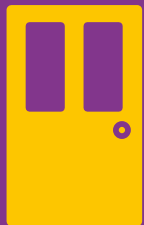


# Home for Good:

The role of social housing in ending rough sleeping



Home  
for  
Good

**St Mungo's**  
Ending homelessness  
Rebuilding lives

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## Executive Summary

**Rough sleeping is the most dangerous form of homelessness. St Mungo's provides support to thousands of people who sleep rough every year across England<sup>1</sup>, and time and time again they tell us how important having the right home – not just any home – is to their recovery.**

For people with a history of rough sleeping, social housing can offer a new start. 94% of St Mungo's client-facing staff say that social housing is the best type of independent move on accommodation for their clients.

94%

of St Mungo's client-facing staff say that social housing is the best type of independent move on accommodation for their clients.

Move on into independence is also an important part of keeping homelessness services working well. If people who are ready to move on are stuck in supported housing and other homelessness services, the whole system can silt up. This means that people who urgently need support to move off the streets may be stuck, unable to get the support they desperately require.

But the right home is becoming increasingly difficult to find.

At its best, social housing is affordable, safe, long term, and allocated on the basis of need. But unfortunately, it has become a more scarce resource and it is now all too often completely unavailable to those with no other options.

To find out more, we spoke to people with a history of rough sleeping about their experiences of trying to move on, analysed government statistics, surveyed St Mungo's staff, and reviewed how local authorities allocate their social housing.

We found that:

**The proportion of single homeless people who move into social housing has decreased dramatically, falling by 44% in 10 years**

- Government statistics show that the overall number of general needs social lettings have decreased by 24% since 2007-08.
- The fall for homeless single people and couples without children has been faster and further than the total fall in general needs social lets, from 31,411 in 2007-08 to 17,482 in 2017-18. This is a fall of 44%.
- In London, the number of people with a history of rough sleeping who have been able to access social tenancies when they move on from homelessness services has also declined. As a proportion of people moving on from this type of temporary accommodation, the number moving into social housing fell from 9.4% to 3.2% between 2010-11 and 2018-19.

**The main reason that people who have slept rough struggle to access social housing is that there simply isn't enough of it**

- Research by Shelter revealed that in 2018 there were 1.15 million households on social housing waiting lists but in the year to June 2018, only 290,000 social homes were newly let.
- This gap is largely the result of not enough new homes being built. In 2017-18 only 6,463 new properties were completed and made available at social rents.
- A consensus is building around evidence that the Government should support the provision of at least 90,000 new social homes in England every year.

<sup>1</sup> This research is focused exclusively on England, and has not reviewed evidence from other UK nations.



**Not enough social homes overall mean local authorities have to ration it. And people who have slept rough are missing out**

- Local authorities ration their social housing by restricting who can 'qualify' to go on to their housing waiting lists. The vast majority have introduced criteria which make it more difficult for many people with a history of rough sleeping to access social housing.
- This often means excluding people who have a history of rent arrears, anti-social behaviour, criminal convictions or who haven't lived in an area for long enough.
- MHCLG data shows that 58% of local authorities in England prevent some people with a history of rent arrears from joining their social housing waiting list. This rises to 66% in the local authorities with the top 50 highest levels of rough sleeping recorded in 2019, and 70% amongst the top ten areas.
- Only 12% of the top 50 areas for rough sleeping have neither a local connection nor residence requirement to access social housing.
- 98% of councils had some form of restriction for people with a history of anti-social behaviour.
- 74% of allocations policies in all areas also had restrictions related to a history of offending or criminal behaviour.
- These restrictions are likely to have a disproportionate impact on people who have slept rough, given their increased rates of conviction, debt and the fact that many people do not sleep rough near areas where they have a local connection. Rent arrears also often build up when a vulnerable person faces a crisis.
- People with these experiences should be offered support, not punitive bans from social housing waiting lists.

**Some local authorities go beyond what is legally required to offer social housing to people who have slept rough – but not many**

- All 326 allocation policies refer to homelessness in some way, but only 28% mention rough sleeping specifically and only 14% of policies regard a history of rough sleeping as a reason to prioritise a housing request.
- 10% of policies have some form of special access scheme for people moving from supported housing (including people who have been homeless) to access social housing. This rises to 14% in the top 50 areas for rough sleeping.

**Troublingly, housing associations can be reluctant to let vulnerable people because not enough support is available**

- The Chartered Institute for Housing (CIH) has found that 71% of social housing providers carry out a pre-tenancy assessment before handing over the keys to a property. Even for those who make it to the top of a social housing waiting list, the promise of a social home may be taken away if they fail these checks.
- The most common reason for these assessments was to check whether the prospective tenant could afford the tenancy (96%), followed by the identification of support needs (87%), a history of rent arrears (87%) and the ability to sustain a tenancy other than affordability (85%). A history of anti-social behaviour was also a common response (84%).
- In focus groups run by the CIH, it was reported that rejection due to unmet support needs following a pre-tenancy check is, unfortunately, a growing issue. Having locally available floating support services would make a difference to these decisions, but opportunities to access support have been restricted by local authority funding cuts.

**Rough sleeping is not inevitable, and neither is the housing crisis. Both can be addressed with the right action from Government**

The Government is currently collecting evidence on how local authorities allocate social housing, and has promised to deliver a White Paper on social housing during this Parliament. This provides a perfect opportunity to address the current under-supply of social housing, and to ensure that local authorities are supporting people with a history of rough sleeping to access the housing they need.

If Government, councils and housing associations, were to introduce the recommendations outlined below it would help ensure that people sleeping rough, or at risk of doing so, can find a home for good, and help the Government to meet its target of ending rough sleeping by 2024.

**Central Government**

- Build 90,000 new social homes a year** – The starting point for any policy which seeks to address access to affordable housing must be to increase the supply of new housing available at social rents. Without this, it is unlikely that housing need in England can be resolved. The Government should commit to building at least 90,000 new social homes in England every year for the next 15 years to meet housing need.
- Invest in homelessness services** – £1 billion less is being spent per year on homelessness services compared to in 2007-08. This funding must be restored so local authorities can plan and deliver support services that prevent and relieve homelessness, including tenancy sustainment services for people who are moving into independent housing.
- Make more social homes available to people who have slept rough** – To achieve its goal of ending rough sleeping in this Parliament, the Government must urgently support the delivery of social homes which are specifically available to people with a history of sleeping rough or homeless people whose multiple needs put them at risk of repeat homelessness.

- Change guidance on allocations policies** – Government guidance currently recommends that local authorities should exclude certain groups from restrictions to accessing social housing e.g. those who are escaping domestic abuse. It also encourages local authorities to have flexibility in their allocations policies, including for people who need to re-engage with their community. We recommend that additional guidance be published which explicitly extends exemptions to people with a history of rough sleeping or people who are at particular risk of rough sleeping, particularly to remove restrictions about local connections and a history of rent arrears. We also recommend that the Government issue new guidance to local authorities which encourages them to retain some of their social housing stock for the delivery of housing-led responses to homelessness, such as Housing First and the Clearing House scheme in London.

**Local authorities and housing associations**

- Implement special access schemes** – All local authorities and housing associations should determine how to implement access schemes which support people with a history of rough sleeping in their local area. This could include a quota of social homes reserved for this group every year, or special agreements with local homelessness services. They should consider how they might support the delivery of new homelessness services, including Housing First and the Clearing House model.
- Improve allocations policies and access pathways** – Where there is evidence that someone has a history of sleeping rough or homelessness, their housing applications should not be automatically blocked by either the local authority or a housing association landlord. Instead, it should be reviewed with the offer of support in mind, with the needs and vulnerabilities of each applicant taken into consideration.

# 2

## Introduction

**In 2018, 726 people died while sleeping rough or in emergency accommodation. The average age of death was only 45 for men. For women it was 43.<sup>2</sup> And the longer someone spends rough sleeping, the harder it is to access support and rebuild their lives away from the streets.**

The Government has recognised that it is unacceptable for people to continue to die on the streets. It has invested in providing emergency support to people who are sleeping rough, through the Rough Sleeping Initiative and other pilots and projects outlined in the 2018 Rough Sleeping Strategy. More recently, since the 2019 General Election, the Government has made a renewed commitment to end rough sleeping by 2024.

Yet, in 2019, 4,266 people were recorded as sleeping rough in England on a single night – this is an increase of 141% since 2010 when the currently methodology was introduced.

### 4,266

In 2019, 4,266 people were recorded as sleeping rough in England on a single night.



St Mungo's provides services and accommodation to thousands of people who have experienced rough sleeping every year. Time and again, our clients tell us how important having the right home – not just any home – is to their recovery from homelessness.

But they also tell us that housing has become increasingly difficult to access. Spiralling housing costs, increasing insecurity for private renters and cuts to homelessness services which support people to find and keep a home have led to the dramatic increase in rough sleeping which is visible across England today. These factors also prevent people from moving on from homelessness services.

Social housing should provide safe, affordable and secure homes for people who are in the most urgent housing need, but the rate of social house building has slowed dramatically in recent years. As a result the number of new lettings has rapidly declined. All too often, social housing is completely unavailable to those with no other options – because there isn't enough of it for everyone who needs it.

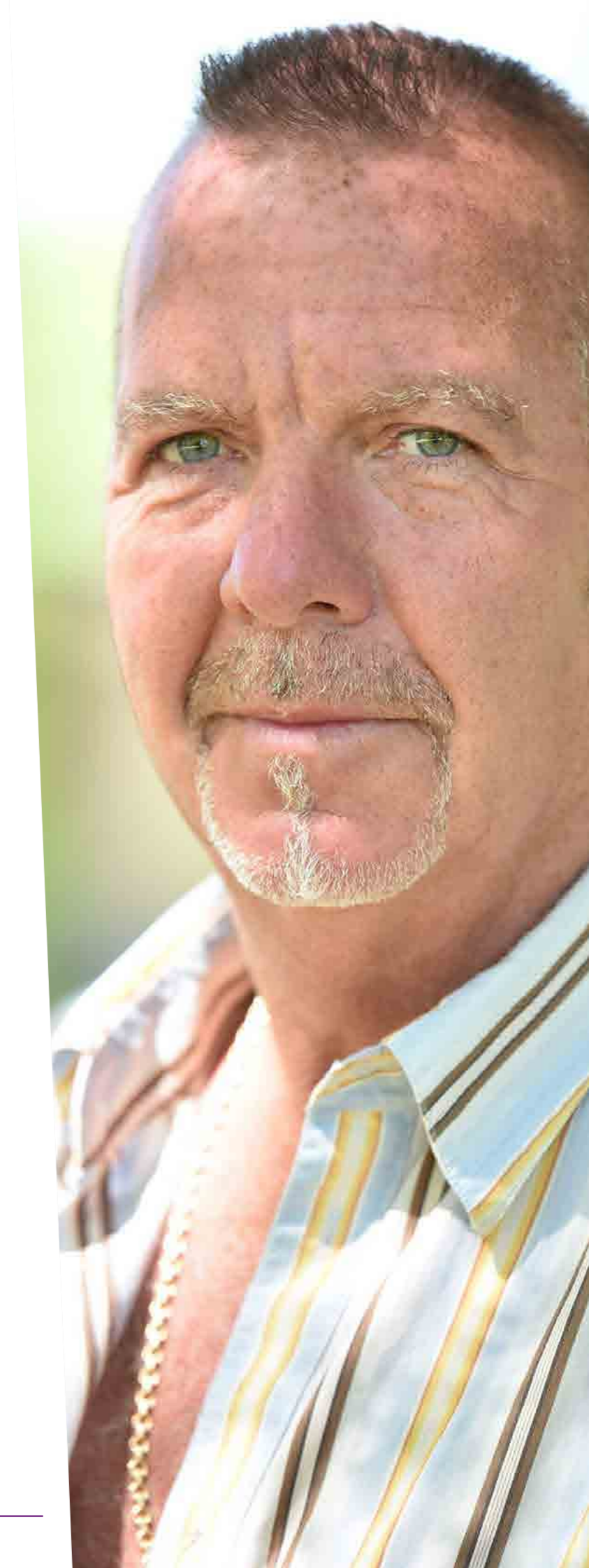
To find out more, St Mungo's decided to investigate the experiences of people who have slept rough, and gone on to try and access social housing. We have interviewed clients of St Mungo's, surveyed our frontline staff, and analysed published data including CHAIN to learn more about how people access social housing.

We have also reviewed the social housing allocation policy of every local authority in England to determine how likely people with a history of rough sleeping are to access social housing in these areas.

The Rough Sleeping Strategy was a crucial first step in addressing the growing problem of people living – and dying – on the streets in England. However, if the Government is to fulfil its promise to end rough sleeping within this Parliament, it needs to do much more to put social housing at the heart of its strategy.

The Government is currently carrying out an evidence collection exercise on how local authorities implement their individual social housing allocation policies, and has committed to a White Paper on social housing in this Parliament. These pieces of work provide a golden opportunity for the Government to take action, increase the number of social homes being built, and ensure the process for accessing social housing doesn't unfairly, or unnecessarily, penalise people who desperately need to rebuild their lives away from the street.

After all, everyone deserves a home for good.



<sup>2</sup> Office of National Statistics (2018) *Deaths of homeless people in England and Wales: 2018* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsofhomelesspeopleinenglandandwales/2018>



To inform this report, we undertook mixed methods research including analysis of existing published data, as well as new primary qualitative and quantitative research. We sought the experiences of people who have been homeless (with a particular focus on rough sleeping) and are now seeking to move on from homelessness services into their own home, as well as those working in frontline services which support people to move on in this way.

More detail on the individual pieces of research are included below.

### Research methods

#### Staff survey

We carried out a survey of frontline St Mungo's staff, which received 93 responses. We received responses from staff working in outreach, emergency and very short term services, as well as long term supported housing and Housing First. We asked respondents to name the local authority they worked most closely with, and received responses from 34 different local areas. 12 of these areas were outside London, in the South East and South West of England. 19% of respondents worked across more than one local authority area.

#### Client interviews

We also undertook in depth interviews with 32 current St Mungo's clients, who were living in our supported housing, assessment centres or Housing First services. These interviews took place across London, Bristol and Thurrock. 85% of the clients interviewed had experience of rough sleeping, 23% were women and 27% were from BAME communities.

All clients were currently living in homelessness services and receiving support, but were either currently looking for independent move on accommodation or had aspirations of doing so in the near future.

#### Desk based research

St Mungo's collects extensive data on departures from its homelessness services (using Opal, our internal data system), and is also responsible for managing information about the larger group of people with a history of rough sleeping in London recorded on the Greater London Authority's CHAIN (Combined Homelessness and Information Network) database. But there does not seem to have been a previous comparison between the two datasets. For this report we have compared information produced by both systems.

