

Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee

21 July 2026



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

Title	Delivering a partnership response to rough sleeping in Reading: coordinated outreach, support and supported housing
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report	Melissa Wise – Executive Director Communities and Adult Social Care (DCASC)
Report author	Verena Hutcheson
Lead Councillor	Cllr Matt Yeo – Lead Councillor for Housing
Council priority	Safeguard & support the health & wellbeing of Reading's adults & children
Recommendations	1. That Committee note this report for information, alongside the presentation delivered with sector partners.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of how Reading Borough Council and its partners deliver a coordinated response to rough sleeping across outreach, emergency provision, supported accommodation and longer-term recovery. It highlights the strength and depth of partnership working across statutory services, commissioned providers, and the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS). The report focuses on the partnership response to rough sleeping, rather than wider statutory homelessness duties.
- 1.2 The report demonstrates how joined-up working enables individuals to access the right support at the right time, particularly those with complex and multiple needs. Key areas of focus include coordinated outreach, partnership led emergency responses such as Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP), specialist pathways including Housing First, and wider work to support recovery, independence and long-term housing outcomes.
- 1.3 This approach is underpinned by *Reading's Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026 – 2031* and associated Action Plan, which sets out a clear commitment to strengthening partnership working, improving early intervention and prevention, and supporting sustainable routes out of homelessness. The work is also aligned with the Government's national direction on tackling homelessness, including a greater emphasis on collaboration between services and shared accountability for outcomes.
- 1.4 Examples of partnership in practice provided in this report illustrate how this approach reduces risk, improves engagement with services, and supports sustained accommodation. The report also highlights ongoing work to strengthen collaboration, including co-production with people with lived experience and the development of new initiatives with partners.
- 1.5 Overall, the report shows that partnership working is fundamental to reducing rough sleeping in Reading. It enables a flexible, person-centred response that not only supports people off the streets but helps them maintain stability, improve their wellbeing and move towards independent living.

2. Context: Summary of provision

2.1. Support and accommodation for people at risk of, or currently, rough sleeping

This section outlines how the council and partner organisations provide outreach, emergency beds, supported accommodation, and ongoing tenancy support to single people and couples rough sleeping or at risk of homelessness.

2.2 Street based outreach and engagement

2.2.1 Rough Sleeping Outreach Service responds to reports of rough sleeping, engages individuals on the streets, and facilitates access to accommodation or reconnection to their home area. The team works closely with Reading's Multiple Disadvantage Outreach Team (MDOT) and Health Outreach Liaison Team (HOLT), both commissioned by Health to support individuals who are rough sleeping or vulnerably housed and facing challenges related to substance misuse, physical health, and mental ill health.

2.3 Emergency and seasonal provision

Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) operates regardless of local connection or access to public funds, ensuring a humanitarian response to immediate risk.

2.3.1 Cold Weather SWEP activated when temperatures fall to zero degrees or below for three consecutive nights, offering emergency accommodation to prevent deaths on the streets. When SWEP is activated, an additional 15 bed spaces become available at Willow House, which provides 24/7 staffed supported accommodation. Further capacity is then secured as needed through paid nightly placements, ensuring that all individuals who are rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping can be accommodated for the duration of the activation.

2.3.2 Heatwave SWEP activated during heat-health alerts, providing water, sun protection, and access to cool spaces. Emergency accommodation may be offered during extreme heat.

2.3.3 The Bed for the Night (B4N) Winter Shelter, operated and funded by FAITH with contributions from the Council, provides 20 additional winter bed spaces from January to March for people who are sleeping rough with a local connection to Reading.

2.4 Supported accommodation pathways

Reading offers a range of supported housing options tailored to different needs – there is capacity to accommodate 289 people across interventions. These comprise 280 commissioned bed spaces (referral only, not direct access) and nine bed spaces for those needing an immediate off the streets offer (direct access):

2.4.1 Nova Project: 10 bed female only service with 24/7 staffing, trauma informed and gender specific support for women with complex needs.

