

Can social housing rebalance the homelessness equation?

Ending homelessness = [prevention + enough affordable homes₂]

The NFA would like to thank the ALMOs that feature in this publication for giving their time and sharing their expertise.

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Contents

Executive summary	4
<hr/>	
Introduction	9
The scale of homelessness	10
Policy environment	12
Policy implications	15
<hr/>	
Part One: COVID-19 and ‘Everyone In’	16
Case Study One – Solihull Community Housing	18
Case Study Two – Colchester Borough Homes	19
<hr/>	
Part Two: The value of prevention	20
Case Study Three – Your Homes Newcastle	21
Case Study Four – Stockport Homes	23
Case Study Five – Blackpool Coastal Housing (Care Leavers)	25
<hr/>	
Part Three: The growing challenge of affordability	27
Case Study Six – Eastbourne	27
Case Study Seven – Barnet Homes	28
<hr/>	
Part Four: Homelessness relief	30
Case Study Eight – Wolverhampton Homes (Housing First)	31
Case Study Nine – Derby Homes	33
Case Study Ten – Cornwall Housing	35
Case Study Eleven – St Leger Homes	37
<hr/>	
Conclusion	39

Executive summary

This report focuses on the work of the ALMO sector – council-owned housing management companies – in the sphere of homelessness. It looks at how ALMOs use their housing expertise to prevent homelessness and support people into settled homes. Through 11 detailed case studies, it explores the challenges that ALMOs currently face, the solutions they have devised, and what works in effective long-term homelessness prevention and relief. It is based on interviews with frontline practitioners at ALMOs which manage some or all homelessness services on behalf of their parent local authorities.

Introduction

Homelessness is not an unsolvable problem. There is a clear consensus on the structural causes and triggers of homelessness. It is well-known that certain groups are over-represented in the homeless population, including care leavers and prison leavers. Individual triggers of homelessness, such as family breakdown, domestic abuse and life-controlling dependency, are also part of this wider picture.

However, the core structural cause of homelessness is increasingly the lack of affordable housing. This drives increasing reliance on the private rented sector which inevitably brings with it insecurity of tenure. This fundamental problem has been amplified by cuts to homelessness services and welfare pots, alongside other wraparound community services.

Nevertheless, ALMOs have developed a range of highly targeted programmes to block routes into homelessness; for example working with care leavers, those discharged from hospital, and people experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse. Mediation programmes help those at risk of homelessness due to a breakdown in their home situation. Much partnership work is done with the private rented sector to sustain tenancies, make such tenancies more secure and affordable, to manage quality or to pay deposits. The PRS is both a leading cause of homelessness and yet, in many cases, a necessary solution.

At its simplest, the solution to homelessness is an equation. If the aim is to end homelessness, then on the other side of the equals sign must be tried, tested and effective homelessness prevention – plus, of course, sufficient truly affordable homes, of the right kind for each type of household, with secure tenure. This report concludes that, at present, current government strategy is failing to balance this equation.

The scale of homelessness

- ◆ Over a **quarter of a million** households (282,500 households) were initially assessed as homeless (owed a prevention duty) or homeless (owed a relief duty) in England in 2019.
- ◆ At the sharp end of homelessness, there were an estimated **4,266 people** sleeping rough in Autumn 2019, up by 2,498 people from 2010, this figure usually seen as an underestimate.
- ◆ The total number of households in temporary accommodation (TA) in December 2019 was **88,330**; 71% of these households had children and **128,340** children were housed in TA. This means that the equivalent of **455 primary schools' worth of children** were in TA in December 2019.
- ◆ Local authorities spent £1.1 billion on TA between April 2018 and March 2019, with more than 30% of this spent on emergency B&Bs.
- ◆ Homelessness numbers have been rising since 2010. Core homelessness rose from 120,000 in 2010 to **153,000 in 2017** (an increase of 28%).

Policy environment

■ Both the 2017 and 2019 Conservative manifestos pledged to eliminate rough sleeping.

A range of recent funding and policy announcements have been largely aimed at crisis services and the ‘sharp’ end of homelessness. In reality, however, there has been a significant decline in the last decade in local authority spending on homelessness services - £5 billion has disappeared from local authority expenditure on homelessness-related services compared to 2008/2009.

In the space of ten years, spending on single homelessness fell by more than 50%, drastically reducing support to help them maintain tenancies and keep their lives on track. At the same time, spending on family homelessness has risen significantly. Local authorities’ temporary accommodation costs increased by 66% between 2011/2012 and 2017/2018.

Funding pots for prevention activities are often short-term and uncoordinated, say this report’s interviewees. Meanwhile forced cuts to other services – such as help with poor mental health and life-controlling issues – are pushing more people towards crisis. Housing providers are perfectly placed to fill such gaps, but they need sufficient and long-term funding to do so.

■ The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) came into force in April 2018 and gave local authorities new duties to take all reasonable steps to prevent and relieve homelessness.

Widely welcomed, the HRA aims to drive earlier intervention, more prevention, and faster alleviation of homelessness. ALMOs have integrated the HRA into their working arrangements and it fits well with the preventative approach that they already follow. They are also gathering considerable data that can inform government policy in this area.

However, the first comprehensive review of the impact of the HRA on local authorities and people accessing the service reports that ‘the intention and ambition of the HRA is being constrained by the housing market, welfare system and funding...’ An LSE report for London Councils drew similar conclusions. In 2017-2018, London local authorities spent over £900 million assessing, assisting and accommodating homeless households. This is predicted to rise to £226 million in 2020/21 and £237 million by 2022/23, rather than reducing as MHCLG estimates anticipated.

■ Government rhetoric has focused largely on the visible problem of homelessness, and more specifically rough sleeping, without developing a coherent strategy to tackle the wider systemic issues that have driven increasing homelessness over last ten years.

These include:

The scarcity of genuinely affordable housing: the freezing of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates put private sector rents beyond the reach of many; and the decline in social rented housing has removed a genuinely affordable secure option. The government’s current programme only aims to deliver 180,000 affordable or social rent homes over five years - half to home ownership and half to rent. Meanwhile experts estimate that 90,000 to 100,000 new social rent homes, every year for the next decade, is the very minimum needed to put a genuinely affordable home within everyone’s reach.

Legislation on the government’s pledge to abolish Section 21 no-fault evictions has not yet been tabled: while councils and their ALMOs often use the private rented sector to rehouse people, it is also a leading cause of homelessness. The looming end of an assured shorthold private rented tenancy is currently the second most common reason why people lose their settled home.

Tackling wider austerity cuts: cuts to wraparound community services, including mental health, social care and probation services, have created gaps in the social fabric that housing services now have to fill.

Homelessness is clearly not just about having a house; it is about being able to manage a home. Without support, the most vulnerable will inevitably be driven towards homelessness.

Tackling domestic abuse: of those households owed a homelessness duty by their local authority in 2019, 9% reported that they were at risk of or had experienced domestic abuse. The evidence shows this group is highly vulnerable to homelessness. A coherent strategy which links homelessness, domestic abuse and housing provision, both locally and nationally, is needed.

COVID-19 and 'Everyone In'

As local authority key partners, ALMOs have been heavily involved in the response to COVID-19 and 'Everyone In'. Streamlined and self-contained organisations, ALMOs are highly adaptable and have been able to shape their services on demand. Case studies from Solihull Community Housing and Colchester Borough Homes illustrate this type of work.

- 📌 **ALMOs reported that many of the people who were housed during 'Everyone In' were not previously known to their Housing Options or rough sleeping services.**
- 📌 **A significant 'second wave' were those who had been precariously housed, many of whom were part of the hidden homeless population, 'sofa surfing' or living in insecure housing.**
- 📌 **The majority of those housed in COVID-19 emergency accommodation are single or childless couples.** This makes move-on difficult in areas where there is limited one-bed accommodation, particularly since few have a formal 'priority need'.
- 📌 **A lot of people housed during 'Everyone In' do not have access to welfare benefits** and have no recourse to public funds (NRPF). What to do with this group is still an unresolved tension at the heart of 'Everyone In'.
- 📌 **'Everyone In' has brought in those who are already homeless, but new cases of homelessness are still being reported to councils** – there is still much work to be done to plug the routes into homelessness.
- 📌 **NFA members are positive about the opportunity the crisis has offered to form closer working relationships with other services and provide one-stop shops for those in need.**

The value of prevention

Stemming the flow of people into homelessness is an absolute priority. ALMOs do much preventative work before statutory homelessness legislation kicks in and focus on supporting people to maintain their tenancies, access affordable accommodation and improve their life chances through financial and employment initiatives.

The moral imperative to stop households from becoming homeless through effective prevention is underpinned by a strong financial case for shifting resources from crisis services to prevention.

Case studies from Your Homes Newcastle, Stockport Homes and Blackpool Coastal Housing illustrate how highly targeted housing services can effectively head off homelessness before it happens, whether directed at a specific group such as care leavers or shaped by an overarching mission to end rough sleeping for good.

The growing challenge of affordability

In many parts of the country, the issue of affordability of homes is a clear structural cause of homelessness.

Interviews for this report showed that even where there were more housing options (for instance, in the north) there were not sufficient affordable one-bed properties to house the large numbers of single homeless (especially with the single person allowance); and quality and location of affordable accommodation was also an issue. Further blockages in local supply were being caused by placement of 'overspill' homeless households from areas where private sector rents were more expensive. Case studies from Eastbourne Homes and Barnet Homes illustrate how the dearth of truly affordable homes is contributing to homelessness.



© Stockport Homes

Homelessness relief

Case studies from Wolverhampton Homes, Derby Homes, Cornwall Housing and St Leger Homes of Doncaster examine the work that ALMOs do to support those at the sharp end of homelessness; those sleeping rough, most often with complex life histories and needs. While work to end rough sleeping in these case study areas was well-developed before COVID-19, it is clear that the crisis has driven further innovation as the numbers of people seeking help have increased.

