

AVON AND SOMERSET  
ROUGH SLEEPER  
STEERING GROUP

August 2012- May 2015

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The successes, the challenges and what lies ahead for services for single homeless people.

Legacy Document



## Introduction

The Avon and Somerset grouping was awarded **£539,000** funding from the Department of Communities and Local Government. Specifically it was for the purpose of supporting work to prevent and tackle rough sleeping and single homelessness and the development of an early intervention and prevention service across the region including supporting the roll out of No Second Night Out.

This is the moment to say thank you to all those who have contributed to the work to improve the life chances and experience of single homeless people in Avon and Somerset. This Legacy Document tries to capture what has been achieved but probably only goes some small way towards summarising the day to day commitment of staff and volunteers who work with homeless clients.

## **Background**

Over recent years, the Government's report Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out Nationwide (DCLG 2011) and Making Every Contact Count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness (DCLG 2012 ) have brought with them significant commitment from central government to addressing single homelessness and rough sleeping together with funding.

Twenty million pounds of Homelessness Transition Fund drove forward the national roll out of No Second Night Out; some local authorities in the Avon and Somerset grouping benefited from this with funding for outreach services.

As a result of Making Every Contact Count, the Department of Health made available £10 million for a Homeless Hospital Discharge Fund. Despite a robust bid, sadly the Avon and Somerset local authorities did not benefit from this funding but it did represent government recognition of the difficulties experienced by hospital, mental health and other treatment settings experience when their patients have nowhere to go on discharge. It has been a recurring theme in Avon and Somerset and the Steering Group has acknowledged these problems, funding a pilot in Bath and North East Somerset and earmarking funding for a similar initiative in Somerset and potentially North Somerset.

One of the most significant breakthroughs has been a recently published document: 'addressing complex needs: improving services for single vulnerable people'. (DCLG 2015) with a 'call for evidence' to be submitted in May 2015. For some while now, local authorities and voluntary agencies have been highlighting the problem of single people with low level multiple needs which alone do not meet the threshold for many therapeutic interventions or practical services but which amount to a life of social and economic dislocation and a continual destructive cycle of A&E attendances, criminal convictions and homelessness. The work of MEAM (Making Every Adult Matter) has successfully raised the profile of such clients whose difficulties have a significant impact on the demand for resources and attendant costs.

**Supporting People, single homelessness and rough sleeping: the funding context**

Single homeless people and rough sleepers collectively are a non-statutory group of clients whose needs can at times be great but would not necessarily reach the high threshold of vulnerability to meet the qualification for a statutory duty for housing from a local authority. The Government has supported a range of homelessness-specific initiatives aimed at single homeless people, and especially those sleeping rough, which many local authorities agree have contributed to an improvement in single homelessness services in their areas.

Homelessness Prevention Grant distributed to local authorities has been protected in the face of severe funding cuts affecting DCLG and £40 million of capital spending has been earmarked for hostels. The Government has further made available £18.5 million to support work by sub-regional partnerships to tackle single homelessness, and the Homelessness Transition Fund, funded by DCLG and administered by Homeless Link, has provided grants to voluntary sector organisations to help roll out the NSNO principles and other innovations such as Housing First projects and the Crisis-run Private Rented Sector Access Development Programme. Most recently, the Help for Single Homeless Fund from the DCLG has made available additional funding for single homeless people. The Avon and Somerset local authorities submitted two bids for this funding and the Avon bid was successful bringing further monies to Bristol, BANES and North Somerset for new services. However all these funding streams tend to be small scale, targeted and time-limited programmes. For example, the Homelessness Transition Fund, the CRISIS Private Rented Sector Access Programme and the Department of Health Hospital Discharge Fund all terminated in 2014.

## **Rough Sleeping**

### **National**

**The autumn 2014 total of street counts and estimates of people rough sleeping nationally was 2744. This is an increase of 14% from the 2013 figure of 2414 people.**

In the last two years, however, the annual rate of increase has been more modest at around 5%, though continued growth in the more 'entrenched' rough sleeping cohorts in London and elsewhere is a matter of particular concern. New restrictions on Housing Benefit entitlements of European Economic Area migrants from April 2014 may further contribute to rough sleeping amongst Central and Eastern European nationals .

It seems likely that the upward trend seen in recent years has been moderated partly by government initiatives such as the No Second Night Out (NSNO) programme, initiated in London in 2011/12 and more recently rolled-out across England.

