



Department for Levelling Up,  
Housing & Communities

# Flow of rough sleeping – final report

Main report



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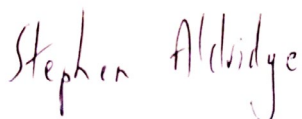
# Foreword

Tackling rough sleeping is a key priority for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The Government has made its ambition clear, with a manifesto commitment to end rough sleeping by the end of this parliament.

In August 2022 DLUHC commissioned Ipsos UK to conduct qualitative case studies into the flow of rough sleeping in five local authorities experiencing high levels of flow. This research sought to provide Government, local authorities and the wider homelessness and rough sleeping sector with a better understanding of the drivers of new and returning rough sleepers to the streets, and to support the development of joined-up prevention and intervention strategies.

Thanks are due to the teams at Ipsos and DLUHC who supported this work, along with the local authorities and individuals with lived experience who participated in the research.

DLUHC is firmly committed to continuing to develop its evidence base on the causes of and solutions to homelessness and rough sleeping.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Stephen Aldridge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

**Stephen Aldridge**  
**Director for Analysis and Data & Chief Economist**  
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# Acknowledgements

The authors of this report are **Andrew McKeown, Jessica Pace** and **Charlotte Albiston**. All are researchers in Public Affairs at Ipsos UK.

**Holly Day, Charlotte Albiston, Zara Johnson-Ireland, Tanisha Colegate, Joe Wheeler, Laura King, Charlotte Baker, Jessica Pace** and independent researcher **Melanie Cohen** conducted the case studies with support from the main project team. **Isabella Pereira** and **Richard Lloyd**, Research Directors at Ipsos MORI, supported the team in the delivery of the work.

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# Executive summary

## Background and aims of this research

The Government has committed to ending rough sleeping. The cross-government strategy *'Ending rough sleeping for good'* (September 2022) set out how this commitment would be realised, with £2 billion of funding being allocated to help achieve this aim over three years.<sup>1</sup> The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has extended their flagship Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) to 2025, with over £500 million funding, so that local areas can provide the support needed to end rough sleeping and to support vital projects.

In August 2022, DLUHC commissioned Ipsos UK to conduct qualitative case studies into the **flow of rough sleeping**, specifically to:

- Gain a more detailed understanding of individuals' journeys before sleeping rough and the key drivers, including whether any opportunities for prevention were likely missed; and
- Gain a better understanding of strategies and approaches to preventing the flow of rough sleeping at a local level, including the role of data and evidence as well as that of different authorities and institutions.

This research is focused specifically on people who had recent experience of sleeping rough in the case study areas for the first time. Participants were either living in off the street accommodation<sup>2</sup> or were sleeping rough at the point they were interviewed. This can include people who have slept rough in other areas previously, as well as people who have not slept rough anywhere before. It does not include people who have been recorded as sleeping rough in a specific area longer than one year ago, or people who have slept rough in a specific area in the past and subsequently returned to sleeping rough.

## Methodology

Five case study areas were selected for this research: Brighton & Hove, Birmingham and three London boroughs of Southwark, Westminster and Camden<sup>3</sup>. The research in each area consisted of the following elements:

- **An evidence review** incorporating quantitative data sources such as the Rough Sleeping Snapshot in England annual statistics, the Support for People Sleeping Rough in England monthly statistics and the Greater London Authority CHAIN dataset, and qualitative evidence relating to their case study areas, such as local authority rough sleeping strategy documents and RSI funding self-assessment forms. The review was supported and contextualised with evidence from **key informant interviews** with selected individuals within each case study local authority area, which

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ending-rough-sleeping-for-good>

<sup>2</sup> Off the street accommodation settings include: hostels, supported accommodation, temporary accommodation, emergency accommodation, respite accommodation, assessment bed settings and night shelters.

<sup>3</sup> These areas were selected because they were identified to have high flows of rough sleeping. Three of the areas (Brighton, Birmingham and Westminster) identified the need for further research into flow (and how it could be prevented) in their funding bid for the RSI. Southwark and Camden were added to gain additional insight into the flow between and across Greater London boroughs.

included Rough Sleeping Leads and Coordinators and service commissioners.

- **Qualitative case studies** consisting of 43 interviews with **individuals working in relevant services** and 25 **interviews with people who had recent experience sleeping rough**. Together, these interviews provided insights into individuals' journeys into rough sleeping, and an understanding of any missed opportunities to prevent rough sleeping.

The research was conducted between August 2022 and June 2023.

## Key findings

This research delved into individual circumstances that led people to sleeping rough for the first time. Missed opportunities to prevent people sleeping rough for the first time related to low awareness of housing options services available, mistrust in support services and barriers in accessing services, as well as pressure among services to prioritise support for people most at risk of rough sleeping. These findings indicate that a tailored approach is needed to target support for people at the point before they are at immediate risk of rough sleeping. This approach should maximise the window of opportunity that service providers have to work with people to prevent them sleeping rough for the first time.

The 25 individuals interviewed for this study included those arriving from other parts of the UK and from EU and non-EU nations, the latter including some who arrived to improve their work opportunities but without accommodation arrangements. The majority were able to point to some form of crisis or life event which had led to them sleeping rough, including losing jobs, family disputes/breakdowns, release from prison, mental health issues and alcohol or drug addiction – which were experienced both individually and serially.

1. Individuals who slept rough for the first time in the five case study areas were often unaware of housing support options from their local authority.
2. Low levels of trust in housing services based on previous experience with statutory services in general can act as a barrier to individuals engaging with services at the point they are at risk of homelessness.
3. Individuals who leave their last settled accommodation but do not have strong social networks of family or friends were at greater risk of becoming homeless before ultimately sleeping rough. However, as the interviewees reported, reliance on family and friends can only provide a short-term solution.
4. After leaving their last settled accommodation, individuals may move between areas before sleeping rough or sleeping rough in more than one area. This can be due to individuals having social connections in specific areas or perceiving these areas to have strong support services.
5. Initiatives to facilitate joint working to prevent flow of rough sleeping across local authorities were evident. However, these initiatives were constrained in the support they could offer to those at risk of homelessness who were not in their home local authority.

6. Local authorities in the five case study areas had equipped housing, homelessness and rough sleeping services to support people at risk of homelessness from rough sleeping.
7. However, these areas experienced barriers to the prevention of the flow of rough sleeping, such as pressure to prioritise intervention services for people at immediate risk of rough sleeping. Some areas also reported barriers to service access where services are commissioned to work with individuals only once they have become homeless/slept rough for the first time.
8. A lack of communication between homelessness service providers and other statutory services, as well as between service providers across other local authority areas, can lead to delays in arranging support for people at risk of homelessness. This can lead to feelings of being forgotten, and reinforce any negative perceptions of the responsiveness of the statutory sector.
9. A lack of co-ordination between services was a particular challenge for supporting people with complex needs. This can result in service providers having short notice to arrange accommodation for people leaving institutions.
10. Gaps in specialised services for people with complex needs could result in individuals being supported into accommodation that does not meet their support needs or not engaging with support after leaving their last settled accommodation.
11. The study found that despite the best efforts of service commissioners and providers, opportunities to intervene to prevent the first instance of rough sleeping could be missed. Areas where opportunities are being missed include improving awareness of available support services, increasing the number of early interventions and referral opportunities, ensuring the capacity and capability to respond at risk at short notice, and improving the ease of access to housing support.

## Suggestions for consideration

The report concludes with a series of suggestions for consideration to help improve access to and the provision of services for people at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping for the first time. These were grouped under four headings as summarised below:

- **Identifying people at risk of sleeping rough for the first time** - can pose a range of challenges. To help address these challenges suggestions include: promoting further joint working and information sharing between housing authority staff and partners across the statutory and voluntary sector, to enable rapid responses to those identified as being at risk; establishing clear communications routes and working relationships with other authorities regarding reconnections; and investing in data driven approaches to identifying those at risk.
- **Engaging with people at risk of sleeping rough for the first time** – which may need to counter any reluctance to engage. We suggest that services develop engagement approaches which are sensitive and trauma-informed; and which



enable rapid responses to avoid a first night sleeping rough. Any barriers to accessing preventative services, such as service commissions which only allow provision once individuals become homeless, should be addressed.

- **Raising awareness of homelessness services** – awareness of preventative services was found to be consistently low amongst potential service users. To address this we suggest that: local authorities and their partners take steps to promote their services clearly and at every opportunity – through posters in A&E, GP surgeries, Jobcentre Plus offices, across local authority premises with public access and in wider community settings – as well as directly to clients. Partner staff should also be briefed to enable them to describe services to clients and make accurate referrals.
- **Access to emergency accommodation** – emerged as a challenge across the case study areas, particularly for non-UK nationals. Suggestions included: local authorities keeping their allocations policies under review to help ensure supply reflects local demand; and encouraging local authorities to develop guidance on completing housing support applications and reminded of their duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Aims and objectives

This research aims to provide evidence about the drivers of the flow of rough sleeping and strategies undertaken to prevent it in five case study areas: Birmingham, Brighton & Hove, Camden, Southwark and Westminster. These areas were selected because they were identified to have high flows of rough sleeping. Birmingham and Westminster City Councils identified the need for further research into flow (and how it could be prevented) in their funding bid for the RSI. Three further areas were identified to include alongside Birmingham and Westminster to form the basis for this study. Southwark and Camden were added to gain additional insight into the flow between and across Greater London boroughs and Brighton & Hove was added to provide additional insight outside London.

*Flow of rough sleeping* refers to instances where people are new to sleeping rough in a specific area. This can include people who have slept rough in other areas previously, as well as people who have not slept rough anywhere before. It does not include people who have been recorded as sleeping rough in a specific area longer than one year ago, or people who have slept rough in a specific area in the past and subsequently returned to sleeping rough. For the purposes of this research, we spoke to people who had recent experiences of sleeping rough (either in a specific case study area or new to rough sleeping altogether) at the point the fieldwork began. This evidence will support the Government in its ambition to end rough sleeping.

In 2019 and 2020, the Rough Sleeping Questionnaire<sup>4</sup> provided detailed quantitative evidence of the experiences of people sleeping rough in the UK. The Rough Sleeping Questionnaire was one of the largest survey data collections on people who sleep rough ever conducted in the UK and provided detailed evidence on the drivers of rough sleeping. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) commissioned qualitative research to build on the existing evidence on the flow of rough sleeping from quantitative sources such as the Rough Sleeping Questionnaire and Government statistical publications outlined in section 1.2. This research aims to provide greater understanding of the drivers of the flow of rough sleeping in the five case study areas and what local authorities are doing to prevent it.

