

**Thames
Reach**



Business Plan 2019–2022

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Vision

Thames Reach's vision is of a society where street homelessness is ended and nobody need sleep rough on the streets.

Mission

In pursuit of this vision, our mission is to ensure that every person that Thames Reach supports is able to find and sustain a decent home, develop supportive relationships and lead a fulfilling life.

Business priorities

Thames Reach will focus on developing and providing services are effective in delivering our mission for people who are or have been street homeless, or are at risk of this. To do this we will work in three areas:

Prevention: We understand that street homelessness is a damaging and disruptive experience with an impact that is lasting and negative to people's health, confidence, employment prospects and relationships. It is important that, where we can, we intervene before people become homeless, or at the very start of becoming homeless, with the aim of providing support that equips them with the resources to continue their lives away from homelessness.

Intervention: Where people are sleeping on the street we will intervene to help them into accommodation and to meet their immediate needs. These needs may be for treatment for poor mental health or a substance misuse problem, and they may also need help with understanding the longer term options available to them.

Recovery: We recognise that the journey away from homelessness is often not a simple one, and may require more than the provision of accommodation. We will work to help people get the support they need to maximise their independence; to improve their health; to build supportive relationships; and to participate in society through sustainable volunteering or work.

Whether new or long-standing, we will measure the effectiveness of our services through their success in contributing to these goals. We will also assess whether services are best delivered by Thames Reach, by other agencies, or through a partnership.

Context

We support the government's stated policy objective of halving street homelessness by 2023 and ending it by 2027, and we welcome the commitment to both investing in solutions to rough sleeping, and to co-ordinating a cross-departmental response across government.

The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act, which came into force in April 2018, which places a duty on local authorities to offer assistance to prevent homelessness, and on other public agencies to identify those at risk, is a further recognition of the need to prevent rough sleeping.

Set against these positive changes is an environment that has seen significant government disinvestment in locally funded prevention services; benefits changes that have destabilised vulnerably housed people; a reduction in the long-term housing available to people who are reliant on benefits and low incomes; and changes to the entitlements available EU nationals that have meant that they now cannot access the help they need.

Services

The majority of our services are commissioned by local or regional government, often as part of a local Homelessness Strategy. As such, they are often reliant on an 'evidence-based' approach that can inhibit innovation. We will be flexible and undogmatic in our approach to service development and delivery, and where we believe that different approaches could be more effective in responding to street homelessness or the threat of it, we will seek funding or we will invest to develop services with the aim of testing these approaches to influence future commissioning.

We will also explore the potential for services to be commissioned more widely (for example tenancy sustainment services commissioned by housing associations), and for these to respond to the specific needs of a locality or user group.

We will advocate for a greater focus on effective outcomes in the commissioning of services, along with greater flexibility in delivering these outcomes. Examples of this approach are the 'Social Impact Bond' contracts that we have experience of delivering, as well as performance-based contracts like those agreed with the Greater London Authority (GLA) and as part of the Living Well Network Alliance in Lambeth. We will aim to ensure that outcomes are challenging but deliverable, and that robust systems exist or are created to evidence performance.

We recognise that many of the people who use our services have experienced significant trauma, often in the early years of their lives, and we will deliver our services in ways that recognise the impact that this has had, and that helps overcome these difficulties. This approach will build on knowledge gained from our work with psychologists to deliver a psychologically informed service in our hostels and some supported housing schemes.

Substance misuse and chronic ill-health are a problem for many of the people we work with, and across all our services we will seek to improve access to, and take up of, treatment. We will be creative in exploring new approaches to these issues, using information to build a case for more effective services; developing partnerships with specialist services; and ensuring that our staff are well trained and have a good understanding of the treatment options available to our service users.

The changes to the benefits system, which include the introduction of Universal Credit, place a greater responsibility on individual claimants to manage their claims, as well as a greater reliance on sanctions when conditions are not complied with. This means that people are more likely to lose accommodation and become homeless, making it more difficult for people to move off streets, potentially destabilising people's recovery. We will continue to develop services that are able to help people manage their claims successfully, which are able to intervene where required to prevent homelessness, and which support the people we work with to develop the skills and resilience to successfully manage their interactions with the benefits system.