2.4.2 Caversham Road Pods: 40 self-contained modular units with 24/7 staffing for individuals with histories of rough sleeping and multiple complex needs.

2.4.3 Intensive and Engaging Support: 33 bed spaces (including four rooms that can accommodate couples), five direct access rooms, three emergency overnight beds, and full board catering with 24/7 staffing. It brings together multiple services in one location (a hub) to simplify access to support for people experiencing rough sleeping. There are also 20 beds in shared cluster flats, including self-catering facilities, with staff available during office hours and 24/7 on call support from the main hub service.

2.4.4 Young Person's Service: 41 units for young people aged 18 – 24, including a direct access crash pad and four young parent flats, with access to training and wellbeing facilities.

- 2.4.5 Housing First and Couples Accommodation Pathway:** 31 units, for 37 people, offering permanent tenancies with wraparound support for individuals and couples with complex needs.
- 2.4.6 Accommodation for Ex Offenders (AfEO):** Council led project supporting prison leavers into private rented accommodation with tenancy sustainment support.
- 2.4.7 Working Towards Independence Accommodation:** 100 bedspaces across 20 properties for individuals needing housing related support before moving on to independent living.

2.5 Tenancy and employment access support

- 2.5.1 Floating Support Service:** Cross tenure support for tenancy sustainment and resettlement, with tiered levels of intervention and open access drop ins.
- 2.5.2 Launchpad 135 Work and Life Skills Centre:** Fully funded by Launchpad Reading, offering training, counselling, and employment support to residents who are homeless or in supported housing.

3 Overview of the coordinated multi-agency response to rough sleeping

3.1 Shared partnerships approach and principles

- 3.1.1 Partners delivering services for people experiencing rough sleeping in Reading operate within a collaborative, multi-agency approach, where housing, health, social care, and voluntary sector organisations work together to meet complex and diverse needs.
- 3.1.2 Partnerships are underpinned by a shared commitment to a person-centred approach, prioritising individual strengths, aspirations and lived experience, with success measured by meaningful outcomes and improvements in wellbeing rather than solely performance metrics. There is a strong emphasis on achieving sustained positive change, with partners focusing on long-term outcomes such as stable housing, improved health, recovery, and improved engagement with support services.
- 3.1.3 Delivery is underpinned by shared accountability and collective ownership, with partners sharing responsibility, and working jointly to achieve the best outcomes for service users. This collaborative ethos is reflected across all relationships within the partnership, including between partners and commissioners, and is supported by a culture of open, ongoing communication. Service delivery is further strengthened by continuous reflection and dialogue, enabling services to respond flexibly to emerging needs, promote transparency, and develop creative, solution-focused efforts for people facing multiple disadvantage.

3.2 Partnership with the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS)

- 3.2.1 The voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) is a key partner in Reading's response to rough sleeping. Strengthening these relationships is a core priority within the *Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping: A strategy for Reading 2026 – 2031* and accompanying Action Plan, which positions VCFS collaboration as central to prevention, early intervention and ongoing support.
- 3.2.2 The Council works closely with commissioned partners, including Launchpad Reading, St Mungo's, The Salvation Army and YMCA Reading, alongside providing ongoing support to FAITH's Winter Shelter. These commissioned partnerships within the VCFS are crucial to the delivery of frontline services, effective referral pathways and a coordinated response to emerging need.
- 3.2.3 Council officers have undertaken targeted engagement with local VCFS organisations in relation to the Government's *Ending Homelessness in Communities Fund*. This has included a well-attended workshop and ongoing officer support to develop proposals and

provide letters of endorsement to enable smaller VCFS groups to bid for funds to strengthen and expand their existing services and delivery approaches. This process has strengthened relationships across the sector and demonstrated strong local appetite for collaboration. The Council will continue to build on this engagement, ensuring that partnerships with the VCFS sector remain central to delivering an effective and coordinated response to rough sleeping in Reading.

- 3.2.4 To further strengthen partnership working, as outlined in *Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping: An action plan for Reading 2026 – 2031*, a quarterly Homelessness Forum will be established to bring together statutory, commissioned and VCFS organisations to improve coordination, share intelligence and identify gaps in provision.

