

GRAVESHAM ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY

2023-2025



Delivering a Gravesham to be proud of

FOREWORD

GRAVESHAM

ROUGH SLEEPING

STRATEGY



One person sleeping rough on the streets of Gravesham is one person too many.

There are few if any roles assigned to local councils more important than supporting those who find themselves without somewhere safe to sleep.

But it is a task that comes with enormous challenges. It's not simply a case of taking people from the streets, putting them in accommodation and considering it a job done.

Here in Gravesham, we have in place a comprehensive network designed around providing care for people who often have complex needs and supporting them in getting their lives back on track.

It's not something we can do all by ourselves and we work closely with valued partners who care about the issue of rough sleeping just as deeply as we do.

These include Gravesend Methodist Church, Gravesham Sanctuary, House of Mercy, North Kent Mind, Change Grow Live, The Hill Group, Serveco, Porchlight, and local foodbanks among many others.

Together, we try to leave no one behind.

However, there are some who for their own reasons step back from our offers of help, which is why we can never promise that we will get to a stage where we have no one sleeping rough on our streets.

But we don't just leave those people. Our outreach workers speak with them regularly and provide them with food vouchers and other important items.

All of this comes at a considerable financial cost, and we are constantly looking for additional sources of funding or partnerships that can help us to help some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

This strategy details our approach to tackling rough sleeping in the borough and concludes with an action plan detailing how we will do that, and how we will measure and report on our progress.

I hope it gives you an idea of not only the complexity of the challenges we face together, but also the size of the comprehensive response we already have in place and are looking to build on with our partners.

With all good wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jenny Wallace". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Councillor Jenny Wallace
Cabinet Member for Housing
Services

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STRATEGY

1. Introduction

The Rough Sleeping Strategy for Gravesham Borough Council is designed to provide a comprehensive plan to address rough sleeping in the area and to align with the guidelines set out by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The strategy aims to provide a range of services that support the needs of single people or couples who are experiencing or find themselves at risk of homelessness, with the ultimate goal of ending rough sleeping in the borough.

Key Objectives

- To reduce the number of people sleeping rough in the area by 50% over the next 2 years.
- To provide immediate support and accommodation to those who are currently sleeping rough.
- To work with local partners to provide a range of services that support the needs of those who are experiencing or find themselves at risk of homelessness.
- To provide tailored support to vulnerable groups, such as those with mental health issues, those with substance abuse issues, and those who have experienced domestic violence.
- To increase the availability of affordable housing in the area through partnerships with local housing providers.
- To provide training and support to local businesses and organisations to help them identify and support individuals who are experiencing or find themselves at risk of homelessness.
- To work with local partners to raise awareness of homelessness and the services available to support those who are experiencing it.

The council has an established Rough Sleeping service that provides immediate support and accommodation to those who are sleeping rough. The team will:

- Work with local housing providers to increase the availability of affordable housing in the area.
- Provide training and support to local businesses and organisations to help them identify and support individuals who are experiencing homelessness.
- Establish a system for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the strategy and will make adjustments as necessary to ensure that it is meeting its objectives.

LEVELLING UP FUND

2. Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

The government's National Strategy for Rough Sleeping is committed to ending rough sleeping for good by 2027. This commitment was launched in 2018 and the plan sets out several measures that the government will take to help people who are homeless or sleeping rough. Key actions include:

- Investing in support services: The government has committed to investing £100 million in support services, such as hostels and homelessness prevention schemes.
- Improving data and information: The government is working to improve the quality and availability of data on homelessness, to help understand the scale of the problem and target support effectively.
- Providing support for people leaving prison: The government is providing funding to ensure that people leaving prison have access to accommodation and support services.
- Tackling the root causes of homelessness: The government is working to address the root causes of homelessness, such as poverty, mental health issues, and addiction. This includes funding for mental health services and drug and alcohol support.
- Improving coordination between services: The government is working to improve coordination between local authorities, health services, and other organisations that provide support to homeless people.



