



London Borough of Tower Hamlets,  
London Borough of Hackney & City of  
London

No First Night Out - Help for Single Homeless People  
evaluation: interim summary report

October 2016  
Author: Becky Rice



## Foreword

*No First Night Out – Help for Single Homeless People* is a tri-borough 18 month project, working across Tower Hamlets, Hackney and The City of London, piloting new approaches to prevent individuals from rough sleeping for the first time (No First Night Out Service) and ensuring those already rough sleeping are able to access housing in the area where they have a local connection (Safe Connections).

The No First Night Out Service (NFNO) ultimately aims to reduce to zero the number of people found sleeping rough in the three boroughs who qualify to be taken to the No Second Night Out (NSNO) assessment hubs in London.

The first report on NFNO published in March 2016 unveiled new research into the current client profile of potential new rough sleepers. It identified several 'at risk' cohort groups.

We are delighted to be able to present this second report which shares learning on the initial months of the new No First Night Out Service as it uses the research to seek out those most at risk of rough sleeping so as to provide a targeted intensive housing options and prevention service.

This initial learning we hope will give readers an insight into the NFNO model working in practice and how we are addressing the task of moving advice and support to earlier in the housing and homelessness journey to prevent the harm and costs of rough sleeping further down the line.

We would like to thank St. Mungo's, and Becky Rice, the specialist independent researcher, for producing these preliminary findings and for her insightful suggestions to us. We would also like to thank all the individuals who agreed to be interviewed for this report, including service users, NFNO workers, and staff in the three housing options services as well as those who collated and submitted data.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the partners and agencies that have been working with us on this unique project. Without their hard work, enthusiasm, creativity and commitment of time and resources we would not have reached this far.

We are looking forward to the next stage of the project which will involve an extensive outreach programme. This is a crucial aspect of rough sleeping prevention since the knowledge emerging from our work is that in the days immediately leading up to rough sleeping most people do not attend Council housing options services. The next stage of the project therefore is to take NFNO into such settings as the Job Centre and local libraries, places potential rough sleepers are known to visit in the days immediately prior to street homelessness.

The NFNO Steering Group hopes to publish a full evaluation of the first year of both strands of the 'No First Night Out – Help for Single Homeless People' project in 2017.

**Tower Hamlets, Hackney and City of London NFNO, Helping Single Homeless Steering Group October 2016**

# 1 Introduction

- The No First Night Out (NFNO) project began operational work with clients in April 2016. This report covers the first three months of the project. The service is delivered by two dedicated NFNO workers and has also engaged the Housing Options teams in the boroughs and partner agencies.
- The interim evaluation, undertaken by an independent researcher working with St Mungo's Research Team, focused on the 'rapid response service' provided for clients who are identified by Housing Options and external partner agencies as being at imminent risk of rough sleeping.
- The report is based on a range of evaluation methods including interviews with six professional stakeholders; an online feedback survey for the tri-borough workshop with Housing Options staff; phone interviews with three clients of the project who found housing solutions; a review session with the practitioner team (two NFNO caseworkers); and an analysis of NFNO, CHAIN and Housing Options data.
- This report is intended to update partners and stakeholders on the progress of the project and to share learning that could help others in developing preventative approaches for single homeless people.
- It is recognised that it is very early to be reporting on the project externally, but because prevention is currently topical and the project is testing a new area of work the Steering Group are keen to share learning at the first opportunity.

# 2 Context

- There are external factors affecting the project's development. Homelessness and housing instability remain high. NFNO seeks to identify the small number of people who will sleep rough if they do not get additional assistance among a much wider cohort of people with housing problems. This represents a key challenge in the design of the service.
- The actions available to NFNO Officers to assist clients and help to resolve situations quickly are impacted by the lack of housing options, especially shared housing for under 35 years olds with low support needs. These are also contributing factors in people's journey into the NFNO service: the lack of affordable housing in the PRS and other sectors makes homelessness a more likely outcome for people when they face housing problems or need to move from their current accommodation.
- The NFNO outreach strategy will engage organisations outside the homelessness sector in identifying those at risk of rough sleeping and referring them to the project. This is currently being rolled out in line with the project plan, and initial work has been undertaken with JobCentre Plus, the Whitechapel Idea Store and Citizens Advice in Hackney. This is a key focus for the next phase of the project.
- The way in which clients interact with Housing Options services has been an emerging issue. For example, the boroughs are considering how to ensure that people return to Housing Options if their situation deteriorates, even when they were initially provided only with basic advice because they had not been at imminent risk of rough sleeping.

