

Life Off The Streets Executive Board – Minutes

Friday 12th November 2021, 11:30-13:00

In attendance

Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development – Tom Copley (chair)
HD, London Housing Directors' Group – Jamie Carswell
GLA, Greater London Authority – Debra Levison
LC, London Councils – Eloise Shepherd, Michelle Binfield, Aura Di Febo (minutes)
DLUHC, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities – Penny Hobman, Tom Preest
LA, Local Authorities – Neil Wightman (Westminster)
Senior Advisor to the Mayor (Health Policy) – Dr Tom Coffey
ADPH London – Rachel Flowers
HMPPS, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service – Kilvinder Vigurs
Conservative Group representative – Cllr Colin Smith
Liberal Democrat Group representative – Cllr Jayne McCoy
HH, Homeless Health – Angela McNab
SM, St Mungo's – Steve Douglas
Crisis – Jon Sparkes
TR, Thames Reach – Bill Tidnam

Apologies

LC Deputy Chair (Housing and Planning)/Labour Group representative – Cllr Darren Rodwell
HMPPS – Matt Grey
HL, Homeless Link – Rick Henderson
GLA – Rickardo Hyatt
GLA – David Eastwood

Welcome and introductions

Tom Copley welcomed all attendees, noting that this is the first meeting of the new Life Off The Street Executive Board and asked attendees for a brief introduction.

Governance and Terms of Reference

Tom Copley presented an outline of the new governance arrangements and the Terms of Reference for this Board – the new Life Off The Streets Executive Board – and the Life Off The Streets Core Group that sits beneath. He noted that the former is a strategic leadership group, offering challenge, insight and oversight and supporting the senior-level collaborative work that will be needed to end rough sleeping, and the latter will provide more operational oversight of the work streams and intended delivery activities, and build and develop partnerships at a more operational level.

Tom highlighted that the new structure replaces the previous task force meetings convened by the Mayor/GLA and the Rough Sleeping Strategic Group led by London Housing Directors established to oversee Everyone In and respond to the pandemic. Plans and activities and membership have been reviewed and drawn together to improve effectiveness and reduce duplication.

Board members were asked to comment on, and approve, the two formal Terms of Reference for the new groups.

- Cllr Jayne McCoy asked the Board to note that the important thing is to collaborate rather than seek to standardise approaches as boroughs are unique and a one size fits all approach will not succeed. Cllr Colin Smith agreed.

- Penny Hobman supported the emphasis on collaboration and cross-boundary working (both geographically and in terms of functions) and asked that thought be given to what success looks like and the need for success measures so the Executive Board can hold the Core Group to account.
- Jon Sparkes stated support for the structure as outlined and asked that data and evidence be always at the centre of the work that is done in furtherance of the work to end rough sleeping.
- Dr Tom Coffey asked that more attention is given to both the importance of drug and alcohol support and treatment and the engagement of social care.
- Steve Douglas echoed the need for success measures to enable effective oversight of work and pointed out opportunity presented to capitalise on the sea-change provided by the creation of the Rough Sleeping Strategy Group and its operational focus. He further noted that there is variance in the performance of local authorities and the ability to challenge and improve standards is important. He noted further that the forthcoming Kerslake report-linked event is a good opportunity to learn.
- Rachel Flowers asked that the Board make every effort to continue to learn from what worked well at the start of the pandemic and to work strongly in collaboration across London. She also asked the Board to consider further work related to: (i) taking the opportunity to learn lessons from the deaths reviewed by Safeguarding Boards, (ii) considering the risks around homelessness faced by asylum seekers, and (iii) considering the routes into rough sleeping linked to those who have been Looked After Children.
- Bill Tidnam stated the main priority needs to be taking the collaborative approach that existed during the crisis of the pandemic and turning that into something that can still be achieved during business as usual.

Tom Copley thanked everyone for their comments and asked for approval subject to the changes suggested.

ACTION: The Terms of Reference were agreed subject to the addition of the importance of success measures to enable oversight, the need to emphasise the importance of learning lessons from Everyone In and all other available data and evidence and a need to update MHCLG to DLUHC throughout.

Annual Work Programme

Tom Copley invited Jamie Carswell and Debra Levison – as joint chairs of the Life Off The Streets Core Group – to present the draft work programme to the Board for approval and comments. Jamie gave an overview of the current position and presented the work being planned to prevent rough sleeping and Debra presented on the work intended to provide a route off the streets when required.

- Angela McNab suggested that the links with health are strengthened in relation to prevention, particularly relating to mental health and dual diagnosis as this can often lead to tenancy loss and people slipping into homelessness.
- Penny Hobman suggested the Core Group prioritise activities according to urgency and impact, and asked that consideration is given to establishing baselines from which improvement can be measured. She also stated that understanding what a ‘consistent approach from LAs’ really means is important – it assumes a need to understand performance levels and use tools like peer review. Jamie stated that a more detailed programme plan will be developed by the Core Group, where each objective will RAG rated on the basis of priorities and assigned deliverables and a timeline.
- Rachel Flowers suggested a need to benchmark performance and activity across London and suggested that more should and could be done within the care system to prevent homelessness at a later point.