3. County position

The Government has committed to ending rough sleeping by 2027. Following the launch of the rough sleeping initiative there has been a noteworthy decrease of 43% in the numbers of rough sleepers since 2019. The government has committed to allocating a budget of £500 million over a span of three years for the rough sleeping initiative. This will facilitate the provision of 14,000 beds for rough sleepers, along with the employment of 3,000 staff to offer tailored support throughout England.

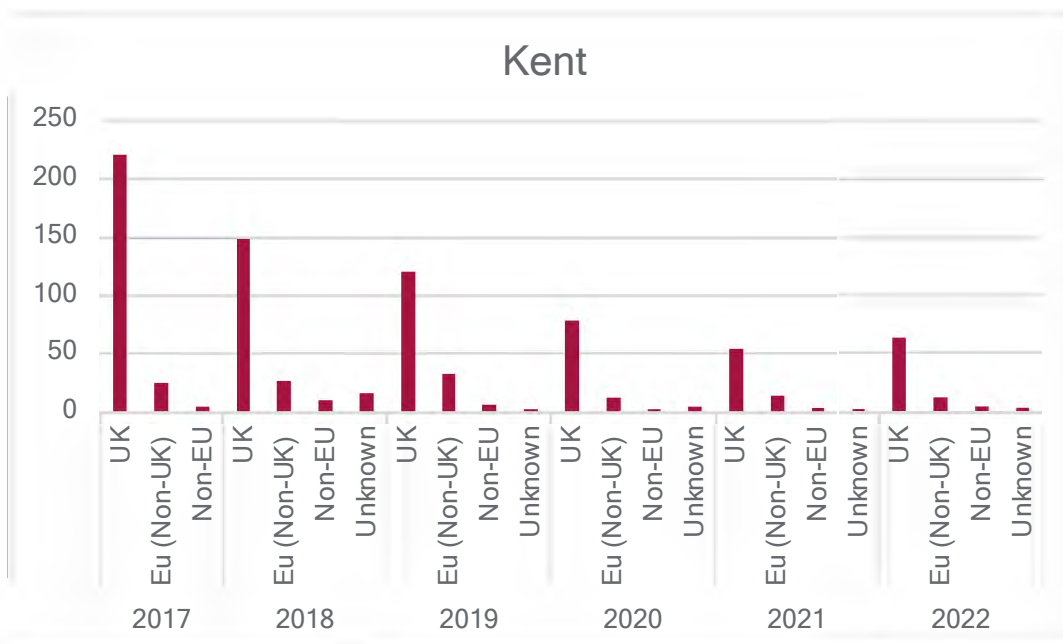
Across Kent, we have seen a significant drop in rough sleeping since 2018.

Rough sleepers in Kent

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
119	104	137	180	200	257	201	162	99	75	85

DLUHC started collating thorough data across England to capture the gender and nationality of rough sleepers in 2017. Across Kent there were a total of 139 female rough sleepers from 2017- 2022, and a total of 732 male rough sleepers. The gender of 8 rough sleepers was unknown.

The below graph shows the nationality of rough sleepers from 2017-2022.



GRAVESHAM

4. Gravesham's position and challenges

Following a successful three-year bid, the Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) has been allocated funding of £999,631 for the period 2022-2025. In addition, the council has invested in the supported housing provision as it has a clear ambition to end rough sleeping. This enabled the council to bid for long-term accommodation support and received an allocation of £350,372.