With these priorities in mind, the objectives of this research are to:

1. Gain a more detailed understanding of individuals' journeys before sleeping rough for the first time and the key drivers, including whether any possible opportunities for prevention were likely to have been missed.
2. Gain a better understanding of strategies and approaches to preventing the flow of rough sleeping employed at a local level.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rough-sleeping-questionnaire-initial-findings>

In order to meet these objectives, this research will focus on five research questions:

1. What evidence is available in the five local authority areas in relation to the flow of rough sleeping and how is this used? Are there any key gaps and, if so, what could be done to improve the local evidence?
2. Based on the evidence available, what are the main drivers behind the flow of people new to sleeping rough in the five areas?<sup>5</sup> What could be the factors behind some areas experiencing higher levels of flow than other areas?
3. What are some of the personal journeys for individuals before sleeping rough? What can be learned from this in terms of the broader reasons behind the flow of rough sleeping in the five areas, particularly in terms of flow from other areas and from institutions?
4. How are local authorities working together to prevent the flow of rough sleeping between their areas, including in terms of preventing individuals moving from one area to another and in facilitating re-connections?<sup>6</sup>
5. How are different systems and services working together in local areas to prevent the flow of rough sleeping, particularly among individuals with prior experience of institutions?

## 1.2 Existing evidence base on people sleeping rough

In addition to the Rough Sleeping Questionnaire, there are a number of different data sources for the number of people sleeping rough in local authorities in England. Local authorities across England submit data on numbers of people sleeping rough in their areas on a monthly and annual basis, which are published by DLUHC. More details about these data sources are available in Annex 1. In addition to this, local authorities maintain databases of information about people sleeping rough in their areas. For the five case study areas for this research:

- the London areas (Camden, Southwark and Westminster) collect data through the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN), which covers all London boroughs; and
- Brighton & Hove Council maintains a database called B-THINK, which collects information within the local authority area.
- Birmingham Councils do not have a dedicated database, but the Council collects information from frontline services about people sleeping rough.

### 1.2.1 Current numbers of people sleeping rough

According to the official annual rough sleeping snapshot statistics, 3,069 people were estimated to be sleeping rough on a single night in Autumn 2022 in England, which is up by 626 people or 26% from 2021<sup>7</sup>. Of the five case study areas, four local authorities saw

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<sup>5</sup> When this research was initially commissioned, this research question included identifying the drivers of people returning to rough sleeping i.e. people who had been recorded as sleeping rough in an area in the past, followed by a period of living in settled accommodation, before returning to sleeping rough. This research question was revised during the course of the research to focus specifically on people new to rough sleeping to ensure these drivers could be sufficiently investigated within the parameters of the fieldwork for this research.

<sup>6</sup> In this context of this research, 're-connections' refers to measures undertaken to prevent individuals from sleeping rough in an area they do not have a local connection to.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2022>

an increase in the number of people sleeping rough on a single night between 2021 and 2022. Camden was the only area to see a slight decrease in this time, from 97 to 90 people.

According to the latest rough sleeping management information published by DLUHC, the total number of people who were **new** to sleeping rough on a single night in England in March 2023 was 649 people.<sup>8</sup> This is an increase of 110 people (20.4%) compared to March 2022. Taken over the course of the year April 2022 to March 2023, this figure has ranged from 869 in August 2022 to 440 in January 2023.

The case study report that accompanies this report includes more detail on the numbers of people sleeping rough in the five case study areas. This includes numbers of people sleeping rough and changes since the previous year, demographic information about people sleeping rough and numbers of people who are new to rough sleeping.

### 1.3 Research methodology

As noted in section 1.2, the existing evidence base on people sleeping rough is primarily quantitative. This research therefore addressed the existing evidence gap through conducting in-depth research interviews with purposively selected participants to meet the research objectives. In total, **25 interviews with people sleeping rough** and **43 interviews with service providers** were conducted.

Mainstage case study data collection was preceded by an initial **evidence review**, covering evidence of flow of rough sleeping and local authorities' strategies to prevent it. This evidence included monitoring information and annual snapshot data collected by local authorities for DLUHC, local authority strategy documents and interviews with individuals responsible for commissioning housing, homelessness and rough sleeping services. The evidence review used to inform the mainstage qualitative research.

The **qualitative case studies** consisted of interviews with both service providers and people sleeping rough in each of the case study local authorities. Findings from the evidence review were used to select at least six participants working in service providers in each area. These participants completed interviews about the drivers of flow of rough sleeping in their areas and what measures were in place to prevent it. Participants working in frontline services such as outreach teams and accommodation settings then supported the research team to engage with people sleeping rough about taking part in the research.

The research team conducted five interviews with people sleeping rough in each case study area to understand their journeys into rough sleeping. Participants who had slept rough had used homelessness, housing and rough sleeping services in the case study areas. However, this research was not designed to systematically align their perspectives of specific services with the perspectives of service provider participants working in those services, rather to engage participants with a range of lived experiences. Full details of the **research methodology**, including **sample achieved**, are included in Annex 2 of this report.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-people-sleeping-rough-in-england-march-2023>

### 1.3.1 Data analysis

Analysis for the qualitative case studies was underpinned by a thematic framework for the study developed from the key research questions. All interviews with service providers were recorded and transcribed, and interviews with people sleeping rough were either recorded if consent was given at the time of interviewed or detailed fieldnotes were taken during the interview. Data management was conducted by generating comprehensive interview summaries in Microsoft Excel and through manual thematic analysis of transcripts and fieldnotes. This process was supported by team discussions, which were used to explore, review and analyse the dataset.

## 1.4 Presentation of evidence

The findings in this report present the range of experiences, views and responses from participating service providers and people sleeping rough. Case illustrations of people sleeping rough have been **anonymised** throughout to protect the identity of individuals, with quotations attributed using gender and age. Quotations from service providers are attributed to a relevant generic job title and by local authority.

The findings reflect the perceptions of research participants. In this report the evidence has not been triangulated with other sources to evaluate the factual content of statements, and rather aims to present a range of perspectives on the issues described.

## 1.5 Report structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 of the report aims to present evidence about **the individual circumstances leading to rough sleeping flow** in the five case study areas, highlighting the relevance of personal situations as drivers for people sleeping rough for the first time. 'Missed opportunities' to engage with individuals who may be at risk of rough sleeping are highlighted through the use of case illustrations and detailed 'journey maps' (drawn from interviews with people sleeping rough). The journey maps included in this report draw on an approach to presenting evidence to illustrate participants' experiences and link these experiences led to missed opportunities to prevent rough sleeping.
- Chapter 3 presents evidence on **service provision aimed at the prevention of rough sleeping flow**, highlighting what works well and barriers to effective service delivery.
- Chapter 4 provides our **conclusions**, with a series of suggestions for consideration to help improve access to and provision of services for people at risk of rough sleeping for the first time.

The report also includes three Annexes: Annex 1 provides details of the key data sources drawn upon to provide data on rough sleeping overall and within the case study areas; Annex 2 details our research methodology; and Annex 3 provides an overview of services for people sleeping rough within the case study areas.

## 2. Individual circumstances leading to someone sleeping rough for the first time in an area

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents evidence on common experiences at an individual level which led to people sleeping rough for the first time in the five case study areas. The findings are based on the perspectives of service providers who work with people new to rough sleeping or in homelessness services, as well as the experiences of individuals who had recent experience of sleeping rough. This report includes case illustrations and journey maps to present the detailed experiences of participants who had slept rough. They illustrate how participants went from leaving their last settled accommodation to sleeping rough in a specific area, highlighting missed opportunities to engage with services.

The findings presented here acknowledge that in individual cases, a wide range of life events and circumstances may converge, leading to people finding themselves homeless and with no option but to sleep rough. These circumstances commonly include loss of employment, household break-ups, family disputes, mental health difficulties and addiction, among others, which may be complex, interlinked and experienced serially. Indeed the very factors which lead to an individual sleeping rough can also limit their opportunities for securing (and sustaining) suitable accommodation. The importance of these types of experiences as drivers of rough sleeping are already well documented and so are not explored in detail here, although the accompanying journey maps include individuals' initial reasons for sleeping rough to provide context.

Instead, we have focussed on the experiences and perceptions of individuals sleeping rough for the first time, and of the local authority and others involved in homelessness services, in terms of the key steps in addressing rough sleeping where it is identified and working to prevent instances of rough sleeping in the first case. The remainder of this chapter explores: awareness amongst potential service users of the homelessness support services available in their areas; the importance of access to informal support networks; the influence of previous experiences of statutory services; and the influence of local connections in the flow of rough sleeping. These factors are outlined in the key findings box and are addressed in detail in this chapter.

#### 2.1.1 Introducing the journey maps

To capture the context for, and experiences of, individuals rough sleeping for the first time, and their engagement with support services, a series of journey maps were produced for a sample of the individuals interviewed. The journey maps are presented thematically across Chapters 2 and 3 as Figures 1 to 5.

The journey maps set out:

- The background and context which led to each individual losing their accommodation and sleeping rough for the first time;
- The steps in their journey from this initial point of crisis towards and into suitable and sustainable accommodation, including the services received (and their attitudes towards them) and setbacks experienced during the journey; and
- Points in time or surrounding particular events where opportunities to intervene may have been missed, which are consolidated in our conclusions.

**Key findings: Individual circumstances leading to someone sleeping rough for the first time in an area**

- Individuals at risk of homelessness were often unaware of the housing support that may have been available from their local authority.
- Individuals who experience an event that impacts their life and do not have access to a strong social network were at risk of becoming homeless before ultimately sleeping rough.
- Low levels of trust in housing services based on previous experience with statutory services in general can act as a barrier to individuals engaging with services at the point they are at risk of homelessness.
- Barriers to accessing suitable support and accommodation at the right time can lead those vulnerable to housing exclusion to move from one area to another before sleeping rough or sleep rough in more than one area due to local connections. This can be due to local connection to specific areas or individuals' perceptions of strong relevant support services or supportive local cultures (e.g. LGBTQ) in specific areas.
- Applying for housing support can be a lengthy process leading to delays in assistance for individuals who are new to rough sleeping.