We recognise that our services are better if they are informed by the experience of the people who use them. We will continue to collect information from them, conducting a cross organisational satisfaction survey on an annual basis, and exploring more effective ways for people who use and have used services to contribute to their design and improvement. We recognise that we will also need to explore other ways of involving potential beneficiaries in service design, for example, when we are seeking to develop services that work with groups that we do not currently work with.

We have broken down our service delivery into three broad areas: Prevention; Intervention; and Recovery. These reflect the categorisation used by the Services Committee, and as part of the MHCLG Rough Sleeping Strategy. While we expect an initial focus on the Intervention area, we anticipate that work in the Prevention and Recovery will grow significantly in the period covered by this plan.



Prevention

We welcome the Homelessness Reduction Act and where possible we will support local authorities and other agencies to fully implement it- for example, through our participation in the SHIPS service in Brent and the Greenhouse service in Hackney. However, we recognise that it is a limited measure, and our experience has been that the majority of people who seek help through the Act subsequently lose their accommodation (albeit they are subsequently re-accommodated).

The reasons why individuals find themselves on the streets are complex, but a combination of factors including poor health, substance misuse, poverty and lack of access to timely help are experienced by many rough sleepers. Our prevention services will aim to be available to people before they are at immediate risk of homelessness and before a move to alternative accommodation is the only option.

Examples of the kinds of service we will deliver in this area include:

Day services: Our Deptford Reach service works with a range of people in the London Borough of Lewisham. Some users of the service are street homeless or in temporary or very insecure accommodation, but a larger group have their own accommodation along with a range of needs that mean without support from the service they would be at imminent risk of homelessness. The practical advice provided by the staff is a key part of this service, but mutual support and the opportunity to belong are also important.

Floating support/tenancy sustainment: We have seen a significant reduction in easily accessible generalist support that can help people retain their accommodation by intervening in a crisis, and by helping people to build resilience. We will work with commissioners to develop sustainable approaches that make the best use of the assets of service users (for example, as volunteers), which do not build dependency, and which are accessible to those who need them.

Employment and skills: This service helps people find and improve the paid work they do, and provides support to help people move into paid work. It also teaches basic skills to help people live independently and to find work, focusing particularly on literacy, digital literacy and numeracy. We will build on the knowledge gained from the work carried out by our Vital Regeneration subsidiary to help people achieve greater financial independence through employment and self-employment.

Affordable accommodation: We will build on the learning from the Peer Landlord London approach (developed in partnership with the charity Commonweal, as well as our work with Private Rented Sector landlords, to retain and further develop sources of shared private rented accommodation that is of a good quality, and which is accessible to people who are on low or variable incomes (for example, people working on casual or zero hour contracts).

Health: We recognise that there is a close relationship between homelessness and poor health, and that these issues need to be addressed together. We will build on our partnership work with health service providers to ensure that an individual's health crisis does not lead to homelessness. One example of this is the Lambeth Living Well Network Hub, where Thames Reach staff work with clinicians to provide an integrated response to people experiencing significant mental health problems. Thames Reach staff at the site provide help with social and housing issues that may have a negative impact on someone's mental wellbeing.



Intervention

Outreach services: Our street outreach services have a deserved reputation for their persistence and effectiveness, and we expect to continue existing services and increase our outreach coverage over the three years covered by this plan.

This will include rapid response services that aim to quickly find people who have been reported as sleeping rough, and to find emergency accommodation. In many cases this service will work with people new to the streets as part of an enhanced No Second Night Out (NSNO) response, drawing on intelligence provided by a range of agencies and by the public, responding to reports from StreetLink and from engaged local groups and individuals.