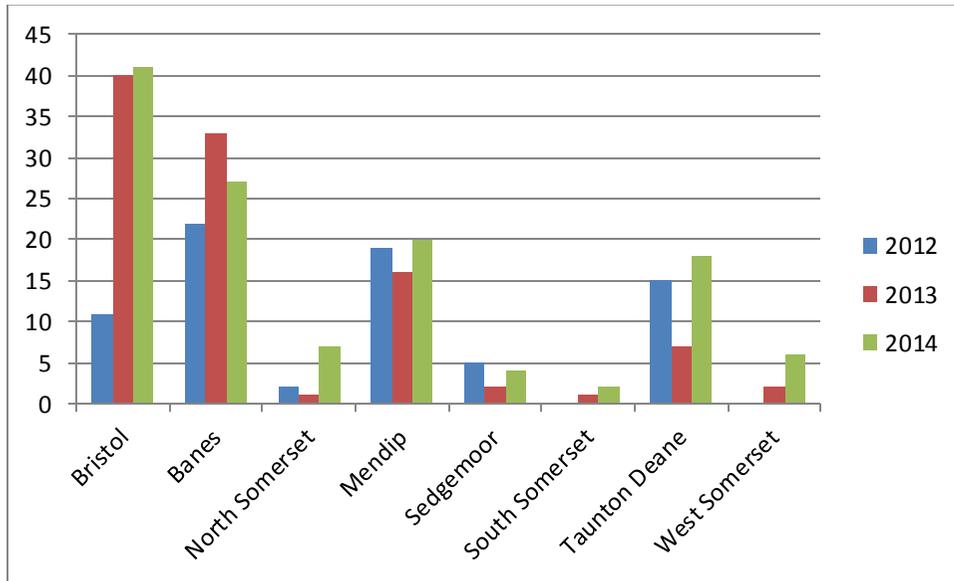
The DCLG national estimate of some 2,400 rough sleepers on any one night is probably therefore best regarded primarily as a basis for trends analysis rather than an attempt at a 'true' absolute number.

**Regional**

Within Avon and Somerset, of the eight local authorities in the Avon and Somerset grouping, Bristol, Banes, Mendip and Taunton Deane have a disproportionate share of rough sleepers with Mendip consistently returning a high estimate. However, both North Somerset and Sedgemoor have shown increasing numbers month on month over the last year possibly attributable to more intensive outreach in those areas and therefore improvements in intelligence gathering.

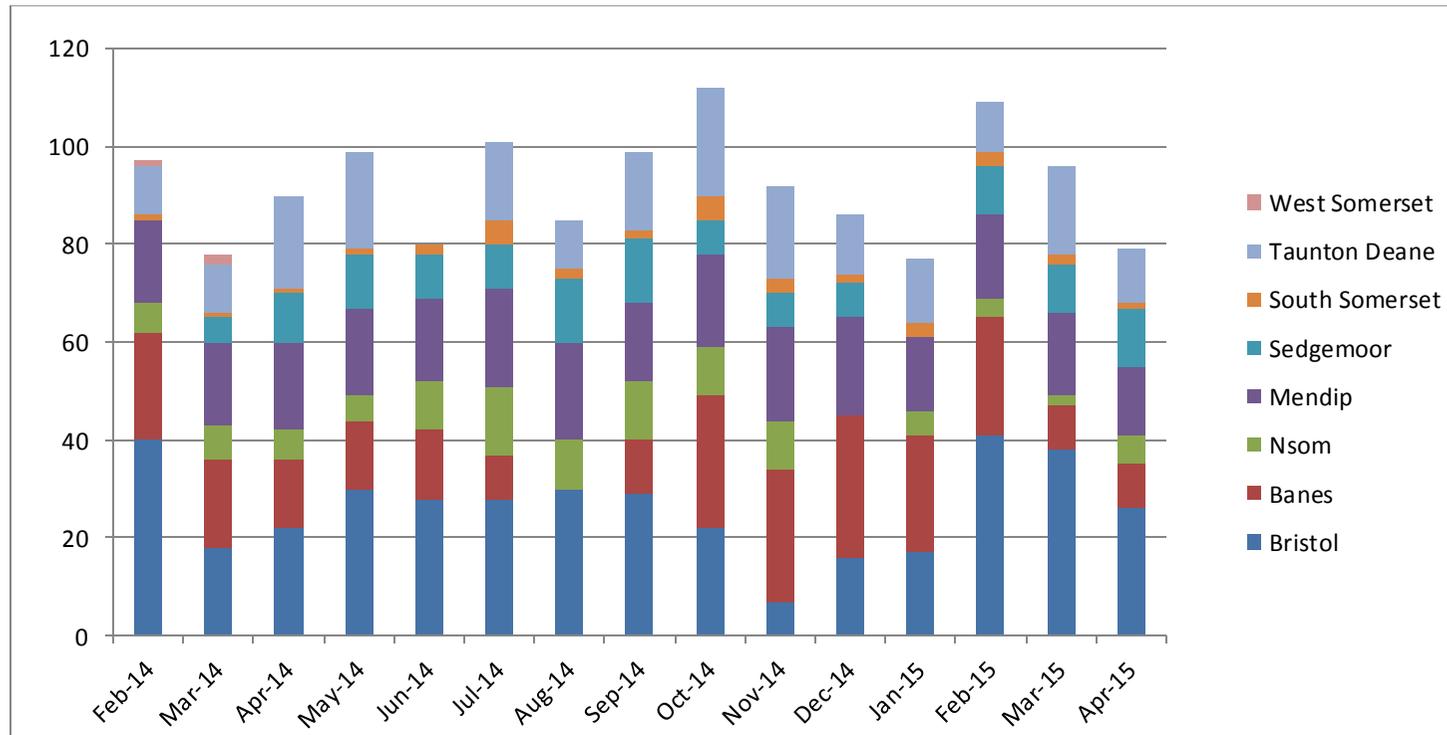
Below are the annual counts/estimates for 2012-2014.

