

Key points

Accommodation

- A lot of people previously rough sleeping have been moved into hotels/accommodation. However, some are still rough sleeping and/or begging (despite fewer people around to give to beggars)
- Concerns as some not engaging have low self-worth and are rejecting offers because of this. Many not getting messages from Government about current social distancing/self-isolation.
- Social distancing measures are non-existent in some properties (hotels/B n B's).
- High numbers of people being moved inside means that support is not there for some people.
- Some parts of support (e.g. assessments) has been moved online which inaccessible for some.
- Concerns around the support that is being provided by hotels, who may not be equipped to support people experiencing multiple disadvantages. Reliance on 'good-will' of hoteliers is a concern as this may not last.
- Blackpool has a lot of B n B's and has seen a dramatic increase in people being accommodated there (historical count is circa 13, though around 95 have been accommodated). People from around the country seem to be pulled/pushed there leading to concerns around what the exit strategy will be.
- Hotels/B n B's have acquired an assumed 'policing' role in terms of monitoring social distancing (particularly in terms of groups of people outside properties). It is felt this 'duty' should instead be handled by support workers.
- There has been little increase in engagement from more entrenched rough sleepers. In Westminster, none of the people engaged with Street Buddies had moved inside. All had been made offers, though did not take them up (one reason given was that location of offer is over 10 miles away, others had longstanding reasons re: trust, substance misuse, etc).
- There were examples of people been evicted from accommodation where there was another 'offer,' to go to, though this was not generally the case.
- Some places/services are not getting required PPE.
- Concerns of negative perception from people living near hotels which are now occupied predominantly by rough sleepers.
- Concern in general given the current reliance on congregate housing/night shelters and what responses to covid-19 will mean for them in the future.

Issues relating to drugs and alcohol

- Challenges persuading people reliant on substances to stay in accommodation. Some places (e.g. Durham) not providing/allowing drugs and alcohol though some do (e.g. Blackpool, Westminster)
- Many people have relapsed due to self-isolation measures (e.g. Exmouth)
- Prescriptions working well in some places (e.g. Blackpool), and there are increased opportunities to engage with detox.
- Increased uptake of prescriptions at rapid pace a challenge in some areas (e.g. Croyden) – GPs cited as particular bottle-neck.
- Some hotels are spot checking people's rooms and then evicting for possession/use of drugs paraphernalia, and minor offences such as smoking.
- In a few areas people had been made an accommodation offer, but no resulting change in accessing scripts.

Increases in approaches to council

Expert Link – National Panel

- Huge influx in people approaching the council for support who were previously sofa surfing and asked to leave due to self-isolation measures (Bedford)
- Increased number of people approaching the council because of domestic violence, but related services/projects not working for people as well as previously.

Police responses

- Generally positive reaction to the work of the police.
- No examples of police specifically targeting rough sleepers – generally all people are being told to 'go inside.'
- Police have been targeting food hand-outs (London) and offering accommodation but not forcing people inside.
- There has been an enforcement approach to some people begging in the city centre (Leeds) without an offer of accommodation. Concern that people are therefore being moved to areas away from potential support.
- Would be helpful to receive information about the Government guidance issued to police: what is their approach for people in public with no home/accommodation to go to.

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.