

The European **End Street Homelessness** Campaign



# LEARNING, FINDINGS AND NEXT STEPS

## **Executive summary**

WESTMINSTER  
HOMELESS  
ACTION  
TOGETHER **2016**

# Context

The number of people rough sleeping in England has been rising since 2010. Westminster, as the busiest, most central London borough, experiences the highest levels of people rough sleeping in the capital. A total of 2,857 people were found sleeping rough in Westminster over the course of 2015-16. This equates to about 300 people on any given night.

The profile and landscape of homelessness has also been changing. 66% of people sleeping rough do not spend more than one night on the streets, but there has been an increase in long term chronically homeless people, usually with multiple and complex needs, as well as non-UK nationals, often with different needs and some with no recourse to public funds (NRPF).

## About WHAT

A partnership of agencies came together to conduct a pilot in Westminster as part of the European End Street Homelessness Campaign (EESHHC). The pilot has been led by the Connection at St Martin's (CSTM), St Mungo's and The Passage, who are commissioned by Westminster City Council (WCC) to provide services to rough sleepers in the borough; as well as the Abbey Centre, Groundswell and West London Mission bringing a different perspective.

WHAT set out to force a rethink about how to end rough sleeping in Westminster and to create a greater sense of urgency through engagement and training of the wider community to pilot a survey of people sleeping rough. WHAT partners wanted to see if the EESHHC approach could provide an opportunity for change and a rethink in how things are done.

### WHAT objectives

- **Galvanise energy amongst services around doing things differently** including improving systems for getting people housed much more quickly.
- **Take a fresh look** through different eyes **and tap into new thinking and resources** eg. housing, time, energy and ongoing commitment, ideas, innovative and creative thinking about scalable solutions for migrants.
- **Raise the profile and increase understanding** of the challenges of a growing problem, not only in London but across Europe.

The partnership also wanted the pilot to influence:

- The recommissioning process taking place in Westminster for services to tackle rough sleeping over the next few years.
- The new Mayor who was about to be elected and the Greater London Authority's approach to ending street homelessness.
- Central Government's homelessness prevention work and recently announced £100K in capital funds.

## European End Street Homelessness Campaign

The EESHHC is a movement of cities that are working together to permanently house Europe's most vulnerable people and end chronic street homelessness by 2020. The campaign is coordinated and supported by the Building and Social Housing Foundation ([bshf.org](http://bshf.org)) which helps transfer outstanding housing practices across the globe, and is drawing on learning and expertise from the successful US 100,000 Homes campaign. BSHF has provided support to London and five other cities to test the processes used in the US 100,000 Homes campaign, and see how they can be adapted in a European context. FEANTSA ([www.feantsa.org](http://www.feantsa.org)), the European umbrella body for homelessness organisations, has provided a platform for its promotion and development.

Communities participating in the 100,000 Homes campaign in the US were found to rehouse chronically homeless people at a faster rate than other places. Part of the success was attributed to a 'registry week' with its emphasis on engaging the community to conduct a survey, getting to know homeless people by name and a survey tool, which assessed and prioritised vulnerabilities. The survey has also been used to monitor the needs of homeless people over time via consistent data gathering. This process underpins a Housing First approach.

Running a campaign creates a sense of urgency. And the US campaign found that new resources, solutions and fresh thinking came about through mass engagement in delivering the survey and participating in a community debrief.

## WHAT methodology

- A WHAT leadership group was formed of senior representatives of the partner organisations (see above), including the City Council, and both commissioned and non-commissioned agencies, meeting regularly and committed to work together to make change.
- Getting the EESH survey off the ground within three months, by utilising the Community Solutions' agile problem solving approach to hit the ground running and 'failing forward'!

In piloting the survey, WHAT set out to explore:

- Whether engagement of the whole community could help change the way services are working to increase success in getting people housed off the streets
- Whether the survey data could add to existing knowledge and whether we could adapt survey questions to fit the London context more appropriately and increase their efficacy
- Whether additional information could be gathered about people and their experiences of services and previous interventions
- Whether this survey is the ideal starting point for prioritising vulnerability and access to housing and other services. Is its system of assessing vulnerability more effective than better use of CHAIN data

WHAT signed up to the principles of the European End Street Homelessness Campaign, which includes getting to know homeless people by name and data monitoring. Given the perceived mistrust of existing data collection systems by a proportion of homeless people, a decision was made to anonymise the survey so as to achieve wider participation. This means it is not possible to match findings to individual people sleeping rough. However, data monitoring of individuals and the stock and flow of rough sleeping is already embedded in London through the CHAIN database. Most people sleeping rough in Westminster are known by name and recorded on CHAIN and there is frequent outreach contact.

