

Business Plan 2025-2028



Ending rough
sleeping in London

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Imagine losing your home because you're ill or struggling.

Thames Reach supports people in London facing homelessness. Whatever their background or situation, we're here to help when they feel there's nowhere to turn.

Because rough sleeping can be avoided.

We help people keep their home when they're facing a crisis. We work with them, with their landlords, with employers and support organisations, to stop them losing their home.

Because rough sleeping should only ever be temporary.

We help people already sleeping on the streets into safe emergency accommodation, and then into long term independent accommodation. We run our own hostels and recovery centres to help people with complex needs to move on.

Because rough sleeping doesn't define people.

With the right support, people can recover from homelessness — and lead fulfilling, independent lives. To achieve that, we need to go beyond housing: from mental health to employment support, we make sure each person gets all the help they need to put their experience with homelessness in the past.

We are Thames Reach — and we're here to end rough sleeping in London.

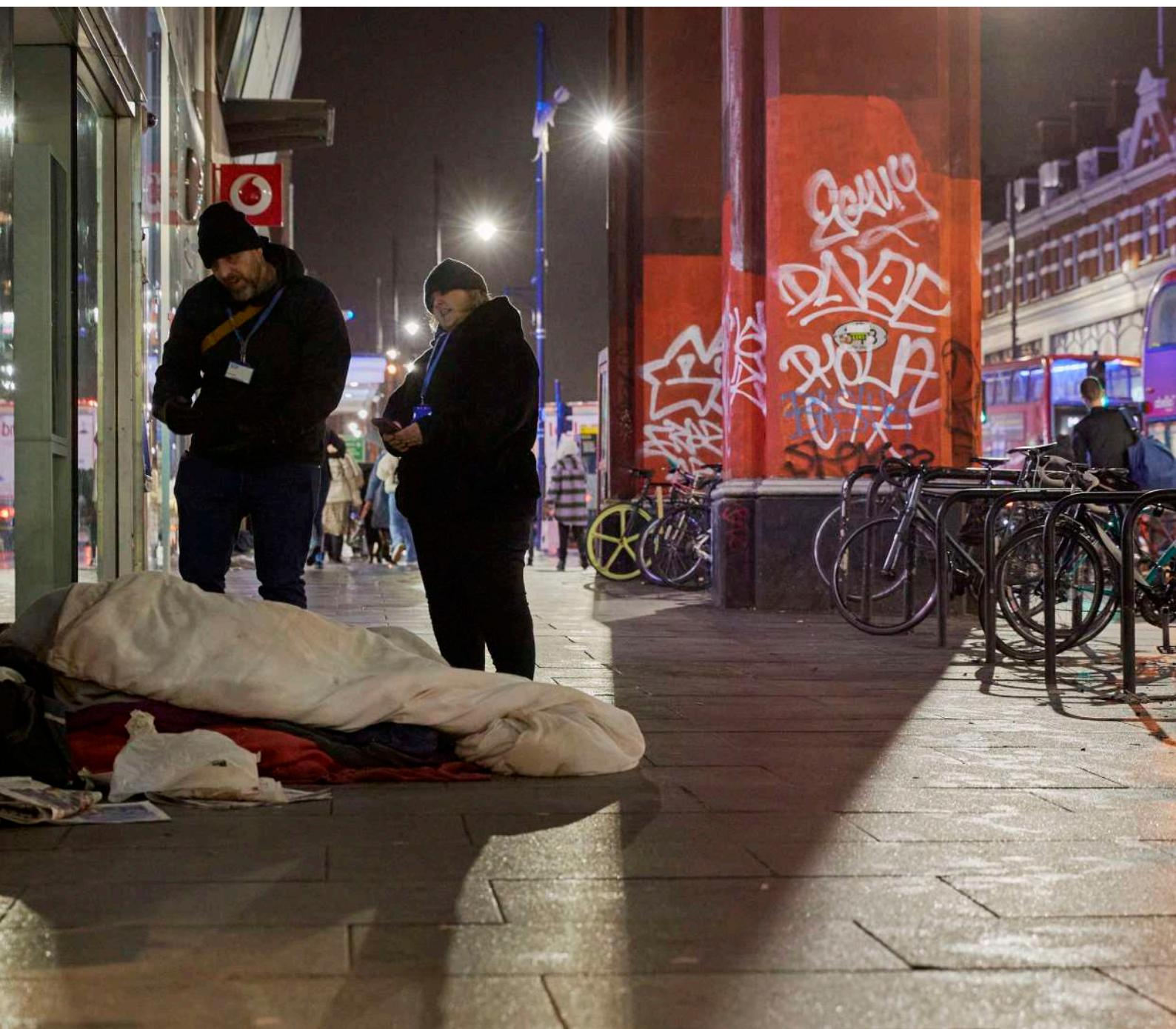


Our mission

Thames Reach's mission is to end rough sleeping.