3.3 Partnership with statutory sector partners

- 3.3.1 Partnership with statutory organisations is central to Reading's approach to rough sleeping. The *Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping: A strategy for Reading 2026 – 2031* and accompanying Action Plan highlight the need for coordinated working across housing, health, adult social care and criminal justice services to respond effectively to complex and overlapping needs.
- 3.3.2 Key partners include Adult Social Care, health services (including HOLT), substance misuse services (CGL/MDOT), Thames Valley Police, probation, and Jobcentre Plus. Together, these services support individuals with a range of needs, including mental and physical health, substance use and safeguarding concerns. Partners demonstrate strong commitment to joint working, including active and consistent attendance at multi-agency forums such as the Access Panel.
- 3.3.3 These partnerships span outreach, emergency responses such as SWEP, and supported housing pathways, continuing through to people moving on from services where support is no longer directly linked to their accommodation. Multi-agency working enables better risk management, improved decision-making and more effective outcomes.
- 3.3.4 The *Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan* for Reading also set out further planned progress to strengthen partnership working, including closer integration between housing and adult social care and improving access to health support. This aligns with the national direction set out in the Government's homelessness reform programme, including the proposed Duty to Collaborate, which will require partners to work more formally together to address rough sleeping and homelessness.
- 3.3.5 Progress in Reading includes the introduction of a dedicated Senior Social Worker role, improving coordination and safeguarding responses for individuals with complex needs. Building on this, partners will continue to develop joint approaches, strengthen shared accountability and respond collectively to emerging need. This is further supported by representation from the Rough Sleeping Initiatives Team on the Safeguarding Adults Board and Safeguarding Adults Review Panel, ensuring the needs and risks facing this cohort are reflected in wider safeguarding arrangements.
- 3.3.6 Overall, statutory partnerships support a joined-up, person-centred response, helping to reduce rough sleeping, sustain accommodation and improve long-term outcomes.

3.4 Partnership working in practice

- 3.4.1 The following sections illustrate how partnership working, across the Council, commissioned services, VCFS and statutory sectors operates in practice, focusing on the non-statutory response to rough sleeping. They provide examples of both immediate interventions and longer-term sustainable routes away from homelessness, demonstrating the breadth and resilience of Reading's local response:

3.5 Coordinated partnership response in practice: Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

3.5.1 SWEP provides a clear example of how partnership working operates at scale, bringing together services to deliver a coordinated and responsive approach. It brings together housing, outreach, health services, accommodation providers, substance misuse services, and VCFS partners to deliver a rapid, humanitarian response during extreme weather conditions.

At times of activation:

- Outreach services (St Mungo's) identify and engage individuals on the streets
- Housing teams coordinate placements and funding, including emergency accommodation
- The Salvation Army provides additional 24/7 staffed bed spaces at Willow House
- Health partners (HOLT, CGL) support individuals with physical, mental health and substance use needs
- VCFS organisations provide practical support such as food, clothing and essential supplies
- Emergency Duty Team ensures access out of hours
- Police and Adult Social Care support safeguarding and risk management
- Home Office and Prison Service colleagues, once notified of SWEP being active, commit to delaying planned releases and the ending of accommodation until after activation period has ended

3.5.2 This level of coordination demonstrates how partners share responsibility, communicate effectively, and mobilise quickly to reduce risk and save lives. It also creates a critical opportunity to engage individuals who may not otherwise access support and connect them into longer-term support / pathways. This work is further supported by a wider network of partners, including probation services, policing, Jobcentre Plus and primary care, whose involvement is essential to identifying vulnerable individuals and ensuring support is targeted by their individual service.

3.6 Partnerships delivering long-term change: Housing First

3.6.1 Housing First provides a strong example of partnership delivering meaningful impact for individuals with the most complex and entrenched needs. The model brings together housing, health, adult social care and voluntary sector partners to provide stable accommodation alongside intensive, flexible and person-centred support.

