

# On the streets

An investigation into  
rough sleeping

December 2018

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# CHAPTER 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## What is the scale of rough sleeping?

The latest official statistics indicate that almost 5,000 people sleep rough on a given night in England. This is a figure that has more than doubled in five years and increased by 15% in the last year alone. However, it is a number that does not reflect the full extent to which rough sleeping impacts lives across the country. Many people may be missed by street counts and estimates, sleeping in concealed locations or trying to avoid bedding down at night at all. Many more people have their lives touched by rough sleeping over the course of a year – something that can have a profound impact even when the experience may be short-lived.

## Why do people lose their settled home?

People lose their settled home for different reasons and there are often multiple factors at play for individuals and families. The people we spoke to told us that the overriding reason is being evicted or asked to leave. Eviction is often the last stage in a complex process which can include triggers such as relationship breakdown, loss of a close family member, drug and/or alcohol misuse and mental health problems.

## What are the barriers to finding a new home?

Once individuals or families have lost their settled home, they then experience difficulties finding a new home before they end up on the street. The people we spoke to told us that this can range from the council not providing support, discrimination against housing benefit claimants and families, and not having enough money for a deposit. Almost half of the people who were turned away by the council were families with children.

## What are the everyday experiences of rough sleeping?

There are some common experiences among the current and former rough sleepers we spoke to, such as the difficulty of accessing services, the loss of possessions, abusive behaviour and stigma towards people who are street homeless. Half of the people we spoke to told us that they experienced difficulties accessing services when they were street homeless. Whilst many people still managed to access these services, it was common to experience significant challenges, such as having benefits sanctioned and not getting medication.

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## **How does rough sleeping impact on individuals and families?**

Rough sleeping had significant impacts on the people we spoke to. Eight of the people we spoke to told us that being street homeless has had an impact on their physical health. Reasons cited for the deterioration of their physical health include being outside and vulnerable to the elements, including extreme cold, sleep deprivation, drug and/or alcohol misuse, a lack of food, and the difficulty of accessing doctors. Other impacts include the increasing prevalence of mental health problems, relationship breakdown with friends and family and difficulties finding a job when street homeless.

## **What are the solutions?**

There is political impetus to end rough sleeping. This includes a greater focus on models such as Housing First. Housing First is a useful model that provides housing to people with complex needs who are street homeless. Most importantly, we need to prevent people from rough sleeping in the first place. This approach will take many forms but could include: providing real security to private renters to prevent unnecessary eviction, making sure that councils are providing their legal duties to prevent and relieve homelessness, ending discrimination against housing benefit claimants, and building more social housing so that people can live in permanent homes they can truly afford.

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## CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTION

In 2018 no one should be living on the street. But official statistics show that there are almost 5,000 people living on the street on a given night in England. They also show that the number of people found rough sleeping has more than doubled in the last five years. This is not inevitable and should be prevented.

The journey to rough sleeping is complex, often including several stages such as being evicted from a settled home, not being able to stay with friends or family and the local authority not providing support.

The experience of living and sleeping on the street can impact on people's physical and mental health, their self-esteem, their relationships with friends and family, and their ability to keep or find a job. It also puts them at risk of violent behaviour and abuse.

In the last year there have been some significant policy developments relating to street homelessness. In April the Homelessness Reduction Act was implemented which gave local housing authorities new duties to assess, prevent and relieve homelessness for anyone who is eligible for assistance, including street homeless people. The government also published its Rough Sleeping Strategy in August. This set out the Government's plans to make good on its manifesto pledge to halve rough sleeping in this Parliament and to end it by 2027.

This investigation explores the reasons why people become street homeless, their everyday experiences of being street homeless with nowhere to go at night, and the impact this has had on their lives, in the hope that it will raise awareness of this national emergency and shed some light on how we might solve it.

***“I’ll tell you what, being homeless is a million times worse than you think it is.”***

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# CHAPTER 3: WHAT IS ROUGH SLEEPING?

Before we outline the methodology and present the key research findings, this section briefly sets out what we mean by homelessness and rough sleeping.

**Homelessness** means not having a suitable home. A person can be homeless, even if they have a roof over their head for the night. You are considered to be homeless if you are:

- sleeping on the streets because you have nowhere else to stay
- staying in a homeless hostel, B&B or night shelter
- staying in self-contained temporary accommodation provided by the council
- squatting (because you have no legal right to stay)
- temporarily staying with friends or family because you have nowhere settled to stay.

You can also be legally recognised as homeless if your housing circumstances are severely detrimental to your wellbeing, including:

- being at risk of violence or abuse in your home
- living with severe overcrowding or in poor conditions that pose a significant risk to your health.

**Rough sleeping** is defined by the Government as:

- ‘people sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments)’
- ‘people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or ‘bashes’).’<sup>1</sup>

In this report we refer to both rough sleeping and street homelessness to talk about the act of living and sleeping outside or somewhere not designed for habitation.

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<sup>1</sup> Homelessness data: notes and definitions, Rough sleepers <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-data-notes-and-definitions#rough-sleepers>

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# CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

## Quantitative research

We carried out analysis of quantitative data to understand the scale of the issue. We looked at how many people sleep rough in England, including where they sleep rough, as well as trends over time. We also present some findings about who sleeps rough. Most of the data is from the Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government's Rough sleeping statistics<sup>2</sup> with some figures from London's Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN)<sup>3</sup>.

We also analysed data from our own records<sup>4</sup>. Shelter's advisers record information about people when they approach us for help, including their homelessness status, household type and tenure. We analysed data for all households that were recorded as street homeless in the last five years.

## Qualitative research

We carried out qualitative research to understand people's experiences of rough sleeping. We spoke to 12 people who have experience of street homelessness. We talked to them about where they are living at the moment, their journeys to rough sleeping, and their experience of living and sleeping on the street or somewhere not designed for habitation.

We reached people through our own services. We talked to current and former rough sleepers based in London, Dorset, Birmingham and Manchester, including two peer mentors who now work for Shelter. Our sample is small and certainly not representative of everyone who has experience of rough sleeping in England. However, it provides insight into the range of pathways to street homelessness and the everyday experiences of rough sleepers, and the impact this has on people's lives.

We asked both open- and closed-ended questions to gather qualitative and quantitative information. All but one of the interviews were conducted face-to-face either in Shelter's hubs or in a local café. Qualitative interviews were transcribed and then analysed using thematic analysis. People's real names have been removed for anonymity.

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<sup>2</sup> The latest rough sleeping statistics were published in January 2018 and the counts were carried out in Autumn 2017. MHCLG, [Rough sleeping statistics](#)

<sup>3</sup> CHAIN statistics are based on information recorded by outreach teams, accommodation projects, day centres and specialist projects such as the GLA commissioned No Second Night Out assessment and reconnection service. Greater London Authority, [CHAIN Annual Report](#), 2017/18

<sup>4</sup> Shelter's advisers record information about clients when they approach us for help using our Case Management System.

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## About the people we spoke to

The majority of the people we spoke to were former rough sleepers. This was in part due to ethical concerns around approaching current rough sleepers who may not be receiving the support they need. The one current rough sleeper we spoke to came in to a Shelter hub on a day we were conducting interviews. People we spoke to had slept in many different places such as disused buildings, shop store rooms, tents, car parks, and bus stations.

Five of the people we spoke to are now living in temporary accommodation, some of which is emergency accommodation, such as B&Bs and hostels. The remaining participants were living in supported housing or voluntary sector hostels with one person living in a private rented home that had been arranged by the council.

Everyone we spoke to was aged between 32 and 71 with most people in their 40s and 50s. Although most of the people we spoke to were men, five of the participants were either women or families who had slept rough with their children.

In the next chapter we explore the scale of rough sleeping in England, including hotspots around the country and change over time.



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# CHAPTER 5: THE SCALE OF ROUGH SLEEPING

## How many people sleep rough?

The latest official statistics indicate that almost 5,000 people (4,751) sleep rough on a given night in England. This has more than doubled in five years and increased by 15% in the last year alone.<sup>5</sup> However, it is a number that does not reflect the full extent to which rough sleeping impacts lives across the country. Many people may be missed by street counts and estimates, sleeping in concealed locations or trying to avoid bedding down at night at all, instead riding public transport or walking the streets to feel safer.

