

DEMOS

# OPPORTUNITIES TO BETTER PREVENT HOMELESSNESS IN ENGLAND

A DEMOS - CENTRE FOR  
HOMELESSNESS IMPACT  
DISCUSSION PAPER

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JULY 2023

PREVENTION  
IN PRACTICE

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July 2023

## PREVENTION IN PRACTICE: A NEW SERIES OF DEMOS POLICY PAPERS

Prevention is back on the political agenda. Momentum is building around the idea that the state needs to tackle the root causes of problems, rather than the symptoms. This is not a new idea, but past initiatives have failed to make good on the promise of prevention. To explore how to achieve this, Demos is publishing a series of papers, outlining how we can bring about a preventative state across different policy areas.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homelessness is rising once more as an issue of public concern in England as cost of living pressures have first stalled and then begun to reverse gains made during the Covid-19 pandemic. Polling shows popular support for greater attention to address homelessness: 75% of UK adults believe more should be done.<sup>1</sup>

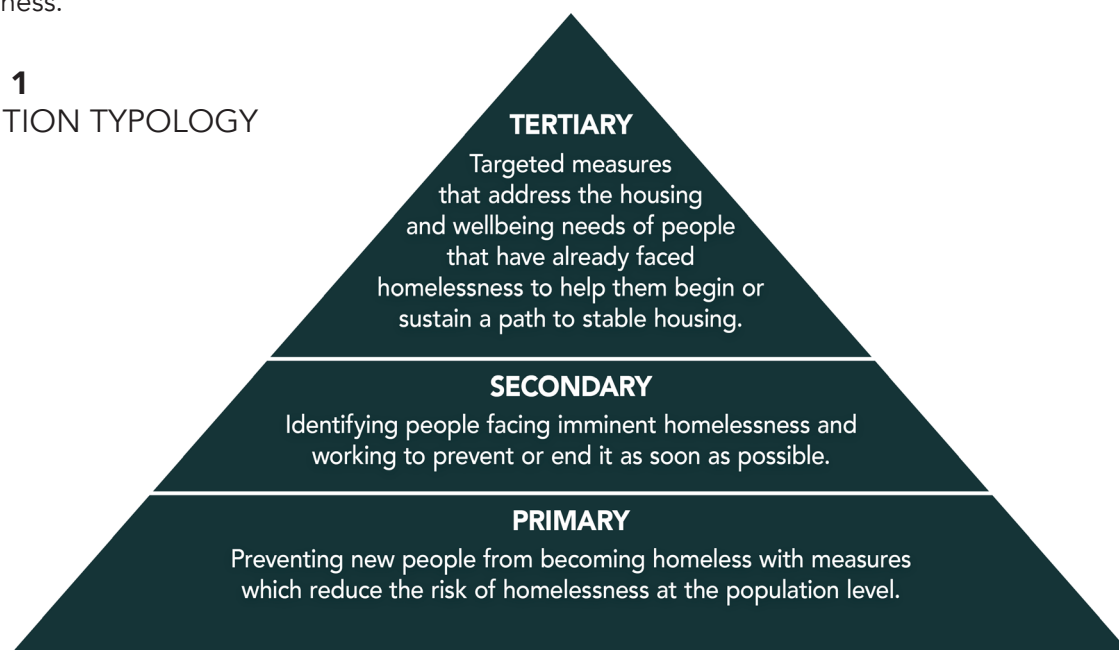
We have seen concerted efforts over several decades to prevent homelessness in England, and even though we know that this is better than cure, efforts until now have only taken us so far. To end homelessness for good, this needs to change.

In *The Preventative State*, Demos recently called for two shifts: first, for a new focus on foundational policy, which seeks to directly influence the foundations we all need to live a good life; second, for existing public service delivery models to shift upstream.<sup>2</sup> This discussion paper explores opportunities for these two shifts with respect to homelessness.

To do so, this paper summarises the current state of play with regard to homelessness prevention in England and, drawing on the available evidence and promising practice from across the UK, explores potential areas where there may be opportunities for an even more effective approach, and where future policy and practice could focus.

Drawing on a common typology used in public health approaches, this paper categorises homelessness prevention efforts into primary, secondary, and tertiary types. Primary prevention seeks to reduce the risk of homelessness for all and prevent it from occurring in the first place, while secondary prevention seeks to help people at imminent risk or, for those experiencing homelessness, end it as soon as possible. Tertiary prevention includes steps to prevent homelessness from recurring amongst those who have experienced it.

**FIGURE 1**  
PREVENTION TYPOLOGY



<sup>1</sup> Lowe, G. *Public perceptions of homelessness*. Centre for Homelessness Impact, January 2023. Available at: [https://assets-global.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/63d39954a6b96f5790e66ff4\\_CHI.IPSOS.2022.V02%40.pdf](https://assets-global.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/63d39954a6b96f5790e66ff4_CHI.IPSOS.2022.V02%40.pdf) [accessed 12/07/2023]

<sup>2</sup> Glover, B, Curtis, P and O'Brien, A. *The Preventative State: Rebuilding our local, social and civic foundations*. Demos, April 2023. Available at: <https://demos.co.uk/research/the-preventative-state-rebuilding-our-local-social-and-civic-foundations/> [access 12/07/2023]

We highlight that central government homelessness strategies in England have historically given limited attention to how wider government policy levers such as health and education could drive primary prevention of homelessness, accompanied by limited coordination and consideration across wider central departments of the impacts of policy decisions on homelessness. Further, while many of the housing-specific policies known to help prevent homelessness at the population level are in place in England (such as the UK's well-established housing benefit system), these are constrained by shortages in availability of affordable housing.

While there have been recent encouraging steps toward better primary prevention of homelessness amongst groups known to be at greater risk (such as people leaving prison), efforts by local public services to join-up to better identify households at risk and intervene early could be more comprehensive and data-led, particularly through cross-agency data sharing, and provision of effective, integrated support to those people at an early stage.

Turning to secondary prevention efforts intended to support people who are already experiencing homelessness or are at imminent risk, we highlight that the legislation and local authorities' work to prevent homelessness are progressive by international standards and many widely adopted practices targeting the known drivers of homelessness (e.g. family mediation services, legal

advice, rent guarantees) show impact and have some promising evidence behind them.

However, there is a gap in evidence on the relative impact and cost effectiveness of different interventions that, if addressed, could potentially help maximise the impact of investment in secondary prevention and create the headroom to systematically reorient resources upstream.

Finally, we highlight positive recent investment in 'tertiary' prevention to help people recover from homelessness and prevent recurrence, including national Housing First initiatives and investment in additional 'move-on' accommodation provision for those who have slept rough or are at risk. However, we identify a need for targeted and tailored solutions to enable households recovering in supported accommodation to move into and sustain permanent housing.

Building on this brief discussion of current prevention efforts in England, we draw on the available evidence to highlight some potential opportunities to enhance prevention of homelessness and where future policy and practice could focus, which include introducing a greater focus and coherence to national policy commitments to prevent homelessness and bringing forward evidence-based solutions to maximise the impact of existing structures (e.g. legislation) and investment in preventing homelessness.

<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	
<p>Primary Prevention to reduce the risk of homelessness and prevent it from occurring in the first place</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1.</b> Introducing a common vision for preventing homelessness, underpinned by a robust data-led framework to coordinate, drive and assess progress.</li> <li><b>2.</b> Considering ways to better leverage housing benefit spending to support prevention of homelessness.</li> <li><b>3.</b> Reducing risk of homelessness among renters by closely monitoring the implementation and impact of reforms to the private rented sector and expanding efforts to minimise homelessness amongst those living in social housing.</li> <li><b>4.</b> Building on promising local practice (e.g. local 'Duty to Prevent' partnerships) to enable local agencies to collaborate and proactively identify and support people at higher risk of becoming homeless earlier.</li> </ol>

Secondary Prevention to quickly identify people facing imminent homelessness and prevent it or, for those experiencing homelessness, end it as soon as possible.