3.6.2 This approach is delivered through close collaboration between the Council's Rough Sleeping Initiatives Team and St Mungo's, with vital contributions from Tenant Services for property supply and management, support from the Anti-social Behaviour Team and from wider statutory partners. Health and substance misuse services, including HOLT and CGL, provide ongoing clinical and recovery support, while dedicated Senior Social Worker support playing a key role in safeguarding and enabling care and support for individuals who need it. Together, these services work around the individual, providing a consistent and coordinated approach that goes beyond housing alone.

3.6.3 Key partnership features include:

- Joint commissioning and delivery between the Council's Rough Sleeping Initiatives Team and St Mungo's
- Dedicated housing management from Tenant Services alongside specialist support, enabling prompt and assertive responses to anti-social behaviour or tenancy concerns, delivered through a cohesive and person-centred approach

- Engagement from the Council's Anti-social Behaviour Team, ensuring a shared understanding of the model and a supportive approach to managing risk
 - Integration with substance misuse services, health outreach and adult social care
 - A focus on sustained tenancies, recovery and improved wellbeing
- 3.6.4 Evidence from local case studies shows that this coordinated, wrap-around approach can stabilise individuals, reduce anti-social behaviour concerns, and support long-term recovery – outcomes that are difficult to achieve without consistent, cross-agency collaboration. This approach supports sustained tenancies, reduces risk and enables long-term improvements in health and wellbeing.
- 3.6.5 Helen [anonymised] describes her experience prior to Housing First. Before moving into her own accommodation, she experienced repeated cycles of homelessness. She spent periods sleeping rough but was mostly part of Reading's 'hidden homeless' cohort staying with other vulnerable adults or placing herself in vulnerable situations to avoid rough sleeping. She had previously been accommodated through the 'Everyone In' pandemic response when at risk of rough sleeping but struggled to sustain accommodation in larger supported settings – choosing not to take up these housing options. For several years, she had been known to Council, statutory and support services, but without the stability needed to break the cycle or consistently engage with support.

"It was tough sleeping in doorways, having people pushed on you, screaming abuse at you. It makes you depressed, suicidal – you don't have friends when you're homeless."

"It was hard to keep yourself clean – stuff got stolen. Every day was uncertain – if you were going to get sleep or feel unsafe. It makes you feel like you're nothing, when you're already in the gutter."

- 3.6.6 Since joining Housing First, Helen has been supported by a range of partners working together to address her needs in a coordinated way. St Mungo's have provided intensive, consistent support, while housing, health and substance misuse services have worked alongside her to stabilise her situation and support her recovery.

"Since working with Housing First – my flat's got everything, St Mungo's helped me with my housing, my debt – everything. They're great."

When asked what she is most proud of since joining Housing First, Helen said:

"Being clean off the gear, having my puppy, sorting out my debt and my mental health, I finally can deal with my mental health."

3.7 Social care and cross-sector partnerships

- 3.7.1 A significant development across overall partnerships is the introduction of a dedicated Senior Social Worker for rough sleeping and homelessness, funded from grant received from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). This role strengthens integration between housing and adult social care, ensuring that safeguarding, care needs and risk management are embedded within homelessness pathways. The role works alongside outreach teams and directly with people who are rough sleeping or at risk of returning to the streets. It supports the upskilling of outreach and wider sector staff, strengthens links between services and helps create a more coordinated and consistent response for people who find it difficult to access mainstream service offers and appointments.
- 3.7.2 Appendix 1 – *Sam's Story: Coordinating social care and homelessness support* demonstrates how stronger integration between services can improve coordination for individuals with complex needs, support more effective decision-making, and enable timely, person-centred responses that reduce the risk of individuals falling through gaps in the system and sleeping rough.

- 3.7.3 This reflects wider feedback from partners that cross-sector roles, like the Senior Social Worker role for homelessness and rough sleeping, act as critical connectors, enabling more effective joint working and improved outcomes for clients, as well as upskilling other sector partners and paving the way for improved relationships across teams.

