

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET HOUSING PANEL 30 OCTOBER 2017
REPORT OF DIRECTOR (HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

ROUGH SLEEPER PROTOCOL

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Rough Sleeper Protocol attached at Appendix A sets out what help is available to anyone found to be rough sleeping in the Borough. It has been drawn up by a sub group of the local Homeless Prevention Partnership, which is chaired by the council.
- 1.2 Key partners involved in this partnership include officers from the council, Fire Brigade, Herts Constabulary, local Housing Associations, YMCA, Herts Young Homeless, Resolve, Citizens Advice and Druglink.
- 1.3 The aim of the protocol is to provide a coordinated and streamlined approach to responding to reports of rough sleeping in the borough, in line with the Governments 'No second night out' agenda.
- 1.4 The Protocol was originally agreed in 2014 and has recently been reviewed in light of the newly commissioned services which aim to provide additional support to rough sleepers locally. The changes to the original Protocol have been highlighted in the Appendix to this report.
- 1.5 This report seeks to update members on the approach to tackling rough sleeping locally and requests members to endorse the revised protocol.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Members to note the content of this report and to endorse the revised Protocol – set out in Appendix A.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 In July 2011 the government published its “**Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out nationwide**”.
- 3.2 The vision document encouraged Local Authorities to develop rough sleeping Services, in line with the “No Second Night Out” principles which are:
 - New rough sleepers should be identified and helped off the streets immediately so that they do not fall into a dangerous rough sleeping lifestyle.
 - Members of the public should be able to play an active role by reporting and referring people sleeping rough.

- Rough sleepers should be helped to access a place of safety where their needs can be quickly assessed and they can receive advice on their options.
 - Rough sleepers should be able to access emergency accommodation and other services, such as healthcare, if needed.
 - If people have come from another area or country and find themselves sleeping rough, the aim should be to reconnect them back to their local community unless there is a good reason why they cannot return. There, they will be able to access housing and recovery services, and have support from family and friends.
- 3.3 The aims of the protocol are in line with this principle and set out within the protocol - Section 3 of appendix A.
- 3.4 The degree of rough sleeping is monitored locally via the Homeless Prevention Partnership. In autumn 2014, the rough sleeper's count which was carried out found a single rough sleeper. This was widely believed to be a low figure and not representative of the true situation in the borough.
- 3.5 The following year in 2015, an estimate was made based on intelligence and information from partner organisations. This produced a figure of 14 rough sleepers. The experience throughout the year following this estimate did not support this figure, and therefore another count took place in autumn 2016. This count found 3 rough sleepers, but 3 other locations with evidence of recent activity, suggesting a true figure of 6 rough sleepers. As only people physically seen can be counted, the official figure was recorded as 3 people.
- 3.6 The definition of what constitutes a rough sleeper for the official count or annual estimate as set out in the DCLG guidance is as follows:
- “People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or “bashes” which are makeshift shelters, often comprised of cardboard boxes).*
- 3.7 For the purposes of this protocol, a rough sleeper is someone whose housing situation falls into one of the following categories:
- *Rough sleeping on the streets*
 - *Sleeping in tents, cars or other vehicles*
 - *Sleeping in abandoned buildings / any other accommodation with no tenancy*
- 3.8 Since the count in November 2016, information has been recorded in a way that will best serve the purpose of recording the extent of rough sleeping. We have seen an increase in rough sleeping since last November and to assist us in managing the reports they are now entered into mapping software and repeat reports have been logged so that duplicate cases are not recorded as additional individuals. This additional resource is expected to be crucial to achieving a more accurate picture of rough sleeping locally.