Many more people have their lives touched by rough sleeping over the course of a year – something that can have a profound impact even when the experience may be short-lived. CHAIN statistics<sup>6</sup> show that in London alone nearly 7,500 people were found sleeping on the street for at least one night over the course of a year – a number that is more than six times higher than the number recorded sleeping rough on a given night.

At Shelter in the last five years over 22,000 households have come to us for help when they were street homeless or at risk of becoming street homeless<sup>7</sup>, a number which includes many lone women and families with dependent children. Shockingly in some cases families can end up spending nights on the street when the support that should prevent this happening has failed.

## Where do people sleep rough?

The area with the **highest rates** of rough sleepers is central London. However, not all local authorities with the highest rates of rough sleepers are in London. Areas including Brighton and Hove (South East), Bedford (East of England) and Southend-on-Sea (East of England) are in the top 10 local authorities. This demonstrates that there are rough sleeping hotspots in London, the South East and the East of England.

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<sup>5</sup> The number of rough sleepers in England has increased by 106% in the last five years. MHCLG, [Rough sleeping statistics](#), Table 1

<sup>6</sup> Greater London Authority, [CHAIN Annual Report](#), 2017/18

<sup>7</sup> When clients approach us for help we record their homelessness status. We looked at data from the last five years (November 2013 to November 2018) for all cases that were recorded as street homeless. Some households may have come to Shelter for help more than once over the 5-year period. Some households recorded as street homeless may not have spent a night on the street.

Rank	Local authority	Region	Number of rough sleepers	Rate per 1,000 households
1	City of London	London	36	7.08
2	Westminster	London	217	1.78
3	Brighton and Hove	South East	178	1.37
4	Camden	London	127	1.14
5	Bedford	East of England	76	1.08
6	Luton	East of England	87	1.06
7	Oxford	South East	61	1.02
8	Hastings	South East	40	0.94
9	Southend-on-Sea	East of England	72	0.91
10	Eastbourne	South East	41	0.86

Table 1 The local authorities with the highest rates of rough sleepers in England<sup>8</sup>

If we just look at the **absolute number** of people rough sleeping on a given night, rather than the rate, the top 10 local authorities are similar but with some new additions from the North West (Manchester) and the South West (Bristol and Cornwall). These local authorities are not included in the above table because they have lower rates of rough sleepers per 1,000 households.

<sup>8</sup> The most recent data was published in January 2018 and the counts were carried out in Autumn 2017. Since then some areas may have been able to reduce the number of rough sleepers due to [targeted investment](#) for local authorities with high levels of rough sleeping. MHCLG, [Rough sleeping statistics](#), Table 1

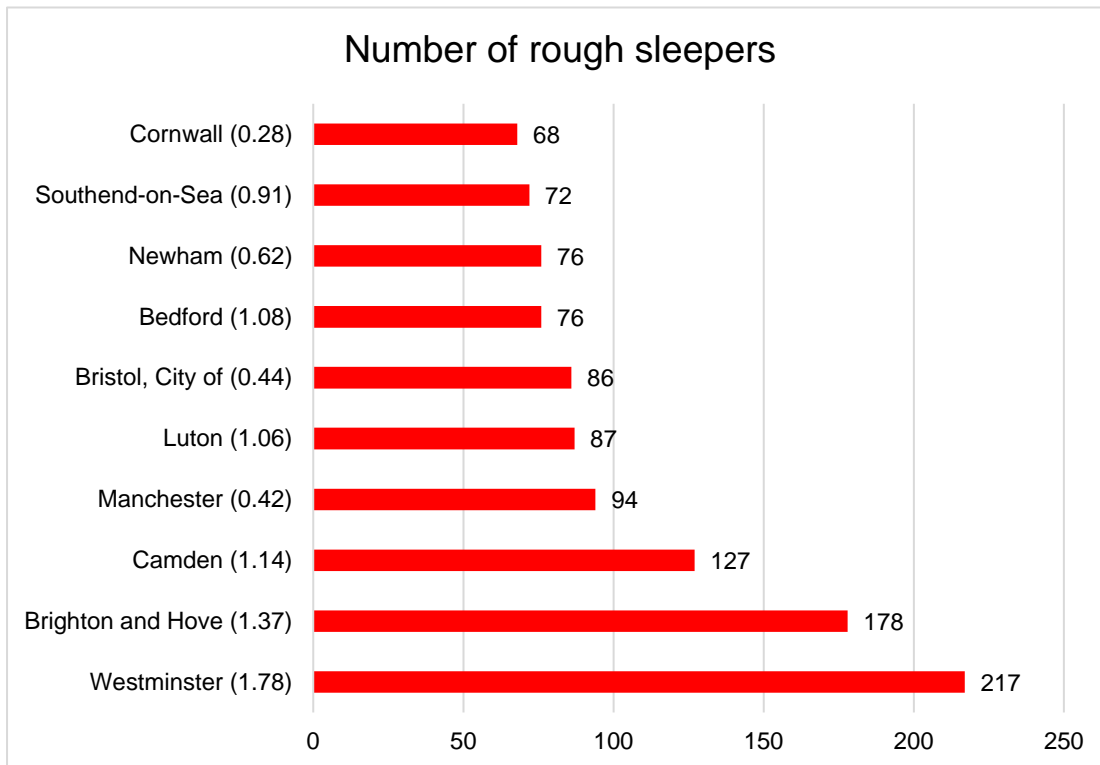


Figure 1 The local authorities with the highest street counts in England<sup>9</sup>

Local authorities across the country, such as Bedford and Luton in the East of England, Manchester in the North West, Brighton and Hove in the South East and Bristol in the South West, could have some of the highest numbers of rough sleepers because of the increasing cost of housing and particularly private rents. These towns and cities have experienced a greater increase in private rents than wage growth since 2011<sup>10</sup>.

There are also several seaside towns in the top local authorities. Hastings, Southend-on-Sea, Eastbourne and Cornwall could have some of the highest numbers of rough sleepers because people gravitate towards seaside towns in search of cheap out-of-season accommodation.

It is likely that the increase in the number of foreign nationals with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) can also help to explain the high street counts in some areas. People with NRPF are at high risk of homelessness because they cannot access mainstream housing and welfare benefits and are usually not allowed to work.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> MHCLG, [Rough sleeping statistics](#), Table 1

<sup>10</sup> Since 2011 there has been a significant private rent to wage lag in these towns and cities: 21.1% in Bedford, 17.6% in Luton, 15.7% in Manchester, 18.5% in Brighton and Hove and 31.9% in Bristol [https://england.shelter.org.uk/support\\_us/campaigns/rising\\_rents](https://england.shelter.org.uk/support_us/campaigns/rising_rents)

<sup>11</sup> Homeless Link, [Supporting people with no recourse to public funds \(NRPF\)](#), 2016

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## How has the number of people sleeping rough changed over time?

The number of rough sleepers has increased at a similar rate in London and outside London. The number of people found rough sleeping has increased by 104% in London and 106% in the rest of England in the last five years.

The region that has experienced the greatest increase in rough sleepers since 2012 is the North West (195%). This is followed by the South East (153%) and the East Midlands (128%).