### 3 Overview of operating model

Figure (a) shows the way in which the project has been operating in its first three months. Work has been done to promote the project and equip workers in Housing Options and other agencies to make referrals to the project. This has included promotion at team meetings and a tri-borough workshop for Housing Options staff.

Clients are identified by the project if they are at risk of rough sleeping and meet the following eligibility criteria:

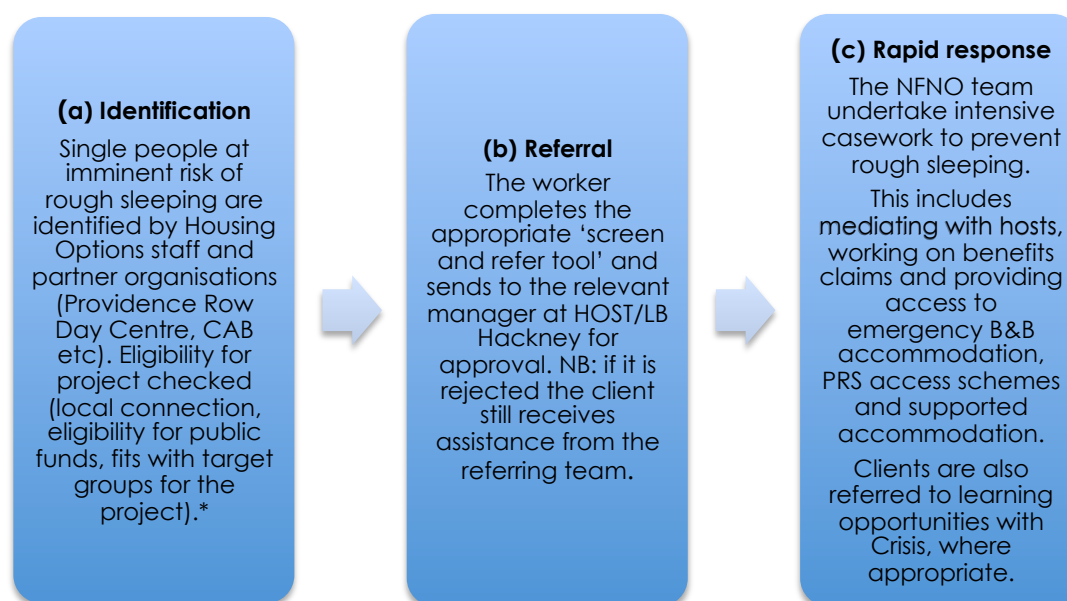
- they have a local connection to one of the three boroughs
- they are eligible for public funds
- they are not already rough sleeping.

Different versions of a 'screen and refer' tool (depending on the referral agency) and a 'typology of new rough sleepers in Tower Hamlets and Hackney' are used to assist staff with making referrals. The typology is an extract from the initial NFNO research and is found in Appendix (a).

The operating model is currently being extended, as planned, to include the identification of clients through outreach work in the community, for example through job centres, libraries and Citizens Advice bureau (CAB).

In the first month of operation several referrals for people who had already slept rough were accepted by the NFNO service. The Steering Group decided to refine the definition of the target group to ensure that the project only accepted those who had not already slept rough. This is to ensure that the project genuinely tests prevention strategy as opposed to creating a new response to current rough sleeping. This is part of the wider challenge of moving advice and support to earlier in the housing and homelessness journey to prevent the harm of rough sleeping.

**Figure (a): Overview of delivery model**



\* A 'typology' of new rough sleepers developed in the initial NFNO research is used to target clients for the project – see page 11.

## 4 Overview of client journeys

Figure (b) on page 6 provides an overview of client journeys up to 5<sup>th</sup> July 2016. Nine people have been helped to access medium to long-term accommodation through the project: six have moved into the private rented sector (PRS) and three into supported accommodation.