In addition, the research also looked at individual tenancy-level social housing data from the Continuous Record of Social Housing (CORE). This dataset is collated by MHCLG and made available through the [UK Data Service](#).

Data is also held centrally and published by MHCLG, in the Local Authority Housing Statistics data set, on social housing allocations policies and in particular how many apply restrictions based on local connection and residency criteria, and rent arrears. The data used to inform this section of the report was published on 28 January 2020.

We analysed this data, and in order to better understand how local authorities use restrictive criteria, reviewed all 326 local area policies. Most of these were available on local authority websites, but where they were not we approached the local authority directly. In instances where different local authorities share the same allocation policies, an entry was made for each local authority.

We recorded any mention of the following, and related, terms:

- Conviction/criminal behaviour
- Anti-social behaviour
- Rough sleeping/street homeless
- Homeless/Homelessness
- Supported housing/support/move on

We also reviewed when these policies had last been updated.

Finally, we also carried out a short desk-based literature review of publications related to rough sleeping, homelessness and social housing.



# 4

## What is social housing?

Put simply, social housing is accommodation which belongs to a registered housing provider – usually a local authority or housing association – which is then let to a tenant. It is overseen by the Regulator of Social Housing.

But for many residents of social housing it is much more than that. At its best, social rented housing is:

- **Affordable** – social rent levels are controlled by the Government, and set in line with local incomes
- **Secure** – most social tenancies are either life-long or last for several years at least
- **Safe** – social housing is regulated, to ensure that landlords fulfil their responsibilities and provide adequate housing
- **Given to those in need** – social housing is allocated by local authorities and housing associations, based on who is at the top of waiting lists.

However, increasing demand for social housing means it isn't working for everyone who needs it, including for those trying to avoid or escape rough sleeping.

Access to social housing is generally controlled by local authorities.

Every local authority is required to have an allocations policy, and while some local authorities still own their stock of social housing (often referred to as council housing), others have nomination rights which allow them to place people in housing association properties. Housing associations may also place people in their properties through agreements with the local authority. They often have a mixture of housing including homes for social and affordable rents, and shared ownership properties.

# 5

## Why is social housing important to people with a history of sleeping rough?

At St Mungo's, our clients often tell us that they wish to move on into social housing.

Although research suggests that home ownership remains a key aspiration for members of the general public,<sup>3</sup> this remains a far off goal for many. For those who are recovering from homelessness and rough sleeping it is extremely unlikely that their first move into independent accommodation will be into a home they own themselves. Instead, their two most likely options are social housing or the private rented sector.

In the interviews conducted for this report, there was almost unanimous agreement that social housing was the best long term option for people who have slept rough. In our survey of frontline staff, 94% of respondents felt that social housing was the best type of independent move on accommodation for their clients.

In 2016 King's College London published a comprehensive, longitudinal study *Rebuilding Lives* which followed the experiences of people as they moved on from homelessness. Its findings were stark. Participants in the study who were rehoused in the private rented sector **“had much poorer housing outcomes than those who had moved into social housing. They were more likely to have moved several times, and a third had become homeless again.”**<sup>4</sup>

This is understandable. Social housing is often more secure and affordable than other types of rented accommodation and can provide an ideal situation in which to offer people on-going support, or to try out new and innovative methods for supporting people to avoid returning to rough sleeping.

In contrast, tenancies in the private rented sector (PRS) start at just six months long. There is very little security of tenure and rents can go up quickly. Given levels of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) no longer cover the cost of rent,<sup>5</sup> people can only afford properties in the very cheapest parts of the private rented market, where the quality of properties and amenities are often very poor. High rents, insecurity and poor conditions can impact on mental and physical health. If a tenancy comes to an end the person may need to find a deposit and rent in advance to secure a new property, and this creates real risks that vulnerable people will become homeless again.

In this chapter, we explore the experiences of people who move on from homelessness into social housing compared to the private sector, and set out the likely impact that these different tenures will have on their recovery from homelessness.

<sup>3</sup> UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (2018) *The 'frustrated' housing aspirations of generation rent*  
[https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/R2018\\_06\\_01\\_Frustrated\\_Housing\\_Aspirations\\_of\\_Gen\\_Rent.pdf](https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/R2018_06_01_Frustrated_Housing_Aspirations_of_Gen_Rent.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Crane et al., *Rebuilding Lives: Formerly homeless people's experiences of independent living and their longer-term outcomes* (2016)  
<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/scwru/pubs/2016/reports/RebuildingLives2016Report.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Crisis (2019) *Cover the Cost: Restoring Local Housing Allowance rates to prevent homelessness*  
<https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/240986/crisis-cover-the-cost-solutions-report.pdf>



## Stability

Social housing offers people with a history of rough sleeping the chance of a stable home, particularly compared with the PRS – where landlords are currently able to evict tenants without reason.

In our interviews with St Mungo's clients for this research, the greater stability of social housing, when compared to the PRS, was mentioned more frequently than affordability. It is not necessarily that the social sector is seen to offer exceptional security, but the private sector is exceptionally insecure. All of the clients interviewed for this report had experienced homelessness and they often spoke about the trauma inflicted by these experiences, and never wanting to return to them. Many clients explicitly rule out even considering a move to the private sector because they think the risk of eviction and a return to homelessness is too high.

Participants were particularly concerned that if they moved into the PRS, their landlord may choose to sell the property and evict them.

**“My rent was never late, even when he put it up, it was never late... I was a good tenant, you know, I looked after his property, never had a problem with rent or anything of that matter. Then for him to just chuck me out like that, it is frustrating.”**

**St Mungo's client**

Several of our client interviewees had first become homeless when they lost a private tenancy. This is by no means uncommon. The Homelessness Monitor<sup>6</sup> for 2019 found that annual acceptances of statutory homeless households – that is, households that the local authority has a legal duty to house often because their need is deemed to be particularly high – increased by 17,000 between 2009-10 and 2017-18, to 56,600. This increase was in large part due to the number of people who had been made homeless from a private tenancy, which almost quadrupled from fewer than 5,000 cases to over 18,000 in the same period.<sup>7</sup>

This is a common story for people who are sleeping rough. The latest CHAIN figures in London state that 31% of people newly seen sleeping rough reported that they had been evicted or asked to leave their previously settled base, and 34% of all people seen newly sleeping rough had last resided in the PRS.<sup>8</sup>

**“If I had my own council flat, I wouldn't be moving in and out of everywhere.”**

**St Mungo's client**

The *Rebuilding Lives* study also found that where people were rehoused had an impact on their eventual housing outcomes. By the fifth year of the study, 20% of participants originally housed in the PRS were homeless again. That compares to 3% of participants originally housed in local authority tenancies, and 6% in housing association tenancies.<sup>9</sup>



**“It looks like I'm going to end up getting a private rented [property]. I don't really want to go through that again because ... I'm not settled then, am I? I don't know when, from one year or six months, whether or not I'm going to have a roof over my head.”**  
**St Mungo's client**

A lack of housing stability can be a source of anxiety for anyone, but there are specific concerns which often face people who have a history of rough sleeping. Many have health conditions which require long term treatment and support after they have moved on from homelessness services. For example, 50% of people who slept rough in London last year had a mental health support need and 41% had a substance use issue.<sup>10</sup>

Being forced to move home regularly may mean that people have to leave behind services which are providing them with ongoing support, and can put their recovery at risk.

Moving home is also an expense that people with a history of rough sleeping, many of whom rely on welfare payments for their income, can ill afford. As outlined in greater detail below, the PRS is already becoming more expensive and difficult to access for our clients. A new tenancy often requires a large deposit, or upfront rent payments which can be very difficult to save given that welfare rates are set at subsistence levels.

**“I'd rather have [social housing] because it's more long term. With private you're never too sure if ... it's only for six months or a year, so you never, ever – you don't know if you're ever going to be settled, if they want to sell then that's it, you're doomed, really. I don't want to go through all this again, it's too much upheaval.”**  
**St Mungo's client**

Although social tenancies are no longer always for life, they still provide significantly more stability than the PRS. Registered providers can still offer life time tenancies,<sup>11</sup> but the 2011 Localism Act also allows both local authorities and housing associations to offer fixed term or flexible tenancies beginning at two years in length (although five is recommended).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The Homelessness Monitor is an annual, independent report, commissioned by Crisis and funded by Crisis, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and with support from players of People's Postcode Lottery. It analyses the impact of recent economic and policy developments in England on homelessness, and surveys people who work in different parts of the housing sector.

<sup>7</sup> Crisis (2019) *The Homelessness Monitor: England*. <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2019>

<sup>8</sup> CHAIN (2019) *Annual Report Greater London, April 2018 – March 2019* [https://airdrive-secure.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/london/dataset/chain-reports/2019-06-19T08%3A14%3A39/Greater%20London%20full%202018-19.pdf?X-Amz-Algorithm=AWS4-HMAC-SHA256&X-Amz-Credential=AKIAJJDIMAIWZJDIKHA%2F20200203%2Feu-west-1%2Fs3%2Faws4\\_request&X-Amz-Date=20200203T133751Z&X-Amz-Expires=300&X-Amz-Signature=9ad279cc741e4844d0f421ca43c093d5b9767b59a096921bf1a3298ad30cf900&X-Amz-SignedHeaders=host](https://airdrive-secure.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/london/dataset/chain-reports/2019-06-19T08%3A14%3A39/Greater%20London%20full%202018-19.pdf?X-Amz-Algorithm=AWS4-HMAC-SHA256&X-Amz-Credential=AKIAJJDIMAIWZJDIKHA%2F20200203%2Feu-west-1%2Fs3%2Faws4_request&X-Amz-Date=20200203T133751Z&X-Amz-Expires=300&X-Amz-Signature=9ad279cc741e4844d0f421ca43c093d5b9767b59a096921bf1a3298ad30cf900&X-Amz-SignedHeaders=host)

<sup>9</sup> Crane et al., *Rebuilding Lives: Formerly homeless people's experiences of independent living and their longer-term outcomes* (2016) <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/scwru/pubs/2016/reports/RebuildingLives2016Report.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> CHAIN (2019) *Annual Report Greater London, April 2018 – March 2019* [https://airdrive-secure.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/london/dataset/chain-reports/2019-06-19T08%3A14%3A39/Greater%20London%20full%202018-19.pdf?X-Amz-Algorithm=AWS4-HMAC-SHA256&X-Amz-Credential=AKIAJJDIMAIWZJDIKHA%2F20200203%2Feu-west-1%2Fs3%2Faws4\\_request&X-Amz-Date=20200203T133751Z&X-Amz-Expires=300&X-Amz-Signature=9ad279cc741e4844d0f421ca43c093d5b9767b59a096921bf1a3298ad30cf900&X-Amz-SignedHeaders=host](https://airdrive-secure.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/london/dataset/chain-reports/2019-06-19T08%3A14%3A39/Greater%20London%20full%202018-19.pdf?X-Amz-Algorithm=AWS4-HMAC-SHA256&X-Amz-Credential=AKIAJJDIMAIWZJDIKHA%2F20200203%2Feu-west-1%2Fs3%2Faws4_request&X-Amz-Date=20200203T133751Z&X-Amz-Expires=300&X-Amz-Signature=9ad279cc741e4844d0f421ca43c093d5b9767b59a096921bf1a3298ad30cf900&X-Amz-SignedHeaders=host)

<sup>11</sup> As part of the 2016 Housing and Planning Act the Government introduced changes to restrict the use of lifetime tenancies by Local Authorities, but announced in the Social Housing Green Paper (2018) that they had decided not to implement these changes at this time.

<sup>12</sup> Shelter (2012) *Local decisions on tenure reform* [http://england.shelter.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/578109/Local\\_decisions\\_on\\_tenure\\_reform\\_full.pdf](http://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/578109/Local_decisions_on_tenure_reform_full.pdf)

**“I was adamant I wanted council... the security of a council flat. I was willing to wait on the sofa.”**  
**St Mungo’s client**

This is substantially longer than the average assured shorthold tenancy in the PRS, which generally last for 6 – 12 months. Private landlords are also currently able to evict tenants using a section 21 or so called “no-fault” eviction.

The Government recently consulted on changing the terms of private tenancies to remove section 21 evictions, and committed to ending no fault evictions in the Queen’s Speech in December 2019. They have also proposed a new deposit system, which could follow tenants to different properties. If implemented, these recommendations would give tenants significantly more security. But landlords will still be able to evict tenants if they need to sell or move into their property.

## Affordability

The second most frequently cited concern about the PRS in our client interviews related to cost. This was the case in London, but also with clients who were based in Bristol and Thurrock.

**“It’s very expensive, private. I can’t find anything. I’ve had a look and I’ve not seen anything that I can actually even afford.”**  
**St Mungo’s client**

In recent years, the cost of renting a home in the private sector has significantly increased.<sup>13</sup> The proportion of people in the poorest fifth of the working-age population in England who spend more than a third of their income (including Housing Benefit) on housing costs rose from 42% in 1994-95 to 47% in 2017-18. People in the private rented sector are more likely to spend

more than a third of their income on housing than those in any other sector – with 41% of this group reported as spending this much, compared to 27% across all tenures.<sup>14</sup>

This increase in the cost of renting has not been matched by an increase in the support available to people who claim welfare payments to cover part or all of their housing costs.

Local Housing Allowance rates determine the maximum amount that people who live in the PRS can claim from Housing Benefit or Universal Credit to support their housing costs. When first introduced, LHA rates were set at 50% of local market rents (including a lower rate for people under 25 who were assumed to be living in shared accommodation – known as the Shared Accommodation Rate).

