



The Methodist Church

Serving locally, connecting the county

[Safeguarding in Lincolnshire District](#)

September 1st 2021

Responding Well to Rough Sleepers

Introduction.

At various times of the year, churches in the District have need to respond well to rough sleepers on church premises, often in gardens belonging to the church or church porches.

The pastoral response to reach out and offer practical support and hospitality has to be balanced with the need to consider whether other agencies have knowledge of someone, the safety of all concerned and the appropriate course of action.

This policy outlines the appropriate responses based on advice from local agencies, lessons learned from experiences across the District and best practice. It recognises the respect which needs to be afforded to those who find themselves rough sleeping, not making judgements or assumptions about the situation in which they are now in.

For further detailed information about rough sleeping in the UK see [Health matters: rough sleeping - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Rough sleepers.

Rough sleepers are defined for the purposes of rough sleeping counts and estimates as:

- 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').

The definition does not include people in hostels or shelters, people in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes or organised protest, squatters or travellers.

Bedded down is taken to mean either lying down or sleeping. About to bed down includes those who are sitting in/on or near a sleeping bag or other bedding.

Impact on health and general well-being

Prolonged periods of rough sleeping have a significant impact on someone's mental and physical health. The longer someone experiences rough sleeping for, the more likely it is they will develop additional mental and physical health needs, substance misuse issues and have contact with the criminal justice system (collectively known as complex needs). The

more complex needs someone has, the more help they will need to move on from homelessness and rebuild their lives.

Rough sleeping is a dangerous and isolating experience. People sleeping rough are more likely to be victims of crime and almost 17 times more likely to have been victims of violence (in the past year compared to the general public). Women are particularly vulnerable, nearly 1 in 4 have been sexually assaulted whilst rough sleeping. Additionally, many people who rough sleep develop issues with drugs and alcohol.

It is therefore necessary to ensure the church responds in the right way to take account of the wide-ranging needs of someone rough sleeping and seek advice on how best to do this.

Involvement of other agencies or organisations.

Experience has shown across the District that many rough sleepers have been or are currently known to agencies or specific organisations. For many reasons, someone may not have been able to take up the services offered or have refused to co-operate with them.

It is possible that someone may have stayed for a period of time in local hostels or residential provision and therefore may be known to local services such as these.

It is therefore policy that a co-ordinated approach be taken in responding well. No church should act alone in supporting a rough sleeper so that it become a part of what will inevitably be a wider support network.

Homelessness obligations

The [Housing \(Homeless Persons\) Act 1977](#), [Housing Act 1996](#), and the [Homelessness Act 2002](#), placed statutory duties on local housing authorities to ensure that advice and assistance to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness is available free of charge. All households that apply for assistance under the Housing and Homelessness Acts are referred to as 'decisions'. However, these do not include households found to be ineligible for assistance (some persons from abroad are ineligible for assistance).

A 'main homelessness duty' is owed where the authority is satisfied that the applicant is eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and falls within a specified priority need group. Such statutorily homeless households are referred to as 'acceptances'.

The 'priority need groups' include households with dependent children or a pregnant woman and people who are vulnerable in some way e.g. because of mental illness or physical disability. In 2002 an [Order](#) made under the 1996 Act extended the priority need categories to include applicants:

- aged 16 or 17
- aged 18 to 20 who were previously in care
- vulnerable as a result of time spent in care, in custody, or in HM Forces

- vulnerable as a result of having to flee their home because of violence or the threat of violence

It is also worth bearing in mind those who are impacted by inability to maintain rent or mortgage payments and eviction is possible/likely.

Where a main duty is owed, the authority must ensure that suitable accommodation is available for the applicant and his or her household. The duty continues until a settled housing solution becomes available for them, or some other circumstance brings the duty to an end. Where households are found to be intentionally homeless, or not in priority need, the authority must make an assessment of their housing needs and provide advice and assistance to help them find accommodation for themselves.

Responding Well.

Immediate steps:

- Inform your Minister or Superintendent and the DSO of someone rough sleeping on church premises;
- Where possible, and without investigation and acting alone, ascertain if the person is in need of urgent medical attention;
- In so doing, any information about the person that can be gained sensitively should be passed on to the Minister, Superintendent and DSO;
- Do not, until advice has been sought, offer hospitality **inside** the church building;
- Call someone else from the church to be present if help is being offered e.g. hot tea and food etc.

In particular, urgent consideration needs to be given to whether services, meetings or other activities may be due to take place that may bring others into contact with the rough sleeper. The church needs to be respectful and sensitive to all, including the rough sleeper, and especially so as not to draw extra attention to someone in this situation.

In addition, the DSO will need to advise if an urgent referral needs to be made to statutory agencies if a rough sleeper is particularly vulnerable –see later.

Next steps:

The DSO will agree with the Minister/Superintendent what immediate checks are necessary with appropriate agencies and who should make them. Until these are made, which will inform some assessment of the situation and the needs of the rough sleeper, no access inside the church building should be allowed but provision for hospitality and care outside considered safely.

Rapid Response Approach.

Such a situation will trigger a Rapid Response approach in that the DSO will initiate a Zoom meeting to respond as quickly as possible to the information received from agencies and the general assessment that has been achieved.

Such decisions could involve:

- On the advice of agencies, asking the rough sleeper to move on;
- Offering the rough sleeper information or named people so they can make contact with appropriate agency people;
- Working with agencies in a structured way to provide appropriate services and help the rough sleeper to move on.

Rough sleeping and Safeguarding.

This policy confirms that rough sleeping is always a safeguarding matter. This allows for clarity of process and assurances of how things will be responded to.

- Anyone found rough sleeping will be vulnerable ;
- Others as they respond could become vulnerable.
- The DSO may need to contact statutory agencies urgently if a rough sleeper is particularly vulnerable through age, disability, mental health, being pregnant or it becomes clear that some has fled domestic abuse and has no safe place to go.
- It may be that people living locally may also be impacted. It may not be possible for the rough sleeper to find suitable facilities such as toilets and other households, land or property may be affected;
- Where more than one person is rough sleeping in the vicinity of the church, or more than one gather at varying times, this may indicate that a particular gathering place has become known locally e.g. City centre or town churches. This could lead to increasing vulnerabilities and a “normalising” that a place is allowed to be gathering space;
- It will be important to record events as they unfold, as agencies may need such information to assist us in responding.

Further information and reading.

[The rough sleeping strategy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

[Rough sleepers given advice on rights \(churchtimes.co.uk\)](http://churchtimes.co.uk)

Policy to be reviewed August 2022

