

Working with migrant rough sleepers

Overview of Thames Reach

Thames Reach's outreach services support rough sleepers found on London's streets by helping them escape homelessness and destitution.

Thames Reach has worked with vulnerable rough sleepers for over 30 years and our staff witness on a daily basis the dangers of sleeping rough, the detrimental effect it has on people's health and the potential for destitute people to die on the streets.

In order to work effectively we have developed a wide range of partnerships that enable us to help rough sleepers move away from the streets. These include partnerships with councils and housing organisations, health services, employers and training providers, the police and, in the last few years, with migrant charities and the Home Office.

The situation facing non-UK nationals sleeping rough

The latest annual figures for rough sleeping in London (CHAIN annual report for Greater London April 2015 – March 2016) indicate that 59% or 4,675 of the 8,096 people seen sleeping rough were non-UK nationals. Most had no rights to welfare benefits or housing. We employ staff from a range of different countries, particularly from Central and Eastern Europe, who have excellent language skills and understand the cultural needs of people from EEA countries who are sleeping rough.

The operational regulations detailed in the instructions covering administrative removal changed in May 2016. They gave new powers to Home Office staff to remove rough sleepers before the three-month period has elapsed because rough sleeping can be considered an abuse of free movement rights. Under the regulations, there is a requirement that the response to rough sleepers who have been sleeping rough for less than three months is proportionate, taking into account all the circumstances of the case. This change in Home Office guidance has not changed the practise of Thames Reach outreach teams or the way in which we work in partnership with HOICE.

Options for non - UK nationals

All rough sleeping clients, including UK nationals receive a complete assessment of their needs in order to enable us to create a Single Service Offer which is recorded on CHAIN. These could include:

Support them to access benefits or work and accommodation.

Referral to legal advice/ Street Legal where individuals have complex immigration cases.

Referral to Routes Home and /or safeguarding teams for complex and vulnerable rough sleepers including those with mental health and substance misuse issues.

Rough sleeping clients who have been comprehensively assessed and have no recourse to public funds, no local connection to any UK borough and are not ready to work and who's

best and fastest option to cease rough sleeping is to return to their country of origin will be offered a supported reconnection.

Thames Reach seek to engage and motivate rough sleepers to take - up offers of support. if this is unsuccessful enforcement options will be used alongside the continuing offer of support. Enforcement action for non -Uk nationals will involve Thames Reach working with HOICE.

Partnership work with ICE

Client who consistently refuse the offer of a supported reconnection and any other reasonable offers by outreach of assistance and who continue to rough sleep presenting a risk to themselves, other rough sleepers and the public will be brought to the attention of HOICE. These clients will be the subject of local authority task and targeting meeting or will be encountered by HOICE staff during joint outreach shifts.

Thames Reach outreach services work closely with local authorities to co-ordinate resources on rough - sleeping 'hotspots' where three or more rough sleepers are found bedded down. Clients who are sleeping in a hot spot may also be met by the home office during a joint shift and advised of the likely consequences of continuing to rough sleep and refuse offers of assistance from commissioned outreach teams.

The role of Thames Reach staff during joint shifts is to ensure that clients understand the information that is given to them and that Home Office staff are acting with due regard to a rough sleeper's vulnerability. GLA guidance is that if the Home Office encounters a vulnerable foreign national at risk of homelessness or 'rooflessness', a referral should be made to local outreach to find the most appropriate route off the streets. It is the GLA's view that where a vulnerable rough sleeper, for example someone dependent on drugs or alcohol, is encountered, they must be referred to local outreach services to make sure they receive the support they need.

Information sharing

In order to facilitate joint work LSR will share basic, operationally necessary demographic information of rough sleepers who have been identified as having no option other than removal. Protected data is not shared with HOICE staff without the consent of clients. Information on locations and hot spots of rough sleeping may be shared.

All Home Office staff will be fully briefed by outreach teams, specifically on possible vulnerabilities, which must be taken into consideration before shifts take place. Those with vulnerabilities should be worked with by outreach. LSR and HOICE will share information on known risks of working with particular rough sleepers.

In extraordinary cases, such as criminal offences unrelated to rough sleeping (for example, being 'wanted for serious crimes abroad', or offences of sexual assault) individual-level data may also be shared to ensure protection of the public. All requests for individual-level data in these circumstances will be required to be approved by the GLA prior to being sent to the Home Office.

Home Office staff will share information with outreach staff on the outcomes for rough sleepers who have been detained and outreach staff will continue to offer an voluntary reconnection as an alternative to administrative removal.

Thames Reach and HOICE staff also meet on a quarterly basis to discuss changes in legislation and demographics of non - UK rough sleepers, these meetings ensure that services are developed to meet changing needs and legal guidance. Thames Reach may also undertake to deliver training and advice for HOICE staff on how to deal with vulnerable client groups.

Data Collection

All work undertaken by Thames Reach outreach staff is recorded on the CHAIN database. Anonymised and aggregated data from this database may be shared by the GLA with the Home Office.

Thames Reach collect data on number of people who have been voluntarily reconnected, and where relevant on numbers who have been detained or administratively removed. This information is used to better understand the needs and outcomes for rough sleepers and to develop more effective services to meet the needs of migrant rough sleepers.