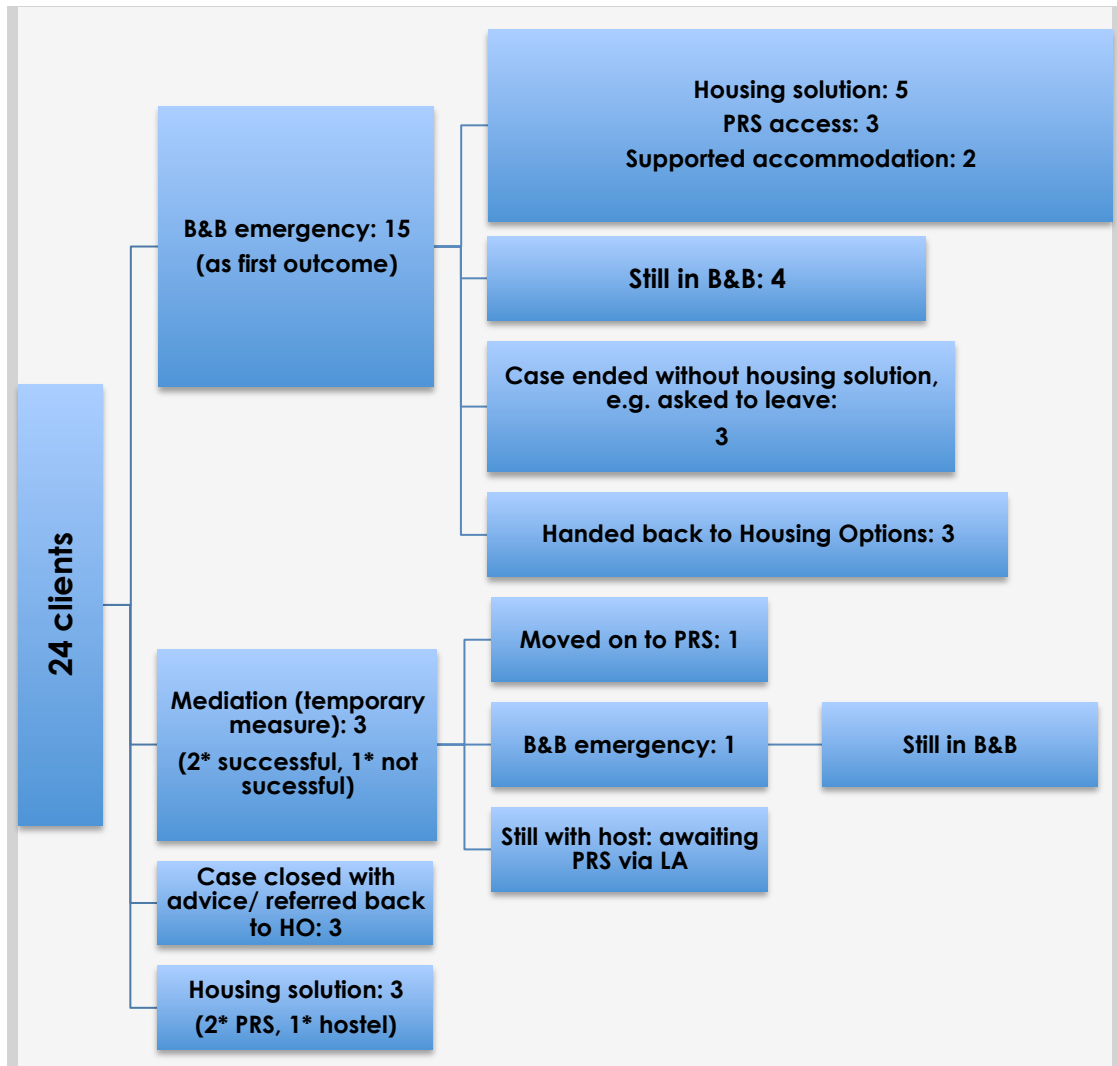
### **Client journeys: key findings:**

- The team relied heavily on placement in emergency bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation as an interim prevention measure (16 clients). This is unsustainable given pressure on budgets and limited availability. Furthermore, while preferable to rough sleeping, emergency B&B accommodation can sometimes be a difficult environment for people, for example if there are issues with drinking, drug use and/or infestations. At the time of writing, on average, those who went into emergency accommodation had stayed five weeks and five people remained in the emergency accommodation. Those remaining in temporary accommodation were under 35 and hard to find suitable alternative options for. Now the team is not accepting referrals for people who have already been sleeping rough, use of B&B accommodation is reducing.
- Mediation features less in the project than suggested in the project proposal. In three NFNO cases mediation was attempted to enable the client to resume their current accommodation or find a housing solution. In two cases this was successful and the clients temporarily returned to the home of a family member (not a parent or sibling).

### **Client journeys – preliminary learning:**

- ✓ The project database illustrates the complexity and intensity of work required in exploring clients' housing options and supporting people to access benefits and services. For example, in many cases multiple options for move on are explored simultaneously. Where the client had issues with benefits, no housing solution could be found, so these are the priority in initial casework.
- ✓ The outreach work and further development of referral pathways to NFNO within Housing Options will seek to identify people before rough sleeping becomes imminent, in the hope that this will help to develop responses that do not involve interim emergency B&B accommodation, such as temporary mediation to remain in the current accommodation.
- ✓ The link with Crisis has been very valuable in providing enhanced access to their high-quality PRS access scheme, as well as meaningful activities for those who are in emergency accommodation.
- ✓ Existing housing options for single homeless people facing rough sleeping are extremely limited and it is recommended that possible pathways are identified ahead of establishing preventative projects. This was done for NFNO through the link with Crisis, but the project still struggles to find move on options for those not suited to the Crisis scheme.
- ✓ Client expectations and motivation can be a challenge. The NFNO team devised a client agreement to help set out the reciprocal nature and limitations of the service – for example clients are required to assist with paperwork, attend appointments and undertake their own accommodations searches because appropriate and provision of emergency accommodation is subject to their accepting reasonable move on offers even if not in the client's preferred location.

