



Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) 1990-1999

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This note provides background to the Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) and an assessment of its impact between 1990 and 1999.

The RSI marked a significant attempt to tackle rough sleeping. Originally envisaged as a short-term initiative, the RSI incorporated a range of approaches and schemes – its broad aim was to make it unnecessary for people to sleep rough on the streets of London.

The programme ran for 9 years and spanned both Conservative and Labour Governments. Over the period of its operation the RSI recorded some significant successes. It was replaced in 1999 with Labour's Homelessness Action Programme.

Crisis commissioned the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York to conduct a review of single homelessness in the UK between 2000 and 2010. The study, *A review of single homelessness in the UK*, was published in January 2011. It provides an overview of the history, causes and policy responses to single homelessness and assesses how successful these policies have been in tackling the issue. The study suggested some policy responses for the next decade.

The current approach to tackling rough sleeping can be found in Library note SN02007, *Rough sleeping (England)*.

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1 The Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI)

The RSI marked a significant attempt to tackle rough sleeping. The programme ran for 9 years and spanned both Conservative and Labour Governments. The following sections provide background and information on the scheme’s approach and successes. The programme was replaced in 1999 with Labour’s Homelessness Action Programme.

1.1 Background to the RSI

The Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) was originally developed in 1990 as a short-term response to the growing numbers of people sleeping rough in London. After consulting a variety of voluntary organisations the then Government announced that £96 million would be made available over 1990-93 for a range of initiatives which eventually became known as the RSI. RSI programmes included advice and outreach work with homeless people, the development of new emergency hostel places and a range of temporary and permanent accommodation comprising properties leased from private landlords and permanent lettings provided by housing associations. The broad aim of the RSI was to make it unnecessary for people to sleep rough on the streets of London.

The initial strategy adopted under the RSI involved a process of moving rough sleepers from the streets of central London through regular contact by voluntary sector outreach and resettlement workers funded by the initiative. Workers sought to persuade people to take up offers of accommodation provided by housing associations and funded by the RSI. A list of agencies known to work with people sleeping rough was compiled and a clearing house established at the Housing Services Agency (HSA) to ensure, as far as possible, that the target group was reached and that the accommodation provided for rough sleepers was "ring fenced" for that group within the associations' stock.

The RSI was due to end in March 1993; however, in his Autumn Statement on 12 November 1992 the then Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that a further £60m would be made available to continue the RSI in central London for an additional three years up to March 1996. It was expected that, by March 1996, a total of £186 million would have been expended by the Government under this initiative and that at least 3,300 bed-spaces in permanent accommodation would have been provided.

Independent research commissioned by the DoE into the effectiveness of the RSI was published in January 1993¹; this report concluded that the RSI "was successful in providing accommodation for several thousand single homeless people, most of whom had a history of rough sleeping. As a result there was a significant reduction in the number of people sleeping rough in the target area."² However, the report also noted: "the initiative has not yet achieved its objective of making it unnecessary for anyone to sleep rough in central London. A continuing programme will be necessary to achieve this."³ The DoE issued a discussion document in January 1993 on the future development of the RSI which drew heavily on the recommendations of the independent research.⁴ A central aim of this paper's proposals was to ensure the closer targeting of resources on the client group.

On completion of the consultation exercise the then Minister for Housing, Sir George Young, outlined the future direction of the RSI in the following Parliamentary Answer:

Mr. Fishburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the outcome of the recent consultation exercise on the next phase of the Government's rough sleepers initiative, and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: Under the first phase of the rough sleepers initiative, from 1990-91 to 1992-93, the Government provided resources of £96 million to assist people sleeping rough in central London.

Independent research, funded by this Department, into the effectiveness of the rough sleepers initiative, shows that it has been a success. Through the initiative, several thousand people with a history of sleeping rough have been provided with accommodation. The number of people sleeping rough in central London has fallen by more than a half, from estimates of over 1,000 before the initiative began, to around 420 at a count in November 1992.

The Government have made available a further £86 million over the next three financial years, 1993-94 to 1995-96, to continue the rough sleepers initiative in central London. On 18 January 1993 I issued a discussion paper "The Rough Sleepers Initiative: The Next Three Years". It contained a range of proposals, based on recommendations from the independent research, aiming to ensure closer targeting of resources on central London's street homeless.

Almost 100 organisations responded to the paper. There has been a broad measure of support for the main thrust of our proposals. In the light of those responses, I am today issuing a strategy document that outlines the way forward for the rough sleepers initiative over the next three financial years until 1995-96, to assist our aim to make it unnecessary for people to sleep rough in central London.