Westminster specific questions were included about needs and challenges identified within the borough so as to add value to the CHAIN data collection method.

15 women known to be sleeping rough but difficult to find at night time were also surveyed one morning but these results were not included in the overall findings due to the different methodology used. The process has, however, cemented relationships between the Pan-London Women's Outreach Network (PLWON) and services including police, transport staff and day centres concerned about female rough sleepers who hide away to keep safe and often sleep during the day in places such as churches, transport terminals and day centres.

## 2 Key Survey Findings

The full report places the survey findings in the context of existing knowledge from the CHAIN database and highlights new information, for example about health and about homeless people's experiences of services drawn from the Westminster additional questions. More work is being done to compare the survey findings and existing information. *NB Percentages throughout are calculated from a total which excludes those people who declined to answer, or for whom information was not recorded.*

### Overview

A total of 250 people out of the 446 people encountered sleeping rough over three nights and one early morning session agreed to participate. This 56% is a high response rate but it is not possible to know if we would have achieved this if we had asked for names.

- 67 people – or almost 27% of the participants – were assessed by the survey scoring mechanism as being in the high needs category requiring long term housing and support but a key finding from this work is that 67 people in the 8+ high needs category is an underestimate. Services report it is more likely to be nearer 100.
- Nearly 59% – 147 participants – were assessed as being in the category requiring temporary supported accommodation or a hostel.

**CHAIN** – The Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) is a multi-agency database recording information about rough sleepers and the wider street population in London. CHAIN, which is commissioned and funded by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and managed by St Mungo's, represents the UK's most detailed and comprehensive source of information about rough sleeping.

**NSNO** – No Second Night Out is a service and an approach to assess and support people sleeping rough for the first time to move away from the streets quickly. This prevents them becoming long term rough sleepers, and ideally not returning – "flowing" – back to the street.

- Just over 14% of people were assessed as requiring only advice or signposting, or the equivalent to the No Second Night Out offer.
- 64% of people (42) scoring 8+ were UK born; 15 people from other EU (European Union) countries including 7 from CEE (Central and Eastern European) countries.
- The relatively small number of people assessed by the survey method as having low needs only requiring advice and assessment may reflect the success of the NSNO approach in supporting around 66% of people sleeping rough off the streets quickly (as recorded by CHAIN).

## Demographics

- Over 46% (114 people) surveyed were under 35, posing challenges given restrictions on the Housing Benefit room rate for under 35s.
- Nearly 4% (9 people) were over 60.
- Just over 11% (28 people) of participants were female as compared to 17% recorded on CHAIN.
- 108 people – 44% of those surveyed – were from the UK which is higher than the proportion of UK rough sleepers recorded on CHAIN in 2015/15 (32.9%).
- 84 people (34.6%) were from CEE countries including 52 people whose country of origin was Romania – the next biggest group after those from the UK (21.4%) although lower than the proportion on CHAIN in 2015/16 reflecting a downward trend which services report continues.
- 27 people (11.1%) were from other EU countries and the remaining 24 people from countries outside of the EU, over half of this group from Africa.

## Needs

- 61% said they had no income of any shape or form.
- A quarter said they had chronic health issues and almost half (47%) said they avoid seeking help when not feeling well.
- More than a third (34%) had been beaten up or attacked since sleeping rough.
- Nearly a quarter hadn't been in permanent stable housing for one to two years. UK born and non EU migrants were most likely to have been on the streets for longer periods.
- 59 people hadn't had stable accommodation for over 3 – 30 years (42 UK, 4 CEE, 9 other EU, 3 Africa and one other where country of origin not recorded).
- Almost 39% of women and nearly 22% of men said homelessness had been caused by a traumatic experience.

## Westminster specific questions

Responses to the set of Westminster additional questions provided new information about homeless people's experiences. This part of the survey also added to our understanding about what had gone wrong and what sort of services people say would make a difference. For example, it found that: quite a lot of people sleeping rough are working (and services deem the numbers to be even higher than identified in the survey); many are not in touch with services but want to be; and, worryingly, that over half reported that they were back on the streets having been rehoused from the streets but arrangements had broken down. This underlines the importance of supporting people to sustain their housing.

- 23 people (9.6%) were working; 7 UK; 9 CEE (4 Rumanian and 3 Polish); 3 Italian; and 3 non EU.
- About half of people said they were coming to London for economic or work reasons.
- 53.5% had been previously housed and ended up back on the streets.
- A third – 34% – said they were not in contact with any services – and of these, 72% said they wanted to be. Over 43.8% of those who haven't been in touch with services and want to be are in 26-35 age group.
- Accommodation – of varying types – was cited most frequently as the intervention that would get people off the streets (in response to an open question about this).

