



The Lord Bailey of Paddington AM Chairman of the Housing Committee

Sir Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London

(Sent by email)

25 June 2026

Rough sleeping in London

Dear Sadiq,

I am writing as Chairman of the London Assembly Housing Committee regarding rough sleeping in London. This follows an evidence-gathering session on 12 March 2026 when my predecessor Zoë Garbett was Chair, which primarily focused on the Mayor's street outreach services. Guests from voluntary and policy organisations, boroughs and GLA officers attended the session. We would like to thank guests for attending and for the insightful evidence they shared with the Committee.

As you are aware, the number of Londoners sleeping rough is at a record high. It has increased by 63 per cent since 2015-16 and year on year since 2021-22.¹ Sophie Boobis, Head of Research and Policy, Homeless Link attributed rising homelessness to "big systematic drivers" as well as the reduced capacity of services supporting people off the streets.² Jess Turtle highlighted the lack of training, capacity and resource across the sector as contributing to the ongoing high levels of rough sleeping in the capital.³

¹ Homeless Link, [Rough sleeping in London climbs to record levels](#), 30 June 2025

² London Assembly Housing Committee, [Rough Sleeping in London: Panel 1](#), 12 March 2026, p. 1

³ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Rough Sleeping in London: Panel 1](#), 12 March 2026, p. 2

Sophie Boobis argued that issues in the supported housing sector are contributing to high levels of rough sleeping. She stated: “we have years of underfunding of the support element of supported housing...We lost the ring-fenced funding supporting people over a decade ago and there has not really been consistent resource going in.”⁴ She also highlighted recent trends in London’s rough sleeping population, such as the increase in rough sleeping for young people, older people, people leaving the asylum system, and people who are “significantly unwell”.⁵

As a Committee, we believe the Mayor should continue to engage directly with community groups, support services and rough sleepers themselves to not only understand the changing demographics of rough sleepers, but to understand how to better respond to changing needs.

We outline in this letter key findings from our meeting on StreetLink and the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP).

StreetLink

The Committee heard some positive views about the use of StreetLink in London. David Eastwood MBE, Strategic Lead for Rough Sleeping, City of Westminster, described it as “crucial” for identifying rough sleepers in locations outreach workers are unlikely to visit.⁶ Jillian Thursby, Service Director, St Mungo’s, told us that there has been some “real success” with the StreetLink London phone line. She stated that “clients can call to the phone line directly, they can reach a staff member who provides them with resources, reassurance, a listening ear, all of that stuff.”⁷

Jillian Thursby highlighted some operational challenges with StreetLink, including rough sleepers moving locations after outreach teams are alerted.⁸ She also highlighted that the StreetLink phone line was seeing increasing use, with 2,398 calls answered in the past quarter (Q3) and 3,179 outbound calls, an increase on the previous quarter (Q2).⁹

Jess Turtle, Founder and Co-Director, Museum of Homelessness, shared more fundamental concerns about the nature of StreetLink. First, she expressed concerns around consent, as people referring individuals to StreetLink are not required to have consent from the person being referred.¹⁰ Second, she highlighted concerns about the verification element of StreetLink and the requirement on rough sleepers to be verified as “bedded down” to access support.¹¹ This can create a pernicious situation whereby rough sleepers may remain on the streets – sometimes in dangerous situations – in order to be verified, potentially turning down support from community organisations as a result.

⁴ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Rough Sleeping in London: Panel 1](#), 12 March 2026, p. 3

⁵ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Rough Sleeping in London: Panel 1](#), 12 March 2026, p. 6

⁶ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Rough Sleeping in London: Panel 2](#), 12 March 2026, p. 13

⁷ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Rough Sleeping in London: Panel 1](#), 12 March 2026, p. 10

⁸ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Rough Sleeping in London: Panel 1](#), 12 March 2026, p. 10

⁹ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Rough Sleeping in London: Panel 1](#), 12 March 2026, p. 10. See [here](#) for how Streetlink’s calling service works

¹⁰ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Rough Sleeping in London: Panel 1](#), 12 March 2026, p. 11

¹¹ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Rough Sleeping in London: Panel 1](#), 12 March 2026, p. 12

Jess Turtle shared concerns about the effectiveness of StreetLink, highlighting a report from 2022 which found that a small proportion of people referred to the service received support.¹² The Committee is aware that in 2024-25, StreetLink received 21,928 alerts from members of the public about someone they had seen sleeping rough, resulting in them finding 2,238 people.¹³ Jess Turtle also shared concerns about the function of StreetLink, stating:

“The way that we resolve people’s street homelessness is there are two ends of the scale, one is a rapid response situation like that where we have to be ready to take action there and then, and the other end of the scale is through consistent, trusting, compassionate long-term relationships. To me, StreetLink does not fulfil either of those things that the community needs. That is why we just wonder what it is for and do we need something else.”¹⁴