The case studies illustrate:

- ▲ **the key importance of strong partnership working and integrated casework**, supported by a top-level strategic commitment and vision.
- ▲ **the importance of long-term, sustainable and tenacious support services that go to where the person is**, rather than expecting people to come to them.
- ▲ **housing options need to be a good fit for those in need of a home.**
- ▲ **access to positive activities are vital part of core service delivery for people experiencing homelessness** because they help disrupt the pull of negative influences and chaotic lifestyles.
- ▲ As with every other service area, **the most effective services are always designed in collaboration with those who have lived experience of using them.**

Conclusion

Homelessness is a complex policy area, but evidence from NFA members shows that there are clear policy adjustments that could greatly assist them in their duty to tackle homelessness. They ask government for a policy environment that delivers:

- ▲ At least **90-100,000 new socially rented homes a year;**
- ▲ **A shift from crisis response to prevention;**
- ▲ **An end to the private rented sector pathway to homelessness;**
- ▲ **Permanent lifting of the LHA rates cap;**
- ▲ **Urgent welfare reform to remove built-in homelessness triggers;**
- ▲ **Long-term, sustainable and sufficient funding for prevention and relief work**

Introduction

This report focuses on the work of the ALMO sector – council-owned housing management companies – in the sphere of homelessness. It looks at how ALMOs use their housing expertise to prevent homelessness and support people into settled homes. Through 11 detailed case studies, it explores the challenges that ALMOs currently face, the solutions they have devised, and what works in effective long-term homelessness prevention and relief. It is based on interviews with frontline practitioners at ALMOs which manage some or all homelessness services on behalf of their parent local authorities.

Homelessness is not an unsolvable problem.¹ There is a clear consensus on the structural causes and triggers of homelessness.² It is well-known that certain groups are over-represented in the homeless population, including care leavers and prison leavers.³ Individual triggers of homelessness, such as family breakdown and domestic abuse, are also part of this wider picture. However, the core structural causes of homelessness are increasingly the lack of affordable housing, increasing reliance on the private rented sector and an inevitable associated insecurity of tenure. These fundamental problems have been amplified by cuts to homelessness services alongside other wraparound community services.

Considerable work has been done on identifying feasible and effective solutions to these problems, most clearly presented in the evidenced road map offered by the 2018 Crisis report *Everyone In – How to end homelessness in Great Britain*.⁴

The case studies selected for this report demonstrate the effectiveness of a housing-led approach to delivering homelessness services, where ALMOs are already responsible for delivering most or all of every other aspect of housing management and support services on behalf of their local authority. They have designed these services to include a core element of tenancy sustainment and prevention, and can leverage the ALMO to deliver welfare, employment, health and other support-focused initiatives which keep people in their homes. In essence, a huge amount of preventative work is done long before the 56-day prevention period mandated in the Homelessness Reduction Act.

ALMOs have also developed a range of highly targeted programmes which seek to block routes into homelessness; for example working with care leavers, those discharged from hospital, and people experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse. Mediation programmes help those at risk of homelessness due to a breakdown in their home situation. Much work is also undertaken in partnership with the private rented sector (PRS); for example, efforts to sustain PRS tenancies, to make such tenancies a more secure and affordable option, to manage quality or to pay deposits. The PRS is both a leading cause of homelessness and yet, in many cases, a necessary solution.

ALMOs work to relieve homelessness in partnership with other organisations and local networks, through rough sleeper initiatives, Housing First pilots and other projects which work with those at the sharp end of homelessness.

However, because private sector tenancies are so insecure and – in many places – unaffordable, and because there are serious constraints on housing supply, finding a place to live for those at risk of homelessness or actually homeless is a constant and growing battle. In London, the battle is not new; now, however, it is a growing problem in other areas of the country – especially the South and Midlands. This is not least because homelessness is so pressing in London that its councils often actively aim to relocate households to the regions (see Box 2: Wolverhampton and the HRA, p.13).

1 See, for example, *Using Evidence to End Homelessness*, Centre for Homelessness Impact: 2020

2 For a useful summary, see *Housing First: Housing-led solutions to rough sleeping and homelessness*, Centre for Social Justice: 2017

3 APPG for Ending Homelessness – *Homelessness prevention for care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of DA*, July 2017, Report One.

4 *Everyone In, How to End Homelessness in Great Britain*, Crisis: 2018

Where there is housing available, it is not always appropriate or of good quality; for instance, in many areas there is an acute lack of affordable one-bed accommodation. With the decline in the supply of council housing and other socially rented housing, inevitably those with responsibility for relieving homelessness are increasingly relying on expensive temporary accommodation. This then swallows budget that might otherwise fund preventative work.

At its simplest, the solution to homelessness is an equation. If the aim is to end homelessness, then on the other side of the equals sign must be tried, tested and effective homelessness prevention; plus sufficient truly affordable homes, of the right kind for each type of household, with secure tenure.

This report concludes that, at present, the current government policy and strategy is failing to balance this equation.

The scale of homelessness

Over a **quarter of a million** households (282,500 households) were initially assessed as homeless (owed a prevention duty) or homeless (owed a relief duty) in England in 2019.⁵ These categories were introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018. The first refers to the duty local authorities have to take all reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for anyone at risk within 56 days. The second refers to the local authority duty to take all reasonable steps to relieve an individual's homelessness.

At the sharp end of homelessness, there were an estimated **4,266 people** sleeping rough in Autumn 2019, up by 2,498 people from 2010,⁶ although this is usually seen as an underestimate.

The total number of households in temporary accommodation (TA) in December 2019 was **88,330**; 71% of these households had children and **128,340** children were housed in TA.⁷ This means that the equivalent of **455 primary schools' worth of children** were in TA in December 2019. Local authorities spent £1.1 billion on TA between April 2018 and March 2019, with more than 30% of this spent on emergency B&Bs.⁸

Homelessness numbers have been rising since 2010. The last full Homelessness Monitor was published in May 2019 and gives the best longitudinal picture.⁹ It reported that core homelessness had risen from 120,000 in 2010 to **153,000 in 2017** (an increase of 28%). This covers those sleeping rough, sleeping in cars, tents and public transport, unlicensed squatting, or occupation of non-residential buildings; staying in hostels, refuges and shelters, living in 'unsuitable' temporary accommodation, and sofa-surfing.

The monitor also reported that official rough sleeping estimates for 2018 were 165% higher than in 2010, and statutory homelessness acceptances were 42% above their 2009 low point. Homeless temporary accommodation placements were 71% higher than in 2011.¹⁰

⁵ MHCLG Statutory Homelessness live tables, table A1. This is provisional data and subject to change. Check live tables for most up-to-date figure.

⁶ MHCLG Rough Sleeping snapshot Autumn 2019, published February 2020

⁷ MHCLG Statutory Homelessness Live Tables, Table TA1

⁸ Amount spent on TA, Shelter, November 2019, based on MHCLG figures England 2018-2019

⁹ The Homelessness Monitor Executive Summary 2019, Fitzpatrick et al, Crisis 2019

¹⁰ Ibid 2019, p7-9

Homelessness is particularly acute in **London**. According to Shelter estimates,¹¹ around 61% of the total number of people who were homeless in 2019 were in London; 69% of those in council-arranged TA, and over a quarter of those sleeping rough. One in 52 people are estimated to be homeless in London, compared with 1 in 200 people in England. Case study seven, Barnet Homes, examines the London situation.

However, many of the issues that London councils have faced for years are now being felt in other parts of the country, particularly affordability pressures and insecurity of tenure. Shelter's data shows an increase in homelessness in the North West of 117% between 2016-2019 (an additional 4,865 people); 50% increase in East Midlands (an additional 1,613 people); and 64% in West Midlands region (an additional 9,273 people). This compares with London's 4% increase (6,978 people).¹²

Box 1: The Benefit Cap

While the Benefit Cap has been affecting households in London since its introduction, numbers have sky-rocketed since COVID-19 and the government's decision to increase LHA rates. For example, in this report's London case study area of Barnet, the number of households capped increased from 1,101 in March 2020 to 2,557 in May 2020, an increase of 132%.

Additional benefit-capped households, London Borough of Barnet, March-May 2020

718 households	Capped up to £50 a week
409 households	Capped between £50 - £100 a week
200 households	Capped between £100 - £150 a week
69 households	Capped between £150 - £200 a week
36 households	Capped between £200 - £250 a week
44 households	Capped over £250

Newly unemployed people with a continuous period of employment have a grace period of nine months before the cap hits. Therefore, the majority of the increase detailed here is attributed to the increase in LHA rates so those households are not benefitting at all from the recent increase in UC rates. Currently, the increase is hitting single households with no children hardest (a 203% increase in that type of household being capped). Among single people with children, the increase is 92%; and for couples with dependent children, 119%.

The Benefit Cap is now treated as 'business as usual' by the DWP and the UC system does not flag up that a household is being capped. Councils could track benefit-capped households under the old Housing Benefit system, but they now have no overview of who might need targeted preventative support.

The impact of this has not yet hit homelessness or support services but frontline staff are clear that it is coming; this level of hit on household incomes will hit the most vulnerable. Alongside the welcome LHA rate increase, it has been counter-productive in London to do this without abolishing the benefit cap.

11 This is England: a picture of homelessness in 2019, Shelter (2019)
12 Ibid Shelter (2019), table 5: Estimated number of people who are homeless, regional trends

Policy environment

Both the 2017 and 2019 Conservative manifestos contained pledges to eliminate rough sleeping. The 2019 manifesto committed to

‘... end the blight of rough sleeping by the end of next Parliament by expanding successful pilots and programmes such as the Rough Sleeping Initiative and Housing First, and working to bring together local services to meet the health and housing needs of people sleeping on the streets.’¹³

A range of funding and policy announcements have included the Rough Sleeping Strategy and Rough Sleeping Initiative with funding of £100 million over two years; £28 million for Housing First pilots; and an additional £260 million in December 2019 from the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and Homelessness Reduction Grant. Other funding pots have been put in place; for example, £3 million to job centres to support homeless people announced in January 2020. A substantial part of this funding is aimed at crisis services and the sharp end of homelessness.

In reality, however, this funding has not been enough to offset the significant decline in local authority spending on homelessness services. The 2019 WPI Economics Report for St Mungo's and Homeless Link found that if local authority expenditure on homelessness-related services had stayed constant since 2008/2009, more than £5 billion extra would have been spent.¹⁴ There has been no reduction in demand for homelessness services, and wider cuts in local authority resources and the removal of the ring-fenced Supported People funding has hit single homeless people hardest:

‘In 2017-2018, nearly £1 billion less was spent on single homelessness than was spent in 2008-2009, a fall of more than 50%. This was entirely accounted for by reduced Supported People activity, which includes a wide range of types of support to help people maintain tenancies and keep their lives on track.’¹⁵

The report found that as expenditure on single homelessness had fallen, though at differing levels across the country, there has been a considerable increase in spending on family homelessness. Temporary accommodation costs increased by 66% between 2011/2012 and 2017/2018. Since local authorities have a duty to house families, there is often no choice but spend huge chunks of budget on temporary accommodation.