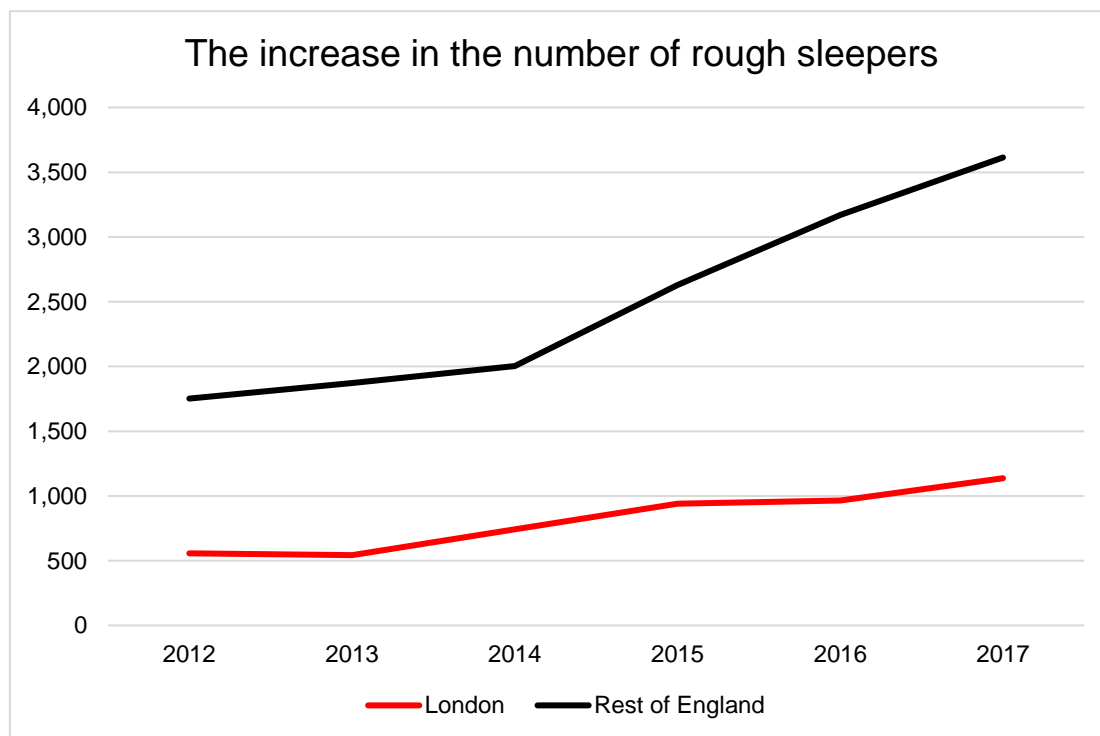


Figure 2 The increase in the number of rough sleepers in London and the rest of England over the last five years<sup>12</sup>

When we look at the **increase over the last five years** for individual local authorities, London becomes even less prevalent. Only one of the top 10 local authorities that have experienced the greatest increase in the number of rough sleepers is in London. Although Camden has experienced the greatest increase of 2,440%, this is followed by Bolton (1,600%) in the North West, and Wycombe (1,300%) and Hastings (1,233%), both of which are in the South East of England.

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<sup>12</sup> MHCLG, [Rough sleeping statistics](#), Table 1

Rank	Local authority	Region	2012	2017	5 year % increase
1	Camden	London	5	127	2,440%
2	Bolton	North West	1	17	1,600%
3	Wycombe	South East	1	14	1,300%
4	Hastings	South East	3	40	1,233%
5	Rochford	East of England	1	11	1,000%
6	Fareham	South East	1	10	900%
7	Bristol, City of	South West	9	86	856%
8	Stoke-on-Trent	West Midlands	2	19	850%
9	Woking	South East	2	18	800%
10	Welwyn Hatfield	East of England	2	18	800%

Table 2 The local authorities with the greatest increase in the number of rough sleepers<sup>13</sup>

### Who sleeps rough?

We know that the majority of people who sleep rough are single men aged over 25. Official statistics show that 83% of rough sleepers are male and 81% are aged over 25.<sup>14</sup>

But at Shelter we know that women and families are also affected. In the last five years, 21% of the households recorded as street homeless were lone women and 11% were families with dependent children.<sup>15</sup> This could mean that they

<sup>13</sup> MHCLG, [Rough sleeping statistics](#), Table 1

<sup>14</sup> MHCLG, [Rough sleeping statistics](#), Table 2a and 2c

<sup>15</sup> The percentage of households recorded as street homeless that are lone women and families with dependent children was calculated using data from our Case Management System. When clients approach us for help we record their homelessness status. We looked at data from the last five years (November 2013 to November 2018) for all cases that were recorded as street homeless. Some households may have come to Shelter for help more than once over the 5-year period. Some cases recorded as street homeless may not have spent a night

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approached Shelter for help and at the point of contact had nowhere to go that night. Both women and families are more likely to be missed by government street counts because they prefer hidden sleep sites to reduce their vulnerability to assault.<sup>16</sup> This finding was reinforced by our investigation. The women and families we spoke to slept in cars, disused buildings and shop store rooms.

It is also a commonly held view that the majority of rough sleepers have support needs. Whilst some do, this is not the case for everyone who ends up on the street. In London in 2017/18, 43% of rough sleepers had alcohol support needs, 40% of rough sleepers had drug support needs and 50% of rough sleepers had mental health support needs.<sup>17</sup>

It is important to recognise that these support needs are unlikely to be the reason that people end up on the street. It could be that they acted as complicating factors, and they are likely to have been exacerbated by living and sleeping on the street. Moreover, at least one in five (20%) people found rough sleeping had no alcohol, drug or mental health support needs.<sup>18</sup>

This chapter has explored the scale of rough sleeping in England, including hotspots and trends. To gain insight into people's experiences and why they ended up on the street, we spoke to 12 people who are current or former rough sleepers. We talked to them about their journey to rough sleeping, their everyday experiences of living and sleeping on the street, and the impact this has had on their lives.

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on the street, particularly households with dependent children. We define lone women as lone female households with and without dependent children. We define families as all households with dependent children.

<sup>16</sup> Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2018) [Women and Rough Sleeping: A critical review of current research and methodology](#), University of York, Centre for Housing Policy

<sup>17</sup> Greater London Authority, [CHAIN Annual Report](#), 2017/18

<sup>18</sup> This could be higher because almost a third (29%) of rough sleepers in 2017/18 did not have a support needs assessment recorded. Greater London Authority, [CHAIN Annual Report](#), 2017/18

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## CHAPTER 6: JOURNEYS TO ROUGH SLEEPING

People's journeys to rough sleeping are complex and often include several stages. There are many reasons why individuals and families end up on the street. What is common across all experiences is that people lose their settled home – for example due to eviction or relationship breakdown – and then find themselves unable to find a new home.

This may be because they don't have the money for a deposit, they are unable to access support from the local authority, or they have no friends and family to turn to. Some people we spoke to told us that there are other complicating factors which they felt help to explain why they ended up rough sleeping, such as drug and/or alcohol misuse, and mental health problems.

Whilst some people lose their settled home and then almost immediately end up on the street, other people we spoke to told us that it can be a gradual process with intermediate stages such as staying in hostels and sofa surfing.

### Why do people lose their settled home?

People lose their settled home for different reasons and there are often multiple factors at play for individuals and families. The people we spoke to told us that the overriding reason is being evicted or asked to leave.

#### *Eviction*

10 of the people we spoke to told us that they lost their settled home due to being evicted or asked to leave. The majority of the people who were evicted were evicted from a private rented home. Everyone who was evicted told us that it played a significant role in them ending up on the street.

This is in line with wider homelessness: the end of a private tenancy is the leading cause of statutory homelessness<sup>19</sup>, as well as statistics showing that being evicted or asked to leave is the most commonly reported reason for rough sleepers in London leaving their last settled base.<sup>20</sup> The reasons cited for being evicted include having their housing benefit reduced and not being able to keep up with rent payments.

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<sup>19</sup> In 2018 Q2, 24% of households who were owed a prevention or relief duty lost their last settled home due to the termination of an assured shorthold tenancy. MHCLG, [Live Homelessness tables](#), Temporary accommodation, Table A2

<sup>20</sup> Greater London Authority, [CHAIN Annual Report](#), 2017/18

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*“We couldn’t afford the rent due to housing benefit cuts. The landlord just said leave and go to the council.” Woman, 50s, with dependent children (13, 11, 9 and 3 years old)*

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It was also quite common for people to have been evicted on multiple occasions and subsequently find themselves rough sleeping on different occasions.

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*“I’ve been homeless a few times after I’ve been evicted. I was illegally evicted... That was when I first became homeless and slept on the street.” Man, 70s*

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People were also evicted from social rented homes. One man told us that he was evicted from a council property because his aunt had died, and the council were not willing to allow him to take on the tenancy. This forced him and his two children to sleep rough for a night.

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*“The judge advised the council to act responsibly and let us stay in the property because we had been paying rent and keeping it clean. But shortly after they came and kicked us out. And then we became homeless instantly. They didn’t give us any time to find somewhere else to live.” Man, 30s, with dependent children (5 and 3 years old)*

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Whilst eviction was the overriding reason for the loss of a settled home for most of the people we spoke to, this is often the last stage in a complex process which can include triggers such as relationship breakdown, loss of a close family member, drug and/or alcohol misuse and mental health problems.

