

## HEADLINE FIGURES

- **COVID-19 and measuring homelessness:** The effectiveness of wide-reaching intervention by government and local authorities to house people sleeping rough during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns has brought the scale of homelessness to the fore.

  - The Everyone In campaign got more than 33,000 people into stable accommodation in England as at November 2020.
  - In Wales, 2,266 people (including 407 rough sleepers) were reported to have been moved into emergency accommodation between 13 April and 28 June 2020.
  - Subsequently, autumn rough sleeping counts fell heavily in 2020: The amount of people estimated to be sleeping rough on a single night fell 37% year-on-year to 2,688. At 30 November in Wales, 96 individuals were recorded as sleeping rough.
- **Government strategies on homelessness and the ending rough sleeping:** The UK government has pledged to end rough sleeping by May 2024, with changes to statutory duties owed to those at risk of homelessness strengthened over the past decade in England and Wales.

  - In 2020-21, 268,560 households were assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness in England, with more than 61,000 (23%) of these aged between 16-24. In Wales, 24,795 people were declared homeless in 2020/21, with more than 5,800 (one-in-four) aged 16-24. This equates to 184 16- to 24-year-olds declared as homeless every day across England and Wales.
  - There are forms of homelessness that don't appear in statistics, such as sofa-surfing or staying with friends and family. Young people are believed to be over-represented in this group because of low income, financial instability and not having 'priority need' for duties owed by local authorities.
  - The ban on evictions as part of the UK government's response to COVID-19 prevented many people from becoming homeless over the pandemic. With its end in May 2021 and those of furlough and the Universal Credit £20 weekly uplift in quick succession, the precarious financial situation people find themselves in may become difficult to manage.

Wanting a place to call home is a natural desire and a basic human right. However, the number of people affected by homelessness each year in England and Wales is considerable.

Fully representative data on the amount of people without their own homes can be difficult to collect, particularly in terms of those who are rough sleepers or in more transient places to sleeping, such as sofa surfing or on public transport. Those who have not approached their local authority for assistance will not be logged in these statistics, however changes in what local authorities provide to those at risk of becoming or being homeless has led to more people accessing support.

Presently, more information is known about people sleeping rough than ever before, as the government's response to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has created greater entitlement to support for people sleeping rough and at risk of homelessness.

### **Measuring a hidden reality**

The rootless nature of homelessness has long made getting an accurate handle on its true scale difficult, however the impact of COVID-19 and the UK government's implementation of national lockdowns has brought the amount of people sleeping rough into stark terms.

Prior to the pandemic, the government's annual snapshot recorded 4,266 people sleeping rough in England as at autumn 2019 – an increase of 141% since 2010.<sup>1</sup> In Wales, the amount of rough sleepers has increased by 114% since 2015-16 to 2019-20 to 176 – although the Welsh government estimates the number of rough sleepers to be 405 people.<sup>2</sup>

### **Mammoth intervention as a pandemic hits**

In response to the public health concern as COVID-19 spread, the UK government introduced a national lockdown. As part of this, it implemented Everyone In, a strategy to house people sleeping rough to quell transmission amongst this vulnerable community. Local authorities were required to house all rough sleepers and those at risk of street homelessness in accommodation where they could self-isolate, working with homelessness charities and hotel chains to ensure appropriate spaces were sourced and those at-risk could be located.

The scale, reach and speed of the Everyone In campaign got more than 33,000 people into stable accommodation in England as at November 2020.<sup>3</sup> In Wales, 2,266 people (including 407 rough sleepers) were reported to have been moved into emergency accommodation between 13 April and 28 June 2020.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, [Official Statistics - Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2019](#), 27 February 2020

<sup>2</sup> Welsh Government, [Rough sleepers by local authority](#), February 2020

<sup>3</sup> National Audit Office, [Investigation into the housing of rough sleepers during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), 11 January 2021

<sup>4</sup> Welsh Government, [Homeless and rough sleepers in emergency accommodation in COVID-19 crisis \(management information\)](#), 8 July 2020

As at January 2021, 26,167 of those helped through Everyone In in England had been supported to move into settled accommodation (private rental or social housing) or onto a ‘rough sleeping pathway’ (hostels, supported housing, or moving in with family/friends).<sup>5</sup>

The Everyone In scheme treated rough sleeping as more than a housing issue, but as one of public health, generating a multi-agency response with person-centred support. However, the Kerslake Commission’s review of the scheme found young people’s needs were not adequately considered in the scheme, with a lack of youth-specific provision. This meant young people not entering services for safety concerns, or those who did were exposed to unsafe situations.<sup>6</sup>

### **The impact on rough sleeping counts**

Given the magnitude of the government’s intervention to get people off the streets during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is unsurprising that its annual snapshot of rough sleeping in England fell in autumn 2020. The amount of people estimated to be sleeping rough on a single night fell 37% year-on-year to 2,688.<sup>7</sup> At 30 November in Wales, 96 individuals were recorded as sleeping rough.<sup>8</sup>