Interviewees for this report said that whilst various funding pots are available for prevention activities, these are often short term and uncoordinated. NFA members also reported that cuts to other services, including mental health and drug and alcohol services, was pushing more people towards crisis. Housing providers are in an excellent position to develop services to fill such gaps, but they need sufficient and long-term funding to do so.

The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) came into force in April 2018 and gave local authorities new duties to take all reasonable steps to prevent and relieve homelessness. The intention of the HRA is to drive earlier

¹³ Conservative Manifesto 2019, p30

¹⁴ Local Authority spending on homelessness – understanding recent trends and their impact, WPI Economics Report, 2019.

¹⁵ Ibid, 5

intervention, more prevention, and faster alleviation of homelessness, and has been widely welcomed. ALMOs have integrated the HRA into their working arrangements and it fits well with the preventative approach that they already follow. It is also starting to provide a considerable amount of experimental data that should drive government policy in this area.

Crisis published the first comprehensive review of the impact of the HRA on local authorities and people accessing the service in March 2020.¹⁶ Although the report found some positives and good practice, it also reported that ‘the intention and ambition of the HRA is being constrained by the housing market, welfare system and funding...’¹⁷ In essence, the HRA will only work effectively if there are affordable options to signpost and support people too.

An LSE report for London Councils drew similar conclusions about the high demand for support through the HRA provisions, but the lack of options for moving people into long-term secure housing.¹⁸ In 2017-2018, London local authorities spent over £900 million assessing, assisting and accommodating homeless households, with £200 million coming from their own General Funds. This is predicted to rise to £226 million in 2020/21 and £237 million by 2022/23, rather than reducing as MHCLG estimates anticipated.

Box 2: Wolverhampton and HRA provision

Wolverhampton Homes is the ALMO for the City of Wolverhampton Council, and delivers the majority of the statutory homelessness duties on behalf of the council, including Housing Options, HRA prevention and relief services, Housing First (in partnership with third sector organisations), temporary accommodation and the Wolverhampton Home Improvement services.

The main challenge that the city faces is the lack of sufficient suitable social housing and affordable private rented property for both temporary and permanent housing to manage the number of people who come through Housing Options. Temporary accommodation costs have significantly increased in the last three years. Due to the relatively cheap rents, other local authorities (especially London boroughs) also move people into private rented accommodation in Wolverhampton. While the city is becoming increasingly reliant on the PRS, the end of PRS Assured Shorthold tenancies is also a significant reason for homelessness in Wolverhampton, so it can be an insecure option (and people see it as an insecure option so are less willing to take it). At the same time, the systems surrounding the HRA are time consuming, which reduces the amount of time that frontline staff have to support people.



Alongside a range of other work, Wolverhampton Homes established a Homeless Prevention & Relief fund as part of its HRA provision to support tenants and landlords in the PRS. This includes assisting people with rent bonds, paying rent in advance and helping to clear rent arrears if necessary to enable someone to take a tenancy and reduce barriers from the landlord side. The ALMO has two staff trained to inspect PRS properties and develop relationships with PRS landlords to line up properties. Those who have been assisted into a PRS tenancy can contact the organisation if they fall into difficulties, and intervention work is then undertaken to save the tenancy.

¹⁶ A Foot in the Door, Experiences of the HRA, Crisis, March 2020

¹⁷ Ibid, page 58-59

¹⁸ The Cost of Homelessness Services in London: An LSE project for London Councils

Government rhetoric has been focused largely on the visible problem of homelessness, and more specifically rough sleeping, without developing a coherent strategy to tackle the wider systemic issues that have driven the increasing levels of homelessness over last ten years. These include:

- 
The scarcity of genuinely affordable housing: in the private rented sector, the freezing of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates put rents out of the reach of many people¹⁹ while the decline in social rented housing has removed a genuinely affordable secure option. Various expert estimates are that there needs to be around 90,000 – 100,000 new socially rented properties built every year to make up the backlog and meet need. However, the current government is focusing almost solely on Affordable Rent and home ownership products; the current affordable housing programme only aims to deliver 18,000 affordable or social rent homes per year
- 
Although the government has pledged to abolish Section 21 no fault evictions, they have so far not tabled the legislation for this. In the period January–March 2020, for example, the end of an assured shorthold private rented tenancy was the second most common reason for the loss, or threat of loss, of someone's settled home, with just over a fifth of cases. Around half of these were due to the landlord wishing to sell or re-let the property. Interviews with frontline staff made it clear that the PRS sector is seen as insecure and temporary not only by many landlords, but also tenants. The PRS is used by Housing Options teams to rehouse people, but it is also a leading cause of homelessness.²⁰

Box 3: Number of households owed a homelessness duty by reason for loss, or threat of loss, of last settled home, Jan-Mar 2020

Region	Total owed prevention or relief duty	Reason for loss or threat of loss, of last settled home: End of PRS assured shorthold tenancy	Percentage of total
North East	4,230	750	18%
North West	10,740	2,050	19%
Yorkshire & the Humber	7,850	1,570	20%
East Midlands	5,820	1,270	22%
West Midlands	7,210	1,310	18%
East of England	7,420	1,530	21%
London	13,680	2,620	19%
South East	10,790	2,370	22%
South West	7,400	1,670	23%
Total	75,140	15,130	20%

Source: MHCLG, Live Tables on Homelessness, Detailed Local Authority Tables Jan-Mar 2020.

¹⁹ As part of the COVID-19 response in March 2020 the government increased the LHA rates for housing benefit to match the 30th percentile. It is hoped that this is a permanent change to LHA rates although that has not been confirmed.

²⁰ Statutory Homelessness detailed local authority level tables January – March 2020

- ▲ *Tackling wider austerity cuts:* cuts to wraparound community services, including mental health, social care and probation services, has had an impact, and housing services are having to fill many of the gaps which have opened up. Wider cuts to local authority funding combined with the ‘de-ringfencing’ of the Supported People funding has also had an impact on how much funding is available for low-level, preventative services. People are much more likely to reach crisis point where much of the national funding is directed. Homelessness is clearly not just about having a house, it is about being able to build and manage a home, and this often requires the right support services to be in place and effectively funded.
- ▲ *Tackling domestic abuse:* For those households which were owed a homelessness duty by their Local Authority in 2019, 9% reported that they were at risk of or had experienced domestic abuse.²¹ There are a range of well-evidenced reasons for why people experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse are more vulnerable to homelessness, including the accessibility and affordability of alternative accommodation, barriers to accessing housing benefit for those with No Recourse to Public Funds, and uneven practices in housing departments for assessing and responding to victims.²² Clearly it is not possible to tackle homelessness without a coherent strategy which links homelessness, domestic abuse and housing provision, both locally and nationally. The case studies in this report describe the solutions ALMOs have developed to support people at risk of, or experiencing, domestic abuse.

Policy implications

Homelessness is a complex policy area, but there are four clear policy adjustments that would greatly improve the prevention and relief of homelessness:

1. At least 90-100,000 new socially rented homes a year are needed to make sure that everyone has a home they can genuinely afford. Building these homes in the social housing sector would also guarantee their residents the wraparound housing support some may need to help maintain tenancies and improve their life chances, so preventing further homelessness.
2. Regulation of the private rented sector should be adjusted to stop it being a route into homelessness. Section 21 evictions should be banned and the government should implement their proposed reforms within the PRS.
3. Urgent welfare reform is needed to remove its current triggers of homelessness: permanent lifting of LHA rates to reflect the true cost of rent; scrapping the Benefit Cap; and reform of Universal Credit so that it is not a barrier to maintaining a home.
4. Long-term, sustainable and sufficient funding is needed to develop prevention and relief strategies, with built-in monitoring and evaluation to show they work. This includes long-term funding for those with complex needs through Housing First projects.

²¹ MHCLG live tables, number of households owed a homelessness duty by support needs of household (quarter 1-4 2019).

²² For further information, see the Domestic Abuse Report 2020: The Hidden Housing Crisis, Women's Aid: 2020

Part 1: COVID-19 and ‘Everyone In’

The government’s ‘Everyone In’ response to COVID-19 was announced at the end of March 2020 to ensure that all people living with vulnerabilities would quickly be housed in emergency self-contained accommodation. This included around 15,000 people who had been sleeping rough, people previously housed in night shelters and those who were made homeless during the pandemic. This was accompanied by an initial £3.2 million funding, as well as £3.7 billion overall to councils to assist vulnerable people. Additional funding has been made available to provide new supported housing units and support those who had been placed in emergency accommodation during COVID-19.

The ‘Everyone In’ response during the early lockdown was successful, although it has stalled between a crisis response and a longer-term solution. It shows what is achievable when political will, direction and money combines with local expertise and service provision.

ALMO response

As local authority key partners, ALMOs have been heavily involved in the response to COVID-19 and ‘Everyone In’. Streamlined, self-contained organisations, ALMOs are highly adaptable, and have shaped their services to meet the need of local authorities during the pandemic. Specifically, in response to ‘Everyone In’:

- ALMOs and local authorities concentrated on maximising the stock available to support those who were homeless or experiencing immediate housing need. This included the emergency suspension of allocations processes (in line with local authority policies) and a move to direct lets, either for those living in temporary accommodation or for those experiencing urgent housing need. It also included turning around void properties to move people into temporary accommodation or to directly let; and sourcing, housing association and private rented sector homes. Lettings processes were also changed; for example, moving to video viewings and online tenancy signings.
- Where it was part of their responsibilities, ALMOs arranged the provision of hotels and other temporary accommodation such as holiday parks to house those who had been sleeping rough. They also worked with third sector and voluntary organisations to provide food and other support.
- As part of the response, ALMOs contributed to local multi-agency partnership working in Everyone In hotels, for example working with drugs and alcohol teams, third sector provision, probation services and community mental health teams.
- ALMOs also developed plans to support people moving out of hospital settings, foster care placements and prisons (these are routes to homelessness for many).

Case studies 1 & 2 in this section (Solihull Community Housing and Colchester Borough Homes) illustrate this type of work.

