through the online donation page www.wolverhamptonchange.co.uk which will be launched soon.
- **Donate food** to established food banks to make sure it reaches the most vulnerable.
- **Volunteer your time** to support an established local homeless charity.
- **Help us to intervene early** by using Street link:
<https://www.streetlink.org.uk/> or **P3 helpline: 0800 107 6753** to report anyone sleeping rough that you are concerned about.