### **Relationship breakdown**

Five of the people we spoke to suggested that relationship breakdown was an important precursor to them losing their settled home. They could either not return to their shared property or could no longer afford to stay there because they couldn’t afford their housing costs alone.

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*“I had my own business and I lived with my ex-partner. I was settled then, I was a hairdresser, I had my own salon... [but] I split up with my ex-partner, so I couldn’t go back.” Woman, 30s*

*“I then became homeless because I couldn’t afford the rent for the 3-bedroom place by myself.” Woman, 50s*

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## Case study: Eviction, landlord discrimination and relationship breakdown

Imogen is in her 50s and was street homeless for 18 months. Before this she was living in a private rented home with her friend. When her friend moved out Imogen was no longer able to afford the rent, so her landlord asked her to leave. She then moved in to a homeless hostel where she lived for a few months before becoming street homeless.

Another friend offered to pay her deposit, but Imogen couldn't find a home due to landlord discrimination against housing benefit claimants.

When Imogen was street homeless she was able to spend 5 hours every night in a shop store room. She was able to sleep there when the shop was closed.

***“It was a saviour that I had a few hours a day that I knew I could be safe.”***

Imogen was able to use the address of the shop store room to register at the local doctors. It also meant that she could access her benefits, so she could use this money to buy food. She recognised that she was relatively lucky to be able to use the shop address – many street homeless people do not have a fixed address they can use.

Being street homeless has had a significant impact on her mental health. Her depression and anxiety were exacerbated by living on the street. Imogen's depression also acted as a barrier to getting help.

***“I had 18 months not joining in society... my depression had set and I felt like I'd screwed up my opportunities.”***

Whilst Imogen was street homeless she lost contact with her family. This made her feel very alone. Imogen distanced herself from her daughter because she was embarrassed to tell her where she was living.

This feeling of embarrassment and low self-esteem is still there for Imogen. Although she is now living in supported accommodation, being street homeless has had a long-term impact on her self-confidence and mental health. Imogen is still suffering from anxiety and depression and finds it difficult to leave the safe haven of her new home.

***“I'm embarrassed because I'm not the person I'm supposed to be because I'm the homeless person.”***

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### ***Loss of a family member***

Experiencing the loss of a close family member was another common factor that played a role in the journey to rough sleeping. Just less than half of the people we spoke to told us that the death of a close family member helps to explain why they lost their settled home and subsequently ended up on the street.

This manifested itself in different ways, such as the family home being sold, not being able to take on a council tenancy, and the costs associated with a funeral pushing people over the edge financially, so they can no longer afford the rent. The grief and its impact on people's mental health are common across all experiences.

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*"We were finding it hard to live. Then my dad died, I came back [from abroad] and couldn't afford my bills. And then we had to sleep outside." Man, 30s, with dependent children (5 and 3 years old)*

*"I lost my girlfriend last year, I found her dead and I went off the rails a bit. I lost my accommodation... they gave me 24 hours-notice to leave the premises. So, I was going to be homeless." Man, 40s*

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### **What are the barriers to finding a new home?**

Once individuals or families have lost their settled home, they then experience difficulties finding a new home before they end up on the street. The people we spoke to told us that this can range from the council not providing support, discrimination against housing benefit claimants and families, and not having enough money for a deposit.

#### ***Council not providing support***

Seven of the people we spoke to told us that when they lost their settled home, they approached the council for support but were turned away. Reasons for this include households being classed as 'intentionally' homeless and not having a local connection to the local authority. Gatekeeping (where the local authority refuses to receive or assess an application for statutory assistance) was a commonly cited problem for some of the people we spoke to.

Almost half of the people who were turned away by the council were families with children. This is particularly worrying because families with dependent children have priority need so should be accepted as homeless by the local housing authority. If a family is found to be intentionally homeless, or there is an issue

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with eligibility<sup>21</sup>, the family should still be supported by the council through Children's Services.<sup>22</sup> The following quotes are from parents with young children.

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*"The reason we slept on the street is the council didn't support us... The council told us to bring the eviction letter that very day we were evicted but we weren't let in the building." Man, 50s, with dependent children (7, 5 and 3 years old)*

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*"They just told us that we had been blacklisted. They had made us homeless. They promised to give us a place to live and then we got the email saying they couldn't help us. It was terrifying." Man, 30s, with dependent children (5 and 3 years old)*

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Someone else we spoke to told us that no council would accept that they had a local connection and would therefore not provide support.

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*"I get unbelievably frustrated about the whole situation, because I just seem to be pushed from pillar to post. Every time I go back to the council, they send me back here." Man, 50s*

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The same person believes that because he is a single man the council are less willing to provide him support.<sup>23</sup>

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*"Councils do not like single, homeless men, because apparently we can look after ourselves, which is absolute rubbish." Man, 50s*

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### **Landlord discrimination**

Another reason for not being able to find a new home is landlord discrimination, particularly against housing benefit claimants and families. 1 in 4 of the people we spoke to suggested that they experienced discrimination when trying to find a new home, all of whom are either women or families with dependent children.

We know this is common across the country. A recent survey of landlords by YouGov in the UK found that 43% of landlords say they have an outright ban against people on housing benefit. 18% say have a ban on families with children.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Eligibility relates to immigration status.

<sup>22</sup> Under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, social services have a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need in their area. This includes providing accommodation. However, the council has discretion as to whether or not to accept or refuse the duty.

<sup>23</sup> People without dependents who are not considered vulnerable are not usually entitled to be accommodated by the local authority. This equally applies to men and women.

<sup>24</sup> YouGov, survey of 1,137 private landlords in the UK, online, July-August 2017

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*“There was ‘no DSS’ discrimination definitely. They didn’t want to let to me because I was on housing benefit... It’s another prejudice against the homeless.” Woman, 50s*

*“Landlords didn’t want families. They didn’t want to rent to us because we had kids. They said, no you have children. I tried a lot...but they said, no, you have a family, we can’t rent to you.” Man, 50s, with dependent children (7, 5 and 3 years old)*

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### **Not enough money for a deposit**

The majority of the people we spoke to told us that not having enough money for a deposit was another significant factor in explaining their street homelessness. This created a barrier to entering the private rented sector, alongside other barriers such as discrimination and the lack of a guarantor and reference. Again, this can be a common barrier for many people on low-incomes accessing a private rental.<sup>25</sup>

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*“We can’t get the money upfront to rent a place, so we can’t rent privately. We can’t afford the upfront rent and deposit. You also need a guarantor and a reference. We don’t have these things.” Man, 30s, with dependent children (5 and 3 years old)*

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### **Lack of support from family and friends**

Half of the people we spoke to ended up rough sleeping because they had nowhere else to turn. This could be because they didn’t know anyone who was able to accommodate them, or they had burned bridges with friends and families due to drug or alcohol misuse.

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*“I’ve been on the streets because basically I lost my mum when I was 27 and I had no one to go to if I had a problem or anything like that.” Man, 30s*

*“I’d reached a point where I’d burnt all my bridges, so that was my most difficult point because then I felt like I had no choice but to carry on doing what I was doing.” Woman, 30s*

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<sup>25</sup> Spurr, H. [Shut Out: the barriers low-income households face in private renting](#), Shelter, 2017

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## Case study: Eviction, loss of family members and the council not providing support

Michael is in his 30s and was living in a private rented home with his wife and two children. His father died suddenly which meant that he had to fly abroad to organise and attend the funeral. The cost of the flight and the funeral caused financial difficulties for the family.

***“I lost my Dad and within three months I had to travel to help bury him. When I came back I found myself in financial difficulties.”***

The family were struggling to pay the rent so were asked to leave. Michael, his wife and their two children moved into his aunt’s council property. Michael’s aunt died soon after they moved in, and the council evicted the family as they were not able to inherit the property.

Michael and his family were not able to rent privately due to various barriers, including the deposit, landlord discrimination and the lack of a guarantor or referee. This meant that they were not able to find a new home.

The family then went to the council for help but were turned away. They were told to ring the out of hours service, but Michael and his children were unable to find emergency accommodation.