Learning

- ▲ **ALMOs reported that many of the people who were housed during ‘Everyone In’ were not previously known to their Housing Options or rough sleeping services.** This included a significant second wave of people who had been precariously housed. Some of these people will have been prevented from finding themselves accommodation due to the lockdown, but many of them would have been part of the hidden homeless population, ‘sofa surfing’ or living in insecure housing.
- ▲ **The majority of those housed in COVID-19 emergency accommodation are single or childless couples.** Family households have previously been prioritised, or are likely to have been given a reprieve from homelessness due to the ban on PRS evictions. This causes difficulties in move-on in some areas where there is limited one-bed accommodation available (especially with the move away from accommodation with shared facilities). It is also challenging as these are people who in the main do not meet priority need criteria and are therefore not owed a duty to be housed.
- ▲ **A lot of people housed during ‘Everyone In’ do not have access to welfare benefits** and have no recourse to public funds (NRPF). What to do with this group is still an unresolved tension at the heart of ‘Everyone In’.
- ▲ **‘Everyone In’ has allowed ALMOs and local authorities to take a snapshot of their rough sleeping and broader homeless population, but there are still people presenting at Housing Options services and becoming homeless.** There are also those who end up in a revolving door and ‘have come around a number of times’ because existing services have failed them. It is not enough to deal with those who are already homeless, you have to plug the routes into homelessness.
- ▲ **Feedback from NFA members has been positive about forming closer working relationships with other services and being able to provide one-stop shops for people who need support,** even though inevitably issues have been caused by placing a number of people with complex lives in close proximity in emergency accommodation. The hope is that this closer working and better understanding of different services can continue longer term.



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Case study 1: Everyone In – Solihull Community Housing

Solihull Community Housing (SCH) delivers homelessness services on behalf of Solihull MBC. As a response to the lockdown and ‘Everyone In’, SCH paused the Housing Register and general lettings:

- ▲ SCH continued to run the homelessness service through their Housing Options Team working remotely. During March and April there were a total of 313 households approach the service because they were at risk of homelessness. This is a 25% increase on March/April 2019. There were 42 ‘Everyone In’ placements in quarter one; many of these were people who had been ‘sofa surfing’ and were not known to homelessness services.
- ▲ SCH continued to work with private landlords through their Solihome team to arrange placements in the PRS with continued tenancy support to prevent any future tenancy-related issues arising. They also used flexible use nightly rate self-contained accommodation to accommodate families.
- ▲ Additional rooms at a local hotel were block booked to provide additional capacity, and detailed move-on plans from hotel accommodation into more settled accommodation were developed for people in hotels. Partnership working with substance misuse and rough sleeping outreach teams were in put in place. The Rough Sleeping Outreach Team and the drug and alcohol addiction service completed at least twice weekly outreach into the hotel.
- ▲ The HRA temporary accommodation portfolio was increased for six months to respond to increased demand. This included a small number of TA units ‘on hold’ to respond to domestic abuse cases.
- ▲ A hot food delivery service was introduced jointly with a charity organisation to support people placed in hotels. The charity organisation worked with a national supermarket to provide fresh fruit and vegetables with these deliveries.
- ▲ A domestic abuse coordinator is in place (employed by Birmingham and Solihull Women’s Aid) to risk assess all those placed into TA due to Domestic Abuse.
- ▲ Weekly telephone contact with all customers placed in TA, and daily contact for those in supported TA. SCH supported people to move on from TA with additional support, including: initiating a ‘TA Move On project’ with the Tenancy Sustainment Team, allocation of additional DHP awards and discretionary grants to those who require support to move into settled accommodation, and direct matching.
- ▲ SCH has supported hospital discharge through the use of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and the handyperson service carrying out minor works. They also have a respite unit at their Extra Care Scheme to support discharge, and held two additional flats empty to support more complex discharges.
- ▲ SCH are due to initiate a new strand of Solihome working with PRS landlords, encouraging them to contact SCH before they serve notice on their tenants

Case Study 2: Moving on – Colchester Borough Homes

CBH delivers the whole Housing Options and TA service on behalf of Colchester Borough Council. CBH has an MHCLG-funded outreach team of five members of staff who generally have caseload of around 30 (prevention, homeless and hostels/resettled cases).

- ▲ CBH grant-funds a senior mental health practitioner. Via the CCG, they also have the services of two nurses who work from a local outreach day centre. The organisation has participated in an Essex countywide approach to respond to rough sleeping and homelessness, with data sharing protocols in place across the county.
- ▲ To respond to COVID-19 and 'Everyone In', the ALMO brought back into use a decommissioned sheltered housing scheme and leased a local hotel, alongside its use of existing temporary accommodation.
- ▲ 57 people sleeping rough were supported (compared with the official rough sleeping count of 10); the vast majority of these were single homeless and were not previously known to the outreach team. Some were homeless as a result of the local night shelter or other supported lodgings closing down and others were asked to leave by family or friends.
- ▲ Of the 57 supported, 41 were accommodated and to date 22 have moved on into more permanent homes, or have returned to stay with friends and family.
- ▲ A multi-agency approach to the communication and the provision of support has resulted in all of those accommodated having a personal support and housing plan, which has included benefit maximisation, health and well-being assessment, and support and prescriptions for drug and alcohol issues. This approach has helped to sustain the emergency accommodation with successful pathways for move-on.
- ▲ To support the recovery from Everyone In, there is a joint recovery plan across Essex and a Colchester Homeless Action Panel. This multi-agency panel will drive the care and recovery plan. CBH have been particularly pleased with the outcomes of the accommodation led approach and are using this model to forward plan services.

Part 2: The value of prevention

It is clear that stemming the flow of people into homelessness is an absolute priority. ALMOs are perfectly placed to leverage their role as trusted partners to local authorities to prevent homelessness, both in their own housing but also in the private rented sector. ALMOs do much work before statutory homelessness legislation kicks in and their focus is on supporting people to maintain their tenancies, access affordable accommodation and improve their life chances through financial and employment initiatives.

The moral imperative to stop households from becoming homeless through effective prevention is underpinned by a strong financial case for shifting resources from crisis services to prevention.²³

There are a range of changes that intersect within the policy environment which would have a considerable impact on the ability of ALMOs to support people, especially in the light of COVID-19. These include: changes to the welfare system including how Universal Credit is paid; removing the Benefit Cap; permanently increasing LHA rates; providing targeted funding for employment and wellbeing initiatives delivered by housing providers; and driving greater integration between health, social care, public health and housing.



© Derby Homes - <https://www.sacredbeancoffee.co.uk>

²³ See, for example, the analysis by Nicholas Pleace, Crisis, At what cost? An estimation of the financial costs of single homelessness in the UK, Nicholas Pleace, 2015

Case Study 3: Ending homelessness – Your Homes Newcastle

Statistics snapshot: Newcastle - January to March 2020²⁴

Households owed a prevention duty: 182

16% of those owed a prevention duty were single parents; 70% were single adults, and 15% were couples with children.

Households owed a relief duty: 293

7% of those owed a relief duty were single parents, 88% were single adults, and 4% were couples with children.

Top 3 reasons for loss, or threat of loss, of last settled home

- 🏠 Family and friends no longer willing or able to accommodate: 31.4%
- 🏠 End of PRS – assured shorthold – 13.9%
- 🏠 Domestic Abuse – 9.3%
- 🏠 Required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office as asylum support – 9.3%

Top three accommodation at time of application

- 🏠 Living with family: 27.4%
- 🏠 Living with friends: 18.1%
- 🏠 Private rented sector: 15.2%
- 🏠 4.6% of households were rough sleeping.

Newcastle City Council has committed itself to ending rough sleeping by 2022, and ending all homelessness over the next 10 years. They are working through their ALMO, Your Homes Newcastle (YHN), to achieve this. YHN manages 26,000 homes on behalf of the city council and has responsibility for the council's housing management, housing options, temporary accommodation and lettings services, and a number of related support services. This makes possible an over-arching strategy that encompasses housing, homelessness and housing support services and teams.

The council and its ALMO have taken a long-term systems approach with considerable investment in person-centred, prevention work over the last 15 years. As a result, Newcastle's homelessness rate is among the lowest in the country and the city is one of three areas partnering with Crisis in their 10-year project to end homelessness.

High Level, long-term commitment: There has been an explicit, high level and sustained commitment to ending homelessness across Newcastle since 2007 when a Sustaining Tenancies protocol was developed. When the ringfence around Supporting People was removed, the Council decided to continue to invest in supporting people-related activities including prevention and tenancy sustainment which has had a considerable impact. Evictions have dropped from 200+ per year in 2008 to just 50 in 2019/2020 (with an explicit commitment to have no evictions into homelessness). This is more than two and a half times lower than the average in the social rented sector. Since 2008, YHN has put in place a number of protocols, services and processes that are directly designed to maintain tenancies, plug routes to homelessness, and prevent the need for crisis services.

24 Data is taken from MHCLG experimental statistics and provides an illustration of the broad situation in the period three months before COVID-19; however comparisons in data – especially lower level data – should be used with caution due to concerns around how cases are classified by different officers in the local authority returns.

Investment: YHN has 70 staff delivering a range of tenancy support services. This includes:

- A general offer to access a Support & Progression service on signing up to a new tenancy, with around a third of all new tenants using this service. This includes practical support to help move in and set up the home, but also linking into other services the ALMO offers, including employability, maximising income and financial wellbeing, and improving health and wellbeing. Last year, YHN supported tenants to access £6.6 million additional income. YHN also runs a furniture service to help tenants furnish their homes quickly.
- Employability and training is a key part of the approach. YHN runs Your Homes Your Jobs which provides individualised support and training for tenants. The initiative offers a route into jobs, apprenticeships, training and setting up businesses; and 15% of YHN staff have come through the Your Homes Your Jobs programme.
- Young People Offers: YHN employs eight qualified social workers to offer a homeless prevention service to all 16/17 year olds, a move-on service for young people leaving care, and 26 emergency and semi-independent units. 213 young people were supported through these services in 2019/2020. These roles integrate social services expertise with housing expertise, with staff trained to navigate the housing system to support young people. This resolves one of the key issues in care leavers' support, since social care staff do not always have the knowledge to navigate the housing system.
- Pathways from temporary accommodation into permanent accommodation, which includes re-housing 88 individuals from supported accommodation, rough sleeping through Newcastle's Emergency Lettings Panel during the COVID lockdown.
- Housing Management Plus in designated units: This initiative bridges the gap for those who cannot easily manage the transition from fully supported accommodation to a general needs tenancy. At a small number of independent flats (exempt-supported accommodation or fixed term tenancies), staff are available three hours a day, Monday to Friday. This has helped a number of tenants move on to general needs tenancies.
- EEA nationals: From 1 July 2021, all EEA Nationals must have applied for settled status or pre-settled status. YHN successfully applied for immigration advice permissions and five staff are currently supporting 820 tenants and their families to apply for their immigration status to prevent the potential homelessness of this cohort.
- Domestic abuse: YHN identified a gap in the provision for tenants given priority for re-housing due to domestic abuse. These tenants were given priority but did not qualify for any support services. YHN now assists customers with housing options (including staying put) and provides tenancy support. Staff are being IDVA trained to make sure they have the knowledge needed to deliver domestic abuse support effectively.
- Hospital discharge protocol: YHN has a clear hospital discharge protocol which prevents hospital discharge becoming a route into homelessness.
- Refugee move-on for newly granted refugees (348 referrals in 2019/2020): Those who come through to YHN tenancies are able to access YHN's full range of services to help maintain their tenancies and build their lives. YHN won the UK Housing Award in 2019 as best supported landlord for its approach in supporting refugees.

