



No More

Homelessness through the eyes of recent rough sleepers

ST MUNGO'S
ACTION WEEK
24 - 30 JUNE '13

No More

St Mungo's 
Opening doors for homeless people



Introduction

It is hard to imagine a more extreme form of poverty than sleeping on the streets:

“It’s horrible, it’s bloody horrible sleeping rough. I don’t care how hard people think they are, if you go and sleep rough, I tell you what, it’ll make you scared.”

“When I was sleeping rough I was vulnerable, scared, was spat upon and told I’m a dirty tramp.”

“Sleeping rough was horrible. Waking up with frost over me in the morning.”

This report explores, through the eyes of recent rough sleepers, the experiences and events which lead people to sleep on the streets in 2013. It looks at where people go for help before they start to sleep rough and identifies missed opportunities to help people to keep a roof over their heads. The report makes the following recommendations:

1. Local authorities should urgently improve housing assessment, advice and assistance that they provide
2. Government should explore new legislation to prevent homelessness
3. Government should ensure homelessness funding really does prevent homelessness
4. Government should extend emergency support for the most unwell people who are sleeping rough, regardless of nationality
5. The Government should ensure that all local authorities, not just the best performing, are meeting the challenges to prevent homelessness set out in its 2012 report *Making every contact count*
6. Criminal justice agencies should play a key role in preventing homelessness
7. Local authorities should take the lead in reducing evictions, which will save future costs arising from homelessness
8. Government should address the housing shortage as a priority.

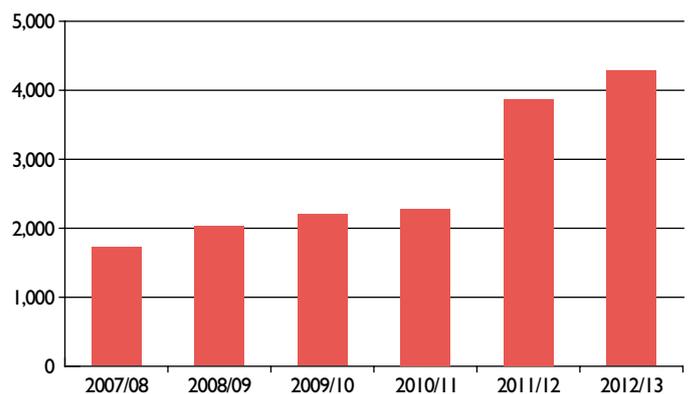
Recent years have seen an alarming rise in the number of people sleeping on our streets:

- Snapshots of the number of people sleeping rough on a single night show a 31 per cent increase from 1,768 in 2010 to 2,309 in 2012
- Over the course of 2012/13, 6,437 people slept rough at some point in London, an increase of 13 per cent on the previous year's total of 5,678
- On average, every day in 2012/13, 12 people started sleeping on streets of London for the first time, an increase from 10 per day in 2011/12.

Alongside these rises, national, regional and local government are working with the voluntary sector to support more people to move off the streets. *No Second Night Out* schemes are becoming established across England. Since 2011 *No Second Night Out* in London has helped 2,900 people to move off the streets. Programmes such as *No One Living on the Streets* and the *Rough Sleeper 205* initiative are also supporting more entrenched rough sleepers in London to get a roof over their head.

However, this good work is being undermined by **sustained increases in the number of people who are starting to sleep rough.** 4,353 people started sleeping rough in London in 2012/13, an increase of 13 per cent since 2011/12. Of those who started sleeping rough in 2012/13, 25 per cent (1,098 people) were contacted by outreach teams on more than one night and 7 per cent (299 people) were seen sleeping rough on more than five occasions.¹

Chart A: Number of new rough sleepers (flow) on the streets of London (CHAIN)



* A substantial part of the large increase between 2010/11 and 2011/12 is due to enhanced levels of outreach services as part of 'No Second Night Out', which means that people sleeping rough, and in particular new people to the streets, are more likely to be contacted and counted.

New research undertaken for this report

This report presents the findings from 33 interviews with 32 single people and one couple, all of whom had slept rough between April 2012 and April 2013. 28 of the interviewees were male and six were female. The interviews were undertaken by peer researchers, who are St Mungo's clients who have themselves experienced homelessness. Nine of the interviews took place at St Mungo's projects in the South of England, 24 at our projects in London.

We also draw on new analysis of CHAIN data² undertaken by St Mungo's. This analysis focuses on records of 4,360 people who were found sleeping rough for the first time in London between March 2012 and February 2013. This group is referred to throughout the report as new rough sleepers in London. 86 per cent of these rough sleepers were male and their average age was 38.

¹ Broadway (2013) Street to Home annual report.

² The CHAIN database is administered by Broadway and records information on rough sleepers who have been contacted by London's street outreach workers. There is little similar up to date information available on rough sleepers outside of London. CHAIN figures show that over this period 4,353 people slept rough for the first time in London. Figure of 12 new rough sleepers in 2011/12 was arrived at through dividing 4,353 by 365 = 11.92. Figure for 2011/12 arrived at by dividing 3,825 by 365 = 10.48.