***“They just told us that we had been blacklisted. They had made us homeless.”***

The family had nowhere to go that night so had to spend a night on the street. This was terrifying for both the parents and children. They spent the night wandering around cafes until they closed and then tried to sleep in shop fronts.

***“I sobbed that night, all of us were in tears. The kids were cold and shaky.”***

The next day the family were placed in emergency accommodation. Since then the family have lived in six different types of emergency accommodation. The process of being evicted, rough sleeping, and living in temporary accommodation has had significant impacts on the parents’ jobs and the children’s education.

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Someone else we spoke to told us that their relationship breakdown with family members meant they were not able to borrow the money they needed for a deposit or one month's rent.

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*"Where were you when I needed you? I wasn't going to spend the deposit, it's going to the landlord. The one month rent I won't spend that. You've both got your own houses – why won't you do it? They didn't want to get involved."*  
Woman, 50

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### **What else plays a role in ending up on the street?**

In addition to losing their settled home and being unable to find a new home, there are other reasons why people end up on the street.

#### ***Leaving an institution or the military***

Four of the people we spoke to told us that leaving an institution, or the military was important in explaining their journey to street homelessness. Individuals told us that when they left prison, rehab or the military, they didn't know how to start their lives again and were not provided with the support they needed to find a settled home. There is evidence to suggest that people leaving institutions are overrepresented in the homeless population due to this lack of support.<sup>26</sup>

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*"When you come out of prison, it's very hard. There's no support."* Man, 40s

*"I was in a rehab and I got kicked out and I ended up living on the streets in... an abandoned warehouse."* Woman, 30s

*"I first slept on the street as soon as I left the Marines and I've been homeless ever since."* Man, 50s

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#### ***Drug and/or alcohol misuse***

Five of the people we spoke to told us that their drug and/or alcohol misuse acted as a complicating factor in their street homelessness. One man told us that his alcohol misuse played a role in his relationship breakdown and therefore the loss of his settled home.

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*"I was with my girlfriend then but because of the alcohol she didn't want me there. It just spiralled from there."* Man, 40s

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<sup>26</sup> Downie, M. et al. [Everybody in: How to end homelessness in Great Britain](#), Crisis, 2018

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Most people who were evicted due to drug and alcohol misuse were already homeless and living in insecure housing, such as hostels. These people's experiences suggest that drug and alcohol misuse can push people into having to sleep rough when they are already in a precarious housing situation.

Having drug and alcohol problems can also make it harder to access support when you are street homeless. One man told us that he felt that being a drug addict made the council less inclined to provide support.

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*"They tend to take advantage if you're on drugs... they take advantage of that not to help you. Not really giving a toss. You know, they don't really care. It's like being put to the very back of the queue if you're homeless and a drug addict." Man, 40s*

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### ***Mental health problems***

Half of the people we spoke to told us that their mental health problems played a role in their street homelessness. This could be because their mental health problems, without sufficient support, made them less able to deal with difficult situations, such as eviction or the loss of a close family member.

Mental health problems can also play a more direct role in ending up on the street. One man told us that his depression meant that he was less able to keep up with rent payments and was subsequently evicted.

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*"Twelve, thirteen years ago, I had a four-bedroom detached place I was paying £1,200 [a month] for but you never know when depression's going to strike"*  
*Man, 40s*

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The people we spoke to told us that their mental health problems, coupled with a lack of support, made it harder for them to maintain a tenancy or find a new home.

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## Summary

This section has explored people's journeys to rough sleeping. People end up on the street because they lose their settled home and are unable to find a new home. Fragile housing situations can be compounded by other factors, such as a lack of support from friends and family, mental health problems and drug and alcohol misuse.

The interviews suggested that the overriding cause of street homelessness is the lack of access to an affordable and secure home.

Why did the people we spoke to lose their settled home?

- Eviction
- Relationship breakdown
- Loss of a close family member

What were the barriers to them finding a new home?

- Council not providing support
- Landlord discrimination (housing benefit claimants and families)
- Not enough money for a deposit
- Lack of support from family or friends

What else can play a role in ending up on the street?

- Leaving an institution or the military
- Drug and/or alcohol misuse
- Mental health problems



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## CHAPTER 7: EXPERIENCES OF ROUGH SLEEPING

We also talked to people about their experiences of living and sleeping on the street or somewhere not designed for habitation.

This section of the report demonstrates that there are some common experiences among the current and former rough sleepers we spoke to, such as the difficulty of accessing services, the loss of possessions, abusive behaviour and stigma towards people who are street homeless.

The people we spoke to also told us that rough sleeping has impacted on their physical and mental health, their relationships with friends and family and their ability to keep or find a job.

We also briefly explore people's experiences of escaping rough sleeping, including where they are living now.

### Where do people sleep rough?

Through our investigation we have found that people sleep rough in a wide range of locations, and it is common for people to move around frequently, often for fear of being moved on by the police and to keep warm. The people we spoke to had slept in disused buildings, shop store rooms, tents, car parks, bus stations, church doorways and a forest.

We spoke to three women with experience of rough sleeping, all of whom chose to sleep in more enclosed spaces where they felt slightly safer.

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*"If I could get into garages, I'd stay in garages, if I could get into a set of flats and go under the stairs or an abandoned warehouse, they were the main places that I used to go, car parks. Anywhere that I could get inside, really."*  
Woman, 30s

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### What are the everyday experiences of rough sleeping?

#### *Difficulty accessing services*

Half of the people we spoke to told us that they experienced difficulties accessing services when they were street homeless. Whilst many people still managed to access these services, it was common to experience significant challenges. Not having a fixed postal address can impact on your ability to access post, set up a bank account, receive benefits and register with a doctor. As a recent Citizens Advice report suggests, this can leave homeless people in 'a catch 22 situation'

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where they are unable to access support to help relieve their homelessness because they are homeless and have no fixed abode.<sup>27</sup>

One man we spoke to had trouble accessing several services as a result of being street homeless.

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*“The problem is that officially you can’t even have a bank account so how do you handle your money?... The other thing is my medication. I’m not supposed to go to the doctors here because I’m NFA [no fixed abode].”*

*“I used a charity’s address a couple of times for mail when I was rough sleeping. Stuff was going everywhere. Some stuff I get but I lost a lot of post.”*  
Man, 70s

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Another woman was able to access her benefits and go to a local doctor because she could use the shop address where she was staying in a store room for four hours every night. She recognised that her situation was relatively unique.

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*“If you’re homeless you don’t get anything. I registered with the doctor and told him the situation and he agreed to take me on. The shop was only four doors down, so he knew. I could use the address for medical and ESA and the doctors knew where I was.”* Woman, 50s

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Whilst several of the people we spoke to were able to access some services, their approach was often ad hoc and not without challenges, such as having benefits sanctioned as a result of not receiving post. One man we spoke to gets his post sent to a homeless day centre which is a few hours away by train. This means he is unable to get there very regularly.

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*“If I don’t turn up in a couple of days, he [an employee at the day centre] sends my post back and that’s how my benefits got sanctioned, because he sent my post back.”* Man, 50s

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### **Loss of possessions**

Five of the people we spoke to told us that losing possessions was a common experience when rough sleeping. This was both in terms of people’s belongings being stolen when they were street homeless, as well as not being able to bring all their possessions with them when they had to leave their accommodation. Possessions lost included both expensive goods, such as appliances and furniture, and more sentimental belongings such as family photographs.

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<sup>27</sup> Byrne, G. [The postal paradox: how having no address keeps people homeless](#), Citizens Advice, 2018

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*“We only pay for the storage that we can afford. We had to leave the cooker, most of our furniture. We just took the most important things, what we would need to start again.” Man, 30s, with dependent children (5 and 3 years old)*

*“I lost all my contacts and old photos... I had a picture of my mum, all these things, they’re irreplaceable... Because I was homeless, and the council said I had to go, where was I going to take it?” Man, 70s*

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### **Abusive behaviour**

Several of the people we spoke to told us that they were regularly at risk of violent and abusive behaviour, often by members of the public. This abusive behaviour included being threatened with a knife, being urinated on and being hit – even being set on fire.