- 3.9 Each year in agreement with partner authorities a rough sleeper count is carried out on the same night, the decision to carry out an estimate has been agreed and a provisional date of 23 November set, the count is an indicator and given it is a snap shot in time, we also take account of the ongoing recording of rough sleepers.
- 3.10 Over the last ten months we have seen a total of 65 reports, 20 are clearly for 3 known individuals. The other 45 reports are not clear enough to determine repeat calls for the same person, for example, there are several reports about people sleeping behind the same shop in Hatfield, but these cannot all be attributed to the same person as the descriptions differ. There are also reports about Eastern European males but there is enough variation between reports to suggest they are not all the same person.
- 3.11 There is a clear focus, strategy and effort towards ending street homelessness in the borough. Partnerships with support services and housing providers enable the council to respond to cases and reports are encouraged from members of the public. Contact details for the council and the national Streetlink scheme are publicised, to assist people to report any rough sleeping that they see.
- 3.12 Most recently, Welwyn Hatfield Housing First has been launched; partners of the project Resolve, Citizens Advice and Druglink increase the resources available to the council in tackling the problem of street homelessness. A dedicated outreach team from Resolve now visits each reported location and engages with the individuals who are rough sleeping. Assistance is offered, ranging from advice to improve their situation, to the provision of accommodation. Welfare advice is available from local Citizens Advice and Druglink can provide accommodation for a limited number of people who have alcohol dependency issues.
- 3.13 The protocol has been shared with key agencies and a leaflet that was devised in previous years continues to raise awareness and sets out the help that is available. Referred to in appendix B.

Implications

4 Financial Implication(s)

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

5 Legal Implication(s)

- 5.1 The council has a legal duty to provide free housing advice and assistance under the Housing Act 1996 (amended by Homelessness Act 2002).

6 Climate Change Implication(s)

- 6.1 There are no Climate Change implications arising directly from this report.

7 Risk Management Implications

- 7.1 There are potentially legal implications (failing to meet a statutory duty to assess a homeless application) and a reputational risk (failing to address a very visible social issue appropriately) in the absence of a clear protocol to deal with rough sleeping. The introduction of the protocol reduces the risk in these areas. The approach to operational risk management is set out in the protocol itself.

8 Security & Terrorism Implications

- 8.1 There are no additional implications arising from this report.

9 Procurement Implications

- 9.1 There are no implications arising from this report.

10 Link to Corporate Priorities

- 10.1 I confirm that the subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Priority, Meeting the Borough's housing needs, and specifically to the achievement of the priority – Prevention of Homelessness – set out in the council's Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2013 – 2018.

11 Equality and Diversity

- 11.1 No negative impact was identified on any of the protected groups under Equalities legislation.

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Appendix A

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL ROUGH SLEEPER PROTOCOL

Contents

1. Background
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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Welwyn Hatfield's Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2013-2018) contains a variety of actions that seek to prevent homelessness in Welwyn Hatfield and to support households with timely housing options advice and support. As a result very few individuals should have to resort to sleeping rough before help and support is provided. Those working with customers who may be at risk of homelessness should always make a referral as early as possible so that WHBC are able to work with households to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping.
- 1.2 A coordinated multi-agency approach is required to ensure that anyone sleeping rough, or at risk of sleeping rough, is able to access the necessary support to help them off the streets and to address the problems that led to their homelessness. In Welwyn Hatfield this approach is set out in this document.
- 1.3 The Rough Sleeper Protocol was approved by the Welwyn Hatfield Homeless Prevention Forum in 2014 and formalises the roles and responsibilities of all partner organisations involved in delivering services to, or responding to reports of, rough sleepers in Welwyn Hatfield.
 - The protocol has been updated in September 2017 to take into account the ring fenced funding the government has allocated to Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council for 17/18 and 18/19 to support schemes that will both help those at risk of homelessness and those experiencing crisis.
 - The Welwyn Hatfield Housing First Project has been set up in partnership with Resolve, Citizens Advice and Druglink
- 1.4 Guidance was published on '**Evaluating the Extent of Rough Sleeping**' in September 2010. This sets out the methodology for carrying out rough sleeper counts and providing intelligence-based estimates on the number of rough sleepers in Local Authority areas. It requires Local Authorities to submit annual estimates of rough sleepers in their area based on either a rough sleeper count or intelligence-based estimate. This should be informed through consultation with all agencies coming into contact with rough sleepers. Counts and estimates are verified by Homeless Link to ensure accurate and consistent approaches across the country.

