

Young people sleeping rough no longer overlooked.

Our response to the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy

We welcome the Government's updated Rough Sleeping Strategy, published on 3rd September, and its renewed commitment to end rough sleeping by 2025. We are particularly pleased to see the long-overdue recognition of the specific needs and experiences of young people, with a series of tailored priorities to this under-served group. However, without a bolder response to the cost of living crisis, we're warning that its prevention objectives will not be met.

This refresh of the Government's [Rough Sleeping Strategy](#) reflects changed needs and circumstances, and moves towards greater collaboration with the wider sector. We're encouraged by this approach, not in the least because it includes the acknowledgement of the rough sleeping risks and experiences of young people, which were previously overlooked.

The Strategy highlights that 48% of people sleeping rough had their first episode of street homelessness before their 25th birthday. To prevent rough sleeping and its damaging long-term effects and make sure no one is forced into repeated nights on the streets, young people *must* be prioritised, and we are pleased to note that this has been understood.

We have long campaigned that young people who find themselves sleeping rough have different experiences and needs and require youth-specific solutions. As such we are delighted to see £2.4 million committed to precisely this via the 2022-25 Rough Sleeping Initiative. Part of this funding will support our emergency accommodation provision for under-25s sleeping rough, and we look forward to working with Depaul UK, Greater London Authority and DLUHC on the continued roll out of this Youth Hub in London in the year ahead.

We are also pleased to see youth-specific provision becoming a priority in the new Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme with a commitment to ensure that young people will benefit from the £200 million set aside for new move-on homes. We look forward to seeing plans as they are announced.

In addition to age-appropriate accommodation provision, the strategy addresses plans relevant to the young people New Horizon supports and policy changes we have advocated for, including:

- A commitment to consider the recommendations of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care around preventing homelessness of young people leaving care. We would urge them to include also an extension of automatic priority need to care leavers up to age 25, as explained in our [briefing](#) with Just for Kids Law and others.
- Improving accommodation standards and support for children in care or leaving care.

- Positive changes and updated guidelines related to modern slavery, which we know from experience will help to prevent or solve rough sleeping for young people who are the victims of criminal exploitation and county lines.
- Improving data and evidence, for which we urge Government to consider young people's experiences of homelessness and rough sleeping. Our own and sector learning shows that, like women, young people negotiate their street homelessness in such a way that they tend not to be visible to outreach services or street counts, and that their circumstances cannot be properly recorded via the H-CLIC system.
- Valuing lived experience via the newly announced advisory group of people who are or have been sleeping rough. Young people must have a presence and voice in this where possible, reflecting the varied experiences of those most at risk of finding themselves on the streets (minoritised communities, women, LGBTQ+, care experienced, leaving prison)

We think the Government is absolutely right to focus its Rough Sleeping Strategy on prevention – which is also key to making rough sleeping rare, brief, and non-recurrent.

To achieve this for young people, we think Government need to consider the following:

- A third of young people leaving care will become homeless within three years, so this group is core of its prevention plans. Our own 2020/21 data shows that 40% of the young people sleeping rough we supported were care experienced. While we welcome the plans announced, a focus too squarely on young people leaving care risks leaving behind the thousands of others who also have no other choice but to sleep rough.
- Our learning further demonstrates that better prevention must involve strengthening the support at local authority level, especially under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA). This is none more so than for young people facing homelessness. In 2020/21, 35% of young people sleeping rough presenting to New Horizon had not had any contact with their council prior or during their homelessness. Of those who did, only 9% received appropriate support in line with the HRA. Clearly there is enormous prevention potential for young people here, which we are keen to support by sharing our learning locally and nationally.
- Preventing rough sleeping will, however, be challenging. The pandemic disproportionately impacted young people in terms of their mental health, employment, housing, and longer-term social mobility. With lower Universal Credit allowance and National Living Wage, under-25s are now also at extreme risk of bearing the brunt of the cost of living crisis. More resources and tailored policies will be necessary to meet the Government's rough sleeping prevention agenda – this winter, and beyond.

With a new Prime Minister to be announced today, we invite Government to continue the progress made and take seriously the commitment to end rough sleeping. As our CEO Phil Kerry said:

“Let’s make sure we all work together to make sure the 1,000 young people who slept on the streets in the capital last year get the support and homes they need and that many others will never have to experience the hardship and vulnerability of sleeping rough.”

For more information or to connect over how to best support young Londoners experiencing homelessness, please contact Marike Van Harskamp, our Head of Policy, Learning and Communications via marike.vanharskamp@nhyouthcentre.org.uk