## 2.2 Awareness of support

The evidence from interviews with both people sleeping rough and service providers demonstrated that there was widespread low awareness among relevant vulnerable populations of support options to prevent homelessness. This was most pronounced among people in precarious financial circumstances and those who were at risk of being evicted at short notice. Service providers working in intervention services such as outreach teams, off the street accommodation providers and day centres reported that they worked with people who did not look for support with alternative accommodation until it was too late and their last available option was sleeping rough, at least in part due to low levels of awareness of the potential support available to support them.

*"There's significant strain on people that struggle with [paying bills] and there's also the reality that people don't always know what to do in terms of preventative measures. People get behind on arrears, they tell us that, 'Oh, well, I thought this would be okay and then it was just too much.'"* **Outreach worker, Westminster**

Participants who were in this position and ended up sleeping rough reported that they did not consider contacting their local authority as an option for support. They either looked to friends and family for support elsewhere or hoped they could resolve their housing situation themselves. Identifying the right person to contact when facing difficult circumstances relating to housing was a challenge for individuals at risk. One charity worker interviewed in the research noted that individuals contact them personally rather than the council because they are typically unaware they are entitled to support from the local authority. Local authority service providers shared concerns about low awareness of support services among vulnerable groups. One emphasised that the sooner an individual approaches their local authority to request housing support, the sooner the housing team can work with them to develop a plan, but that this happened infrequently.

*"When [people at risk of homelessness] get to crisis point it's a lot more difficult to try and help them ... If they know that they're [in a relationship that is going to end] and they're going to leave a private tenancy, for example, or they're going to leave their mother's home, in x amount of months or x amount of days, it's a lot easier for us to try and help them at that stage."* **Housing team, Southwark**

The support that housing teams can provide includes mediation between a client and 'excluders'<sup>9</sup> within their household, between a client and their landlord/accommodation provider, support with rent arrears and help finding alternative accommodation. However, service providers highlighted that these support options may be limited if they do not have enough time to implement them for clients. For individuals in such situations, this could represent a missed opportunity to prevent them becoming homeless due to a lack of awareness of housing support individuals are entitled to from their local authorities.

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<sup>9</sup> Excluders can refer to landlords who plan to evict an individual, or family members who want an individual removed from the household.



Figure 1 – Journey map presenting lived experience of using homelessness and rough sleeping services

## Low awareness of support services at point of crisis

Luke is a single male who became homeless after a breakdown in his relationship with his partner of 9 years led to restricted access to his children. Following this, Luke became depressed and turned to alcohol to cope, which led to him losing his job.

Luke's **last settled base** was a two-bed property in Southampton that he rented by himself. He had paid a year's worth of rent upfront, and after he lost his job and the year was up, Luke could no longer afford his rent.

Luke was not aware of any support services in Southampton at the time and did not speak to anybody about his experience.

Luke **left his last settled base in November 2022**. After leaving his flat in Southampton, he took a train to Clapham Junction to stay with a friend. Luke was sleeping in the corner of the friend's kitchen for a few weeks. However, after an argument, it was agreed it was best for him to leave.

Luke was sleeping rough for around one month in Clapham. However, he did not feel safe sleeping rough here. **With no set plan, Luke walked towards central London and ended up in Westminster.** He reported feeling slightly safer sleeping rough in Westminster compared to Clapham because it was busier and more touristy.

**After one month of sleeping rough in Westminster, The Passage connected with him.** This was the first contact with a support service since he began sleeping rough. The Passage provided food and showers, helped him obtain an ID and registered him at the GP to address his depression.

*"I've never been in this situation so I was a bit clueless... I probably wouldn't have found The Passage until they found me"*

**The St Mungo's outreach team engaged with Luke while he was sleeping on the streets.** They provided Luke with accommodation in a bed & breakfast within Westminster. He has stopped sleeping rough since February 2023. They have also supported him with an assessment at Harrow Road Assessment Centre, which supports those who want to reconnect to their last settled base.

**It can be challenging for individuals in crisis to recognise the need to seek help.** This can prevent individuals from receiving appropriate support to help them stay in their last settled base.

*"Maybe if I had spoken to a doctor or something they could have prevented it... but my head was all over the place, I wasn't thinking straight"*



**Low levels of awareness of homelessness support available from local authorities** can lead individuals to sleep rough once they have exhausted their options from informal support, such as help from friends and family. This highlights the temporary nature of reliance on social networks while homeless.



**People who are sleeping rough can "drift" from one part of London to another part in the search for somewhere safer.** This highlights how the perceived feelings of safety in 'busier' areas of London can affect the flow of rough sleeping in London.



**Individuals who have experienced sleeping rough in other areas may not have been approached by outreach services.** It can be challenging for outreach teams to find individuals to verify them. This highlights the importance of outreach teams to provide support for people sleeping rough's immediate needs.



The provision of tailored support based on individual circumstances can be instrumental in swiftly securing appropriate accommodation and keeping people sleeping rough off the streets.



## 2.3 Access to informal support networks

Participants working in homelessness and rough sleeping services felt that people end up sleeping rough in their areas because they lacked a 'safety net' of support that could have prevented them from sleeping on the streets. Those participants associated this lack of support with people who had experienced one or more events that impacted their lives, such as losing a job, relationship breakdown, experiencing domestic abuse or living in insecure accommodation. Where individuals in these circumstances did not have strong social networks of family or friends they could rely on, they were at risk of a period of homelessness followed by rough sleeping, or rough sleeping directly after leaving their last settled accommodation<sup>10</sup>.

*"If you think about yourself, you lost your job, you can no longer afford your rent, you'd have a number of people you could turn to. We find that those who end up rough sleeping for the first time, don't have those networks."*

### **Service commissioner, Camden**

Among those interviewed for this research study, many had experienced a negative event, followed by a period of temporary homelessness during which they stayed with friends or family until they decided or were asked to move on. Time periods for this temporary homelessness ranged from a couple of days to several months depending the arrangements individuals were able to make. Once they had exhausted their options for support – combined with low awareness of alternatives (as outlined in the previous section) – they slept rough as a last resort.

*"I was sofa-surfing, moving around. But eventually I felt like I became a burden on people... even though in hindsight they [my friend] would have been ok [if I stayed]. But I stopped asking and just disappeared off my phone."*

### **Male sleeping rough, 30s, Camden**

Other participants had resorted to rough sleeping immediately after leaving their last settled accommodation because they felt they had no family or friends that they could turn to for support or that lived in a similar area, and were unable to access alternatives or were unaware of them. Similarly, EEA national participants who had arrived in the UK recently (and therefore could not apply for settled status) reported that they planned to get a job quickly and then find somewhere to live. However, when these participants were not able to find work, they resorted to sleeping on the streets because at that point in time they did not have friends or family in the UK they could turn to for support and were not eligible for housing support in the UK. These experiences prior to sleeping rough illustrate how having a poor local social network can lead to individuals only accessing support at the point they begin sleeping rough.

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<sup>10</sup> This finding aligns with research undertaken by Oxford Brookes University, accessible at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266563122\\_Social\\_and\\_recovery\\_capital\\_amongst\\_homeless\\_hostel\\_residents\\_who\\_use\\_drugs\\_and\\_alcohol](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266563122_Social_and_recovery_capital_amongst_homeless_hostel_residents_who_use_drugs_and_alcohol)

*I came [to the UK] with just enough money. I was thinking to find a job straightaway, but I was unlucky and I ended up homeless in 10 days."*

**Male sleeping rough, 53, Westminster**

## 2.4 Previous experiences of homelessness and housing services

Participants who had had, or perceived that they had, poor previous experiences of statutory and non-statutory services felt their priorities were not being accounted for by the support they were accessing. These experiences included being supported into accommodation that was poor quality or unsafe, as well as feeling like service providers are not listening to their concerns while in an accommodation setting. Participants who had experienced these circumstances felt disillusioned with the quality of support that homelessness and housing services could offer them in future. Without trust in these services, they felt that sleeping rough was their only option after leaving their last settled accommodation.

*"[The housing provider] didn't even see me, all they wanted was £100 a month [to cover service charges] and then they were gone."*

**Female sleeping rough, 40s, Birmingham**

Participants from homelessness and rough sleeping services were aware that mistrust of services based on poor previous experiences was a barrier to engaging people at risk of rough sleeping. In addition to poor quality of accommodation and not feeling listened to, service providers noted that individuals they have supported have lacked trust in services that do not fulfil promises for support.

*"They felt that frontline support services had let them down, they'd said they were going to do things but didn't do them, they didn't support them when they needed that support and all of those things tied into the lack of trust they had for us as professionals."*

**Service commissioner, Birmingham**

Service providers from Birmingham and other case study areas identified building trust with individuals as key to engaging them with housing services. Nevertheless, capacity to achieve this varied across services and across case study areas, and it was widely agreed that it took time to build up the necessary relationships with vulnerable individuals. Where services were able to take the time needed to build trust with individuals, service providers reported this was because it was a core principle of the service. In contrast, other service providers felt that because their service was focused on supporting individuals quickly through assessments and matching them to accommodation, this did not allow the time needed to build trust with individuals and gather information needed to fully understand their support needs.

Figure 2 – Journey map presenting lived experience of using homelessness and rough sleeping services

## Poor experiences of exempt supported accommodation

Richard is in his 30s and has lived in Birmingham for 2 years. He came to Birmingham after a local authority in the West Midlands referred him to Birmingham Council for housing support. **Richard has lived in a series of exempt accommodation in Birmingham, before he decided to leave and to sleep rough.**

Richard's **last settled base** was in exempt accommodation in Birmingham, where he stayed for two weeks. He left the property because it was in poor condition, and he did not feel safe to stay. He has lived in various exempt accommodations, all of which were in poor condition, noting infestations, plumbing problems, as well as excessive noise and anti-social behaviour.

Richard tried to get support and move into alternative accommodation, but this was unsuccessful. He **left his last settled base in December 2022** and began sleeping rough, often near the train station. As Richard did not receive any support, he found himself suppressing his situation and started to take drugs.

While sleeping rough, Richard **chose not to engage with outreach teams**. He believed he would be placed back into exempt accommodation, and he did not want to return to one given the numerous issues he faced at previous properties.

SIFA Fireside Services, a day centre, engaged with Richard and provided food, showers and clothes, and helped him to set up a bank account. Richard has received support from drug workers at Change Grow Live (CGL) to help him recover. Richard found these **services were effective at supporting his immediate needs and his health**.

Richard reported he would need time to develop trust in housing services before engaging again in housing support. He felt there was a lack of support from landlords to resolve the issues.