1. Identifying, testing and scaling the most effective prevention interventions for those at imminent risk of homelessness to maximise the potential of existing legislation and investment in prevention and close the 'implementation gap'.
2. Scaling the most promising short-to-medium term 'bridging solutions' to help as many households in temporary accommodation move on into sustainable housing as possible.

Tertiary Prevention to address the housing and wellbeing needs of people that have already faced homelessness to help them begin or sustain a path to stable housing.

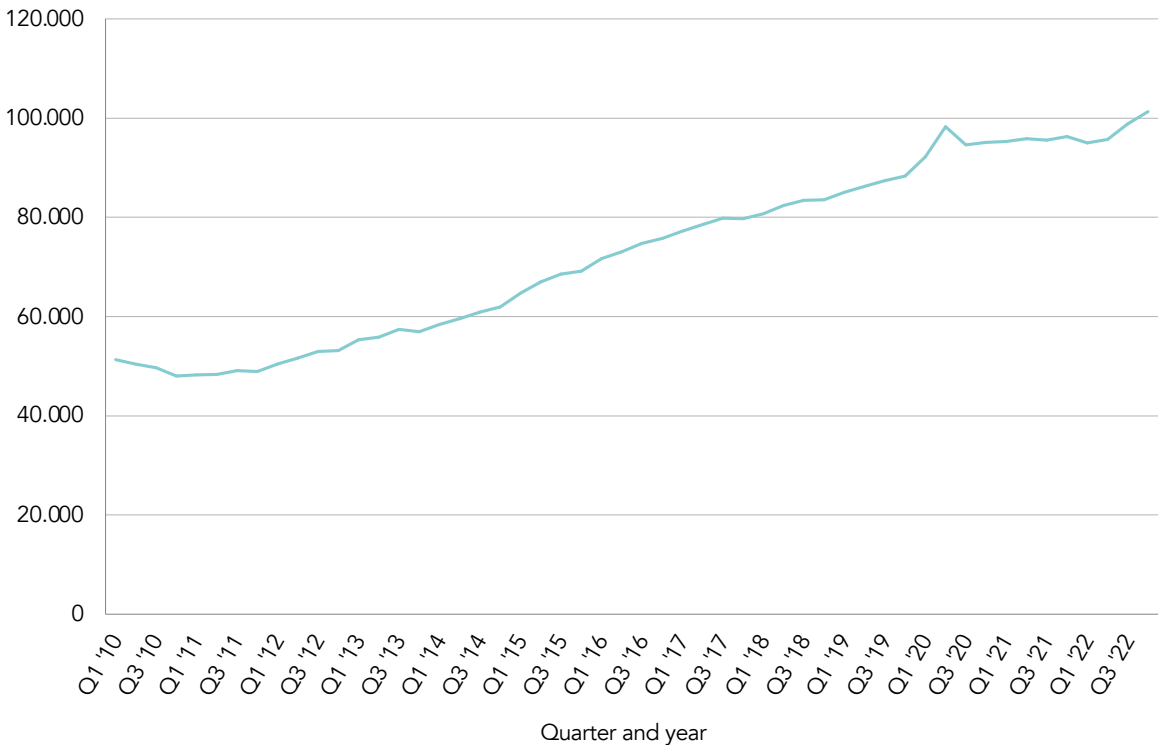
1. Introducing a specific goal to prevent repeat homelessness, matched with national data on recurrence and the effectiveness of tertiary interventions.
2. Targeting and tailoring expansion of accommodation with support such as Housing First, floating support services, and specialist accommodation to local population needs to help individuals recover from homelessness.

# INTRODUCTION

Official statistics show that homelessness in England has risen in recent years. The number of households who are homeless and living in temporary accommodation has risen substantially, reaching 101,300 households in December 2022 - twice as many as in 2010.<sup>3</sup> More recently, the numbers of people seen sleeping rough has also risen, a step

back on previous positive progress from 2017. According to the latest 'rough sleeping snapshot', 3,069 people slept rough on a single night in 2022.<sup>4</sup> This is an annual increase of 26% year-on-year and 74% higher than in 2010, but is still much lower than the peak of 4,751 people in 2017.<sup>5</sup>

**FIGURE 2**  
NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS LIVING IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION AT THE END OF EACH QUARTER IN ENGLAND SINCE 2010



<sup>3</sup> Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. *Statutory Homelessness in England: October to December 2022 (Online)*. Gov. UK, May 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-october-to-december-2022> [accessed 30/06/2023]

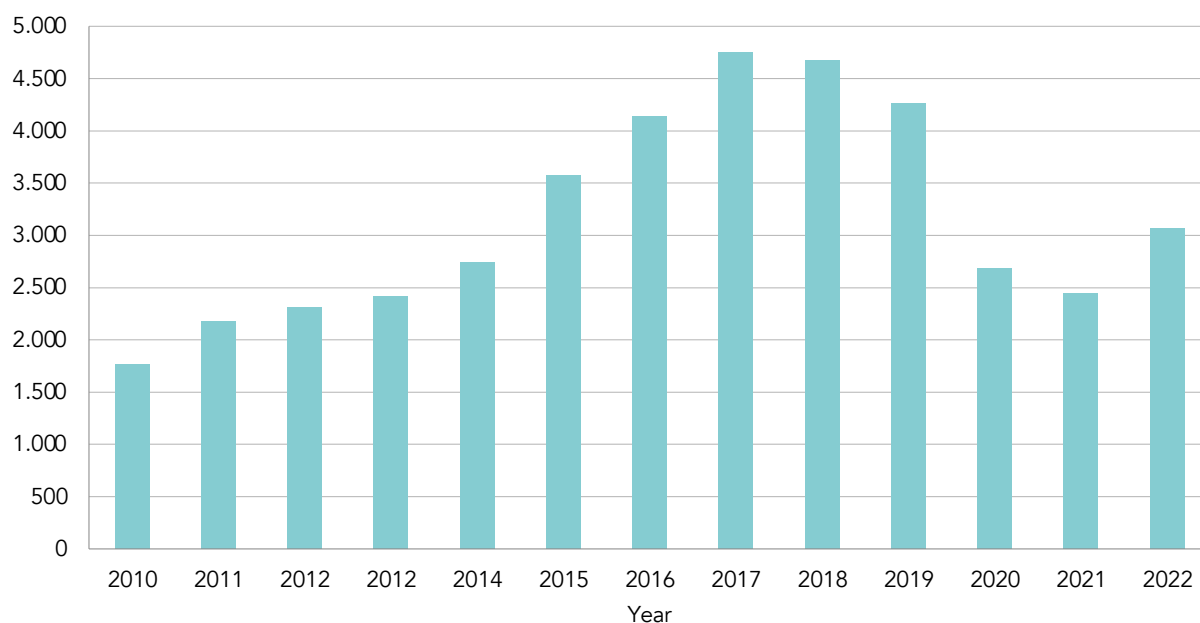
<sup>4</sup> Butler, P. *Rough sleeping in England rises for first time in half a decade*. The Guardian, February 2023. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/feb/28/rough-sleeping-in-england-rises-cost-of-living> [accessed 30/06/2023]

<sup>5</sup> This report focuses on statutory homelessness and on rough sleeping, drawing on official statistics to do so. It is important to note there are limitations to these official statistics as they rely on people approaching local authorities for assistance or, in the case of rough sleeping, on the single night count which does not give an indication of the number of people who sleep rough annually and may underestimate rough sleeping amongst some populations (e.g. women). Estimates that incorporate other forms of homelessness such as sofa surfing are higher than official statistics.



**FIGURE 3**

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS SLEEPING ROUGH ON A SINGLE NIGHT IN AUTUMN IN ENGLAND SINCE 2010.



Despite these ongoing pressures and the evidence that prevention is better than cure, efforts to tackle homelessness have historically tended to focus on crisis intervention that responds to households that are already homeless or at imminent risk rather than on prevention.<sup>6</sup> To end homelessness, this needs to change.