YHN and Newcastle City Council continues to review the services offered to make sure that they identify and address all the pinchpoints which put tenancies at risk. A major challenge is funding; while government tends to channel funding into crisis schemes (e.g. rough sleeper initiatives/ Housing First), YHN does most of its prevention work before the statutory duty period kicks in at 56 days.

Generally, an unintended consequence of current policy is that housing organisations have less incentive to do early prevention work, and fewer resources to draw on if they choose to do it early. Effective prevention demands upfront investment and high-level commitment over the long term to reduce homelessness and shift the focus to prevention.

Case Study 4: ALMO flexibility – Stockport Homes

Statistics snapshot: Stockport - January to March 2020

Households owed a prevention duty: 175

26% of those owed a prevention duty were single parents; 57% were single adults, and 17% were couples with children.

Households owed a relief duty: 140

16% of those owed a relief duty were single parents, 74% were single adults, and 8% were couples with children.

Top 3 reasons for loss, or threat of loss, of last settled home

- 🏠 Family and friends no longer willing or able to accommodate: 34.3%
- 🏠 End of PRS – assured shorthold – 25.1%
- 🏠 Domestic Abuse – 7.9%

Top three accommodation at time of application

- 🏠 Living with family: 26.7%
- 🏠 Private rented sector: 23.5%
- 🏠 Living with friends: 12.4%

3.8% of households were rough sleeping.

Stockport Homes is the ALMO for Stockport MB Council and delivers all elements of the homelessness services on behalf of the council, alongside housing and support services. Due to their size and focused remit, ALMOs are able to quickly adapt and develop services that meet both short and longer-term needs, and Stockport Homes is an excellent example of this. Stockport Homes Group also has a charity arm, Foundations, which expands the work that the ALMO can do. Stockport Homes is also part of the wider Greater Manchester wide homelessness work.

- 🏠 Stockport Homes runs a number of cross-tenure tenancy sustainment and support services, including the Money Advice Service; Employment, Advice and Guidance service; Furniture Recycling Scheme; and are a partner of the Greater Manchester-wide Motiv8 programme which works with those who face challenges to improve their wellbeing, confidence and skills.²⁵
- 🏠 The ALMO provides five placements in shared households for complex care leavers; adult social care staff deliver support to bridge the move-on into independent living. This is designed to take care leavers out of the high-risk category for homelessness.
- 🏠 Stockport Homes delivers the H4 project, which has one member of staff based at hospital and one in the community to facilitate planned hospital discharge and prevent a cycle of hospital to homelessness to hospital.²⁶ Currently funded through the Big Lottery Fund, its proven efficacy has won a further year's funding from the Mayor's fund.
- 🏠 The 10 local authorities in Greater Manchester fund a Housing Options officer to work in HMP Manchester. Stockport Homes are establishing an offender in-reach worker funded through their charitable arm to provide a seamless transfer from prison to housing and into other support services.

²⁵ <https://www.motiv8mcr.org/>

²⁶ An Evaluation of the project can be found here: <https://www.h-3.org.uk/h4-hospital/outcomes/> In 2017-2018, 126 homeless people were supported into long term setting accommodation, and there were estimated cost savings of over £1 million to health services and £77k to housing.

- ▲ Stockport Homes funds 2.5 FTE mediation workers on a cross-tenure service through the Flexible Homeless Support Grant to work with people who are facing homelessness due to a breakdown in their housing arrangements. The mediation workers negotiate a planned resolution to avoid crisis and homelessness.
- ▲ Temporary Accommodation: Stockport MB Council made a policy decision to retain their stock of temporary accommodation and invest in it. The ALMO manages three temporary accommodation schemes in Stockport, providing a mixture of single and mixed sex homes, and some dispersed flats. Stockport Homes has also converted some low demand three bed properties into shared accommodation. The TA schemes have floating support funded through a council grant and Intensive Housing Management, and provide an alternative to hostels which can institutionalise people. Stockport Homes works closely with partner organisations, including H3²⁷, to enrich the environment and give people activities to do while in TA; as well as working with health services, including GPs.
- ▲ Stockport has around 10 people who sleep rough either permanently or intermittently, and who have multiple and complex needs. One of the biggest problems this group faces is the gradual disappearance over the last ten years of specialist services which would have supported them.
- ▲ Stockport Homes is part of the Greater Manchester-wide MHCLG-funded Housing First initiative which has been running for two years. In the first year, the organisation successfully supported into long term housing and recovery six individuals who had extremely complex needs, a history of rough sleeping and disengagement from services. There are also two rough sleeper workers who work across Tameside and Stockport to take services to where people are. Stockport Homes are also currently developing a navigator role, co-designing it with Housing First clients to understand the barriers and make sure the interventions put in place are the right ones.

²⁷ For more information on H3, see: <https://www.h-3.org.uk/about-us/>

Case Study 5: Care leavers – Blackpool Coastal Housing

Statistics snapshot: Blackpool - January to March 2020

Households owed a prevention duty: 124

33% of those owed a prevention duty were single parents; 49% were single adults, and 17% were couples with children.

Households owed a relief duty: 230

4.7% of those owed a relief duty were single parents, 90% were single adults, and 4.7% were couples with children.

Top 3 reasons for loss, or threat of loss, of last settled home

- 🏠 End of PRS – Assured shorthold – 28.8%
- 🏠 Family and friends no longer willing or able to accommodate: 18.9%
- 🏠 Non-violent relationship breakdown – 5.6%

Top three accommodation at time of application

- 🏠 No fixed abode – 31.9%
- 🏠 Private rented sector: 29.7%
- 🏠 Living with friends: 8.5%

7.3% of households were rough sleeping.

Some groups are over-represented within the homeless population, including care leavers. Research shows that care leavers represent about 1% of young people, yet it is estimated that 14% of young people who are homeless are care leavers; and an estimated one third of young people with care backgrounds experience homelessness at some stage between six and 12 months after leaving care.²⁸ One in four homeless people have been in care at some point in their lives.²⁹ In the January to March 2020 statistics, 2.4% of households owed a homelessness duty contained a care leaver.

Blackpool Council and its ALMO, Blackpool Coastal Housing, run an innovative programme of support which targets care leavers, the Positive Transitions Pathway (PTP). Seen as a national exemplar, this programme draws on the expertise of the housing landlord function to stabilise lives, develop aspirations and support people into employment.

The PTP works with care leavers, of which there are a particularly high number in Blackpool. Previously, care leavers would move out of care into privately rented tenancies and tenancy failure was at 100%. Housing staff found that many care leavers do not have the skills to manage their lives, finding simple tasks such as turning up to appointments and accessing basic services difficult. Without these skills, it was extremely difficult for them to maintain a tenancy and stay in work, training or further education. Many care leavers also have hugely complex backgrounds that make everyday life challenging.

The PT officer provides intensive support, assisting them to feel settled, make decisions, access services, and create a home. They keep the care leaver on track and help them learn to manage their lives. A key part is building the individual's confidence and talking to them about their aspirations. As the care leaver grows more independent the service steps down, but can step up again in times of difficulty.

²⁸ Data quoted in the Centre for Social Justice Report (2017)

²⁹ APPG for Ending Homelessness – Homelessness prevention for care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of DA, July 2017, Report 1

Box 4: A care-leaver's story

YP1 is a Care Leaver with a highly complex history including parental neglect, and as a result has complex mental health issues and a history of self-harm and high risk behaviours. Services find it difficult to engage with YP1, and she is not in education, training or work. The PTP has been working with YP1 to support her to move into an independent placement from residential care.

The service worked with YP1 to identify a flat, and a team of volunteers supported YP1 to decorate the property and buy the furnishings that she wanted to make it hers. She was supported to set up utility bills, access housing benefit and implement a budget planner. YP1 has remained on her benefit and has been supported to access her GP and get her fit notes for her benefit claim. She manages her money well and continues to pay her bills. While YP1 is still intensively supported by the PTP, she is gradually becoming more stable, has improved her ability to look after herself and is maintaining her tenancy and property condition, all of which are vital for longer term sustainment of her tenancy.

The project has worked with 51 young people to date. Of these:

- ◆ 24 are housed and actively working with PT officers
- ◆ 8 have been stepped down (being supported through light touch approach)
- ◆ 10 have been moved out of the project through planned and supported moves, and only two have been evicted following extensive support (4% tenancy failure compared with the previous 100%).
- ◆ 7 are working with PT Officers in their supported accommodation in preparation for moving into their first homes.



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Part 3: The growing challenge of affordability

In many parts of the country, the issue of affordability of homes is a clear structural cause of homelessness.

In recently published research, the National Housing Federation calculates that there are nearly eight million people in England with some form of housing need; for 3.8 million of these (1.6 million households) social rented housing would be the most appropriate tenure to address that need. In 2017-2018, a total of 2,701,321 people in housing need were affected by the affordability issue.³⁰ Clearly the freeze on working age benefits has exacerbated affordability issues, and it is likely that the fall-out from COVID-19 will further worsen the situation.

The scale of the problem is particularly acute in London and parts of the south due to high house prices, high rent and higher density of people. However, the same report finds that within the private rented sector affordability is proportionally a much greater problem in the north and midlands than in London and the south.

Interviews for this report showed that even where there were more housing options (for instance, in the north) there were not sufficient affordable one-bed properties to house the large numbers of single homeless (especially with the single person allowance); and quality and location of affordable accommodation was also an issue. Further blockages in local supply were caused by other councils, some local and some much further away, placing their 'overspill' homeless households in areas where PRS rents were relatively cheaper.

Case study Spotlight

Case Study 6: Beyond our budget – Eastbourne

One of the biggest challenges in Eastbourne is the issue of affordability. Not only is private rented property unaffordable for many (for a 1 bed property there is around a £155 a month average shortfall on the 2019/20 LHA rates going up to £333 a month shortfall for a 3 bed), but the jump from renting a council house to home ownership is too great for most. The average price for a flat is £205k. Although there are over 1,000 people on the local authority waiting list, only around 100 properties become vacant every year. This means the vast majority of people presenting as homeless and in priority need are housed in emergency and temporary accommodation, and the cost of this outstrips budget every year.