AVON AND SOMERSET ANNUAL ROUGH SLEEPING STATISTICS 2012-2014



AVON AND SOMERSET ROUGH SLEEPER STEERING GROUP

AVON AND SOMERSET MONTHLY ROUGH SLEEPER STATISTICS TO APRIL 2015



It is difficult to identify trends in rough sleeping as there are no obvious patterns to discern including patterns that might emerge with seasonal changes.

## What were the key successes?

### **Commitment of local authority members to the Steering Group**

The Steering Group has been a key success in the roll out of the Avon and Somerset single homeless funding. It has had a pivotal role in determining priorities with the Co-ordinator and for evaluating funding proposals and their outcomes notwithstanding competing priorities. Those local authorities with more embedded services in urban settings have been able to enhance the work of the Group with their experience. Julian House, a BANES based homelessness agency has provided resources in the form of the Rough Sleeper Reporting Line, website and leaflets as well as organising training on the INFORM database for frontline staff, recording interventions with rough sleepers across local authority boundaries.

### **Co-operation of local authorities to work with Co-ordinator**

In order for the Co-ordinator to research the landscape of services and to identify gaps, much has depended on the co-operation and contributions of the local authority partners and their voluntary agencies. This has made it possible to bring together data and information as well as best practice to discussions at the Steering Group with a view to improving services across the region. For example, local authorities via their homelessness agencies provided monthly statistics for the Co-ordinator to track and record levels of rough sleeping. This has provided material evidence of need and trends which has proved important when considering the allocation of resources and bidding for additional funding.

### **Reconnection**

The Steering Group developed a Reconnections Policy to be applied across the Avon and Somerset local authorities. This has been a useful tool where reconnection can prevent homelessness enabling some homeless people to rebuild their lives within the communities from which they came. Reconnection can be a way for homeless people to rebuild their lives. For some single homeless people it is not a solution if moving away from those communities is part of a longer process of recovery.

### **Low Cost High Impact Funding**

This was a programme of grants introduced early on in the life of the funding which acknowledged that small grants could often make a large difference at client level. The first phase of funding was heavily over-subscribed particularly with applications for improving access to the private

rented sector as well as other small bids for improving services within homeless hostels and day centres . A second phase of funding was therefore introduced geared solely at initiatives that improved single homeless people's ability to access private rented sector housing, for example support with deposits and rent in advance.