Encouragingly, there has been a distinct ‘prevention turn’ in English homelessness policy, seeing policy makers increasingly embrace the need to prevent homelessness rather than just respond to it. The ‘Housing Options’ model of non-statutory homelessness prevention assistance was first established in the early 2000s.<sup>7</sup> More recently, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 introduced new prevention duties in England requiring local councils to help someone who is threatened with homelessness find accommodation within 56 days, regardless of whether they are considered to be in ‘priority need’.<sup>8</sup> The 2017 Act also introduced the Duty to Refer, which requires a range of public

authorities including prisons and emergency departments to highlight people at risk of homelessness to local housing authorities.<sup>9</sup>

This shift is welcome, but with data highlighting rising rates of homelessness, more can be done. This paper intends to prompt discussion of how homelessness prevention in England could go further by summarising the state of play with regard to homelessness prevention in England today and, drawing on the available evidence and promising practice from across the UK, identifying where opportunities may lie for an even more effective approach.

## DEFINING PREVENTION

To understand the state of play with regard to homelessness prevention in England, we draw on a common approach in public health which categorises prevention activities into primary, secondary and

6 Using Evidence to End Homelessness. Bristol University Press Digital, 2019. Available at: <https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com/view/book/9781447354109/9781447354109.xml> [accessed 30/06/2023]

7 Fitzpatrick, S, Mackie, P and Wood, J. Homelessness Prevention in the UK: Policy Brief. UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence, July 2019. Available at: <https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Homelessness-Prevention-in-the-UK-Policy-Brief-July-2019-final.pdf> [accessed 30/06/2023]

8 A local authority only has a duty to provide accommodation under a homeless application to someone who has or might have a priority need, such as being a household with dependent children.

9 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. A Guide to the Duty to Refer. GOV.UK, September 2018. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homelessness-duty-to-refer/a-guide-to-the-duty-to-refer> [accessed 20/06/2023]

tertiary types.<sup>10,11</sup> Primary prevention seeks to prevent people from becoming newly homeless including amongst groups known to be at particular risk, secondary prevention seeks to quickly identify people facing imminent homelessness and prevent it or, for those experiencing homelessness, end it

as soon as possible, and tertiary prevention aims to reduce the risk of recurring homelessness.<sup>12</sup> This model corresponds to 'Upstream/Midstream/Downstream' framing used in other public policy areas.<sup>13</sup>

CATEGORY	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES OF INTERVENTIONS
Primary Prevention	Primary Prevention seeks to prevent new people from becoming homeless, incorporating measures which reduce the risk of homelessness at the population level.	Poverty Reduction Measures Income support (e.g. Universal Credit) National Health Service Existence of Minimum Wages Tenancy legislation and Regulation Social/subsidised Housing Housing Subsidies (e.g. Housing Benefit) Employment Interventions (e.g. wage subsidies) Resettlement and Institutional Discharge Programmes Domestic Abuse Interventions
Secondary Prevention	Secondary Prevention is about quickly identifying people facing imminent homelessness and working to prevent or end it as soon as possible.	Tenancy Sustainment (e.g. advice, advocacy, subsidy, mediation) Cash Transfers Family Mediation and Reconciliation Legal Advice Debt Advice Emergency and Temporary Accommodation Hosting Schemes
Tertiary Prevention	Tertiary Prevention is targeted measures that address the housing and wellbeing needs of people that have already faced homelessness to help them begin or sustain a path to stable housing.	Housing First Supported Housing Tenancy Sustainment

10 Fitzpatrick, S, Mackie, P and Wood, J. *Homelessness Prevention in the UK: Policy Brief*. UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence, July 2019. Available at: <https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Homelessness-Prevention-in-the-UK-Policy-Brief-July-2019-final.pdf> [accessed 30/06/2023]

11 Several typologies of prevention exist, including the five-category typology - universal, targeted, crisis, emergency, and recovery prevention - which is useful for more granular discussion of the different measures and interventions that can be taken to prevent homelessness than is covered in this report.

12 Raising the Roof. *About Homelessness - Long Term Solutions*. Raising the Roof. Available at: <https://raisingtheroof.org/long-term-solutions/> [accessed 30/06/2023]

13 Coote, A. *THE WISDOM OF PREVENTION - Long-term planning, upstream investment and early action to prevent harm*. New Economics Foundation, April 2012. Available at: <https://neweconomics.org/2012/04/the-wisdom-of-prevention> [accessed 30/06/2023]

# SECTION 1

# HOMELESSNESS

# PREVENTION IN

# ENGLAND TODAY

## PRIMARY PREVENTION

The evidence tells us that homelessness is a manifestation of inequality.<sup>14</sup> Similarly to the social determinants of poor health, poverty or offending, homelessness often occurs when a combination of circumstances impact on an individual's ability to protect themselves from losing their home. For example, experience of (childhood) poverty often predates, and is a predictor of (adulthood) homelessness.<sup>15</sup> These inequalities are compounded by ethnic and other forms of inequality; there is significant over-representation of people from ethnic minorities and of people with disabilities among people experiencing homelessness.<sup>16, 17</sup>

As such, the available international evidence suggests that prevention will be most effective as part of an integrated homelessness strategy, taking into account wider policy areas such as health.<sup>18</sup> Policies that seek to address overall socio-economic inequalities, in particular amongst children and

young people, thus have a role to play in reducing homelessness at the population level, with examples including:

- Access to affordable health and mental healthcare services.
- Income support for households, such as welfare benefits.
- Minimum wages and labour market protections.
- Education and skills interventions.<sup>19</sup>

However, central government homelessness strategies in England have historically given limited attention to how such wider government policy levers could drive primary prevention of homelessness, accompanied by limited coordination and consideration of potential impacts of policy decisions (e.g. reductions in overall welfare generosity) on homelessness prevention across

14 Teixeira L. *What works to address ethnic inequalities and homelessness?*. The Centre for Homelessness Impact, February 2023. Available at: <https://www.homelessnessimpact.org/post/what-works-to-address-ethnic-inequalities-and-homelessness#:~:text=The%20evidence%20tells%20us%20that,perhaps%20its%20most%20extreme%20form> [accessed 30/06/2023]

15 Bramley, G and Fitzpatrick, S. *Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk?* Housing Studies, July 2017. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02673037.2017.1344957> [accessed 30/06/2023]

16 Finney, N. *Ethnic inequalities and homelessness in the UK*. The Centre for Homelessness Impact, December 2022. Available at: [https://assets-global.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/63e6476b4d417106be76eae5\\_CHI.Ethnic.Inequalities.homelessness.pdf](https://assets-global.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/63e6476b4d417106be76eae5_CHI.Ethnic.Inequalities.homelessness.pdf) [accessed 30/06/2023]

17 Stone, B and Wertans C. *Homelessness and disability in the UK*. The Centre for Homelessness Impact, May 2023. Available at: [https://assets-global.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/645a76da097c6dad33fcc423\\_CHI-disabilities-homelessness23.pdf](https://assets-global.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/645a76da097c6dad33fcc423_CHI-disabilities-homelessness23.pdf) [accessed 30/06/2023]

18 Please, N. *Preventing Homelessness : A review of the International evidence*. The University of York, April 2019. Available at: <https://www.york.ac.uk/media/chp/images-general/Preventing%20Homelessness%20-%20A%20Review%20of%20International%20Evidence.pdf> [accessed 30/06/2023]

19 Fitzpatrick, S., Mackie, P., & Wood, J. *Advancing a Five-Stage Typology of Homelessness Prevention*. International Journal on Homelessness, 1(1), 79-97. (2021) Available at: <https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/ijoh/article/view/13341/11482> [accessed 06/07/2023]

central government departments.<sup>20</sup>

Many of the housing-specific policies known to help prevent homelessness at the population level are in place in England. The UK, for example, has a well-established programme of housing subsidies, with total expenditure on housing benefit and the housing element of Universal Credit making up around 15% of the welfare budget.<sup>21</sup> As a direct way to respond to shortfalls between household incomes and housing costs, this expenditure is the one of the most influential areas of public spending, protecting people from losing their homes during a period of ill-health or unemployment and helping those on low or no income pay their rent while also paying for accommodation for homeless households.<sup>22</sup>

