



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

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*Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing*

**Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local  
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Dear Leader,

**SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE SLEEPING ROUGH: NEW COVID-19 VARIANT; CLINICAL  
VULNERABILITY; AND THE SEVERE WEATHER EMERGENCY PROTOCOL**

Firstly, I would like to thank you for the excellent work you are doing to ensure people sleeping rough receive the support they need during this unprecedented year. In the midst of the many challenges that COVID-19 has brought about, the work you all continue to lead to support some of the most vulnerable people in society has been remarkable and saved hundreds of lives. I'd also like to recognise the additional challenges that the new restrictions and upcoming cold weather pose for local authorities in terms of rough sleeping.

In light of the recently announced restrictions, including the introduction of a fourth tier, and the discovery of a more transmissible Covid-19 variant, I am writing to urge you to ensure that you continue your excellent work to support people sleeping rough into safe accommodation. During these challenging times, it is even more important that we make every effort to bring in vulnerable people still sleeping rough. The Government has supported this work with significant funding, including the Rough Sleeping Initiative, the Next Steps Accommodation Programme, the Cold Weather Funding, and, in some areas The Protect Programme. This is on top of the unprecedented resources already committed to councils since the start of the pandemic, including over £4.6 billion in unringfenced grants, the Contain Outbreak Management Fund and additional funding for authorities to support care homes, high streets and the most vulnerable in their communities.

This funding, along with the conversations we have held with you, has given us confidence that you have the necessary support plans in place. However, if you are struggling to provide people sleeping rough with the necessary support or would like to discuss any of the matters above further, please contact our team of Rough Sleeping advisors or contact [rsi-y3@communities.gov.uk](mailto:rsi-y3@communities.gov.uk) if you have any questions.

I fully recognise how tiring this year has been to the entire sector, from local authorities to frontline workers. Despite this, it is crucial that everyone remains vigilant over the coming weeks and months, and, with a new, more transmissible strain of the virus currently in circulation, it is vital that we redouble our efforts to tackle the spread of Covid-19.

This means three key things. Firstly, homelessness accommodation and service providers must minimise the risk of Covid-19 transmission by rigorously following these measures:

- Staff, volunteers and residents should stay 2 metres away from other people at all times; social contact should be minimised, and crowding avoided
- Staff and volunteers should stay at home if they are symptomatic or have a positive test result
- Residents and service users should be checked for symptoms on a daily basis (by asking them)
- Residents and service users who are symptomatic, have a positive test result, or who have been identified as a contact, must isolate and avoid all close contact with others
- Ensure that indoor areas are well-ventilated, with open windows and doors wherever possible
- Face coverings should be worn when in an enclosed space. It is critical to observe good hand hygiene before and after handling a face covering to prevent contamination
- Everyone should wash their hands more often than usual, for 20 seconds using soap and hot water, especially after using tissues to cough or sneeze into or touching frequently touched areas
- Frequently clean and disinfect regularly touched objects and surfaces in communal and shared spaces

Please regularly check gov.uk for the latest guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>. We also recommend that Government advice, adapted by people with experience of homelessness with funding from NHS England, is shared with people sleeping rough, accommodation and service users: this can be found at Groundswell's website <https://groundswell.org.uk/coronavirus/>.

Secondly, local authorities and accommodation providers must ensure all people sleeping rough are assessed for clinical vulnerabilities before being taken into accommodation. Only by having a full understanding of their health and care needs will we be able to prevent serious illness from Covid-19 and provide people with the tailored support that they require. The completion of clinical vulnerability assessments and supporting people to register with a GP if they are not already, will also make it easier to provide priority access to the vaccine to those that need it. If you are unsure about what this process involves, I would urge you to watch this Homeless Link and Housing Justice webinar on the clinical vulnerability assessment process: <https://www.homeless.org.uk/assessing-clinical-vulnerability-for-non-clinicians>.

Please continue to communicate your plans and local guidance to providers within your area. Only by doing so will providers be able to establish a suitable referral process (including clinical vulnerability assessments), provide clear messages to people sleeping rough, and help get individuals off the street.

Thirdly, Covid-19 homelessness setting guidance (for: [hostel services](#) and the [provision of night shelters](#)) recommends that setting specific risk assessments are undertaken, and plans put in place to mitigate against identified risks. It is essential that these risk assessments and plans are reviewed in light of the new COVID variant, paying particular attention to the key transmission reduction measures above.

Finally, winter also brings the possibility of extreme weather conditions and the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) to the fore. I would like to remind you of the SWEP guidance, provided by Homeless Link, which many of you will be using to steer your activity. This is available at <https://www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/guidance-on-severe-weather-emergency-protocol-swep-and-extended-weather-provision>.

I know that many local authorities already have SWEP plans in place and have indeed activated them in recent weeks. However, if that does not include your authority, I would urge you to move quickly to address this and ensure that availability meets likely demand. In bringing forward this provision you should consider how you will ensure that you continue to limit transmission of the COVID-19 virus and ensure accommodation is self-contained and COVID-secure.

Night shelter-style settings should only be used where absolutely necessary to protect against the risk to health and life of individuals remaining on the streets when other alternative options are unavailable. If you deem it necessary for such a setting to open, I would urge you to consult the operating principles we have published for night shelters, which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-provision-of-night-shelters>. Any proposal to open a night shelter-style setting in your area should be raised with your Rough Sleeping Advisor and discussed and approved by your local Public Health team.

This Government remains absolutely committed to protecting this vulnerable group and ending rough sleeping for good, and I thank you for all your work to help us achieve this.

Yours sincerely,



**KELLY TOLHURST MP**