3.8 Partnership with the VCFS: Bed for the Night (B4N)

- 3.8.1 The Bed for the Night winter shelter illustrates the strength and evolution of partnership with the VCFS in Reading. Delivered by FAITH Christian Group with support from the Council and commissioned services, the model provides 20 winter bed spaces and a welcoming, community-led environment.
- 3.8.2 While the partnership is now well-established, it has developed over time. Initial relationships, over 10 years ago when the shelter first opened, were more challenging, with differing views on delivery models and referral pathways. Through continued engagement, shared learning and a focus on common outcomes, trust has been built between the Council and St Mungo's, and FAITH and the network of churches and volunteers who deliver the service.
- 3.8.3 The current winter-led model reflects both this learning and practical considerations. Operating seasonally helps sustain a large volunteer base without risking burnout, maintains the quality and consistency of provision, and avoids pressures associated with a single fixed-site, year-round model (including potential impacts on local communities such as ASB concentration). It also enables the service to act as a flexible, surge response during periods of heightened risk, particularly in colder months, complementing rather than duplicating existing and planned commissioned provision.
- 3.8.4 Over time, this model has developed into a partnership characterised by:
- Strong alignment with outreach and statutory services
 - Trusted referral pathways and coordinated support
 - A volunteer-led, relational approach that builds engagement and trust
 - Clear links into wider and recovery focused accommodation and support pathways beyond the winter period

The model demonstrates how collaboration with the VCFS can enhance flexibility, extend reach, and provide more personalised support, particularly for individuals who may not engage with statutory services.

- 3.8.5 This relationship reflects how strong, effective partnerships between the Council and the VCFS develop over time, with trust and relationships needing to be built and earned by all parties to enable any model or joint project to fully thrive. The success of co-production and joint projects depends on this trust and a shared understanding of goals, as it allows partners to work closely together and develop future projects in a meaningful way.

3.9 Co-production and lived experience

- 3.9.1 A key area of development for Reading has been the establishment of a co-production forum ("Shared Voice"), bringing together people with lived experience and cross-sector service providers to influence service design and delivery.
- 3.9.2 While still at an early stage of development, having been set up in March 2025, with further work planned to strengthen participation and outputs, this work represents a significant shift towards:
- Inclusive decision-making, ensuring services reflect real experiences
 - Building trust and accountability between services and those they support
 - Identifying practical improvements in accessibility and effectiveness
 - Actioning commitments made by the Council in their *Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping: An action plan for Reading 2026 – 2031*

3.9.3 Partners have emphasised that creating a shared space for co-production – across organisations rather than within individual services – is a major step forward and will continue to shape future service development. This is complemented by partnership forums such as the Access Panel where services come together to review complex cases and support coordinated decision-making, and future Homelessness Forums where partners can share learning, strengthen relationships, and align approaches across the partnership.

3.10 Using partnerships to support recovery: Skills, employment and independence

3.10.1 Partnership working extends beyond outreach and supported accommodation and plays a key role in supporting recovery, skills development and long-term independence. The Launchpad Work and Life Skills Centre provides a collaborative space where multiple organisations support individuals to develop skills, access training, and move towards employment.

This includes:

- Joint delivery with St Mungo's employment support
- Employer engagement (e.g. Thames Water apprenticeships)
- Access to training, counselling and daily living skills
- Practical support such as travel costs and clothing
- A space for all partners to utilise for to host partnership or client events

3.10.2 This work highlights a shared commitment across partners to support meaningful move-on and long-term independence, recognising employment and life skills as key routes out of homelessness. It underlines that successful recovery is not defined by housing alone, but by a sense of wellbeing, stability, and the ability to sustain independence and progress into education, training, and employment.

3.11 Continuous learning and opportunities for innovation through partnership

3.11.1 Partnerships continue to evolve and improve through jointly delivered, evidence-led initiatives, reflecting a shared commitment to learning, adapting and improving responses to rough sleeping.