### **Raising the profile of single homeless people with statutory and other agencies**

This has been a positive aspect of the work undertaken by the Steering Group. Cross agency working with Bristol CCG, Somerset CCG, Banes Supporting People, The Royal United Hospital in Bath, Somerset Partnership (mental health services), North Somerset CCG, Public Health within local authorities, Pathway Homeless Health Care, and Avon and Somerset IMPACT (prolific offenders), are examples of the bodies that have come to know the work undertaken by the Steering Group . For example, health inequalities amongst the single homeless population are now well-documented and this has paved the way for closer working with the health services around improving access to health care, improving outcomes for clients discharged from hospital as well as general health and well-being.

### **Supporting homeless women engaged in street sex work**

Identifying this single homeless client group resulted from the work in identifying the gaps in service provision. Street sex workers were a cohort peculiar to Bristol but quickly became identified as a need group that were street homeless although at the time, little was known about their homelessness experiences. The Steering Group was able to fund support to expand the drop in service for this group of women where somewhere to 'nap' was available even if only utilised for a short period, acknowledging sleep deprivation as a public health issue, as well as advice and support to access housing, substance misuse services and other health care services.

## What were the key challenges for the Group and its work?

### Supporting single homeless people is a non-statutory service

Central Government funding to statutory services for homelessness prevention activities has been protected but overall local authority homelessness services have faced funding pressures in recent years. Inside Housing reported that local authority support budgets for single homeless people had been cut by 26% in the three years to 2013/14 possibly linked with the ongoing decline in Supporting People funding and increased removal of ring fenced pots of money for a vulnerable client group. It has recently been reported that 'housing welfare support' has been cut by nearly half in real terms over the past five years (46%). (*Crisis homeless monitor*) Homeless Link's 2014 edition of their annual survey of single homelessness services in England found that 38% of accommodation projects had seen their funding fall over the past 12 months.

Nationwide, services affected by funding decreases have generally responded by reducing the provision of services such as key-working and meaningful activities and frontline staffing. This impacts on accommodation projects declining referrals of people with multiple and complex needs or challenging behaviour. Tenancy sustainment and other low intensity support services are at greatest risk in this difficult financial climate, with potentially long-term implications for increased levels of homelessness and rough sleeping.

An example of these challenges has been the recent experience of Somerset where the County Council is making significant budget cuts that will affect the future of the non-statutory services for single homeless people.

### Outreach

Outreach services existed across all local authorities within the Group, some services receiving seed funding from the Steering Group. The existence of outreach services is critical to accessing and supporting rough sleepers, the application of No Second Night Out principles and gathering intelligence on the extent of need. During the three years of the Steering Group's work, this service has been threatened as funding streams came to a close and other sources of funding had to be identified.

### **No Second Night Out**

All local authorities pledged to provide a No Second Night Out service. In practice, the response was variable and was considerably easier where accommodation overnight was available to allow time for assessment. Accommodation was not available in North Somerset or Mendip although Mendip has funded some direct access beds in recent months from its own resources.

### **Access to housing in the private rented sector**

The private rented sector is the main source of accommodation for non-priority single homeless people. This is in short supply across Avon and Somerset at a rent that is affordable for this client group. The extension of the shared accommodation room rate for adults up to 35 has exacerbated difficulties through increasing demand where supply of houses in multiple occupations may not be available.

Added to this, many clients are dependent upon accessing a deposit and rent in advance from a third party ; often this can mean qualifying for support from a third party voluntary agency or local authority. The Low Cost High Impact grants for improving access to the private rented sector were welcomed by local voluntary agencies as a source of funding for this.

### **Complex revolving door cases**

Tackling the needs of clients with complex needs, usually low level multiple needs has been and remains a challenge. The Golden Key programme run by Second Steps in Bristol is a positive outcome of the recognition that is now being given to this group of clients although the demand for this 8 year long service funded by the Big Lottery Fulfilling Lives Programme is proving so far to exceed available resources. Moreover, central government recognition of the challenge to public resources has led to a recent announcement for a “Call for Evidence” from local authorities and homeless agencies under the banner ‘Addressing Complex Needs’. Notwithstanding a change of government, it is hoped that the evidence will be used to bring about a focussed programme of support across the United Kingdom.

Clients with multiple and complex needs are also high profile in Banes and Somerset. Bath and North East Somerset Council is looking at allocating some funding as a pilot but this has not so far come to fruition. Similarly, it is a recurring theme across the districts in Somerset and the profile of the issues has been consistently raised with Somerset County Council and it is hoped this will translate into practical solutions. Lack of floating support time to support those with low level multiple needs to live independently is one concern as well as those clients who are hard to reach both physically through rough sleeping and socially through exclusion, not accessing mainstream services except in a crisis.