Figure (b) Summary of client journeys



## 5 Processes of the project

### **Identification and referrals: key findings**

- The project is still in the process of testing and establishing an effective way of reaching the target group. Initially referrals were accepted for people who had already slept rough, and consequently referral levels from one borough were unmanageably high.
- The referral processes and tools for referral received good feedback and were considered to be clear and practical by those using them.
- The evaluation has identified a number of barriers to achieving the desired quality and quantity of referrals, including initial lack of clarity about the target group, which has now been rectified. In the first three months under half of referrals resulted in cases being accepted onto the project. Referrals that were rejected received assistance from the referring organisation.
- The Steering Group are clarifying how 'imminent' rough sleeping needs to be for people to be eligible for a NFNO service. A key part of the work of this project is to try and capture people before they are just about to spend a night on the streets.
- The organisation of the Greenhouse (provider of Housing Options for homeless single people in Hackney) makes a referral to NFNO more difficult to embed than in the Tower Hamlets Housing Options Singles Team (HOST) service. The Greenhouse service seeks to provide a 'one stop shop' for homeless people, as opposed to an 'assess and refer' service. The benefit of NFNO to the Greenhouse team is still unclear. It is likely that the forthcoming outreach element of the project will be more relevant to Hackney.

### **Identification and referrals: preliminary learning**

- ✓ Simple, clear referral forms – not too long and not asking for information available from other tools – received positive feedback in the evaluation.
- ✓ The initial work determining the target group and communicating this to potential referrers is crucial in establishing prevention projects.
- ✓ It has been important to integrate 'NFNO thinking' in the assessment process of referrers. Housing Options officers and staff in other homelessness agencies need to carry out assessment work and checks before referring otherwise the project will become oversubscribed. How this will work for a broader range of organisations such as libraries will be explored in the next phase of the project.
- ✓ It was clear in feedback from interviews and the tri-borough workshop that effective housing options interviews are flexible and sensitive to the individual to elicit the most useful information.
- ✓ The use of a typology based on evidence about those who have gone on to sleep rough in the recent past is an ongoing area of exploration – some stakeholders found this tool very useful in targeting those at risk, others felt that it may exclude some people at risk of rough sleeping. Further feedback will be gathered.

