

General areas of concern

Rising rough sleeping

Regretfully, rough sleeping appears to be rising. One area particular highlighted a large number of people rough sleeping, including people who were previously rough sleeping and did not take up any offer of accommodation, and those that have been deemed 'un-manageable' by accommodation providers.

"There are still people sleeping rough. Which is shocking really." Member of the National Advisory Panel

"I've noticed an increase in people sleeping rough. So I'm wondering how many people are being kicked of the hotels and the B n B's that we're not aware of." Member of the National Advisory Panel

Relations with the police

There have been some negative experiences relating to police attitudes. Despite the work of many organisations, some relations with the police have deteriorated, with police associating rough sleeping with anti-social behaviour that should be 'sorted out' by local service, or else people should be 'locked-up.'

"They just want to keep our people locked up... People have worked so hard through all of this. It's been really tough. It really upsets me when you feel like they're criticising." Member of the National Advisory Panel

"A couple were being called on by housing, and the police were with them. I was like, 'Do you really have to have the police with you? You're going to speak to somebody, why do you have to take the police?" Member of the National Advisory Panel

Mental health challenges

The 'reality' of COVID-19 is also hitting home for many, particularly where friends have passed away and they have been unable to attend funerals. This is having a detrimental effect on people's mental health.

"Of the few people I talk too, two are struggling and one's gone out of the area completely. They're still worried about the hotels and everything else." Member of the National Advisory Panel

"I don't hear much hope. On Tuesday I'll admit, for the first time ever I was scared to go out, and I've never had that before." Member of the National Advisory Panel

Plans for move-on

In some areas, discussions around where those in temporary accommodation will be moved on to seem only just to have started.

“[CITY] are looking at YMCA’s or universities to place some of our service users in. But they’re not clear what they’re doing. That discussion is only just been had with our street support team.” **Member of the National Advisory Panel**

However, it was positive to note that in one area, people with lived experience of multiple disadvantages are playing a key role in strategic decisions around move on.

“They want to make sure that move-on’s are done right. So that’s good.” **Member of the National Advisory Panel**

Move-on choice

“People want the same as everyone else wants...” **Member of the National Advisory Panel**

Whilst the temporary arrangement has worked for some, move-on may cause difficulty for those with pets (e.g. dogs) which were allowed in temporary accommodation but which are not in the move on properties.

“Someone was in tears to me. They said to get the property he was going to have to get rid of his dog.” **Member of the National Advisory Panel**

“It’s a bit unfair to say they can’t have a dog when all the neighbours have dogs.” **Member of the National Advisory Panel**

One area identified an issue for couples, who are not being made an offer where they can stay together.

“We can’t seem to house couples. This needs to be looked at nationally. You can’t be a ‘single homeless person’ when you’re in a relationship. We’re all entitled to that(a relationship), as human beings.” **Member of the National Advisory Panel**

People with No Recourse to Public Funds

“They’re individuals, they’re not a group” **Member of the National Advisory Panel**

As noted by the Select Committee, the accommodation and support offer for those with No Recourse to Public Funds is a concern to many, including national and local government.

“It’s a growing issues. What we tend to find is rough sleeping is more hidden. Most referrals we receive outside the city centre, in woods, cemeteries, is EU nationals. The problem will be bigger than people are aware of.” **Member of the National Advisory Panel**

“On a shift 3 years ago we went into a disused garage block with dozens of Romanians hidden away, we would find encampments hidden behind large advertising boardings” **Member of the National Advisory Panel**

We are aware of some positive work done at a local level. In one area, local providers have managed to source properties that EU nationals will be able to use while applying for settled status. In other areas projects had looked at sourcing accommodation and employment opportunities.

*“We had an encampment with EU nationals. Myself and another worker were engaging with them. They will go in to private rented accommodation. When hopefully things have returned to normality we can support them with settled status and identification, which is a big issue. A lot of individuals we come across have their identifications documents stolen or lost.” **Member of the National Advisory Panel***

*“[Charity] were given allocated money to pick up a group of people who didn’t have recourse to public funds, house them and then get them employment... What they found was they were picking them up, trying to house them, and then they found that they had a drug or alcohol problem.” **Member of the National Advisory Panel***

Regretfully, we have heard that policy is potentially being considered whereby people will be made a single offer, regardless of location, for individuals to then go and get a job. This is highly unlikely to decrease rough sleeping given housing and labour markets, and the disruption of individuals support and social ties.”

*“[POTENTIALLY] They’re going to be told, ‘Here’s a place for you, take it or leave it.’” **Member of the National Advisory Panel***

*“[POTENTIALLY] If they turn down this one time offer, they won’t get any help.” **Member of the National Advisory Panel***

*“If you are living somewhere and the only offer of help you can get is over 250 miles away, that’s infuriating. To dislocate people like that, is disgusting. If that’s official, that needs to be challenged... We’re human beings, not commodities.” **Member of the National Advisory Panel***

*“People are going to be moved out from the areas they are living where there is some form of work, to areas where there is excess living but no work. Moving people out, giving them a month to find a job where there is no job to do. We’re just then setting them up to fail, where they’re going to be evicted in a month’s time. It’s another local authority’s problem.” **Member of the National Advisory Panel***

*“With COVID and all the redundancies that are happening across the country, there is not work for anyone, let alone EU migrants. We’re going to be in a recession soon. Where is this work that people are meant to be finding, apart from on the farm?” **Member of the National Advisory Panel***

*“Even if people get work, as soon as that falls down its very draconian [what happens to their benefits]. It doesn’t work, if your intention is to end rough sleeping.” **Member of the National Advisory Panel***

*“If people have been sleeping rough for a long period of time, the idea that they can now hold down employment just like that, is really problematic.” **Member of the National Advisory Panel***

Recommendation

It is clear to the National Advisory Panel that changes will need to be made to current policy to ensure that people with No Recourse to Public Funds do not return to the streets.

At a local level, local authorities are under increasing pressures, with limited funds, due to COVID and historic funding settlement. If responsibility is placed solely on local authorities, there is a real risk that this group will not receive adequate support.

“The issue is where is all this money coming from to fund this? It’s going to have to be pulled from other places. Because COVID on its own has cost so much money. Local Authorities are going to struggle

*once this is over, which means a lot of the community services that we rely on are going to fold or go under.” **Member of the National Advisory Panel***

The lack of support, employment opportunities and access to welfare mean that people with NRPF are highly likely to remain rough sleeping without national intervention. It is a systemic issue, which requires clear messaging from national Government.

Our National Advisory Panel recommends local support is made accessible to people with No Recourse to Public Funds. Critically, amendments to immigration legislation should be made granting a one-time amnesty for current migrants with No Recourse to Public Funds so that people can access welfare support. With Brexit legislation due to go through Parliament, this provides an opportune moment to make this happen.

*“If you seriously don’t want people to return to rough sleeping, then you need to give them an amnesty, so they can get housing benefit and get themselves back on their feet.” **Member of the National Advisory Panel***

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.