### **Mental health**

A recurring theme for the Group has been concern about the level of mental health problems amongst the single homeless population and the impact this has on accessing and sustaining accommodation. Of particular concern has been the management of clients presenting as homeless to local authorities on discharge from community or inpatient mental health services. BANES has been proactive in this area and has a member of staff whose remit is to develop close ties with mental health services in BANES so that discharges are planned and availability of accommodation or prevention of homelessness is timely. This model has been seen as a possibility for Somerset but a different approach is likely to be relevant to the much larger geographical area. It is hoped to fund a pilot which will provide a discharge service to homeless people being discharged from all treatment facilities i.e. mental health services, acute hospitals and drug and alcohol services. This is still at the planning and design stage.

### **Substance misuse**

Drugs and alcohol addictions are commonly understood to be features of the single homeless population but a new and growing concern has developed in the form of new psychoactive substances (NPS) otherwise known as 'legal highs'. Taunton in Somerset has been particularly affected and other urban areas within the Avon and Somerset grouping are similarly concerned. Legal Highs can affect behaviour including reducing inhibitions which has led to evictions from homeless hostels and other supported accommodation, for example evictions from Taunton Association for Homeless doubled in a sixth month period where the primary reason was use of Legal Highs.

### **Rurality**

Large parts of Avon and Somerset are rural areas. For example, Somerset's rural and 'rural related' population accounts for 71% of the county's population against 24% of the population nationally. Somerset experiences significant levels of social exclusion and in turn rough sleeping numbers

are not matched by the resources available in other more urban areas. There is a strong case for highlighting the rural nature of parts of Avon and Somerset as it represents important evidence for future bidding and the lack of understanding centrally has arguably influenced unsuccessful bids made in the duration of this work

### **Homeless Link**

Homeless Link has provided a helpful reference point for advice and support for the Co-ordinator and the Steering Group. The South West Regional Manager has attended Steering Group meetings and provided useful feedback on national policies and programmes. Unfortunately, there has been significant turnover of staff during the last three years which has challenged continuity and perhaps undermined the full potential of the role in supporting the activities of the Group. Going forward, it is hoped that a period of stability in staffing will mean a return to the good service provided in the past.

### **Disparate group of local authorities**

The Avon and Somerset grouping was an alliance of local authorities defined by the Department of Communities and Local Government. An aspiration of the funding was to encourage cross-boundary working. In practice, this has been difficult to deliver on the ground as the demography, geography, local challenges and varying resources meant that local responses to meeting local needs was more relevant for each local authority partner. However, there was a sense of collective responsibility at Steering Group level where local authority partners were able to critically appraise funding proposals and share experience and skills.

### **INFORM database**

The use of the INFORM database was a challenge for local authorities and frontline staffing alike. Although welcomed by all members of the Steering Group as a means of tracking rough sleepers and gaining intelligence on interventions, the existence of parallel databases with the same purpose has made it difficult to implement the use of INFORM and it has not been used to its optimum. Eventually, with the prospect of the need to purchase further licenses, the decision was made to cease use of the database except by individual partners.

## **What does the future hold?**

### **Change of government**

A change of government is imminent. It is difficult to forecast the priority that will be afforded single homeless people and rough sleepers. CRISIS claim that the main party manifestos make commitments to do more to end homelessness and will be holding the next government to account on these pledges asking for a review of the help that single people receive under the homelessness legislation. Homeless Link is calling on the next government to take action in five key areas: rough sleeping, employment, affordable housing, support for people with the most complex needs and a long term strategy for homelessness. Certainly, an end to short term funding and a more robust proactive approach to funding single homelessness and their attendant support needs along the lines of the historic 'Supporting People' would bring fresh confidence to meeting the challenges of this client group.

### **Ongoing austerity**

All the main parties plan to reduce debt over the next Parliament.

The Autumn Statement 2014 plans cuts in spending on public services of 14% between 2015-16 and 2019-20 to generate a total budget surplus. Unprotected departments which mean those outside the NHS, schools and overseas aid face cuts of over a quarter, on top of cuts of a fifth in the previous five years. (Source: Austerity: Growth Costs and Post-Election Plans John Van Reenen: A series of background briefings on the policy issues in the May 2015 UK General Election)Centre for Economic Performance London School of Economics.