In addition we will provide casework services aimed at helping people move away from the streets. This is likely to be longer term work aimed at people with more complex needs who have been on the streets for longer. The work will be focused on agreeing and initiating a sustainable route away for the streets for this group. This route will be different for different people but could include a connection with a local authority that has a duty to assist the individual, together with an agreed housing and support plan. It could also include nomination into a suitable accommodation option with appropriate support, alongside a route to longer term accommodation, and/or access to appropriate residential treatment services. As part of this approach, we will aim to work with mainstream health services (such as those delivered by NHS Trusts), with the aim of giving people who are sleeping rough access to the services they need.

An important function of both aspects of our outreach services is to build an up-to-date and accurate picture of rough sleeping in the areas in which we work – contributing to the CHAIN database, and raising awareness of changes in the population and of issues that are affecting rough sleepers and homeless people.

Hostels: Where we run hostels, we will seek to improve and maintain the physical environment to a good standard, supporting their function as places that effectively prepare residents for moving on into longer term accommodation that maximises their potential for independent living. Alongside this, we will provide services that keep residents safe, and provide routes to access the specialist services that they need to improve their health, receive treatment for addiction, and to retain and develop a productive life away from homelessness. Where we believe we can work with commissioners to deliver similar high-quality services we will seek to expand our hostel provision.

We recognise that there is a need for some services to be integrated into the day-to-day running of the hostel, these could include help in finding suitable future accommodation, psychological support for staff and residents, and some health services, but where possible, and practicable, we will support residents to access mainstream services in the place where these services are normally delivered. Where we are not able to do this – for example, because an individual would not be able to attend an external appointment – in-house arrangements will be made on an individual basis and regularly reviewed.

Accommodation: We will work with local and regional authorities to develop short term accommodation that provides a first step away from the streets for people who are not eligible for accommodation through local supported housing pathways. Typically, these individuals will not have a local connection to the place where they are sleeping out, or they will not have recourse to public funds. This accommodation will provide safety and a degree of stability to support the casework described above. This accommodation is likely to be improvised and may use buildings that are temporarily available, as well as using partnerships with local volunteer agencies as part of service delivery.



We recognise that it can be difficult for hostel and shelter staff to have the time and specialist knowledge to devise and agree individual move-on plans for people with complex problems, and we will explore the degree to which it will be possible to establish specialist staff to do this. We will also ensure that people get the help they need with the practical aspects of setting up a new home and receive the support they need to stay housed and move forward with their lives.

Recovery

Ending homelessness is not just about the provision of accommodation and the support to maintain it. Many people who use our services do not feel that they have a stake in the society they live in and feel that this society excludes them. Equally, they can feel that they have little choice or control over what happens to them, particularly in a large hostel pathway. The process of recovery can be complex and is specific to each individual, but commonly seen factors include: the provision of appropriate accommodation; support to make positive choices; and the opportunity to participate in society.

We will maximise the accommodation available to people using our services by developing direct relationships with private and public sector landlords; by using access schemes run by our local authority partners; by making good use of the Rough Sleepers' Initiative Clearing House; and by providing support with deposits and other requirements for setting up a new home. We will use our influence and knowledge of the needs of rough sleepers to campaign for access to more and better long term accommodation for those who need it. We will also continue to manage a range of step-down accommodation with integral support for people who need additional support in a less intensive environment before they are able to take on independent accommodation. This includes specialist accommodation, for example, aimed at people living with significant mental or physical health problems, and who require on-site support.

It is important that people who need help to sustain and progress their recovery can access appropriate support from skilled staff when they need this, and that this support should be focused on helping them to maximise independence. This should not be dependent on the type of accommodation that they live in. One example of this model of support is our GLA funded Tenancy Sustainment Team, which works with former rough sleepers in RSI accommodation, and which we would seek to make available more widely on the basis of need across all tenures.

Housing First: Some people we work with have needs that cannot be easily met in a hostel or supported housing environment, and for them this is not a route to successful recovery. We will build on the learning from our existing Housing First scheme in Croydon, and from our BRiL project in Lambeth, to develop a Housing First offer. We also support the development of a specific service working in Clearing House accommodation which is targeted at former rough sleepers with complex needs.