However, since 2011 a series of policy changes have reduced the level of LHA rates to the point where most people will struggle to fully cover their rent using Housing Benefit. Initially, LHA rates were cut to 30% of local rents, with caps imposed to limit the highest amounts that people could claim in expensive areas such as London. LHA rates were then pegged to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) measure of inflation rather than any calculation of actual rent costs in 2013. In 2014-15, rates were increased by just 1%, before finally being fully frozen between 2016 and 2020. The Shared Accommodation Rate was also extended to all claimants under 35.<sup>15</sup>

Part of the rationale for these changes was to attempt to reduce rent increases in the PRS. But there is no requirement for landlords to let their properties at LHA levels, and high demand for housing meant that rents continued to rise, outpacing LHA rates and causing an affordability crisis for those on the lowest incomes. In fact, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported that between January 2015 and September 2019 – when LHA rates increased by 1% across the whole period – private rental prices in the UK increased by 8%.<sup>16</sup>

Crisis and the Chartered Institute for Housing carried out research into the impact of underinvestment in LHA rates, which found that 61% of areas across Great Britain were unaffordable in 2018-19 to single people, couples, and small families. 92% were unaffordable to at least one of these household types, and when England alone was assessed, this rose to 97%.<sup>17</sup>

**“With private renting at the moment, the rents they ask for are through the roof.”**  
**St Mungo’s client**

By contrast, social rents have remained consistently affordable for people on low incomes. Social rents are calculated taking into account previous local incomes, average rents and inflation, and increases are controlled by central Government.<sup>18</sup> Between 2016 and 2020 they were reduced by 1% a year.<sup>19</sup> Many residents of social housing have their full rent covered by Housing Benefit, but a further 1.2 million tenants who were not in receipt of Housing Benefit in 2015 were expected to benefit by £700 per year through this reduction.<sup>20</sup> The Government has indicated that increases to social housing rents will be limited to CPI plus 1% for five years from 2020.<sup>21</sup>

**“I’m very insecure and scared about not being able to afford to pay the rent and being homeless. That really bothers me a lot. With the council the rent was lower...it keeps me awake at night...because I don’t have any family or a safety net of money I can fall back on to or anything.”**  
**St Mungo’s client**

It is important to note that registered providers of social housing have not fully welcomed rent reductions, arguing that their reduced income would impact on the development of new social housing.<sup>22</sup> However, it is clear that maintaining rents within levels that can be covered by Housing Benefit, without requiring top-ups from other income, is hugely beneficial to tenants, and homelessness prevention efforts.

Social rents are different to affordable rents, which were introduced by the coalition Government in 2010. Affordable rents are pegged at 80% of average local rent levels and are in no way linked to average incomes. Housing associations are permitted to let properties at these rates, and can convert homes which were previously let at social rents to the higher affordable rent level.

Unfortunately, given the rent increases which have taken place across the UK over the past decade, these properties are in practice often unaffordable for people on low incomes including those who claim welfare – particularly as potential tenants will be at risk of hitting the Benefit Cap. Throughout this report when we refer to the need for an increase in social housing, this means homes that are available at social rents.

<sup>13</sup> Office for National Statistics (2019) *Private Rented Sector:2018* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/ukprivaterentedsector/2018>

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation. *Housing Costs* <https://www.jrf.org.uk/data/housing-costs>

<sup>15</sup> In response to the coronavirus pandemic, the Government restored LHA rates to cover 30% of local rents. However, this is a temporary measure for 12 months to cover the crisis caused by the virus.

<sup>16</sup> Office of National Statistics (2019) *Index of Private Housing Rental Prices, UK: September 2019* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/indexofprivatehousingrentalprices/september2019#uk-private-rental-prices-growth-rate-unchanged>

<sup>17</sup> Crisis (2019) *Cover the Cost: Restoring Local Housing Allowance rates to prevent homelessness* <https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/240986/crisis-cover-the-cost-solutions-report.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> MHCLG (2019) *Policy statement on rents for social housing* [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/781746/Policy\\_Statement.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/781746/Policy_Statement.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> House of Commons Library (2019) *Rent setting: social housing (England)* <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN01090/SN01090.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Hood (2015) *Benefit changes and distributional analysis* [https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/budgets/Budgets%202015/Summer/Hood\\_distributional\\_analysis.pdf](https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/budgets/Budgets%202015/Summer/Hood_distributional_analysis.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> MHCLG (2019) *Rents for social housing from 2020: Government response to the consultation* [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/781243/Consultation\\_Response\\_document\\_-\\_25-02-19.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/781243/Consultation_Response_document_-_25-02-19.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN01090/SN01090.pdf>



## No DSS

Many of the clients interviewed for this report mention their concerns that private landlords are becoming increasingly reluctant to let to people who claim welfare to help pay their rent. These discriminatory policies are often referred to as 'No DSS'.<sup>23</sup>

**"I tried to privately rent again, but just couldn't find a landlord that would accept part-DSS, because I only work part-time, that's really difficult to find."**

**St Mungo's client**

Following campaigning by the housing charity Shelter, there has been significant progress in reducing the number of adverts which state that people who claim welfare cannot rent a property.<sup>24</sup> But landlords are able to choose their tenants and can refuse to let to people who claim welfare to help pay their rent.

Clients from across London and Thurrock mentioned that they had struggled to access PRS properties due to no DSS policies.

Research from Shelter and the National Housing Federation suggests that this is a widespread problem. In a survey of nearly 4,000 private renters carried out in 2018, 30% of those who claimed Housing Benefit had not been able to rent a home due to a 'No DSS' policy in the last five years.<sup>25</sup> Homelessness service users who were surveyed by Crisis reported similar experiences. More than two thirds of those who took part in this research had encountered landlords who were unwilling to let to people who were homeless or in receipt of Housing Benefit.

Even where blanket policies which reject welfare claimants do not exist, landlords often place increased requirements on welfare claimants or people who have experienced homelessness. This may include asking for greater rent deposits, rent paid in advance or a guarantor – when such requests would not be made of other prospective tenants.<sup>26</sup> This was echoed by the St Mungo's clients who were interviewed for this report.

**"If you privately rent, it's a huge deposit, you've got to get a guarantor, everything's impossible. That's why you end up living in a tent."**

**St Mungo's client**

The Residential Landlord's Association surveyed their members on this topic in 2018 and found that the majority of respondents were unwilling to let to people in receipt of Universal Credit (62%) and Housing Benefit (52%).<sup>27</sup>

The problems faced by those who have experienced homelessness and rough sleeping can be even starker than those who claim welfare more broadly, as similar research among private landlords found that only 18% of respondents were willing to let their properties to people who were homeless.<sup>28</sup>

The reluctance from many landlords to let to certain tenants has a variety of causes. Some state that their mortgage agreement prohibits them from letting to welfare claimants, while others cite concerns about stagnating LHA rates, or rule changes under Universal Credit which make it more difficult for landlords to access direct rent payments.<sup>29</sup>

**"We're no different, alright, we may not be working and working class, but we're still humans, we're not a number, we are people. Some people struggle more, you know what I mean?"**

**St Mungo's client**

## Access to support

Another way in which the PRS can fail to provide appropriate homes for people with a history of rough sleeping is the lack of support that is available to tenants in this type of housing.

**"When I get a flat, eventually, if I do, I'd rather get it somewhere in London where I don't know anybody. So I can start afresh, where I've still got the support. Not too far away. But still, where the support worker will still meet up with you."**

**St Mungo's client**

When people with a history of rough sleeping move on into independent housing they may benefit from tenancy sustainment support. These services often work with vulnerable tenants who are at risk of losing their home. They can provide support with paying rent on time, help tenants to claim all of their welfare entitlement, and ensure that they are able to access appropriate care for health conditions.

However, research suggests that people living in the PRS were less likely than those living in social housing to have received on-going support following homelessness.<sup>30</sup>

**"I think that's probably why moving into social housing is a better option because there's... assistance there, if I need it."**

**St Mungo's client**

Housing associations often offer some support to their tenants in social housing. A recent survey of 141 housing associations by the National Housing Federation found that 79% of respondents provided some form of tenancy sustainment support to their tenants.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The term No DSS is used because the Government department responsible for welfare payments used to be called the Department for Social Security, although this has not existed since 2001

<sup>24</sup> Shelter (2018) *Stop DSS Discrimination* <https://blog.shelter.org.uk/2018/11/stop-dss-discrimination-live-blog/>

<sup>25</sup> Shelter (2018) *Stop DSS Discrimination* [https://england.shelter.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/1581687/Stop\\_DSS\\_Discrimination\\_-\\_Ending\\_prejudice\\_against\\_renters\\_on\\_housing\\_benefit.pdf](https://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1581687/Stop_DSS_Discrimination_-_Ending_prejudice_against_renters_on_housing_benefit.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Crisis (2016) *Home: No less will do* [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237168/home\\_no\\_less\\_will\\_do\\_access\\_crisis.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237168/home_no_less_will_do_access_crisis.pdf) <https://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/home-no-less-will-do-prs.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Residential Landlord's Association (2018) *Investigating the impact of welfare reform on private renting* <https://research.rla.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/investigating-effect-welfare-reform-private-renting.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Crisis (2016) *Home: No less will do* [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237168/home\\_no\\_less\\_will\\_do\\_access\\_crisis.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237168/home_no_less_will_do_access_crisis.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>30</sup> Crane et al, *Rebuilding Lives: Formerly homeless people's experiences of independent living and their longer-term outcomes* (2016) <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/scwru/pubs/2016/reports/RebuildingLives2016Report.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> National Housing Federation (2018) *Homelessness Survey: Discussion paper* [http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/pub.housing.org.uk/Homelessness\\_discussion\\_paper.pdf](http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/pub.housing.org.uk/Homelessness_discussion_paper.pdf)

A significant minority provided some form of mental health advice or support (44%), substance use advice or support (37%) or support for ex-offenders (30%). Some will provide this support using funding from the local authority, but many employ tenancy sustainment teams using funding from rental income.

**“I’d rather be in a council [property] because there’s support there as well.”**  
**St Mungo’s client**

The intensity of the support provided by housing associations will vary from organisation to organisation, and more research is needed to determine how comprehensive this support is (particularly as, as is outlined below, some housing associations are becoming increasingly unwilling to let to people with support needs). It is clear, however, that access to similar support is much more difficult in the PRS.

Although access schemes which support people who have a history of homelessness to find tenancies in the PRS do exist, their funding is limited and they often do not provide on-going support.

In the 2017 Autumn Budget, the Government announced a £20mn fund for such schemes, but this included funding for services which only provide initial financial assistance such as a rent or deposit bonds. Other schemes only offer pre-tenancy training and do not have the resources to provide on-going support. Where support is provided, it is largely only available for 12 months.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/757218/PRS\\_Access\\_Fund\\_Bidding\\_Prospectus.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/757218/PRS_Access_Fund_Bidding_Prospectus.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Nicholas Pleace et al (2017) *Using Housing First in Integrated Homelessness Strategies* [https://www.mungos.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ST\\_Mungos\\_HousingFirst\\_Report\\_2018.pdf](https://www.mungos.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ST_Mungos_HousingFirst_Report_2018.pdf)

**“I need support. I don’t need financial support, but I do need support where I can go, ‘Look, I’ve got a bit of a problem, I don’t know what I’m doing,’ and they’ll help me with it.”**

**St Mungo’s client**

## Innovative services

Some people who are recovering from rough sleeping need more intensive support. This might mean living in supported housing for a period of time before moving into independent accommodation, with a step down in the support available. However, increasingly, people with high and on-going support needs are living in their own homes, with wrap around support provided in situ. The most well-known service model which operates in this way is called Housing First.

Housing First services provide intensive support, and follow a set of seven core principles for service delivery.<sup>33</sup> This includes a focus on the human right to housing and choice and control for service users. St Mungo’s is one of the largest providers of Housing First in England, and we use properties in both the PRS and social housing to deliver this type of support.

In our experience, using the PRS to deliver housing-led solutions to homelessness for people with complex support needs is less successful than using social properties. The short term nature of assured shorthold tenancies (ASTs – the type of tenancy most commonly used in the private sector), and the difficulty of sourcing private landlords who are willing to let to our client group can mean that support workers spend significant amounts of time dealing with finding properties, rather than focusing on supporting clients.

By contrast, where social housing is available, we can be more confident that our clients will have the time they need to settle into their new home and community, and focus on their recovery.

In a recent review of Housing First services in Westminster and Brighton, both provided by St Mungo’s, a key difference between the two services was that one (Westminster) was delivered in partnership with a housing association and so had access to social housing (on a very small scale), while the other (Brighton) was not. Access to suitable housing was cited as the principle challenge in delivering the service in Brighton, with one staff member stating *“An average wait for a council property is several years long, which is absolutely not a realistic option for us [and the] privately rented sector is extremely difficult to enter...”*<sup>34</sup>

## People at risk of rough sleeping

While this report focuses on people who are moving on after a period sleeping rough, it is important there should be routes into social housing for people experiencing other forms of homelessness, and who need the stability and affordability it offers. With the introduction of Somewhere Safe to Stay services, currently being piloted under the Rough Sleeping Strategy (2018), we hope to see people receive help before they are forced to sleep rough.

While people in these services may have lower support needs and be able to access the PRS, some will have as much need for social housing as people who sleep rough.

If rough sleeping is to be ended for good, interventions and pathways into stable housing must not require people to have slept rough first before they can access support.

<sup>34</sup> K Jones et al (2019) *Assessing the impact of Housing First in Brighton and Westminster* [https://www.mungos.org/app/uploads/2019/12/St-Mungos-Housing-First-Research\\_December-2019\\_Final.pdf](https://www.mungos.org/app/uploads/2019/12/St-Mungos-Housing-First-Research_December-2019_Final.pdf)

## Improving the PRS

Policy change can ensure that the PRS is more suited to the needs of people who are sleeping rough, or are at risk of doing so.

Many of the interviewees for this report stated that they would prefer to have their rent paid directly to their landlord, and ensuring that welfare payments can cover the true cost of renting in the PRS is of vital importance to people who need support from the welfare system to pay their rent.

St Mungo’s clients often end up on the streets having exhausted their financial resources, and need to claim welfare in order to get back on their feet and re-integrate with society. They are unlikely to be able to access the money needed to pay an increased deposit or rent in advance, and may not have a family member or friend who can act as a guarantor. They have also often reported that the quality of properties which can be afforded at LHA rates is poor.

The Government should address these problems to help end rough sleeping. First and foremost, this means increasing LHA rates to cover the cheapest third of rents in every local area beyond the 12 month period that rates have been increased for in response to the coronavirus pandemic, and legislating to abolish Section 21 ‘no fault’ evictions.

This will make it easier for our clients to access the PRS, reassure landlords and ensure that private tenancies are more stable and secure in the long term.



# 6

## Can people who have slept rough access social housing?

Despite the clear evidence that social housing can provide people with the stability they need to leave rough sleeping behind for good, evidence suggests that people with a history of rough sleeping are struggling to access this type of housing.

### People moving directly from the street

Unfortunately, data on the accommodation outcomes of people who are moving off the streets does not exist across England.

However, data derived from the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) in London does provide insight into how many people are moving directly into social housing from rough sleeping.

In 2018-19, only 0.8% of people who achieved an accommodation outcome directly after sleeping rough moved into a general needs social housing tenancy, let either by a local authority or a registered social landlord. A further 1.5% of people moved into a Clearing House property. Clearing House provides self-contained one-bed or studio flats to people with a history of rough sleeping, alongside floating support, in properties provided by housing associations. More information on this service is provided in Chapter 5.

Many people who are moving on from rough sleeping have support needs, which may be best met through a temporary period spent living in supported accommodation where they will be assigned a key worker and focus on addressing their needs. This is often a crucial first step for many people in rebuilding their lives away from the street.