*"What I've noticed about [supported exempt accommodation] is that they'll put the same type of people in houses; if you're putting drug addicts or alcoholics all in one house it's not good."*

People in exempt accommodation pay a contribution towards the service. However, individuals can be left feeling frustrated when they **do not see the money being used for adequate housing maintenance or support**.

*"[The landlord is] happy to sort everything out the day before the inspection and that it just goes back to normal after that."*



**Lack of support in finding alternative accommodation** combined with **poor conditions of exempt accommodation can compel individuals to leave** and make the difficult decision to sleep rough.



Individuals who have had a bad experience with exempt accommodation can be **reluctant to engage with outreach teams for fear of being placed back into one**. Improved conditions of exempt accommodation may help to keep people in secure accommodation rather than sleeping rough.



**Support services that are co-located enable people rough sleeping to conveniently access multiple support services**, particularly if no appointment is required. For example, having dedicated drop-in sessions where people sleeping rough can address various issues in one place.



Poor conditions in supported housing, for instance in exempt accommodation can lead to people sleeping rough to have **low levels of confidence in housing support services**. While it can be straightforward to secure a tenancy, poor conditions of properties prevent people from being kept off the streets and sleeping rough.



## 2.5 “Drift” through and between different local authority areas

Interviews with people sleeping rough for the first time demonstrated how individuals found themselves sleeping rough and accessing services in specific local authorities primarily due to – often fairly loose – social connections to an area. One notable trend was that of individuals turning to friends in a city for support, somewhere they could ‘sofa-surf’ – as noted in section 2.2. Once they felt they had overstayed their welcome they turned to the streets locally rather than returning to the location of their last settled accommodation, sometimes ‘drifting’ to a neighbouring local authority (in the case of London) or to one which was easily accessible by public transport.

Difficulties in negotiating reconnection also played a part in participants choosing to sleep rough in specific areas: several noted that they had experienced considerable challenges in engaging their ‘home’ local authority, and others reported that their applications had been refused. Figure 5 in section 3.4.3 illustrates one participant’s experience of accessing support from her local authority during a period of homelessness in Brighton & Hove.

Word of mouth was also a factor in drawing people who were at risk of homelessness to certain local authorities. Participants reported that they had been told that certain local authorities had good housing availability and would be able to accommodate them – this was notable in the case of Birmingham, but was also relevant to London. Participants working in rough sleeping services also felt individuals were coming to live in their areas due to specific, localised factors, such as the local culture. In Brighton & Hove, a participant working in rough sleeping services believed the city’s reputation for tolerance made it an attractive option for LGBTQ+ people with restricted eligibility for support.

*“We do get a lot of people [with restricted eligibility for support] who’ve left their Home Office accommodation elsewhere in the country and come to Brighton for various reasons. It could be around sexuality and wanting to be somewhere more open minded because that’s the reputation Brighton has. I suppose the problem is usually we don’t have any accommodation for [people with restricted eligibility for support].”*

**Outreach worker, Brighton & Hove**

## 2.6 Difficulties in providing required documentation

Many participants in the research who had slept rough for the first time noted that the process for accessing housing support could be lengthy and complex, and that this was a factor leading them to sleep rough. Participants working in rough sleeping services also highlighted that individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness may feel discouraged from applying to their local authority for support due to requirements to provide specific evidence, such as ID, to support their application.

Individuals may experience delays to their housing support applications if they do not have the evidence needed at the point they contact a housing team or because they are not clear how their application is being progressed. These delays can put individuals at increased risk of sleeping rough before housing support is confirmed. One service provider outlined examples where individuals thought their applications were being processed, but

they had been paused pending further evidence.

*“The proof that you need [to apply for housing support] means that clients are mostly turned away. Like, photographic ID. Sometimes clients approach a council and an application isn't taken or it's not clear whether an application's been taken.”*

**Outreach worker, Brighton & Hove**

These complications with applying for support can be exacerbated for individuals who do not have a local connection to the local authority area. One service provider outlined how applications for people with no local connection can take longer because even once a local authority has accepted they will provide support, they may subsequently refer that person to a local authority where they do have a local connection, prolonging the time before that person is helped.

## 2.7 Conclusion

This chapter set out the key factors that underpin individuals' journeys from leaving their last settled accommodation to sleeping rough in a specific area, highlighting missed opportunities to engage with services. These factors include lack of awareness in services, lack of social networks of support, mistrust of services, availability of support in specific areas and difficulties in accessing housing support.

Alongside these factors, individuals' experiences of significant life events can influence the point at which individuals engage with services and how much time those services have to prevent someone from sleeping rough. Chapter 3 will set out how local authorities in the five case study areas have designed services to engage with people at risk of homelessness as quickly as possible to maximise the time they have to prevent rough sleeping.

# 3. Rough sleeping prevention services

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the strategies and approaches employed by local authorities in the five case study areas to prevent the flow of rough sleeping. It presents evidence on the factors that have enabled prevention services to be delivered successfully as well as circumstances that have made it more difficult to put them in place. This demonstrates in more detail why people at risk of homelessness may not get the support they need to prevent rough sleeping.

### **Key findings: rough sleeping prevention services**

- Local authorities in the five case study areas had equipped housing, homelessness and rough sleeping services to support people at risk of homelessness from rough sleeping.
- However, these areas experienced barriers to the prevention of the flow of rough sleeping such as pressure to prioritise intervention services for people at immediate risk of rough sleeping.
- A lack of communication between service providers and other statutory services, as well as between service providers across other local authority areas, can lead to delays in arranging support for people at risk of homelessness.
- A lack of co-ordination between services was a particular challenge for supporting people with complex needs. This can result in service providers having short notice to arrange accommodation for people leaving institutions.
- Gaps in specialised services for people with complex needs could result in individuals being supported into accommodation that does not meet their support needs or not engaging with support after leaving their last settled accommodation.

### **3.1.1 Collaboration on prevention with other local authorities**

Service commissioners and providers outlined their experiences, and the mechanisms in place, for collaborating with other local authorities to prevent the first instances of rough sleeping. The London Boroughs described how existing pan-London initiatives, such as CHAIN and examples of co-located accommodation provision, supported efforts to prevent a first night out.

Nevertheless, service providers in the London case study areas reported challenges with in-flows of people at risk of rough sleeping, where home authorities could be reluctant to accept their duty of care (especially regarding reconnections), and some suggested that a more comprehensive pan-London preventative approach was required. In Brighton & Hove, one service commissioner felt that joint initiatives with other local authorities in Sussex can be too focused on reactively addressing rough sleeping in Brighton & Hove. They noted that there were joint working activities in place, such as multi-disciplinary teams and data sharing processes. However, these activities could be limited in practice due to a lack of joint working culture within the local authorities. Some service

commissioners and providers went further and felt that a national approach was required for preventative efforts to be effective. This would include developing similar service offers across all UK local authorities (to reduce any actual or perceived disparities between services in different areas) and help ensure the flow of new rough sleepers is addressed 'at source'.

*"If I can have one thing, it would be that the clients that arrive in Westminster have had the same offers wherever they're from that they are going to get here."* **Service commissioner, Westminster**

## 3.2 Support services to prevent first-time rough sleeping

Across the five case study areas, there was evidence that local authorities had designed strategies to prevent the flow of rough sleeping in their areas and commissioned services to implement this. Local authority service commissioners and service providers outlined how day centres, outreach services and Housing Options teams were equipped to provide advice and direct people who are at risk of rough sleeping for the first time to appropriate services. In Southwark, participants who worked in the local authority housing team outlined a dedicated *gateway prevention team* that focuses on supporting people at risk of homelessness. These activities include advising individuals on debt management, support with claiming the housing element under Universal Credit, direct financial support from the Council for housing costs and mediation within households to prevent exclusion of individuals. In Westminster one service provider highlighted *No First Night Out* as a positive example of a service for people who are not recorded on the CHAIN database but have nowhere to stay that night. Through *No First Night Out*, the Council can refer individuals to the Passage, where they can access emergency accommodation.

*"If somebody presents at our day centre fresh off the bus and isn't known to CHAIN... we will immediately prevent them from entering CHAIN by, as long as they meet the criteria, going into a hotel with Passage and Passage working with them before they need to rough sleep."* **Local authority housing team, Westminster**

Furthermore, Birmingham City Council has developed a Charter of Rights for exempt supported accommodation providers<sup>11</sup>. This charter sets out quality standards expected of providers of exempt supported accommodation, raises awareness among tenants of what support they are entitled to and has created a team to conduct more inspections of properties. Service providers in Birmingham were positive about the Charter of Rights because it increased regulation of exempt supported accommodation and supported accommodation providers to maintain good quality services. However, service provider participants noted that accommodation providers are not required to sign up to the scheme, so there is a risk that some accommodation providers will continue to provide poor quality accommodation.

Across the case study areas, participants working in outreach services noted that they are only commissioned to support people at the point they start sleeping rough. So if an individual who is homeless contacts them for support, outreach workers would signpost

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<sup>11</sup>

[https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/news/article/833/new\\_charter\\_of\\_rights\\_and\\_quality\\_standards\\_for\\_exempt\\_supported\\_housing\\_launched](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/news/article/833/new_charter_of_rights_and_quality_standards_for_exempt_supported_housing_launched)



them to the council, but were limited in the direct support they could provide. In the London case study areas, service providers described situations where individuals came to day centres to look for support because they had nowhere to stay that night. Outreach teams cannot help an individual in this situation if they are not already on the CHAIN database. However, to be on the database, an individual must be sleeping rough.

*“If you’re not verified... you have a lack of access to [specific pathways of support].”*

**Outreach worker, Westminster**

*We’re only commissioned to work with rough sleepers, if we get someone who’s about to become homeless make contact with us, then we don’t know what to do. We just say, ‘This is what we’d do, but... we’d recommend you go to the council.’*

**Outreach worker, Brighton & Hove**

Some rough sleeping service providers noted that limited resources meant they were obligated to prioritise support for individuals who were most at risk of rough sleeping before supporting those at less immediate risk. Therefore, these participants felt services were focused on intervention, rather than preventing it in the first place. One service manager for temporary accommodation felt their local authority was under pressure to prioritise support for individuals who were at a point of crisis and sleeping rough before they could support someone at risk of homelessness, but still in settled accommodation.

