

## **Rough Sleeping Policy FAQs**

### **Who will hand out the notices?**

The notices will be issued by the landowner in cases where there is no anti-social behaviour. Where there is anti-social behaviour, the notices would be handed out by the StreetWise team.

### **Why are people turning down offers of support?**

People often underestimate the risks and dangers of sleeping rough. People turn down offers of support for a number of reasons – each person's situation is different. For example some people have complex needs, difficulties with trust or specific mental health issues, which can mean it takes longer to build up a relationship where the offer will be accepted – but we never give up on anyone. Part of supporting people is challenging them to take up an offer that is not always their first choice. Some people believe (mistakenly) that if they stay in their situation on the streets they will end up being made a better offer.

### **Why do some people say they do not want to go into hostels?**

The most common reason people give is that they do not want to live with other people in hostels whose behaviour might make the environment feel chaotic, often this is based on an out-of-date view of how hostels are now or the range of options available. Some other people are in denial about their situation or have a fixed view about a specific offer they feel they should receive.

### **Why can't people be left alone?**

Sleeping rough is dangerous and severely impacts on people's mental and physical health. People sleeping rough are at significant risk of becoming victims of crime and anti-social behaviour. The longer people spend sleeping rough, the longer it is likely to take to recover from that situation. It is part of supporting people to challenge them where they are making uninformed decisions, and to monitor people's wellbeing to take swift action to prevent serious injury and death.

### **How long will people's things be stored for?**

Items will be stored for 28 days. If property/possessions are unsanitary then they will be disposed of immediately.

### **What is available to people during the day?**

Across the sector, organisations are also working on providing a more creative solution to day services, to try and make sure there is a safe space for rough sleepers to visit during the hours when the shelters are not operational. We are aware that the current provision is not good enough.

### **What is Bristol's city approach to homelessness?**

We are striving for a One City approach to homelessness and rough sleeping in Bristol. No one should have to sleep on the streets.

Bristol is a strategic thinking city, looking at long term solutions, while at the same time responding to the immediate needs of people faced with homelessness.

There are a number of organisations and partnerships working together in Bristol to support those who are homeless and those at risk of homelessness. These organisations include Bristol City Council, St Mungo's, Golden Key, The Julian Trust, Crisis Centre Ministries and Caring in Bristol.

A Rough Sleeping Partnership (RSP) designed to reduce and prevent homelessness has been set up by Bristol City Council. The partnership is led by St Mungo's and includes Avon and Somerset Police,

Julian Trust, Crisis Centre Ministries and the Golden Key Programme. It aims to address the problem of street homelessness in the city.

Homelessness is a complex problem that cannot be solved overnight. That is why all these organisations have come together to work towards long term change, committed to ending the blocks and barriers to finding stable homes for some of the city's most vulnerable people.

### **There seems to be more homeless people in Bristol - why has there been an increase?**

Nationally there has been a rise in homelessness since 2010. The introduction of austerity cuts and welfare changes, alongside much less stable employment and falling real incomes for some households has led to an increased number of evictions, repossessions and financial stresses on families.

Bristol is an economically successful city which attracts people from outside the area. This puts additional pressure on our already limited housing supply. Higher rents and higher house prices, coupled with the lack of new house building means that many people can no longer afford a roof over their heads.

### Top reasons for rough sleeping

For period: 1<sup>st</sup> Dec 2016-30th Nov 2017

Top 3 reasons (52% of all reasons)

#1 Eviction (1 in 4)

#2 Relationship Breakdown (1 in 5)

#3 Leaving Prison/Remand (1 in 10)

### **How many homeless people are there and how many are sleeping rough?**

The number of people rough sleeping in Bristol has increased. Official figures peaked at 97, following the official annual street count in November 2015. This is an increase from 41 rough sleepers (on any one night) in 2014 and less than 10 in 2012 (on any one night). In 2017 the number of people sleeping rough in Bristol was recorded at 86 during the annual count. Although this represents a drop in the official figure recorded in 2015, the actual figure is believed to be higher, and the council and its partners believe that nobody should be forced to sleep rough and remain committed, to addressing the problem of homeless and reducing rough sleeping – eventually reducing to zero - in the city.

The number of people living on the streets is not static, as there are constantly people moving into accommodation and new people finding themselves rough sleeping. Between 1,200-1,400 people a year experience rough sleeping in Bristol, and 100 people every quarter are new to rough sleeping in the city. No children or families with children sleep rough.