3.11.2 Key areas of focus include:

- **Weekly Access Panel meetings** bringing together statutory, commissioned, VCFS and Council partners to review referrals into supported housing, discuss complex cases, share insight, prioritise vacancies and coordinate support for individuals sleeping rough, or at risk of homelessness
- **Target Priority Group meetings** bringing homelessness sector partners together monthly to coordinate support for individuals experiencing long-term and cyclical rough sleeping
- **Enhanced outreach and encampment responses**, delivered jointly with the Council's Safer Public Realm Team, St Mungo's and health and substance misuse outreach partners
- **Scoping work with specific vulnerable cohorts**, including women and people involved in sex work, such as Reading's first Women's Rough Sleeping Census, delivered in partnership with RAHAB, CGL, YMCA Reading, Launchpad Reading, St Mungo's, the Salvation Army, The Cow Shed and Utulivu, as part of the national programme led by Solace
- **No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) project**, a 12-month pilot (April 2025 – March 2026), funded by the Centre for Homelessness Impact and delivered in partnership with Refugee Support Group, Settled, the Home Office and St Mungo's, enabled targeted support for a cohort who are not usually eligible for public funding. The

project helped to reduce long-term rough sleeping among people with no recourse. It supported several people to move off the streets into accommodation and progress their immigration status. Findings will be published later in 2026 to inform national and local next steps.

- **Targeted ‘off the street’ and rapid rehousing initiatives**, to be delivered with the VCFS, with additional units expected to become available from Summer 2026
- **Long-Term Rough Sleeping Programme and Partnership Plan**, to be developed with statutory and VCFS partners by Autumn 2026
- **Delivery of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026 – 2031 Action Plan**, including commitments to strengthen statutory, VCFS and lived experience partnerships and improve communication across the borough
- **Representation within safeguarding structures**, including the Safeguarding Adults Board and Safeguarding Adults Review Panel, ensuring the needs of people experiencing rough sleeping are reflected in wider safeguarding arrangements

3.11.3 These activities and projects show a variety of partnership efforts informed by local data, needs analysis and shared learning, with several using a ‘test and learn’ approach to develop and refine services. This enables partners to support each other in responding flexibly to emerging need, building on what works and continuously strengthening the local response. With success has come stronger relationships and a greater sense of shared purpose.

3.12 Summary of partnership approach and case study

- 3.12.1 Across all aspects of delivery, partnership working is fundamental. No single organisation can meet the breadth of needs associated with rough sleeping, so outcomes are achieved through coordinated, cross-sector responses.
- 3.12.2 Partners operate within a complex and high-pressure context, requiring ongoing review of practice and difficult decisions to respond to changing demand and risk.
- 3.12.3 This is illustrated in Appendix 2 – *John’s Story: Partnership working in practice*, which demonstrates how individuals move through multiple services – from street outreach to accommodation and into longer-term recovery, and beyond – enabled by coordinated partnership working at each stage. As John’s journey shows, sustained progress is achieved not through a single intervention, but through consistent, joined-up support over time.

4 Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1 The partnerships set out in this report contribute directly to improving outcomes for residents by providing a coordinated and person-centred response to rough sleeping. By working collaboratively across services, the approach helps to reduce the number of people sleeping rough, improve access to accommodation and support, and enable individuals to move towards recovery and independence. This benefits not only those directly supported, but also the wider community by improving public spaces, reducing risk and supporting safer, healthier neighbourhoods.
- 4.2 The work aligns with the Council Plan priorities for 2025–2028:
- **Promote more equal communities in Reading** – by supporting some of the most vulnerable residents to access accommodation, health care and wider support
 - **Secure Reading’s economic and cultural success** – by enabling individuals to move towards employment, training and independence, and improving the accessibility and safety of the town centre

- **Safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children** – through integrated working with health, social care and safeguarding partners
 - **Ensure Reading Borough Council is fit for the future** – by strengthening partnership working, improving coordination and making best use of shared resources
- 4.3 The delivery of this work reflects the Council's core principles, particularly putting residents first, working collaboratively with partners, and recognising the diverse needs of Reading's communities. The emphasis on co-production and lived experience further supports the Council's ambition to involve and empower residents in shaping services.
- 4.4 The partnerships outlined in this report support the Directorate of Communities and Adult Social Care's common purpose of '*supporting the life that matters to you*' by working alongside individuals to understand their needs and goals, providing coordinated support to achieve stable housing, improved health and wellbeing, and greater independence. This approach recognises individual strengths, builds trust and enables people to make meaningful and lasting changes in their lives.