*“What I see is prevention is seen as a luxury. It’s very much around and managing the crisis. But if you can identify that somebody’s housing is likely to break down, the narrative that you get is, ‘Well we almost have to deal with that when it happens because there’s so many people that are ahead of them already.’”*

**Accommodation provider, Brighton & Hove**

Other service providers mentioned the challenges for services designed to keep people in their accommodation or find alternative accommodation. For example, one participant from an outreach team in Westminster said it was often difficult to deliver their support offer for tenancy sustainment due to funding constraints and capacity within their team. Therefore, although the service is designed to provide contact time from a floating support worker this depends on the resources at the time of offering the service.

*“Sometimes everything that should be on offer isn’t on offer. Like, you can refer someone to a tenancy sustainment service, but there’s a reality that [a floating support worker] might say they’ll come quite often and be in touch with you all the time, but the reality is that it isn’t going to happen.”* **Outreach worker, Westminster**

This perception was echoed by an outreach worker in Westminster who noted that support was available for individuals at risk of homelessness, in particular a scheme to help individuals with a deposit for a new tenancy. However, the impact of this support can be limited in an area like Westminster where there are few affordable accommodation options.

*“The rent deposit is amazing because it’s a huge sum of money, but actually, it’s incredibly difficult for people to find that accommodation in the first place. We’re seeing a huge reduction in stock available across private rented anyway.”*

**Outreach worker, Westminster**

In Birmingham, services were delivered for people homeless or at risk of becoming homeless with an emphasis on building trust between individuals and frontline staff. Initiatives to build trust included support workers accompanying individuals to appointments, providing drop-in services to minimise waiting times, support workers taking time to get to know individuals and show they are listening to them. Service providers also reported that it was important to provide services such as a drop-in centre where individuals could access all the support they needed at once and at a time that suited them. By taking these measures, these services were lowering the barriers to accessing services that individuals can face as much as possible.

*“We’ve got street nurses and then Homeless Health Exchange, so they may work differently for [young people at risk of homelessness]. So they’ll have drop-in [sessions] ... we know someone may not go and sit there between 9 and 1 waiting to be seen, well let’s try and be more flexible around this, for example.”*

**Outreach worker, Birmingham**

#### **Case illustration**

Service providers in Birmingham cited SIFA Fireside as a good example of a hub service that supported people with a range of issues. Individuals could come to the SIFA Fireside centre without needing to book an appointment and access services that were all co-located together. These services included:

- Pathways to identify people at risk of rough sleeping
- Applications for housing support from Birmingham City Council housing team
- Support for individuals with setting up a new tenancy
- Support for ex-offenders to find accommodation

*“Where somebody [is at risk of rough sleeping], and they want to see somebody in person, they can drop in at SIFA where we’ve got co-located housing option services as well as the team at SIFA who do the wrap around stuff.”*

**Strategic stakeholder, Birmingham**

### **3.3 Using data to identify those at risk of rough sleeping for the first time**

Service providers highlighted practical challenges they face when trying to obtain data and information about individuals at risk of sleeping rough for the first time in order to target suitable interventions. Service providers reported that these challenges can occur when requesting information about individuals from other statutory services as well as from other local authorities. They felt that these challenges stemmed from not having data-sharing agreements in place with organisations. This means service providers must spend time confirming consent to share an individual’s information, leading to delays in receiving information needed to put an intervention place.

*"But in terms of information sharing more widely, it can be quite tricky, especially if you're contacting, you know, another council or something like that, you need signed consent all the time and all of that sort of stuff, and it does slow stuff down."*

**Service commissioner, Camden**

One participant from a frontline service in Camden reported a specific issue with gathering health information about individuals. They said that it can take some time to get responses from NHS services about individuals' health information, which they felt could cause delays in supporting a person to find accommodation. A team leader at Camden Council also reported this is a challenge that could result in an individual being placed in inappropriate accommodation.

*"Someone's medical information can be spread across various different services, and not being able to access that all in one place makes things incredibly difficult sometimes for us. Sometimes that even means that people end up in inappropriate accommodation because we were just not aware of certain conditions."*

**Reconnections team, Camden**

Service providers in Birmingham and Brighton & Hove felt that services across local authorities should use the same system for recording information about individuals. This would help ensure services had the most up to date information for putting support in place for people at risk of rough sleeping. In Birmingham, an outreach manager working with young people at risk of rough sleeping said it could often be challenging to acquire data about young people who were not from Birmingham. They therefore had to liaise with services outside Birmingham which caused delays in arranging accommodation and getting the appropriate support.

*"We have challenges trying to liaise with other services in the local authority that [an individual] has come from, around data protection for example, and them sharing that information with us."*

**Outreach worker, Birmingham**

Service commissioners in the London case study areas were positive about using CHAIN to understand the backgrounds and support needs of the people they work with. One participant involved in commissioning services in Westminster noted that CHAIN was useful for producing evidence about where individuals had a local connection to another area. They felt this was important to demonstrate that initiatives to address the flow of Westminster need to be implemented beyond Westminster itself.

*"From what I see, from CHAIN, and what I hear from my outreach teams, are that those rough sleepers are coming in nationally. So if I can have one thing, it would be that the clients that arrive in Westminster have had the same offers wherever they're from that they are going to get here."*

**Local authority service commissioner, Westminster**

In Brighton and Hove, a service commissioner highlighted the potential limitations to the data requested by DLUHC on a quarterly basis for The Homelessness Case Level Information Collection (H-CLIC). They felt they understood specific aspects of flow of rough sleeping in their area, such as reasons for leaving last settled accommodation because it is a mandatory requirement to collect this data. However, they felt that data that

was not mandatory to collect, such as data on individuals' support needs, was less well reported and presented a challenge to designing services to prevent the flow of rough sleeping.

*"If you're dealing with somebody who is homeless or threatened with homelessness, you're not going through a big [set of questions]. I think, because that's non mandatory data, that tends to be very much under reported."*

**Local authority service commissioner, Brighton & Hove**

## 3.4 Accommodation availability for individuals with complex needs

The supply of suitable accommodation for those with complex needs was widely cited by service providers as a reason why vulnerable individuals slept rough for the first time. In this section we discuss the provision for those leaving institutions, those with restricted eligibility for support (asylum-seekers, refugees and other types of non-resident immigration status), and survivors of domestic abuse.

### 3.4.1 People leaving institutions

A key challenge in preventing rough sleeping for people leaving institutions, such as prison, hospital and care settings, was the amount of time that services had to arrange accommodation for individuals.

Service providers highlighted the importance of better communication between specific services within an area, facilitated by appropriate data sharing agreements and in a multi-disciplinary setting, and particularly between the prison service and local authority housing teams. Some reported situations where individuals were signposted to services on the day of leaving prison, such as their local authority housing team or other homelessness/rough sleeping services. Service providers therefore felt these situations could be improved with better collaborative working between services.

*"We have people that are released [from prison]... and they're literally just told, 'Well, here's an appointment slip, you just need to present at Housing Options,' but Housing Options will not help you. That's just a reality. As a worker, it's impossible to get temporary accommodation on the same day."*

**Outreach worker, Westminster**

Another challenge identified by service providers was the allocation process for emergency accommodation, which made it difficult to arrange accommodation for prison leavers in particular. Even when a local authority housing team knows when an individual will be released from prison, they may have to wait until the day of release to arrange accommodation. This can occur when applications for emergency accommodation can only be made on the day they are needed and therefore not held in reserve for an individual.

*“If someone's coming out of prison after a four-year sentence, you've had four years to actually plan that person's discharge but the way our systems are set up, it's like we can get the information, but actually finding somewhere, we can't do until the day because we don't know what voids in emergency accommodation we have.”*

**Local authority housing team, Brighton & Hove**

A shortage of accommodation specifically for prison leavers can also make it more difficult for local authority housing teams to find appropriate accommodation for individuals. In Birmingham, an accommodation provider outlined the local authority housing team receive more referrals to accommodate prison leavers than they have commissioned accommodation places for prison leavers. Consequently, prison leavers are being accommodated in exempt supported accommodation, which may not provide the standard of support required by some individuals and put them at risk of leaving their accommodation.

*“We will have 900-odd referrals coming through the Offenders Hub in a year, there are 150 units of commissioned offenders accommodation in Birmingham. We have to rely on exempt accommodation to place the people we're referred... it's the [only] provision that's there.”* **Accommodation provider, Birmingham**

More broadly, some service providers expressed concerns over the lack of specialist support available for prison leavers in particular due to reductions in funding for tailored services. One service commissioner reported that funding for specialised supported accommodation for prison leavers that had previously been ring-fenced had been lifted. This meant that individuals with different support needs were referred to the service, leading it to become ‘a more generalised service’ that no longer provided specialised support to prison leavers.

*“Previously there was a network of ex-offender supported housing across the UK... [in one area] there weren't enough high tariff offenders with a connection to that borough that were being presented to the Housing Options service, so they changed it to a general needs service... and it just became a dumping ground.”*

**Service commissioner, Westminster**

Despite these challenges, this research has identified **examples of good practice** that indicate people leaving institutions can successfully transition into accommodation, provided a robust referral process and the appropriate wraparound support is in place.

### **Case illustration**

In Brighton & Hove, service providers highlighted initiatives that help ensure people being discharged from hospital have sufficient support in place for securing accommodation. The **Out of Hospital Care Programme** is funded by Rough Sleeping Initiative funding and a local health contribution. Through this, service providers have established a referral process whereby individuals preparing for hospital discharge can complete a form for the local authority housing team, leading to a quick referral to supported accommodation provision.

Alongside this, the **Step Down Beds** initiative in Brighton & Hove ensures that hospital leavers are provided with ongoing clinical support in their new accommodation. An accommodation manager felt that this initiative, and supporting individuals with discharge from hospital in general, was successful because there were housing support staff based within hospitals who could ensure that individuals were referred to the most appropriate support option, as needed.

*“It’s about ensuring when you can safely discharge. It’s flagging it up to Housing Options and doing a form, so people are placed in emergency accommodation when they leave the hospital. Then they’ll have a referral to us, so we can pick them up asap.”*

**Accommodation provider, Brighton & Hove**

### **Case illustration**

Southwark Council has a dedicated housing officer who works closely with the Probation Service. They conduct assessments via video call with individuals who are due to be released from prison. This process begins one month before an individual is due to be released and ensures that the housing team understands the individual’s support needs so they can make the most appropriate referral into accommodation. A housing services manager felt this process was very effective because it: accounts for each individual’s support need, gives individuals a degree of control over their post-prison accommodation, and ensures that the individual can go straight into accommodation on their release.