Social rented housing has also historically delivered rents at around 50% of market rates alongside long-term security of tenure and, while the sector has declined considerably in size, there remain around 4 million socially rented homes nationwide, accommodating 11% of households.<sup>23</sup>

However, despite these well-established mechanisms for reducing the risk of homelessness at the population level, their effectiveness in England is arguably limited.<sup>24</sup> The UK's well-acknowledged lack of suitable, affordable housing means fewer households are able to access the lowest rents and highest security of tenure than in the past. A total of 233,000 new homes were supplied in 2021-22, falling short of the 340,000 that estimates suggest are needed annually.<sup>25</sup> Only 59,000 of these were affordable, with only 13% offering the lowest rents and higher security of tenure offered by social rents.<sup>26</sup>

The declining availability of social housing has contributed to an increase in the number of people living in the relatively insecure private rented sector - in 2021-22, 44% of households assessed as being at risk of homelessness were renting privately, while social renters made up only 11%.<sup>27</sup> The Government's 2023 Renters Reform Bill has sought to give more security to tenants by for example, removing fixed-term tenancies and Section 21 evictions which allowed landlords to evict without specific grounds. However, the legislation still offers mandatory grounds for landlords to evict if they want to move in to or sell their property, and does not increase notice periods for those households whose homes are repossessed.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, increasing private rents and real-term reductions in key benefits (e.g. the Local Housing Allowance) have reduced affordability in the private rented sector and welfare system's effectiveness in protecting private renting households from homelessness, with recent analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies finding that the share of new private rental properties affordable to housing benefit or universal credit recipients - i.e. with rents that can be covered by the LHA - has fallen from 23% to 5% since 2020.<sup>29 30</sup>

Primary prevention efforts also include targeting early-stage and upstream intervention focussed on high-risk groups, including vulnerable young people and those leaving institutions transitions such as local authority care, prison, or mental health in-patient treatment. Evidence reviews have suggested the following interventions may be effective to target prevention activities at those most at risk:

20 Pleace, N. *Preventing Homelessness: A review of the International evidence*. The University of York, April 2019. Available at: [https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/145335/1/Preventing\\_Homelessness\\_A\\_Review\\_of\\_International\\_Evidence.pdf](https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/145335/1/Preventing_Homelessness_A_Review_of_International_Evidence.pdf) [accessed 30/06/2023]

21 Pery, J and Lister, S. Housing for people on low incomes – how do we make the best use of government subsidies in England? The Centre for Homelessness Impact and Chartered Institute of Housing, October 2021. Available at: [https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/616952c88499426e7d779606\\_Centre%20for%20Homelessness%20Impact%20and%20Chartered%20Institute%20of%20Housing%20Policy%20paper.pdf](https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/616952c88499426e7d779606_Centre%20for%20Homelessness%20Impact%20and%20Chartered%20Institute%20of%20Housing%20Policy%20paper.pdf) [accessed 30/06/2023]

22 Clarke, A and Oxley, M. *Using incentives to improve the private rented sector for people in poverty: An international policy review*. Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research, October 2017. Available at: [https://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/system/files/documents/I\\_P\\_Review.pdf](https://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/system/files/documents/I_P_Review.pdf) [accessed 30/06/2023]

23 Wilson, W and Barton, C. *Social rented housing (England): past trends and prospects*. House of Common Library, August 2022. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8963/> [accessed 30/06/2023]

24 Fitzpatrick, S, Mackie, P and Wood, J. *Homelessness Prevention in the UK: Policy Brief*. UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence, July 2019. Available at: <https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Homelessness-Prevention-in-the-UK-Policy-Brief-July-2019-final.pdf> [accessed 30/06/2023]

25 Bramley, G. *Housing supply requirements across Great Britain for low-income households and homeless people: Research for Crisis and the National Housing Federation; Main Technical Report*. Heriot Watt University, April 2019. Available at: <https://researchportal.hw.ac.uk/en/publications/housing-supply-requirements-across-great-britain-for-low-income-h> [accessed 30/06/2023]

26 DLUHC and MHCLG. *Live tables on affordable housing supply*. GOV.UK, June 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-affordable-housing-supply#live-tables> [accessed 30/06/2023]

27 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. *Statutory Homelessness Annual Report 2021-22*. September 2022. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1105577/Annual\\_Statutory\\_Homelessness\\_release\\_2021-22.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1105577/Annual_Statutory_Homelessness_release_2021-22.pdf) [accessed 30/06/23]

28 Anderson, R. *Will Renters Reform Bill protect households from homelessness?* Centre for Homelessness Impact, May 2023. Available at: <https://www.homelessnessimpact.org/post/renters-reform-bill> [accessed 30/06/2023]

29 Cromarty, H. *Local housing allowance and homelessness*. House of Commons Library, July 2019. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2019-0199/> [accessed 30/06/2023]

30 Waters, T and Wernham, T. *Housing benefits have been frozen while rents have sky-rocketed*. Only 1 in 20 private rental properties on Zoopla can be covered by housing benefit. IFS, June 2023. Available at: <https://ifs.org.uk/news/housing-benefits-have-been-frozen-while-rents-have-sky-rocketed-only-1-20-private-rental> [accessed 30/06/2023]

- Systems for preventing homelessness caused by unmet support and treatment needs, such as shared protocols for release from institutions like prisons and link workers based in GP surgeries.
- Systems for detecting and intervening when domestic violence or abuse are present as triggers for individual/family homelessness.
- Systems for stopping unplanned moves when relationship or family breakdowns have occurred, including teenage runaways.<sup>31, 32</sup>

There have been some promising moves towards more targeted prevention of this kind in England in recent years. However, despite evidence that leaving a state institution often results in homelessness<sup>33</sup> and growing policy interest in using data to identify 'at-risk' groups at a local level, early intervention efforts focused on targeting vulnerable groups and transitions after leaving institutions are not comprehensively implemented.<sup>34</sup> There have been some more encouraging recent initiatives, with the current Government's 'Ending Rough Sleeping for Good' strategy containing greater emphasis on more primary prevention for at-risk groups, mainly focused on people leaving public institutions. For example, the strategy pledges national roll-out of transitional accommodation for people released from prison.<sup>35</sup>

Upstream prevention of this kind could be taken further through greater coordination between local authorities and local public services. For example, the Duty to Refer under the Homelessness Reduction Act does not extend to all public agencies who might identify a household at risk earlier than the local authority e.g. GP services.<sup>36</sup> Also, the Duty currently does not require local partners to actively work to prevent homelessness alongside councils,

just to refer households thought to be at risk.<sup>37</sup> This means opportunities are probably being missed to identify people at risk of homelessness - particularly through cross-agency data sharing - and provide effective, integrated support to those people at an early stage.

## SECONDARY PREVENTION

Of all of the levels of prevention, secondary prevention for those at immediate risk of homelessness has had the greatest policy emphasis in recent years and is the focus of much local delivery and public investment.

This is partially because prevention activities are underpinned in England by legislation which entitles people to support to prevent homelessness likely to occur within a foreseeable period.