## 6 New rough sleepers in the tri-borough area

- Initial analysis shows a drop in the number of new rough sleepers found in the tri-borough areas compared to the same time last year. This is greater than the reduction in numbers in London overall. Further evidence is required to establish whether this drop can be attributed to the NFNO project and this is an ongoing area of investigation.
- The next phase of the evaluation will seek to undertake a detailed analysis of new rough sleepers with a local connection to one of the three boroughs. This will explore whether there were missed opportunities to provide a NFNO service to clients and see if there are other potential points of referral.

## 7 'Big picture' feedback

- Stakeholders interviewed remained universally supportive of the concept of No First Night Out in targeting single homeless people before they sleep rough. This is despite the significant challenges the project has faced, for example around move on and referral quality in its first few months.
- Clients and professional stakeholders gave very good feedback on the service offered by the NFNO workers, including being contactable, providing feedback and being proactive.
- Overall cross-borough working is viewed as a strength area of the project. Testing the NFNO approach across different areas enhances the potential for learning from the project. All those responding to the online survey following the tri-borough workshop agreed that it was helpful to meet with Housing Options staff from other boroughs. Inevitably working across boroughs does create some systems' issues with workers needing to access multiple IT systems and become familiar with processes in different organisations.
- Professional stakeholders referred to the forthcoming benefits cap for single households as a serious risk to the success of the project. It will limit housing options further because of the resulting shortfall in money for rent and basic living costs. There is also a concern about potential increases in numbers of people at risk of rough sleeping.
- Clients on Universal Credit are faced with further challenges because they are likely to experience a shortfall for paying the rent. This has proved a barrier to accessing housing for one client who would have otherwise been able to access a hostel.



## 8 Case studies

### Case study: Marek

- **Profile:** Man in his early 30s, White European – EU national, cohort group one (primary need is for accommodation – see Appendix 1 for details on the cohort groups)
- **Inputs:** NFNO worker (contact by email only as the client is working), 39 days in temporary accommodation (TA), Crisis – housing coaching, employment and skills, housing placement including grant
- **Outcome:** Placement in PRS shared accommodation.

Marek was facing eviction from his PRS accommodation – a room in shared accommodation – after living there for four years. He is employed with a low and variable level of income and had no deposit with his landlord. He has mental health problems, most significantly anxiety and panic attacks and has had medical treatment for this over recent years.

Marek contacted his local Housing Options service but had not been resident in the area for long enough to have a local connection. He looked into his options and found that he might have a local connection to one of the three boroughs in the partnership, through his ongoing employment in the area. This was confirmed and the Housing Options service referred him to the NFNO team.

The first few nights after being evicted he used up the small amount of money he had to stay in hostels. This soon ran out and he started staying in his workplace which caused him considerable distress: 'a thief in your own company'.

Through NFNO he was provided with emergency B&B accommodation. While initially very pleased to have somewhere 'calm' to sleep away from the stress of squatting, over time he found the accommodation very challenging, feeling unsafe at night and being bitten by bedbugs. Due to a problem with his benefits (resulting possibly from a short-term increase in his hours which was then revoked) he has received a request for payment for the B&B cost which he is attempting to rectify.

Marek is happy with the shared accommodation he accessed through Crisis: *'Crisis – everything is amazing; their work is fantastic. [Crisis worker] was very helpful. Everything is 10 points. I obviously was also looking [for a place...] but then he found me this option which I was happy with. If I had not got help from Tracey and Crisis – that's the thing, I don't know what would have happened. They would maybe catch me at work, then that's it – disciplinary immediately.'*

### Case study: Raul

- **Profile:** Man in his late 50s, Black-African, referred to the NFNO project by Providence Row, cohort group three (capacity and motivational issues affect ability to resolve housing problems)
- NB Raul would no longer be eligible for the project because he had slept out prior to referral.
- **Inputs:** NFNO worker, 84 days in TA, Crisis – housing coaching, employment and skills, housing placement including grant
- **Outcome:** PRS tenancy