In addition, a survey of 68 people who are currently sleeping rough, or have slept rough since April 2012, was completed by St Mungo's street outreach workers and hostel staff. The survey asked people about their use of services before and after they slept rough for the first time.

Rough sleeping and nationality

Our analysis of new rough sleepers in London shows that people of 113 different nationalities arrived on the streets between March 2012 and February 2013. **By far the most common nationality was British.** 1,823 people (43 per cent) were UK nationals. 1,274 people (30 per cent) were from Eastern European states that have acceded to the EU since 2004.

CHAIN data from 2008 to 2012 shows that rough sleeping has increased amongst both UK nationals and people from outside the UK. The proportion of rough sleepers from outside the UK has remained relatively constant at around 55 per cent.

This report is primarily focused on people who have slipped through the safety net in the UK. Many of the points we raise apply to both UK and non UK nationals who sleep rough or are at risk of sleeping rough.

We also recognise that the help that non UK nationals can access is often much more limited and that there are often substantive differences in the reasons why they end up on the streets. Seeking work, for example, is the most common single reason for non UK rough sleepers to have left their last settled base, whereas it is only the fifth most common reason given by UK nationals (see Chart B). However, the differences between why UK and non UK nationals start to sleep rough and the support that they access are not explored in this report.

Our findings

I. Why do people start sleeping rough?

Background factors

Our interviews indicate that people are arriving on the streets with serious personal issues, and that living on the streets exacerbates these. The factors detailed below were those raised most often by interviewees when they were asked how they started to sleep rough. The interviewees tended to face complex, interrelated problems, which often had their roots in childhood experiences.

a) A traumatic childhood

“My nan and grandad brought me up and bless them, they did a really good job but me being an angry little kid, there was a lot of past stuff, rape, sexual abuse all that that my nan had to deal with. So I moved out of my nan’s when I was about 13 and I just went to stay with my friend and her family.” [Interview number 33]

“I’ve been on and off the streets since the age of 14. I left home of my own accord because of family problems. Unless you had a bottle of spirits my mum didn’t want to know, and my dad didn’t want to know.” [4]

“I was brought up in care from five to 18. From the ages of nought to five I must have been to about five different places, that was with my mum and dad. My dad got put in prison and then basically mum was left to bring us up on her own and all they kept on doing was going to hostels, bed and breakfasts, friends, kept on moving around, fobbing me off. My life’s just a fucking mess, mate, it’s just a fucking mess.” [13]

It was striking that 14 out of the 34 people we interviewed brought up experiences from their childhood. These experiences frequently included periods characterised by unstable accommodation and homelessness, depriving people of a settled base that they could return to when threatened by homelessness or made homeless later in life.

b) Problematic drug and alcohol use

“I left home when I was 14 because I was using heroin.” [5]

“When I was 18, before I left my foster parents, they got me into like a shared house, things were going downhill from there. Lots of people doing drugs in my circle so I started smoking blow.” [13]

Our analysis shows that almost half (43 per cent) of people sleeping rough in London for the first time in 2012/13 have drug and/or alcohol support needs.³ Half (17) of the people we interviewed talked about problems that they had experienced with drugs or alcohol. Most of these said that problematic drug and alcohol use had preceded rough sleeping, often they had starting when they were teenagers.

c) Mental ill health

“I can’t cope. Two and a half months ago I was on top of a 12 storey block of flats wanting to jump. Police officers saved my life they pulled me down. They took me away to the mental hospital, did a Section 136, the police actually sectioned me without my say so because I was not in a very good state of mind.” [12]

Four in 10 (41 per cent) of people sleeping rough on London’s streets for the first time in 2012/13 have mental health support needs;⁴ 23 per cent have mental health needs as well as drug and/or alcohol support needs.

³ For each of the statistics given below, clients for whom support needs are either not known or not recorded for all relevant fields are excluded from the base. Drug and alcohol base = 3,850.

⁴ This figure counts assessments made by outreach/support workers and mental health professionals. Base = 3,758.

There is a shortage of services that will provide treatment for people with mental health problems who also use drugs and/or alcohol problematically.⁵ The multiple needs that make these people so vulnerable thus also prevent them from being able to access treatment. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that so many of these people fall through safety nets.

Outreach psychotherapy for people with complex needs

St Mungo's LifeWorks service provides psychotherapy for people with challenging behaviour and complex needs, including severe mental health and substance use problems. There are very few other services that provide psychotherapeutic services to people with these types of needs, meaning that patients often arrive at LifeWorks with long term mental health problems that have been left untreated.

Evaluation of the first three years of the service found that it improved 75 per cent of patients' mental well being, decreased patients' use of accident and emergency services and supported patients to enter employment or training placements. LifeWorks is limited in scale as it is currently funded only by St Mungo's charitable income.