In September 2017 there were 518 households placed in temporary accommodation in Bristol and 271 of these had been there more than 6 months. This compares to 282 households in March 2014. This does not include any stay in emergency accommodation before going into the temporary accommodation.

In addition to those in temporary accommodation about 800 people are in supported accommodation at any one time as a result of homelessness.

### **What is the impact of increased homelessness in Bristol?**

There is a greater demand on services commissioned by the council, including the Outreach team, physical and mental health services, housing (shelters, hostels, supported housing etc.) and support working (Golden Key).

In addition there is also a greater demand on community and charitable services including drop-in centres, night shelters and food provision.

On average people are now sleeping rough for a longer period of time – up from around three weeks to three months.

There are a number of issues for those forced to sleep rough. These include a significant reduction in life expectancy, issues with mental and physical health, a lack of safety and an increased risk of being victim of crime and barriers to getting back into work.

For some street homeless people with more complex needs there are also ‘hidden’ costs on a number of services including criminal justice, A&E and substance treatment services.

### **Where can a homeless person go tonight?**

There are four night shelters for homeless people in Bristol with a total of 70 available beds. They cost nothing to access. They are run by charities and are staffed, safe, warm places for people to sleep. There is one where people can queue for a space, one for women only and two that the St. Mungo’s rough sleeper Outreach team nominate people for on a nightly basis. There have consistently been spaces available in the night shelters.

For anyone facing a night on the streets the quickest way to get help from Bristol’s Outreach services is referral to Streetlink – a national service. This can be done by the homeless person themselves or by someone concerned for their welfare.

If you are concerned about someone who is rough sleeping ANYONE can make a street referral via [Streetlink.org.uk](http://Streetlink.org.uk)

### **Do homeless people have to pay for accommodation?**

In general, no they don’t. People who are asking for money sometimes say they need £12-20 to get into a hostel or night shelter, so if you give money it is likely to be spent on other things.

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Bristol City Council currently funds around 1,100 supported housing bed spaces, including homeless hostels. They are free to access if service users do not have income or savings, but service users are expected to contribute a small amount towards heating and hot water costs, typically £10-20 per week, usually payable from benefits. There is a referral and assessment process with a waiting list, but while people are waiting they can stay in a night shelter.

There are cheap backpacker hostels in Bristol that can cost £15 to £20 per night and some homeless people do use these occasionally. But there is free shelter accommodation available across the city especially for those who are engaging with the Outreach services.

### **Why shouldn’t I give out tents to people who are sleeping rough? At least they will be safe and warm as there is little help to move them off the streets.**

We do not want to encourage rough sleeping as it is not safe. The council funds a rough sleeping service that engages and works with rough sleepers to move them into accommodation and support and off the streets. This service also works with a wide range of supported housing providers, private landlords and night shelters to help people find accommodation that suits their needs.

We understand the need for people to stay warm and dry when they are rough sleeping. However, when people are sleeping in tents the rough sleeping team often find it difficult to engage with them and this can prevent or delay helping people into accommodation. Campers can feel more comfortable than if they were rough sleeping and therefore may not engage with the rough sleeper service.

We do not want to encourage encampments in public parks and areas as it often leads to complaints from the public about mess, littering and anti-social behaviour. Parks and public places are not designed for camping and do not have suitable facilities for campers.

We appreciate the offer of help from people who would like to provide tents and sleeping bags, but we do not want to encourage large encampments in the city centre. Instead, we would encourage people to volunteer with a number of organisations that work to provide shelter or help to assist people off the streets and into accommodation and support.

### **Why can't you just give a derelict building for homeless people to stay in?**

As part of the Rough Sleeping Partnership, Bristol City Council has been working with St Mungo's to bring closed buildings into use as temporary accommodation for people who have been rough sleeping. The properties are council owned former offices or community centres which are currently out of use, and are offered to St Mungo's on a 12 month lease and management agreement. The former rough sleepers act as property guardians and in return are charged an affordable rent.

Just opening up a derelict building is unsafe as it is usually unsupervised and unsecured. This type of property does not provide adequate warmth, hygiene solutions or shelter or offer long term move on options. Many homeless people do not want to stay in that sort of environment, but for those that do, there is a real danger that people can become trapped. There is also the risk of creating hot spots for anti-social behaviour and having a negative impact on the local neighbourhood. Properties of this kind could attract drug dealers.