5 Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1 Not applicable – this report is for information only.

6 Community Engagement

- 6.1 Not applicable - this report is for information only.

7 Equality Implications

- 7.1 Not applicable - this report is for information only.

8 Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1 Not applicable – this report is for information only.

9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 Not applicable - this report is for information only.

10 Financial Implications

- 10.1 Not applicable - this report is for information only.

11 Timetable for Implementation

- 11.1 Not applicable - this report is for information only.

12 Background Papers

- 12.1 There are none.

Appendices

1. **Sam's Story: Coordinating social care and homelessness support**
2. **John's Story: Partnership working in practice**

Appendix 1 – Sam’s Story: Coordinating social care and homelessness support

Sam had a long history of poor mental health, substance misuse and homelessness, including periods of rough sleeping. He was known to homelessness outreach and support services, often on the margins, and like many in similar situations, his needs were complex. Support was often framed around supported accommodation (large, shared, 24/7 staffed environments) as the main route away from homelessness and rough sleeping, with less consistent focus on coordinated, person-centred support and effective partnership working across services.

Following a serious assault, Sam sustained a brain injury which affected his mobility, cognition and overall wellbeing. This led to a change in his presentation and level of need. However, when hospital discharge planning began, the primary focus remained on referrals into, and acceptance for supported accommodation pathways commissioned by the Rough Sleeping Initiatives Team. The wider impact of his injury, particularly on his ability to function and live independently, was not fully understood at this time. Advocacy and input from the Senior Social Worker for Homelessness and Rough Sleeping helped inform decisions on suitable accommodation.

Concerns about Sam’s discharge were raised by Change, Grow, Live (substance misuse support service) and shared by other non-statutory partners, who felt that the proposed supported accommodation pathway did not reflect his needs. There was consensus that a more coordinated, person-centred approach was required, highlighting the importance of partnership working in identifying risks and advocating for alternatives. The Senior Social Worker role brought oversight of the wider system, knowledge of legal frameworks, and established cross-sector relationships, helping to identify gaps and coordinate a response. Concerns were escalated appropriately, supported by partners’ willingness to share information and remain engaged in achieving the best outcome. This collaborative approach helped ensure Sam did not become lost in the system during a highly vulnerable period.

Sam was being considered for an Intentional Homelessness decision, which could have significantly limited his options. Alongside this, a key issue was the proposal for Sam to move into large, shared, 24/7 commissioned ‘hostel’-type accommodation. While this reflected his previous pathway and could meet some of his needs, it did not account for the risks linked to his current condition. Through advocacy, informed challenge, and joint discussions, both the homelessness decision and housing options were reconsidered and more suitable options identified.

Using the principle of suitability, highlighted by the Senior Social Worker, professionals in Sam’s case recognised that accommodation should be based on his needs, not simply what was available. A commissioned supported housing setting presented several risks, including an inability to meet his full accessibility needs, increased safeguarding concerns, and the potential impact of a larger, shared environment on his mental health and recovery. This open, collaborative approach – combining legal knowledge, professional curiosity and judgement, and partner expertise – helped shift the focus from processes to meeting Sam’s individual needs.

Advocacy remained central and was shared across services, particularly where Sam’s voice risked being overlooked due to communication difficulties and disengagement. Rather than being seen as non-compliant, his behaviour was understood in the context of trauma, instability and bereavement. The Senior Social Worker role, alongside strong partnership working, helped maintain a consistent, person-centred and trauma-informed approach. Clear communication and coordinated roles ensured support continued during periods of disengagement, reducing the risk of gaps and helping keep Sam visible within the system.