We will continue to work towards this goal by the delivery of a range of services, through partnerships with other individuals and organisations, and by the influence we can have on the way that services and resources are commissioned, delivered and improved. The services that we deliver are important because of the direct impact that they can have, but also because they provide a model for others.

This business plan aims to set a broad strategic direction for the organisation for the years in question and will be supported by thematic plans covering areas such as development, service improvement, investment and people, which will be supported by measurable indicators and reviewed on an annual basis and overseen by the Sub-Committees of our Board.





Our core business

Core business

Our business model is the delivery of high-quality support to people who are affected by rough sleeping, with the overall aim of helping people to improve their situation and to move away from the streets and towards an independent and secure life. While recognising that this work is delivered in a range of contexts, it follows the same broad principles and applies similar skills in these different settings.

Alongside this we recognise that our services will mostly be delivered under contract, largely to governmental bodies, and that we will pursue proper recovery of the costs we incur from these contracts - with fundraised income and resources complementing this contract income, for example, by allowing us to make welfare payments or to remove barriers to move-on.

To be clear: our aim is to balance our income with our expenditure, and by doing so ensure the sustainability of our services.

It is important that we do not look at services that we provide in isolation and that we are careful to assess and evaluate the broader impact that they might have towards our mission of ending rough sleeping. Similarly, where we identify systemic issues that are barriers to this mission, we will challenge them and we will be flexible and responsive in developing and implementing solutions.

We support and will advocate for better approaches to planning and developing services that are focused on impact; that break down barriers between different funding and professional silos; and which are able to evolve and change in response to changing needs and a better understanding of what works. We believe that this approach as well as our willingness to work positively with partners is one of the things that distinguishes Thames Reach from other similar organisations.



Prevention

Prevention remains our preferred way to achieve our mission but needs to move away from a reliance on crisis intervention. However, we will continue to provide services that identify people at imminent risk of rough sleeping and work with them to identify options that avoid this.

Along with the widespread availability of tenancy support to enable people to start and maintain secure tenancies, we will continue to argue for a properly resourced institutional duty to prevent rough sleeping - this should apply to housing and support providers, health, criminal justice, immigration, and similar services.

We believe that our organisational competence equips us to deliver these services, which should, however, be consistently focused on supporting people to fulfil their potential for independence (as opposed to building long-term dependence on services).

There are many factors that can increase the likelihood of people sleeping rough. These include, for example, childhood trauma and the transition between children and adult services. We support increased attention being given to the long-term impact of interventions that can respond to these issues. However, our prevention focus is on three key areas:

Institutional prevention

We recognise that involvement with institutions (such as imprisonment, or hospital stay) can disrupt fragile housing arrangements and the networks that support people to manage their lives; in other cases (such as the asylum system) the institutional involvement can compound an existing crisis.

This often leads directly or indirectly to rough sleeping. Recognising this risk and responding to it should be a duty for these institutions and is also an opportunity to identify people who are at risk of rough sleeping and intervene to prevent it. Thames Reach can work with these institutions and the people who use them to prevent homelessness, particularly to keep existing accommodation open, and to understand the options available; although an effective response will also require the provision of suitable accommodation.

An example of this approach is our CLaSS service which works with patients in acute hospital wards to facilitate their successful discharge.

Late prevention

Rough sleeping should never be necessary in order to get access to housing and support. Too often people are recommended by a range of agencies to report themselves as rough sleeping through the 'StreetLink' process. This arises from a, sometimes justified, perception that verification as a rough sleeper gives access to help that is not available to those at immediate risk of homelessness.

We will work with commissioners to develop approaches that enable these resources to be accessible to all who need them and that people who would otherwise sleep rough are provided with a route to divert them away from rough sleeping. We recognise that there are challenges associated with this approach in an environment of reduced housing and accommodation options and a necessary part of the successful application of this approach is an increase in the supply of accommodation.