*“[The housing officer] does assessments for people who will be released so we have that opportunity for us to start the work early. So early preventions. Before that people would turn up like on a Friday [after being released from prison] and we are like, ‘Okay, we were not made aware of this.’”* **Service commissioner, Southwark**

Figure 3 – Journey map presenting lived experience of using homelessness and rough sleeping services

## Limited housing support upon release from prison

James is in his late 40s and was recently released from prison to his mother's home in Camden, where he grew up. Before going to prison, he lived in an outer London borough with his ex-wife and children for 12 years. **James was released on probation and on license, with nowhere permanent to live.**

**James' last settled base was in prison.** After he was released to his mother's, James applied for housing support from an outer London borough he had a local connection to. He felt his application was not accepted because they considered his local connection to be Camden Council. James also felt his Probation Officer failed to support him with his application because they did not accept he was homeless if he was temporarily staying with his mother.

James stayed on his mother's sofa temporarily, however, it was not tenable as a long-term solution and had to leave. A friend provided James with access to a portable cabin, however it lacked water and electricity which made it unsuitable to live in.

James had **slept rough for approximately one week.** James then referred himself to the StreetLink website run by Camden Council, which verified him as homeless a week after he began sleeping rough.

James was housed in the 165 Hub in Camden, a hostel providing temporary accommodation to single homeless people, where he stayed for four weeks. James highlighted needing to sign in and out of the premises, queuing at mealtimes and sharing the TV. **He felt this accommodation was not suitable due to the trauma he experienced while in prison.**

The Camden Reconnection Team helped to **rehouse and reconnect James to the outer London borough he had a local connection to.** He was also referred to alcohol and mental health support services. *"Amazing, I can call [key worker] any day and they will have a good chat with me. I was stressed out the over week and he spent a good 20 minutes on the phone with me, which relaxed me."*

Individuals can be left **feeling frustrated when their last settled base prior to going to prison is not considered upon their release.** Limited support from probation officers to help with applications further perpetuates the feeling of being failed by support systems.

*"[An outer London borough] Council didn't believe I was homeless. [They said] 'speak to Camden, we don't want to know.'"*



A **lack of housing support available for prison leavers to find permanent accommodation can leave them vulnerable to homelessness,** and ultimately sleeping rough. There are missed opportunities to consider individual circumstances as well as the availability of housing options in different areas.



**Awareness of how to self-report sleeping rough to the council may help to reduce the amount of time an individual may be sleeping rough.** This enables individuals to be verified as homeless promptly and start the process of finding longer-term accommodation.



**Limited availability of specialist temporary accommodation for people sleeping rough who have left prison** can result in individuals being placed in accommodation that is not suitable. This can run the risk of re-traumatising individuals.



**Reconnection teams within councils can play a fundamental role in keeping individuals who have slept rough off the streets.** Key workers who provide reassurance, as well as support for their immediate needs, can have a positive impact on those individuals who have experienced rough sleeping.



### 3.4.2 People with restricted eligibility for support

People sleeping rough who had restricted eligibility for support due to conditions of their settlement status in the UK can experience difficulties in accessing support after leaving their last settled accommodation, leaving them with no option that they are aware of but to turn to sleeping rough. In our research, this included participants who were:

- Asylum seekers whose asylum claim had been refused;
- Asylum seekers living in accommodation funded by the Home Office which they had to leave after being granted refugee status;
- European Economic Area (EEA) nationals who had not applied for settled status after the UK left the European Union (EU); and
- International students who lost their financial support and were not entitled to housing support in the UK.

Participants who were EEA nationals and had been living in the UK before the UK left the EU were typically staying in private rented accommodation prior to becoming homeless. They reported that they had to leave their last settled accommodation after being evicted with little notice, for example 28 days. These participants had not applied for settled status due to missing the deadline and therefore found that they were not eligible for housing support from their local authority.

Participants who have had their asylum application refused by the Home Office were faced with difficulties in accessing housing support. They were typically unsure what support might be available after an asylum claim was refused, and commonly only started looking for support once served an eviction notice on their asylum accommodation. This timeframe meant that sleeping rough was often the only option.

Individuals who have claimed asylum and been granted refugee status were at risk of not having sufficient time to arrange alternative accommodation before they are required to leave Home Office funded accommodation. One participant working in rough sleeping services highlighted that once someone who has applied for asylum is granted refugee status, they are no longer eligible for accommodation funded by the Home Office. While these individuals are eligible for housing support from their local authority, one participant working in rough sleeping services emphasised that this is a particular challenge for young people granted refugee status. Although the Home Office does provide information on accessing benefits (including housing support), if individuals cannot read it in English, they are at risk of not being clear on how to access housing support from their local authority.

*“Young people that have just got their asylum claim come through, they’re given a 28-day notice from the Home Office to vacate their property, and then just no support. I don’t feel there’s enough support for that group to navigate the system then.”* **Outreach worker**

Consequently, local authority services and other support organisations may only start engaging with people in these circumstances at the point they start sleeping rough in their area.



Figure 4 – Journey map presenting lived experience of using homelessness and rough sleeping services

## Person seeking asylum with a negative decision

Althea is an asylum seeker in her 60s. She was evicted from accommodation for asylum seekers in Leeds after her asylum claim was refused. **Althea came to London to seek help after the eviction and ended up sleeping rough in Southwark as she had nobody to turn to.**

Althea had been living in Home Office funded accommodation for asylum seekers in Leeds. However, Althea's asylum claim was refused and she was served an eviction notice. While appealing her asylum decision, she tried to resolve her housing situation by contacting the accommodation provider and speaking to asylum seekers in similar situations. However she could not get the support she needed.

Althea had to leave her last settled base in March 2023. She called charities in Leeds for support. However, very limited support was available for her situation. She travelled down to London by bus as she perceived there to be more support options there. Althea did not know anybody in London and started sleeping rough.

Althea had been sleeping rough in Southwark for two weeks, taking shelter in McDonald's and a police station. Althea called multiple charities but was told they offer advice and not housing support. Shelter had no space and told her to contact Southwark Council as she may be entitled to housing support.

Althea referred herself to StreetLink, who told her she needed to be sleeping on the streets to be verified as a rough sleeper and potentially eligible for support. However, she had not yet been engaged with outreach teams or placed in temporary accommodation.

Southwark Council sent Althea a form to complete and told her she would receive a response after three days. **However, Althea experienced delays in receiving a response from the council.** While she waited for a response, Althea continued to sleep rough as she had no other options.

**Limited housing support after serving an eviction notice can leave asylum seekers vulnerable and at risk of having no secure accommodation.** Those claiming asylum may not be aware of what housing support they are entitled to, particularly after being refused asylum.



**Low availability of support can lead those who have had their asylum claim refused to look elsewhere for support.** The perception of more support options in London can drive individuals to the area.

Asylum seekers who do not have any local social connections to a new area can make them vulnerable to sleeping rough.



Those claiming asylum may not be aware of the support local authorities may be able to provide while they are sleeping rough. This highlights how a **lack of clarity for asylum seekers on their entitlements can result in those individuals having no options but to sleep rough.**



Verification of being a rough sleeper can be **challenging when the conditions outside are cold.** There can be delays from outreach teams to identify individuals, particularly when they seek temporary shelter rather than sleeping on the streets.



Although Southwark does have temporary accommodation provision specifically for people with limited eligibility to support (funded by the Rough Sleeping Initiative), **delays in accessing this housing option can leave asylum seekers with no choice but to sleep rough.**



### 3.4.3 Survivors of domestic abuse

Survivors of domestic abuse faced barriers to securing or remaining in emergency accommodation that did not account for additional complex support needs, such as with mental health issues and trauma. One participant working in a rough sleeping service attributed this barrier to emergency accommodation settings not being designed to deliver trauma-informed support.

*“The security teams at some of the emergency accommodation aren't necessarily trauma-informed in the same way as supported accommodation support staff might be.”*

**Day centre worker, Brighton & Hove**

Female service users who had experienced domestic abuse found it hard to stay in temporary accommodation because other residents or those using the services were predominantly male. Similarly one participant had also stayed in several houses of multiple occupation (HMO) since becoming homeless but these had not worked out because she did not feel comfortable living in a shared property. This was also acknowledged by a participant working in a homelessness service, who noted that

*“My service is just a female cluster with three females and 16 males, so it might not be the best place for a woman who's been traumatised to come into, and then be around such a large presence of male service users. So those are things I look at... we might not be able to offer these services and we should look into moving them into somewhere where their needs can be addressed.”* **Accommodation provider, Camden**

Another participant working in a rough sleeping service felt it could be difficult for women with multiple support needs to access specialised services because they are not always available. They reported that applying to the Council for housing support is difficult because the Council will refer individuals into temporary accommodation, which may not be appropriate for women with multiple support needs. While there is specialised supported accommodation, such as Westminster Women's Safe Space, this service provider highlighted that the availability of spaces is limited and there is a risk that individuals may not have further accommodation in place before they have to move on.

*“Resources for women are quite squeezed. You've got the Westminster Women's Safe Space, but... they'll only allow people to access [their emergency bed spaces] for 1 or 2 nights then you have to move them on, but there's not always somewhere to move them on to.”* **Outreach worker, Westminster**

Service providers across the case study areas outlined specialist pathways in place for people with specific support needs who are at risk of homelessness. In the London case study areas, participants working in frontline services valued being able to signpost female clients to specialist services such as Solace Women's Aid<sup>12</sup> because they could provide trauma-informed support for women with complex support needs around domestic violence. In Birmingham, a service commissioner felt female only services were essential because women, in particular survivors of domestic abuse, needed a different model of support to men. They highlighted that women sleeping rough may be 'less visible' and less likely to be seen sleeping on the street specifically. This participant therefore valued

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.solacewomensaid.org/>

specialist pathways in Birmingham that focused on sharing information between services about individual women at risk of rough sleeping.

*“Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid were coming across women who were on the cusp of, if not, rough sleeping but not really thinking of themselves in those terms, approaching them for a domestic abuse intervention. And working between us we have weekly meetings to discuss referrals... so yes there's a prevention function there.”* **Service commissioner, Birmingham**

## 3.5 Conclusion

This chapter sets out how local authorities' have sought to prevent the flow of rough sleeping in the five case study areas. All five local authorities had measures in place that focus on preventing people from sleeping rough in their area for the first time. However, there were two key challenges to successfully implementing these measures. Pressure to prioritise support for those most at risk of rough sleeping, or already sleeping rough, made it difficult for service providers to support people who were not at this point. In addition to this, the window of opportunity that service providers had to support individuals could be a challenge to preventing them from sleeping rough. Poor communication and co-ordination between statutory services and the availability of specialised support options could lead to delays in arranging accommodation for people with complex support needs.