### **Welfare reform**

Welfare reform measures have now all been operating for some time. Recent welfare reforms particularly relevant to single homeless people include sanctions under Jobseekers Allowance/Employment and Support Allowance, the Shared Accommodation Rate, Council Tax benefit reforms and localisation of the Social Fund. The tightened sanctions regime and the Shared Accommodation Rate applied to single people up to 35 have the most impact on single homeless people.

In terms of the future, the Government's Work and Pensions Select Committee has called for a full independent review of benefit sanctions. Meanwhile welfare reform is likely to continue with the potential for further cutbacks in the coming years. The last budget committed the next government to making a further £12 billion of cuts to the welfare budget over two years although the methodology is awaited.

### **The need to become work ready**

Against this backdrop of welfare reform and financial restraint, the focus must shift to the potential for work or work readiness for single homeless people who have fallen out of the employment market either through lack of opportunity or multiple needs that create obstacles to work. This has not been an area explored in depth by the Steering Group but it remains an important ingredient to bringing about a positive change in circumstances. CRISIS has launched Employment Fortnight where in centres across the UK, homeless people will boost their job prospects by meeting with local employers. This is just a small part of a Crisis service that lifts people from homelessness back into work and a better, independent life

### **The Care Act**

The Care Act 2014, together with a range of regulations and statutory guidance, is the base upon which social care will develop over the next few decades.

It enshrines the new statutory principle of individual wellbeing, the driving force behind the Act, and makes it the responsibility of local authorities to promote wellbeing when carrying out any of their care and support functions. The implications for homelessness need to be explored.

Elizabeth Parry

Single Homeless & Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator

5 May 2015

## Appendix 1

### Definitions

The national annual rough sleeping counts and estimates are single night snapshots of the number of people sleeping rough in local authority areas within the period 1 October and 30 November. Local authorities gain intelligence for street counts and estimates from local agencies such as outreach workers, the police, the voluntary sector and the public.

Notwithstanding the difficulties of accurately counting or estimating the number of rough sleepers within the area of a local authority, there has now been a consistent approach to collecting the figures over the last five years and their robustness is enhanced by Homeless Link being involved in verifying local counts and validating local estimates.

Rough sleepers are defined for the purposes of rough sleeping counts and estimates 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, comprised of cardboard boxes).'**

## Appendix 2

### Funding and Appointment of Co-ordinator

The Avon and Somerset Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator was appointed in August 2012 initially for 12 months but following two extensions the role has continued until May 2015. The aim of the project has been to develop a strategic response to ensuring that frontline service provision is effective at preventing and reducing non-priority single homelessness and rough sleeping across Avon and Somerset.

The Avon and Somerset grouping was awarded £539,000 funding from the Department of Communities and Local Government. Specifically it was for the purpose of supporting work to prevent and tackle rough sleeping and single homelessness and the development of an early intervention and prevention service across the region including supporting the roll out of No Second Night Out.

### Appendix 3

#### Steering Group and Action Plan

The Co-ordinator has been reporting to a Steering group comprising the eight local authority partners of:

- Bristol
- Bath and North East Somerset
- North Somerset
- Mendip
- Sedgemoor
- South Somerset
- Taunton Deane
- West Somerset

During the first year, Somerset County Council re-commissioned its accommodation and housing related support services for young people and adults with one or more support needs. These services formed an integral part of Somerset's services for this non-statutory group and it was decided that Somerset County Council should be represented on the Steering Group to help inform the debate.

The Steering Group is both guardian and beneficiary of the fund. In that role the Steering Group has been setting the policy and direction for the funding. Mendip District Council was appointed the lead authority and has hosted and managed the post.

The demography of each local authority varies considerably from the very urban to the very rural, each with its own challenges for single homeless people. Somerset is within the 10 most rural counties in England. Bristol and North Somerset contain areas which are within the top 5% most deprived nationally. Bristol and Banes have well-embedded local services to support rough sleepers and single homeless people. Their resources and experience have been helpful in addressing some of the issues for the other more rural authorities where there are similar challenging social issues associated with homelessness without a social infrastructure to meet these challenges.

## AVON AND SOMERSET ROUGH SLEEPER STEERING GROUP

The role of the Steering Group has been to determine an overarching Action Plan based on agreed priorities supported by a Gap analysis. One of the first priorities of the Co-ordinator was to prepare a Gap Analysis that mapped all services currently in place across the 8 authorities and to highlight the gaps. The Steering Group met regularly to review the Action Plan, the monthly rough sleeping statistics and to evaluate any funding proposals that fell within the remit of the Action Plan.