We will continue to concentrate on funding permanent accommodation in houses and flats, with outreach work and resettlement support from voluntary organisations, to allow people sleeping rough to make a successful transition to a settled life. To ensure the better targeting of resources we are concentrating help on a limited number of specialist agencies with referral rights into RSI permanent accommodation; making referral agencies responsible for upholding the eligibility criteria; focusing some of the resources on zones, commencing with the Strand, with particular encouragement for consortia to come forward with proposals to reduce significantly the numbers sleeping rough in a specific area; and reducing the number of housing associations to develop

¹ DoE *The Rough Sleepers Initiative: An Evaluation* 1993

² *ibid*, summary para 3

³ *ibid*, summary para 102

⁴ DoE *The Rough Sleepers Initiative the Next Three Years*, 18 January 1993

permanent move-on accommodation under the initiative. Also, we are aiming to move towards a more contractual relationship with agencies, in the form of grants with tight, clearly-defined objectives. This, along with regular counts of the number of people sleeping rough in central London, will assist the better monitoring of the initiative.

The further £86 million made available for this initiative, and the proposals in the strategy document to target resources more closely on those in need, will ensure that people sleeping rough in central London will continue to be helped to start a new life away from the streets. I am keen that this initiative should make a further significant impact on the problem of people sleeping rough in the capital.⁵

The June 1995 Housing White Paper, *Our Future Homes*, set out the then Government's commitment to continue the RSI in central London beyond 1996 and assist in the development of the RSI model in other areas where rough sleeping could be demonstrated to be a major problem. In October 1995 the Government published a consultation paper entitled *Rough Sleepers Initiative: Future Plans*. This paper recommended continued emphasis on outreach and resettlement work and the provision of winter shelters. Local authorities outside London were invited to produce evidence of rough sleeping within their areas that could not be addressed within existing resources. The third phase of the initiative was announced in March 1996; £73 million was allocated to develop the RSI and include work outside central London.

In June 1997 the new Labour Government announced the allocation of £20 million over the next two years under the RSI:

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what funding decisions have been reached for the 12 areas offered assistance under the third phase of the rough sleepers initiative.

Ms Armstrong: The Government's aim is to ensure that there is no necessity for people to sleep rough. I am therefore delighted to announce £17.2 million funding under the Rough Sleepers Initiative and the Rough Sleepers Revenue Fund for voluntary sector organisations and housing associations in Bath, Bournemouth, Brighton, Cambridge, Ealing, Exeter, Leicester, Manchester, Nottingham, Oxford, Richmond upon Thames and West London, to alleviate the difficulties faced by people sleeping rough in those areas. Temporary and permanent accommodation, including specialist accommodation for people suffering mental ill health and drink and drugs misuse problems, will be funded in Brighton and West London. Outreach and resettlement workers will be funded in all 12 areas, and organisations in some of the 12 areas will also receive funding for additional hostel staff.

I am also particularly pleased that the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health has confirmed that the Department of Health will be contributing nearly £3 million to the initiative. As part of the expansion of the Homeless Mentally Ill Initiative beyond central London, nearly £2 million will be allocated to local authorities over the next three years to provide extra services for people sleeping rough who have mental health problems. £2.5 million will be provided in 1997-98 under the Drug and Alcohol Specific Grant to 81 projects, with £740,000 of that going to 21 new projects providing services to people sleeping rough who have alcohol and drug misuse problems. The co-ordination of funding between the Departments of the Environment and Health will reinforce the partnership approach which is a key to the success of strategies to help people sleeping rough.

⁵ HC Deb 16 June 1993 cc569-70W

My Department and the Housing Corporation are writing today to each of the voluntary sector organisations and housing associations who submitted a bid for funding to let them know what decisions have been reached. My Department, in conjunction with the Department of Health, has also written today to the relevant local authorities explaining the funding allocations in detail. The Government welcomes the part played by local authorities and voluntary sector organisations in preparing strategies aimed at tackling rough sleeping and in working up the bids for funding.

I have considered a number of proposals to increase staffing in existing hostels for people sleeping rough. It is clear that more thought needs to be given to the co-ordination of provision in some areas and I have decided, therefore, to invite the local authorities in Bath, Bournemouth, Cambridge, Ealing, Exeter, Nottingham, Oxford and Richmond upon Thames to work with local hostel providers to develop further proposals to ensure that provision meets the needs of people sleeping rough in those areas. There will be a further opportunity for organisations in those areas to apply for additional hostel staff later in the year. Earlier this year, my Department produced guidance to enable local authorities to evaluate the extent of rough sleeping in their areas and develop strategies to ensure that there is no necessity for people to sleep rough. Ian Brady, deputy Chief Executive of Centrepoint, has been seconded to the Department to promote the guidance and encourage the development of local strategies. We will consider offering funding to support local strategies in further areas where major rough sleeping problems are identified. Mr. Brady is also chairing a Rough Sleepers Forum of homelessness charities to help co-ordinate national efforts to tackle rough sleeping. A list of the schemes being offered funding today has been placed in the House library.⁶