Between January and March 2020, 28% of those who were owed a prevention or relief duty by the local authority were facing an end to their Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST), with 58% of these due to the landlord wanting to re-let or sell the property. For those owed a prevention duty, nearly half of those threatened with homelessness were due to the service of a Section 21 notice.

In addition to the numbers in temporary accommodation usually, COVID-19 'Everyone In' saw 40 people housed in hotels, the majority of whom are single homeless people and couples, who would not ordinarily have access to local authority housing due to restraints on priority need. There is a real challenge as to how to manage the longer-term ramifications of this, considering the size of the waiting list already and those already in temporary accommodation (about 150 people).

The area has a Rough Sleeper Initiative and a Housing First project, but this does not tackle the general problem of finding affordable homes for those who have simply been priced out of every part of the housing market and reducing the numbers of people coming through the council's door to ask for help.

30 People in housing need: a comprehensive analysis of the scale and shape of the housing need in England today, National Housing Federation: 2020).

Case Study 7: The London view – Barnet Homes

Statistics snapshot: LB Barnet - January to March 2020

Households owed a prevention duty: 302

33% of those owed a prevention duty were single parents; 51% were single adults, and 14% were couples with children.

Households owed a relief duty: 230

21% of those owed a relief duty were single parents, 69% were single adults, and 10% were couples with children.

Top 3 reasons for loss, or threat of loss, of last settled home

- 🏠 End of PRS – Assured shorthold – 24.2%
- 🏠 Family and friends no longer willing or able to accommodate: 23.3%
- 🏠 Domestic Abuse – 12%

Top three accommodation at time of application

- 🏠 Private rented sector: 47.4%
- 🏠 Living with family: 24.2%
- 🏠 Living with friends: 7.7%

0.6% of households were rough sleeping.

As with all London boroughs, Barnet faces a huge demand for affordable housing in an area which has very little stock available below the LHA cap. By 2025, half of the borough may live in private rented accommodation.

The council spends around £28 million a year on temporary accommodation and has around 2,600 households living in TA. Last year, they let 674 private sector properties to help avoid further admissions into TA. Barnet needs at least 17,600 new affordable homes by 2041 to keep up with demand (704 homes a year).

Data for January to March 2020 shows nearly a quarter of homelessness applications in Barnet are due to the end of an Assured Shorthold tenancy; a similar percentage due to family and friends being no longer able to accommodate the household. In all, these two groups accounted for just under half of all applications. With high demand and limited housing supply, services are designed with homeless prevention in mind to sustain people in their housing.

Barnet had an official rough sleeping count of around 24 before COVID-19, although local estimates were much higher at about 80 entrenched or 'some time' rough sleepers. During Everyone In, Barnet accommodated 200 single homeless rough sleepers. There is a plan to support rough sleepers into temporary accommodation, but there are challenges for those with very complex needs who require wrap-around support. 58 of the 147 currently being supported through Everyone In have NRPF (39%), with the majority of these EEA nationals. Barnet Homes has funding to support EEA nationals in various ways, such as with applications for settled status, and uses their Employment & Training arm to help people access employment. Without government support for this cohort, however, there are limitations to the amount of support that can be funded at a local level.

Adjustment to several national policy areas would make a significant difference quickly in London. Abolishing Section 21 notices would add security to the PRS and make landlords and tenants see it as a long-term housing solution (rather than the insecure temporary option it is now). Whilst the government has temporarily

lifted the LHA cap in response to Covid, this is pointless in London without also removing the benefit cap. Funding to build genuinely affordable housing is also long overdue.

Although a lot of the issues lie outside their control, Barnet Homes and the London Borough of Barnet have a very strong ethos around early intervention and prevention which includes well established working arrangements. This has driven an increase in the number of homeless preventions over the last five years: 832 achieved in 2014/15 rising to 1221 in 2019/20; and a reduction in the number of households in temporary accommodation from 2758 in March 2015 to 2467 at the end of March 2020.

Other initiatives include:

- ▲ **Let2barnet Team:** This team secures good quality accommodation in the private rented sector at Local Housing Allowance rates and procures around 650 units a year.
- ▲ **Tenancy Sustainment Team:** This legally trained team works with private sector households, providing housing advice around complex landlord/tenant issues, disrepair, mortgage and rent arrears, and welfare benefits. They aim to support people to stay in their current home or, if that is not possible, move to alternative accommodation.
- ▲ **BOOST- Cross Tenure Employment & Training arm:** Sitting in Housing Options, this provides employment, training and welfare benefit support through co-located hubs around the borough.
- ▲ **Mediation Service:** Trained mediation officers work with family and friends to resolve issues and, if necessary, support move on into alternative accommodation.
- ▲ **Domestic Violence and Abuse One Stop Shop:** Brings together a range of specialists in one place to provide a one-stop shop of options around housing, refuge places, sanctuary safety measures, legal advice and support.
- ▲ **Temporary Accommodation Reduction Team:** to support people to move from temporary accommodation into longer term housing options.
- ▲ **Acquisition of homes on the open market:** for use as affordable temporary and long-term accommodation, alongside a large new build programme;
- ▲ **Funding of a day centre, Homeless Action in Barnet:** providing support and services to around 700 homeless people annually.

Barnet Homes also has an MHCLG-funded Rough Sleeping Team to support rough sleepers off the streets and into accommodation.

Part 4: Homelessness relief

The following case studies look at the work that ALMOs do to support those at the sharp end of homelessness; those sleeping rough, most often with complex life histories and needs. While work to end rough sleeping in these case study areas was well-developed before COVID-19, it is clear that COVID-19 has considerably increased the numbers of people seeking assistance, driving further innovation.

Learning

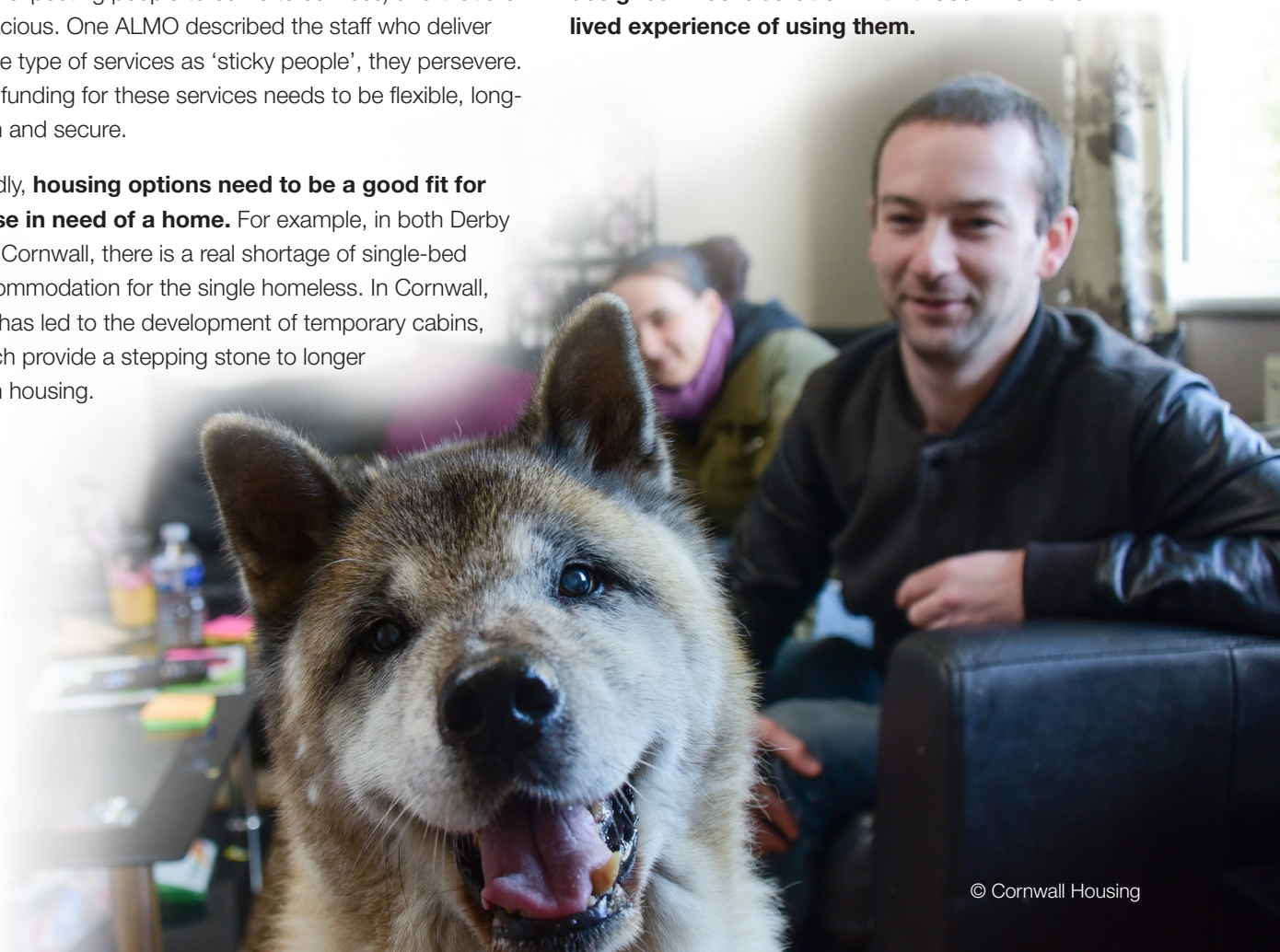
The case studies in this section show **the key importance of strong partnership working and integrated casework** across all local partners, supported by a top-level strategic commitment and vision. In essence, everyone from local authority to public health, from health to police, from housing to prison services, from DWP to local charities, have to be signed up to the same goal and working towards it together.

Secondly, they show the importance of someone having a roof over their head to give them the space and security to start to sort themselves out, **but also the importance of long-term sustainable support services that go out to where the person is** (rather than expecting people to come to services) and that are tenacious. One ALMO described the staff who deliver these type of services as 'sticky people', they persevere. The funding for these services needs to be flexible, long-term and secure.

Thirdly, **housing options need to be a good fit for those in need of a home**. For example, in both Derby and Cornwall, there is a real shortage of single-bed accommodation for the single homeless. In Cornwall, this has led to the development of temporary cabins, which provide a stepping stone to longer term housing.

Fourth, **access to positive activities are vital part of core service deliver for people experiencing homelessness**. For example, Derby Homes' gap analysis of their services revealed a lack of positive activities for those sleeping rough to occupy their time and break away from negative influences and chaotic lifestyles. Interestingly, this has been a key and really effective element of many organisations' response to the pandemic, looking to find constructive ways to engage people housed in hotels (in part to discourage negative alternative behaviours).