Intervention

While we welcome the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2018 and the duty of local authorities to prevent or relieve homelessness for single people as well as families, our work with people who have been forced into rough sleeping indicates that there are still too many people for whom this does not work.

There have been a lack of resources to support this duty, but many people who end up on the street have not sought help from councils under a prevention duty. There are many reasons for this including a suspicion of authority, offending, support needs around mental health and substance misuse as well as poor language or literacy skills. We know that an assertive service can be effective in finding, supporting and diverting this complex group away from rough sleeping and towards the accommodation and support they need.



Accommodation

We believe that lack of suitable accommodation options available to people affected by rough sleeping means that it is harder to move away from the street, and that people are at a greater risk of returning to rough sleeping.

An effective system should involve a range of accommodation including assessment and high support transitional supported housing beds, which are available when they are needed and which have the capacity to respond to urgent need. We recognise that these services are not a permanent housing option and their focus needs to be on resolving crisis, accessing appropriate services and preparing to move on to more secure suitable options. The physical environment in this accommodation is important; we believe that good quality provision is key to the effectiveness of such services, along with high quality staff teams and specialist partners.

Much current supported housing and hostel provision was built or converted many years ago and is no longer suitable for the role it is now expected to play. Where this is the most effective approach, we will use our registered provider subsidiary to acquire and improve such accommodation including, where appropriate, stock transfers from other registered providers.

We see the management of this type of accommodation as a key contribution that Thames Reach can make to ending rough sleeping, however we are concerned about the current approaches to funding this accommodation, which have an overdependence on rental income, and little funding security, making it challenging to make the kind of long-term investment that is needed to provide accommodation of the type described above. We will continue to make the case for reforms in the ways that such provision is funded, working with other providers and commissioners and seeking to influence the Government's approach in this area.

While we do not see it as our role to develop or manage mainstream housing, we are committed to working with housing providers who can work with us to provide more suitable long-term accommodation for people who have experienced, or who are at risk of, rough sleeping, including accommodation used for 'Housing First' initiatives. It is likely that any provision will be provided through a combination of social housing and hybrid accommodation, using elements of social housing and the private rented sector to access affordable housing, and we are committed to working with a range of competent housing providers to provide the support necessary for people who need it to access and sustain suitable housing.

We understand that the lack of suitable and properly staffed emergency accommodation has led to an increase in the use of hotels and temporary accommodation in response to crises. We believe that this accommodation is not an appropriate response to rough sleeping and we will work with partners to find more suitable options including independent housing and longer term supported accommodation.





Support

The generalist support that Thames Reach provides is the glue that holds together any serious attempt to end rough sleeping.

As well as providing tenancy support that can identify and resolve issues before they escalate into homelessness, we can support people through the transitions between homelessness and housing, help people access the preventative health care that they need, move into employment, and work with people with complex needs to better manage their interactions with multiple agencies and make these more effective. This is our core offer as an organisation and we will seek to grow our work in this area, with a focus on preventative work and on helping people to successfully move away from homelessness and reliance on hostels and supported housing.

Targeted support can also enhance and support more specialised interventions – examples of this include move-on services that provide the knowledge and challenge that can enable people to move on from hostel accommodation; or to begin to access substance misuse services.

While we do not plan to provide specialist substance misuse treatment, we are keen to work in partnership with agencies that do this work – particularly as part of a process of rehabilitation and recovery that enables people to move away from substance use and the street activity that supports this.

Employment is a part of this process of recovery that is too often neglected – the benefits system is often a barrier for those seeking work after homelessness; as is the lack of effective support through the transition into work, and the reluctance of employers to consider people with a history of homelessness. We know that for many people, employment is probably the most important step in a journey away from rough sleeping and good employment that can be sustained is a preventative factor that supports recovery. Investment in support in this area will be repaid, both through benefits saving and reducing repeat homelessness. We will seek to grow our work in this area by setting challenging expectations around finding and sustaining work. It is also important that we put our money where our mouth is and model the behaviour that we expect from employers, which is to give people who have experienced homelessness a fair chance at real work and opportunities for progression.



Influencing

Our role as an organisation working with people who are affected by rough sleeping brings the responsibility to bring our experience and that of those who use our services to a wider audience, particularly to those who make decisions about how we respond to homelessness. We also have a responsibility to use this insight to help shape services and approaches that are effective in preventing and responding to rough sleeping, and of helping people who have been affected to move on and to fulfil their potential.