In November 1998 the then Housing Minister, Nick Raynsford, said that the Government intended to revise the Homelessness Code of Guidance⁷ to make clear that care-leavers, with very few exceptions, should be regarded as 'vulnerable' and considered under the homeless provisions of the *1996 Housing Act*. He also said that homeless 16 and 17 year olds with no back-up support should normally be regarded as 'vulnerable'.⁸ The Code of Guidance was subsequently revised to reflect this. The April 2000 Housing Green Paper, *Quality and Choice: a decent home for all*,⁹ stated that the Government would extend the homeless priority need categories to include homeless people who are vulnerable as a result of having an institutionalised background, such as ex-servicemen and prisoners.¹⁰

The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) commissioned research by Geoffrey Randall and Susan Brown of Research and Information Services into the effectiveness of the RSI (published 1999). Their main findings informed the then Government's decision to replace the RSI with the Homelessness Action Programme from the end of March 1999. Over the nine years of its existence the RSI provided around 3,500 units of permanent accommodation in London in which 5,500 people were housed; many of these were young people.¹¹

⁶ HC Deb 3 June 1997 cc224-5W

⁷ This Code provides guidance to local authorities in fulfilling their duties to homeless applicants under Part 7 of the *1996 Housing Act*. The Code is not legally binding but local authorities are required 'to have regard to it.'

⁸ HC Deb 2 November 1998 cc312-3W

⁹ Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), April 2000

¹⁰ *ibid*, para 9.55

¹¹ DETR, *Homes for Street Homeless People: An evaluation of the Rough Sleepers Initiative*, December 1999, p10 para 29

1.2 Evaluation of the RSI

As noted above, the DETR commissioned research by Geoffrey Randall and Susan Brown of Research and Information Services into the effectiveness of the RSI and their findings were published in December 1999, a summary of which is provided below.

Numbers of people sleeping rough

It was found that no areas had detailed estimates of the supply of hostel beds and permanent accommodation needed to meet targets on the reduction in numbers of rough sleepers. The report proposed a method for making these calculations: in central London it indicated a need for around 510 direct access places in the first 3 years reducing to 360 thereafter.

Outreach work

A 'lack of clarity' was found in some areas in the aims and objectives of street outreach work. In some areas workers supported people with a street lifestyle but the DETR's aim was to get rough sleepers into accommodation. The researchers recommended more assertive focus on rough sleepers and contracting agencies to deliver results in defined geographical areas. A need to enhance specialist support to rough sleepers with mental health and substance abuse problems was identified as was the need for other services for rough sleepers to encourage resettlement rather than reinforce street lifestyles.

Temporary accommodation

There was a need for a wide range of hostel provision to meet different needs and to ensure access for people sleeping rough. A shortage of direct access beds was found in most areas and where beds were available they were of poor quality or were not available for rough sleepers. Not all RSI funded hostel provision was well targeted on rough sleepers. There was a need for specialist support services for people with mental health and substance abuse problems to help people retain their hostel places and move onto a resettlement programme.

Resettlement

There was a need to ensure effective resettlement services for all former rough sleepers. The right sort of support could prevent the majority of tenancy failures but it needed to be properly focused and have clear outcome targets.

Permanent housing

The problem was not a shortage of accommodation in some areas but lack of support for former rough sleepers. The major gap was in the supply of supported and semi-supported accommodation. In London lack of supply remained a problem and there were problems over assessing eligibility for RSI stock. The profile of those re-housed did not match closely enough the known profile of rough sleepers, indicating that some of those re-housed were unlikely to have had a history of rough sleeping.

Strategy and programme management

RSI had improved inter-agency co-operation but there were still problems to be resolved. The achievement of the target of a two thirds reduction in rough sleeping would require detailed plans in each area to assess the level of accommodation and support services necessary and establish the organisational framework to deliver them. Neither central London nor the other areas were found to be in a position to do this at that point. It was 'widely recognised' in London that a more co-ordinated approach was needed: the Rough

Sleepers Unit was welcome but views differed on how improved co-ordination should be achieved. Outside of London the replacement of the RSI with the Homelessness Action Programme (see below) was welcomed as offering scope to fund projects for a wider group of single homeless people but some saw a potential loss of targeting on the problems of rough sleeping. It was questioned whether local authorities would provide replacement funding when DETR funding was tapered.