

Date: 12 February 2025

Item: Safeguarding Customers at TfL

This paper will be considered in public

1 Summary

- 1.1 Safeguarding children and adults at risk from harm is a priority for us. Our TfL Strategy sets out our commitment to enhance our safeguarding response to protect our most vulnerable customers, identifying and mitigating risks. This includes: how we deal with the behaviour and safe travel of young people; reduce the risk of suicide and support customers in mental health crises; tackle rough sleeping; and reduce harm through exploitation.
- 1.2 As an organisation we are very proud of the work we do on safeguarding and vulnerability. We commit to providing updates to the Panel on all aspects of our safeguarding work for the purposes of scrutiny but to also recognise the outstanding contributions of teams and colleagues across our organisation to protect vulnerable people who are travelling or seeking refuge on our network.
- 1.3 This paper focuses on our activity to safeguard those people sleeping rough on our services and infrastructure, and the work we do to prevent suicide on our transport network by way of illustrating our safeguarding approach. We will bring a further update to the Panel at a future meeting providing a deep dive into safeguarding children and young people as they travel, and on our work contributing to the prevention of child sexual exploitation.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 **The Panel is asked to note the paper.**

3 Background

- 3.1 Our safeguarding work is broad and covers a wide range of issues and risks. Despite not having a statutory safeguarding duty in most cases, we recognise the opportunities and the important role we can play in reducing harm to children and adults at risk and reducing vulnerability (because of circumstance or presence of an offender) more broadly.
- 3.2 Our Compliance, Policing, Operations and Security (CPOS) Directorate, under the leadership of the Chief Operating Officer, is the organisational lead for customer safeguarding with a small, dedicated team of safeguarding specialists. Colleague safeguarding is led and managed through the Chief People team. CPOS is responsible for developing our strategic response to customer safeguarding risks across the organisation as well as coordinating and delivering tactical interventions. However, our safeguarding activity goes far beyond this

team. Everyday our frontline colleagues are spotting and responding to vulnerability in the moment, connecting vulnerable people with the support they need and showing compassion.

- 3.3 We take a structured approach to our safeguarding activity by using data and evidence to identify and understand risks, and work with partners to respond to them. We have an internal safeguarding forum with representation from across our operational business areas and specialist police input to help manage our strategic safeguarding risks, as well as sharing knowledge, industry expertise, and insight from our own analysis and academic research. We plan to involve more external partners in the forum moving forward.
- 3.4 This approach is coupled with extensive engagement, training and support for our frontline colleagues to help ensure that they are skilled, equipped and confident to identify vulnerability and to act.
- 3.5 We were accredited under the Department for Transport's Safeguarding on Rail scheme in 2023 for our approach to managing safeguarding risks on London Underground. This approach is mirrored across all our modes.

4 Rough sleeping

- 4.1 Rough sleeping is a complex, prevalent, and increasing issue which impacts our transport network and our infrastructure. Rough sleeping by its very nature is dangerous. Rough sleepers are highly vulnerable, often with complex physical and mental health conditions. People sleeping rough are more likely to be victims of crime and almost 17 times more likely to have been victims of violence (compared to the general public), as shown in data from the Office for National Statistics. They are also more vulnerable to criminal exploitation.
- 4.2 We do not receive any government funding or resources to deal with homelessness but we recognise the contribution we can make to safeguarding people who are rough sleeping or seeking refuge on our network and infrastructure to ensure that our network is safe and efficient for all. We work closely with the Greater London Authority (GLA), local authorities, the London Navigator Team (which provides 'through-care casework' supporting people from the street, through emergency or temporary accommodation placements in to settled housing) and outreach services to try to connect people with support. The police may need to be involved in some cases where there is associated crime (including threatening behaviour towards our staff) and antisocial behaviour. In some cases, after all other options available to us have been exhausted, we may need to consider enforcement action to remove the rough sleepers from the site.
- 4.3 Our rough sleeping coordinator reviews and analyses reports from transport staff and customers, works with partners to assess and respond to the risks and helps to connect rough sleepers with support. It is challenging and time-consuming work. Rough sleepers – especially those who sleep on our network – are sometimes reluctant to engage with outreach services or have complex needs which means that they are unable or unwilling to accept the support available to them. It takes time for outreach to build rapport and be able to help them off the streets.