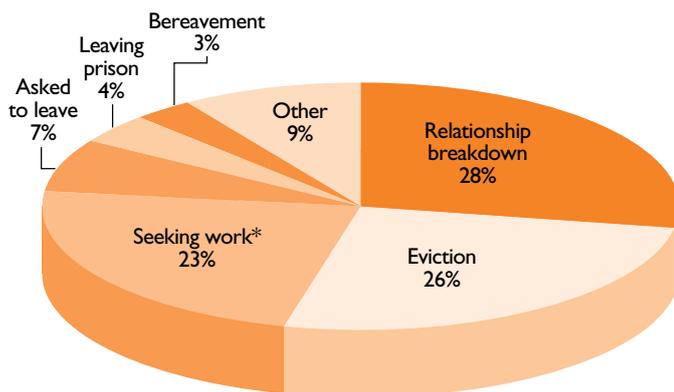


⁵ For more information see Rethink (2011) Factsheet: Dual Diagnosis Mental Illness and Substance Misuse www.rethink.org/resources/d/dual-diagnosis-factsheet and http://www.mungos.org/how_you_can_help/_hard_habit_break

Triggers

The background factors outlined above mean people are likely to be less resilient and able to cope when things go wrong. The interviews and our analysis of CHAIN data on London's new rough sleepers show that relationship breakdown, eviction, leaving prison and bereavement are among the most common events to immediately precede rough sleeping. This section of the report is concerned with these 'trigger' events.

Chart B: New rough sleepers' in London main reason for leaving last settled base March 2012 – February 2013.
Figures drawn from CHAIN flow data



Base = 2,175 – excludes all of those for whom reason for leaving last settled base was either not recorded or was recorded as other and not specified.
This chart shows the primary reason why people left their last settled base, in some cases secondary reasons were also recorded.

*93 per cent of those who left their last settled base to seek work were non UK nationals

a) Relationship breakdown

“It was overnight, my marriage just ended. My daughter was in nappies, she was a baby and my son was a toddler. We came home, I'd picked my son up from nursery, we walked in and I saw my ex husband with the training woman he was involved with naked on the sofa. I kicked him out but the thing is I felt I couldn't live there because it was too many memories so I left the house. That was the first time I went on the streets.” [12]

“When I came back to Reading I stayed with my father for a while but we're like chalk and cheese. We're OK, but living under the same roof it doesn't work. We had periods where we'd fall out, we didn't talk so I was forced to use the drop in centre. So things didn't work out so I started sleeping out.” [32]

14 of the people we interviewed mentioned relationship breakdown when asked how they had started to sleep rough. Most talked about a break up with their family and five talked about break ups with partners or spouses. Relationship breakdown was given as the most common single reason (28 per cent) for new sleepers in London to have left their last settled base.

One of the female interviewees had started to sleep rough after experiencing domestic violence. Shockingly, St Mungo's latest client survey shows that 39 per cent of our female clients who have slept rough were made homeless by domestic violence.⁶

Helping people affected by homelessness to build relationships

St Mungo's and Relate delivered an innovative joint initiative, the Relationship and Parenting Skills Project, which supported people who were homeless to develop the practical and emotional skills needed to create and maintain relationships with others. Through participating in the Project, people were better able to build support networks and resilience, making it less likely that they would return to homelessness and rough sleeping.

Participants reported improved self esteem and self confidence to make positive changes to their lives; 85 per cent of the men and women who have used the service said they found it very useful. The service ended in 2008 due to a lack of funding.

⁶ St Mungo's (2013) Client Needs Survey.

b) Eviction

“Council kicked us out after my mum died. But they didn’t send the first eviction letter when they were supposed to have done. We got a letter and then a couple of days later this guy come out and he broke through the door with this red thing, took the lock off so they kicked us out. He was very apologetic, he was like sorry we had to do it. And we said we’d just lost our mum and we were trying to sort ourselves out and he said if I hadn’t had to break the lock I could have given you more time but you do have to go.” [30]

“They did surgery on both legs [...] it was very, very painful. I struggled financially afterwards, I told [my wife] things were going to be rough financially for a couple of months and she was having none of it, took my keys off me, and my spare keys and – out.” [24]

A third of the people we interviewed said that an eviction had played some sort of role in the events that led to their rough sleeping.⁷ Eviction was the second most common single reason (26 per cent) given by new rough sleepers in London for having left their last settled base.

Evictions were often linked to relationship breakdown. Several interviewees had been evicted by friends and family. St Mungo’s 2012 report on eviction found that our clients usually did not understand what was happening or where to turn when they were made homeless by an eviction.⁸ This is perhaps unsurprising given the additional strains that they are often subject to, for example two of the people interviewed for this report said that they had been evicted by the council following the death of their mother.

Our 2012 report also found that eviction was usually part of an escalating cycle of problems, frequently including drug and alcohol problems, poor health, bereavement and job loss. Nine out of ten of our clients who have been made homeless after an eviction had mental or physical health problems or drug or alcohol issues.⁹

Why we are concerned about eviction

Being evicted can often prevent someone who is vulnerable and homeless from being housed by local authorities as they are deemed to have intentionally made themselves homeless, and are therefore **not owed the main homelessness duty**.¹⁰ This can leave them with few other alternatives other than to start sleeping rough.

Official homelessness statistics show that the number of people owed the main homelessness duty after leaving private rented accommodation due to rent arrears or the end of a tenancy has increased by 140 per cent since 2010.¹¹

This is likely to be due to the growing affordability gap between rent levels and people’s earnings. It is also likely to be due to reductions first introduced in 2011 on the maximum amount of housing benefit payable. Further benefit caps are being introduced and rents are continuing to rise,¹² which could cause additional increases in the number of people being made homeless after an eviction.