Despite Everyone In creating responsibility to get rough sleepers into accommodation and, for the first time, identifying the amount and individuals rough sleeping, there are still several thousands of people living on the streets. In London alone, Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) data showed a 3% annual increase in the number of people seen rough sleeping in the capital to 11,018 in 2020/21.<sup>9</sup>

In the autumn 2020 snapshot, several local authorities in England recorded an increase in rough sleeping. Reasons cited revolved around the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic: job losses, inability to pay rent or living in accommodation tied to jobs, illegal evictions, relationship breakdowns, reduced winter shelter provision and having to leave homes where they sofa-surfed. In particular, this is likely to hit young people and those without access to public funds, such as non-UK nationals.<sup>10</sup>

### **Governments promise to end rough sleeping**

In its 2019 election manifesto, the Conservative party pledged to end rough sleeping by the end of the next Parliament (May 2024), stepping up its initial aim of halving rough sleeping by 2022. This would be achieved through the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) and Housing First, as well as bringing together local services.<sup>11</sup> The RSI,

<sup>5</sup> House of Commons Library, [Coronavirus: Support for rough sleepers \(England\)](#), 12 October 2021

<sup>6</sup> The Kerslake Commission on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping, [A new way of working: ending rough sleeping together \(Final report\)](#), September 2021

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, [Official Statistics – Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2020](#), 25 February 2021

<sup>8</sup> Welsh Government, [Homelessness accommodation provision and rough sleeping: November 2020](#), 4 February 2021

<sup>9</sup> CHAIN, [CHAIN Annual Report – Greater London: April 2020 – March 2021](#), 3 June 2021

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 25 February 2021

<sup>11</sup> Conservative and Unionist Party, [Manifesto 2019](#), 24 November 2019

launched in March 2018 and targeted at local authorities with high numbers of people sleeping rough, with a net reduction of 15.92 sleeping rough in 2018 in the areas in the scheme compared to those not.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, the Welsh government's Rough Sleeping Action Plan, released in February 2018, sought to prevent people from having to sleep rough through the support of early referral of new rough sleepers to relevant services, conducting research on understanding the causes of the recent increase in rough sleeping, and engaging in work undertaken to reduce the impact of adverse childhood experiences.<sup>13</sup>

Further action to tackle rough sleeping was announced prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in February 2020. The UK government's strategies included a £236million fund towards a Housing First style move-on accommodation for up to 6,000 rough sleepers and those at immediate risk of rough sleeping, as well as the appointment of an independent adviser to lead an urgent review into the causes of rough sleeping to guide on additional action required.<sup>14</sup>

The Welsh government furthered its initial funding package of £10million at the start of lockdown to house people sleeping rough with a further £20million to ensure that no-one in emergency shelter through the pandemic response has to return to the streets or stay in unsuitable accommodation.<sup>15</sup>

In December 2020, the UK government promised a £310million to local councils, targeted at areas with high numbers of homeless people, those at risk of homelessness or those living in temporary accommodation. This contributed to a total allocation of more than £700million to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in 2020/21.<sup>16</sup>

For 2021/22, the Government has pledged £750million to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, including £203million to the Rough Sleeping Initiative and is receiving applications for £212million in funding through the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme 2021-24. The latter is for the provision of move-on accommodation and supported services, with two-thirds of the funding for capital projects (e.g., building or restoration work) and the other third for revenue projects (provision of services).<sup>17</sup>

### **Homelessness beyond rough sleeping**

Rough sleeping and homelessness are not interchangeable terms: the former is the most visible form of the latter, with thousands of people in temporary

<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, [Impact evaluation of the Rough Sleeping Initiative 2018](#), September 2019

<sup>13</sup> Welsh Government, [Rough Sleeping Action Plan](#), February 2018

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, UK Government, 27 February 2020

<sup>15</sup> Welsh Government, [Welsh Government announce new £20 million fund to transform homelessness services and ensure no-one need return to rough sleeping](#) – press release, 28 May 2020

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, House of Commons Library, 12 October 2021

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

accommodation or at-risk of losing their homes who approach their local authorities for support.

In 2020-21, 268,560 households were assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness in England, with more than 61,400 (23%) of these aged 16-24.<sup>18</sup> Although the total figure fell 7% from 2019-20, those aged 16-24 were the only age group to see homeless declarations increase year-on-year. While the eviction ban on households during the pandemic may have kept more people in their homes, reducing the amount brought to crisis point, national lockdowns may have impacted households. More than half of those declared newly homeless in 2020/21 (56%) cited their family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate them, family breakdown, violence or domestic abuse – compared to 45% in 2019/20.

In Wales, 24,795 people were declared homeless in 2020/21 with at least 5,800 (one-in-four) aged 16–24.<sup>19</sup> This equates to 184 16- to 24-year-olds declared as homeless every day across England and Wales.