Internationally, England has comparatively strong legislative duties on local authorities to prevent homelessness, having had a form of prevention duty in place since the 1970s. The main legislation covering these duties is the Housing (Homelessness Persons) Act 1977, the Housing Act 1996, the Homelessness Act 2002, and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.<sup>38,39,40,41</sup> The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) is particularly significant as it required local authority to intervene earlier to prevent homelessness for anyone who is eligible for assistance and is considered at risk of homelessness within the next 56 days. The Act also made earlier support available to a broader group of people, including people not assessed as having 'priority need'.<sup>42</sup>

31 Please, N. *Preventing Homelessness : A review of the International evidence*. The University of York, April 2019. Available at: <https://www.york.ac.uk/media/chp/images-general/Preventing%20Homelessness%20-%20A%20Review%20of%20International%20Evidence.pdf> [accessed 30/06/2023]

32 Centre for Homelessness Impact. *Institutional Discharge*. Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2022. Available at: [https://assets-global.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/63219914cb514018f2b5f6e8\\_WWC%20Evidence%20in%20Practice\\_%20Institutional%20Discharge.pdf](https://assets-global.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/63219914cb514018f2b5f6e8_WWC%20Evidence%20in%20Practice_%20Institutional%20Discharge.pdf). [accessed 30/06/2023]

33 Centre for Homelessness Impact. *Institutional Discharge*. Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2022. Available at: [https://assets-global.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/63219914cb514018f2b5f6e8\\_WWC%20Evidence%20in%20Practice\\_%20Institutional%20Discharge.pdf](https://assets-global.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/63219914cb514018f2b5f6e8_WWC%20Evidence%20in%20Practice_%20Institutional%20Discharge.pdf). [accessed 30/06/2023]

34 Fitzpatrick, S, Mackie, P and Wood, J. *Homelessness Prevention in the UK: Policy Brief*. UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence, July 2019. Available at: <https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Homelessness-Prevention-in-the-UK-Policy-Brief-July-2019-final.pdf> [accessed 30/06/2023]

35 DLUHC. *Ending Rough Sleeping for Good*. DLUHC, September 2022. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1102408/20220903\\_Ending\\_rough\\_sleeping\\_for\\_good.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1102408/20220903_Ending_rough_sleeping_for_good.pdf) [accessed 30/06/2023]

36 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. *A Guide to the Duty to Refer*. GOV.UK, September 2018. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homelessness-duty-to-refer/a-guide-to-the-duty-to-refer> [accessed 30/06/2023]

37 Local Government Association. *Re-thinking homelessness prevention*. LGA, Dec 2020. Available at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/re-thinking-homelessness-prevention> [accessed 30/06/2023]

38 *Housing (Homelessness Persons) Act 1977*. Legislation.gov.uk, 1977. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1977/48/contents/enacted> [accessed 11/07/2023]

39 *Housing Act 1996*. Legislation.gov.uk, 1996. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/52/contents> [accessed 11/07/2023]

40 *Homelessness Act 2002*. Legislation.gov.uk, 2002. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/7/contents> [accessed 11/07/2023]

41 *Homelessness Reduction Act 2017*. Legislation.gov.uk, 2017. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/13/contents/enacted> [accessed 11/07/2023]

42 Local Government Association. *Re-thinking homelessness prevention*. LGA, Dec 2020. Available at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/re-thinking-homelessness-prevention> [accessed 30/06/2023]



Given this legislative emphasis on secondary intervention as the mainstay of the prevention response to homelessness, it is welcome that many interventions already in use in England show signs of effectiveness.<sup>43</sup> However, it is vital that interventions are well-evidenced and reliably impactful to maximise the effectiveness of available resources and create the headroom to move efforts upstream wherever possible. In terms of what measures are most effective for preventing homelessness at the point of crisis, the evidence suggests the following:

- Timely financial assistance and more comprehensive interventions that provide a range of financial assistance, counselling, and legal support can prevent homelessness among families at risk of losing their homes, such as systems for preventing eviction by negotiation/working with landlords.
- Systems to ensure an unwanted move does not result in homelessness by ensuring alternative housing is in place, such as following the end of an assured tenancy where the landlord is seeking repossession but the household does not wish to move.
- Housing rights services where the risks of homelessness arise from illegal or inappropriate action by lenders or landlords.
- Rapid rehousing systems for when homelessness cannot be prevented or individuals or families present too late for assistance to be practical.<sup>44</sup>

It is positive that these interventions are already commonly used in England. However, the relative impact and cost effectiveness of different responses in different contexts haven't been rigorously tested, partially due to a lack of granular impact data. Significant variations both in local housing needs and the way prevention activities are structured and delivered between local areas also mean that

approaches that work in one area or population are not certain to be effective in others, making it important to understand what works in specific contexts so that local authorities have a reliable portfolio to draw on.<sup>45</sup>

This could help explain why available statistics suggest limitations in the success of prevention efforts of this kind. In 2021-22, only just over half of the households threatened with imminent homelessness and owed a prevention duty were supported to secure accommodation for 6 months or more and were deemed no longer threatened with homelessness.<sup>46</sup>

At the same time, despite expansions in eligibility under the Homelessness Reduction Act, some groups still struggle to access this kind of support due to restrictions on eligibility (e.g. immigration status, lack of local connection). One study of the implementation of the Act found that 17% of people approaching their local authority received no support, advice or assessment.<sup>47</sup>

This variability in the effectiveness and availability of support for households at risk of homelessness may help explain why a substantial share of funding for homelessness is currently spent supporting people whose homelessness could not be prevented and are in need of emergency support and rehousing.

This can be seen in the ongoing increases in the numbers of households who are homeless and living in temporary accommodation, which exceeded 101,000 households in December 2022, at a total annual cost of £1.6 billion.<sup>48,49</sup> Data from 2022 also shows that stays in Temporary Accommodation are often long. The most common length of time for households with children in England to be in temporary accommodation was from 2 to 5 years while over a fifth of households with children were in temporary accommodation for more than five years.<sup>50</sup>

43 Centre for Homelessness Impact. *What Works Evidence Notes Prevention*. Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2021. Available at: [https://assets-global.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/61a5fcbfdb6e3b634905254b\\_CHI.WWC.EvidenceNote.Prevention.pdf](https://assets-global.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/61a5fcbfdb6e3b634905254b_CHI.WWC.EvidenceNote.Prevention.pdf) [accessed 30/06/2023]

44 Please, N. *Preventing Homelessness: A review of the International evidence*. The University of York, April 2019. Available at: <https://www.york.ac.uk/media/chp/images-general/Preventing%20Homelessness%20-%20A%20Review%20of%20International%20Evidence.pdf> [accessed 30/06/2023]

45 Centre for Homelessness Impact. *What Works Evidence Notes Prevention*. Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2021. Available at: [https://assets-global.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/61a5fcbfdb6e3b634905254b\\_CHI.WWC.EvidenceNote.Prevention.pdf](https://assets-global.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/61a5fcbfdb6e3b634905254b_CHI.WWC.EvidenceNote.Prevention.pdf) [accessed 30/06/2023]

46 DLUHC. *Statutory Homelessness Annual Report 2021-22*. September 2022. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1105577/Annual\\_Statutory\\_Homelessness\\_release\\_2021-22.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1105577/Annual_Statutory_Homelessness_release_2021-22.pdf) [accessed 30/06/23]

47 Crisis. *Research into the Homelessness Reduction Act*. Crisis, May 2022. Available at: <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/services-and-interventions/research-into-the-homelessness-reduction-act/> [accessed 30/06/2023]

48 DLUHC. *Statutory homelessness in England: October to December 2022*. GOV.UK, May 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-october-to-december-2022> [accessed 30/06/2023]

49 DLUHC. *Local authority revenue expenditure and financing England: 2021 to 2022 final outturn (Revised)*. GOV.UK, March 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing-england-2021-to-2022-final-outturn/local-authority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing-england-2021-to-2022-final-outturn#local-authority-expenditure> [accessed 30/06/2023]

50 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. *Statutory Homelessness Annual Report 2021-22*. September 2022. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1105577/Annual\\_Statutory\\_Homelessness\\_release\\_2021-22.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1105577/Annual_Statutory_Homelessness_release_2021-22.pdf) [accessed 30/06/23]

## TERTIARY PREVENTION

Tertiary prevention intervenes when homelessness has already occurred, and the goal is to avoid recurrent episodes.