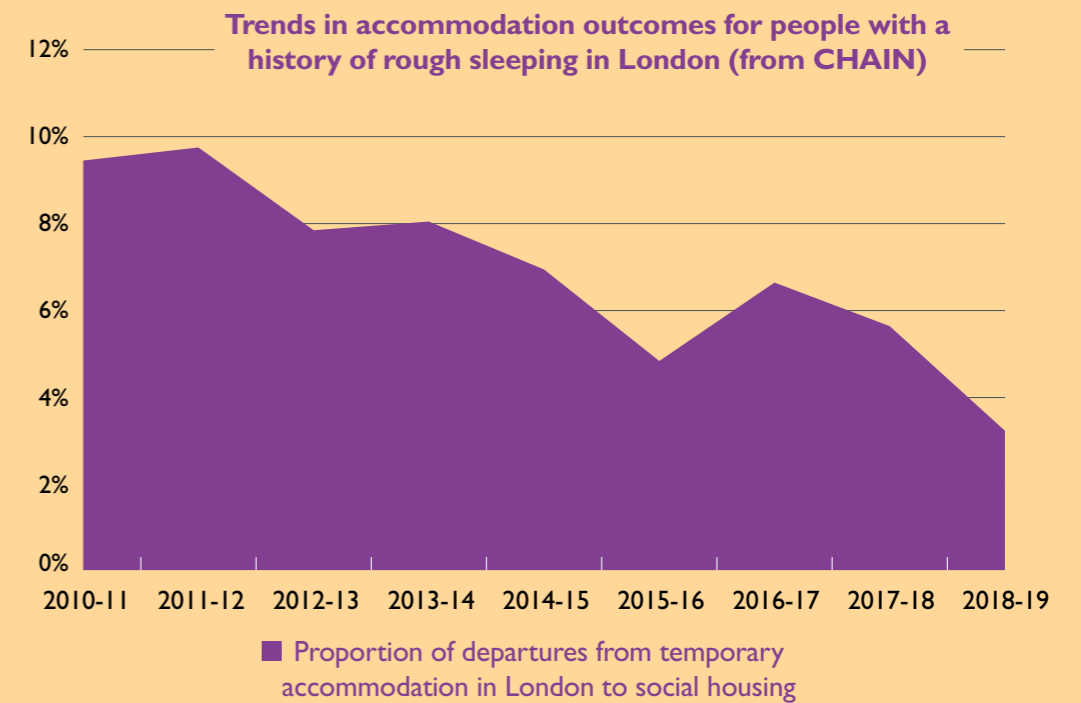
In 2018-19 significantly more people moved directly from the street into the PRS (6.1%) than into social housing. As outlined above, people who move into privately rented homes are significantly more likely to return to homelessness than those who live in social housing, and it is very important to ensure that people who do move into the PRS are able to access support if they need it.

### People moving from short term accommodation

The CHAIN database also collects information on the departure destinations of people who have slept rough in London and are leaving hostels, assessment centres and second-stage accommodation (which is a step up from emergency accommodation – but still basic and temporary). This is referred to as temporary accommodation in the annual CHAIN reports.

This data shows that, over the past decade, the percentage of people with a history of rough sleeping who have been able to access social tenancies when they move on from homelessness services has declined.

As a proportion of people moving on from this type of temporary accommodation, the number moving into social housing fell from 9.4% to 3.2% between 2010-11 and 2018-19.



These figures include moves to Clearing House properties – which are reserved for people who have a history of rough sleeping. When Clearing House homes are removed from the figures, move on into social housing has declined from 4.6% to 0.6%. This means that the proportion of people moving into general needs social housing (which is not reserved for people who have slept rough) from short term homelessness services is now basically identical to the proportion of people going directly from the street. It suggests that there has been a steep decline in the availability of social housing for this very vulnerable group.

The amount of people moving into the PRS from this type of temporary accommodation remained more stable, but also declined from 5.4% in 2010-11 to 4.3% in 2018-19.

Every time a St Mungo's client leaves one of our residential services,<sup>35</sup> information about their departure is recorded on our internal data system, Opal. This allows us to track move on rates and destinations over time.

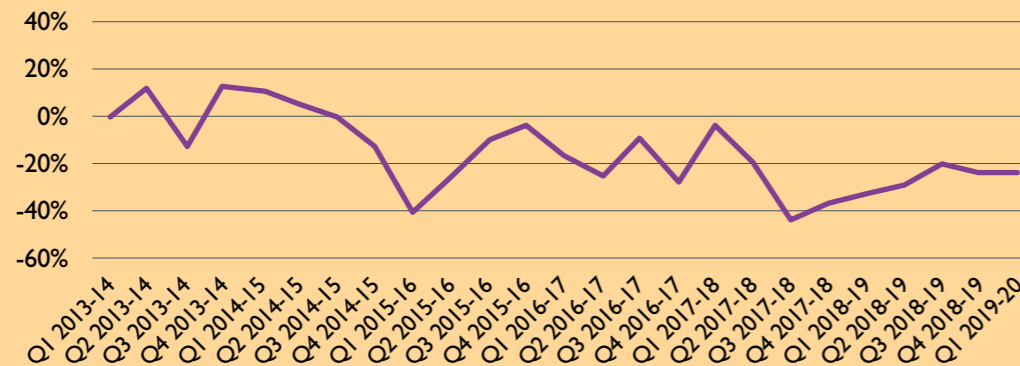
We have analysed the rate at which our clients are moving in to social housing to track how this has changed over time. The departure rate is the number of people moving on from St Mungo's services into social housing, adjusted by the total number of people living in St Mungo's services in the same period. This gives a truer picture of how easy it is to move on from St Mungo's services into social housing once you take into account that the organisation has grown in size.

The rate at which St Mungo's clients are moving on into social housing has fallen by a quarter (25%) – between 2013 and 2019.

<sup>35</sup> For these purposes, residential services include all long-term supported accommodation services as well as Real Lettings. They exclude emergency bedspaces, including No Second Night Out (NSNO) and Somewhere Safe to Stay hubs. NSNO Staging Posts, where clients stay for longer, are included.

**% change in move ons into general needs social housing over time**

(Q1 2013-14 - Q1 2019-20, % of Q1 2013-14 social housing departures per client)

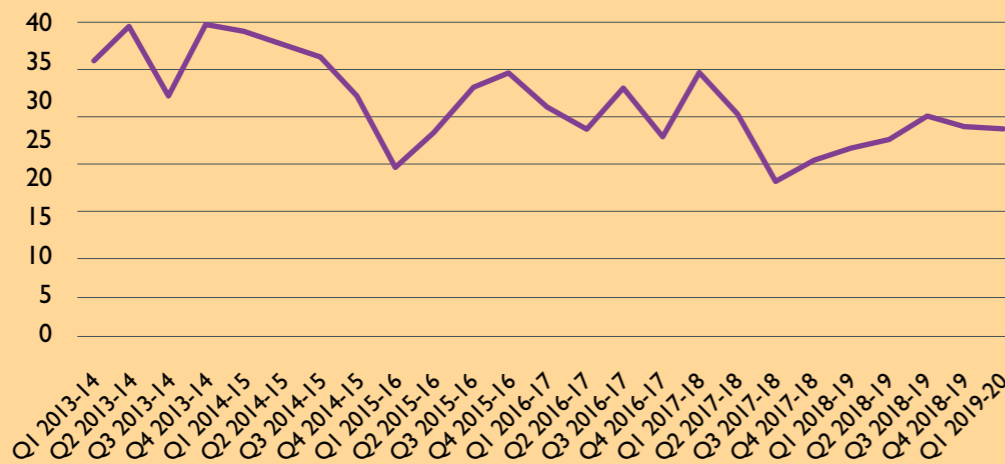


% change in departures from St Mungo's residential services to general needs social housing

In terms of real numbers, this means the rate of departure of clients into general needs social housing has declined from 35/1000 clients to 25/1000 clients in each quarter.

**Move ons into general needs social housing over time**

(Q1 2013-14 - Q1 2019-20, total social housing departures per client)



General needs social housing departures per 1,000 clients per quarter from St Mungo's residential services

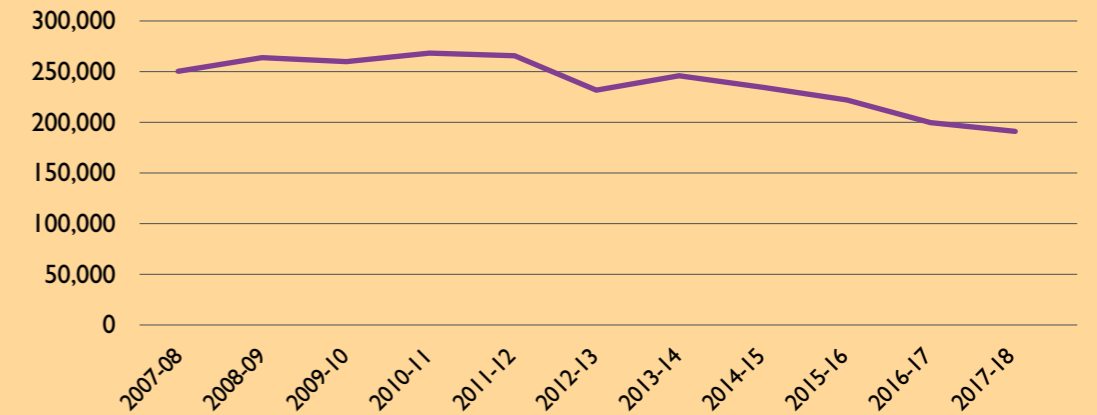
This is in line with a national trend of social housing becoming increasingly inaccessible to homeless people without children.

Data collected by the MHCLG on social lettings (known as the CORE dataset) shows that there has been a substantial decline in the total number of new general needs social lettings, from 251,199 lettings in 2007-08 to 191,255 in 2017-18 – a total fall of around a quarter.<sup>36</sup>

This fall has been concentrated into the second half of the period. The total number of general needs social lettings actually rose slightly between 2007-08 and 2010-11, before falling rapidly afterwards.

**Total general needs social lets in England**

(2007-08 to 2017-18)

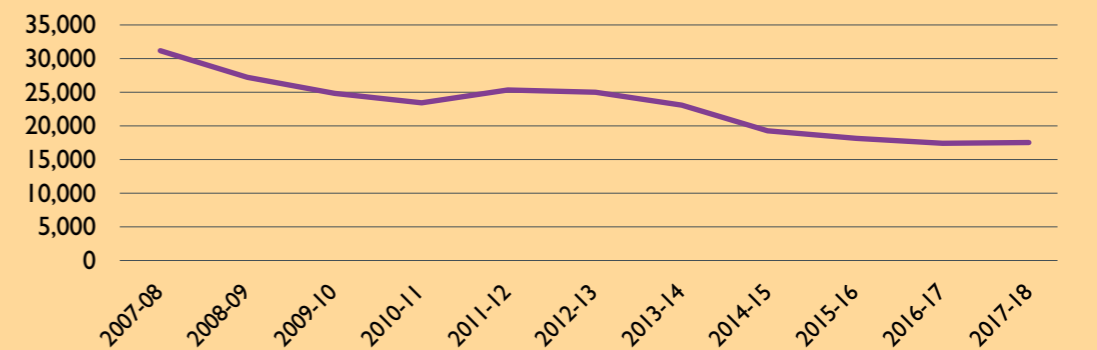


Homeless single people and couples without children have been hit hard by these changes. The decline in lettings to this group has been faster and further than the total fall in general needs social lets. They are also the group most at risk of rough sleeping.

In 2017-18, about 17,500 general needs social lets were to homeless single people or childless couples compared to more than 30,000 in 2007-08.

**Total general needs social lets to homeless single people and couples without children**

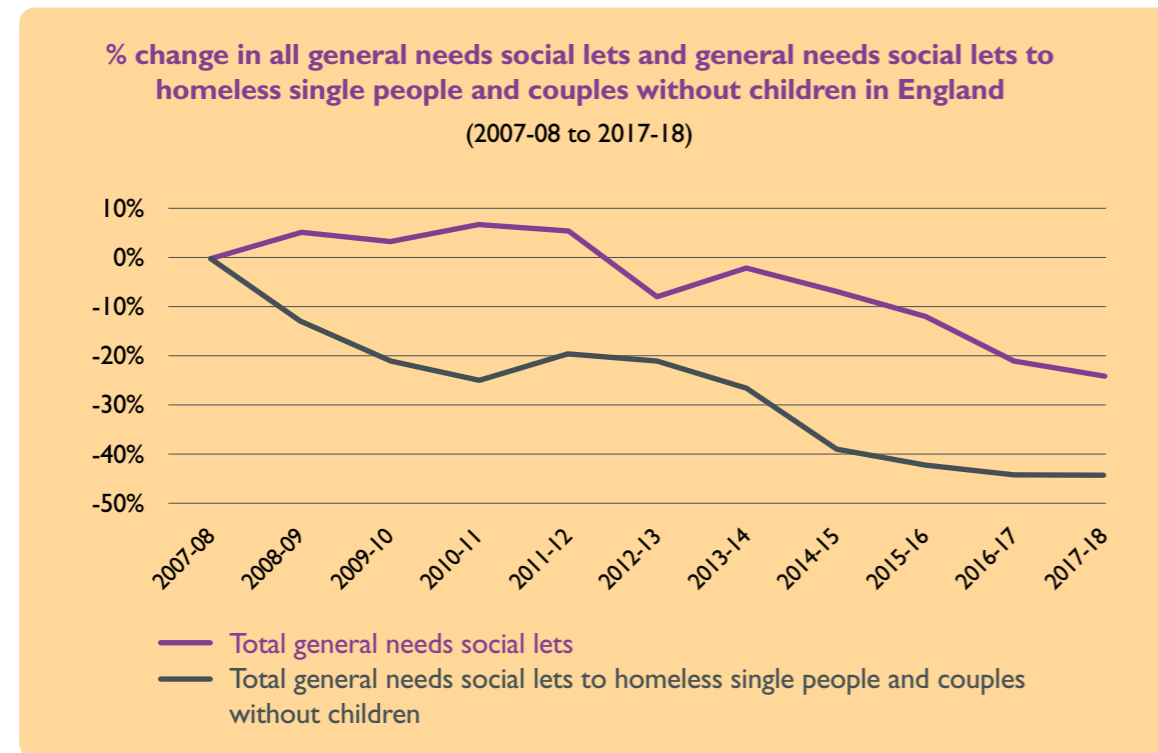
(2007-08 to 2017-18)



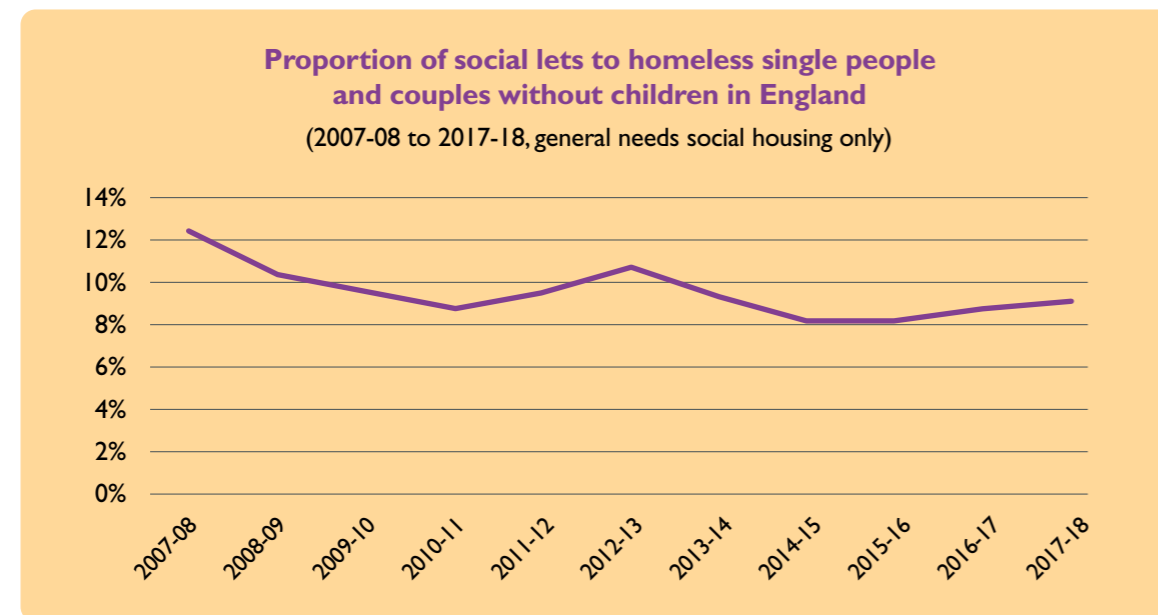
<sup>36</sup> In this analysis, we have included some households who are not statutorily homeless, which are categorised as 'other homeless' in the CORE dataset.