Raul had been homeless for three years when he was referred to the NFNO project. He was evicted from a long-term PRS tenancy because the landlord wanted to use the property. He attended Housing Options but was found to be not in priority need. He managed with sofa surfing some of the time but also found he had to sleep outside and on buses for periods. When he was homeless Raul struggled to maintain his benefits claim stating that he could 'not get letters on a regular basis' and was repeatedly sanctioned. It was the job centre that suggested he went to Providence Row, which he had not previously heard about. NFNO referred Raul to Crisis as part of their support: 'I got registered with them and got engaged with them. There was painting and decoration going on – I loved that one, I really enjoyed that.'

Raul's Crisis housing coach found him a PRS property, but he decided it was unsuitable because it was not very child friendly and he hoped to have his children visiting him. An alternative bedsit was identified and Raul moved into the property following a viewing. He is very pleased with this turnaround in his circumstances, which has impacted on every aspect of his life:

*Now I am living there I am really, really happy. I am enjoying my house, I am catching up and doing things I was not doing. I called [my NFNO worker] to say thank you. For instance I was not having a bath, now I can have a bath. I really want to go back to work... I can cook my own meals, I can call my kids – they are so happy about it! I was feeling shame for myself that I didn't have no future... I buy my electricity – things I didn't know how to do – to have some more responsibility and [I see that] I can manage that; I can look after myself. All this because [those] guys gave me a chance... My mind is at rest, I can sleep and be more focused on things, what I need to achieve and do.*

## Appendix (a): Typology

### Typology of new rough sleepers in Hackney and Tower Hamlets

This typology is an extract from the No First Night Out research project conducted in 2015. It is used to target people at risk of rough sleeping for the NFNO project.<sup>1</sup>

Description	No. & % people*	Key features of group
<b>Group (1): Primary need is for accommodation</b>	8 (24%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medium to high levels of resilience</li> <li>• Low or very low support needs</li> <li>• Low or reduced social networks</li> <li>• Some common features from the research:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Several from refugee background</li> <li>◦ Often one-off/ unusual life event major contributor to homelessness (e.g. bereaved)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Group (1b) Primary need for accommodation with complicating factors arising partly due to housing situation</b>	3 (9%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similar profile to 1 but with notably deteriorating and or / poor mental health</li> </ul>
<b>Group (2) Homelessness is linked to support needs including drug use, offending, often combined with mental health</b>	8 (24%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medium to high support needs</li> <li>• Medium to low support networks, low levels of resilience</li> <li>• Problematic drug use and offending prevalent in this group</li> <li>• Problems both socially (friends and family) and personally (support needs, drugs, offending, mental health)</li> <li>• Some common features from the research               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Nearly always in 20s and 30s</li> <li>◦ Most are Bangladeshi men, others spread across ethnic groups</li> <li>◦ Generally never had independent accommodation - family home/ prison/ hidden homeless</li> <li>◦ People often described sense of shame, being ostracized</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Group (2b) Homelessness is linked to mental health and family problems (but not substance misuse)</b>	2 (6%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same profile as 2 but without drug use</li> <li>• Mental health problems, deterioration of mental health and problems in the home</li> <li>• Some common features from the research               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Included victims of domestic abuse</li> <li>◦ People showed feelings of hopelessness and isolation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Group (3) Capacity and motivational issues are key issue, often more isolated and older age groups</b>	10 (29%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People in 40s/50s/60s</li> <li>• Range of support needs</li> <li>• Low levels of motivation and/or capacity due to a range of issues</li> <li>• Some common features from the research               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ All were White British or Irish or Black Caribbean in the research</li> <li>◦ Often had transient/ insecure backgrounds, people who just about 'hang in there' until something happens and they then have nowhere to go</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Group (4) Not possible to group in above</b>	3 (9%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A small number of people did not fit into the groups above</li> </ul>

\* Refers to the number and % of the 34 people interviewed in initial research

<sup>1</sup> Please note: to be eligible for the project clients must also have a local connection to one of the three boroughs, have recourse to public funds and not already be rough sleeping.