



NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY PANEL 3

HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPERS

8 NOVEMBER 2018

BRIEFING NOTE: BACKGROUND DATA

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its inaugural scoping meeting, Scrutiny Panel 3 (Homelessness and Rough Sleepers) agreed that it would receive details of background research reports to inform its evidence base.
- 1.2 There are a number of published academic, Governmental and think-tank journals that explore the causes and effects of homelessness and rough sleeping which will be presented to the Scrutiny Panel over a series of meetings for its information.
- 1.3 Details of research papers were presented to the meeting of the Panel at its September meeting.
- 1.4 The research papers for consideration by the Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 8 November 2018 are:
 - House of Commons Library – Briefing Paper (23 February 2018) Rough Sleeping (England)
 - Crisis – Ending Rough Sleeping: What Works? An international evidence review
 - CJS – Housing First – Housing Led Solutions to Rough Sleeping and Homelessness (March 2017)

1.5 House of Commons Library – Briefing Paper (23 February 2018) Rough Sleeping (England)

1.5.1 The Summary of the Briefing Note details:

“Local authorities' duties

Local authorities in England do not have a duty to secure accommodation for all homeless people. Those who approach an authority for help who are deemed to be homeless but not in priority need, may find themselves sleeping rough. Rough sleepers are one of the most vulnerable groups in society; studies have found strong correlations between homelessness and a multiplicity, and increased severity, of both physical and mental health conditions. Rough sleepers are over 9 times more likely to commit suicide than the general population; on average rough sleepers die at age 47 (age 43 for women).

Government initiatives

Successive Governments have put in place initiatives to tackle rough sleeping. The [Rough Sleepers Initiative](#) operated between 1990 and 1999 until it was replaced by Labour’s Homelessness Action Programme. Over the years some ambitious targets have been set; for example, Labour set a target in 1999 to achieve a two thirds reduction in rough sleeping by 2002. [No One Left Out](#) (Labour, 2008) set a target of ending rough sleeping “once and for all” by 2012. Crisis commissioned the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York to conduct a review of single homelessness in the UK between 2000 and 2010. The study, [A review of single homelessness in the UK](#), (2011) provides an overview of the history, causes and policy responses to single homelessness, and assesses how successful these policies have been in tackling the issue. The study suggested some policy responses for the next decade. The Conservative Government elected in 2015 continued with the approach initiated under the Coalition. This [No Second Night Out](#) approach was piloted in London. A key aim was to ensure that no-one new to the streets sleeps out for a second night. A [Ministerial Working Group](#) was established to prevent and reduce homelessness.

*The current Government was elected with a manifesto commitment to **“halve rough sleeping over the course of the parliament and eliminate it altogether by 2027”** by setting up a new homelessness reduction taskforce to focus on prevention and affordable housing and by piloting a Housing First approach to tackle rough sleeping. The Government also supported Bob Blackman’s Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which will place additional duties on local authorities in England to prevent and relieve homeless for all eligible applicants from April 2018.*

Rough sleeping is still increasing

Despite these considerable efforts, the official rough sleeper counts have risen in each year since new methodology was introduced in

autumn 2010. The most recent statistics published on 25 January 2018 recorded a 169% increase in the number of people sleeping rough in England since 2010. Existing programmes have recorded successes in helping individuals to exit rough sleeping, but the flow on to the streets continues. The UK Statistics Authority declared DCLG's Rough Sleeping statistics to not to meet the standard to be regarded as National Statistics in December 2015.

Rough sleeping is at its most severe in London. The latest financial year report from the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) database, [CHAIN Street to Home Annual Report 2016-17](#), shows that a total of 8,108 rough sleepers were contacted by outreach workers or building-based teams in London during 2016/17.

Factors identified as contributing to the ongoing flow of new rough sleepers to the streets include: welfare reforms, particularly reductions in entitlement to Housing Benefit/Local Housing Allowance; reduced investment by local authorities in homeless services; and flows of non-UK nationals who are unable to access benefits.

Organisations working in the sector have called for an effective safety net and a long-term homelessness strategy backed by investment to deliver it. Some organisations support legislation to extend the priority need categories to cover all homeless people, an approach already adopted in Scotland. In December 2017, the Public Accounts Committee published a [report](#) which criticised the Government's approach to rising homelessness:

The Department for Communities and Local Government's attitude to reducing homelessness has been unacceptably complacent. The limited action that it has taken has lacked the urgency that is so badly needed and its "light touch" approach to working with the local authorities tackling homelessness has clearly failed.

The Department is placing great reliance on the new Homelessness Reduction Act to provide the solution to homelessness.

While this new legislation will no doubt help, it cannot be successful unless it is matched by a renewed focus across government on tackling the twin issues of both the supply and affordability of decent housing, which underlie the causes of homelessness."