Volunteering: This is important to Thames Reach because it increases the capacity of our services, but also because it gives people who use our services the opportunity to participate in delivering them; this is mutually beneficial – Thames Reach benefits from the life experience of our service users, whilst volunteers have access to training and support that is valuable in itself, and which can also help prepare for moving on into employment. We will aim to further extend the range of opportunities open to service user volunteers within Thames Reach, and also develop high quality volunteering opportunities in other organisations. Alongside this, we will review the support we provide to volunteers for moving on, building on the excellent training already provided through TRAVEL and MIMO other training programmes targeted at volunteers with experience of service use.

Training and employment: Our key role in this area is to provide access to basic skills training (particularly around digital skills), and support to access mainstream training. It is important that we are able to provide access to this basic skills training at key sites across the organisation. In addition, we have a role in brokering work placements, and in ensuring that our support staff are able to help people moving into employment, with extra support for the specialised employment and skills resources described above.

Social isolation and loneliness affect people who are recovering from street homelessness as they typically try to move away from the social networks they have developed whilst homeless as part of their recovery. We recognise the need to explore how we can support the development of supportive social networks for this group.

Enablers

Ending street homelessness is not just about service delivery – it is important that the face-to-face work we do is supported by a well-governed and accountable charity with an infrastructure that can equip our staff and volunteers to deliver effective services, and help the people we work with to make positive and lasting changes to their lives. This section sets out how the objectives stated above will be supported by organisational resources, including our central services teams.



Investment

Many years of prudent and effective management of our finances, together with the contribution made as a result of a merger with Vital Regeneration, mean that the organisational balance sheet is healthy. While many of our assets invested in a range of buildings, we also have cash reserves in our business development and other restricted funds.

A lack of clarity about the process for drawing down these funds has meant that we have made limited use of them to date. We will develop a process for agreeing the use of this fund, but our intention is to use this investment to fund pilot projects that will enable us to test these approaches to service delivery:

Proposals will need to describe the project and the investment needed, what the project will achieve and how this will be measured; the timescale for the project and an exit plan (this could be a move to contractual or charity funding, or a report that can be used as a proof of concept in discussions with commissioners).

The procedure will also set out delegated decision making arrangements for the use of this fund.

People

If we are to achieve our ambitious plans for the next three years we will need to recruit, retain and develop the best staff.

We will recruit people who are new to working in the sector, including those who have previously used support services by providing excellent training, clear support and supervision and opportunities for progression.





We will benchmark salaries and other contractual conditions against similar organisations, to ensure that we are offering competitive rewards for staff.

We will review in-house training to ensure that it is fit for purpose and fully meets organisational needs.

We will offer structured development opportunities for staff – for example, a ‘Pathways to Management’ programme which enables senior support staff to express an interest in being considered for management roles, and provides training and acting up opportunities to prepare them for such a move.

We will encourage staff to apply for tuition aid to support them to take up relevant external training and education opportunities by providing financial support and time to study.

We will roll out new HR management systems that will reduce the administrative burden on both local managers and the HR team, and enable us to better understand what is working and help us to identify problems.

Messages

We believe that we should use our knowledge of what is happening on the streets, gained from our work with homeless people, to advocate for change. We will develop and maintain connections with a range of influencers to raise issues that have a direct impact on homelessness and homeless people. To do this we will identify a limited number of high-level campaigning issues which will form the core of our work with the media. Currently these are:

The way that the benefits system (and particularly recent changes) destabilises vulnerable people, putting them at risk of homelessness, and the way that the same system is not effective in supporting homeless people away from the streets.

The large numbers of EU rough sleepers on the streets of London and the fact that we have very limited options to help them away from homelessness.

Homelessness and poor health are closely linked, and these links endure after people move away from the streets. People that we work with often do not get the help that they need from the NHS, and are more likely to use crisis services such as A&E and in-patient psychiatric treatment.