Unlike Scotland and some other nations such as the US, England does not routinely publish national statistics on repeat homelessness which makes assessing the effectiveness of efforts to prevent recurrence challenging.<sup>51</sup>

However, data from the London-wide CHAIN (Combined Homelessness and Information Network) database includes data on people seen sleeping rough in consecutive years ('stock') and those returning to rough sleeping who have been seen in prior years ('returners') and highlights that more than a third (37%) of people seen sleeping rough in London in 2022/23 had been seen in previous years.<sup>52</sup>

Research from 2019 found that interventions that fall into the tertiary prevention space received the least focus at the local level.<sup>53</sup> Before 2010, these were primarily funded by Supporting People, a large multipurpose ringfenced grant for housing-related support services for disadvantaged and vulnerable people. From 2009, this funding was reduced and unringfenced. Spending on Supporting People fell from £1.28 billion net local authority expenditure in 2010/11 to £294m in 2021/22, with wider cuts to local authority funding creating pressure on councils to spend money in other areas and resulting in reduced investment in housing-related support services.<sup>54</sup>

More recently, however, greater emphasis has been placed on tertiary prevention, at least for rough sleeping. The 2022 Ending Rough Sleeping for Good strategy included recovery prevention as one of its four main themes while in 2020, the UK government introduced the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme which aims to provide 6,000 homes for people with histories of rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping between 2021-2024, and has recently been expanded in scope to the Single Homeless Accommodation Programme.<sup>55</sup> Further, several regional Housing First pilots were introduced

in England to support homeless people with multiple and complex needs to access and maintain independent housing.<sup>56</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this brief overview highlights some important limitations with current homelessness prevention in England, along with a number of areas where there may be opportunities to go further within existing systems.

We highlight that central government strategies have focussed primarily on crisis management (such as responding to rough sleeping), with limited consideration of primary prevention at the national level, and that well-established systems such as housing benefit could play a greater role in preventing homelessness at the population level. At the local level, despite efforts to move prevention upstream and strong legislation, ongoing service pressures have hindered the prioritisation of upstream measures and limited evidence on the effectiveness of interventions means there may be opportunities for existing legislation and practice to have greater impact. Finally, sustainable move-on options for those in supported accommodation remains a significant challenge in need of evidenced solutions.

51 Mackie, P and Thomas, I. Measuring Repeat Homelessness. ADR, July 2020. Available at: <https://www.adruk.org/fileadmin/uploads/adruk/Documents/Data-Insights-Measuring-Repeat-Homelessness.pdf> [accessed 10/07/23].

52 Greater London Authority. CHAIN ANNUAL REPORT GREATER LONDON APRIL 2022 - MARCH 2023. GLA, 2023. Available at: <https://data.london.gov.uk/download/chain-reports/6ee424a2-e7e0-4ad3-9622-e225276940cd/Greater%20London%20full%202022-23.pdf> [accessed 10/07/2023]

53 Local Government Association. *Re-thinking homelessness prevention*. LGA, Dec 2020. Available at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/re-thinking-homelessness-prevention> [accessed 30/06/2023]

54 WPI Economics. *Local authority spending on homelessness: understanding recent trends and their impact*. WPI, April 2019 Available at: <https://wpieconomics.com/local-authority-spending-homelessness-understanding-recent-trends-impact/> [accessed 30/06/2023]

55 DLUHC. *Ending Rough Sleeping for Good*. DLUHC, September 2022. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1102408/20220903\\_Ending\\_rough\\_sleeping\\_for\\_good.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1102408/20220903_Ending_rough_sleeping_for_good.pdf) [accessed 30/06/2023]

56 DLUHC. *Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots Third Process Report*. GOV.UK, September 2022. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1102005/Housing\\_First\\_Evaluation\\_Third\\_process\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1102005/Housing_First_Evaluation_Third_process_report.pdf) [30/06/2023]

# SECTION 2

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR A MORE EFFECTIVE APPROACH TO PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS IN ENGLAND

Building on the above discussion of current primary, secondary and tertiary prevention efforts above and the available evidence, this section explores some opportunities for more effective homelessness prevention efforts in England and where future policy and practice could focus.

## PRIMARY PREVENTION

### 1. Introducing a common vision for preventing homelessness, underpinned by a robust data-led framework to coordinate, drive and assess progress.

Homelessness strategies have often focussed on crisis responses which help, but have not so far created sustainable change. A common vision of preventing homelessness, matched with suitable

data to understand whether efforts are working, could be an important step towards changing this.

There has recently been increasing appetite and momentum for such an approach, with local areas such as London, Manchester and the West Midlands collaborating with the Centre for Homelessness Impact to trailblaze the first data-driven definition of ending rough sleeping which foregrounds prevention, which has now been rolled out nationally. This model offers insight for the first time into opportunities for better prevention of rough sleeping by, for example, capturing data on the number of people sleeping rough after leaving institutions.<sup>57</sup>

There is an opportunity to build on this progress, learning from similar approaches developed in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland with the support of the Centre for Homelessness Impact,<sup>58,59</sup>

57 Centre for Homelessness Impact. *New data points the way to ending rough sleeping for good*. Available at: <https://www.homelessnessimpact.org/post/new-data-points-the-way-to-ending-rough-sleeping-for-good> [accessed 30/06/2023]

58 Welsh Government. *Ending Homelessness Outcomes Framework*. Welsh Government, 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/ending-homelessness-outcomes-framework> [accessed 30/06/2023]

59 Scottish Government. *Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group: final report and recommendations*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/temporary-accommodation-task-finish-group-final-report-recommendations/> [accessed 30/06/2023]



<sup>60</sup> and introduce a clear definition of ending homelessness in England:

*Homelessness is prevented wherever possible and, where it cannot be prevented, is a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience in every community.*

Underpinning this definition with robust data-led indicators on prevention will offer better insight into primary, secondary and tertiary prevention efforts; for example, the Welsh government's draft Ending Homelessness Outcomes Framework seeks to introduce indicators on access to health and social care, labour market participation, poverty and household breakdown.<sup>61</sup>

This could drive a more data-led approach that can learn from success, rapidly scope and tackle barriers, and more easily identify and scale effective prevention interventions in areas where data is currently limited, such as on repeat homelessness. It would also bring all of the UK nations under a unified definition of ending homelessness, enabling better learning and cross-UK collaboration.

## **2. Considering ways to better leverage housing benefit spending to support prevention of homelessness.**

Retaining and improving the link between Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates and rents in the private rented sector could help more individuals stay in their home.<sup>62</sup> Further, given the substantial size of housing benefit spending which reached £30.3 billion in 2021-22, opportunities to maximise the value for money of existing spending in preventing and driving recovery from homelessness could be considered.<sup>63</sup>

Efforts to move households out of expensive temporary accommodation and into 'settled' Private Rented Sector accommodation with support could

produce savings of up to £500 million over a 5-year period.<sup>64</sup> More specifically, demonstration projects could test the relative effectiveness of smaller adjustments to the benefits system to prevent homelessness amongst those most at risk. These could include one-off cash transfers for groups at particular risk of street homelessness (e.g. prison leavers), targeted additional welfare benefits for those with high support needs, loosening of sanctions and conditionality requirements and various approaches to maximising benefits uptake.<sup>65</sup>

Expanding existing exemptions to the less generous single room Local Housing Allowance rate could also be a targeted way to improve prevention outcomes. These are currently in place for some homeless households (e.g. those who have been in a hostel for 3 months) and could be expanded to those at risk of or recovering from statutory homelessness. This could operate in a similar way to the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme in place in the Republic of Ireland which gives local authorities discretion to offer more generous Housing Assistance Payments for homeless households to source accommodation.<sup>66</sup>

## **3. Reducing risk of homelessness among renters by closely monitoring the implementation and impact of reforms to the private rented sector and expanding efforts to minimise homelessness amongst those living in social housing.**

Some elements of the Renters Reform Bill are a positive step forward for increasing tenancy security, particularly the abolition of Section 21 evictions which allowed landlords to evict without specific grounds. However, gaps around enforcement and the introduction of new mandatory grounds for landlords to evict means private renters are likely to remain at greater risk of homelessness than owner occupiers or social tenants. Further, local authorities currently have limited resources to enforce standards