Finally, and most importantly, as with every other service area, **the most effective services are always designed in collaboration with those who have lived experience of using them**.



© Cornwall Housing

Case Study 8: Housing First – Wolverhampton Homes

Statistics snapshot: Wolverhampton - January to March 2020:

Households owed a prevention duty: 220

33% of those owed a prevention duty were single parents; 45% were single adults, and 23% were couples with children.

Households owed a relief duty: 428

23% of those owed a relief duty were single parents, 69% were single adults, and 9% were couples with children.

Top 3 reasons for loss, or threat of loss, of last settled home

- 🏠 Family and friends no longer willing or able to accommodate: 26.9%
- 🏠 End of PRS tenancy – assured shorthold – 16.2%
- 🏠 Domestic Abuse – 12.5%

Top three accommodation at time of application

- 🏠 No fixed abode: 22.2%
- 🏠 Living with family: 22.1%
- 🏠 PRS: 17.9%

The NFA is a member of the Housing First Advisory Group which aims to increase the number of social landlords involved in and providing accommodation to Housing First projects. Housing First is an internationally recognised and evidence-based approach to ending homelessness for people who experience multiple disadvantages, providing them with a secure home alongside unconditional, personalised and intensive support.

As part of the Housing First Advisory Group, the NFA is calling for the government to commit to long-term funding for the support services needed to enable 16,500 Housing First tenancies over the current parliament and to acknowledge the scale of need for a supply of suitable homes for Housing First projects and wider housing-led provision to tackle homelessness.³¹

Wolverhampton Homes has a team of three staff delivering Housing First in conjunction with a third sector organisation that provides additional staff and peer mentoring programme. 14 people (12 male and 2 female) have been supported from sleeping rough directly into tenancies since the pilot started. Allocation criteria to Housing First is based on complex needs, and these are people who are often totally disengaged from services and have been out of housing for a long time. Of those who are being supported by Housing First:

Number of Housing First clients	Length of tenancy to date
5	One month
3	Up to six months
2	Between six months and a year
4	Between one and two years

³¹ Scaling up Housing First, Joint Statement from the Housing First Advisory Group

The service provides intensive support to Housing First tenants through a harm reduction approach, with the aim of gradually stepping them down into a generic Housing Outreach team. The success of the service is based on the considerable level of wraparound support provided, but also the skills of the staff delivering it, with tenacity, problem solving and the right attitude being core. Alongside a fund for decorating the flats for tenants (e.g. carpeting and curtains), there is a personalisation fund that tenants can use to help them with activities they enjoy.

Box 5: A rough sleeper's story

The HF service began to work with Simon in January 2020. Simon was rough sleeping and begging, had been homeless for approximately four years and had little faith or trust in services. At the start, Simon declined every offer of TA.

Prior to COVID-19, the Intensive Support Worker contacted Simon daily to discuss support services, check his health & wellbeing, and access drug services (which the support worker attended with him). There were some difficulties with the appointment and Simon disengaged, so the support worker persevered, reassured Simon that the service was there to help him, and he re-engaged and received the medication he needed. During this period the support worker was looking for suitable properties for Simon.

Lockdown in March unfortunately triggered setbacks and challenges in keeping Simon accessing services, with all the uncertainties and difficulties in keeping communication open. The support worker continued to contact Simon and was finally able to re-engage him. Hotel and temporary accommodation arrangements were unsuitable for Simon and he returned to sleeping rough, feeling that services were working against him.

The Intensive Support Worker persevered and found Simon temporary accommodation where he could have his own space, a one-bed flat. Since moving into the temporary accommodation, he has become drug free. He is also engaging with Healthy Minds for support with his mental health and continues to engage with other services. He is now under offer for a permanent property in the area of his choice. He has an improved standard of living, is looking after himself, shops on paydays and is re-building his relationships with his family.

This case study shows clearly all the points where, without the intensive support, Simon would have disengaged and returned to sleeping rough. It also shows that the standard options (hostels, hotels, TA) were not suitable, and that Simon needed the self-contained, secure home in the area where he wanted to be alongside the support needed to end his long-term homelessness.

Case Study 9: Derby Homes

Statistics snapshot: Derby - January to March 2020

Households owed a prevention duty: 346

25% of those owed a prevention duty were single parents; 76% were single adults, and 9% were couples with children.

Households owed a relief duty: 270

14% of those owed a relief duty were single parents, 81% were single adults, and 6% were couples with children.

Top 3 reasons for loss, or threat of loss, of last settled home

- 🏠 End of PRS tenancy – assured shorthold – 22.2%
- 🏠 Family and friends no longer willing or able to accommodate: 20.9%
- 🏠 Eviction from supported housing – 13%

Top three accommodation at time of application

- 🏠 Living with family – 21.9%
- 🏠 Living in PRS – 20.3%
- 🏠 No fixed abode – 18.8%

3.9% of households were rough sleeping.

Derby is the third largest city in the East Midlands and comprises a clearly defined city centre and distinct neighbourhoods. It has a younger than average population, with almost half of Derby residents under the age of 35. Derby has seen homeless applications more than double since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act; and the number of households on the housing register almost doubled in the 18 months from June 2017 to December 2018.

Derby Homes carries out all of the homelessness prevention and relief duties on behalf of the City Council. Their service consists of:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 🏠 A housing access team – to triage applicants and refer on to specialist teams if necessary | 🏠 Temporary Accommodation team – to undertake placements and manage move-on. |
| 🏠 An allocations team | 🏠 Work with the probation service to support offenders and prisoners including a specific accommodation pathway for offenders leaving prison with wraparound housing and support in partnership with the YMCA. Derby Homes has its own seconded probation service officer to provide the link between probation, the prison and housing. |
| 🏠 A singles' team – to tackle the fact that there is a shortage of suitable 1-bed accommodation and support for single tenants; and a families' team. | |
| 🏠 A PRS team – to deal with s21 notices and illegal evictions. | |
| 🏠 A PRS access team – to bring online new property, saving tenancies and providing some tenancy sustainment services. | |

As with other case studies identified in this report, effective homelessness prevention and relief starts with a strong strategic commitment and partnership working. As a subgroup of the city's Safer Communities Board, Derby's **Strategic Homeless and Safe Housing Board** provides governance through senior members of statutory agencies across the police, council cabinet and officers, National Probation Service and community rehabilitation company, DWP, adult social care, children's social care services, public health, CCG and Derby Homes. The Board receives reports from the Homeless Liaison Forum on progress against action plans, the main partnership meeting in the city for organisations that work with and support homeless people. Members of this forum have been working together over a long period of time, working towards the same objectives.

As part of Derby City Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy their ALMO, Derby Homes, has been working with Public Health England, the Police and Crime Commissioner, Derby Constabulary and MHCLG who provide some funding to support **a multi-agency rough sleeping hub** within a **"SafeSpace"**, with services delivered by Derby City Mission for people with complex problems.

SafeSpace provides basic shelter, rapid assessment and support to deliver housing pathways for rough sleepers or those at risk of rough sleeping. The service was set up pre-COVID-19 and was originally an open plan space offering communal basic shelter alongside services provided for residents. It was about to move into new premises when COVID-19 struck and Derby Homes shifted focus to 'Everyone In', moving all rough sleepers into hotel accommodation so everyone had safe, secure and self-contained accommodation during lock down. The services that had been provided at SafeSpace were then transferred to the hotels. These included a specialist rough sleeper / homelessness paramedic, probation services, social care and drug and alcohol treatment services.

During lock down they had over 140 individuals in their hotels – at the end of the 90 days the dilapidation costs were in the region of £5k which can be attributed to the positive behaviour of the guests, in large part due to the provision of positive activities. Partners used the car parks and provided outside activities like basketball, football, badminton. Arts and craft and other indoor activities were socially distanced. Derby City Mission supported residents, the street outreach team was based there and continued its work; the police were able to drop by; DWP staff, social services and treatment services were also able to answer the call and support the work within the hotel.

Derby Homes is now hosting **a coordinator role to facilitate a multi-agency rough sleepers hub (MARSH) in order to help hold onto the learning** and focus on unblocking the problems in the system that prevent some getting the help they need. They see the key to reducing rough sleeping as a whole system approach that works to address barriers and engage all customers as some of the most vulnerable struggle with drug addiction, alcohol dependency and mental health problems. By embracing a whole system approach Derby Homes and all of its partners aim to give all rough sleepers a real chance of getting their lives back on track and holding down a tenancy.

The partnership with DWP is really helping some of the residents. Claiming UC is a complex and overwhelming task for many people dealing with other problems in their lives, particularly mental health and drug and alcohol problems. Many single rough sleepers have been unable to navigate the welfare system finding it complex and frustrating the have chosen to give up and return to begging – which can yield as much money without a month's wait to be paid. Whilst many influencers have called for changes to UC, those working to assist rough sleepers believe UC should be further simplified for this cohort; although their local DWP centre is now engaged and doing more hand-holding, the process is still too much for some people.

However, Derby Homes are the first to admit that some individuals decline their services choosing other lifestyle options which include negative and harmful behaviours. In these circumstances, they can call on the **Proactive Engagement & Enforcement Partnership (PEEP)** which is a multi-agency team coordinated by Public Health and made up of a wide variety of organisations such as the police, probation services, drug and alcohol support groups, religious and faith organisations and housing providers. PEEP promotes engagement with access to health, treatment services, housing and support and where this is continually refused enforcement may be necessary, which could include probation recalling individuals to prison. The Police may choose to arrest or disperse individuals where repeated anti social behavior disrupts the balance in the City Centre.

Derby Homes have submitted a bid to the MHCLG for accommodation to be built within the new SafeSpace building – to create self-contained glass rooms for sleeping as well as acquiring 1 bed properties on the open market. **There is high demand for social housing with limited availability of one bed properties as Derby Homes and its partners work to eradicate rough sleeping in Derby.**

Case Study 10: Small town and rural homelessness – Cornwall Housing

Statistics snapshot: Cornwall - January to March 2020

Households owed a prevention duty: 321

28% of those owed a prevention duty were single parents; 50% were single adults, and 20% were couples with children.

Households owed a relief duty: 299

15% of those owed a relief duty were single parents, 78% were single adults, and 7% were couples with children.