^{7 8} For the purpose of this report, occasions on which people are forced to leave their accommodation, for example by family or housemates, without legal proceedings being taken in counted as an eviction.

⁹ St Mungo’s (2012) Out in the Cold: Homeless people’s experience of eviction.

¹⁰ See page 14 for more details.

¹¹ See Live Table 774, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

¹² According to the HomeLet rental index average rents in the UK were 2.5 per cent higher in May 2013 than in May 2012 <https://homelet.co.uk/rentalindex>

St Mungo's and migrant rough sleepers

St Mungo's works with people of many different nationalities. The support we aim to offer to all is **personalised, holistic and recovery oriented**. We therefore help migrants to access healthcare, the benefits they are entitled to and skills and employment support. In many cases the best way of supporting someone to recover from homelessness is to help them return to their country of origin and to access services there. This can be complex and takes time. St Mungo's believes that it is unacceptable that migrants are living on our streets with little hope of recovery and face an early death.

We are particularly concerned about people living on our streets who suffer serious health problems and are not accessing public services or travelling home. Our recommendations below include a call for **more emergency respite shelter to prevent early deaths**.



c) Leaving prison

"I was released from prison in the middle of January and that's when I became street homeless. Obviously my parents had got to the point where they said look, we want you to do well but there's buggar all else we can do for you, we need to step back here." [34]

"I could sort of see myself getting homeless but then I went to crime, went to prison then when I came out of prison I didn't think I was going to be homeless, I thought I'd get some sort of help, a hostel or something. But came out and basically got told 'no', we can't help you and that was it really, put your name on a waiting list." [29]

Four of the people we interviewed told us that they started to sleep rough immediately upon release from prison. Having been in prison is also a common background factor in the lives of people who sleep rough; twenty of the people that we interviewed had been to prison at some point in their lives.

“I remember a time I went into prison on purpose, just to get somewhere to sleep. I walked into Sainsbury’s, picked up a bottle of Bacardi, drank it, waited for the camera. Went to court, took all my bags with me and said ‘I’m not going out again until you put me in prison.’” [33]

Two of the people we interviewed told us that they had been sent to prison on purpose to avoid sleeping rough. We know that people frequently get stuck in a ‘revolving door’ of imprisonment and homelessness; ex prisoners who are homeless upon release are twice as likely to reoffend as those who have stable accommodation.¹³

In 2005 research found that 30 per cent of prisoners leave prison with nowhere to live.¹⁴ In a 2012 Government study of 1,435 adult prisoners, 37 per cent stated that they would need help to find a place to live when they were released.¹⁵

‘Through the gate’ housing advice and support services that work with ex prisoners when they are released do exist. Where this provision is sufficiently resourced it can be effective. However, it is widely acknowledged that the support available for ex offenders who leave prison is often inadequate, especially for those released after serving short sentences.¹⁶

d) Bereavement

“Mum died and bosh, going downhill since then, buried mum together but since then, we don’t speak me and my brother.” [1]



“Life was good, married for 20 years and then she died. I didn’t care [about becoming homeless]. My wife had died.” [17]

“I only came down for a month or so for a break after my daughter passed away and basically stayed. I couldn’t face going back up North.” [31]

Seven interviewees brought up bereavement when talking about why they started to sleep rough. They suggested that bereavement started a downward cycle of negative experiences and events that led to rough sleeping. Analysis of CHAIN data suggests that bereavement can often precede other issues that lead to rough sleep including increased substance use, relationship breakdown and eviction.

¹³ Homeless Link (2011) Breaking the cycle: Effective punishment, rehabilitation and sentencing of offenders consultation response.

¹⁴ Niven, S. and Stewart, D. (2005) Resettlement outcomes on release from prison, Home Office Findings 248.

¹⁵ Williams, K., Poyser, J. and Hopkins, K. (2012) Accommodation, homelessness and reoffending of prisoners: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) survey Ministry of Justice Research Summary 3/12.

¹⁶ Ministry of Justice (2013) Transforming Rehabilitation: A Strategy for Reform.

Who do people ask for help?

“I’ve got no friends, only acquaintances. It varied how long they’d let me stay for.” [31]

a) Getting support from family and friends

“Me and my family have never been too close. I tried to go back there the day I got released and it was like ‘hello, how are you’, door closed. Make sure I was all right and door closed... Support network at the moment is really small; I speak to my sister but other than that... They’re all lucky, they’ve all got houses, they don’t see the other side. They say oh, [name]’s all right, he’s a tough lad he’ll be all right, can look after himself. They don’t realise, it’s flippin’ hard work.” [29]

“I asked my Dad for help when I was desperate. He helped financially but not beyond the financial. He didn’t feel I deserved help, he thought I needed to rough sleep. [2]”

When faced with problems many people look to family and friends for help. However, as shown above, relationship breakdown is a common trigger for rough sleeping, and is likely to remove elements of people’s support network. Troubled family backgrounds are also likely to limit the support that people who sleep rough could have accessed.

Ten of the people we interviewed said that they had a period of sofa surfing, staying with friends or acquaintances. However, in all of these cases this was clearly only a temporary solution.