AVON AND SOMERSET ROUGH SLEEPER STEERING GROUP

**Appendix 4: Gap Analysis of Landscape of services for non-priority single homeless people and rough sleepers**

Standard Service

	Co-ordinated rough sleeper estimates and counts	Rough sleeper reporting line	Extensive coverage of outreach services	Reconnection service	Day centre services	No Second Night Out	Rapid Response Service	Emergency temporary accommodation  B&B or direct access beds	Personalised solutions	Support and means to access private rented sector	Intensive case work  Follow up casework
Bristol	👍	👍	👍	👍	👍	👍		👍	👍	👍	
Bath & NE Somerset	👍	👍	👍	👍	👍	👍		👍	👍	👍	👍
North Somerset	👍	👍	👍	👍	👍	👍		👍		👍	👍
South Somerset	👍	👍	👍	👍	👉	👍		👍		👍	
Sedgemoor	👍	👍	👍	👍	👍	👍		👍	👍	👍	
Taunton Deane	👍	👍	👍	👍	👍	👍		👍	👍	👍	
Mendip	👍	👍	👍	👍	👍	👍		👍		👍	
West Somerset	👍	👍	👍	👍		👍		👍		👍	

KEY: 👍=in place; 👉=working towards or proportionate to local conditions; blank = not in place or not appropriate

AVON AND SOMERSET ROUGH SLEEPER STEERING GROUP

Standard service

Enhanced service

	Supported accommodation	Move on accommodation with floating support	Severe weather provision		Transition planning from and between services	Hospital discharge protocol	Prison discharge protocol	Health, mental and therapeutic services	Eviction and referral protocol	Complex needs protocol	Women services/women only homelessness services
Bristol	👍	👍	👍			👍	👍	👍	👍	👍	👍👍
Bath & NE Somerset	👍	👍	👍			👍		👍	👍	👉	👍👍
North Somerset			👍			👍					/👍
South Somerset	👍	👍	👍				👍	👉	👍	👉	/👍
Sedgemoor	👍	👍	👍						👍	👉	/👍
Taunton Deane	👍	👍	👍					👍	👍	👉	/👍
Mendip	👍	👍	👍					👍	👍	👉	/👍
West Somerset	👍	👍	👍						👍	👉	/👍

KEY: 👍=in place; 🔄=working towards or proportionate to local conditions; blank = not in place or not appropriate

**Appendix 5: Initiatives receiving funding from Avon and Somerset Steering Group**

In addition to the funding of the Co-ordinator's post funding has been allocated to the following key initiatives.

<b>Details</b>	<b>Amount (£'s)</b>
Cold Weather support worker for East Somerset LA areas	<b>£20,000</b>
Cold Weather support worker for West & North Somerset LA areas	<b>£20,000</b>
Funds towards RS o/reach service covering Mendip	<b>£10,000</b>
Outreach service covering Bridgewater & Taunton	<b>£15,000</b>
Seminar	<b>£1468.60</b>
Crisis sheet	<b>£484.00</b>
Low cost High Impact Funding : Round 1 'making a difference' eg crisis living packages; Big Issue vendor support	<b>£ 32,124.00</b>
INFORM licenses for database access	<b>£1107.00</b>
Nightstop/Outreach Worker North Somerset	<b>£35,197</b>

AVON AND SOMERSET ROUGH SLEEPER STEERING GROUP

Rough Sleeper Reporting Line Extension	<b>£750</b>
Training course; 'Empowering difficult to engage service users'	<b>£1750</b>
Outreach service for West Somerset	<b>£4999</b>
Low Cost High Impact Funding: Round 2 'improving access to private rented sector'	<b>£50,000</b> <b>allocated</b>

Housing Options Evaluation	<b>£ 2,700</b>
Winter Watch Sedgemoor	<b>£6,000</b>
Listening Event on mental health service users at risk of homelessness	<b>£1,232</b>
Hospital Discharge Service for homeless people from Royal United Hospital Bath	<b>£55,000</b>
South Somerset Homeless Day Centre	<b>£70,000</b>
Contribution to overnight drop in services for street sex workers	<b>£20,000</b>