That amounts to a total fall of 44% for homeless single people and couples without children over the course of the decade, compared to a 24% total decline.



Consequently, the proportion of all new social lets going to homeless single people and couples without children has also fallen, from 12% to 9% in this period. The rise in homelessness in the same period makes this contrast all the starker:



Homeless couples without children are included in these findings as, alongside single homeless people, they are less likely to be found in 'priority need' and therefore are less likely to be able to access social housing.

People who are in priority need are owed a statutory duty to housing (often referred to as statutory homelessness), and local authorities must provide this group with emergency accommodation. Social housing allocations policies also often award higher priority (known as a higher 'band' or 'bandings') to people who are in 'priority need' and unintentionally homeless.<sup>37</sup>

Although you can be considered as 'priority need' by proving you are particularly vulnerable, this can be a big hurdle for many – and the majority of St Mungo's clients are not statutorily homeless.



<sup>37</sup> Local authorities may undertake investigations into how people who seek support for homelessness lost their housing. If they find that someone deliberately did (or did not) do something which caused them to leave accommodation they otherwise could have stayed in then that person may be deemed to be intentionally homeless and lose access to some support.

## 7

## Why are people failing to access social housing?

It is clear that a smaller proportion of people who have slept rough are now able to access social housing as they recover from homelessness compared to 10 years ago. This chapter explores why such a decline has occurred.

The main reason that people struggle to access social housing is that there simply isn't enough of it.

Research by Shelter revealed that in 2018 there were 1.15 million households on the social housing waiting list. In the year to June 2018, only 290,000 social homes were made available to new lets.<sup>38</sup> The majority of these homes became available as people moved out of them, as in 2017-18 only 34,672 units of affordable rental housing were added to the existing stock of social housing. This included only 6,463 new units available at social rent.<sup>39</sup>

This is in stark contrast to the number of new social homes which are required to address housing need in England. Research by Herriot Watt university shows that 340,000 new homes are needed per year for at least 15 years, including 90,000 homes for social rent to address England's housing needs.<sup>40</sup> This will require an investment of £12.8bn per year, in today's prices.<sup>41</sup>

The Government has indicated that it supports increasing the availability of social housing. In 2018, the cap on local authority borrowing for housebuilding was removed, and Prime Minister Theresa May also announced £2 billion of funding to build new council owned properties, followed by a further £2 billion for new housing

association properties.<sup>42</sup> However, the Green Paper on Social Housing, published in August 2018, failed to commit to a transformational new programme of house-building.

In the 2019 Conservative manifesto, the new Government pledged to build 300,000 new homes a year by the mid-2020s, but it is not clear what the tenure of these homes will be. The manifesto also commits to a social housing White Paper, which will “*support the continued supply of social homes,*” but no commitments have been made to specific targets for new homes.<sup>43</sup>

In the current environment, social housing is an increasingly scarce resource and access to it is rationed.

This is clear in the process for applying for social housing.

### Applying for social housing

There are broadly three stages which applicants need to pass through before they access a social home. These are:

- Accessing the social housing waiting list
- Reaching the top of the list
- Passing pre-tenancy checks

For people with a history of sleeping rough, each of these steps can present a significant barrier to accessing social housing. But our services report that in many cases, St Mungo's clients simply haven't got any chance of clearing the first hurdle of joining the social housing waiting list.

Local authorities are able to restrict social housing waiting lists to people that they deem should “*qualify*” for access. This is largely due to the Localism Act (2011).

Prior to the Act, all local authorities were required to have a social housing allocation policy, which gave ‘reasonable preference’ to certain groups including those experiencing homelessness. This expectation still remains. They could place restrictions on access to social housing based on the behaviour of individual applicants, through a screening process named the “*Acceptable Behaviour Test*.”

If an individual or someone in their household had committed behaviour which made them an unacceptable tenant, their application could be refused. This was assessed on a case by case basis.<sup>44</sup> Local authorities were also required to determine priority between different applicants, but were able to do this using their own discretion.

The Localism Act expanded the restrictions that local authorities could place on access to waiting lists by allowing them exclude whole groups of people, whom they deemed to be non-qualifying. In guidance which was issued alongside the Act, the Government stated that it had “*given back to local authorities the freedom to better manage their social housing waiting list*.”<sup>45</sup>

However, the guidance also sets some expectations. The Government stated that it expected “*social homes to go to people who genuinely need and deserve them*” and that it wished to see greater priority given to people “*who have invested in and demonstrated a commitment to their local community*.”

Councils should not be excluding groups of people who are owed a reasonable preference due to their homelessness, and a small number of councils have been successfully challenged in court for doing this.<sup>46</sup> Government guidance also states that local authorities should “*retain the flexibility to take proper account of special circumstances*” which can include providing protection to people “*who need support to rehabilitate and integrate back into the community*.”<sup>47</sup>

Almost all of the allocations policies we reviewed were unclear about whether someone's housing status would over-ride qualification criteria. But we do know that these restrictions are having a harmful impact on our clients. **In our survey of St Mungo's staff, 54% said their clients had faced restrictions from a local authority or housing association due to the lack of a local connection, 59% due to a history of rent arrears, 49% due to anti-social behaviour and 31% due to previous convictions.** All of these clients were having these qualification criteria applied, in spite of being homeless or at serious risk.

The Government also introduced the following restrictions and suggestions:

- Local authorities are encouraged to use local connection, and historic anti-social and financial behaviour to determine priority between households with similar levels of need.
- It “*strongly encourages*” local authorities to implement a residency test when accessing qualification for social housing, of which “*a reasonable period... would be two years*.”
- Local connection criteria should not apply to certain families and individuals with a connection to the armed forces.
- Further guidance outlines how the local connection criteria should be set aside for householders who are fleeing violence or domestic abuse in a different local authority area.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Shelter (2018), *One year on from Grenfell, millions still stuck on housing waiting lists*, [https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press\\_releases/articles/one\\_year\\_on\\_from\\_grenfell\\_millions\\_still\\_stuck\\_on\\_housing\\_waiting\\_lists](https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_releases/articles/one_year_on_from_grenfell_millions_still_stuck_on_housing_waiting_lists)

<sup>39</sup> HCLG (2020) *Live tables on Affordable Housing Supply* <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-affordable-housing-supply>

<sup>40</sup> G. Bramley (2018) *Housing supply requirements across Great Britain*: [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/239700/crisis\\_housing\\_supply\\_requirements\\_across\\_great\\_britain\\_2018.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/239700/crisis_housing_supply_requirements_across_great_britain_2018.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> National Housing Federation (2018) *£12.8bn needed to end the housing crisis* <https://www.housing.org.uk/press/press-releases/128bn-needed-every-year-to-end-the-housing-crisis/>

<sup>42</sup> The Guardian (2018) *PM announces funding for next decade and calls for end to social housing 'stigma'* <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/sep/19/housing-associations-praise-mays-2bn-plan-as-total-step-change>

<sup>43</sup> The Conservative Party (2019) *Get Brexit Done: The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2019* [https://assets-global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c5dda924905da587992a064ba\\_Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf](https://assets-global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c5dda924905da587992a064ba_Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> Crisis (2017) *Moving On: Improving access to housing for single homeless people in England* [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237833/moving\\_on\\_2017.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237833/moving_on_2017.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> DCLG (2013) *Providing social housing for local people. Statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England* [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/269035/131219\\_circular\\_for\\_pdf.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/269035/131219_circular_for_pdf.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> Local Government Ombudsman (2016) *Full house: Councils' role in allocating social housing* [https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=2ahUKEwjFncXN57XnAhUyrXEKHQZvBB0QFjAAegQIB-hAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.lgo.org.uk%2Fassets%2Fattach%2F2678%2FFR-Full-House-housing-allocations-Jan-2016.pdf&usq=AOvVaw0WpC5\\_MvB7bFzIH45aIR](https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=2ahUKEwjFncXN57XnAhUyrXEKHQZvBB0QFjAAegQIB-hAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.lgo.org.uk%2Fassets%2Fattach%2F2678%2FFR-Full-House-housing-allocations-Jan-2016.pdf&usq=AOvVaw0WpC5_MvB7bFzIH45aIR)

<sup>47</sup> DCLG (2013) *Providing social housing for local people. Statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England* [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/269035/131219\\_circular\\_for\\_pdf.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/269035/131219_circular_for_pdf.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> MHCLG (2018) *Improving Access to Social Housing for Victims of Domestic Abuse in Refuges or Other Types of Temporary Accommodation* [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/753667/Improving\\_access\\_to\\_social\\_housing\\_for\\_victims\\_of\\_domestic\\_abuse.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/753667/Improving_access_to_social_housing_for_victims_of_domestic_abuse.pdf)





## Local connection and residency test

Many people understandably feel that access to social housing should be prioritised for people who have a connection to the area in which they are seeking to live.

As outlined above, the Government has encouraged local authorities to impose restrictions based on whether prospective tenants have a local connection, and whether they have been resident in an area for a certain amount of time.

These restrictions are sometimes known as a “localist” approach.

For people with a history of rough sleeping this can be a damaging barrier to accessing housing. Many people do not sleep rough in the same local authority where they previously lived, or had another connection to such as employment. There can be numerous reasons for this including escaping violence, negative relationships or painful memories. It can also be due to shame, embarrassment, or fear of being seen rough sleeping by friends or family. They may also have had to move area to access emergency accommodation or other services if these were lacking in the area where they lived.

Many people begin to access services before and during their recovery from rough sleeping. This can include mental health, drug and alcohol and employment support. It is vital that people have continuity of care while they work to rebuild their lives away from the streets. However, accessing this support will not always count as a local connection, and people who have slept rough in an area may struggle to prove they have been resident there.

The Government has recognised that local connection rules should be flexible in certain circumstances, advising local authorities not to impose restrictions on people who are fleeing domestic abuse. These exceptions could be extended to people who have experienced rough sleeping, in order to allow them to continue to access the support they need while also registering for social housing. We acknowledge that there are some areas – such as some central London boroughs – where these exemptions may need to vary due to the volume of people who are sleeping rough with local connections to other areas, but we would still support the introduction of flexibility for these rules wherever possible.

Not all local authorities believe that these restrictions are beneficial to their area. In a survey of local authorities for the 2017 Homelessness Monitor, 15% of respondents reported that localist approaches to allocations had had a wholly negative impact on attempts to reduce homelessness. When asked why this was, respondents stated that residency requirements could lead to a reduction in move-on opportunities and an increase in people stuck in temporary accommodation. Just under half of all respondents said that the localist agenda had led to mixed results. Temporary accommodation can be extremely expensive and is not, in itself, a solution to homelessness as it simply keeps families and individuals in limbo as they wait for a permanent home. This shows that localist policies can be counter-productive and keep people in uncertain and insecure housing.<sup>53</sup>