“The sofa surfing, I wouldn’t say people actually ‘helped’. It’s just when you’re in the drugs and the drink, that way of life... Sometimes you don’t even sleep. You’re in different people’s houses, you might have a little sleep and then you’ve got to get up so early in the morning, put your backpack on and it’s not like, you know, a friend’s house that says ‘have a spare room’ you know, you’re in and out, that crazy crack and drug house scene.” [33]

Negative sentiments about friends or acquaintances were expressed explicitly in eight of the interviews. This was

usually because interviewees felt that the people they were spending time with were making their problems worse.

“I’ve tried to step out of the circle of friends I was in because it wasn’t the right circle, I wasn’t going anywhere far in that circle if that makes sense. I would have been stuck in the same position for ever.” [29]

“Oh my god, what would I advise? You know, just to be, to be aware, be aware of friends. Because a lot of us fall into this homeless situation due to the choice of friends that we hang with.” [27]

b) Getting support from local authorities

“I was actually really appalled at how bad the council was. I was expecting them to help you help you, you know but it just doesn’t work. It’s horrible, it’s demoralising you know, you already feel like less of a person.” [31]

19 of the interviewees said that they had approached a local authority housing options or advice team for help. Only four interviewees, who were all referred into supported accommodation, described this as a positive experience. 12 interviewees told us that they had had negative experiences.

Past research has found that it is common for single homeless people to receive a poor service from local authority housing teams. Assessments have been found to be unsatisfactory and the advice and assistance provided has been found to be inadequate.¹⁷

Local authority housing teams are currently facing an increasing workload; in 2012 local authorities in England made 112,870 decisions on homeless applications, 60 per cent more than in 2009.¹⁸ This increase in workload has taken place over a period in which funding for local authorities has been reduced. However, while we acknowledge the extra pressure that local authorities are facing, we found evidence showing that some are delivering unacceptably poor levels of service.

¹⁷ Crisis (2009) No one’s priority, Local Government Ombudsman (2011) Homelessness: How councils can ensure justice for single homeless people.

¹⁸ Live table 770, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

Assessment challenges

Between July 2012 and January 2013 a St Mungo's street outreach service referred 11 clients whom they believed were **in priority need** to the local authority to make homelessness applications. Five of these clients had already been told by the local authority that they couldn't be helped and **turned away**. However, when the five clients returned to the local authority, St Mungo's staff made sure the housing team were aware of the issues that they faced. This time, each of the five clients was found to be **in priority need** for housing. David (not his real name) was one of these clients.

David is a 33 year old with mobility problems, he walks with a stick following a serious fall at work and has very limited use of his right hand. He has a history of self harm, suicidal thoughts, heroin addiction, alcohol abuse and was sexually abused as a child. David went to the council for help when he was sleeping rough after being evicted from his flat, at the time he was on medication for schizophrenia and depression. The council **decided that he had no support needs and was not in priority need**. He was referred to St Mungo's street outreach team as a rough sleeper.

St Mungo's discovered that David had been evicted illegally and referred him to the council's illegal evictions team, who took up his case. St Mungo's also supported him to make another homelessness application with the local authority housing team. This time they decided that **he was in fact owed a statutory duty** and housed him in a bed and breakfast.

Assessments

Local authorities do not have to provide housing for everyone who is or is at risk of homelessness or rough sleeping (see policy and legislation box). However, they do have to assess whether they owe a duty to anyone who is eligible for assistance and is homeless or threatened by homelessness. Most of the interviewees who had negative experiences felt local authorities' assessments were inadequate. They felt that the problems they faced were not recognised and/or were ignored.

“Council was no help, not obligated to help me as I'm not a priority. I took a letter from my GP to the council but was told that it didn't matter, they didn't take a blind bit of notice.” [25]

“I just think that there are boundaries and rules that they have and it would be nice for their rules to be looking at the person, you know, have a little look at the person.” [33]

The experiences of the people we interviewed supplement existing evidence to suggest that this type of inadequate assessment is widespread.¹⁹ A potentially significant judicial review has also recently been granted after a tribunal found that a local authority did not properly assess the needs of a person who made a homelessness application.²⁰

Advice and assistance

Local authorities are required to provide advice and assistance to people who are homeless or sleeping rough, even when they find that they do not have a duty to house them. However the people that we interviewed found the advice and assistance they were offered to be of limited use.

¹⁹ Crisis (2009) No one's priority, Government Ombudsman (2011) Homelessness: How councils can ensure justice for single homeless people.

²⁰ For more information see <http://www.criminallawandjustice.co.uk/clj-reporter/R-application-IA-v-City-Westminster-Council-2013-All-ER-D-355-May-IA-vs-Westminster>

“The council were like well, there’s not much we can do. I did get the impression they were like ‘not really our problem’, kind of thing.” [34]

“We went to the housing office, yeah, we went to three different housing offices. They just gave me a load of numbers to call and stuff. They couldn’t help so I was just sleeping in the park.” [29]

“I think if I knew about the right ways to go I would have done better. But because I didn’t and just went to the council... I think if the council had instructed me I could have done things quicker rather than sleep rough.” [14]

“In my experience you’re lucky if they give you a number; normally they just give you a name and leave you to look up the number yourself, nine times out of 10.” [31]

People also felt that a degree of prior knowledge and understanding was needed in order to get good help from council housing teams.

