



How we're supporting people who are rough sleeping over the winter months

**If you see someone in distress or imminent
danger due to hypothermia, call 999
immediately.**

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Foreword

The winter months can be a particularly hard and dangerous time for people who are sleeping rough. This includes people who are sleeping on the street, in vehicles or anywhere that isn't designed for habitation.

The drop in temperatures creates an increased risk to health and can prove fatal.

Throughout the year our Street Outreach team provides a service dedicated to helping rough sleepers. This service first helps people to move off the streets and then supports them to stay off the streets.

We work with Streetlink and Rapid Response to enable us to identify people who are sleeping rough in Hackney and to get help to them quickly.

During periods of cold weather we provide extra support to help people who are rough sleeping. In severe weather this includes offering emergency accommodation to anyone who is rough sleeping in the borough.



Rough sleeping, Centre for Homelessness Impact Changing Perceptions of people experiencing homelessness portraits.. © Tor Evans/PA/ Centre for Homelessness Impact

Our Street Outreach team

Our Street Outreach team (SORT) is often the first point of contact between people sleeping rough and the Benefit and Homeless Prevention service.

The team operates throughout the year. They identify people sleeping rough and engage with them on the street.

They help people to move off the street and into accommodation. In addition they use personalised and tailored support to address other issues. This helps entrenched rough sleepers with more complex needs to prepare to move off the street, often by changing their behaviours.

The team plays an essential role in:

- Obtaining information on the extent of rough sleeping in Hackney
- Encouraging rough sleepers to leave the streets as quickly as possible
- Connecting rough sleepers with appropriate support services and accommodation options
- Reducing the likelihood of rough sleepers returning to the streets



Individual, Centre for Homelessness Impact Changing Perceptions of people experiencing homelessness portraits.. © Tor Evans/PA/ Centre for Homelessness Impact

Streetlink and Rapid Response

[Streetlink](#) is an online platform. It connects people sleeping rough to support provided by local authorities and charities.

Streetlink works in two ways:

- People who are sleeping rough can use Streetlink to self-refer and make Streetlink aware of this
- Anyone who encounters someone sleeping rough can use the platform to alert Streetlink to the person's location

Once alerted, Streetlink passes this information to local homelessness services. This includes the local Rapid Response team.

The Rapid Response team forms part of the Mayor of London's [Life Off the Streets programme](#).

The Rapid Response team uses the information they receive from Streetlink to quickly locate people sleeping rough. They operate 365 days a year and aim to locate people within 24 hours.

Where possible they'll provide rough sleepers with emergency accommodation. They'll also connect them with local support agencies and services.



Image source: Timur Weber, "Homeless Man Eating on Street", 2021, Public Domain.

Extra help in severe weather

To protect rough sleepers during particularly cold periods we follow the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP).

The Greater London Authority decides when to activate and deactivate SWEP. They inform us and other local authorities when SWEP starts and again when it ends.

SWEP is activated for the whole of London when any part of the capital is forecast to be 0°C or lower overnight.

When SWEP is active we take measures to protect rough sleepers from the severe weather. This includes offering all rough sleepers emergency accommodation. The accommodation is offered as a humanitarian response rather than a legal requirement.

We offer accommodation to anyone who is rough sleeping in Hackney. The usual eligibility requirements to get support with homelessness do not apply. All rough sleepers including those with no recourse to public funds will be offered emergency accommodation. People with pets can be accommodated as well those who want to be accommodated as a couple.

When SWEP is activated our Street Outreach team takes quick action to contact rough sleepers. They let them know that accommodation is available.

The accommodation offered is either rooms or shared spaces.

Before being offered accommodation each rough sleeper is given a needs assessment. This is to ensure that the type of accommodation that they'll be offered is appropriate for their needs. The assessments are completed by either the Street Outreach team or by officers from the Benefits and Homeless Prevention Service. The assessment will consider issues such as:

- Physical health needs
- Mental health needs
- Support needs
- Other vulnerabilities

After the assessment we identify appropriate accommodation and will offer this to the person who is rough sleeping.

Not all rough sleepers who are offered accommodation will choose to accept it. On average we expect to provide accommodation to approximately 20-25

rough sleepers when SWEP is activated.

Accommodation is provided in hotels, shelters and warm spaces in various locations. We provide this in partnership with organisations such as [St Mungo's](#) and [Hackney Doorways](#) (which operates the Hackney Winter Night Shelters).

When SWEP is deactivated the emergency accommodation offer ends and the accommodation offer is withdrawn. Some rough sleepers will continue to be offered accommodation whereas others will be asked to leave. The course of action taken depends upon a person's individual circumstances including factors such as their eligibility and their needs.

Before anyone is asked to leave emergency accommodation they will be given either a more in-depth homelessness assessment, advice or support. This is in accordance with the “In for Good” principle which encourages all local authorities to ensure that people are given a support plan to end their homelessness before they're asked to leave emergency accommodation.



Temporary Accommodation, Centre for Homelessness Impact Changing Perceptions of people experiencing homelessness portraits.. © Tor Evans/PA/ Centre for Homelessness Impact