

ROUGH SLEEPERS Fact Sheet

Information about services available to Rough Sleepers within the London Borough of Sutton

A rough sleeper is defined by the Government as *'people sleeping, or bedded down, in the open air (such as on the streets, or in doorways, parks or bus shelters); people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or 'bashes')*.

In 2011/12 the authority set up a multi-agency Rough Sleepers Group that meets monthly and rough sleepers are discussed, information shared and a plan of action agreed for each individual in an effort to end their rough sleeping. The group is currently chaired by the Head of Service for Housing Advice, Information and Assessment and is attended by representatives from the police, Salvation Army, StreetLink, St Mungo's (No Second Night Out Hub (NSNO)), Sutton Community Works, Mental Health, Drug Services, Adult Social Care, Department of Work and Pensions, Citizens Advice Bureaux, SPEAR and Thames Reach Supported Housing.

Not every rough sleeper in the borough has connections to Sutton and the Rough Sleepers Group works to identify the person's 'home' borough so that they can be supported to return. Although, support is offered to people who are rough sleeping in the borough to access emergency accommodation, some rough sleepers choose not to take up the options offered. When this happens support continues to be offered each time the person is seen in the hope that they will change their mind. In addition, some rough sleepers do not engage well with services available or follow the advice given to end their homelessness.

Authorities are required to undertake a Rough Sleepers count / estimate annually. This takes place on a nominated night of the year in accordance with government guidelines. As the London Borough of Sutton reports a figure below '10', Sutton bases its figure on an estimate of the number of rough sleepers on a nominated typical night, the last nominated night being 11/12th November 2016. The figure was reached at the Rough Sleepers Group by sharing information and intelligence and agreeing that an individual was likely to have been sleeping rough on the nominated night and an independent verifier attended the meeting. Eight rough sleepers were reported for 2016. The figure was six for the previous year.

When a rough sleeper is sighted, completing the form on the StreetLink website is the most appropriate way to notify StreetLink about them, link below:

<http://www.streetlink.org.uk/tell-us-about-a-rough-sleeper>

StreetLink operates across London boroughs and aims to verify a rough sleeper through outreach services within 72 hours of the alert. Once verified, the customer will be recorded on CHAIN (Combined Homelessness and Information Network), which is a multi-agency database recording information about rough sleepers and the wider street population in London, and is useful when establishing the outcome from previous contacts made with the individual. For new rough sleepers a space in the No Second Night Out Hub (NSNO), run by St. Mungo's Broadway, may be offered if there is room whilst St Mungo's Broadway continues to work with individuals to resolve the rough sleeping. There are representatives from both StreetLink and St Mungo's on Sutton's Rough Sleepers Group.

As well as StreetLink, a local outreach service operates in Sutton provided by SPEAR, which is funded by the London Borough of Sutton. SPEAR also runs a weekly advice drop-in at Sutton Civic Offices every Tuesday afternoon for those who are rough sleeping or at risk of doing so. At the outreach session SPEAR staff attempt to look for rough sleepers in the borough late at night/early morning once a week, providing advice and support with a view to ending their rough sleeping, linking in with the NSNO hub as well as the Rough Sleepers Group.

Although there are no direct access hostels in the London Borough of Sutton, Sutton commissions the Single Homeless Pathway, which is accommodation with support for single people. As part of this pathway there is an assessment centre, which is a six bed space shared house. Rough sleepers with an appropriate Sutton connection are given priority for any vacancies. It is intended that residents can stay there for up to 13 weeks so that their needs can be assessed, and a support plan is drawn up in conjunction with the service user with an appropriate move on plan. Move on could be a move further down the pathway into other supported housing, alternative supported housing with another provider better able to meet the assessed needs of the service user, or assistance and support to the resident to secure accommodation in the private sector.

SPEAR also manages a South West London sub regional shared house for men who have been verified as rough sleeping. This is situated in Merton. Sutton, as well as other South West region boroughs, have referral rights to this project and the South West region have funded a similar project in Kingston for females that has recently opened. Nominations for these projects are taken from the South West region boroughs.

There are also Severe Weather Emergency Provisions (SWEP) that come into force when the overnight temperature falls below zero degrees for three consecutive nights. Key partners have copies of this procedure and are alerted when SWEP is in place. Single households at risk of rough sleeping during this time are placed in emergency bed and breakfast accommodation until the temperature rises above zero. During the cold weather in January 2017, 14 households were placed into emergency accommodation through the SWEP provisions, some of whom were not previously known to the service or were not rough sleeping prior to placement.

There are also voluntary organisations that support rough sleepers including Sutton Community Works and the Salvation Army, and as mentioned previously their representatives consistently attend the Rough Sleepers Group. Sutton Community Works is a Christian charity of 15 churches in the London Borough of Sutton who work together for the benefit of the community. For more information please see the website www.suttoncommunityworks.org. Their initiatives include: Sutton Street Pastors, who will identify rough sleepers on their late night patrols, alerting, and signposting to appropriate agencies, and providing food and sleeping bags where appropriate, and Sutton Foodbank, providing emergency food to clients, including individuals sleeping rough. Further information regarding these initiatives and how people can become involved can be found at www.streetpastors.org and www.suttonfoodbank.org.uk. Sutton Community Works have a network of churches across the borough and they send regular mailings to each church to let them know about opportunities for involvement in their activities.

Sutton Salvation Army welcomes all rough sleepers in the borough and gives advice with signposting to appropriate services. They can also provide hot snacks and hot drinks, internet access, emergency phone calls and is an organisation that hosts the Foodbank each week. They have basic shower facilities that the homeless can use, although depending on other activities in the building it may be necessary to arrange a mutually convenient time for showers. Sutton Salvation Army does not run a night shelter scheme, nor can they provide any beds/accommodation within their building.

In the majority of cases, once reported, rough sleepers are assisted into some form of accommodation within a few days. Some of the individuals with more complex needs or those reluctant to engage take longer to resolve.

In around the autumn of 2015 Sutton Night Watch (soup kitchen) began operating in the borough. There are some concerns about the impact of the service following an increase in rough sleepers, in particular those travelling into the Sutton area from outside the borough boundaries.

All rough sleepers, whether they have a local connection or not, are offered help by SPEAR and where possible are assisted to reconnect with their home borough. It has been found however that a number of those with no local connection are proving difficult to engage with and are reluctant to return to their home borough.

There has been a marked increase (69%) in reports of rough sleepers during the last 12 months. However, despite this, there has been an increase in positive outcomes for this client group.