“I’ve tried approaching the council one time. But, um, I didn’t get much help there. Maybe because of lack of knowledge – don’t know where to turn, don’t know the right questions to ask and stuff like that.” [27]

“They won’t show you how to do these things [at the council] ... if you struggle, you’ll get no help with any of it. No advice, nothing. Most people I speak to have all had the same experience. If you have trouble navigating these things and you don’t understand how it works, the council will not actually physically help you.” [31]



Legislation across the UK

The 1977 Homeless Persons Act placed a duty (often referred to as the **'main homelessness duty'**) on local authorities to make an offer for suitable, settled accommodation for eligible²¹ people who are homeless or are threatened by homelessness. However, for this duty to apply, applicants must have a **local connection**, not be found to have made themselves **'intentionally' homeless** and fit with defined **priority need** categories, i.e. living with dependent children, being pregnant or living with a pregnant woman, being made homeless as a result of an emergency, or being vulnerable as a result of mental illness, handicap or physical disability. Subsequent legislation has since broadened the definition of priority need to include certain people aged 16 or 17 and care leavers, as well as people who are vulnerable due to their old age or having been in care, the armed forces, a young offender institution or who have had to leave their home due to violence or harassment.

In 2012 priority need was abolished in Scotland, meaning that **anyone who is unintentionally homeless is entitled to settled accommodation**. Priority need criteria currently remain in place throughout the rest of the UK, although the Welsh Government has released a White Paper which proposes placing more duties on

local authorities to prevent homelessness.

The people with whom this report is concerned are usually found by local authorities not to meet all of the criteria around intentionality, priority need or local connection, and are **therefore not entitled to the main homelessness duty**.

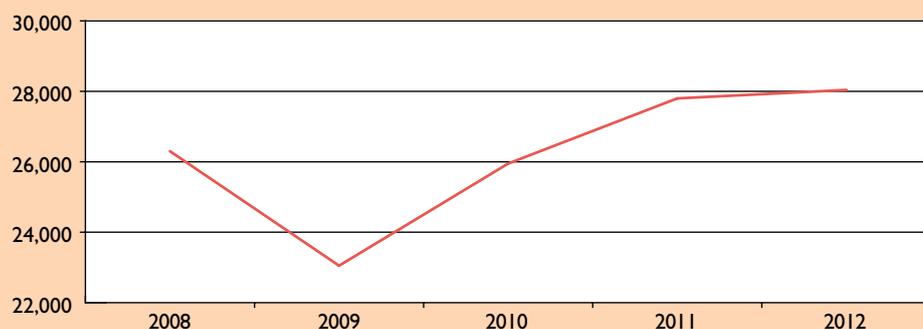
When a person is found to be in priority need and intentionally homeless, local authorities have a duty to secure accommodation for a limited amount of time as well as **providing advice and assistance**.

If a person is found to be intentionally homeless then they are not owed the main homelessness duty, regardless of how vulnerable or in need they are.

Local authorities are obliged to provide people who are not found to be in priority need with advice and assistance. Guidance states that advice and assistance should be **current, accurate and appropriate to the individual's circumstances**.²²

Since 2002 local authorities in England and Wales have also had a duty to produce an up to date Homelessness Strategy that includes plans for preventing homelessness, providing accommodation for all people who are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless.

Chart C: Number of people found to be homeless but not owed 'main homelessness duty', Local Authorities in England 2008-2012. DCLG Homelessness Statistics



²¹ Generally people subject to immigration control are ineligible for assistance.

²² DCLG (2006) Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities.

UK Government policy for preventing homelessness

The Government has maintained funding for homelessness prevention over the 2011-15 spending review. Over £70 million of additional funding has also been made available to homelessness agencies and local authorities to invest in prevention and support. The Government has set out its approach to

preventing rough sleeping in publications on homelessness. In 2011 *Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out nationwide* was published followed by *Making every contact count* in 2012. *Making every contact count* focused on what could be done by public services to tackle the root causes of homelessness. It posed ten challenges around preventing homelessness to local authorities and their partners. These challenges were not Government commitments and local authorities are not obliged to act to meet them.

Resolving multiple disadvantage in Bristol

In 2012 St Mungo's were commissioned by Bristol City Council to deliver an action research project into hidden homelessness in Bristol. Working with IVAR and Barton Hill Settlement, detailed peer led interviews with 431 households were carried out. The research found that 75 per cent of people who were interviewed were affected by poor housing conditions. Residents were also found to have a poor awareness of their rights and entitlements. The project made interventions to prevent the loss of accommodation and homelessness including tackling overcrowding, preventing eviction and ensuring that landlords carried out repairs.

Bristol City Council has since funded St Mungo's to undertake further preventative work to address poor awareness of entitlements by introducing a community bridge building scheme. The scheme will also develop an advice, advocacy and signposting service delivered by a team of community volunteers and will be targeted at people who are vulnerably housed.

London and the south of England in order to find out what services they had sought support from to avoid sleeping rough.