- 1.5 In July 2011 the government published its “**Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out nationwide**”. Central to this vision was the government’s pledge to roll out the principles of “No Second Night Out” which has been operating in London since 1st April 2011. The aims of which are to ensure that anyone who does spend one night sleeping rough is immediately helped off the streets.
- The approach identifies where rough sleepers are coming from and improves prevention and recovery services in these areas. It also sits alongside reconnection policies which aim to reconnect rough sleepers with services and support networks in their home towns and, in some cases, their country of origin.
- 1.6 The vision document encouraged Local Authorities to develop rough sleeping services in line with the “No Second Night Out” principles which are:
- New rough sleepers should be identified and helped off the streets immediately so that they do not fall into a dangerous rough sleeping lifestyle.
 - Members of the public should be able to play an active role by reporting and referring people sleeping rough.
 - Rough sleepers should be helped to access a place of safety where their needs can be quickly assessed and they can receive advice on their options.
 - Rough sleepers should be able to access emergency accommodation and other services, such as healthcare, if needed.
 - If people have come from another area or country and find themselves sleeping rough, the aim should be to reconnect them back to their local community unless there is a good reason why they cannot return. There, they will be able to access housing and recovery services, and have support from family and friends.

Homeless Links strategic plan 2015-2020 is to continue to work in all local areas to promote and develop the principles of No Second Night Out as the core way of working.

- 1.7 As part of the national commitment to roll out the principles of No Second Night Out the **StreetLink** service was launched in December 2012. A nationwide wide 24/7 phone line, website and mobile app that members of the public can use to report concerns about individuals who may be sleeping rough on the streets in their area.
- 1.8 StreetLink passes the information to the relevant local council. This will be followed up within ten days to find out what happened to the rough sleeper reported. An update will be provided to the member of the public, if they ask to be kept informed.
- The overall aim of the StreetLink service is to provide a level of public scrutiny and bottom up action to tackling rough sleeping. It will also allow the government to establish a national web-based system and database where rough sleeper reports, locations and outcomes are publicly and transparently (but anonymously) available.

2. Definitions

2.1 The definition of what constitutes a rough sleeper for the yearly official count or intelligence-based estimate as set out in the DCLG guidance is as follows:

“People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or “bashes” which are makeshift shelters, often comprised of cardboard boxes).

2.2 For the purposes of this protocol a rough sleeper is someone whose housing situation falls into one of the following categories:

- Rough sleeping on the streets
- Sleeping in tents, cars or other vehicles
- Sleeping in abandoned buildings / any other accommodation with no tenancy

2.3 The definition for referral based on the above will be more flexible than the definition set out in the official guidance (point 2.1) and if a partner agency or member of the public has “reason to believe” someone is sleeping rough in one of the above categories a referral should be made in line with the procedure set out in section 4.

2.4 This protocol deals specifically with rough sleepers aged 18 and over.

2.5 People under the age of 18 who are sleeping rough can be referred as part of this protocol but there is a different process in place for responding to their needs once the initial referral has been received. Where someone under the age of 18 is sleeping rough they will be dealt with through the joint protocol between housing and children’s services.

3. Aims

3.1 The aims of this protocol are to:

- Prevent rough sleeping in Welwyn Hatfield
- Ensure that new rough sleepers are identified and helped off the street immediately
- Ensure that entrenched and long term rough sleepers are aware of the services that are available to assist them, and are referred to relevant support organisations.
- Enable members of the public and any other local organisations who are likely to come into contact with rough sleepers to report and refer rough sleepers to the relevant local services.
- Assist identified rough sleepers to access a place of safety where their needs can be quickly assessed, they can receive advice on their options and are assisted to access other services such as healthcare, if needed.
- Reconnect those people who have come from another area or country back to their local community (where it is safe and appropriate to do so) to their home country, where they are agreeable to this.

