



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

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**Ministry of Housing, Communities
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Dear Local Leaders,

Thank you for your continuing work in response to the COVID-19 crisis. This scale of the challenge we all face is unprecedented. I know this is a particularly challenging time and that you and your staff are going above and beyond to help support your communities at this time.

Last week, the Government asked Dame Louise Casey to lead the Government's response to COVID-19 and rough sleeping to help make sure that we bring everyone in. It is our joint responsibility to safeguard as many homeless people as we can from COVID-19. Our strategy must be to bring in those on the streets to protect their health and stop wider transmission, particularly in hot spot areas, and those in assessment centres and shelters that are unable to comply with social distancing advice.

This approach aims to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on people facing homelessness and ultimately on preventing deaths during this public health emergency. Given the nature of the emergency, the priority is to ensure that the NHS and medical services are able to cope and we have built this strategy based on NHS medical guidance and support.

The basic principles are to:

- focus on people who are, or are at risk of, sleeping rough, and those who are in accommodation where it is difficult to self-isolate, such as shelters and assessment centres
- make sure that these people have access to the facilities that enable them to adhere to public health guidance on hygiene or isolation, ideally single room facilities
- utilise alternative powers and funding to assist those with no recourse to public funds who require shelter and other forms of support due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- mitigate their own risk of infection, and transmission to others, by ensuring they are able to self-isolate as appropriate in line with public health guidance

This should be done by taking the following programme of actions:

1. Convening a local coordination cell to plan and manage your response to COVID and rough sleeping involving the local authority (housing, social care and public health) and local NHS partners together. This would then report in to wider local COVID structures.

2. Seeking to stop homeless people from congregating in facilities such as day centres and street encampments where there is a higher risk of transmission
3. Urgently procuring accommodation for people on the streets if you have not already done so – MHCLG will support you to do so if you are struggling to procure sufficient units
4. Triaging people where possible into three cohorts driven by medical advice:
 - those with symptoms of COVID19;
 - those with pre-existing conditions but without symptoms; and
 - those without any of the above.

Attached to this letter is additional guidance on the approach that agencies should be taking to triaging agreed with NHS England and Public Health England.

5. Getting the social care basics such as food, and clinician care to people who need it in the self-contained accommodation. It is likely that you will need to utilise your commissioned homeless services to provide support to people in this accommodation and we urge you to work with the commissioned and non-commissioned sector to make sure there are adequate levels of support provided.
6. If possible, separating people who have significant drug and alcohol needs from those who do not.

In the longer term it will of course be necessary to identifying step-down arrangements for the future, including the re-opening of shelter-type accommodation.

Given the Prime Minister's announcement on Monday night that the public should be staying in their homes wherever possible, it is now imperative that rough sleepers and other vulnerable homeless are supported into appropriate accommodation by the end of the week. Dame Louise is spearheading all of our efforts to get everyone in. As she has said 'it won't be perfect but all of us together will do our best'.

We know that this requires funding. Last week, the Government announced £1.6bn for local authorities to respond to other COVID-19 pressures including for services helping the most vulnerable, including homeless people. This grant will cover all costs incurred in the first phase of the response, but we will keep future funding need under review. To support our understanding of what authorities or additional funding is likely to be required we will be working with local authorities to develop an ongoing assessment of costs.

Thank you very much for everything you are doing to save lives and provide care for some of the most vulnerable in our society.

PD

Luke Hall MP