Figure 5 – Journey map presenting lived experience of using homelessness and rough sleeping services

## Lack of specialist support for survivor of domestic abuse

Anna is a young female in her mid-20s and grew up in an outer London borough with her parents. She became homeless after she was a survivor of domestic abuse by her ex-boyfriend. Anna had a strained relationship with her parents, with a previous experience of being 'kicked out' and does not feel she can turn to them for help.

Anna had been living with her boyfriend and friends in a house share in Woolwich but moved out after experiencing domestic abuse from her boyfriend. She was not allowed to return to the house to avoid trial-related discussions with other tenants. The police referred her to an outer London borough council, where she had a local connection. However, the housing team took a month to reply. Anna was not able to complete the form via smartphone.

Anna left her last settled base in October 2022. She was sofa surfing in London with different friends, however, it became awkward to continuously ask to stay and they began making excuses. Anna got on a train to Brighton, where she stayed with friends before she started sleeping rough.

Anna started sleeping rough in November 2022, sleeping in a train station or walking around the area. She alternated sleeping on the streets with staying with friends. This lasted approximately 4 weeks before outreach services at Project Antifreeze engaged with her.

Project Antifreeze provided her with food and washing facilities at their day centre, as well as accommodation in a B&B for two weeks. She was then referred to Change Grow Live (CGL) for accommodation as well as assessed her additional support needs. CGL set Anna up with a mental health assessment and referred her to victim support.

CGL placed Anna in a mixed-gender hostel, although as the only female, she found this intimidating. Brighton & Hove Council worked with an outer London borough to arrange alternative permanent accommodation. However, Anna does not want to be re-connected to the outer London borough she grew up in due to associated negative memories.

Lack of referrals to specialist housing support for survivors of domestic abuse can leave them vulnerable and at risk of having no immediate, safe accommodation following a DA incident. While individuals are referred to the local authority for housing support, delays in this process can contribute towards survivors of DA having no secure accommodation.



People who are homeless can "drift" from one area to another if they have a local social network and can turn to friends for support. This highlights how individuals who are at risk of homelessness do not always end up sleeping rough in their local area.



Survivors of DA may not know what housing solutions they are eligible for within local authority areas. This lack of awareness of accommodation support provided by local authorities highlights how individuals end up sleeping rough after they are made homeless.



Providing swift support that addresses the immediate needs of a person sleeping rough can be an important first step in assessing additional needs. The ease of referrals between support organisations enables individuals to continue to receive the necessary support in a particular area.



There has been limited evidence to show that support services have been tailored to a victim of a male DA perpetrator. While local authorities can have female-focused housing solutions, the availability of appropriate accommodation may not always be possible.



# 4. Conclusion and suggestions for consideration

## 4.1 Conclusions

As noted in the introduction, the objectives of this research are to:

1. Gain a more detailed understanding of **individuals' journeys before sleeping rough for the first time** and the key drivers, including whether any possible opportunities for prevention were likely to have been missed.
2. Gain a better understanding of the **strategies and approaches to preventing the flow of rough sleeping** employed at a local level.

The study found that options to intervene early to prevent individuals becoming homeless and facing their first night of rough sleeping can be limited, with a series of barriers and challenges to early intervention being identified. These included:

- For individuals at risk of rough sleeping for the first time – where a lack of awareness of available support services, a reluctance to engage following previous negative experiences of statutory and non-statutory services, and the sensitivities involved, lead to individuals only seeking help once (or after) a crisis point has been reached.
- For the services in place to support individuals at risk of homelessness – where barriers to effective provision can include limited data sharing between agencies to identify those at risk and to target support effectively; variable multi-disciplinary approaches locally; the capacity to provide support (and available emergency accommodation) within already stretched services; and commissioning arrangements which in some cases can lead to support services only being offered once individuals have become homeless.

As the report describes, each of the case study areas have developed responses to help address these challenges, tailored to local needs and circumstances, which can provide templates for replication. Insights into individuals' experiences of sleeping rough highlighted how **trust in services was key** to successfully supporting someone away from rough sleeping. This was reflected in case study areas where services had been **designed to engage with people to understand their support needs**. In contrast to this, service providers noted that services designed to support large numbers of people quickly risk failing to understand individuals' specific support needs and not provide them with the most appropriate support – and so less likely to result in a positive housing outcome or prevent an instance in the first case.

The role of management information systems and how data is shared within and across local authorities was important for understanding how services seek to identify individuals at risk and respond accordingly. Gaps in individuals' records or delays in receiving

information could lead to services providing inappropriate support or not responding quickly, and so risk individuals disengaging from the service.

Similarly, the success of supporting people at risk of rough sleeping who need multi-agency support, such as people leaving institutions, can depend on how well services communicate with each other. A lack of communication between services can result in individuals being released from prison, and leaving other institutional settings, with no accommodation in place. Nevertheless, robust referral processes between institutions and local authority housing teams can successfully support individuals into appropriate accommodation. Examples of good practice from this research illustrate how this can be achieved using dedicated roles, such as housing officers working directly in institutions or having close relationships with partner services, set within a wider multi-disciplinary team (MDT) environment where support services can be more easily navigated and coordinated.

The experiences of participants working in reconnections teams highlighted barriers to working across local authorities. Communication was a key factor, with participants reporting practical difficulties in liaising with counterparts in other local authorities.

#### **4.1.1 Missed opportunities for preventative intervention**

Despite the best efforts of the actors involved, many of the issues and challenges reported in this document can result in opportunities to intervene to prevent people sleeping rough for the first time being missed. Several common situations were identified during the research, from data sharing to identify needs and formulate solutions to aspects of service design, which may limit the opportunities for preventative interventions. Examples of such missed opportunities are included in the service user journey maps (see Figures 1 to 5).

The journey maps show that many individuals did not seek help with potential accommodation issues until or after a crisis point was reached, often once they had become homeless. This makes the provision of effective preventative services particularly challenging, as a lack of awareness of available provision amongst those at risk, and a reluctance to engage with it makes early, means services may be unable to intervene prior to an individual becoming homeless.

The maps also show **points in their journey where possible opportunities to intervene had been missed**. These reflected the findings from both the stakeholders and the individuals sleeping rough for this study, and included:

- Potential referral opportunities being missed – for example those attending GP surgeries, A&E, Jobcentre Plus and other community facilities reporting issues and seeking support for reasons that put them at particular risk of homelessness and rough sleeping.
- Engagement prior to individuals being released from prison or other institutional settings – while some services reporting engaging with prisoners pre-release with positive results, these approaches could be replicated more widely.

- The role of community-based organisations – such as community centres, food banks etc, where people at risk may turn in the early stages of crisis and where a degree of trust is already in place.

Below we provide a series of suggestions for consideration, based on the findings from the research and the missed opportunities above, to help reduce the flow of first-time rough sleepers and address the challenges of identifying those at risk and early engagement.

## 4.2 Suggestions for consideration

This research has generated detailed insights into individuals' experiences of rough sleeping for the first time in an area, and how local authorities have developed strategies to prevent the flow of rough sleeping. With this in mind, we provide a series of suggestions for consideration to help improve access to and provision of services for people at risk of homelessness. These are based on suggestions from service providers and people sleeping rough interviewed for this study, and insights from the research conducted.

### **Identifying people at risk of sleeping rough for the first time**

Identifying people **at risk** of sleeping rough is a key component of any strategy to prevent rough sleeping, but can pose a range of challenges, including individuals' potential reluctance to engage with services until a crisis point has been reached (requiring more of a restorative focus). To help address these challenges we suggest:

- Take steps to promote further joint working between housing authority staff and partners across the statutory and voluntary sector, to help ensure common understandings, referral points, and the sharing of information to enable rapid responses to those identified as being at risk.
- Any expanded joint working should also include establishing communications routes and working relationships with other authorities regarding reconnections.
- Local authorities invest in data driven approaches to identifying those at risk – including in staff capacity to maintain, develop and interrogate management information systems to record information about individuals sleeping rough. The value of such systems should be promoted, with any system developed being accessible to front line workers.
- To enable more data driven approaches to identification, and rapid responses, seek to improve data sharing between actors in the local homelessness infrastructure within current legal constraints and guidelines. This includes involving housing services in case meetings where the risk of rough sleeping has been identified.

### **Engaging with people at risk of sleeping rough for the first time**

Closely aligned with the identification process is the need, in some cases, to counter any reluctance to engage with services for whatever reason. This is also a highly sensitive topic area, which may compound this reluctance to engage further. We suggest:

- Services develop engagement approaches which are sensitive, trauma-informed and designed to counter any reluctance to engage (including where individuals perceive they have been 'let down' by statutory service previously).

- The importance of responding rapidly to individuals found to be at risk should be emphasised, to avoid them experiencing a first night out and, should this occur, help ensure they are found accommodation urgently. Ensuring sufficient resources to provide the staff time to do this is key, at a time of financial constraint.
- Take steps to exploit any opportunities to intervene early with individuals in institutional settings (e.g. prison, hospital or other care settings) who are due to be released / discharged, to allow emergency places to be reserved.

We also suggest attention be given to how local authorities design strategies to prevent the flow of rough sleeping. The ability to intervene early may be hindered by issues such as organisations being commissioned to provide services once individuals have become homeless.

### **Raising awareness of homelessness services**

One key finding of the study was that awareness of local authority homelessness services is very low amongst people at risk of sleeping rough, so people do not know where to go to find help. To help those at risk present earlier, we suggest:

- Local authorities and their partners take steps to promote their tenancy support services at every opportunity – through posters in A&E, GP surgeries, Jobcentre Plus offices, across local authority premises with public access and in wider community settings – as well as directly to clients.
- Any messaging should describe the service offer clearly and in a way that avoids any perceived stigmatisation.
- Key partner staff should also receive a briefing on the homelessness services in their area, to be cascaded to their teams, to enable them to describe the service to clients.

### **Access to emergency accommodation**

The availability of emergency accommodation was reported as a challenge across the case study areas, and one which can limit authorities' ability to provide housing at short notice. In addition, it was clear that the process of securing accommodation could be challenging for individuals, notably non-UK nationals, which may hinder their ability to avoid eviction and a first spell of rough sleeping. We suggest:

- Local authorities keep their allocations policies under review, to help ensure that the supply of emergency/short-notice accommodation reflects local demand.
- Local authorities are encouraged to develop or expand clear guidance for people on how to complete housing support applications, and the duty owed them under the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- As some new rough sleepers described delays in securing a property, which some perceived as being forgotten by the local homelessness service, local authorities should seek, and be supported, to process housing support applications for those at imminent risk of rough sleeping as a priority.