These campaigning issues will influence how we prioritise our work with the media, and we will review them annually, taking into account environmental changes and the impact of the message.

We recognise that it is important and effective to give people who use, or have used, services the opportunity to speak for themselves about their experience of homelessness, but we also recognise that we hope to support people to move beyond homelessness and service use –we will be clear about the decisions that they can make around being involved, and the possible consequences of this, and the opportunities they have to move on from identification as a former homeless person.

Internally, we will develop more effective approaches to communicating with our staff and volunteers, with timely sharing of organisational news and other relevant information as an important part of equipping people to do their jobs; while ensuring that the organisation is governed in a transparent and open way.





Fundraising

We expect that our primary source of income will continue to be payment for support services delivered under contract to statutory authorities, and we will explore whether this approach could also be taken with other agencies (for example housing associations).

Non-statutory fundraising is particularly valuable at a time when contracted services are under significant cost pressure, and can enable us to fill gaps by responding to important areas of need that lie outside contracted service specifications, but which have a significant positive impact on the lives of our service users. These include:

- Services delivered by the Employment and Skills team (basic skills, volunteering training, transition and in-work support)
- Key organisational infrastructure posts (for example support for volunteers)
- Hard to Reach fund (to enable welfare payments for individual service users)
- Improvements to properties owned and managed by Thames Reach

We will review these priorities at least annually, and other priorities may be identified in the course of the delivery of this business plan.

Use of property

We will continue to use the non-residential property that we own or manage firstly to enable us to deliver services and then to generate rental income and to reduce our reliance on rented property by providing accommodation for Thames Reach staff. Any income generated in this way will first go towards ensuring that our buildings are well maintained and fit for their purpose and to repay capital investment; and any surplus after this will contribute towards organisational development and fundraising priorities as set out above.



At the time of writing we own or are committed to purchase fourteen residential flats through the Brokerage and Resettlement in Lambeth (BRiL) project, and lease seven additional properties as part of the Peer Landlord London scheme.

BRiL

We will continue to develop the BRiL scheme by purchasing additional flats as funding and market conditions dictate up to a total of twenty flats, and will then conduct an internal review of the project to establish the extent to which it is practical and desirable to extend this model (possibly to other areas).

Peer Landlord

Our experience with this project has been useful and we have established that the provision of good-quality affordable shared accommodation for people in work on low incomes can be effective in preventing rough sleeping, but also that this is a challenging market. As we come to the end of the lease period on these properties we will explore options to purchase some properties, but longer term will seek to develop a model that will enable social investment to be used to provide accommodation on this model more widely.

Re-provision of Deptford Reach premises

We will explore options to provide more suitable premises for this service, whether by moving to a more suitable building, or by rebuilding the existing site. We will continue to own the premises and to use them to deliver the existing Deptford Reach service (as described above), and to maximise the use of the site.

Property sub-committee

Where necessary to ensure Board oversight of and support for significant property related projects (for example the Deptford Reach re-provision), we will establish a sub-group of the Finance Audit and Fundraising committee.