<sup>60</sup> Northern Ireland Government. *Ending Homelessness Together Homelessness Strategy 2022-2027*. Northern Ireland Government, 2022. Available at: <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getattachment/73313718-aa0e-4aae-b122-6573dcab88c7/Ending-Homelessness-Together-Homelessness-Strategy-2022-27.pdf> [accessed 30/06/2023]

<sup>61</sup> Welsh Government. *Ending Homelessness Outcomes Framework*. Welsh Government, 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/ending-homelessness-outcomes-framework> [accessed 30/06/2023]

<sup>62</sup> Centre for Homelessness Impact. *Money spent on housing support could be used more effectively, new joint report*. CHI, October 2021. Available at: <https://www.homelessnessimpact.org/post/money-spent-on-housing-support-could-be-used-more-effectively-new-joint-report-finds> [accessed 30/06/2023]

<sup>63</sup> Pery, J and Lister, S. *Housing for people on low incomes – how do we make the best use of government subsidies in England?* The Centre for Homelessness Impact and Chartered Institute of Housing, October 2021. Available at: [https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/616952c88499426e7d779606\\_Centre%20for%20Homelessness%20Impact%20and%20Chartered%20Institute%20of%20Housing%20Policy%20paper.pdf](https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/616952c88499426e7d779606_Centre%20for%20Homelessness%20Impact%20and%20Chartered%20Institute%20of%20Housing%20Policy%20paper.pdf) [accessed 30/06/2023]

<sup>64</sup> Centre for Homelessness Impact. *Money spent on housing support could be used more effectively, new joint report*. CHI, October 2021. Available at: <https://www.homelessnessimpact.org/post/money-spent-on-housing-support-could-be-used-more-effectively-new-joint-report-finds> [accessed 30/06/2023]

<sup>65</sup> Centre for Homelessness Impact. *What Works Evidence Notes - Welfare and Single Homelessness*. CHI, December 2021. Available at: [https://assets-global.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/61ad3266f5ee1c4b73b5e7e0\\_CHI\\_WWC\\_EvidenceNote\\_Welfare.pdf](https://assets-global.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/61ad3266f5ee1c4b73b5e7e0_CHI_WWC_EvidenceNote_Welfare.pdf) [accessed 30/06/2023]

<sup>66</sup> Citizens Information. *Housing Assistance Payments*. Citizens Information, May 2023. Available at: <https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/housing/renting-a-home/housing-assistance-payment/> [accessed 03/07/2023]

and tenants' rights, which may limit the effectiveness of legal protections and standards in practice.

There is an opportunity to maximise opportunities for preventing homelessness amongst private renters by monitoring the effectiveness of the local implementation of the Renters Reform Bill, the impact it has on homelessness, and the extent to which local authorities are able to enforce legal protections in practice. For example, if the data suggest limited improvements in protection from homelessness for private renters due to frequent use by landlords of mandatory possession ground to evict sitting tenants and subsequently re-let, potential adaptations might include increasing the period in which landlords cannot re-let their properties following the use of a mandatory grounds for repossession from 3 months to one year.<sup>67</sup>

While private renters are at highest risk of homelessness, there are opportunities for local areas to further strengthen prevention for households living in social or supported housing. Local councils might consider trialling 'no eviction' policies in social and supported housing, and work with local partners to achieve this. For example, in 2013, Newcastle City Council introduced its Active Inclusion Newcastle approach, bringing together 130 local partners into a single coordinated service to identify and respond to risk of homelessness, and saw zero evictions from a possible 27,000 social housing tenancies in 2020 and 2021.<sup>68</sup>

#### **4. Building on promising local practice (e.g. local 'Duty to Prevent' partnerships) to enable local agencies to collaborate and proactively identify and support people at higher risk of becoming homeless earlier.**

Current prevention efforts rely on individuals approaching local authorities to apply for support, which means that opportunities may be missed for upstream intervention. Other public agencies may be able to identify people at risk much earlier and play an active role in preventing homelessness, but the current Duty to Refer does not require agencies to cooperate with local councils to support people at risk of homelessness once they've been referred and does not include some key agencies, such as GPs.

While the existing legislation has limitations, there are good examples of local areas going beyond the legislative requirements to work together to carry out targeted upstream prevention activities. Islington Council for example has introduced a local 'Duty to Prevent', collaborating with a large range of statutory and non-statutory partner services to identify and respond to individuals at risk of homelessness.<sup>69</sup> Areas should also draw on promising practice such as establishing simple protocols to identify individuals at risk (e.g. screening tools for GPs).<sup>70</sup>

Local partners should also explore options to use data-led approaches that proactively identify people at risk and intervene earlier to prevent homelessness. For example, Barking and Dagenham council's Community Solutions service uses administrative data (e.g. council tax) and proactively targets people in financial difficulty, offering immediate support to prevent homelessness amongst those with housing issues which has helped improve prevention outcomes and save money on temporary accommodation.<sup>71</sup>

## **SECONDARY PREVENTION**

### **1. Identifying, testing and scaling the most effective prevention interventions for those at imminent risk of homelessness to maximise the potential of existing legislation and investment in prevention and close the 'implementation gap'.**

England has strong legislation that prevents many households from becoming homeless. There is also good prevention practice in place across the country. However, to close the 'implementation gap' between the full potential of legislation and current practice, local services should be able to draw on a robust portfolio of measures that are tailored to specific drivers of homelessness in their area and the needs of their communities.

67 Citizens Advice. *An end to unfair evictions?* Citizens Advice, June 2023. Available at: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/our-work/policy/policy-research-topics/housing-policy-research/an-end-to-unfair-evictions/> [accessed 03/07/2023]

68 Hancock, E. *ZERO evictions from 27,000 social housing tenancies: How Newcastle is leading the way.* World Habitat, October 2022. Available at: <https://world-habitat.org/news/our-blog/how-newcastle-is-leading-the-way/> [accessed 03/07/2023]

69 Islington Council. *Duty to prevent.* Islington Council. Available at: <https://www.islington.gov.uk/housing/finding-a-home/homelessness/duty-to-prevent-homelessness> [accessed 03/07/2023]

70 Huey, A. *Homelessness and primary care: Problems and solutions.* Royal College of General Practitioners, April 2017. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/17557380231162391> [accessed 03/07/2023]

71 Crisis. *Homelessness prevention by London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.* Crisis, February 2023. Available at: <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/resources-for-practitioners/homelessness-prevention-guide/london-borough-of-barking-and-dagenham/> [accessed 03/07/2023]

Currently, while there are a range of widely adopted practices (e.g. family mediation services, legal advice, rent guarantees) targeting the known drivers of homelessness, these are rarely evaluated which makes it difficult to assess the relative effectiveness of interventions and deploy the right measures in the right context.

For this to change, promising interventions need to be robustly assessed for relative cost and impact and effective approaches must be scaled rapidly. This should both help maximise the impact of current investment and systematically reorient resources to the most promising interventions and drive prevention upstream.<sup>72</sup>

The current government's investment in a £12m 'Test and Learn' programme intended to accelerate the diffusion of both innovation and proven good practice is a welcome step in this direction.<sup>73</sup> This could be developed through a longer-term commitment to investment in learning and evaluation which prioritises assessment and scaling of the most effective prevention interventions.

## 2. Scaling the most promising short-to-medium term 'bridging solutions' to help as many households in temporary accommodation move-on into sustainable housing as possible.