4. Procedure

- 4.1 Members of the public or partner organisations wishing to report a rough sleeper should contact WHBC's Housing Advice Team on 01707 357613. In office hours (8.45 – 5.15 on Mon to Thurs and 8.45 – 4.45 on Fri) or **0800 111 4484** out of hours. WHBC is also responsible for responding the reports of rough sleeping made online via Streetlink.
- 4.2 Resolve's targeted outreach team will work with rough sleepers, particularly those who are long-term/entrenched rough sleepers and those who have more complex needs, as a delivery partner with the local authority and Citizens Advice.
- Working jointly to provide the specialist engagement and support, Resolve's outreach team provide the street work and locate people who are sleeping rough, either as part of their normal work or when referred by any agency, and bring them into the service.
 - Citizens Advice will provide the ongoing advice, support and advocacy needed until the person is ready to live independently.
 - Resolve will send officers out within 24 hours of a report being received from WHBC. Working hours are between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday and on a Saturday 8am-Noon. This will be to try and establish initial contact with the person or persons sleeping rough and to make an assessment of their situation. The assessment will establish whether the rough sleeper is local and what housing options are available to them.
 - During the assessment Resolve will establish any other support needs they have and will discuss the possibility of referring them to any other partner organisations for relevant assistance.
 - If there are concerns for safety, the police or street wardens will attend to accompany officers.
- 4.3 Once contact has been established, an initial assessment will take place, and where it is the case that the rough sleeper has nowhere to sleep that night, Resolve will refer to WHBC to provide emergency accommodation for up to three nights in the YMCA. Where this is not appropriate or available, the council would provide accommodation within our available temporary accommodation.
- *Without the WHHF project temporary accommodation cannot be provided to rough sleepers on an on-going basis. This would be as a stepping stone to finding their own accommodation; in addition*
 - *The Rough Sleeper Protocol is therefore to be seen as a last resort for those who fall through the gaps in prevention and options services, rather than a suggested pathway to access housing services*
- 4.4 During their stay in emergency accommodation WHHF partners will work with the customer in order to address issues as appropriate with a known care path to a number of possible outcomes to deal with housing options.

The customer will be required to work with WHHF partner as a condition of the continued provision of the accommodation.

- 4.5 If the customer has been referred to Druglink they will be provided with a room in a shared house and will work with druglink until they are ready for move on accommodation within the guidelines of the Welwyn Hatfield Housing First project.

5.0 Role of partner organisations

The Street Wardens: Welwyn Hatfield Council's street warden service will make appropriate reports of rough sleepers through to WHBC in line with this protocol. They will also place site clearance warning information out where necessary.

Hertfordshire Police: The Police will often come into contact with rough sleepers as a result of concerned calls from members of the public. They will endeavor to ensure contact and referrals are made through to WHBC in line with this protocol. Where there is considered to be a high risk from attendance at a site or from a particular individual to officers the Police will attend in order to keep the peace.

Fire Service: The Fire Service can often come into contact with rough sleepers when on a call out. They will endeavor to ensure contact and referrals are made through to WHBC in line with this protocol.

Resolve: Resolve's targeted outreach team, based in Hatfield, will provide services across the borough working with people who are presenting as street homeless/rough sleeping and those who may have more complex needs requiring housing solutions. Resolve will provide the street work and locate people who are homeless/sleeping rough within the scope of the Welwyn Hatfield Housing First project and process these people within the Housing First guidelines/this protocol.