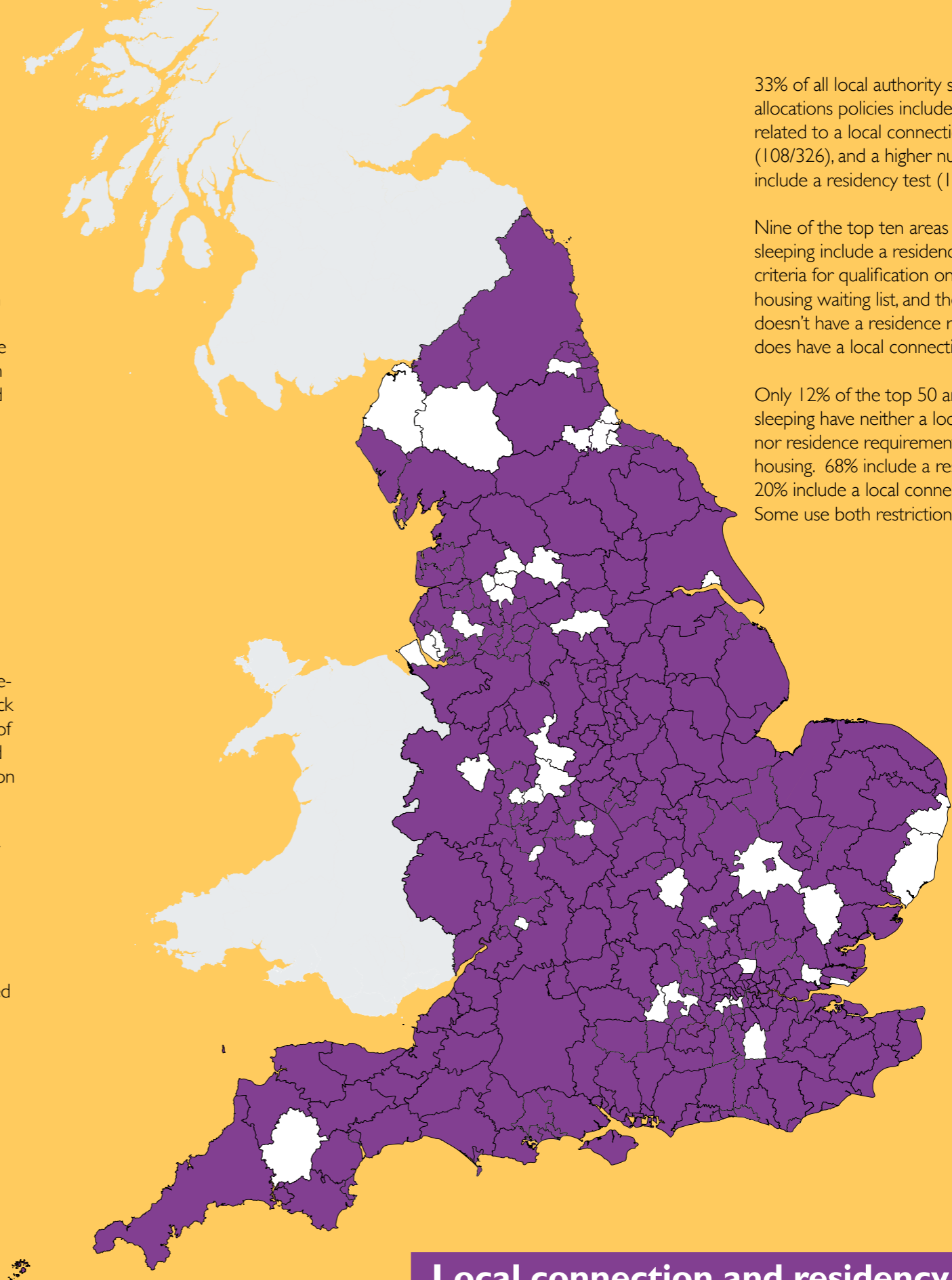
In the 2019 Homelessness Monitor, several different local authority respondents are quoted as saying that local connection and residency restrictions have had a negative impact on reducing homelessness.<sup>54</sup>

However, for now ‘localist’ restrictions are especially prevalent in areas with high levels of rough sleeping.

33% of all local authority social housing allocations policies include a restriction related to a local connection requirement (108/326), and a higher number – 55% – include a residency test (178/326)

Nine of the top ten areas for rough sleeping include a residency test in the criteria for qualification on the social housing waiting list, and the one which doesn't have a residence requirement does have a local connection test.

Only 12% of the top 50 areas for rough sleeping have neither a local connection nor residence requirement to access social housing. 68% include a residency test, and 20% include a local connection restriction. Some use both restrictions.



## Local connection and residency test

- Local authority with a local connection and/or residency test restriction
- Local authority without a local connection and/or residency test restriction

<sup>53</sup> Crisis (2017) *The Homelessness Monitor: England* <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2017/>

<sup>54</sup> Crisis (2019) *The Homelessness Monitor: England* <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2019/>



## Anti-social behaviour

Another qualification criteria which is commonly used by local authorities to restrict access to social housing waiting lists relates to anti-social behaviour (ASB).

Government guidance to local authorities states that *“authorities may wish to adopt criteria which would disqualify individuals who satisfy the reasonable preference requirements. This could be the case, for example, if applicants are disqualified on a ground of anti-social behaviour.”*<sup>55</sup>

Once again, we are concerned about the potentially disproportionate impact of such restrictions on people who have a history of rough sleeping.

Due to existing legislation in England, people may face ASB records for rough sleeping. The 1824 Vagrancy Act can be used to prosecute people for the act of sleeping out. Research by Crisis has found that use of the Act varies significantly across the country, but a total of 1,320 people were prosecuted under it in 2018. Of these, 1,144 were prosecuted for begging, 165 for being found in enclosed premises, and 11 for sleeping out.<sup>56</sup>

People who are sleeping rough can also be subject to Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs), which restrict how certain public areas can be used. If found to be in breach of a PSPO, individuals can face an on the spot fine of £100 and if this isn't paid can face a fine of £1,000 and a summary conviction.<sup>57</sup>

Although the number of people impacted by these two pieces of legislation is low, there is symbolic significance in the fact that rough sleeping in itself can lead to a history of ASB being recorded.

Other people who have slept rough will have a history of ASB which is not directly linked to their homelessness, but which nonetheless will be best addressed through access to support services, including tenancy sustainment support which is most commonly accessed in social housing.

It is understandable that local authorities want to tackle ASB in their area. However, restricting access to social housing is unlikely to be the best way of addressing this issue.

ASB can be indicative of issues with mental health, domestic abuse or family breakdown. In some instances, it can also be the result of tenancy hijack (also known as 'cuckooing'). In this situation, a vulnerable person's accommodation is used by drug users or dealers as a place to use or deal drugs, making it dangerous and putting the named tenant at risk of eviction. There are known links between this issue and organised crime (including 'county lines', exploitation and trafficking).<sup>58</sup>

ASB can often be addressed through access to the right support services, such as mediation or floating support. This can provide tenants with the tools they need to manage their tenancy, reduce disruption to neighbours, and sometimes address other unknown issues, while protecting the household from homelessness.

It is crucial to offer an individual approach which takes into consideration the individual needs of a household and the circumstances surrounding their prior behaviour. This does not necessarily mean restricting access to social housing, but instead planning carefully where this housing could be located and offering a support package.

However, at present references to ASB in allocation plans tend to be linked to blanket bans on access to waiting lists, sometimes for several years.

The MHCLG does not collect data centrally on the use of restrictions related to ASB in social housing waiting lists. For this research we analysed all local allocations policies to determine how widespread their use is.

We found that 98% of councils (320) had some form of restriction for people with a history of ASB. Of councils which restricted access due to ASB, 34% had specific time limits for how long applicants should wait between incidences of ASB and applying for social housing. This includes

time restrictions in 28% of the areas with the 50 highest levels of rough sleeping in the country.

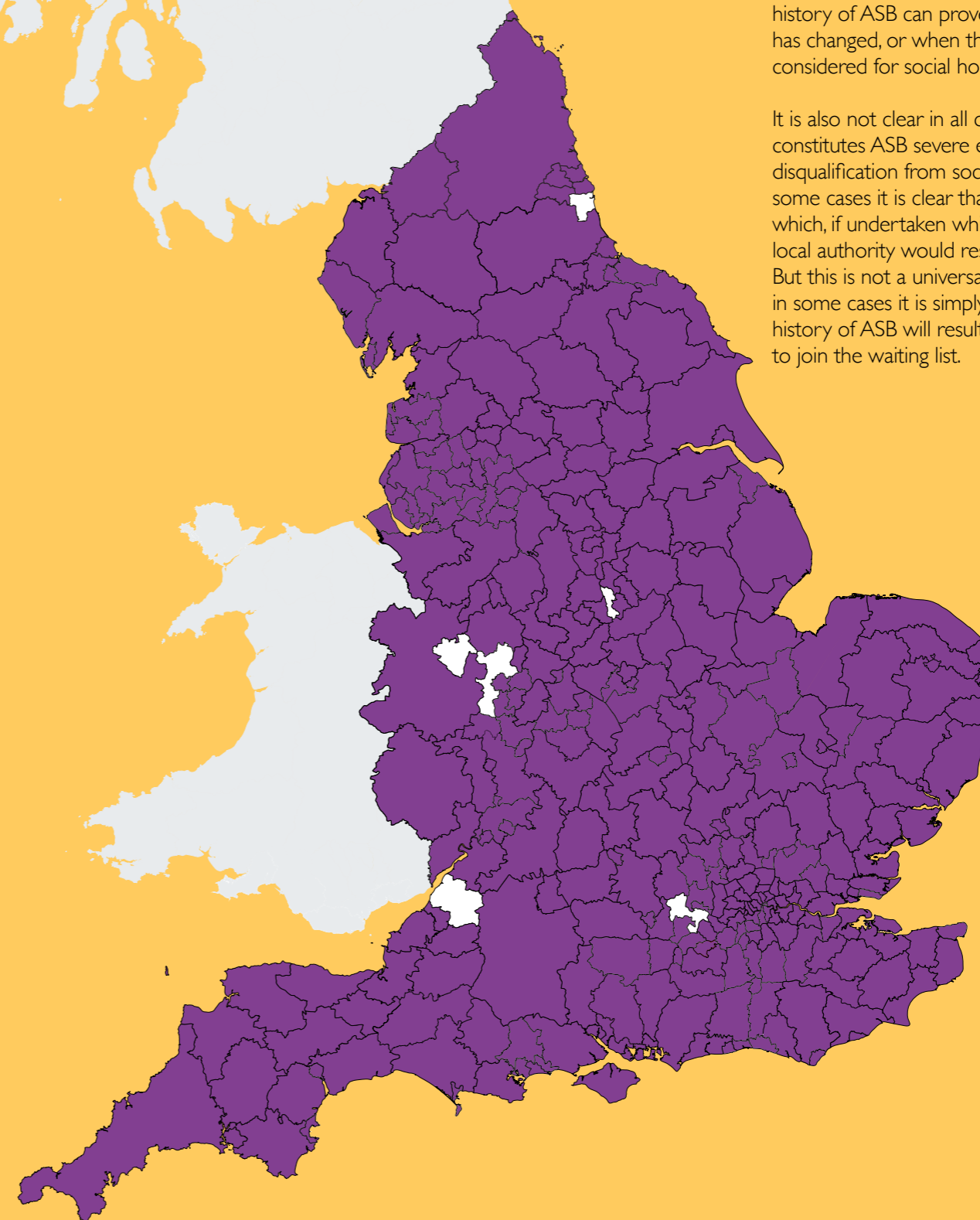
The most common length of disqualification due to ASB was 12 months, but 11 local authorities disqualified households for three years and 15 for five years. One local authority had a time period of 7 years for disqualification.

Where specific time limits aren't used, it is often not clear how someone with a history of ASB can prove their behaviour has changed, or when they will be considered for social housing.

It is also not clear in all cases what constitutes ASB severe enough to face disqualification from social housing – in some cases it is clear that this is behaviour which, if undertaken whilst a tenant of the local authority would result in eviction. But this is not a universal definition, and in some cases it is simply stated that any history of ASB will result in people failing to join the waiting list.

## Anti-social behaviour

- Local authority with an anti-social behaviour restriction
- Local authority without an anti-social behaviour restriction



<sup>55</sup> DCLG (2012) *Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England* [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/5918/2171391.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5918/2171391.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> Crisis (2019) *Scrap the Act: The case for repealing the Vagrancy Act (1824)* [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/240604/cris0220\\_vagrancyact\\_report\\_aw\\_web.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/240604/cris0220_vagrancyact_report_aw_web.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> The Guardian (2019) *Rising number of councils issuing fines for rough sleeping* <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/mar/07/rising-number-of-councils-issuing-fines-for-rough-sleeping>

<sup>58</sup> St Mungos (2018) *On My Own Two Feet* [https://www.mungos.org/app/uploads/2018/06/StM\\_PRR\\_TEXT\\_0718\\_web.pdf](https://www.mungos.org/app/uploads/2018/06/StM_PRR_TEXT_0718_web.pdf)

## History of offending

In addition to restrictions related to ASB, many local authorities restrict access to social housing based on a history of offending.

People with a history of rough sleeping often have prior convictions. CHAIN data shows that 37% of people who were seen sleeping rough in London in 2018-19 had experience of the prison system, and 3.7% of people new to rough sleeping reported that their last settled base was prison.

There is significant evidence to suggest that leaving an institution such as prison can increase the likelihood of becoming homeless. These restrictions can further prevent people from rebuilding their lives after homelessness, following a period in prison.

As with ASB, we advocate for a personalised approach in offering housing to people with a criminal conviction. In some cases there may be concerns about community or individual's safety which need to be taken into consideration.

However, our review of allocations policies reveals a very inconsistent use of restrictions related to offending history.

Of all social housing allocations policies, 74% (241/326) had restrictions related to a history of offending or criminal behaviour. However, different areas took very different views as to what types of conviction should result in people failing to qualify for social housing. Of those with such restrictions, 37% did not specify any specific types of conviction which would bar

access to social housing, but simply referred broadly to convictions or criminal behaviour.

A further 39% did specify that convictions for the immoral or illegal use of a previous home, or similar acts committed in the vicinity of a previous home, would act as a barrier: 19% specify that violent crimes, such as assault or domestic abuse, would lead to restrictions while 10% stated that convictions for housing or welfare related fraud meant that applicants would be ineligible. Finally, 5% of those with restrictions specified that convictions for anti-social behaviour would block access to the waiting list.<sup>59</sup>

The number of local authorities with criteria related to convictions or criminal activity remains very high in areas with higher levels of rough sleeping. 68% of the top 50 areas for rough sleeping have some restrictions based on previous criminal activity, and this rises to 90% of the top ten areas.