### **How can the public help?**

A new website providing a single online access point for information and help on rough sleeping in Bristol has been launched. Bristol Homeless Connect has been created to offer a single point of access for all the information and advice on offer to rough sleepers or those at risk of rough sleeping. Whether you're in need of support yourself, want to help or just to find out more about it, this website aims to connect you with the right organisations and advice in the city. [www.bristolhomelessconnect.com](http://www.bristolhomelessconnect.com)

### **STREETLINK**

If you are concerned about someone who is rough sleeping ANYONE can make a street referral via [Streetlink.org.uk](http://Streetlink.org.uk) giving the following information:

- the rough sleeper's name (if known)
- physical description
- any distinguishing characteristics (e.g. colour of distinctive clothing/possessions/sleeping bag or distinctive accent)
- specific location where the person is sleeping
- Time they were seen

### **DONATIONS**

**Safer off the Streets (#SOSBristol):** The four charities that provide night shelters to support rough sleepers have come together to set up a single, online crowdfunding appeal that offers people the chance to donate a specific sum - £17 – to provide one bed for one night to a homeless person. <https://www.fundsurfer.com/project/bristol-rough-sleeping-partnership>

### **VOLUNTEERING**

None of our night shelters can operate without the dedication of volunteers, and in Bristol, helping the homeless by giving up a night a week or a night a month is the best way. You can contact the charities directly:

- **St Mungo's:** telephone 0117 954 2958 | website [www.mungos.org](http://www.mungos.org)
- **Julian Trust:** telephone 0117 924 4604 | website [www.juliantrust.org.uk](http://www.juliantrust.org.uk)
- **Crisis Centre Ministries:** telephone 0117 330 1230 | website [www.crisis-centre.org.uk](http://www.crisis-centre.org.uk)
- **Caring in Bristol** telephone 0117 9244 444 | website [www.caringinbristol.org.uk](http://www.caringinbristol.org.uk)

**We are also consulting on vehicle dwelling encampments at the same time as consulting on rough sleeping encampments. The Frequently Asked Questions below refer to both consultations.**

**Why are you asking for feedback on these policies?**

We are formalising our approach to vehicle dwelling and rough sleeping encampments. The policy that has been drafted for rough sleeping encampments builds on an approach already taken in parks so we are looking for consistency across our spaces. For vehicle dwelling encampments it formalises an approach we are already taking with greater emphasis on monitoring. We want feedback from those rough sleeping, living in vehicles, local people and businesses so that any concerns or issues can be discussed and addressed.

**Why is this process taking so long?**

The needs of the individuals concerned are complex, and consideration needs to be given to what happens to people if they are moved on. The council and its partners need to ensure we have a clear understandable process for all concerned, and that the right resources are identified and are in place to enable a policy to be implemented effectively.

**What is happening in the meantime?**

The council and Avon & Somerset Police will continue to monitor encampments of those living in vehicles and will take action when it's necessary. The approach in the first instance is always to come to agreement with those who are vehicle dwelling and address any arising issues with them – it is also to provide signposting and support to meet any welfare needs.

When we know people are rough sleeping they will be visited by outreach workers and they will be invited to have a bed in a shelter. The aim is to get people in to safe accommodation off the streets.

**Why are you asking for feedback on both vehicle dwelling and rough sleeping encampments at the same time?**

Both consultations cover policies that address how the council and partner organisations will manage encampments and sets out the support offered to those occupying the encampments. The policies are being drawn up at the same time and both cover encampments although they relate to people who can have very individual and often complex needs. You can provide feedback on both policies or just one of them during the consultation period.

**What is an encampment?**

An encampment can be one or more people with their belongings on the street, or camped in a tent for the purposes of the rough sleeping encampment policy. In relation to the vehicle dwelling encampments policy it refers to one or more person living in one or more vehicle or structure on the highway.

**Why don't you have one policy for all encampments?**

The needs of those rough sleeping and of those vehicle dwelling can vary considerably. The reasons they find themselves in the position they are in may also be different. The effect that an encampment can have will also vary considerably. Encampments made up of vehicles on the highway will be affected by different legal powers to those of people rough sleeping. The policies are separate as they need to reflect these differences.