People and Health Overview Committee

Rough Sleeping Programme

Committee: Overview Committee
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Status: Public

Executive Summary

The Government has launched a national Rough Sleeping Programme aimed at delivering its commitment to end rough sleeping by ensuring that people sleeping rough have a route off the streets before Christmas 2026, alongside longer-term access to settled accommodation and intensive wraparound support.

Dorset Council has responded proactively through a partnership approach involving housing services, outreach providers, health services, substance misuse services, and the voluntary and community sector. Preparatory work is well advanced and includes enhanced outreach capacity, specialist housing support, emergency accommodation provision, and the development of a Night Assessment Centre in Weymouth.

While rough sleeping numbers in Dorset remain comparatively low, those affected frequently experience complex challenges including poor physical and mental health, substance misuse, trauma, social isolation, and barriers to accessing services. The programme provides a significant opportunity to strengthen Dorset's housing-led response and improve outcomes for some of the county's most vulnerable residents.

Recommendations

The Overview Committee is asked to:

1. Note the Government's national Rough Sleeping Programme and Dorset Council's response.

2. Note the progress made in establishing a coordinated multi-agency approach to rough sleeping across Dorset.
3. Recognise the importance of long-term accommodation and support pathways beyond the initial winter response.
4. Support continued partnership working across housing, health, social care, and the voluntary sector.
5. Note the intention to discuss the initiative at the Health and Wellbeing Committee, to raise awareness and seek wider partner support.

Reason for Recommendations

Rough sleeping has significant consequences for individual wellbeing, public services, and local communities. People sleeping rough often experience multiple disadvantages that require sustained and coordinated intervention across a range of agencies.

The national programme presents an opportunity to strengthen local services, secure additional investment and improve outcomes for residents experiencing rough sleeping. Strong governance will help ensure the programme delivers both immediate support and long-term sustainable accommodation solutions.

To assist in this process a report is being submitted to the Health and Wellbeing Board, as a reporting route via the Healthy Places Sub-group and as a means of securing long term partner input and commitment.
This report is the first phase of the Rough Sleeper Programme. Utilising the Health and Wellbeing Board which through its sub-group structures can pave the way to integrating the work of partners to secure the longer term wraparound support that will be required in the longer term. This will complement the partnerships already in place including our drug and alcohol services, Access Wellbeing, accessible primary care, outreach etc.

Background

Dorset Council has a strong track record of partnership working to prevent homelessness and reduce rough sleeping and has developed well supported homeless pathways for rough sleepers. Through outreach services, housing advice, commissioned support services and voluntary sector partnerships, the Council

continues to engage proactively with people experiencing rough sleeping throughout the county.

Although numbers remain relatively low compared with many urban authorities, people sleeping rough in Dorset often present with multiple and complex needs requiring coordinated support from housing, health, and care services. Access to affordable accommodation, specialist support and sustainable move-on options remain key challenges, as does the rural nature of the County.

The Report

In response to the national programme, Dorset Council and partners have undertaken significant preparatory work to strengthen local capacity and ensure that individuals sleeping rough can be identified quickly and supported into accommodation.

Key areas of activity include:

- Establishment of a multi-agency Rough Sleeper Taskforce.
- Development of a Night Assessment Centre at The Bus Shelter in Weymouth.
- Expansion of outreach and navigator services.
- Creation of specialist rough sleeper housing casework capacity.
- Investment in homelessness prevention activity through the Lantern Trust.
- Enhanced partnership arrangements with The Bus Shelter.
- Provision of rent in advance and personal budgets to access private rented accommodation.
- Identification of accommodation capacity and staffing requirements to support delivery.

Dorset has been allocated £1.1 million of Government funding over three years, comprising £703,000 revenue funding and £438,000 capital funding. Initial proposals include investment in staffing, accommodation provision, and prevention activity, with further funding expected to become available through future programme announcements.

This report only covers the first phase of the Government's Programme, namely "Routes off the Street by Christmas," this is the immediate priority and final proposals for this phase must be submitted to Government by 1 December 2026.

In a letter received on the 29th of October from the Deputy Prime Minister, a further announcement has been made that the national allocation of funding, for the Rough Sleeper Programme will be doubled. Additional funding will be made available for 2027/28 and 2028/2029, to ensure the longer-term commitment of ending rough sleeping can be achieved. As at the time of writing this report we have not been notified what this new allocation will be.

Accommodation Provision

The accommodation model currently being developed includes a range of interventions designed to provide both immediate and permanent housing solutions.

Accommodation Type	Purpose	Capacity
Night Assessment Centre (The Bus Shelter, Weymouth)	Assessment, stabilisation, and support planning	6
Bed & Breakfast Accommodation (Weymouth)	Emergency temporary accommodation	10
Spot Purchase Accommodation (Lyme Regis and Swanage)	Flexible emergency accommodation	3*
Private Rented Sector Tenancies	Settled accommodation supported through Rent in Advance and personal budgets	4

Accommodation Type	Purpose	Capacity
Direct Lets through Housing Register	Permanent accommodation solutions	9
Total Planned Capacity		**32**

*Subject to final confirmation.

Financial Implications

Government funding has been allocated to support delivery of the programme and Dorset Council will continue to maximise opportunities to secure further external investment as additional programme guidance and funding allocations are announced.

Any future financial commitments requiring Council resources will be reported through the appropriate decision-making processes.

Risks

Current Risk: Medium

Without effective partnership coordination there is a risk that opportunities presented through the national programme may not be fully realised, resulting in poorer outcomes for individuals experiencing rough sleeping and reduced access to future funding opportunities.

Residual Risk: Low to Medium

Risks can be mitigated through strong governance arrangements, continued multi-agency collaboration, robust needs assessment and a sustained focus on prevention, housing outcomes, and early intervention.

Conclusion

The Rough Sleeping Programme presents a significant opportunity to strengthen Dorset's response to rough sleeping through increased investment, enhanced partnership working and a stronger focus on long-term housing solutions.

Dorset Council and its partners have already established a strong foundation for delivery. Creating a governance route through the Health and Wellbeing Committee will help ensure that the programme achieves its objectives of reducing rough sleeping, improving outcomes for vulnerable residents, and creating sustainable pathways into settled accommodation.