

No Second Night Out: Middlesbrough Council Policy

Introduction

Our vision is to embed a policy that aims to end rough sleeping. Middlesbrough Council and neighbouring Tees Valley local authorities know that rough sleeping is the worst form of Homelessness, and is very harmful to those involved or affected by it, especially rough sleepers themselves, but also families, the wider community and other frontline services. People who sleep rough are more likely to die 30 years earlier than an average person of the same age.

What is homelessness?

Homelessness is a very complex issue caused by a range of factors, and it can be roughly described as a circumstance where a person does not have settled accommodation that they are legally able to occupy. It can be caused by emergencies, evictions, repossessions, fleeing violence or threats, vulnerability issues such as mental health or substance misuse, or the property may be unsuitable to continue to live in. Not all people who lose their accommodation will become rough sleepers, and they may be able to use temporary accommodation until they get settled housing again. For those who do rough sleep, they are more vulnerable and excluded than most, and need concerted help to exit such a harmful lifestyle.

What is a rough sleeper?

Rough sleepers are:

- People sleeping or bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments);
- People about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding);
- People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or dens)

What is a 'sofa surfer'?

Sofa surfers are people whose homelessness is 'hidden'. They are more prevalent than rough sleepers, but they are also a less visible manifestation of homelessness. Like rough sleepers, they are mostly deemed to be non-priority (or non-statutory) homeless people and they do not usually have secure accommodation that they are entitled to live in. Unlike rough sleepers, this group will usually find temporary shelter by staying with family and friends, or staying in private hostels or B&BS, and in some cases squats. They are less exposed to the risks that rough sleepers face, but they are known to rough sleep on occasion for short periods of time, and are still likely to suffer serious detriment to their health as a result of insecure, poor living conditions.

What are we trying to achieve?

Because of the complexity surrounding rough sleeping, and usually those affected by it, it is a problem that needs a committed partnership approach to be properly tackled and ended. Middlesbrough Council and its partners believe we all have a responsibility to work together to help end rough sleeping, and this is why we have developed the No Second Night Out Policy. We are committed to the following pledges:

- There should be no second night out
- No one should have to live on the streets

- No one should have to return to the streets
- No one should have to arrive on the streets

Rough sleepers, on average:

- Will use health services up to eight times as much as a person of the same age;
- Are twice as likely to reoffend as an ex-offender who has accommodation;
- Die 30 years earlier than an average person of the same age; and each cost up to £26,000 as a direct result of their homelessness

The national standard for adopting a comprehensive approach to dealing with the issues of single homeless and rough sleepers is called No Second Night Out (NSNO). It builds upon previous strategies to tackle rough sleeping, and involves the whole community working together so that no-one is destitute. NSNO was piloted in London, and championed strategically. It has been judged to be a major success in reducing rough sleeping and tackling homelessness among a high demand group, and it has been recommended by Homeless Link (please see 'Supporting Information'), among others, that NSNO be adopted by each authority in the country.

The number of rough sleepers is just the start, though, and follow up is essential.

Joint Working

This is a jointly developed policy that has been adopted by the following local authorities:

- Middlesbrough Council
- Stockton Borough Council
- Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
- Darlington Borough Council
- Hartlepool Borough Council
- Durham County Council
- Sunderland City Council
- South Tyneside Council
- North Tyneside Council
- Gateshead City Council
- Newcastle City Council
- Northumbria County Council

Because of the complexity of the issue, rough sleeping affects the whole Council and will usually involve several services such as Housing, Social Care, Community and Environment Protection or Enforcement Teams, as well as Police and health services.

Five Principles of No Second Night Out

1. New rough sleepers should be identified and helped off the streets immediately so that they do not fall into a dangerous rough sleeping lifestyle.
2. Members of the public should be able to play an active role by reporting and referring people sleeping rough.

3. 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.
4. They should be able to access emergency accommodation and other services, such as healthcare, if needed.
5. 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.

Middlesbrough - a new approach

Middlesbrough Council works in partnership to tackle rough sleeping. There are relatively low numbers of rough sleepers across Tees Valley and the North East, with recent information indicating there to be approximately seven individuals in Middlesbrough on a single night. Nevertheless, the Tees Valley authorities recognise that more now needs to be done to help rough sleepers, and that no one should rough sleep.

Middlesbrough Councils is committed to providing clear information on rough sleeping, and advice and information for rough sleepers/ members of the public, through our websites, and through a regional awareness raising campaign linked to the national rough sleeping helpline, StreetLink. We are committed to a continuing dialogue with frontline voluntary sector partners about the help that is available to rough sleepers, and to ensuring that rough sleeper information is available in libraries, Accident and Emergency departments, police stations, and where possible, partner organisations' web pages too.

