

## Horizon scanning

### Access to food

In some areas people were struggling to access food, with food drops being cancelled. Further, food vouchers were no longer being provided to some people, with frontline workers being required to provide these from their own savings. Access to food vouchers was cited as a key reason why people who had been previously been rough sleeping for long periods stayed in accommodation, and so the lack of this provision is detrimental to keeping these people engaged with support.

*“It’s a concern that the people who have taken 20 years to get in are now wanting to come back out because they haven’t got any money for food.”*

There are positive examples where communities have worked to provide food to people. Some soup kitchens had adjusted their delivery models and were taking three meals a day to people in Bed and Breakfasts, hostels and drug and alcohol residential services. There were good networks in other area with hotels also providing meals to people accommodated there.

### Access to drugs

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the price of drugs has risen, and that some are now being cut differently. There was evidence that some people were taking heroin and feeling dizzy and vomiting as a result. **Resources will need to be made available for projects working with people with substance misuse issues, work will need to be undertaken to mitigate the risk of overdoses once supply increases post-lockdown.**

### Social distancing

Social distancing remains a challenge in some projects. For many with low self-worth this is not a priority.

In some areas rough sleepers were receiving warnings for not social distancing. Alarming in an area of London some people have received fines for being outside and not social distancing, despite them having no accommodation to access. **We would recommend clearer guidance is issued to police on appropriate measures to take where people who do not have access to accommodation are not adhering to general social distancing recommendations.**

### Access to support

The support in some areas has been very positive; however the support that some will need in the way that it is needed is no longer available due to social distancing. The movement to online support does not work for some. The closure of drop-in centres etc will be particularly difficult for those with No Recourse to Public Funds.

Although in the short-term most people in accommodation projects are able to self-isolate, there are increasing concerns that this cannot be sustained for much longer.

### Positive approaches

In one area where there had been challenges for people who had been previously evicted with no further offers available, there had been an improvement in the availability of a new offer. This is extremely welcome.

*“There are now a lot more options for people, and a lot of issues around the time it was taking between referral and offer seem to have been addressed.”*

It was also positive to hear in some areas examples of increased partnership working between agencies, increased donations from the public and good relations with the police.

## Priorities for the future

The amount of resource and impetus expended on supporting people experiencing rough sleeping at this time is extremely welcome, particularly the movement of large numbers of people into places where they can now begin engagement with services. This provides a huge opportunity for the Government to meet its target to end rough sleeping by the end of the Parliamentary term, and thereby make huge savings across different Government departments at a time where public resources will undoubtedly be stretched.

We will be making recommendations next week to the Select Committee on priorities for future work with rough sleepers. In advance, we share the following priority areas we will be addressing:

- Provision of accommodation for people currently using hotels and other temporary accommodation, given the unaffordability of much of the PRS, low engagement with the benefits system, the non-adherence to social distancing of many hostel spaces, and the large number of people who have re-located out of borough through this current emphasis on rapidly housing people.

*“If it’s not done properly, then people will be back on the streets... and then we’re back to where we were before.”*

- Ensuring access to tailored support, which will recognise individuals need (including where appropriate recognition of experiences of trauma).
- Maintaining the positive relationships that have been developed between people experiencing rough sleeping and those providing support, so that the opportunity is not lost to engage sustainably where appropriate.

*“The guy’s we get in, when you do get them in, you have to teach them how to live again. They don’t know how to live. You have to go to the shops with them. You have to go to the Jobcentre with them. Until a time, maybe 2 or 3 years later, when they say “Actually, I don’t need you to come with me today.”*

- Developing positive relationships with individuals where these have been compromised (e.g. through changes to the accessibility of support) so that effect plans for support can begin in advance of future changes.

*“If people don’t get listened to now, they’re going to be mis-placed again, and then will be in the same boat.”*

*“You forever hear about the distrust of services, the distrust of support. If we’re not careful, we’re going to get another generation of this... especially now we do have a window of opportunity to engage.”*

## About Expert Link

Expert Link is a peer led organisation championing the voice of people with lived experience of multiple disadvantages, including homelessness, mental health issues, substance misuse, offending and domestic violence and abuse. We advocate for a world where people with lived experience of multiple disadvantages are treated as equal partners in decisions made about their lives.