Citizens Advice: Citizens Advice (Queensway House, Hatfield) has an adviser dedicated to working with rough sleepers. Referrals can be made by phone on 01707 280421. Alternatively, Citizens Advice will see anyone sleeping rough through our drop in and phone service to offer advice on subjects including housing, benefits, relationships and debts. Directions, opening times and details of how to get in touch can be found at <https://www.whcab.org.uk/cawh/home/contact-us/>

ONEYMCA: The YMCA hostel on Peartree Lane offers supported accommodation to up to 125 single homeless people. The hostel is staffed 24/7 and each resident is allocated a support worker. During their 18 month stay, residents meet with their support worker regularly to set and review targets aimed at enabling them to achieve their personal goals.

The hostel is able to provide 3 beds (within 2 rooms) for emergency accommodation. Individuals need to be aged 18+ (there is no upper age restriction), need to be able bodied and be confirmed rough sleepers who have been referred to the service by WHBC. All EP have interviews for accommodation within 24 hours following interview an email is sent with the outcome.

A hot evening meal is provided if the customer arrives before 6pm, after 6pm a packed meal will be available and a breakfast is provided, as well as toiletries and shower facilities and an opportunity to wash their clothes in the on-site laundry room. This accommodation can be extended for up to 4 nights, depending on circumstances and room availability. Referrals via the Council only.

Druglink: This service will provide a residential service that bridges the gap between community and acute units. Providing accommodation for a minimum of 12 weeks to support the customer to re-engage with services to include health and benefits. Housing outreach support will continue with the customer after leaving the accommodation.

Herts Young Homeless: Will offer assistance to young homeless people between the ages of 16-24 year olds. The assistance offered includes vouchers from the local food bank, travel warrants to access emergency accommodation and advice and guidance via our 18+ Advice Line which will include signposting and appropriate referrals as needed. They can also link Rough sleepers in with their dual diagnosis team for those with substance abuse of mental health issues.