Top 3 reasons for loss, or threat of loss, of last settled home

- 🏠 End of PRS tenancy – assured shorthold – 21.5%
- 🏠 Family and friends no longer willing or able to accommodate: 18.1%
- 🏠 Domestic abuse – 13.2%

Top three accommodation at time of application

- 🏠 Living in PRS – 30%
- 🏠 Living with family – 21.6%
- 🏠 Social Rented Sector – 13.7%

4.7% of households were rough sleeping.

Unlike other case study areas in this report, Cornwall is a predominantly rural area, characterised by small towns and villages separated by large areas of open space. Low self-employed earning and wage levels combined with high house prices mean that many homes are not affordable for local people. This context provides some particular challenges when trying to prevent homelessness or support rough sleepers into accommodation, which Cornwall Council and Cornwall Housing are seeking to address.

Cornwall Housing delivers Cornwall Homechoice, the Housing Options and advice services on behalf of Cornwall Council. In place is **a multi-agency approach in partnership with Cornwall Council, Coastline Housing's Homelessness service and St. Petroc's Society, Nos Da Kernow project (Cornish for Good Night Cornwall)** which had driven a reduction in rough sleeping prior to COVID-19. However, as the pandemic hit the country in March, Cornwall Housing saw an unprecedented increase in households needing assistance. Between March and mid-June:

- 🏠 562 households were placed in temporary accommodation, 362 as a direct result of COVID-19
- 🏠 139 rough sleepers were assisted into accommodation
- 🏠 201 direct matches have been made so far with RP partners for move-on accommodation; 147 households have been found time-limited accommodation.

The biggest challenge was that rough sleepers were widely dispersed in relation to existing services. Each small group was centred around a small town and wanted to stay in their local area where they had support networks.

The initial emergency response centred on securing hotels and caravan parks. Then, as the tourist industry made plans to re-open at the beginning of July, move-on accommodation was needed quickly. The usual rough sleeping facilities were communal and completely unsuitable during this crisis.

To respond to this challenge, working with the Council the **Rough Sleeping team established seven fixed sites across the county**, providing both accommodation and services in one place, but in the areas where people were sleeping rough. One temporary site is in Truro; it makes use of temporary rented cabins which are plumbed-in and landscaped. The cabins are single berth, fully self-contained with showers and cooking facilities.

Support needs are provided in partnership between Cornwall Housing and voluntary sector bodies We Are With You, St Petrocs and others to meet resident support needs and find them a sustainable home to move on to. Intensive efforts have been made to find suitable move-on accommodation for all residents and there has been wide local recognition for their successes from the press and other partners such as the police and local politicians.³² There has been a significant reduction in street drinking and anti-social behaviour while rough sleepers have somewhere safe to stay plus support to tackle some of the issues that stop them holding down a tenancy.

The rough sleeping team have used direct lets into Cornwall council's own stock, direct lets to the many registered providers across the country and found supported housing for some of those with higher needs.



Box 6: Carrick Cabins

B had been rough sleeping in Falmouth for two years, using alcohol daily and causing a high level of ASB in the town. Since moving to Carrick Cabins, he has been dry of alcohol, has been accepted into supported accommodation and started volunteering.

F had been rough sleeping on and off for over 15 years and has been through many supported accommodations in that time. During his time at the cabins he has been working with staff on-site to establish and address his support needs and will be

moving into detox and rehab services once space is available.

L has been a complex client due to his behaviour and needs. The team at Carrick Cabins has sensitively supported him with an area that he does not identify as being a problem area, alcohol, and he has been able to speak to a professional. Just by giving time, support and a listening ear to L, the service has secured him safe and settled accommodation of his own, and he is working with professionals to improve his life.

Whilst having a home (albeit temporary) with integrated support services has been a vital first step, some residents will have much more complex needs than others and will need a lot more engagement and support before they are able to sustain a permanent tenancy. For these people it is crucial to have staff who are skilled at working with those who are particularly far away from services; those who have burnt all their family and social bridges; people with severe mental distress or addictions often combined with a severe mistrust of services. Specialist staff can work with residents to develop a trusting relationship so they are able to know, accept and engage with different services. It takes time, trust and persistence to undo the long years of trauma that these residents have been through. This intensive multi-agency approach requires sustainable support funding over the long term, but it starts with a secure and safe roof over their heads.

³² Two video interviews with residents who have been supported through the cabins can be watched here: <https://www.cornwallhousing.org.uk/find-a-home/homelessness-reduction/>

Case Study 11: Integrated care – St Leger Homes

Statistics snapshot: Doncaster - January to March 2020

Households owed a prevention duty: 147

40% of those owed a prevention duty were single parents; 39% were single adults, and 22% were couples with children.

Households owed a relief duty: 335

18% of those owed a relief duty were single parents, 73% were single adults, and 11% were couples with children.

Top 3 reasons for loss, or threat of loss, of last settled home

- 🏠 End of PRS tenancy – assured shorthold – 19.7%
- 🏠 Family and friends no longer willing or able to accommodate: 17.4%
- 🏠 Non-violent relationship breakdown - 10%

Top three accommodation at time of application

- 🏠 No fixed abode – 24.5%
- 🏠 Private rented sector – 22%
- 🏠 Living with family – 17.8%

St Leger Homes is the housing ALMO for Doncaster Council and delivers all the housing management and the statutory homelessness services on behalf of the council. This includes being a key partner in the town's award-winning Complex Lives Alliance, which is an integrated care approach to supporting rough sleepers with complex health and support needs.

The Complex Lives Alliance was created in 2017/18 as a response to increasing concern around the rising levels of rough sleeping in Doncaster, concerns about the increasing complexity of need, and unplanned and complex demand being placed on local services. There are four prisons operating in Doncaster, and this adds strain to the system, since prisoners as a group are more likely to end up rough sleeping for a range of reasons. Deep-dive research in Doncaster gave an estimated cost of £1 million per annum for 57 specific people with complex needs, which when scaled up to all the cohort, would give a significant cost to the public purse.

While the Complex Lives Alliance is working with those at the sharp end of homelessness and rough sleeping, it is clearly a partnership model that applies to many other areas of their locality working, where services intersect across people's lives. Whilst it is true that the type of clients being supported by the Alliance do have complex lives and histories, it is also true that traditional services which are designed in silos have not been able to meet the needs of people who straddle more than one service, and this creates unnecessary barriers and creates complexity.

The Complex Lives Alliance has been developed as a whole system operating model, using ethnographic surveys of people with lived experience as a key part of its design and operating model. This is best practice and should be a core part of the development of any homelessness model.

Alliance partners include St Leger Homes, Doncaster Council, two local hospitals, Primary Care, other supported housing providers, Community Rehabilitation, NACRO (social justice charity), National Probation Service, South Yorkshire Police, DWP, and community and voluntary sector partners.

The model consists of Complex Lives integrated case management, support services, Doncaster Housing Plus pathways, and a Changing Lives fund to remove barriers. The approach uses MEAM (Making Every Adult Matter) principles.³³ Within the integrated delivery team there are MEAM case workers, navigators, Housing Options single point of access staff, a Housing Options officer, a Drug & Alcohol worker, a Housing Benefits officer, assertive outreach workers, a NACRO worker, mental health nurse and trauma worker.

Ongoing evaluation is showing that this approach is working. The team is currently working with 115 clients, all of whom were previously rough sleeping; 90 are now in settled and stabilised accommodation, supported by key workers and wrap-around support plans. 80% have shown improvement in offending behaviour, while 70% have reported less problematic substance misuse. The remaining clients are being supported in different settings. Six clients have been stepped down from the service due to no longer needing intensive support.

In addition to this, there is a South Yorkshire accommodation pathway in place for adults in prison which aims to have early conversations with people to assess their housing situation post-release, make sure that housing options, support and rehabilitation needs are discussed, and a personal housing plan are put in place prior to release, and that individuals have accommodation to go to when they are released. 36 offenders were accommodated on release via the pathway during the first 3 months of the year.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, St Leger Homes had 527 presentations of homelessness, and accommodated 461. Of these, around half (227) had previous contact with the service, and 143 were verified rough sleepers. The Complex Lives team used weekly Alliance meetings to escalate for discussion challenging and emerging cases, such as prisoners due for release, rough sleepers, and those at risk of losing accommodation and likely to sleep rough.

St Leger Homes is proud to be at the forefront of developing this whole system Complex Lives approach in Doncaster, making a real, positive difference to people's lives on a daily basis – particularly vulnerable people with complex needs. The hope is that this experience will help others in tackling these difficult issues to help transform the lives of those they work with.

³³ <http://meam.org.uk/>

Conclusion

Summary

Because private sector tenancies are so insecure and – in many places – unaffordable, and because there are serious constraints on housing supply across the UK housing market, finding a place to live for those at risk of homelessness or who have actually become homeless is a constant and increasingly unwinnable battle.

In London, the battle is not new; however, it is now a growing problem in other areas of the country, especially the South and Midlands. This is not least because homelessness is so pressing in London that its councils often actively aim to relocate households to the regions where rents are (relatively) cheaper.

Even where housing is available, it is not always appropriate or of good quality; for instance, in many areas there is an acute lack of affordable one-bed accommodation, even as changing patterns of adult living drive higher demand for such homes.

And, of course, supply of council housing and other socially rented housing continues to decline as right-to-buy sales cancel out acquisition or building of new stock and budget constraints shrink new supply programmes.

The result of all this is that local authorities who have an unavoidable statutory responsibility for relieving homelessness increasingly must rely on expensive temporary accommodation in the private sector. Inevitably, this focuses budget on crisis response and swallows funding for the preventative work that would offer much better value for money.

Policy asks

Homelessness is a complex policy area, but evidence from NFA members shows that there are clear policy adjustments that could greatly assist them in their duty to tackle homelessness. They ask government for a policy environment that delivers:

- 🏠 At least **90-100,000 new socially rented homes a year** to make sure that everyone has access to a home they can genuinely afford.
- 🏠 **A switch in budget focus from crisis response to prevention**, particularly through government support for social housing that comes with guaranteed wraparound support for those who need it to prevent further homelessness.
- 🏠 **An end to the private rented sector pathway to homelessness**, through the removal of Section 21 ‘no fault’ evictions and government implementation of proposed reforms to PRS regulation.
- 🏠 **Permanent lifting of the LHA rates cap** so that rates reflect the true cost of rent.
- 🏠 **Urgent welfare reform to remove built-in homelessness triggers**, such as the Benefit Cap which cuts benefit without taking account of housing costs.
- 🏠 **Long-term, sustainable and sufficient funding for prevention and relief strategies**, with built-in monitoring and evaluation to show what works.
- 🏠 Long-term funding for those with complex needs through **Housing First projects**.



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