# Annex 1: Statistical publications about rough sleeping

**Rough Sleeping Snapshot in England:** this is an annual snapshot of the number of people estimated to be sleeping rough on a single night in autumn (1 October to 30 November). Local authorities use either a count-based estimate of visible rough sleeping, an evidence-based estimate based on meetings with local partner, or a combination of the two approaches. The snapshot methodology has been in place since 2010 and remains the most official and most robust measure of rough sleeping on a single night. The evidence used here is taken from Rough Sleeping Snapshot in England: Autumn 2022.<sup>13</sup>

**Rough Sleeping Management Information in England:** this includes management information submitted to DLUHC by local authorities on a monthly basis (the monthly figures are published quarterly). The data is a more frequent but less robust estimate of people sleeping rough than the official annual snapshot statistics. The evidence used here is taken from Rough Sleeping Management Information, March 2023.<sup>14</sup>

**CHAIN:** this is a detailed and comprehensive database of information recorded by outreach teams in Greater London boroughs (the figures are published quarterly). It records the number of people sleeping rough for the first time in each area and the number of times they were seen by outreach services over the course of a year. It also records information about individuals' history prior to sleeping rough and information on accommodation and reconnection outcomes. The evidence used here is taken from Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN), 2021-22.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2022>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-people-sleeping-rough-in-england-march-2023>

<sup>15</sup> <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports>

# Annex 2: Research methodology

This research comprised an evidence review followed by qualitative case studies, both focused on five local authority areas: Birmingham, Brighton & Hove, Camden, Southwark and Westminster. These areas were selected because they were identified to have high flows of rough sleeping. In addition, three of the areas (Brighton, Birmingham and Westminster) identified the need for further research into flow and related prevention measures in their funding bid for the RSI. Southwark and Camden were added to gain additional insight into the flow between and across Greater London boroughs.

## Evidence review

The aim of the evidence review phase was to generate a detailed picture of strategies and approaches to preventing the flow of rough sleeping in each case study local authority as well as that of different authorities and institutions and to inform the mainstage qualitative case study design. Evidence incorporated in the review included:

- Quantitative data sources, such as the Rough Sleeping Snapshot in England annual statistics, the Support for People Sleeping Rough in England monthly statistics and the Greater London Authority CHAIN dataset.
- Qualitative sources, such as local authority rough sleeping strategy documents and RSI funding self-assessment forms.
- Key informant interviews with individuals responsible for co-ordinating and commissioning housing, homelessness and rough sleeping services within each case study local authority to support and contextualise the secondary analysis of existing evidence.

## Qualitative case studies

The qualitative case studies consisted of interviews with both service providers and people sleeping rough in each of the case study local authorities. Given the vulnerabilities of participants who were sleeping rough, measures were taken to ensure the safety and wellbeing of research participants, such as a clear disclosure protocol and information sheets for participants which presented sources of support if required.

### **Service provider interviews**

Drawing on the evidence review and with input from DHLUC, at least six suitable individuals in each local authority area were identified, selected and interviewed. Services typically covered by the interviews included: local authority housing teams; service commissioners within local authorities; service managers within local authorities and commissioned services; outreach services; emergency and temporary accommodation providers; and day centre services. Participants included those working in in both frontline and strategic roles.

Interviews with service providers took place between December 2022 and April 2023. All interviews lasted approximately one hour, were conducted on Microsoft Teams and participants took part individually or in pairs. Researchers used a discussion guide

developed with input from DLUHC and Rough Sleeping Advisers, covering the following issues: local area drivers of rough sleeping; the referral process into and through rough sleeping services; barriers and enablers to preventing flow of rough sleeping; use of data to understand flow of rough sleeping in local areas; systems level working to prevent rough sleeping.

### **Interviews with people sleeping rough**

Five interviews with people who were new to rough sleeping<sup>16</sup> were conducted in each case study area. To meet the stated research objectives, it was important that that all participants:

- Had recent experience of sleeping rough at the point of conducting the interview;
- Were either living in off the street accommodation<sup>17</sup> or currently sleeping rough; or
- Were people who had not been seen sleeping rough in the area before, either because they were new to rough sleeping altogether, or new to rough sleeping in that area (and may have previously slept rough elsewhere).

Further sampling criteria were included to account for area-specific drivers of rough sleeping flow, such as demographic profile, settlement status, accommodation prior to rough sleeping and health support needs. Researchers used these additional sampling criteria alongside insights from the evidence review to select participants for the interviews.

Participants were recruited with support from local rough sleeping services, such as day centres, outreach teams and accommodation services, and took place between March and June 2023. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and took place in-person in a location that suited each participant, such as offices and meeting rooms in day centres and accommodation services. Researchers used a topic guide that had been developed with input from DLUHC and Rough Sleeping Advisers. This was designed to be used flexibly by researchers, acting as a framework for discussing specific topics in an order and level of detail that participants were comfortable with. The topic guide included areas such as: participants' last settled accommodation; period between leaving last settled accommodation and sleeping rough; point at which participants started sleeping rough; and engagement with services during these points.

Full details of the achieved sample and discussion guides for both service providers and people sleeping rough can be found in the appendix to this study.

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<sup>16</sup> Rough sleeping is defined as people sleeping, or about to bed down, in the open air or in a building not designed for habitation. It does not include hostels or shelters, campsites or squatters or Travellers. Please see Homeless Link website for full definition: <https://homeless.org.uk/what-we-do/streetlink-and-chain/rough-sleeping-counts-and-estimates/>

<sup>17</sup> Off the street accommodation is a placement for people who have slept rough that is intended to last no longer than six months. It includes settings such as hostels, supported accommodation, temporary accommodation, severe weather emergency protocol (SWEP) accommodation, emergency accommodation, hotels for respite and assessment, other assessment bed settings and No Second Night Out beds/night beds.

## Achieved sample in the research

**Table 1.1: Roles of service provider participants in the qualitative case studies**

Role	Case study area	Case study area	Case study area	Case study area	Case study area
	Birmingham	Brighton & Hove	Camden	Southwark	Westminster
Local authority: housing team	0	3	0	2	0
Local authority: strategic	1	4	2	1	2
Outreach service: frontline	2	4	1	2	2
Accommodation provider: frontline	0	1	2	0	0
Day centre: frontline	1	1	0	1	0
Assessment centre: frontline	0	0	0	0	2
Commissioned service: strategic	3	0	2	0	2
Other	0	1	0	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>

**Table 1.2: Age profile of participants with experience of sleeping rough**

<b>Age</b>	
18-29	6
30-39	6
40-49	3
50+	3
Not recorded	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>

**Table 1.3: Gender of participants with experience of sleeping rough**

<b>Gender</b>	
Male	21
Female	4
Not recorded	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>

**Table 1.4: Ethnicity of participants with experience of sleeping rough**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	
Asian or Asian British	1
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	4
White <sup>18</sup>	16
Other ethnic group	2
Not recorded	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>

**Table 1.5: Nationality of participants with experience of sleeping rough**

<b>Nationality</b>	
Bangladeshi	1
British	14
Iranian	1
Iraqi	1
Italian	1
Polish	1
Romanian	1
Somalian	1
Spanish	1
Not recorded	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>

**Table 1.6: Prior accommodation for participants with experience of sleeping rough**

<b>Accommodation prior to rough sleeping</b>	
Asylum accommodation	1
Emergency accommodation (outside area)	1
Family home	1
Hostel accommodation (outside area)	1
Living outside the UK	3
Prison	1
Private rented sector	14
Social housing	1
Supported accommodation	2
Not recorded	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>

**Table 1.7: Health support needs for participants with experience of sleeping rough**

<b>Health support needs<sup>19</sup></b>	
Mental health	14
Physical health	4
Substance use	6
None recorded	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>

<sup>18</sup> This includes people who are English, Welsh Scottish, Northern Irish or British, Irish, Gypsy or Irish Traveller, Roma or any other White background.

<sup>19</sup> Totals may sum to greater than five due to individuals having multiple support needs.

# Annex 3: Outline of services across the five local authority areas

The services that are outlined in this chapter include **prevention services**. These are services that aim to support people who are living in settled accommodation but may be at risk of having to leave, as well as people who have left their last settled accommodation and do not currently have settled accommodation but are not sleeping rough. This can include people who are staying temporarily with friends and family for a limited period of time. These services typically involve supporting people to stay in their last settled accommodation or to find alternative accommodation.

## Local authority housing teams

Local authority housing teams are responsible for providing support to individuals who are at risk of homelessness, with an aim to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping. They support individuals who have applied to the housing team and are eligible for housing support. Under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, local authorities have a duty to support individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness for a period of 56 days.<sup>20</sup>

Housing teams duties in supporting individuals include:

- Assessing applications to confirm eligibility for support under the Housing Reduction Act
- Developing personal housing plans that focus on preventing clients' exclusion from their last settled accommodation
- Supporting clients to find alternative accommodation
- Supporting clients to set up a new tenancy for alternative accommodation
- Developing specialist pathways into accommodation for clients with specific support needs e.g. prison leavers
- Supporting clients with reconnection where they do not have a local connection to the local authority area

## Outreach

Outreach services are typically focused on intervention support – helping people who have been sleeping rough into 'off the street' accommodation. However, some outreach services focus on prevention as they support individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. These services focus on supporting specific groups of people, such as people with severe mental health conditions<sup>21</sup> or young people who have recently been supported into independent accommodation through the council or children's services.<sup>22</sup> These services take an 'outreach' approach by engaging individuals directly and referring or signposting them to mainstream services.

## Commissioned services from third sector organisations

Local authorities commission third sector organisations to run day centres. People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness can attend a day centre to access support to help

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/overview-of-the-homelessness-legislation>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.lambethandsouthwarkmind.org.uk/directory/start-team-outreach-service-for-homeless-people/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/adult-social-care-hub/health-and-adult-social-care-directory/brighton-and-hove-young-peoples>

find accommodation or to stay in current accommodation. These services include advice and support with:

- Access to benefits
- Debt management
- Tenancy sustainment

These services also support individuals with applying to the council for housing support, or where relevant, supporting individuals to reconnect to an area where they have a local connection and apply for housing support there.