There is no immediate "magic bullet" for significantly improving options for move-on for households in temporary accommodation, with a lack of affordable housing severely constraining local authorities' abilities to source long-term options for households. In the absence of immediately available new affordable supply, bridging solutions that seek wherever possible to help households move-on into sustainable housing as quickly as possible should be considered. There is an opportunity to identify and scale the most promising short-to-medium term responses, drawing on practice by across the UK to do so, such as:

- Reducing 'churn' in repeat placements amongst single households into short-term expensive crisis accommodation including B&Bs through improved case management (e.g. Critical Time Interventions)<sup>74</sup> and housing-led interventions.
- Explore options for "flipping tenancies," as trialled in areas of Scotland and committed to in Northern Ireland's draft Temporary Accommodation strategy - whereby households in temporary housing are offered a permanent tenancy, paired with suitable support as needed.<sup>75, 76</sup>
- Consider trialling 'Prevention at all costs' interventions for families at risk to help them stay where they are as long as possible, as they are most likely to experience long and costly placements, drawing on established tenancy sustainment and rehousing interventions including early mediation, landlord incentives, or emergency cash transfers (e.g. via Discretionary Housing Payments).<sup>77, 78</sup>
- Evaluate well-defined support models aimed at helping households in temporary accommodation sustainably move on to understand what works well for different households with different needs and move-on options.<sup>79</sup>

## TERTIARY PREVENTION

### 1. Introducing a specific goal to prevent repeat homelessness, matched with national data on recurrence and the effectiveness of tertiary interventions.

The evidence tells us that homelessness is often cyclical, with those who experience it earlier in life more likely to experience it in the future. Data from Scotland shows that 5% of households had previously been assessed as homeless in the 12

72 Teixeira, L. What Works: *Research Impact and Homelessness European Journal of Homelessness Winter 2022*. Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2022. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homelessness-and-rough-sleeping/homelessness-and-rough-sleeping-evaluation-html> [accessed 03/07/2023]

73 Teixeira, L. What Works: *Research Impact and Homelessness European Journal of Homelessness Winter 2022*. Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2022. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homelessness-and-rough-sleeping/homelessness-and-rough-sleeping-evaluation-html> [accessed 03/07/2023]

74 Center for the Advancement of Critical Time Intervention. CTI Intervention. Center for the Advancement of Critical Time Intervention. Available at: <https://www.criticaltime.org/cti-model/> [accessed 03/07/2023]

75 Scottish Government. Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group: final report and recommendations. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/temporary-accommodation-task-finish-group-final-report-recommendations/> [accessed 30/06/2023]

76 Northern Ireland Government. Ending Homelessness Together Homelessness Strategy 2022-2027. Northern Ireland Government, 2022. Available at: <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getattachment/73313718-aa0e-4aae-b122-6573dcab88c7/Ending-Homelessness-Together-Homelessness-Strategy-2022-27.pdf> [accessed 30/06/2023]

77 As public data on duration of TA stays by household type in England were not available, this analysis draws on data from Scotland which shows that households with children stayed on average longer in TA than any other household type

78 Green, S, Ferrari, E and Rodriguez-Guzman. Tackling Tenancy Insecurity in the Private Rented Sector What works to prevent homelessness? Centre for Homelessness Impact. Available at: [https://assets-global.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/626bb415605bc8645523cc37\\_CHI.Tackling-tenancy-insecurity.pdf](https://assets-global.website-files.com/59f07e67422cdf0001904c14/626bb415605bc8645523cc37_CHI.Tackling-tenancy-insecurity.pdf) [accessed 03/07/2023]

79 Such as the ReSettling' project delivered in Bexley by Kinneara - <http://kinneara.co.uk/resettling/>

months prior to their most recent assessment and 3,844 households (13%) had been in the previous 5 years, with large variations area to area - 9% of homeless households in Glasgow and Inverclyde had previously been assessed as homeless in the 12 months prior, compared to 0% in East Dunbartonshire.<sup>80</sup>

However, England does not currently monitor rates of repeat homelessness or give specific policy emphasis to preventing the recurrence of statutory homelessness.

There is an opportunity to introduce a specific goal and supporting data on preventing repeat homelessness, building on and widening the government's recent Ending Rough Sleeping For Good Strategy which gave emphasis to 'recovery' prevention amongst people who have slept rough and, importantly, pledged to introduce new data on the effectiveness of measures to prevent recurrence by tracking the numbers of people experiencing repeat and long-term rough sleeping.<sup>81</sup> Such a commitment could draw on learning from Scotland, which has seen repeat homelessness reduce since 2015, and the Welsh government's draft Ending Homelessness Outcomes Framework which sets out a goal to end repeat homelessness supported by indicators to track effort on rates of repeat homelessness and the success of tertiary interventions such as rehousing and tenancy sustainment.<sup>82</sup>

## **2. Targeting and tailoring expansion of accommodation with support such as Housing First, floating support services, and specialist accommodation to local population needs to help individuals recover from homelessness.**

Recent investments in additional accommodation with support to help individuals move into and sustain permanent housing such as the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme are a positive step, but estimates of need are higher and vary significantly from area to area.<sup>83</sup>

To maximise the opportunities to help households recover from homelessness within limited resources, local areas should be able to draw on the evidence

on the range of accommodation and support models and use data on local population needs to ensure that options suitable for people with differing levels of support needs are available, ranging from light-touch resettlement support to specialist longer-term supported accommodation.<sup>84</sup>

For example, Housing First provision offers individuals with the highest support needs and experience of chronic homelessness secure and settled accommodation, and then addresses their individual support needs (for example, alcohol dependence and physical/mental health problems) at a relatively high cost per head. The support it provides is open-ended, unlike other housing-led approaches where support is often time-limited and 'treatment-first'.<sup>85</sup> Targeting expansion of HF provision to large metro areas and those with the highest levels of need, alongside other less intensive options, could help make the best use of investment in supporting individuals with the greatest needs to sustainably recover from homelessness.

80 Scottish Government. *Homelessness in Scotland: 2021/22*. Scot.Gov, August 2022. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-scotland-2021-22/pages/7/> [accessed 11/07/23]

81 DLUHC. *Ending Rough Sleeping for Good*. DLUHC, September 2022. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1102408/20220903\\_Ending\\_rough\\_sleeping\\_for\\_good.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1102408/20220903_Ending_rough_sleeping_for_good.pdf) [accessed 30/06/2023]

82 Scottish Government. *Homelessness in Scotland: 2021/22*. Scot.Gov, August 2022. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-scotland-2021-22/pages/7/> [accessed 11/07/23]

83 DLUHC. *Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme*. GOV.UK, January 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/single-homelessness-accommodation-programme> [accessed 30/06/2023]

84 Teixeira, L. *Accommodation-based programmes for individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness*. Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2020. Available at: <https://www.homelessnessimpact.org/post/systematic-review-on-accommodation> [accessed 03/07/2023]

85 Teixeira, L. *Accommodation-based programmes for individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness*. Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2020. Available at: <https://www.homelessnessimpact.org/post/systematic-review-on-accommodation> [accessed 03/07/2023]

# CONCLUSION

The need for a comprehensive, coordinated and evidence-based approach to homelessness prevention in England is clear. Despite concerted efforts over the years and an increasing focus on prevention, homelessness is increasing, driven by a lack of sustainable solutions and worsened by the current cost of living crisis. To end homelessness for good, it is crucial to focus even more on upstream interventions.

This discussion paper has identified opportunities for more effective prevention across the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. In terms of primary prevention, establishing a common vision supported by robust data-led indicators is essential to creating the foundations that will help reduce the risk of homelessness across the population and prevent it from occurring in the first place.

For secondary prevention, the relative cost and impact of promising interventions for individuals facing imminent homelessness need to be tested and assessed, and effective interventions must be scaled rapidly. This will help close the 'implementation gap' to maximise the potential of existing legislation and efforts to prevent homelessness at this critical stage.

Finally, to address tertiary prevention, specific policy emphasis on preventing repeat homelessness is needed. This must be supported with data which helps us to monitor rates of repeat homelessness in England, building on and widening the government's recent Ending Rough Sleeping For Good Strategy. Further, more targeted and tailored expansion of supported accommodation that is based on the needs of local populations will help to more effectively aid individuals in their recovery and sustain stable housing.

Overall, this discussion paper highlights the importance of an integrated and collaborative approach to homelessness prevention in England and the need for focussed efforts to prevent homelessness at all stages, and identifies areas where national and local governments could seize opportunities to move towards a society where homelessness is prevented wherever possible, and when it does occur, is rare, brief and non-recurring.



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