- 4.4 Our coordinator managed over 20 complex, deeply entrenched rough sleeping locations over the last year. In these cases, we were and continue to be dependent on the cooperation and support of the local authority and outreach services. We host multiagency meetings to agree an approach and coordinate activity with partners, including those with statutory responsibility for homelessness or who provide support services. We have built excellent relationships with some boroughs, particularly Westminster City Council (WCC), where we are working together to address some very difficult rough sleeping issues and safeguard the rough sleepers.
- 4.5 One example was the encampment on Park Lane central reservation which posed significant health and safety risks for the rough sleepers, residents and road users. As the highway authority for Park Lane, we worked with partners to connect rough sleepers with accommodation and support but despite our best efforts and extensive outreach engagement over many months we had to apply and enforce a possession order, which was action taken as a last resort. We have removed the large unauthorised encampment from this location, but unfortunately, it continues to be an area of concern as a small number of rough sleepers have returned. WCC has offered support, including accommodation. We are managing the situation with WCC, outreach services, the GLA and the police.
- 4.6 We actively encourage all our frontline customer teams to report rough sleepers. Reporting through staff apps and StreetLink enables our coordinator to identify locations for additional outreach support and gives the best chance of connecting them with support and accommodation. Every report is acted upon. In 2023/24 our London Underground staff reported 2,543 rough sleepers (a four per cent decrease compared to 2022/23) and our bus drivers reported 9,234 rough sleepers (a 23 per cent increase compared to 2022/23). This was against a backdrop of the highest number of rough sleepers reported in London over the last 10 years.
- 4.7 The profile of people sleeping rough on the transport network is broadly consistent with London-wide data, with the majority being male and around half being UK nationals. Around half also had support needs relating to mental health, around 30 per cent had a need relating to drugs, and a similar proportion had a need relating to alcohol. Given the impact of rough sleeping on our transport network and infrastructure, we continue to work with the GLA to support efforts to deliver on the Mayor's commitment to end rough sleeping in London by 2030, which includes a new Mayor's Rough Sleeping Plan of Action.
- 4.8 Last year we launched our new online training course, available to all frontline colleagues, reminding them of the importance of reporting those they see rough sleeping, and how we use that information to assist those individuals. We continue to promote this training. In parallel to this we are trying to make it easier for colleagues to report issues including reporting apps and easy links to StreetLink reporting. We introduced a new reporting system for bus station staff which has been fully operational since October 2024. This has helped to streamline reporting of rough sleeping among other issues such as aggressive begging and antisocial behaviour, ensuring a more timely and efficient response.

- 4.9 Our most recent Customer Pulse survey data (Quarter 3 2024/25) showed that six per cent of customers were worried by a begging incident and five per cent were worried by rough sleeping. Our data for reported incidents is showing that begging, a separate issue but often conflated with rough sleeping, is also increasing. In 2023/24, our London Underground colleagues reported 1,546 incidents of begging (a four per cent increase compared to 2022/23). 4.3 per cent of work-related violence and aggression incidents had begging or rough sleeping as a contributory factor. We deal with begging as a separate issue and focus our efforts on aggressive and organised begging which has links to work-related violence and aggression, organised criminality and modern slavery. We are working with police to renew our approach to take account of the increased risk in these areas.
- 4.10 As rough sleeping is not an issue specific to transport or to London, we will continue to liaise with other transport providers and authorities (both nationally and internationally) to learn from each other and to refine our approach. Our involvement in UITP, the International Association of Public Transport's rough sleeping group is an important part of this.

5 Suicide Prevention

- 5.1 Suicide prevention is an integral part of our safeguarding activity. Tragically, 22 people have committed suicide on London Underground and a further 15 people have attempted suicide this year (January - December 2024).
- 5.2 Our thoughts are with the families and friends of people who have died or been injured when attempting to end their lives on our network. The impacts are also felt by our colleagues who are witness to these traumatic events and related actions such as attendance at inquests. We are committed to doing all we can to prevent suicide on our roads and transport networks, support people in mental health crisis who are at risk of harm and to support our colleagues who are impacted by these tragic events.
- 5.3 Experienced safeguarding practitioners led on the development and coordination of our pan-TfL suicide prevention programme. This was initially established in 2017 for London Underground but has been expanded to include all modes including roads and rivers. In line with the Department of Health and Social Care's Suicide Prevention Strategy for England and Wales, our programme covers:
- (a) training to all our staff where the aim is to enable the tools, confidence, and knowledge on how to intervene and what to do. This includes spotting vulnerability signs and behaviours, tailored to our operational environment, and equipping staff with response tactics to support the individual concerned. We have worked closely with mental health experts to develop this material, and all training is delivered by a qualified mental health practitioner. We recognise our colleagues are our most useful tool and best method of intervention as our 'active bystanders'. Alongside the Gateway training offered to our frontline staff, the Suicide Prevention Lead is now qualified to deliver Suicide Prevention training packages via the charity Every Life Matters. This will complement our standard approach at locations where we have seen ongoing presentations;