RSI

Rough Sleeping Partnership Manager

1 x Housing Resettlement Officer

2.5 x Outreach Workers

1 Specialist Drug and Alcohol Worker

0.5 Mental Health Practitioner

0.5 x Support Worker for supported accommodation

All year-round flexible surge accommodation

Private rented incentives

Inform licence

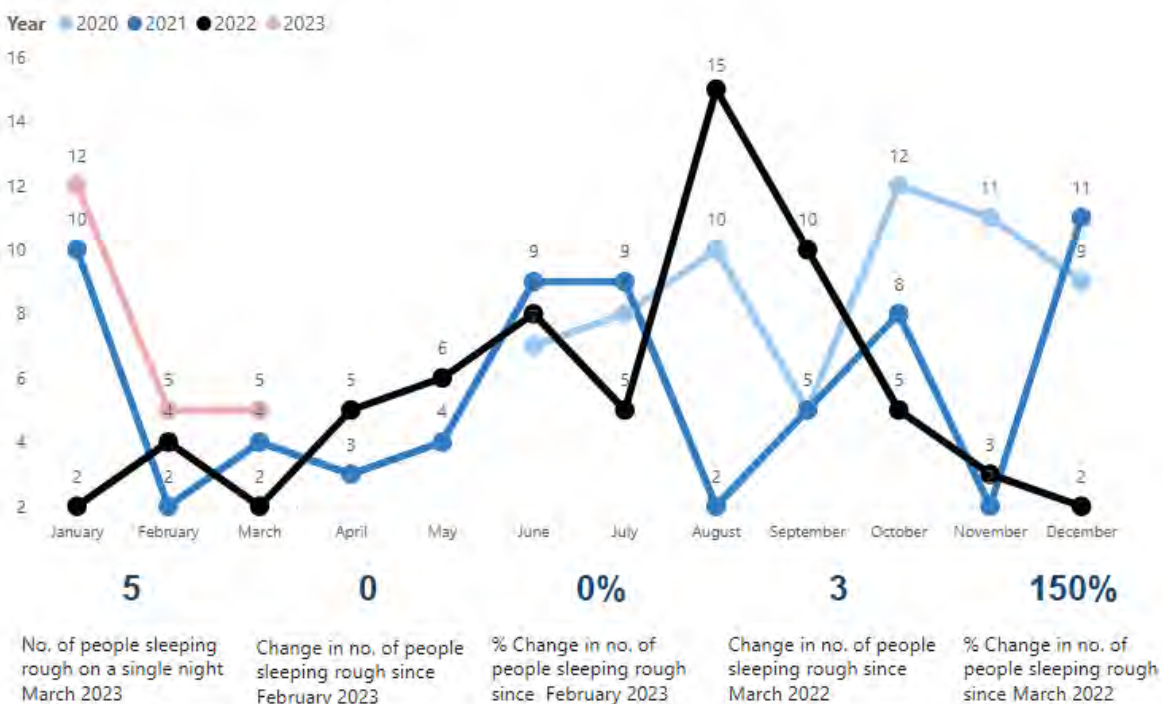
Personalised budget

NSAP/RSAP

Provide a 10-bedroom supported accommodation with the provision of 4 emergency bed spaces.

The below shows the number of people sleeping rough on a single night.

No. of people sleeping rough on a single night



Some of the challenges Gravesham faces include:

- Increasing cost and inaccessibility of the private rented sector: Gravesham is close to London and this has an impact on the local market, where rents have increased significantly at a difficult time, resulting in more accommodation becoming inaccessible and unaffordable to those on low incomes or at risk of homelessness.
- Increasing need for services: This is true across the spectrum of homelessness but is particularly true in relation to households losing their accommodation in the private rented sector. The use of Section 21 notices to bring private sector tenancies to an end is a particular challenge.
- Increasing numbers of rough sleepers: The number of people found rough sleeping has fluctuated in Gravesham. Our population of rough sleepers is made up of individuals who have a local connection to the area and also those from wider Kent, UK and the European Union. Each of these individuals is unique with their own history of how they came to sleep rough and what resources and housing options are open to them in Gravesham. Although the rough sleeping team has made significant progress in supporting people into accommodation, new people moving onto the streets for the first time continues to rise.
- Complex needs: Rough sleepers with a local connection often have very complex needs (e.g. people with a triple diagnosis and/or a serious forensic history, couples, and people with pets) and need very sophisticated and personalised accommodation and support options. A major concern is the level of substance misuse.
- Entrenched rough sleepers: Those who are very entrenched in a street lifestyle can often be resistant to taking up offers of support (including health and substance abuse support) and accommodation options. These individuals can also contribute to notable levels of anti-social behaviour that negatively impacts on the community.
- Limited accommodation options: Some clients with a local connection to Gravesham are unwilling to use accommodation in other areas while others face the reality of the lack of specialist provision.
- Returning to rough sleeping: There are a number of people who return to rough sleeping after a period of time in either temporary or long-term accommodation.
- People with no status: There are a number of households without a status in the UK and language barriers which require bespoke work with these individuals and close working with the Home Office.