We were surprised to find that most of the people surveyed had had little contact with public services, excluding criminal justice agencies, before sleeping rough. Only 16 out of the 52 people surveyed who told us the date when they had first slept rough said that they had used a GP, hospital, mental health service or drug or alcohol service at all before they started to sleep on the streets. This in itself is deeply concerning given the prevalence of health problems among people sleeping rough for the first time. It also underlines the need for day centres which provide informal health support to people who are homeless, and other health services targeted at rough sleepers.

The survey findings are supported by data from the interviews, in which most people told us they had not sought support from anyone until things had reached crisis point and they were sleeping on the streets or were close to doing so.

However, one in four of the people we surveyed told us that they had been in contact with and/or arrested by the police before they had started to sleep rough. More people had been in contact with the police before they slept rough than any other service. St Mungo's believe it is therefore necessary to explore what more can be done to use contact with the police as an opportunity to prevent future rough sleeping.

c) People do not ask for help

Our outreach workers surveyed 68 people who were currently sleeping rough, or had recently slept rough in

Conclusion and recommendations

Our research has shown that people are arriving on the streets with complex personal issues and that opportunities to prevent homelessness are repeatedly being missed. Traumatic childhoods, drug and alcohol issues and mental health problems erode people's resilience. Without support to address these issues, facing a relationship breakdown, eviction, release from prison or bereavement can be hard to cope with. When families, friends and local authorities all turn their backs, sleeping on the streets is too often the only option left.

Many of these triggers and background factors are not new, but our research has shown that they are not going away either. It is deeply concerning that rough sleeping is continuing to rise, yet less support is available. Local authorities are turning vulnerable people away. Hostel bed spaces are being reduced at a concerning rate and are at their lowest number since 2008²³, and now night shelters are also under threat. At the same time, mental health and other support services are tightening their access criteria as they face budget cuts. In addition, changes to welfare benefits are further eroding support available for the most disadvantaged in society.

The following section sets out what we believe local authorities, central government, criminal justice, health and housing agencies need to do to reverse the rising tide in rough sleeping.

Recommendations

I. Local authorities should urgently improve housing assessment, advice and assistance

Local authorities should urgently **improve standards of housing assessment, advice and assistance** to prevent people who ask for help from sleeping rough.

When someone is homeless or threatened with homelessness, they are entitled to advice and assistance from their local authority. Our research and others²⁴ has found that many people who approach local authorities for help with housing are turned away. Those who do receive advice are often given irrelevant information. The caseload and funding pressures currently affecting local authorities cannot excuse this level of service, which results in people having to sleep rough unnecessarily.

- a. **Improve assessment:** Local authorities should ensure that people who are at risk of rough sleeping are not turned away and receive a proper assessment of their situation. Local authorities must fulfil their legal requirements and carry out a thorough assessment of the needs and circumstances that led to people becoming homeless or being threatened by homelessness.
- b. **Improve advice:** The Government has asked local authorities to “offer a housing options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients”.²⁵ This is not routinely happening. Local authorities should ensure that everyone who approaches them for help receives advice which is up to date, relevant to people's situation and written down.
- c. **Try new solutions:** Given the scale of the problem, it is time for new ideas. Local authorities should pilot new approaches that identify people who are most at risk of rough sleeping when they approach housing offices for help. These services should offer troubleshooting support to prevent difficult situations escalating into crises and homelessness. This service should be available regardless of priority need or “intentionality”. External agencies can play a role in delivering this type of service.

²³ Homeless Link (2013) Survey of needs and provision.

²⁴ Crisis (2009) No one's priority.

²⁵ Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) Making every contact count.

St Mungo's Homeless Prevention and Engagement (HOPE) service

St Mungo's believe that we can prevent 1,000 men and women from becoming homeless and potentially sleeping rough for the first time. We are looking to work with two local authorities in central London to pilot services which will ensure more people are supported to keep a roof over their head.

St Mungo's HOPE service would supplement the work of local authorities existing housing services. It would help people at risk of homelessness to maximise their chances of remaining in their current accommodation or to secure new accommodation, taking into account their aspirations, entitlements and the local availability of housing.

The service would work with people to address the issues that are putting their housing at risk, such as the threat of eviction, unresolved health issues and the consequences of relationship breakdown. It would equip them with the skills to find and sustain their own housing. The service would be delivered in part by volunteers who have themselves used support services, building on St Mungo's experience of delivering our Peer Advice Link tenancy sustainment service.²⁶

2. Government should explore new legislation to prevent homelessness

Current legislation is failing to protect those who are most at risk of rough sleeping. The Welsh and Scottish Governments have taken the lead in developing new legislation that aims to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping.²⁷ The Government should ensure that other parts of the UK are not left behind. It should explore **legislative options** to expand the minimum offer of support that local authorities must make to all eligible households who are homeless or threatened by homelessness.

3. Government should ensure homelessness funding really does prevent homelessness

The Government has allocated local authorities over £400 million for homelessness prevention and £6.5 billion for housing related support for a range of vulnerable groups including homeless people for 2011-2015. The Government has promised to protect the amount it invests in these funds. However, this funding is allocated to local authorities without specification of how it is to be spent and, in the current financial climate, **is often not being used effectively to stop people becoming homeless.** The Government must set out clear expectations for how these funds should be spent. Local authorities should be held to account if they fail to meet these expectations.