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*“There were a couple of violent ones [interactions with the public] as well, where I got threatened with a knife and I managed to run away. There was another one where I got attacked but they tried to keep me inside a room and I screamed really loud and I managed to get out.” Woman, 30s*

*“When you’re on the streets you’ve got to keep your eyes open constantly, just in case you get the odd person come past who will be aggressive to you, or something like that.” Man, 30s*

*“I’ve been urinated on, set fire to... hit with a baseball bat.” Man, 50s*

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### **Stigma and shame**

Half of the people we spoke to told us that feeling stigmatised is common among street homeless people. The people we spoke to felt that street homeless people are often judged and look down on because of their situation.

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*“When you’re homeless... people look at you like you’re a leper, do you see what I mean? All the people who once talked to you, they don’t talk to you now just because you’re a bit scruffy.” Man, 40s*

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This stigma and prejudice often leads to feelings of embarrassment. One woman told us that she is embarrassed about being known as “the homeless person”.

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*“I was her mum and she knew me getting up at 6 in the morning, going to work. She used to see me in a suit every day, going to work and getting in at half 7 every night. I was a professional mum to her, and for her to look at me now. I get embarrassed... I’m embarrassed because I’m not the person I’m supposed to be because I’m the homeless person.” Woman, 50s*

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## Case study: Difficulty accessing services, losing possessions, impact on physical health and relationship breakdown

John is in his 70s and has been street homeless on multiple occasions, often after being evicted from private and social rented homes. In the last year alone, John has spent three months living on the street. Over this time, he has slept in a tent in a car park and on the edge of a lake.

John has cancer, mild dementia and mobility issues which made the experience of being street homeless particularly difficult.

John experienced significant difficulties accessing services, in particular getting to the doctors. When he became street homeless he was told that he was no longer able to go to the same doctors to pick up his medication because he had no fixed abode. This meant that he went a few weeks without any medication.

***“It’s impossible to keep the same doctor and get medications to the same place.”***

John has lost lots of possessions due to being evicted and having to leave his home suddenly, and things being stolen when he was street homeless. When John was evicted he had to leave items such as photo albums of family members, clothes, furniture and appliances. He also regularly had things stolen from his tent, such as a stove and a kettle.

As a result of being street homeless, John lost contact with his daughters. This was largely because he was not able to charge his phone and they did not live nearby. The relationship breakdown with his daughters made him feel lonely.

***“I lost contact with my daughters as well... when I needed them I couldn’t get in contact with them.”***

John’s physical health rapidly deteriorated when he was street homeless. He was regularly bitten by gnats when sleeping outside. He also often had cuts which became infected. This added to his existing health problems and meant that he regularly had to go to the hospital.

John is now living in temporary accommodation so is still homeless.

***“I’ll tell you what, being homeless is a million times worse than you think it is.”***

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## How does rough sleeping impact on individuals and families?

This section of the chapter explores the impacts that rough sleeping has on the people we spoke to.

### **Physical health**

Eight of the people we spoke to told us that being street homeless has had an impact on their physical health. Reasons cited for the deterioration of their physical health include being outside and vulnerable to the elements, including extreme cold, sleep deprivation, drug and/or alcohol misuse, a lack of food, and the difficulty of accessing doctors.

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*“Physically, I went down to about six stone, I’ve got no teeth, well, my bottom ones are there. I’ve got problems with my shoulders now, I think it’s affected a lot of things.” Woman, 30s*

*“People who live out on the streets, they’re that far away from death, one cold span and that’s it because it does take a lot out of you.” Man, 40s*

*“My health deteriorated, I went down to nine stone. I looked as you would look if you lived on the street, being cold all the time... I was in and out of hospital 24/7” Man, 40s*

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Another man we spoke to told us that the impact on his physical health was the hardest thing about living on the street.

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*“I would say that the hardest thing is that your physical condition can deteriorate. Without even knowing I’d done it, I had a huge cut on my leg. I had a load of gnat bites.” Man, 70s*

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### **Mental health**

The impact of rough sleeping on mental health was a universal experience among the people we spoke to. This was true for people who had spent one night on the street as well as those that had spent several years rough sleeping. Whilst several people had no pre-existing issues, for others the act of rough sleeping served to exacerbate their mental health problems. One man told us that his anxiety and depression got so severe when he was rough sleeping that he would intentionally go to prison as a way of escaping his street homelessness.

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*“With anxiety and depression, it’s just sometimes I just want it to stop. My old point of view used to be, ‘Go back in prison,’ sometimes it’s quieter in prison.” Man, 40s*

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Mental health problems were often cited as a barrier to accessing support when street homeless. One woman suggested that she had been street homeless for 18 months in part because her depression made her feel “worthless”.

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*“Depression I suppose, it’s self-pity because you’ve got no worth. I’d wake up and I’d feel really low. You get in a rut – what am I going to do? I am sleeping in a store room.” Woman, 50s*

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Linked to this, a few people we spoke to talked about the long-term impact of street homelessness on their self-esteem.

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*“I think it’s massively affected how I am. I know that before all that happened [street homelessness], I was at work, I had a lot of confidence.” Woman, 30s*

*“I’m not confident enough to stop thinking that I’m not a homeless person. I’m not confident enough to go into an agency and ask them to find me a job. How do you say to someone that you’ve been walking round London and in the store room for 18 months?” Woman, 50s*

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The long-term impact on people’s self-esteem could be explained in part by the stigmatisation of street homelessness.

### ***Relationships with friends and family***

Being street homeless can impact on relationships with friends and family. It was quite common for people to lose contact with friends and family, either due to stigma and feelings of embarrassment, or the practical difficulties of maintaining contact when living on the street.

One man told us that not being able to charge his phone meant that his relationships broke down with his daughters.

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*“I’ve lost contact with my daughters as well. I’m back in contact with them now but when I needed them I couldn’t get in contact with them because I couldn’t charge my phone.” Man, 70s*

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There was also a common feeling of resentment towards family members who did not help people who were street homeless.

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*“I was very resentful when I was on the street, you know, against family members because of what had happened... Was it of my doing? Not all of it was.” Man, 40s*

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One man told us that him and his partner split up because they ended up on the street and the situation was too difficult for them to deal with.

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*“My wife left because we were on the street. It was too much for her.” Man, 50s, with dependent children (7, 5 and 3 years old)*

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The breakdown of relationships with friends and family often resulted in people feeling isolated. Five of the people we spoke to told us that they often felt lonely when they were street homeless. One woman told us that she preferred to isolate herself rather than tell people that she was rough sleeping. This isolation can act as a barrier to accessing support.

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*“I was very isolated... My daughter would make sure my phone was topped up but sometimes I'd just switch it off because I just really didn't want to tell people what a rubbish day I'd had again. I didn't want to tell people that I'd just been on the bus again.” Woman, 50s*

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### **Keeping and finding a job**

Over a third of the people we spoke to told us that they lost their job due to their housing situation and becoming street homeless.

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*“I was working but through the eviction, I couldn't keep it. The situation forced me to not to go to work anymore.” Man, 50s*

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One man we spoke to told us that he was able to keep his job for a few months whilst street homeless and living in a disused bungalow. He lost his job because he broke his ankle and ended up in a wheelchair.

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*“I was at a good job, but I broke my ankle and what happened was, I had a couple of weeks off... I ended up with a cast right up to the top of my leg because I'd really done my leg some damage by going back to work so early. So, I lost my job in the end... I ended up in a wheelchair for nine months. I was homeless.” Man, 40s*

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Some people said it was difficult to distinguish the impact of rough sleeping from other forms of homelessness in terms of its impact on their employment. One man told us that the stress of losing his home, sleeping on the street and now living in temporary accommodation meant that both him and his wife lost their jobs.

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*“Me and my wife are out of work at the moment. The situation cost both of us our jobs. The housing kicked everything out. We were doing very well before this housing crisis.” Man, 30s, with dependent children (5 and 3 years old)*

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Being street homeless can also impact on your ability to find a job. None of the people we spoke to were able to find a job when they were living on the street. This was due to not having an address, as well as not having anywhere to wash, not being able to buy new clothes, not having easy access to computers and a lack of self-esteem and confidence.