PRIORITIES

5. Our strategic priorities

Gravesham Borough Council, like many local authorities in the UK, has set out its own strategy to end rough sleeping in the borough. The strategy is based on a number of strategic priorities, which are as follows:

- **PRIORITY 1** - Prevention: The council aims to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping by providing early intervention and support to those at risk of losing their home. This includes working closely with private landlords and social housing providers to provide more affordable and accessible housing options.
- **PRIORITY 2** - Outreach: The council aims to identify and engage with people who are sleeping rough in the borough, providing them with support and assistance to help them find stable accommodation. This includes partnering with local charities and outreach teams to provide services such as health checks, advice, and referrals to other services.
- **PRIORITY 3** - Multi-agency working: The council works in partnership with other agencies, such as health services and the police, to coordinate efforts to tackle rough sleeping in the borough.
- **PRIORITY 4** - Support and services: The council is committed to providing a range of services and support to help people who have experienced rough sleeping to rebuild their lives. This includes access to health services, training and education, and employment support.

Overall, the priorities of Gravesham Borough Council's strategy to end rough sleeping focus on prevention, outreach, and the provision of support and services to help people find and maintain stable accommodation.

5.1 Rough sleeping verifications

Outreach

The council employs outreach workers via Serveco and Porchlight to conduct early morning/late evening outreach to verify rough sleepers. As per the guidance provided by DHLUC, individuals who have been confirmed to be rough sleepers by our outreach team may be provided with temporary housing after a thorough evaluation of their needs and risks. However, if there is uncertainty surrounding their homelessness/rough sleeping status, they may be required to undergo up to three verifications before being offered temporary accommodation.

Rough sleepers are also reported via StreetLink, where a report is sent directly to the rough sleeping partnership manager and senior rough sleeping outreach worker. Typically, the outreach team go out twice a week to verify any rough sleepers within the borough who have been reported to us. The outreach team is reactive and conducts outreach more frequently in line with the number of reports received.

SWEP

When the temperature reaches certain lows or highs, Gravesham Borough Council will take the decision to activate the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) for verified rough sleepers.

According to the guidelines provided by Homeless Link, the activation of SWEP takes place in anticipation of severe weather conditions. SWEP is implemented at a minimum when the forecast indicates three consecutive nights with temperatures reaching zero degrees or below. However, the approach adopted by Gravesham is adaptable, as we take into account additional factors such as wind chill, snow accumulation, rainfall, near-freezing temperatures, strong winds, or excessive heat.

When SWEP is activated, it is accessible to everyone rough sleeping, including those who may otherwise be excluded from the service, people with immigration status restrictions, etc.

https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/SWEP_and_Winter_Provision_Toolkit_2022_JP020822_002.pdf

The RSI team is extremely reactive during this time, increasing the number of outreaches conducted to verify rough sleepers and are out every day throughout the SWEP period offering support and conducting welfare checks.

This protocol is in place to protect rough sleepers who cannot find shelter and keep themselves safe from harm in periods of extreme weather. For this reason, during SWEP periods, if an individual is verified whilst SWEP is active, they will be offered temporary SWEP accommodation.

During office hours rough sleepers can self-refer and outside agencies can refer individuals to the Housing Options Service and out of hours referrals can be made by contacting the emergency telephone number. There is the opportunity for the individual to remain in temporary accommodation following the deactivation of SWEP, providing the client engages with the RSI team and engages with the process of completing an RSI Needs Assessment and all support offered thereafter.

Annual rough sleeping street count

Gravesham and its surrounding local authorities plan for the count in advance. A date is confirmed between the local authorities to conduct the annual street count and avoid any duplicate head counts. When conducting the annual rough sleeping count, Gravesham RSI team covers the known rough sleeping locations, any StreetLink reports made, rural areas, as well as typical streets, town centre, car parks etc.