1. How do we respond to rough sleepers?

Reporting rough sleeping and on-going intelligence gathering

Although official street counts can be carried out to get an accurate snapshot figure of how many rough sleepers there are on one night in an area, it is also important to use information provided by local residents, and frontline services across all sectors. Some of these will have more regular contact with rough sleepers and homeless people, and they can be an invaluable source of information about the wider extent of homelessness and rough sleeping.

Middlesbrough Council's housing solutions team can be contacted for advice, information and to arrange interventions by telephoning 0800 130 3667. The service is available out of hours, in an emergency, on 01642 726050. Stakeholders can also e-mail the Housing solutions team at: homelessteam@thirteengroup.co.uk. There is also a national service which can be used by stakeholders or members of the public; StreetLink have developed a short webform facility to help rough sleepers or members of the public to request help for rough sleepers. The link to the No Second Night Out form is on all council's websites, and will also be publicised.

Middlesbrough Council and its local and North East partners are committed to regular collection of information and data on rough sleepers, and sharing this with each other.

Deploying rapid help to rough sleepers

The Housing Solutions Team will verify and act upon information received as soon as possible.

They will also work with partners and use resources to provide:

- A place of safety for rough sleepers to go
- An assessment of their needs
- Access to other services such as healthcare and support

Below Zero/ Severe Weather Emergency Provision

Middlesbrough Council also has an arrangement in place for rough sleepers who need access to emergency accommodation during severe weather periods. We are committed to providing help so that no one is left out in the cold.

Reconnections Policy

Middlesbrough Council will, where possible, assist rough sleepers from another area to reconnect, in a planned way, to their original community, where they have a local connection. This will help them reconnect to previous or existing support networks and will enable them to access housing and recovery services, and get support from family and friends. It is widely recognised that support networks, both formal and informal, increase the opportunity for people to move away from homelessness and sustain settled accommodation. The resettlement location will be discussed and agreed with the rough sleeper, and any services/ individuals that are supporting them.

Taking action to help rough sleepers

Middlesbrough Council deliver frontline services and financial assistance to the some of the most entrenched rough sleepers, by using some, part or all of the solutions described below.

Accommodation

- Personalised solutions through the Homeless Prevention Fund This can allow Homeless Prevention Officers to deliver relatively simple and inexpensive solutions to rough sleepers, such as paying a service charge to help them gain accommodation, or for identification, new clothes and shoes, or travel. The rough sleeper can direct what is needed to overcome their homelessness.
- Private Rented Sector Solutions Middlesbrough Council can offer assistance, either through
 - rent deposit schemes, and rent in advance, to secure accommodation;
 - Using Discretionary Housing Payments;
 - Using its Homeless Prevention fund flexibly to negotiate an accommodation placement, where they may be requirements other than rent in advance etc;
 - Helping people get into settled housing more quickly by taking up a tenancy in private rented sector accommodation, rather than waiting for a social housing allocation

Health and Support issues

- Floating Support: Rough sleepers will be linked into floating support and other therapeutic services as soon as possible, e.g. if they have just been placed in temporary accommodation

Rough Sleeping Interventions and Enforcement

Middlesbrough Council work with Adult Social Care and Community Protection/ Enforcement Teams to help rough sleepers who have relevant support needs and who might persistently refuse to come indoors due to underlying issues, and:

- Continue to offer suitable accommodation and support to exit rough sleeping;
- Ensure they fully understand the assistance offered, and have capacity to decide to refuse such options
- In certain cases, it may be necessary to take a co-ordinated approach to enforcement action to end rough sleeping, through Problem Solving Groups and with Community Safety partners.

2. How do we prevent people sleeping rough in future?

Preventing Homelessness

Middlesbrough Council believes in the benefit of dealing with and preventing all homelessness, and especially rough sleepers. We are committed to a partnership approach to continue carrying out:

- Working with all local partners, including police, health, charities and non-commissioned services, to resolve rough sleeping issues Preventative initiatives that provide targeted assistance to homeless people
- Sharing data and information with each other on rough sleepers
- Sharing resources where possible, or information on resources, that can help rough sleepers
- Raising awareness in the private rented sector and exploring available opportunities
- Provide case studies on successes
- Providing information on our individual web sites re rough sleepers

Ongoing monitoring of rough sleeping

Middlesbrough Council will continue to work with local partners, sub regional organisations and other Tees Valley authorities to tackle homelessness across the sub region. Each authority has different arrangements for collecting estimates, or conducting street counts, but they will continue to meet regularly, share information and good practice, and monitor progress.