**“Hi all, I really liked the opportunity to get involved in this project to save lives. So many people need help and I could see and feel that I can do that. I was inspired by all of you to sign up and help more. I met quite a few rough sleepers and they said how much more comfortable they were speaking with us. It was great experience. Thank you!”** Volunteer

## 3 Learning

- Community involvement brings a fresh perspective and impetus; it raises awareness and a sense of ownership of the problem within the whole community and has the potential to deliver more ideas and resources.
- 300 volunteers expressed an interest and a diverse group of 250 signed up, undertaking the training, conducting the survey over three nights and one day and inputting the survey data; the group included people with relevant languages. The energy and ideas contributed by volunteers and within the partnership has created a sense of confidence that working together to find new and better ways of supporting people off the streets is possible.
- The approach and the partnership that developed to deliver the survey with the involvement of volunteers have succeeded in putting a spotlight on the issue and created a growing appetite for change.
- Current information gathering and use needs to be reviewed. The survey tool piloted does not add sufficient value in Westminster but the approach, including use of volunteers to conduct surveys, and the emphasis on utilising data gathered to be more effective in supporting people off the streets has illuminated changes needed.
- Efforts to rehouse the most vulnerable must be redoubled through setting targets and making sure that services are fit for purpose.

## 4 Conclusions

The WHAT partnership is concerned that street homelessness has been rising in Westminster and that there is a large proportion of chronically homeless people on the streets who have multiple and complex needs. The survey findings demonstrate starkly the level of risk that all people sleeping rough experience and the poverty and vulnerability they face. The current outreach model is more successful in helping those who have been on the streets for a short period but does not sufficiently meet the needs of the chronically homeless population.

Agencies in Westminster cannot take responsibility for plugging the gaps created by austerity and bureaucratic failure, for instance in the high numbers of people sleeping rough who were previously in care, the armed forces or discharged from prison with no adequate resettlement package, or in the inadequacy of benefits and their administration. Capacity within agencies is stretched due to rising needs and limited resources. The partnership however is committed to doing better – and the best it can.

The EESH survey tool did not produce revelatory findings in Westminster and WHAT partner agencies have concluded that the tool does not add sufficient value to existing data sources. The campaign approach has, however, succeeded in its aims of putting current ways

of working under a spotlight as well as raising awareness amongst and engaging the wider Westminster community. It has also cemented a much-needed partnership of commissioned and non-commissioned agencies that are committed to:

- Taking the next steps in making change to the way services for rough sleepers operate in the borough, including identifying and adopting targets for rehousing the most vulnerable, a Housing First approach and being prepared to change the way partners work to be even better in supporting and housing people.
- Continuing to support the engagement of the whole community including residents, businesses, experts by experience and a broader range of stakeholders to understand the problem and develop new solutions and help get the perspectives of other agencies that may not always be involved through the traditional case conferencing methodologies we apply.
- Reviewing how data is collected currently and how it is used to inform and improve rehousing and support packages. The survey has shone a spotlight on the need for more effective use of current CHAIN data, particularly in rehousing the most vulnerable group, estimated by services to be significantly higher than the number identified by the survey.

## 5 Next steps

- Consulting and testing the survey findings within partner organisations as well as volunteers and rough sleepers.
- Discuss findings with key bodies including housing providers and corporate supporters, WCC, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), London Councils and the Greater London Authority (GLA) whose support is needed to solve rough sleeping in Westminster.
- Identifying and prioritising the most vulnerable cohort by cross-referencing survey findings with CHAIN and agency information.
- Drawing in wider expertise to support development of a new strategy for tackling street homelessness in Westminster including a sustainable survey/information tool, potentially for annual use.
- Developing the framework for a road map for systems change in Westminster, which will utilise the learning to scrutinise current approaches so as to ensure activity, in particular contact time with people sleeping rough, builds trust and is as effective as possible.

**“WHAT if we utilised the space, money and resources that are out there and ended rough sleeping.”** Volunteer

**“WHAT has made me want to do more to support people who are homeless.”** Volunteer

**“Together we have a louder voice. Together we can achieve more. Great experience. Thanks.”** Volunteer

**“More sustainable housing options. This could reduce repeat rough sleeping (hopefully).”** Volunteer

**“Genuine collaborative working, wonderful experience.”** Partner

**“Cooperative working at its best ... there was a spirit of togetherness.”** Partner

# The European **End Street Homelessness** Campaign



Westminster Homeless Action Together is organised by



With support from



City of Westminster

[www.westminsterhomelessactiontogether.org](http://www.westminsterhomelessactiontogether.org)