## Complex support needs and rough sleeping

It is often the most vulnerable people in society who will have a history of rent arrears, antisocial behaviour or convictions. People who sleep rough are likely to experience many other types of exclusion and disadvantage before their first night on the streets. One study on 'multiple exclusion homelessness' plotted the median ages at which people experienced different kinds of behaviour or disadvantage, alongside the percentage of individuals who had experience of each.<sup>60</sup> The results of this study can be seen in the infographic below:

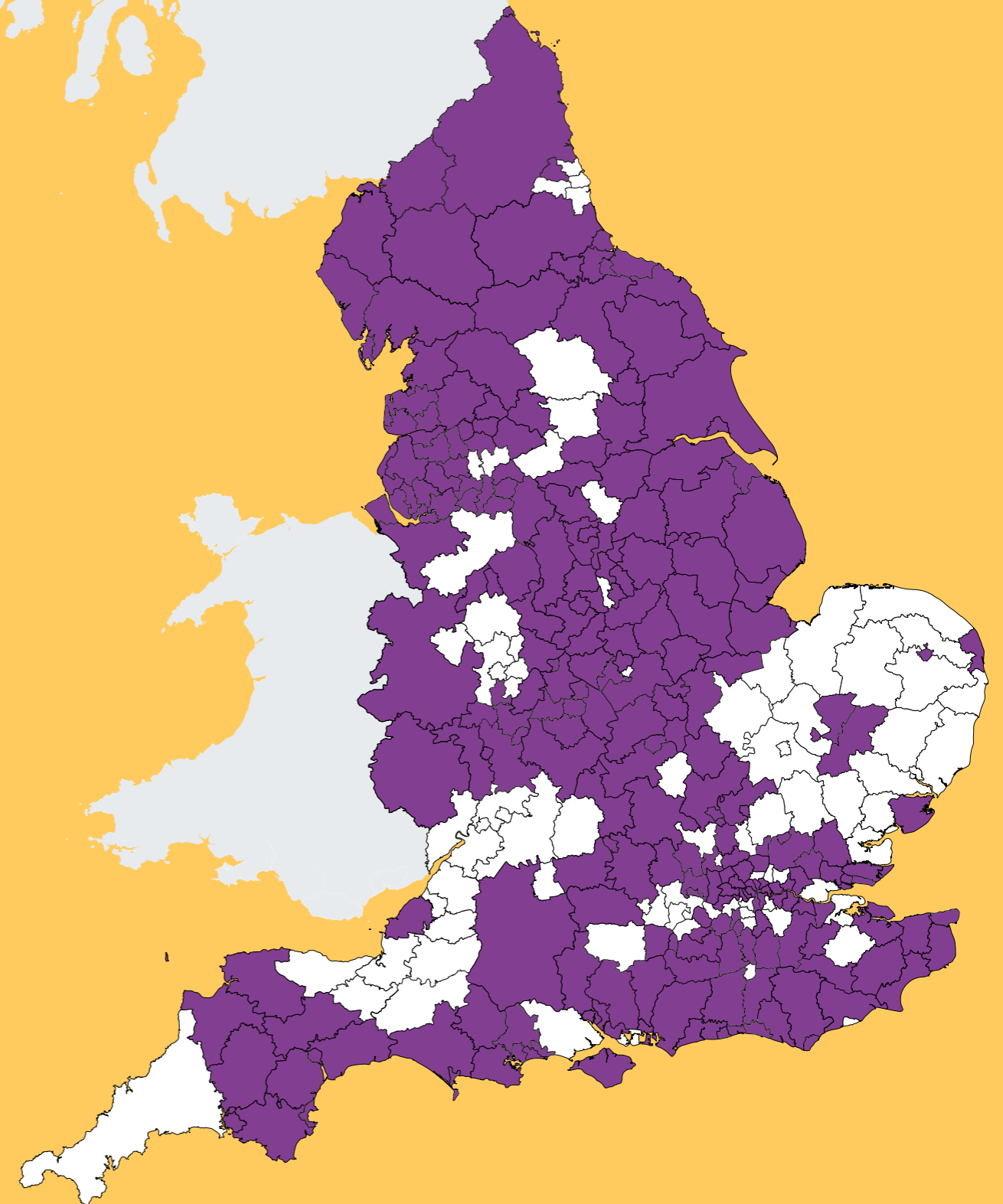


<sup>59</sup> Adds up to more than 100% as some local authorities had more than one specified restriction

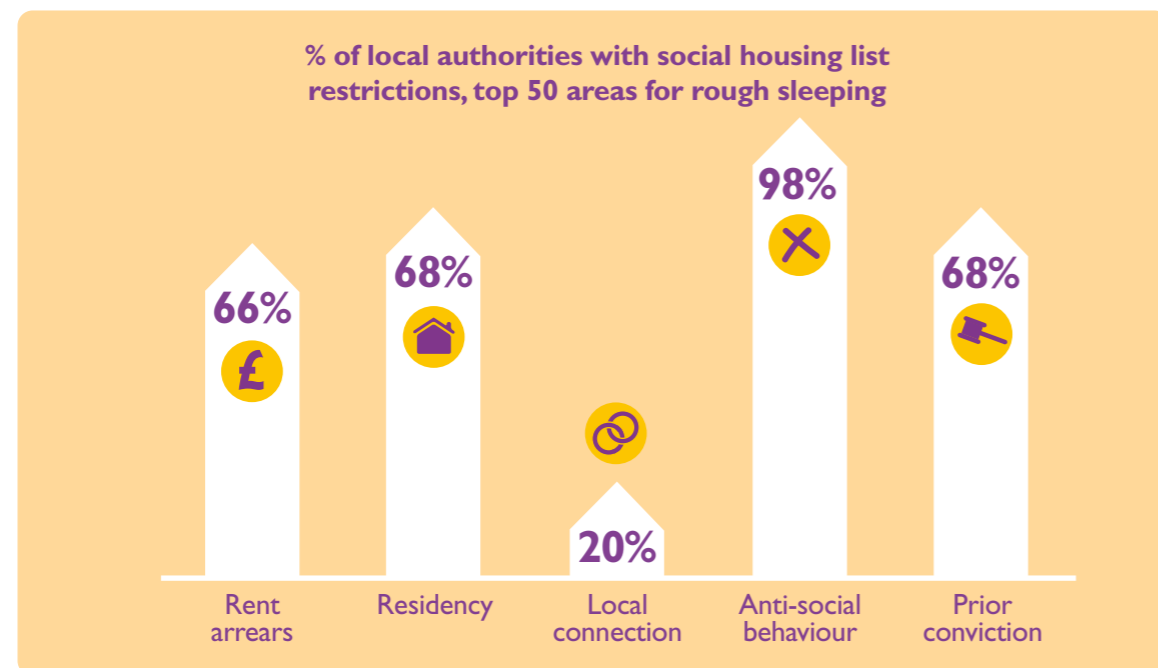
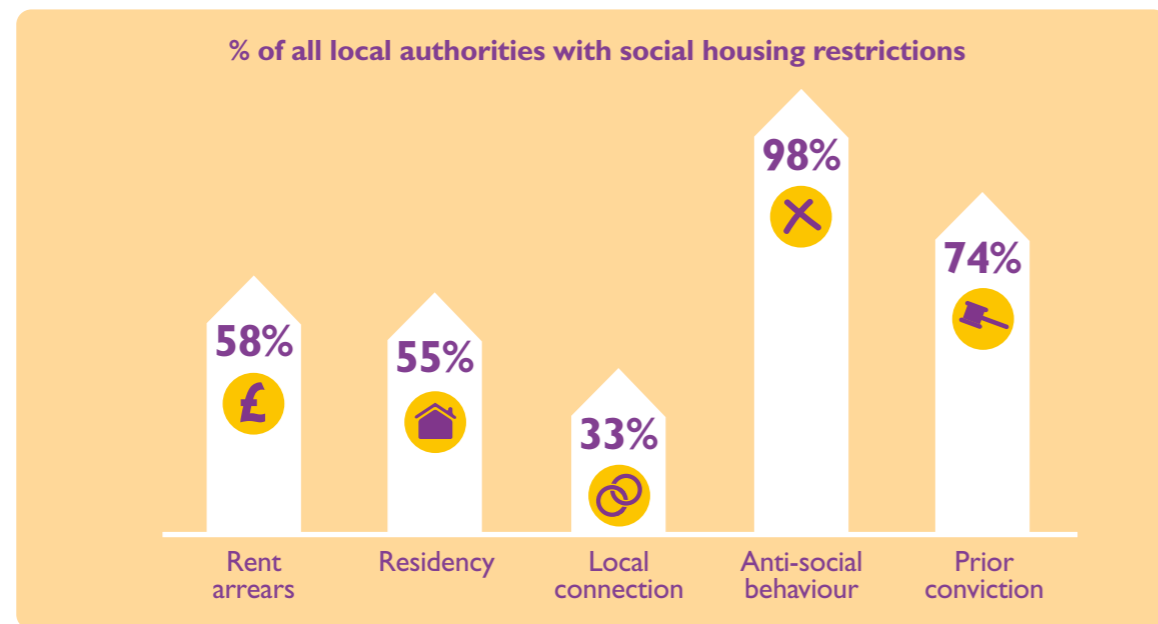
<sup>60</sup> Suzanne Fitzpatrick et al (2012), *Pathways into Multiple Exclusion Homelessness in Seven UK Cities*, *Urban Studies* [https://pureapps2.hw.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/7456915/US\\_Pathways.pdf](https://pureapps2.hw.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/7456915/US_Pathways.pdf)

## History of offending

Local authority with a history of offending restriction  
 Local authority without a history of offending restriction







### Differences between neighbouring local authorities

The data we have collected on how local authorities control access to their social housing waiting lists shows that there is no one size fits all policy.

Neighbouring local authorities can have totally different approaches to restrictions based on rent arrears, previous convictions and anti-social behaviour. This has created a postcode lottery in access to the list, and it can be very difficult for residents in an area to access information about why they are not allowed to join the waiting list for social housing, when residents in their neighbouring borough are. This raises serious questions about the fairness of allowing local authorities such discretion with their allocations policies.

### Reaching the top of the list

It can be very difficult for people with a history of rough sleeping to get on a social housing waiting list if they have a history of rent arrears, anti-social behaviour, offending or a lack of local connection to the area in which they are trying to access housing.

But even for those who are able to access the waiting list in spite of these challenges, it can still prove difficult to get housing. This is due to the level of priority they are given.

The vast majority of people who are experiencing rough sleeping should be granted *reasonable preference* by their local authority. Allocations schemes are required by law to give such preference to groups of people who are defined as having a housing need due to certain circumstances. This includes those who are homeless as outlined in Part VII of the 1996 Housing Act (which includes those who are not in priority need and those who are intentionally homeless), those who are living in unsanitary or overcrowded housing, those who need to move on medical or welfare groups, and those who need to move to a particular area in the district of the housing authority to avoid hardship.

People with a history of rough sleeping are likely to meet this criteria. But as outlined above, local authorities can put in place restrictions which prevent people who have reasonable preference from getting on the social housing waiting list.

They can also introduce banding systems into their scheme which, in effect, can mean that those without priority need will struggle to reach the top of the list and get social housing.

### Priority need

Local authorities are required to secure accommodation for households who are homeless and deemed to be in priority need. Social housing allocations policies also often award higher bandings to people who are in priority need and unintentionally homeless.

There are six categories of people who must be recognised as having a priority need. They are:

- Pregnant women, and those who are living with a pregnant woman
- A household where children reside, or might reasonably be expected to reside
- 16 or 17 year olds
- 18 to 20 year olds who have left care
- Those who are homeless due to a fire or flood
- Those who are classed as vulnerable. This may be due to a physical or mental health issue or disability, age, fleeing domestic abuse or violence, or time spent in care, prison or the armed forces

St Mungo's clients are often very vulnerable. Over the year to November 2019, 51% of St Mungo's clients had a physical health need which hindered their recovery or caused them distress. 72% had a mental health need and 53% had a substance use need. In the survey of staff conducted for this report, 88% of respondents had attempted to demonstrate to the local authority that their clients should be found in priority need.

However, local authorities have different thresholds for vulnerability when assessing priority need, and interpretation of the legislation can vary significantly. This is reflected in the experiences of our staff in trying to access priority need designation for our clients.

Due to the high levels of variation between different areas, success is very dependent on the local situation, including the availability of social housing, qualification criteria for the waiting list, and individual relationships with the local authority.

In some areas, our staff have extremely productive and positive working relationships with the local authority's housing options team. As a result, these staff are more successful in accessing social housing for their clients.

## A history of rough sleeping

We also assessed whether local authorities had any special policies in place either in their banding scheme, or as a separate policy, for people with a history of rough sleeping, or those who were moving on from supported accommodation.

All allocation policies referenced homelessness and reasonable preference. However, only 28% mention rough sleeping specifically and only 3% of policies give people with a history of rough sleeping top band priority for social housing. A further 11% offer second band preference.

Significantly more allocations policies have special access schemes in place for people who are ready to move on from supported housing. This is likely to include people who have experienced homelessness, including rough sleeping.

92% of policies make some reference to move on from supported housing, although this percentage decreases to 82% in the 50 areas with the highest levels of rough sleeping.

Of policies which reference supported housing, 10% have some form of special access scheme for supported housing residents, including direct lets to this group or an annual quota of reserved properties. This rises to 14% in the top 50 areas for rough sleeping.

24% offer top band priority to people moving on from supported housing (20% in the areas with the highest levels of rough sleeping), while a further 50% offer second band priority (48% in the highest areas). The remaining policies offer priority in a lower band.

It is very welcome that special consideration is being given to residents in supported housing across so many different local authorities. But these policies are not without their own constraints.

In the vast majority of cases, the policies make it clear that people moving on from supported housing will only be offered social housing if their needs have been assessed and a support package put in place. This is entirely reasonable. It is best practice to ensure that people have the support they need to sustain a tenancy before moving into independent housing, reducing the likelihood that they will struggle to cope and potentially become homeless.

However, research from St Mungo's shows that the type of support that this group will require – known as floating or tenancy sustainment support – has been subject to significant funding cuts over the past decade.

Freedom of Information requests to areas with the highest levels of rough sleeping found that there had been an 18% decline in funding for floating support services between 2013-14 and 2017-18. 61% of areas reported a decrease in funding for these services and there were significant differences at a regional level. For example, across London boroughs there was a reduction of 41% over this period.<sup>61</sup>

St Mungo's has also found that, overall, £1bn less was spent on services which help people to manage their housing need and keep their homes between 2008-09 and 2017-18. This was previously known as Supporting People funding. In order to ensure that people with a history of rough sleeping can be supported to access, and keep, social housing this funding gap must be urgently addressed.

It is likely that, as a result of these funding cuts, fewer people will be able to access the support they need to move on from homelessness services and will therefore be excluded from accessing a social housing tenancy.

This not only prevents people from fully recovering from homelessness, but also silts up supported housing projects. By preventing people with lower support needs from moving on, places in homelessness services are withheld from those with higher needs – some of whom are still sleeping rough. This is a particularly acute problem as rough sleeping has increased 141% since 2010,<sup>62</sup> but there has been a 30% fall in the number of bed spaces in accommodation projects, including hostels, between 2008 and 2017 (from 50,000 to 35,000).<sup>63</sup>

For those who are still able to move on into social housing, it is likely that they too will be less able to access the support they need to keep their home long term.

## Pre-tenancy checks

The final potential barrier which could face someone trying to access social housing is the pre-tenancy check.

These may be undertaken by either a housing association or the local authority, dependent on who the applicant's landlord would be.

The Chartered Institute for Housing (CIH) has done significant research into the topic of pre-tenancy assessment. In a 2019 survey, 71% of respondents said they conducted these checks. This included 68% of stock owning local authorities and 92% of housing associations.<sup>64</sup>

The CIH also enquired as to why these assessments were carried out. The most common reason was to assess whether the prospective tenant could afford the tenancy (96%), followed by the identification of support needs (87%), a history of rent arrears (87%) and the ability to sustain a tenancy other than affordability (85%). A history of anti-social behaviour was also a common response, cited by 84%.

Concerns about the affordability of social housing for tenants on low incomes has increased since the introduction of affordable rent levels, and

restrictions on the level of welfare that can be claimed to support housing costs.

