

Tonbridge and Malling Rough Sleeper Protocol

1. Background

It is a priority of The West Kent Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2016 – 2021 to improve the availability of housing for all and to work with key partners to meet the challenge of preventing homelessness over the lifetime of the Strategy, ensuring support is available to help people avoid being without a home. The link to the Strategy can be found here

http://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/227098/79074C40686724F2E0531401A8C0CDFC_Joint_Housing_Homeless_Strategy_TW1374_V4_Final.pdf

This Rough Sleeper Protocol will not replace the existing pathway of accessing housing services and customers who are at high risk of homelessness should still be referred to the Housing Options and Support Service as early as possible to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping. This protocol is to be used when individuals are already rough sleeping.

This protocol will sit alongside the Councils Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP), Allocations Policy and the Councils Rent Deposit Scheme with the intention of meeting the aims contained with the Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2016 – 2021.

By law (The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017) we have a legal responsibility to provide long-term accommodation to someone where we are satisfied that household has a local connection to Tonbridge and Malling and is:

- Homeless
- Eligible
- In priority need

Therefore, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council is not under a legal duty to provide emergency accommodation for everyone who is rough sleeping and provision of temporary emergency accommodation where the Council has no emergency accommodation duty will be at the discretion of the Housing Options and Support Manager.

2 Purpose of the Protocol

This protocol defines the process that Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and its partners will take if a member of the public or any other organisation has reported a rough sleeper within the Borough. It details how partners will work together to provide timely advice and assistance to any rough sleeper aged 18 and over. Rough sleepers aged 16 and 17 must still be reported to the Housing Options and Support Service, but they will be assisted via the 'Joint Protocol for Homeless 16 and 17 year olds' which is a Kent Wide Protocol and the link to this can be found here:

<https://www.kenthousinggroup.org.uk/protocols/joint-protocol-homeless-16-17-year-olds/>

This protocol sets out the responsibilities of each of the main signatory organisations.

3 Aims

The aims of this protocol are to:

- Prevent rough sleeping in Tonbridge and Malling.
- Ensure early identification of rough sleepers
- Ensure that rough sleepers are aware of their housing options and the services that are able to assist them and, where possible, rough sleepers are referred to services for support.
- Increase reports of rough sleeping from members of the public or any other organisation who come into contact with a rough sleeper.

4 Procedure

4.1 Reporting a rough sleeper

Members of the public: Members of the public can report a rough sleeper by contacting the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council Housing Options and Support Service on 01732 876067 during office hours (Monday to Friday 8.30am – 5pm). Due to potential safety risks, members of the public will be dissuaded from approaching rough sleepers and will only be expected to provide information regarding the rough sleepers location, name (if known), gender, approximate age, ethnicity, and any issues we should be aware of. Members of the public can also provide us with their contact details if they wish to be informed of the outcome of their referral.

If a member of the public encounters a rough sleeper they can also report this to Porchlight who operate a Tell Us service and provide an outreach service in the district. They can be contacted via telephone on 0800 567 7699. Alternatively a web form can be completed. The link to this can be found here:

<https://www.porchlight.org.uk/tell-us>

Alternatively reports can be made via Street Link. The link to do this can be found here:

www.streetlink.org.uk/tell-us-about-a-rough-sleeper

Street link also offer a smartphone app which can be downloaded to smartphones.

When a member of the public reports a rough sleeper to Streetlink, this referral is then passed to Porchlight and Tonbridge and Malling Council will also be notified of the report.

If a member of the public encounters a rough sleeper out of hours, although it will not be encouraged due to health and safety issues, there may be circumstances where the rough sleeper is present with the member of the public and willing to stay with them for the

assessment. If this is the case, the member of the public can report the rough sleeper using the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council out of hour's service on 01732 844522.

If the member of the public does not wish to remain with the Rough Sleeper, then they can contact the Porchlight number and report the rough sleeper, complete the form on line or report via the Streetlink app and again Porchlight and the Council will be notified of the report.

Partner organisations: Partner organisations can report a rough sleeper by contacting Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council's Housing Options and Support Service on 01732 876067 during office hours (Monday to Friday 8am – 5.30pm).

If a partner organisation encounters a rough sleeper out of hours and the rough sleeper is present and they are willing to stay with them for the assessment, they can report the rough sleeper using the Out of Hours Service on 01732 844522. Partner organisations will be encouraged to approach rough sleepers if it is assessed as being safe to do so in accordance with their own organisation's procedures. If the rough sleeper is not present then the partner organisation should report the rough sleeper via either the Porchlight number or online or the StreetLink website or smart phone app.

