

ROUGH SLEEPER INITIATIVES

The Government has pledged to end rough sleeping by 2025. In line with this commitment local authorities have worked alongside the Department of Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to produce an Ending Rough Sleeping Plan for their locality. This work tied with DLUHC's Rough Sleeping Grant Funding Initiative (RSI 2022-2025), launched in November 2021, that gave local authorities the opportunity to apply for grant funding to reduce rough sleeping in their area. Previously, Government funding for rough sleeping initiatives has either been made available on an annual basis or for very short-term funding periods. The new 3 year funding bid round enabled local authorities to undertake longer term planning to tackle rough sleeping in their area.

The Council has a strong history of working collaboratively with our neighbouring authorities on tackling rough sleeping and, in this regard, we worked closely with our district and county council colleagues to develop a Gloucestershire Ending Rough Sleeping Plan. This was submitted alongside a Countywide RSI 2022-25 grant funding application in February 2022 by Gloucester City Council on behalf of the district housing authorities. The bid submission was a result of complex negotiation, and at times, difficult decision making as the bid partnership was tasked with stepping down funding levels over the 3 year grant plan period.

District initiatives developed prior to the RSI 2022-25 bid

Historically, there has not been high incidence of visible rough sleeping in the Stroud District. However, there is incidence of individual's finding themselves spending a night or two on the streets between ad-hoc 'sofa surfing' type arrangements. The Countywide Assertive Homeless Outreach Service, jointly commissioned by the district authorities, actively engages with people rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping to take up offers of accommodation but with emergency provision in the form of 'Somewhere Safe to Stay Hubs' centred in Gloucester and Cheltenham offers were often refused.

The Council has actively sought opportunities over the last two years to develop an accommodation pathway and support locally for this client group. Following the Government's edict that all homeless individuals needed to be temporarily housed during the Covid-19 pandemic the Council contacted Open House, a 10-bed accommodation unit in Stroud, that had previously held contract provision for young people aged 16-25 years old. We worked urgently to enable Open House to immediately accommodate single homeless people with complex needs who were at imminent risk of rough sleeping. Over the following months we sought opportunity for Government funding to enable the project to continue in a more meaningful way by the provision of a dedicated in-house support service. While this has been in the form of individual short-term funding pots this has resulted in the provision of two full time support staff, from November 2020 to date, who provide comprehensive support to

Laura Stephen, Senior Housing Strategy & Enabling Officer
Email: laura.stephen@stroud.gov.uk

clients with complex needs, which may include substance misuse, anger management Issues, mental health, attachment disorders and inappropriate behaviours. Open House also work closely with statutory and voluntary organisations to best enable clients to address their support needs and to develop any skills required to manage independent living.

The Council has also creatively used Government Funding for Open House to seek to develop a separate unit of accommodation for emergency placements and to kit out a 'Skills Room' to enable delivery of workshops and training.

In addition, the Council was awarded capital funding from DLUHC through the Next Steps Accommodation Programme to enable the purchase of 3 x 1 bed units to be used as 'Housing Led' provision. The 'Housing Led' initiative provides self contained accommodation to rough sleepers with very complex needs with enhanced housing support attached to help ensure that tenancies are sustained. The Council has also provided 4 x 1 bed 'Housing Led' units bringing the current provision to 7 units. Enhanced Housing Support services are currently jointly commissioned by the countywide partnership and we plan to expand this service further with additional funding from the RSI bid to enable us to utilise 3 additional 1 bed units in the Stroud District taking our total provision to 10 units.

We also used Government funding to support a dedicated Linkworker for the district attached to the Countywide Homeless Outreach team. This role concentrated on the longer term entrenched rough sleeper cohort. While due to funding constraints this was a short term project, the success of this role was built on and strengthened to now form part of the Countywide Assertive Homeless Outreach service provision (the service was recently re-procured).

RSI 2022-25

The countywide partnership bid includes funding requests for core elements of the current rough sleeping pathway including expansion of the Enhanced Housing Support service to support the 'Housing Led' model, funding for emergency accommodation provision in Cheltenham and Gloucester together with the development of a new Multiple Disadvantage Team (a team of specialist officers with expertise in mental health, drug and alcohol services and Adult Social Care). Locally, we have requested funding for the ongoing provision of two full time support staff at Open House to enable continuation of the project (the current funding arrangement ends June 2022). At the time of writing the DLUHC RSI 2022-25 funding bid announcement is embargoed but I hope to be in a position to update you at the Committee meeting.

Laura Stephen, Senior Housing Strategy & Enabling Officer
Email: laura.stephen@stroud.gov.uk