Affordable rent levels were introduced by the Coalition Government and allow Registered Providers to let properties at 80% of gross market rent in the local area (inclusive of service charges), rather than at social rent levels which are pegged to local income levels. They can cause difficulty for people who live on low incomes. For those who claim Housing Benefit to help pay their rent, affordable rent levels may result in them hitting the Benefit Cap and leave them unable to claim all of their rent costs through the welfare system. This would likely be flagged in any affordability check as part of a pre-tenancy assessment check and could result in a household failing to get social housing.

This concern is noted in the 2019 Homelessness Monitor, which found that 64% of local authorities reported that housing affordability checks (which the report states are largely used by housing associations) were making it increasingly difficult for homeless households to access tenancies.<sup>65</sup>

The focus on assessing support needs is also troubling.

As outlined above, limited access to floating support is having a negative impact on the ability of people with a history of rough sleeping to get social housing, as it can mean they are not offered a home in the first instance. It may also lead people to fail pre-tenancy assessment checks.

In their recent research, the CIH noted that rejection due to unmet support needs following a pre-tenancy check was a growing issue, which was noted in the survey and at all workshops run to support the research. However, participants did note that having locally available floating support services would make a difference to these decisions, and opportunities to get support have been restricted by local authority spending cuts.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>61</sup> St Mungo's (2018) *Home for Good: the role of floating support in ending rough sleeping* <https://www.mungos.org/publication/home-for-good-the-role-of-floating-support-in-ending-rough-sleeping/>

<sup>62</sup> Official MHCLG stats

<sup>63</sup> Homeless Link (2018) *Support for single homeless people in England: Annual review* [https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Annual%20Review%202017\\_0.pdf](https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Annual%20Review%202017_0.pdf)

<sup>64</sup> Chartered Institute for Housing (2019) *Rethinking Allocations* <http://www.cih.org/resources/Rethinking%20allocations.pdf>

<sup>65</sup> Crisis (2019) *The Homelessness Monitor: England* <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledgehub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2019>

<sup>66</sup> Chartered Institute for Housing (2019) *Rethinking Allocations* <http://www.cih.org/resources/Rethinking%20allocations.pdf>



## Reforming allocations

The blanket restriction policies operated by both local authorities and housing associations can prevent people with a history of rough sleeping from moving into a social home.

It is often the most vulnerable people in society who will have a history of rent arrears, anti-social behaviour or convictions, and many of those who have a history of rough sleeping understandably wish to move away from their past and access support in a new area.

Research suggests that, for many people, homelessness can be closely linked to trauma arising from 'adverse childhood experiences.' This can include childhood abuse, neglect, parental substance use, mental ill health, death or separation. These events are closely associated with poverty and deprivation and can lead to early involvement in problematic drug and alcohol use, or mental health issues.<sup>67</sup>



Similarly, it seems counter intuitive that social housing – which is often more affordable than the PRS – is out of reach to those who are failing pre-tenancy affordability checks. If others are deemed to have too high support needs for this type of housing, the question remains of where they will be supported to live.

But such policies are understandable. Social housing is increasingly scarce, and local authorities and housing associations are looking to secure their income and reduce the risk of rent arrears and failed tenancies. Placing people in independent housing without adequate support is also unlikely to resolve their risk of homelessness in the long term.

It is only by addressing the long term, structural barriers to social housing such as lack of supply and lack of funding for support that the door to social housing will be re-opened for many people who desperately need it.

But what more can be done in the meantime?

# 8

## Social housing-led responses to homelessness

### Despite pressures on social housing, some local authorities and housing associations are making colossal efforts to retain social housing for people with a history of rough sleeping.

In our survey of St Mungo's staff, 27% of respondents reported that a local authority or housing association they worked with had a special scheme in place designed to support people with a history of rough sleeping to access social housing. One St Mungo's service in an outer London borough reported that all of their clients moved on into social housing, due to strong local relationships and dedicated support from the local authority.

Below are three very different case studies of local approaches which enable people with a history of rough sleeping to access the social housing, and support, they need to move on.

### Clearing House

Clearing House is a London based programme which provides people who have slept rough with a housing association property, alongside on-going floating support. It is one of the legacies of the Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) launched by central government in 1991. Between them, over 40 housing associations provide more than 3,750 flats across London ring-fenced for people who have slept rough with support needs.

A central team, funded by the GLA and currently run by St Mungo's, receives referrals from hostels and other agencies and matches these to available Clearing House properties. The Clearing House team acts as a central point of liaison between housing providers and other partners and works to ensure properties are not withdrawn from the Clearing House scheme by housing providers.

Around 8 in 10 people accepted for Clearing House properties have needed support with drugs, alcohol or mental health.

Since 2000, Tenancy Sustainment Teams (TSTs) have supported tenants to learn crucial living skills such as budgeting and cooking, achieve financial independence and access training and employment.

Clearing House caters for people with a range of support needs and is aimed

at people currently sleeping rough, as well people living in homelessness accommodation services such as hostels.

Right now it is only available to individuals who have been verified as sleeping rough by a commissioned outreach service in the capital and have a record on the CHAIN database. Typically around 25% of individuals referred to the Clearing House scheme are still sleeping rough, the rest are referred from hostel accommodation.

Risk assessments for tenants are undertaken, but requirements such as local connections or residency tests are not applied to this group. A history of rent arrears or anti-social behaviour is also not necessarily a barrier to accessing a Clearing House property, as a support plan can be put in place to manage these issues. In the first 25 years of operation, 92% of Clearing House tenants never returned to rough sleeping. Before this, the same individuals had spent 110,000 nights sleeping rough.

Amongst the thousands of people who have benefitted from this service are 291 "hard to reach" clients (people with particularly high support needs) who have been housed since 2009. As of 2016, more than half of this group were still living in their Clearing House homes, and the number of occasions they had slept rough reduced from 5,740 to 252.

<sup>67</sup> St Mungos (2020) *Knocked back: Failing to support people sleeping rough with drug and alcohol problems is costing lives.* [https://www.mungos.org/app/uploads/2020/01/StM\\_Knocked\\_Back\\_DA\\_Research\\_Report\\_Final\\_2901.pdf](https://www.mungos.org/app/uploads/2020/01/StM_Knocked_Back_DA_Research_Report_Final_2901.pdf)

## Gosport local lettings scheme

Gosport local authority in Hampshire has a special scheme in place designed to increase access to social housing for people moving on from supported housing.

It has a quota of properties for this group, which is determined by need in the previous year and adjusted on an on-going basis if more people than expected are identified.

In 2019 there were five spaces for people with an identified mental health need, five for single homeless people, six for care leavers, four for young people and four for foster carers.

People who are ready to move on from supported housing are identified by their provider and join the social housing waiting list, but only local authority owned housing stock is provided to this group.

This quota system has been in place since 2001, and over 670 people have been re-housed via the scheme.

Prior to move on, prospective tenants have an assessment and their support needs are identified. They will then be referred on to an agency to provide some on-going support for at least six months.

Tenants are reviewed at six and 12 months alongside their support needs. Tenants can be moved to more appropriate housing if their needs change over the course of living in the property, or they will be moved onto a fixed term tenancy in the same property.

The scheme has housed people with learning disabilities, a history of homelessness, physical and mental health needs, and substance use issues. It helps these tenants to acquire the skills they need to live independently.

When people are moved into the new properties they are also supported by estate management teams, including housing officers. As they remain in the same property, they are able to build relationships and access support through these means too.

Gosport local authority currently owns over 3100 units of social housing, and is expanding the amount they possess. Their waiting list is shared with housing associations in the area, but since 2019 they have had 100% nomination rights apart from for expected moves between housing association properties.

## Sanctuary's relationship with Westminster Housing First

The Westminster Housing First team has existed since 2017. Since the project started, it has had a partnership with Sanctuary, a major housing association, to provide clients who were sleeping rough and working with the local outreach team with socially rented properties in Pimlico. Tenancies were initially funded for two years with a plan to further extend after a review.

The partnership has relied on close and ongoing communication between both providers. Sanctuary have been flexible with their referral criteria to accommodate Housing First clients with complex needs, for example, by relaxing their prohibitions

on tenants with serious and recent offending histories.

The Sanctuary connection has been invaluable for the Westminster Housing First team, providing clients with stable, affordable tenancies in one of the most expensive housing markets in the country.

An evaluation of the project was published in 2019. Although all the clients had extremely complex housing histories and high support needs, at the time of the evaluation there had only been one eviction / abandonment in two years, and that client had since returned to the property.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>68</sup> K Jones et al (2019) *Assessing the impact of Housing First in Brighton and Westminster* [https://www.mungos.org/app/uploads/2019/12/St-Mungos-Housing-First-Research\\_December-2019\\_Final.pdf](https://www.mungos.org/app/uploads/2019/12/St-Mungos-Housing-First-Research_December-2019_Final.pdf)

# 9

## Recommendations

Throughout this report, we have focused on the current environment which has led to increasing difficulties for people with a history of rough sleeping who are trying to access social housing. We have identified that problems begin with the overall supply of social housing, and are exacerbated by the lack of support available to people with complex needs.

This is the result of central government policy which must be addressed. The Government is currently collecting evidence on how local authorities allocate social housing, and has promised to deliver a White Paper on social housing during this Parliament. This provides a perfect opportunity to address the current under-supply of social housing, and to ensure that local authorities are supporting people with a history of rough sleeping to access the housing they need.

But locally set policies led by local authorities and housing associations can have an impact too.

Central Government, local authorities and housing associations should work together to implement these recommendations, and help provide the homes that are needed to end rough sleeping for good.





## Central Government

### Build 90,000 new social homes a year

The starting point for any policy which seeks to address access to affordable housing must be to increase the supply of new housing available at social rents. Without this, housing need in England will continue to rise.

Research by Crisis and the National Housing Federation has identified that at least 90,000 homes for social rent must be built in England every year for the next 15 years to address existing housing need in the country (alongside housing of other tenures). The total government investment needed in house building is £12.8bn per year (in today's prices) for the next ten years. We urge the government to increase investment in social rented housing in line with these recommendations, and commence building the homes that we need to end homelessness.

### Make more social homes available to people who have slept rough

To achieve its goal of ending rough sleeping in this parliament, the Government must urgently support the delivery of social homes which are specifically available to people with a history of sleeping rough or homeless people whose multiple needs which put them at risk of repeat homelessness. This will enable more people to move on from short-term accommodation services creating space for those who urgently need to move off the streets, and create a more sustainable solution to rough sleeping.

To achieve this, the Government should encourage local authorities to assess need in their area, both for Housing First and for homes for people who need low to medium level support after moving on from other homelessness services. The Government should provide capital funding for local authorities and housing associations to build, refurbish or lease homes for this group and revenue funding for appropriate support services to help people sustain their tenancy. This should include homes ring-fenced for Housing First, and for the expansion of the successful Clearing House model in areas with high levels of rough sleeping and housing need.

In the 2020 Budget, the Government announced £237 million for move on accommodation for up to 6,000 people who have slept rough and £144 million for associated support services. This funding is encouraging, and we urge the Government to take this opportunity to provide social housing to people who have slept rough. However, more work is needed to determine how best to distribute this money and guarantee funding for the future, to ensure that enough social housing and support is available in the long term both for people who have slept rough, or have experienced homelessness and need extra support to sustain their tenancy.

### Invest an extra £1bn per year in support services to prevent homelessness and end rough sleeping

Some people need support to find and keep a home, and no-one's vulnerability should prevent them from being able to access social housing. However, cuts to homelessness and housing related support services mean local authorities and housing associations are becoming increasingly wary of offering homes to people who need extra support to sustain their tenancy.

Research by St Mungo's has revealed that £1 billion less is being spent per year on homelessness and housing related services compared to 2007-08.<sup>69</sup> This has led to drastic cuts in services like floating support and supported housing which help to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping among people with complex support needs. We recommend funding is restored to the levels invested in homelessness services before the financial crash and this of funding is provided with long-term certainty. This means spending an extra £1 billion in each year of the next Spending Review period and beyond if needed. Given the wider pressure on local authority budgets, the funding should be ring-fenced to ensure it is targeted at services that prevent and reduce homelessness.

### Improve guidance on allocations policies to support recovery from rough sleeping

Current government guidance recommends that local authorities should exclude certain groups from restrictions to accessing social housing, and that flexibility should be used in some circumstances. For example, it recommends that those who are fleeing domestic abuse should not have to meet local connection or residency requirements, and further exemptions exist for members of the armed forces and their families.

We recommend that new guidance is published that extends exemptions to exclusionary policies to people with a history of rough sleeping and homeless people whose multiple needs put them at risk of sleeping rough. Where there is evidence that someone has a history of homelessness or rough sleeping, they should not face a blanket exclusion from the social housing waiting list based on existing qualification criteria. Instead the assumption should be that a stable tenancy can help their recovery and therefore their application should be considered on an individual basis with a plan to support them to sustain their tenancy.

People who have slept rough should not need to prove a local connection if they are accessing support services in the local area, and rent arrears should not prevent people from joining the social housing waiting list given that arrears can be result of an earlier crisis in the person's life. The emphasis must be shifted to ensuring people have access to the housing that they need to get their lives back on track.

<sup>69</sup> WPI Economics (2020) on behalf of St Mungo's and Homeless Link *Local authority spending on homelessness: 2020 update* <https://www.mungos.org/publication/local-authority-spending-on-homelessness-2020-update/>

## Local authorities and housing associations

### Implement special access schemes

Schemes which allow special access to social homes have proven to be a successful way of enabling people with a history of rough sleeping to end their homelessness by moving into secure, long term social housing. These schemes can take the form of a quota of properties offered by individual housing associations, access to a priority band on the social housing waiting list, or special agreements with individual homelessness services to offer move on properties for their clients.

We urge all local authorities and housing associations to consider how they could implement such schemes, following the example of existing programmes such as Clearing House, the Gosport council quota and housing associations which provide units for the delivery of Housing First.

### Improve allocations policies and access pathways

Individual local authorities can make tackling rough sleeping a priority and should consider amendments to their allocations policies, and improve pathways into social housing for people who have a history of sleeping rough or who are at significant risk.

We recommend that where someone has a history of rough sleeping or homelessness, they should not be blocked from housing waiting lists due to qualification criteria. Their applications should be considered on its own merits, with their needs and vulnerabilities taken into consideration alongside their behavioral history. In particular, special consideration should be given to people with a history of rough sleeping who are accessing support services in the local area, and those with rent arrears who have agreed to a repayment plan.

By taking a person-centred approach and ensuring that there are routes into housing for people most at risk, local authorities can do more to tackle rough sleeping and ensure people most at risk have a home for good.







To join our **Home for Good** campaign, please visit [www.mungos.org/homeforgood](http://www.mungos.org/homeforgood)



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