We record data on the number and demographic characteristics of rough sleepers we encounter. We compile this data and provide a report to Homeless Link.

Bi-monthly rough sleeping street count

Much like the annual street count, the rough sleeping team, its partners, and volunteers conduct a rough sleeping count covering all the known rough sleeping locations, any StreetLink reports, rural areas as well as typical streets, town centres, car parks etc.

5.2 Rough sleeping partners

- **Serveco:** Delivers the reactive outreach support in the borough. The workers help in identifying and verifying rough sleepers. Also delivers night concierge service in Gravesham council's support accommodation provision.
- **Porchlight:** Delivers the harm reduction outreach staff who work intensively with those who have an identified substance/alcohol misuse issue.
- **Gravesend Methodist Church Community Centre:** Operates a daytime hub for homeless guests on Monday, Wednesday and Friday between 10am -12 noon.
- **Gravesham Sanctuary:** Operates a day centre for those facing homelessness, providing a point of contact and safe space.
- **Police and Probation:** Provide updates on those who are due out of prison or who have been arrested and/or charged.
- **House of Mercy:** Runs a day centre that caters to homeless individuals, offering hot drinks, sandwiches, and soup. They also offer guidance on benefits and housing, as well as directing clients to other appropriate agencies. Readily accepts referrals for accommodating clients with minimal support requirements.
- **Lighthouse Counselling:** Provides counselling sessions to our rough sleepers, those in supported accommodation or in settled accommodation moved on by the RSI. The sessions support our clients to process difficult and traumatic experiences.
- **Gravesham Borough Council Housing Needs team:** Refers client who do not meet the criteria for temporary accommodation and may be at risk of rough sleeping. Also refers clients who have vulnerabilities and require support.
- **Change Grow Live:** Works with our clients to help reduce the intake of drugs and/or alcohol.
- **North Kent Mind:** Delivers the mental health support in Gravesham council supported accommodation provision for rough sleepers with support needs. Support is offered to tenants to overcome their vulnerabilities and be ready for independent accommodation.

5.3 Rough sleeping support and assistance

Support and assistance available to verified rough sleepers

- Emergency accommodation
- Supported accommodation
- Referrals to private rented accommodation
- Mental health support
- Drug & alcohol/ harm reduction support
- Counselling
- Help with getting a form of I.D
- Help with status in the UK
- Register to a GP/ Dentist
- Applying for benefits
- Help with finding employment
- Basic life skills
- Reconnection abroad
- Debt repayment plans
- Local reconnections
- Booking Covid vaccines
- HepC testing



6. Rough Sleeping supported accommodation

In November 2021, Gravesham Borough Council opened our own supported accommodation for vulnerable rough sleepers. It provides 10 ensuite bedrooms and 4 emergency overnight crash-pads. The Government's Next Steps program has funded the mental health support which is offered in-house by our partners North Kent Mind and a night concierge is also offered by Serveco to ensure the property is manned 24/7.

Gravesham's supported accommodation scheme is instrumental in tackling homelessness within the borough. It means that the council can offer a 24-hour support service, seven days a week and provide settled accommodation for rough sleepers with complex needs. The scheme is offered as a settled home for a period of up to 2 years so there is no pressure for residents to move out. It provides support to prepare residents for independent living.

From the opening in November 2021, the supported accommodation project has accommodated 34 rough sleepers to date. As of March 2023, 14 rooms were occupied in Wrotham Road, 14 previous tenants were moved on into suitable and affordable accommodation.

7. Monitoring the Rough Sleeping Strategy

Some of the actions in this strategy are actively taking place now whereas others will take time to achieve. There can be legislative or policy changes at a national or local level that could render some of the actions in the strategy redundant or unachievable. In addition, there may be new guidance that would require the strategy to be updated. It is therefore important that the strategy responds to changing needs and new actions are agreed as necessary.

The strategy is accompanied by an action plan which sets out when the actions will be completed and achieved. The strategy and action plan will be reviewed and monitored regularly, and a report will be produced and published annually to update the community and other interested parties on how the strategy is progressing.

Reporting will also take place through the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.