²⁶ St Mungo's (2012) Recovery Results briefing: Peer Advice.

²⁷ See Homeless Persons Advice and Assistance (Scotland) Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002 No.414), Welsh Government (2012) Homes for Wales: A White Paper for Better Lives and Communities and CAB (2002) Possession Action, A last resort?

4. Government should extend emergency support for the most unwell, regardless of nationality

Too many people from outside the UK are unable to get home or get to treatment. Instead, they are ending up totally destitute and seriously ill on the streets. When the cold weather is most severe, emergency provision is available to keep people of all nationalities out of freezing temperatures. However, this provision is not available year round. This humanitarian response should be extended to ensure that anyone with serious health problems, regardless of their nationality, has access to respite shelter at any time of the year.

5. The Government should ensure that all local authorities, not just the best performing, are meeting the challenges to prevent homelessness set out in *Making every contact count*

The Government's joint homelessness prevention strategy, *Making every contact count* (2012)²⁸ sets local authorities ten challenges in preventing homelessness. These challenges cover housing options prevention services, partnership working with the voluntary sector as well as private rented sector and homelessness prevention strategies.

We welcome the establishment of the Gold Standard Board which will disseminate good practice in preventing homelessness. But if the Government is to meet its ambition to end rough sleeping, highlighting success is simply not enough, especially in the current climate of limited resources and a pressurised housing market.

The Government should ensure that every contact counts in **all** local authorities, not just the best performing. Poor performing local authorities should be identified and held to account.

6. Criminal justice agencies should play a key role in preventing homelessness

More rough sleepers we surveyed had been in contact with the police before they slept rough than any other service. **The police can play a crucial role in identifying people who are at risk of rough sleeping – both in the community and in police custody. The police can also do more to work with other agencies to address problems before they escalate into homelessness.**

Working with the police and local partners to prevent imprisonment and homelessness

St Mungo's and Revolving Doors Agency's Neighbourhood Link scheme was a five-year pilot project that ran from 2007 to 2012 in the London Borough of Islington. The service worked with local police Safer Neighbourhood Teams, landlords and health agencies to divert repeat offenders with mental health problems or learning difficulties away from the prison system and street homelessness.

The project increased clients' engagement with support services and decreased their contact with the police. It was praised as "exceptional" by the Bradley Review²⁹ and was highlighted by the Cabinet Office as a prime example of a successful integrated and personalised early intervention service. St Mungo's Link Team now delivers a similar service across North and East London.

²⁸ Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) *Making every contact count*.

²⁹ Department of Health (2009) *The Bradley Review*.

More than two thirds of people we interviewed had been to prison or had been referred to the probation service, and four had slept rough immediately after release from prison. Government plans to ensure all prisoners are met on release by a mentor; whose role will include helping them find a place to live,³⁰ present an opportunity to make contact with the criminal justice system count in preventing homelessness. However, mentors alone will not solve the housing problems faced by many ex prisoners when they are released.

Prisons should ensure all prisoners access robust housing advice, and are supported to secure accommodation on release. Courts, police and probation should also take a lead role in ensuring suitable accommodation is available. Offenders with the most complex problems should get the most help.

Preventing homelessness among black minority ethnic women ex offenders

St Mungo's delivers a floating support service for women from black and minority ethnic backgrounds leaving Her Majesty's Prison Holloway. Funded by the J Paul Getty Jr Charitable Trust, the service provides housing advice and assistance both before and after release, supporting women 'through the gate'. A forthcoming evaluation of the service by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies finds that the service is highly valued by clients and helped them to find housing, maintain family relationships, set up benefit claims and access substance use services. The evaluation finds evidence to suggest that the service may reduce rates of reoffending. It also finds that 100 per cent of clients who remained engaged in the service found housing and called for more funding to become available to fund similar services.

7. Housing providers should provide personalised tenancy support to prevent eviction

Rough sleeping is often triggered by an eviction, yet in many cases evictions are avoidable. **Local authorities** should work with housing associations, voluntary groups, and private landlords to provide **personalised tenancy support to prevent eviction**. This will save costs arising from homelessness later down the line. St Mungo's Peer Advice Link (PAL) provides a cost effective example of how people at risk of losing their tenancy can be supported to keep their home.³¹

8. Government should address the housing shortage as a priority

The shortage of housing is putting ever greater pressure on the supply of affordable accommodation. This is making it harder for local authorities to house those who are most in need of accommodation and contributing to the poor responses from local authorities that we identified in our research. As recognised by all parties, increasing the availability of housing should be a national priority. The Government should urgently take action to ensure the housing shortage is addressed.

³⁰ From a Speech by Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice Chris Grayling MP, 20 November 2012.

³¹ St Mungo's (2012) Recovery Results briefing: Peer Advice Link.

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No More



No More increases in the numbers of people sleeping rough
No More preventable homelessness
No More suffering on the streets

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For more information contact:

St Mungo's, Griffin House
161 Hammersmith Road, London W6 8BS

Tel: 020 8762 5500 Fax: 020 8762 5501

www.mungos.org

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Opening doors for homeless people