1.5.2 A copy of the full Report can be [located](#).

1.6 Crisis – Ending Rough Sleeping: What Works? An international evidence review

1.6.1 The Summary of the Report states:

“Ending rough sleeping: what works? An international evidence review (2017)

This study demonstrates what works to end homelessness for rough sleepers through an international evidence review. The ongoing need for people to sleep rough on the streets of the UK is indicative of an unacceptable societal failure and recent homelessness projections suggest that the scale of the issue is worsening. Ending rough sleeping is an increasing policy priority across the UK. Crisis commissioned Cardiff University and Heriot-Watt University to undertake an international evidence review of what works to end rough sleeping.

Key findings:

Through analysis of over 500 published studies and interviews with eleven homelessness experts around the world, the review found that current approaches to address rough sleeping are not as effective as they might (and need) to be. The development of an improved approach to ending homelessness must of course incorporate the views of rough sleepers and those who work with them, and take into account homelessness prevention, but the learning from this evidence review can play a key role in shaping a new approach. It suggests five key principles should underpin this approach:

- 1. Recognise heterogeneity – of individual rough sleepers’ housing and support needs and their different entitlements to publicly funded support. Local housing markets and rough sleeper population profiles will also vary across the UK.*
- 2. Take swift action – to prevent or quickly end street homelessness, through interventions such as No Second Night Out (NSNO), thereby reducing the number of rough sleepers who develop complex needs and potentially become entrenched.*
- 3. Employ assertive outreach leading to a suitable accommodation offer – by actively identifying and reaching out to rough sleepers and offering suitable accommodation.*
- 4. Be housing-led – offering swift access to settled housing including the use of Housing First*
- 5. Offer person-centred support and choice – via a client-centred approach based on cross-sector collaboration and commissioning. Personalised Budgets are a good example of this.*

In the UK there is both an opportunity and a need for change in the way rough sleepers are assisted. The findings presented from this review

should be used alongside the wider body of work being undertaken by Crisis with rough sleepers and those who work with them, to shape an improved approach and end rough sleeping. Moreover, we hope this synthesis will provide a reference point for policy makers, practitioners and researchers working with rough sleepers across the globe.”

1.6.2 A copy of the full report can be [located](#)

1.7 CJS – Housing First – Housing Led Solutions to Rough Sleeping and Homelessness (March 2017)

1.7.1 It is reported that the Centre for Social Justice, that was established in 2004 is an independent think-tank that studies the root causes of Britain’s social problems and addresses them by recommending practical, workable policy interventions. The CSJ’s vision is to give people in the UK who are experiencing the worst multiple disadvantages and injustices every possible opportunity to reach their full potential.

1.7.2 The Executive Summary of its report “Housing First – Housing Led Solutions to Rough Sleeping and Homelessness (March 2017)”:

“Homelessness is a devastating experience. It can trigger and exacerbate problems, from substance misuse to mental health conditions, and destabilise families and support networks. And the effects can last a lifetime; children who experience homelessness are much more likely to experience homelessness as adults. This cycle must be broken. But over the last six years, the number of people experiencing homelessness in England has risen significantly. The number of households approaching their council for homelessness assistance has grown considerably. And at the sharpest end rough sleeping has increased by over 130% since 2010 to over 4,000 on any given night. Throughout the course of a year, CSJ analysis has found that around 34,500 people might sleep rough in England. As well as the significant personal harm caused to individuals, the Government has estimated that the cost to the state is up to £1bn every year.

Both statutory and non-statutory responses to homelessness are too often predicated on crisis, with less focus on prevention interventions. For many people with complex needs they often fail to qualify for statutory assistance, but are turned away from hostel accommodation because their needs are too high. Falling between the gaps of statutory and non-statutory provision they can find themselves with nowhere else to turn. Furthermore, a lack of access to affordable housing is both a key driver of homelessness and undermines efforts to ensure that when people find themselves in this situation they are quickly able to secure stable housing and get back on their feet.

Opportunity for change

While the rising number of people experiencing homelessness, especially rough sleeping, is of significant concern, and has provided an impetus for this report, it is still well within our capability to resolve this issue. The Government has already made a strong commitment to do this, which is

warmly welcomed by the CSJ. This report provides a detailed plan on how this ambition can be achieved.

With strong political will and robust evaluation of the services we deliver, there is great potential to ensure that local authorities and government departments work in a smarter, more efficient way to end homelessness. This report will emphasise the need to move towards a housing led approach to ending homelessness, with a specific focus on scaling up Housing First provision for people with multiple and complex needs. The Government has a significant and realisable opportunity to end homelessness for this group. The move towards Housing First sits alongside broader recommendations in this report looking at preventing homelessness from occurring in the first place and addressing broader structural issues relating to affordable housing.

