



Guidance

Operating Principles for Night Shelters

From the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

The guide was published in August 2022 and replaces the COVID-19 Operating Principles for night shelters.

On reading the guidance, it seems the Government does not wish to appear prescriptive but still subtly proposes that communal night shelters should be an exception and no longer the norm.

Some of the guidance might be outside of the past and present scope of church-run winter night shelters.

Key elements

- In July 2022, the *Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)* launched a £10 million Night Shelter Transformation Fund to support non-commissioned night shelters run by community and faith groups.
- In many instances, providers have been encouraged to prioritise and provide single accommodation where possible.
- However, the Government understands that circumstances might mean *limited* occasions where providers have no choice but to provide communal shelters to protect people from sleeping rough.
- The guidance principles recommend that providers of night shelters with a communal sleeping model seek advice from their local Director of Public Health prior to opening.
- Communal shelters should be considered only where these correlate with the level of rough sleeping.
- Communal sleeping arrangements should be established in partnership with the LA, with clear referral processes.
- Providers are invited to give feedback on these principles.
- Let fresh air in, good air circulation.
- Limit close contact with people, especially if they are displaying symptoms of respiratory infection or if they are not fully vaccinated. *Regarding the latter, all the coordinating bodies of winter night shelter provision contacted in December 2022 have put rules in place that require people to be fully vaccinated prior to being offered night shelter, this is in order to reduce the risk of infection.*
- The DLUHC considers limiting close contact as a matter of personal choice but encourages it.

- Face covering, regular hand washing and wiping of surfaces still advised if the risk is high.
- Self isolation is advised if a person (whether staff, guest or volunteer) develops symptoms of respiratory infection.
- Coordinate with the LA and other agencies so that the night shelter can play a clear role in the local pathway out of homelessness, particularly moving-on arrangements for people the shelter season ends. This provision includes people who are not eligible for homelessness assistance and housing. However, it is not clear what options providers could discuss with people in the second category in the absence of government assistance.
- Partnership with the local community, i.e. signposting individuals for additional support, such as local debt advice agencies, immigration support, volunteering, training, employment, etc.
- Partnership with local services, including Primary Care and Mental Health support services and immigration advice.
- Partnership with statutory services such as Social Services and the Job Centre.

All in all, it seems that the Government is departing from the traditional vision of a night shelter and the guidance alludes to a more active role in the referral pathway in the future. The practicality of the partnership principle might be a matter for debate because, as we know, winter night shelters open their doors when most of the recommended partner agencies have already closed for the day.