In this we will be guided by our ethos and values, which include the following statements which set out our approach in this area:

Open-mindedness

We are renowned for our open-mindedness, creativity, flexibility and refusal to allow rigid, dogmatic approaches to reduce effectiveness or inhibit actions.

We tell it as it is

Our strength lies in knowing what is happening on the ground and we use this knowledge to make an impact at the highest level, especially by giving people who use our services the chance to speak directly to those with influence and power. We always tell it as it is, presenting information and delivering our messages with integrity and honesty.

In particular we will seek to use the insight and credibility that this approach gives us to influence government at all levels in their response to rough sleeping, and to influence the way in which we deliver existing services and design new ones, whether or not Thames Reach will be involved in delivering these.

We will also identify and work with others to provide practical solutions to issues in the wider environment that are driving rough sleeping and housing insecurity or which may be driving social exclusion. In particular we see the causes and solutions to rough sleeping as lying in a broader co-ordinated picture that involves housing, but also health, social care, benefits, employers, and the wider community.



Supporting our services

Commissioning – co-creation

The idea of working in partnership is reflected in our organisational ethos and value statements, and we believe that this is key if we are to achieve our goal of ending rough sleeping. We believe that this partnership approach should be applied not just to the delivery of services, but also to how they are conceived and commissioned and how they are managed. Thames Reach will be generous in working with service commissioners and others who have influence on the way that services are designed and developed to ensure they are effective and continue to respond to changing need.

Co-production

We will continue to work through our approach to co-production with the aim of ensuring that the experience of people who use our services is central to the way in which they are developed and improved. We will do this methodically by involving people who use and have used our services in the work of Thames Reach and exploring ways in which these beneficiaries can be a genuine part of the way the organisation is governed and exert influence on the ways that services are run.

As part of this commitment we will continue to work within our co-production strategy, reviewing this annually and producing an annual co-production action plan which will set out the practical steps that we will take in the course of the year.

People

We have made good progress in the term of the last business plan in this area, developing and refining systems to support recruitment of paid staff and volunteer colleagues. We are also improving the quantity and quality of the training that is given to people who work for Thames Reach, as well as providing support to managers to help develop staff across the organisation. This approach together with competitive salary levels and support for well-being has meant that, in a challenging labour market, Thames Reach has performed better than sector averages in the areas of recruitment and retention. We will continue and develop this work over the period of the business plan, but we also want to improve our performance in the following areas:

Colleagues with lived experience of service use

Thames Reach pioneered an approach in which people who have experience of using services are valued and respected for the lived experience that they can bring to work in our organisation, and we are proud that around 20% of our team have experience of homelessness or service use. We believe that this improves our approach to delivering services, as well as modelling a way in which employers can help people to move away from homelessness.

One of the main ways in which we have achieved this is through an annual trainee scheme. This remains well subscribed and is effective and regularly updated. However, we believe that there are opportunities to increase the number of colleagues with lived experience, and we will seek to grow this percentage, including exploring the use of training combined with part-time and relief work as a transitional step.

As part of our investment in this important area of our work we will look at the support we can provide to enable people who have a background of service use to sustain work and progress through the organisation to fulfil their potential. The aim of this work will be to ensure that we increase the proportion of colleagues with lived experience of service use at all levels in Thames Reach.

Common roles and progression

We believe that while we work in many different contexts there are strands that unite all our work to end rough sleeping. We already have common job descriptions across the organisation other than for a small number of specialist central roles. We seek to attract the best people and to provide them with opportunities to develop and progress within Thames Reach, which, in turn, is evidenced by the commitment shown by our colleagues to their work.

We will seek to fully use the opportunity provided by this approach to enable colleagues to move 'sideways' across the organisation both in response to their own developmental needs as well as the needs of service delivery. As well as reinforcing a flexible approach to delivery and providing opportunities for development, this approach will also help equip colleagues for progression into more senior roles, as well as reducing our dependence on agency and other temporary staff.

Investment in services

We anticipate that we will generate capital from the disposal of redundant property assets and subject to the organisational reserve requirement we will seek to invest this capital in the development of services. We will develop a separate investment plan which identify options for our partners and our expectations of them.

We expect that this work will focus on the acquisition and/or improvement of property which will allow us to deliver services identified in this business plan. As stated above, our registered provider subsidiary increases our options in this area, but developments are likely to be contingent on the development of a more positive environment around the way in which revenue funding is provided for supported housing and hostels.