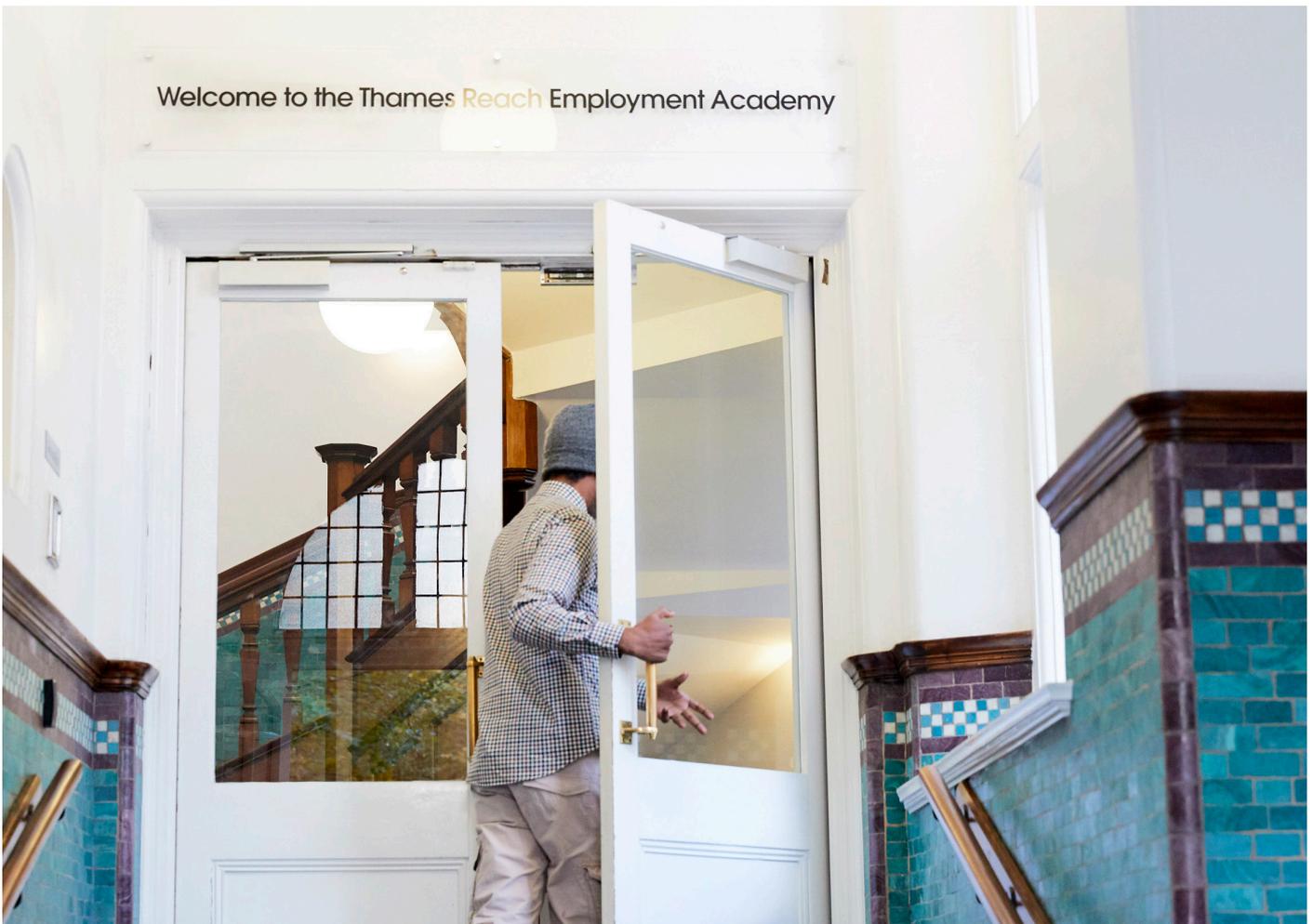
Registered provider subsidiary

We are already committed to the establishment of Thames Reach Housing (TRH), a registered provider subsidiary to take ownership of our Robertson Street hostel. In most cases, we manage our hostel and supported housing accommodation on behalf of Housing Associations through management agreements. While we have an excellent relationship with many of our housing association partners, others do not see the provision of agency managed accommodation as a core part of their business. Where we are clear that stock transfer is viable, will result in an improvement in the quality of the accommodation that we manage and/or secure the future of our services, we will pursue this approach.

Information

As part of our work we collect a great deal of information. This is a significant responsibility and we need to continue to ensure that we hold this information safely, that we protect the confidentiality of the people who have supplied it, and that we do not retain information unnecessarily.

As well as complying with our legal obligations, it is important to recognise that this information is valuable and that we need to use it effectively to improve our services and to support campaigning by identifying trends or gaps in services. To support this, we need to ensure that information is consistent, and that we understand why we are collecting it and what we are doing with it. In support of this, we will carry out an organisational information review, to improve compliance with these objectives, and will revisit this on an annual basis.



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