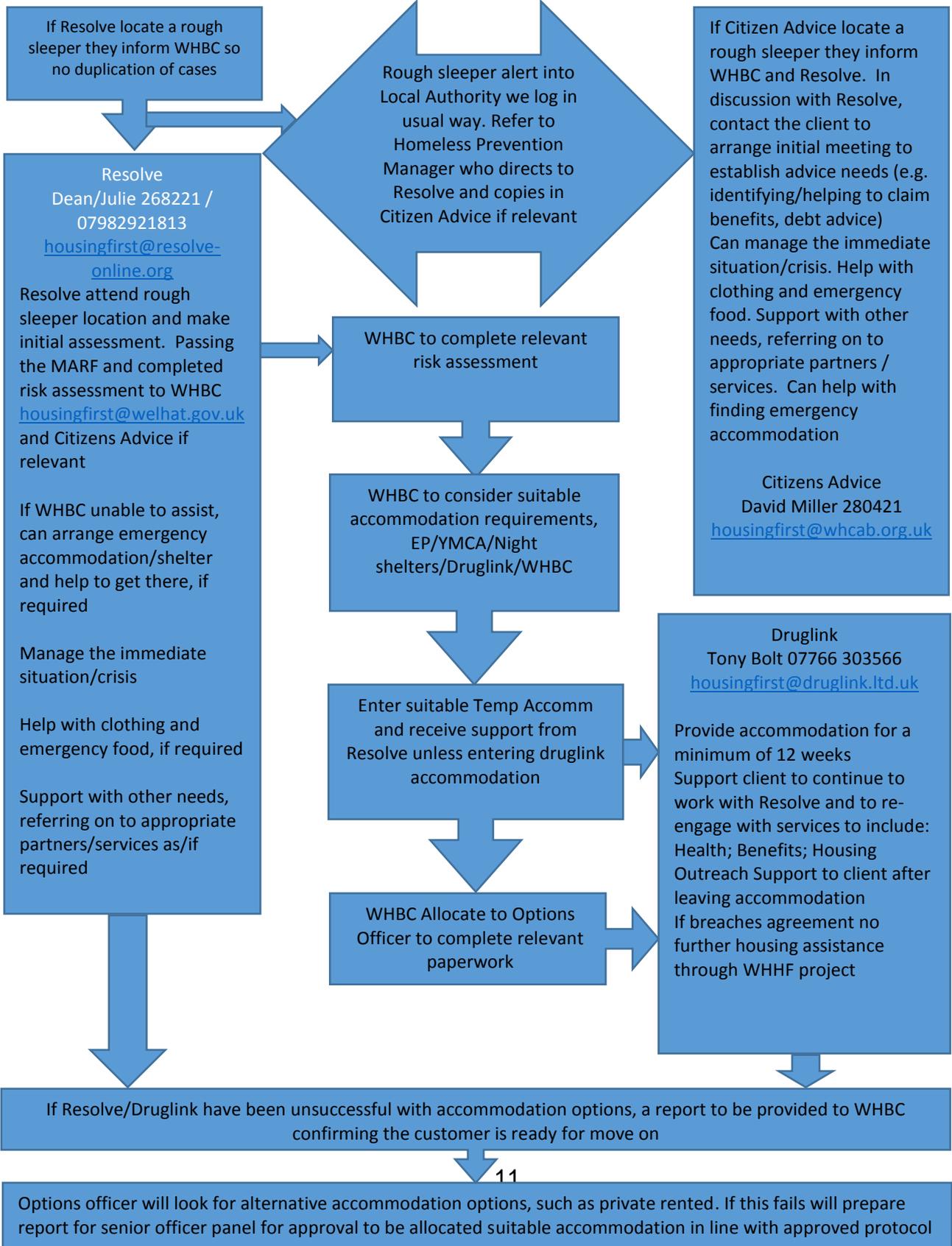
6.0 Site Clearance

- 6.1 It is recognised that sites where rough sleepers choose to bed down in larger numbers can become unsightly, a risk to public health, the environment and can cause issues of anti social behaviour for residents in the vicinity of the site.
- 6.2 As a result we have agreed a process for site clearance as part of this protocol. This will take place where every reasonable attempt has been made for contact with those sleeping at the site.
- 6.3 Serco will clear sites on non-privately owned land at the request of the Council. Serco will clear at no cost if it can be incorporated into the usual cleansing schedule. If additional cleansing or specialist cleansing equipment is required, there may be a charge to cover overtime/equipment hire etc.
- 6.4 Clear notification will be placed at a site in advance of any clearance. If the site is causing a public nuisance they will be cleared within 24 hours, otherwise we would consider 2 working days a reasonable period of time for relevant partners to engage with each other. The notification will include details of how and where to make contact for advice and assistance in line with this protocol.
- 6.5 Any valuables or forms of identification will be stored securely for up to 3 months by the council before being destroyed.

7. Welwyn Hatfield Housing First Flowchart



**WELWYN
HATFIELD**



Appendix B

Help us address rough sleeping in Welwyn Hatfield

If you notice someone sleeping rough around the borough please contact us:

📧 Online at www.streetlink.org.uk

☎ Call **01707 357 613** (in office hours)

☎ **0800 111 4484** (outside office hours)



**WELWYN
HATFIELD**

Our office hours are:

8:45am - 5:15pm – Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday

8:45am - 4:45pm – Friday

We will go out within one working day to see how we can help, leaving our contact details if no-one is there.

Even if you don't see someone but there is evidence of rough sleeping, please report this to us in the same way. We can arrange for sites to be cleared if a rough sleeper has moved on. We will always leave written notice at sites before clearing them.

We would advise you not to approach a rough sleeper directly. Please try to provide us with the following details:

- Name
- Approximate age
- A description of the location
- How regularly they are in this location
- Appearance
- Any contact details.

**For further details please call 01707 357 613
or email housingadviceteam@welhat.gov.uk**



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