New business development fund

We have a small designated reserve intended to support the development of new business. Where we have used this in recent years it has become clear that this is effective in supporting the implementation of services, particularly where existing services are transferred to Thames Reach, rather than as a funding stream for new services that we hope will receive future contract funding, or to pay for additions to existing services. We will continue to monitor, evaluate and report to the Board on the use and the impact of this fund.

Fundraising

Our previous business plan committed the organisation to an investment in developing our fundraising with the aim of increasing this as a reliable source of funding for supplementary expenditure that is not covered by contract funding (the Essentials Fund); for funding from trusts and foundations to cover activities (particularly around employment) that complement our contract work; and to generate larger sums of money to support potential large projects.

The success of this has been mixed, we have succeeded in significantly growing our supporter database, and we have built positive ongoing relationships with some corporate supporters. We have been less successful in our work to generate funding for services through trust and foundations – this has been affected, at least in part, by changes in the priorities of many trusts. We will use the learning from the past three years to review our approach to fundraising with a focus on generating funding for the Essentials Fund and similar unrestricted funding, and of generating significant funds to support potential capital projects, when these are identified.

Artificial intelligence and digitalisation

It is clear that the growth of artificial intelligence will provide opportunities for all organisations over the period of the business plan. It is important to remember that the increasing digitalisation of society is not universally positive and that there are many for whom this means that it is more difficult to manage their lives, and that this is a group that is disproportionately represented amongst the people that use our services.

We will explore the opportunities that AI and digitalisation can bring to our work to end rough sleeping. It is likely that this will be around support functions and reducing administrative workload, rather than replacing face to face contact with people who use services. We will also apply rigorous business planning tests to any development, ensuring that investment is cost effective and brings real benefit to our services and to the people who use them.

Environment

We are committed to reducing the negative impact that our activities have on the environment. We have limited control of many aspects of our work; we manage many buildings that are owned by housing associations who have control over the majority of the infrastructure of these buildings, and who have responsibility for much of the plant and insulation of buildings. In this context we will advocate for investment in upgrading buildings to reduce their carbon impact.

Where we have full responsibility, we will invest in reducing our carbon impact where this is viable, and we will seek grants to upgrade our stock where these are available. We contact regular assessments of our carbon footprint using the Energy Savings Opportunity Scheme (ESOS). Where this is viable, we will consider prioritising green tariffs for utilities when these contracts are renewed.

One of the most important potential uses of fossil fuels in our work is through transport - many of our services are based in the community and travel is a core part of their role. We have long encouraged colleagues to use public transport, and we support those who cycle by providing support for purchasing bicycles and relevant equipment. When the use of vehicles is unavoidable (for example in outreach teams covering broad geographical areas at night), we continue to use club cars, allowing us to take advantage of more fuel-efficient, hybrid and electric vehicles.

Our ethos and values

What we do:

Never giving up on people

We believe that the effects of homelessness and social exclusion are a great injustice and that the road to recovery can often be long and painful. We are committed to never giving up on people, no matter how complex, chaotic and challenging they may be.

Highest aspirations, expectations and respect for service users

We passionately believe that people can make real and lasting changes in their lives. We have the highest aspirations, expectations and respect for our service users and will never be indifferent to their individual needs.

How we do it:

Staff: compassion, integrity, professionalism and commitment

Thames Reach's staff are characterised by their compassion, integrity, professionalism and commitment. In return, unstinting support will be given to staff making decisions in the best interest of service users, trusting in their ability to work autonomously.

Working together

Everyone at Thames Reach is working to end street homelessness, and all parts of the organisation have important contributions to make. We believe passionately in achieving trust and mutual respect between the different parts of the organisation to accomplish this objective.

Working in partnership with others

Our aims can only be achieved by working in partnership with others; we know we do not have all the solutions. We generously give time, resources and expertise to others if the ultimate outcome gets us closer to achieving our vision and mission.

Open-mindedness

We are renowned for our open-mindedness, creativity, flexibility and refusal to allow rigid, dogmatic approaches to reduce effectiveness or inhibit actions.

We tell it as it is

Our strength lies in knowing what is happening on the ground and we use this knowledge to make an impact at the highest level, especially by giving our service users the chance to speak directly to those with influence and power. We always tell it as it is, presenting information and delivering our messages with integrity and honesty.

**Thames
Reach**