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*“Without a home you have no address, you can’t get a job.” Woman, 50s*

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### **Case study: Being at risk of abusive behaviour, loneliness and the impact on physical and mental health**

Kate is in her 30s and was street homeless for about three years. Before she was street homeless she owned her own business. She became street homeless when she left rehab and was unable to turn to her family for help.

***“I’d reached a point where I’d burnt all my bridges.”***

During this time, she slept in garages, disused buildings and car parks. She chose to sleep in more enclosed spaces to protect herself from other people and to keep warm.

Kate was regularly at risk of abusive and sometimes violent behaviour. She was using drugs at the time, so felt particularly vulnerable. One time Kate was threatened with a knife and another time she was attacked in a disused building where she was sleeping.

She spent most of her time rough sleeping by herself which made her feel very lonely. She also lost contact with her friends and family, in part due to her drug misuse.

As a result of previous trauma and her current situation, Kate developed psychosis whilst rough sleeping. This made her feel even more alone. She became afraid and distrustful of everyone.

Kate went down to about six stone and developed various physical health problems whilst sleeping on the street. Street homelessness has also had a long-term impact on her confidence and self-esteem.

***“Rough sleeping massively affected how I am. I’m a completely different person now.”***

Kate is now living in supported accommodation for former drug users.



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## Where are people living now?

Only one of the people we spoke to was currently rough sleeping. The remaining 11 individuals and families were no longer sleeping on the street. However, of these 11, seven are still homeless and living in temporary accommodation or voluntary sector hostels.

Since rough sleeping one man had lived in six different types of emergency accommodation with his wife and two children. This has had an impact on his work and his children's education.

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*"We've been in 6 different types. They have all been hotels – just a small room in a hotel... It was so hard to manage a new job and keep the kids in school. We were really trying hard to maintain that stability." Man, 30s, with dependent children (5 and 3 years old)*

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Another man was living in a voluntary sector hostel but had overstayed his six-month tenancy because he had nowhere else to go.

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*"At the moment, I live in supported accommodation. I've been there for just over six months. My tenancy did finish, or it was supposed to finish on 24th of last month... but they've let me stay there until I find somewhere but it can't go on any longer than nine months. So, I'm still homeless really." Man, 40s*

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Some of the people we spoke to are now living in more secure accommodation. One woman is now in private rented accommodation arranged by the council but is concerned that she won't be able to keep up with rent payments and will be evicted again. She lives there with her four children.

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*"I'm worried that we won't be able to pay again, and we will get kicked out." Woman, 50s, with dependent children (13, 11, 9 and 3 years old)*

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Another woman is living in supported accommodation arranged by the council after she was accepted as homeless.

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*"This place is like a little gem really... It has a shared garden and it's so nice. It's about getting back into life, about joining in with life again." Woman, 50s*

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Although this woman was very happy with her new home, she recognised the long-term impacts of being street homeless, particularly on her physical and mental health.

The journey back to secure accommodation can be difficult. Many of the people we spoke to are still homeless and see their current situation as a continuation of their street homelessness. For those who are in secure accommodation, their

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housing situation can still feel precarious and the long-term impacts of street homelessness are evident.

### Summary

This section has explored people's experiences of rough sleeping. Although this experience is diverse, the people we spoke to told us that there are some common experiences and impacts on individuals and families.

What are the everyday experiences of rough sleeping for the people we spoke to?

- Difficulty accessing services
- Loss of possessions
- Being at risk of abusive and violent behaviour
- Stigma and shame

How does rough sleeping impact on the people we spoke to?

- Deteriorating physical health
- Deteriorating mental health (e.g. depression, anxiety, low self-esteem)
- Isolation from friends and family
- Ability to keep or find a job

The people we spoke to told us that street homelessness can continue to impact on individuals and families after they have escaped rough sleeping.

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## CHAPTER 8: POLICY CONTEXT

In the last year there have been some significant developments in government policy to address rough sleeping.

### Homelessness Reduction Act

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 is one of the biggest changes to the rights of homeless people in England for 15 years.<sup>28</sup>

Local housing authorities now have a legal duty to provide support to all those who are eligible<sup>29</sup> and are homeless or threatened with homelessness, including those who are sleeping rough. There are new duties to assess, prevent and relieve homelessness. This means that anyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness should receive meaningful help. Although not all street homeless people are entitled to be accommodated by the local authority – you need to have a ‘priority need’ and be ‘unintentionally’ homeless – they will be able to access support, such as:

- Helping to secure or securing an immediate safe place to stay for people who are sleeping rough or at high risk of sleeping rough
- Helping to access a private rental with a financial payment (e.g. deposit)
- Helping to access voluntary sector accommodation, e.g. hostel or Housing First scheme
- Negotiation/mediation work to help them return to family or friends
- Advice on claiming benefit entitlements to afford a private rental

It is hoped that the new duties will create a culture shift away from asking people to prove that they qualify for accommodation, to one where councils and other public bodies work together to ensure that everyone in need of help can access it in enough time to avoid a housing problem becoming a rough sleeping crisis.

### Rough sleeping strategy

In August the Government published its Rough Sleeping Strategy. This set out the Government’s plans to make good on its manifesto pledge to halve rough sleeping in this Parliament and to end it by 2027.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The last major change was the Homelessness Act 2002, which shifted the emphasis from responding to homelessness when it occurred to strategic prevention with new duties on councils to review the causes of homelessness in their area.

<sup>29</sup> Eligibility relates to immigration status

<sup>30</sup> MHCLG, [The rough sleeping strategy](#), August 2018

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The strategy was based on the recommendations of the Rough Sleeping Advisory Panel on which Shelter sat alongside other housing and homelessness organisations. It sets out a “three-pillared” approach:

- Prevention – understanding the issues that lead to rough sleeping and providing support for those at risk
- Intervention – helping those already rough sleeping with support tailored to their individual circumstances
- Recovery – supporting people in finding a new home and rebuilding their lives.

In terms of prevention, there is a new £19 million fund to support over 5,000 people at risk of rough sleeping to sustain their tenancies and retain their rented home. We already know that the loss of a private tenancy is the leading cause of statutory homelessness<sup>31</sup>, so this could help to prevent some people from ending up on the street. However, this will only go some way to plug the huge gap left by cuts to the Supporting People programme. Last year, the National Audit Office<sup>32</sup> reported that spending under the Supporting People programme had fallen by 59% in real terms since 2010-11 (from £1.44 billion to £588 million).

The strategy also highlights the importance of the various government departments – work and pensions, health, and justice – working together to prevent and rapidly alleviate the problems that lead to rough sleeping.

While the strategy is a good start, with the emphasis on prevention and joint working particularly welcome, it’s not a solution to homelessness. To solve homelessness – including street homelessness – people must have access to a safe, secure and affordable home.

## **Housing First**

The Government’s Rough Sleeping Strategy<sup>33</sup> cites international evidence showing that a Housing First approach could be a vital tool to meet the needs of people with complex needs who are sleeping rough and the Government is keen to learn more about how this could work on a larger scale, within the UK’s housing system.

At the end of 2017, the Government announced £28 million funding for Housing First pilots. The two main principles of Housing First are a home as a human right and intensive support. A key aspect of the Housing First model is that it offers immediate accommodation for street homeless people who are willing to take up

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<sup>31</sup> MHCLG, [Live Homelessness tables](#), Temporary accommodation, Table A2

<sup>32</sup> National Audit Office, [Homelessness](#), September 2017

<sup>33</sup> MHCLG, [Rough Sleeping Strategy](#), August 2018, paragraph 165

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a tenancy agreement, even if they are not assessed as being 'tenancy ready'. The model has no preconditions of addressing wider support needs.<sup>34</sup>

The West Midlands, Manchester and Liverpool were chosen to pilot the scheme. The pilots will support around 1,000 rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping experiencing the most complex disadvantage to help them to end their homelessness.

Shelter has long advocated for a Housing First approach as one solution for people with multiple and complex needs; we published a Good Practice Briefing<sup>35</sup> in 2008 and have been delivering a two-year Housing First pilot<sup>36</sup> in Manchester since April 2016, which has recently been extended to a small pilot delivered out of HMP Styal. We are also delivering a further service in Dorset.<sup>37</sup>

Our model follows the principles of Housing First, with an additional element of co-production with service users and peer mentoring from people with lived experience. We help people into the most appropriate accommodation available, including 12-month private rentals and social tenancies. Following the Housing First principles, choice and control for service users is key.