- Cllr Jayne McCoy suggested that a function of the Executive Board should be to lobby for legislative change around some of the drivers of homelessness including welfare reform and the definitions of priority need.
- Jon Sparkes noted the list-based approach to tackling rough sleeping being taken by the T1000 project and suggested this was a good way forward with this group of more complex rough sleepers.

Angela McNab presented on the work being undertaken around homeless health and asked for comments.

- Bill Tidnam suggested that a priority should be to help homeless people to access mainstream health services rather than always providing specialist services. Angela McNab agreed and said that was absolutely the intention.

Debra Levison presented on the work being undertaken to support non-UK rough sleepers and asked for comments.

- Jon Sparkes supported all that had been outlined, stating it was comprehensive, but suggested an additional focus on employment and employment support as it is particularly important as a route out of homelessness for this group.

Kilvinder Vigurs presented on the work being undertaken to prevent rough sleeping and homelessness for offenders on probation and prisoners being released into London. No comments were offered.

Jamie Carswell presented on some of the cross-cutting priorities and work being taken forward by the Core Group, including the intention to review and improve data systems which support the work to tackle rough sleeping in London and efforts to understand and maximise the key contribution of the voluntary sector.

- Rachel Flowers suggested that the Core Group needs to focus not just on the data but on the narrative and be willing to use both qualitative and quantitative data. She highlighted a need to build a consensus about the interpretation of data and its impact on the work ongoing in London.
- Tom Coffey suggested that a risk log should be developed by the Core Group to enable risks (eg: funding running out by a particular date) to be mitigated. Jamie stated that the Core Group has developed a risk register, and this can be shared with the Exec Board.
- Penny Hobman suggested that the work around understanding and tackling workforce shortages be widened outside of the VCS so as to consider where else this might be a barrier (eg: health, substance misuse, LA commissioning).
- Steve Douglas noted colleagues points about the importance of data analysis but stated that London still has issues with data capture and data sharing too – all three elements need considering together.

Tom Copley noted the comments and asked the Core Group to take them into account as the plan develops. He asked the Board to approve the plan on the understanding that it will be adaptable and iterative.

ACTION: The Work Programme was agreed subject to the comments made, and prioritisation process suggested.

ACTION: The Core Group's Risk Register should be circulated to the Executive Board for the next meeting.

Winter planning

David Orton (GLA) presented plans around providing accommodation for rough sleepers in the event of severe weather. Noted that all local authorities and the GLA will be meeting needs with self-contained accommodation (except where couples of family/household groups specifically request shared accommodation). The shortfall in provision vs. identified need based on returns from 30 out of 33 local authorities looks to be around 170 bed spaces so GLA are seeking to source a hotel to meet this shortfall.

David noted the fact that – despite advice from local Public Health teams on the risks – some winter shelter providers are still intending to open communal shelters and requested the support of the Board in taking action to mitigate the risks associated with this, particularly in agreeing a position of non-engagement with the communal shelters that can be communicated to commissioned outreach, advice and day centre providers.

Dr Tom Coffey stated that the high rate of circulation of COVID this winter, the transmissibility of the Delta variant, the clinical vulnerability of many rough sleepers and the low level of vaccination within this population makes offering communal sleeping facilities clinically unsafe.

Rachel Flowers agreed and stated that ADPH London have written a guidance note to this effect and offered to circulate this. She noted that the London approach of being strict about offering self-contained accommodation has so far prevented the serious outbreaks seen elsewhere, reopening communal shelters presents a serious risk to health and all steps should be taken to discourage their use.

Jamie Carswell agreed and suggested that LA housing and support commissioners can cascade a strong message to this effect to commissioned providers asking them not to refer to the communal shelters and to highlight the risks to those they are working with. Noted this will not prevent individuals referring themselves but it is likely to help.

Steve Douglas stated that it was good to have a strong and unified position on this issue and noted that, while communal shelters present the highest risk, even with shelters offering more self-contained accommodation there is a need to be careful.

Penny Hobman noted that that the government position on communal shelters was as set out in the Operating Principles: it was clear that they should be used as a last resort only and with appropriate risk mitigation as far as possible. She also noted that winter shelters have been provided with transformation funds by the department to seek to avoid this scenario.

<p>ACTION: The Board agreed that all commissioners should take steps to instruct commissioned providers not to refer to or signpost to the communal shelters and to make the risks clear to those who are on the streets.</p>
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AOB

- 1) Tom Copley noted this was Jon Sparkes last meeting before moving on from his role at Crisis and thanked him for all his work. Those thanks were echoed by everyone. Jon Sparkes happy to have steered Crisis to its current place as a strong collaborative partner and critical friend.
- 2) Steve Douglas noted that a London event linked to the lessons learned from Everyone In and the recommendations contained within the Kerslake report was being planned with support from Bloomberg and the Centre for Homelessness Impact. Invites going out next week for the morning of 16 December 2021.

Date of Next Meeting

Weds, Feb 16th 2022, 13.30-15.00