### Homelessness over time

The way homelessness is assessed by local authorities, and the duties they provide to those seeking help, have changed in recent years. In England in 2014/15, 53,140 households were accepted as statutory homeless, with prevention (a solution for those who is at risk of homelessness for at least the next six months) and relief (help to secure accommodation for those who authorities have been unable to prevent homelessness) provided to 205,000 and 15,700 households respectively.<sup>20</sup>

This is in part due to the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) enacted in England in April 2018, part of which included single adult households who do not have priority need offered duties and relief that they were not entitled to previously.

The HRA was a comprehensive reform to homelessness legislation which enhanced the duties local authorities could take to prevent and relieve homelessness and was supported by an £72.7million in funding.<sup>21</sup> More than 270,000 households have had their homelessness successfully prevented or relieved through securing accommodation for more than six months since the HRA's introduction.<sup>22</sup>

In Wales, the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 gave local authorities new statutory duties to carry out prevention work with all eligible households and to help secure

<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, [Statutory Homelessness Annual Report 2020-21, England, 9 September](#) 2020

<sup>19</sup> Welsh Government, [Households for which assistance has been provided by outcome, age and gender](#), 16 December 2019

<sup>20</sup> Department for Communities & Local Government, [Statutory homelessness, January to March 2016, and homelessness prevention and relief 2015/16: England](#), 30 June 2016

<sup>21</sup> UK Government, [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#), 27 April 2017

<sup>22</sup> UK Government, [Prime Minister sets out new measures to end rough sleeping \(press release\)](#), 27 February 2020

accommodation, with an emphasis on early intervention in attempts to limit assistance only given once a person's situation reaches crisis point.<sup>23</sup> In the first year following the introduction of the Act, 17,247 households were provided assistance.<sup>24</sup>

Changes in legislation on how households are assessed as homelessness are not alone the reason behind such considerable rises. There have been wider changes at the political level which may have contributed to pushing more people into homelessness: shortfalls in the building of affordable housing, lack of replenishment from the sell-off of social housing and changes to the welfare system and Housing Benefit that reduced the levels of protection individuals may have had from homelessness.<sup>25</sup>

### **The hidden homeless**

There are some forms of homelessness which do not appear in rough sleeping counts or statutory homelessness figures, particularly if no intervention from the local authority has been sought. This term is used to categorise people who have no fixed address or have become homeless but have somewhere to stay temporarily, such as with friends or family, sofa surfing, in squats or insecure accommodation.

People who typically become hidden homeless are those not in 'priority need' of support from local authorities but cannot afford housing: a demographic formed in the main by young single people without dependent children. In 2017, it was estimated that in London, 13 times more people are homeless but hidden than are visibly sleeping rough, with around 12,500 people in this situation every night.<sup>26</sup>

### **Where do we go from here?**

The English and Welsh governments' response to getting rough sleepers into accommodation during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns was on an unprecedented scale, supporting thousands of the countries' most vulnerable people and providing somewhere safe. It showcased what could be done with substantial intervention, funding and implementation.

As the return to normality is forged, the Conservative Party's aim of ending rough sleeping within this parliament must not be forgotten – particularly given the knowledge of those in this precarious situation only documented due to the pandemic.

However, the pandemic has also pushed many more people in England and Wales closer to homelessness through joblessness, reduction in income and existing volatile or temporary housing arrangements to the brink. The Coronavirus Act 2020 prevented landlords from evicting tenants and was repeatedly extended, finally

<sup>23</sup> UK Government, [Housing \(Wales\) Act 2014](#), September 2014

<sup>24</sup> Ibid Welsh Government, 25 July 2019

<sup>25</sup> House of Commons Library, [Statutory Homelessness in England](#), 26 November 2020

<sup>26</sup> London Assembly, [Hidden homelessness in London](#), September 2017

ceasing on 31 May 2021.<sup>27</sup> However, this eviction ban did not prevent debts from mounting or tenants from accruing arrears if they became unable to pay the full cost of their rent on the back of the lockdowns. Furthermore, the cessation of the temporary £20 weekly uplift in Universal Credit on 6 October will impact the income of 2.9million households renting in the UK.<sup>28</sup> No impact assessment conducted by the Government beforehand on what the removal of the uplift would have on families.<sup>29</sup>

As normality begins to resume, how these policies are brought forward will be the difference between securing somewhere safe or having stability stripped from under people's feet. With young people most likely to have lost work or earnings during the pandemic through job loss, reduction in actual hours worked and furlough, this moment represents an inflection point on what the future of homelessness may look like, and who is most likely to fall victim to it, in England and Wales.

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<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, [Guidance for landlords and tenants](#), updated 13 October 2021

<sup>28</sup> Institute for Fiscal Studies, [The expiry of the Universal Credit uplift: impacts and policy options](#), 15 July 2021

<sup>29</sup> UK Parliament, [Written questions, answers and statements: Universal Credit, Question for Department for Work and Pensions – UIN 25105, tabled on 30 June 2021](#), 9 July 2021