4.2 Procedure if rough sleeper is reported during office hours:

If there is availability within the service, a Housing Options and Support Officer will attempt to make contact with and interview the rough sleeper on the same day, either by phone or if they are able to come into the Kings Hill Office then they will be encouraged to do so. If it is not possible to do this, then a Housing Options and Support Officer will attempt to make contact and interview the rough sleeper the next working day. When contact is made, it will follow the normal interview process of establishing their situation and identifying whether they have any accommodation available to them. If they have access to accommodation, the Housing Options and Support Officer will assist them in making contact and/or help them get there (e.g. pay for travel costs).

In some circumstances, emergency temporary accommodation may be arranged. This will be at the discretion of the Housing Options and Support Manager based on the assessment of the needs of the rough sleeper and the individual case.

This assessment may also identify that there are no duties for the Council to provide emergency accommodation. In this situation, the authority will have a duty to help the Rough Sleeper, and will look for accommodation, but this may be hostels that are not in the district and may not be immediately available, or it may include offers of accommodation in shared housing or in the private rented sector.

If the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol is active, as this is a humanitarian response to Rough Sleeping, then accommodation will be offered to any rough sleeper reported regardless of their situation, in line with this protocol.

4.3 Procedure if rough sleeper is reported out of hours:

Reports of rough sleepers submitted through Streetlink will automatically generate an email which is sent to Porchlight and the Housing Options and Support Service. This email inbox is checked each working day and, a Housing Options and Support Officer will attempt to make contact with and interview the rough sleeper the same day unless the report is submitted out of hours or over the weekend, where it will be dealt with the next working day. If it is not possible to do this, then the officer will attempt to make contact and interview the rough sleeper the next working day. When contact is made, it will follow the normal interview process as outlined above.

Reports to the Out of Hours Service should only be made if it is viable for the rough sleeper to be assessed at that point in time by the Duty Housing Options and Support Officer. If it is, the officer will take the relevant details and assess if there is a requirement for emergency accommodation following existing procedures. All rough sleepers reported through the Out of Hours Service will be offered an appointment for the next working day to undertake a full housing assessment. If it is not possible to do this, it will be the next working day.

4.4 Use of temporary accommodation

If the rough sleeper is reported during office hours, the Housing Options and Support Officer will establish if there is an appropriate direct access hostel place available. If there is no place available and the rough sleeper is not known to the authority, nor have they worked with them previously, then the Council may provide emergency temporary accommodation for up to 2 nights to allow the authority to work with the individual to support them to reconnect to where they came from or into appropriate accommodation. This accommodation could be out of the Borough. The cost of this will be met out of existing emergency accommodation budgets.

If the assessment was not carried out on the same day, the rough sleeper may be placed into emergency temporary accommodation for one night at the discretion of the Housing Options and Support Manager and the Rough Sleeper should attend an assessment with the Housing Options and Support Service the next day.

5. Safeguarding

Where a safeguarding issue is identified an appropriate safeguarding referral must be made in line with Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council's Safeguarding Children and Adult at Risk of Abuse & Neglect Policy and Procedure.

If there are concerns that an adult with care and support needs is at risk of, or suffering abuse and neglect the Housing Options and Support Officer must make an Adult Safeguarding referral to the Front Door Service 03000 41 11 11 during office hours or 03000 41 91 91 out of hours.

If there are safeguarding concerns in relation to a child or vulnerable adult the Housing Options and Support Officer must make a referral to the Front Door Service on 03000 41 11 11, out of hours 03000 41 91 91.

5. Partner responsibilities

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council's Housing Options and Support Service will investigate all reports of rough sleepers following the procedure outlined in this protocol.

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council's Community Safety Team will ensure that they report sightings of rough sleepers to the Housing Options and Support Service using the partner organisation procedure outlined in this protocol. The team will also continue to share their local knowledge as part of the rough sleeper estimate.

Outreach Service will respond to reports of rough sleepers within their procedures and work with the Council on delivering services to those who may be rough sleeping and ensure that they receive necessary services

Kent Police will ensure that they report sightings of rough sleepers to the Housing Options and Support Service using the partner organisation procedure outlined in this protocol

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council Safeguarding Team will respond to reported safeguarding concerns within the locally agreed procedures.

6. Reviewing the protocol

The protocol will be reviewed annually or sooner should there be any major changes in National or Local policy. Where minor changes are required to the protocol this will be undertaken with the agreement of the Head of Service, Director and / or the Cabinet Member for Housing.

7. Further information

If you would like further information about this protocol please contact Tonbridge and Malling Borough Councils Housing Options and Support Service

In writing: Kings Hill, Gibson Building, Gibson Drive, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent ME19 4LZ

By telephone: 01732 876067

By email: housing.services@tmbc.gov.uk