An interim report<sup>38</sup> found that our pilot in Manchester is generating strong, positive results. 16 people had engaged with the pilot and 15 had been housed. An interim progress report<sup>39</sup> calculated that the fiscal payback is £376,893 over five years, representing a potential 2.65:1 return on investment.

However, Housing First must not be seen as a single-model panacea to end street homelessness. It isn't suitable for everyone, such as those who don't want to live on their own or people with lower support needs (intensive support is very costly). Crisis have suggested that it might be a suitable approach for around a third of rough sleepers.

So, Housing First must be one of a range of solutions for helping street homeless people into accommodation. These solutions include measures outlined above, such as the council providing support to access a private rental and help to access voluntary sector accommodation.

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<sup>34</sup> McKeown, S. [Housing First – a Good Practice Briefing](#), Shelter, 2008

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*

<sup>36</sup> Ralph, U. [Putting Housing First to reduce homelessness](#), Shelter, 2017

<sup>37</sup> Garvie, D. [Housing First: what so many street homeless people need](#), Shelter, 2018

<sup>38</sup> Pleace, N. and Quilgars, D. [The Inspiring Change Manchester Housing First Pilot: Interim Report](#), University of York, 2017

<sup>39</sup> Barnes, S. and Bray, S. [Inspiring Change Manchester: Housing First](#), Greater Manchester Combined Authority, 2017

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## CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS

This investigation has explored the scale of rough sleeping, why people end up on the street, and their experiences of rough sleeping more widely. Although most rough sleepers are lone men, at Shelter we know that women and families are also affected. Indeed, more than a third of the people we spoke to were either women or families with dependent children.

Our research with 12 individuals or families with experience of rough sleeping has found that the overriding cause of street homelessness – as with all forms of homelessness – is the lack of access to an affordable and secure home and support to sustain the tenancy. The people we spoke to told us that the most common reason for losing a settled home was eviction, most often from a private rented home. Other common reasons include the loss of a close family member and/or relationship breakdown.

The people we spoke to then experienced difficulties finding a new home, with not having enough money for a deposit the most common reason. Other barriers cited include the council not providing support and landlord discrimination. For some people leaving an institution, mental health problems and drug and/or alcohol misuse had played a role.

The experience of rough sleeping is diverse but there are some common themes. The most common experiences are feeling stigmatised and finding it difficult to access services. The people we spoke to told us that being street homeless can impact on your physical and mental health, your relationships with friends and family, and your ability to find or keep a job. The most significant impacts are on people's physical and mental health.

Even when the people we spoke to were able to escape rough sleeping, they were unlikely to go straight into secure accommodation. Seven are still homeless and living in temporary accommodation or voluntary sector hostels. It can be a long process back to secure accommodation. For those who have been provided more secure accommodation there are often long-term impacts of being street homeless, such as a lack of confidence and mental and physical health problems.

There is rightly political impetus to end rough sleeping. This includes a greater focus on models such as Housing First. Housing First is a useful model that provides housing to people with complex needs who are street homeless. But it still requires access to suitable private or social rented homes and intensive support for as long as needed.

Most importantly, we need to prevent people from rough sleeping in the first place. This approach will take many forms but could include: providing real

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security to private renters to prevent unnecessary eviction, making sure that councils are providing their legal duties to prevent and relieve homelessness, ending discrimination against housing benefit claimants, and building more social housing so that people can live in permanent homes they can truly afford.

To avoid homelessness, people must have access to a safe, secure and affordable home. No one should be homeless – on the street or otherwise – in 2018. It isn't inevitable.

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## CHAPTER 10: EXAMPLES OF SUPPORT PROVIDED BY SHELTER

Shelter provides a range of support for rough sleepers. This includes accessing housing advice from our hubs and helpline, as well as specific services that support people who are street homeless. In the last five years Shelter has provided support to over 22,000 households in England who were street homeless or at risk of street homelessness.<sup>40</sup>

### Examples of our services for people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness

#### Helpline

Our free national helpline is open 365 days a year. It is the biggest housing and homelessness helpline of its kind, with a team of housing experts on hand to listen to, support and advise people in need of immediate help. On average, callers receive 25 minutes of advice, and each conversation can be the difference between somebody losing and keeping their home. Last year, 44,134 households were given advice over the phone.

#### Digital advice

Our digital advice can empower people to independently resolve their housing problems and improve their living situation. Our step-by-step guides, tools, template letters and videos can help people navigate the complex world of housing law, and our live webchat service allows people to get personalised advice and signposting to relevant resources. We also offer online advice in real time via Facebook Live.

#### Our hubs

Shelter has several different hubs across the country, all of which have expert local housing advisers. We offer a range of face-to-face services developed in partnership with other local services to ensure that each person gets the right support. Every hub is different to reflect the needs of the local community, but there are some common services, such as specialist housing advice, legal

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<sup>40</sup> When clients approach us for help we record their homelessness status. We looked at data from the last five years (November 2013 to November 2018) for all cases that were recorded as street homeless. Some households may have come to Shelter for help more than once over the 5-year period. Some households recorded as street homeless may not have spent a night on the street.



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support and housing-focused support for people who face multiple barriers to accessing, keeping or improving their homes.

### Work in prisons

We run specialist services in prisons across the north of England to give people a chance to rebuild their lives once they leave. The work we do in this area is tailored to prisoners' individual needs, which can be complex. We're funded to deliver housing, debt and benefits advice to people within the prison community, as well as give wider advice around employment options.

### Examples of our specific rough sleeper services across the country

We also have some specific rough sleeper services. Most of these services are targeted at rough sleepers with multiple and complex needs. These services include:

#### Inspiring Change Manchester

Inspiring Change Manchester (ICM) is a Shelter led programme funded by the Big Lottery. It is an eight-year programme which spans 2014-2022. The programme works with people with three or more complex needs including problem drug or alcohol misuse, mental health or emotional wellbeing, homelessness and offending. Most people who are supported by ICM have historically struggled to access or benefit from support services, and many have chaotic lives.

Since April 2016 ICM has been piloting a Housing First approach to identify and support people with entrenched homelessness into their own accommodation. Using Housing First principles, people are asked to show only that they want to take up (and maintain) a tenancy agreement. This gives them a base from which to take control of their situation, helping professionals to provide meaningful support with long-term benefits.

#### Dorset Housing First

As well as Housing First in Manchester, there is also a recently established project in Dorset. The project provides intensive support to people with multiple and complex needs across Dorset, much of which is rural. A key aspect of the Housing First model is that it offers housing for those who are willing to take up a tenancy agreement, even if clients are not assessed as being 'tenancy ready' or ready to engage with other services. A key challenge for the Dorset service is to secure suitable accommodation in an area of service users choice.

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## Birmingham Changing Futures

The aim of Birmingham Changing Futures is to improve the lives of people with multiple and complex needs. It works with people who have two or more complex needs including homelessness, offending behaviour, substance misuse and mental health problems. The programme provides client-led support that is tailored towards individuals' needs. Shelter provides both professional experience and lived experience through peer mentors.

## Pathways Norwich

Shelter Eastern Counties is one of several delivery partners for Pathways Norwich. The project provides support to people who are rough sleepers or vulnerably housed. The team carries out an assessment and produces a full support plan. These will be person-centred and explore all support and accommodation options available to each individual. Support will be provided that aims to reduce or remove barriers to accessing accommodation. The desired outcome is for people with complex needs to achieve long term stability.

## STAR Partnership

The STAR Partnership is a consortium led by Shelter. It is a pan-London housing and homelessness service for Londoners over 25. The key aims include helping people to secure short and long-term accommodation, helping to resolve disputes with their landlord, increase their financial resilience, help to improve people's physical and mental health and link people in with employment, education and training. There is a strong street outreach element of the partnership which aims to help rough sleepers into accommodation, this is delivered by our partners Thames Reach.

Shelter helps millions of people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness through our advice, support and legal services. And we campaign to make sure that, one day, no one will have to turn to us for help.

We're here so no one has to fight bad housing or homelessness on their own.

Please support us at [shelter.org.uk](https://shelter.org.uk)

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