Key recommendations

1 Problem: *Rough sleepers and people experiencing chronic homelessness often fall through the cracks of services. People who experience chronic homelessness will often not qualify as vulnerable enough for an offer of settled accommodation under the homelessness legislation, despite having high support needs such as mental health problems and addiction issues. Furthermore, a significant number of hostel providers report refusing people access to accommodation because their needs are too high.*

Many of these people, slipping through the gap between statutory and non-statutory provision, are forced to sleep rough. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) counted over 4000 rough sleepers on a single night last year.

Although the London CHAIN rough sleeper database recorded much higher numbers in the capital throughout the course of the year (8,096). For those who do gain access to temporary hostel accommodation, they are often required to address issues such as substance misuse in a relatively chaotic and unstable environment before they can access permanent housing.

Recommendation: *The Government should create a new funding pot of at least £110 million per year to deliver a National Housing First Programme to end rough sleeping and chronic homelessness for people with the most complex needs. This programme will be cost neutral over the course of a parliament.*

There is overwhelming international evidence to support the use of Housing First as a housing solution for people who have multiple and complex needs. Housing First provides stable, independent homes alongside coordinated wrap-around, personalised support to homeless people. Widely adopted across North America and Western Europe, Housing First has formed a central component of successful, national homelessness strategies. Reduced national spending, high tenancy sustainment rates and improved health and wellbeing outcomes provide a compelling argument for scaling up this approach in England.

Problem: A lack of effective prevention work.

Both statutory and non-statutory responses to homelessness are too often predicated on crisis and geared towards providing an emergency response. The homelessness legislation provides an all or nothing system of assistance, with certain groups receiving an offer of permanent accommodation when they lose their home, but very little provision for preventative interventions for most single people. As a result, important opportunities are missed to help prevent homelessness and avoid much costlier emergency responses.

Recommendation: *The Government should amend the homelessness legislation to place a greater focus on prevention work. The homelessness legislation in England should be amended to create new prevention and relief duties (following the new Welsh model). Unlike the current statutory assistance, these new duties would expand entitlements to a greater number of people. Moreover, the period that someone would be considered to be threatened with homelessness should be extended from 28 to 56 days. Based on the Welsh experience, this would help reduce the numbers of people for whom local authorities are required to make an offer of permanent accommodation and house in expensive temporary accommodation.*

Recommendation: *The Government should set up a Prime Ministerial Taskforce to embed housing and homelessness strategies across government departments to better prevent and end homelessness. Preventing homelessness requires a cross-government approach. Homelessness policy sits within DCLG, but is heavily influenced by a number of other departments (including, for example, the Treasury, Department for Work and Pensions, the Department of Health, the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Education) which are often much more likely to be in contact with someone when they are at risk of, but have not yet become homeless. The Taskforce should have the very clear objective of developing and embedding housing and homelessness prevention strategies across these departments. A Prime Ministerial Taskforce would provide the level of authority and accountability required to be effective. This report outlines specific interventions that various departments should take to prevent homelessness for groups of people at risk of homelessness, including care leavers and prison leavers.*

Recommendation: *DCLG should support and help facilitate the expansion of a CHAIN style database to other parts of England. This should focus particularly on cities with growing numbers of rough sleepers where street outreach teams operate.*

Problem: A lack of access to affordable housing undermines efforts to tackle homelessness.

While the private rented sector is now playing a much more significant role in housing for those on the lowest incomes, the loss of a private rented home is the leading cause of homelessness. Private landlords are becoming increasingly more reluctant to let to tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit and those who have experienced homelessness, therefore limiting access to affordable housing. Furthermore, social landlords are imposing stricter affordability criteria on tenants, which often

serves as a barrier to those on the lowest incomes.

Recommendation: *The Government should boost investment in low cost rental accommodation. This would help provide affordable housing for households on very low incomes, reducing their risk of homelessness and ensuring that when episodes of homelessness do occur, they are brief and non-recurrent.*

Recommendation: *While the CSJ strongly supports the Government's welfare reform agenda, there are adjustments that could be made to help improve and increase the supply of housing for people who are homeless. This report sets out how a further set of exemptions from the Shared Accommodation Rate, a more personalised response to benefit conditionality for people who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness, and better access to Alternative Payment Arrangements for people moving onto Universal Credit could help prevent people from losing accommodation. These measures would encourage landlords to let to tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, further boosting affordable housing supply for people who have experienced homelessness.*

Recommendation: *The Government should support social lettings agencies to improve access into the private rented sector and ensure that people can be rapidly rehoused if they face homelessness.*

Social lettings agencies should support people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness to create and sustain tenancies in the private rented sector. These letting agencies have shown clear value for money, helping people rapidly exit homelessness and achieving high tenancy sustainment levels."

1.7.3 A copy of the full report can be [located](#).

2 Recommendations

2.1 That the information provided in this briefing note informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Review.

Author: Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of Councillor Cathrine Russell, Chair, Scrutiny Panel 3 – Homelessness and Rough Sleepers

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