- (b) we work closely with the British Transport Police (BTP) Harm Reduction team which supports vulnerable people who have shown signs of intentional self-harm on the rail network on multiple occasions. The BTP provides targeted support to those who need it most, encouraging active engagement with mental health services and prevention of suicide on the railway;
- (c) our Safeguarding team record all incidents where a suicidal intention was shown. The team works with partners to understand any root causes, patterns and learnings to further improve our approach and mitigate further risk. We use this information to develop our collaboration and partnerships, ensuring suitable escalation plans are in place, developed with local stations. We analyse our data to explore trends which helps assist us to focus our attention on emerging patterns;
- (d) a periodic meeting was established in 2024 enabling all our modes to share approaches to suicide prevention and establish a common framework. We work with Network Rail, Highways England and train operating companies to share information and approaches to managing incidents of suicide and continuously improve our training and supporting materials to reflect this. We are also increasing our work with boroughs and are now attending London Borough Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Working Groups in six borough locations;
- (e) the Suicide Prevention team directly contact each station where an incident occurs. The aim of our contact is to offer a station visit with the Area Manager and staff who may have been affected by the incident. We signpost internal and external resources available to staff to ensure this information is readily available to all station staff. When reaching out to the station staff, we ensure we provide a reminder about the Gateway training and offer a refresher course to help rebuild confidence in the topic;
- (f) we recognise the fundamental need to be supported by greater internal communications presence. We have already started promotion of our training with a “new year's resolution pledge” regarding individuals signing up to complete suicide prevention training. We aim to share the excellent interventions our staff are doing, such as by arranging blogs to go on our intranet, Platform, or sharing more about the Suicide Prevention team and the work planned in 2025 by promoting this in our internal ‘On the Move’ magazine. NHS Thrive London and various suicide and mental health charities provide us with materials for stations and engagement tools with the communities we serve and customers using the network; and
- (g) we are working with universities to conduct an ethnographic review. This is an independent review of our programme compared to academic theory and best practice, and will enable us to challenge our current approach and update our materials if required. We are also beginning a project which focuses on a ‘Sensory Review’ of locations, which will investigate further into the specific look, feel and atmosphere of a station to further understand how this may impact a customer who is feeling distressed.

- 5.4 The Office for National Statistics published data for 2023 registrations that showed increasing suicide rates for England and Wales – the highest seen since 1999. London had the lowest rates for any region. Males accounted for most of the suicide and attempted suicide victims on our network which is consistent with the national profile. Historically we have seen a lower age profile, with approximately half of victims aged between 20 and 39 where the national profile is 45-49 for males and 50-54 for women.
- 5.5 Representatives from across our operational business come together every four weeks to share insight and learning within a common framework for managing risk. We also take this approach with external partners such as the London and Thames Water Safety Partnership and Highways England for our road network improvement programme. Critical to the success of our programme are our partnerships with NHS Thrive London and several other suicide and mental health charities. We are strengthening our partnership working with local authorities and are now attending London Borough Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Working Groups for repeat locations.
- 5.6 In December, London River Services reached an important milestone of training 400 colleagues in river safety which covered how to throw life rings or throw lines, where to throw, who to call should you see someone in the Thames (999 ask for coastguard) and what to do should you rescue someone from the water. This is another great example of training colleagues so they are skilled and confident to assist people in need.
- 5.7 Our customer-facing colleagues are supporting the millions of customers using our services every day. Some of these customers are highly vulnerable and may be in mental health crisis. The quick-thinking actions of our colleagues can prevent harm and save a life. Between April – December 2024, our colleagues have intervened in 318 situations where we believe the individual was in crisis, vulnerable and at risk of harm. Colleagues are rightly recognised for their actions through Lifesaver and Safeguarding Awards. We are in the process of setting up a new award ceremony to properly recognise and honour our amazing colleagues who go above and beyond to safeguard our most vulnerable customers in what can be very difficult and traumatic circumstances.
- 5.8 Reporting on suicide trends sensibly and sensitively is imperative. External reporting, including our reporting, should align with [Samaritans' media guidelines on the reporting of suicide](#) because of the potentially damaging consequences of irresponsible reporting. If anyone is affected by the themes in this paper and is struggling to cope, please call Samaritans for free on 116 123 (UK and the Republic of Ireland) or contact other sources of support, such as those listed on the [NHS help for suicidal thoughts web page](#). Support is available 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

List of appendices to this report:

None

List of Background Papers:

None

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