Sam now lives in his own bedsit with minimal care and support in accommodation that is appropriate, accessible and supports his recovery.

This case highlights the importance of person-centred practice and strong partnership working, especially when supporting people with multiple disadvantage. In Sam’s case, skilled roles, legislative knowledge, strong relationships, and shared advocacy kept his voice central and enabled appropriate challenge. Without this coordinated approach, the outcome could have been significantly different, and Sam’s cycle of homelessness would have almost certainly continued.

Sam’s story reflects a broader approach being championed through new roles and ways of working across the directorate – demonstrating that when services work together with the individual at the centre, better outcomes are far more likely.

Appendix 2 – John’s Story: Partnership working in practice

John was verified rough sleeping in August 2025 by St Mungo's rough sleeping outreach team having referred himself through the Street link App. The outreach team looked for his sleep site during their next shift but were unable to locate him despite calling his name and phoning the telephone number he gave. The following day the team returned and were able to locate and verify John rough sleeping. He was allocated an outreach worker from St Mungo's and completed an initial assessment which enabled the team to identify any support needs together, identifying the best route for John to come off the streets.

During the assessment it was identified that John had lost his accommodation in the private rented sector after he lost his employment due to a decline in his mental health which led to an attempted overdose. A referral was completed by his St Mungo's worker to the NHS Health Outreach Liaison Team for support with his physical and mental health. They were able to support John to engage with his GP practice and negotiated for his medication to be administered on a weekly basis, they also completed an urgent referral to Common Point of Entry for mental health support.

John also had a history of alcohol use when his mental health declined, and he asked once accommodated for a referral to Change Grow Live (CGL the local drug and alcohol treatment agency) for support to remain abstinent. He was also seen by the Council's homelessness prevention team, and they were able to confirm John's local connection to Reading.

Within four days of being verified by St Mungo's an off the streets bed became available at Willow House, managed by The Salvation Army, and it was agreed that John could be placed there on a temporary basis. St Mungo's rough sleeping outreach workers completed a Common Assessment Form with John, and John was referred to the Access Panel for consideration for Council commissioned supported housing, it was agreed that he would be assessed by Launchpad for their Working Towards Independence supported accommodation.

Whilst waiting for this assessment John agreed to attend Reading's Shared Voice Lived Experience Forum and a referral was made to St Mungo's Employment Service Team who started to engage with John.

A vacancy became available in an Emergency and Assessment room at Willow House which John was nominated to by the Council's Rough Sleeping Initiatives Team and he was accepted – this gave him greater stability. John continued to engage with all services, becoming involved with Launchpad's Work & Life Skills Centre at 135 Cardiff Road, supporting with graphic design and the service's newsletter. John completed barista training and volunteers once a week running the barista station for professionals and clients using the Centre.

John's St Mungo's worker contacted the Volunteer, Involvement, Apprenticeships and Student Placement team to identify if there were any opportunities for John to become involved with as John was keen to use his graphic design skills and fill his time with meaningful activities. The senior graphic designer from the Graphic Design and Communications Team at St Mungo's contacted John to explore opportunities.

In October 2025 a suitable placement was identified by Launchpad for John to move into and transitional support continued from his St Mungo's worker, ensuring there was ongoing joint working with Launchpad. The client involvement worker from St Mungo's contacted John and he attended an in-person meeting at St Mungo's for the Client Involvement in Non-accommodation Settings Forum where he actively participated. After this John requested to, and joined, St Mungo's Client Advisory Board which oversees the Governance of St Mungo's. He has a formal placement with the Graphic Design and Communications team which means he has a St Mungo's laptop and ID card. More recently John trained in interview skills so he could support with undertaking interviews and in May 2026 spent two days with the outreach team interviewing and recruiting for an outreach worker position.

While accommodated with Launchpad John will be supported to explore more independent long-term housing away from supported accommodation.

All partners involved are very proud of John's progress and his continued involvement with St Mungo's Client Advisory Board, Shared Voice Reading and Launchpad's Work & Life Skills Centre. John is using his experience and voice to shape the services he has used.