Ellen Storrar, Head of Specialist Housing and Services, GLA, told us that ending verification for services is “at the heart” of the Mayor’s Rough Sleeping Plan of Action 2025.¹⁵ We acknowledge the current risks posed to rough sleepers by verification, and therefore understand this objective, while noting that steps should be taken for stretched resources to be appropriately targeted at rough sleepers in lieu of verification going ahead. We note that the new “Ending Homelessness Hubs” will support rough sleepers based on an assessment of specific needs and not verification of whether they are “bedded down”.¹⁶

The GLA’s review of StreetLink as part of the Rough Sleeping Plan of Action should consider the latest data on StreetLink’s operation and consider how to reduce the use of verification as part of the referral process, whilst ensuring that support is appropriately targeted at rough sleepers going ahead.

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

We heard mixed views about the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP). David Eastwood highlighted the Mayor’s “In for Good” principle as a positive change to the service. He said:

“Anyone who comes in during SWEP, we will look to be assessing that individual and working out what the route off the street for that individual is. It does not mean they are going to be in accommodation for good, but it does mean that, as part of that, we have worked out what the route away from the streets is for that individual. I can remember the days way back when SWEP was literally activated, people came in, and then as soon as it finished, people left.”¹⁷

However, Sophie Boobis, Head of Research and Policy, Homeless Link, emphasised the ongoing, temporary nature of SWEP and the missed opportunities for using it as a way to get people off the streets long-term. She attributed this to the lack of bed spaces available for

¹² London Assembly Housing Committee, [Rough Sleeping in London: Panel 1](#), 12 March 2026, p. 11

¹³ London Assembly, [Streetlink success rate](#), 15 January 2026

¹⁴ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Rough Sleeping in London: Panel 1](#), 12 March 2026, p. 12

¹⁵ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Rough Sleeping in London: Panel 2](#), 12 March 2026, p. 4

¹⁶ [Mayor’s Rough Sleeping Plan of Action 2025](#), pg.32

¹⁷ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Rough Sleeping in London: Panel 2](#), 12 March 2026, p. 11

rough sleepers to move on to but also highlighted a lack of coordination within the wider system. We were concerned to hear Jess Turtle report that one council recently used a “sit-up” service for SWEP – providing rough sleepers with chairs to sleep on – rather than beds.¹⁸

Jess Turtle, Sophie Boobis and Jillan Thursby all highlighted that SWEP does not address the range of extreme or prolonged weather that rough sleepers endure. Sophie Boobis told us:

“[SWEP] is extremely weighted to cold weather. There is now guidance for hot weather, but what we see as extreme weather is changing and it is changing rapidly. There is not SWEP preparedness for heavy rains and flooding and high winds, which are equally dangerous. We have done research on the health of people experiencing homelessness and one of the most reported health problems relates to things like open infected wounds or issues with feet. These are things that are extremely hard to manage [...] but if you add in cold weather, if you are wearing damp clothes, this becomes a real health crisis.”¹⁹

We are pleased that the GLA and London Councils published guidance for boroughs last year on how to protect people sleeping rough in hot weather. However, we are unsure of how commonplace these measures are across London or what the outcomes are for rough sleepers as a result. We are concerned that other types of extreme or prolonged weather are not being addressed, despite the serious and devastating effects on rough sleepers. As a Committee, we believe the current scope for SWEP is too narrow.

Jess Turtle and Jillian Thursby told us that verification is used as part of SWEP. Like StreetLink, being required to be “bedded down” to gain access to services provided through SWEP can put rough sleepers in dangerous situations.²⁰ During SWEP, this is particularly worrying, as rough sleepers may be withstanding extreme weather in order to get verified.

In its upcoming internal review of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol, the GLA should consult with community organisations and people with lived experience of rough sleeping to identify how types of weather other than cold weather, including extreme or prolonged rainfall or wind, affect rough sleepers.

The GLA and London Councils should engage with boroughs to evaluate the effectiveness of the hot weather guidance. This review should also identify any barriers faced by boroughs which make implementing this guidance challenging.

The Committee would be grateful if you could set out your views on the issues set out in this letter. Please send your response to Diane Richards, Committee Officer, at diane.richards@london.gov.uk. We would welcome a response by Tuesday 1 September 2026.

¹⁸ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Rough Sleeping in London: Panel 1](#), 12 March 2026, p. 18

¹⁹ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Rough Sleeping in London: Panel 1](#), 12 March 2026, p. 16

²⁰ London Assembly Housing Committee, [Rough Sleeping in London: Panel 1](#), 12 March 2026

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Bailey', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**The Lord Bailey of Paddington AM
Chairman of the Housing Committee**