

Summary  
report

# Home for Good:

The role of social housing  
in ending rough sleeping



Home  
for  
Good

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

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

“That’s my aspiration, to move on...I do have children and it’s very difficult for children to come and visit in a hostel...”

**St Mungo’s client**

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



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

But the right home is becoming increasingly difficult to find.

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

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

**St Mungo’s client**

Part of the problem is there simply isn’t enough social housing for everyone who needs it. In 2018 there were 1.15 million households on the social housing waiting list but in the year to June 2018, only 290,000 social homes were available to let.<sup>2</sup>



The vast majority of these homes were old stock, which came up for rent as people moved out of their homes. In 2017-18, only 6,463 newly built properties were available at social rent.<sup>3</sup> This is far below the 90,000 new homes at social rents that we need every year.<sup>4</sup> Anecdotal evidence from our services indicates that more and more people with a history of rough sleeping are missing out as a result.

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

<sup>2</sup> Shelter (2018), *One year on from Grenfell, millions still stuck on housing waiting lists*  
[https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press\\_releases/articles/one\\_year\\_on\\_from\\_grenfell\\_millions\\_still\\_stuck\\_on\\_housing\\_waiting\\_lists](https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_releases/articles/one_year_on_from_grenfell_millions_still_stuck_on_housing_waiting_lists)

<sup>3</sup> MHCLG (2020) *Live tables on Affordable Housing Supply*  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-affordable-housing-supply>

<sup>4</sup> G. Bramley (2018) *Housing supply requirements across Great Britain*:  
[https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/239700/crisis\\_housing\\_supply\\_requirements\\_across\\_great\\_britain\\_2018.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/239700/crisis_housing_supply_requirements_across_great_britain_2018.pdf)

“I’m very insecure and scared about not being able to afford to pay the rent and being homeless. That really bothers me a lot. With the council the rent was lower..”

**St Mungo’s client**

To find out more, we spoke to people with a history of rough sleeping about their experiences of trying to move on, analysed government statistics, surveyed St Mungo’s staff and reviewed how local authorities allocate their social housing.<sup>5</sup>

We found that:

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

- Government statistics show that the overall number of general needs social lettings have decreased by 24% since 2007-08.
- The fall for homeless single people and couples without children has been faster and further than the total fall in general needs social lets, from 31,411 in 2007-08 to 17,482 in 2017-18. This is a fall of 44%.<sup>6</sup>
- In London, the number of people with a history of rough sleeping who have been able to access social tenancies when they move on from homelessness services has also declined. As a proportion of people moving on from this type of temporary accommodation, the number moving into social housing fell from 9.4% to 3.2% between 2010-11 and 2018-19.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.mungos.org/publication/home-for-good-the-role-of-social-housing-in-ending-rough-sleeping/>

<sup>6</sup> This data is available at individual tenancy-level social housing data from the Continuous Record of Social Housing (CORE). This dataset is collated by MHCLG and made available through the [UK Data Service](#).



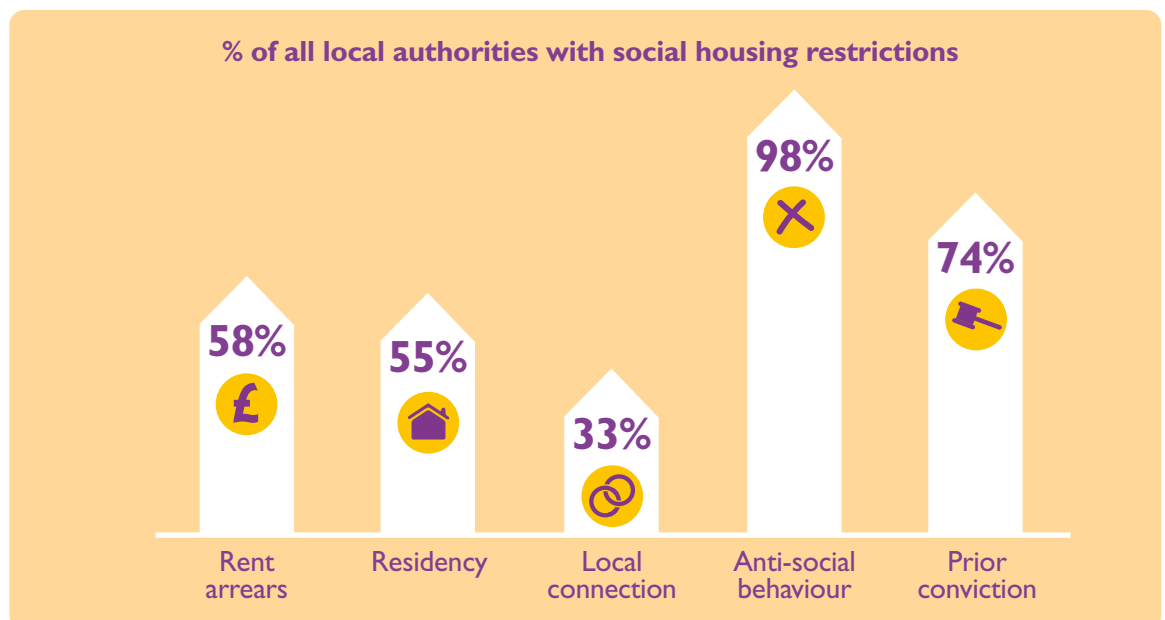
**Not enough social homes overall mean local authorities have to ration it. And people who have slept rough are missing out**

- Local authorities ration their social housing by restricting who can 'qualify' to go on to their housing waiting lists. The vast majority have introduced criteria which make it more difficult for many people with a history of rough sleeping to access social housing.
- This often means excluding people who have a history of rent arrears, anti-social behaviour, criminal convictions or who haven't lived in an area for long enough.
- MHCLG data shows that 58% of local authorities in England prevent some people with a history of rent arrears from joining their social housing waiting list. This rises to 66% in the local authorities with the top 50 highest levels of rough sleeping recorded in 2019, and 70% amongst the top ten areas.
- Only 12% of the top 50 areas for rough sleeping have neither a local connection nor residence requirement to access social housing.
- 98% of councils had some form of restriction for people with a history of anti-social behaviour: 74% of allocations policies in all areas also had restrictions related to a history of offending or criminal behaviour.<sup>7</sup>

- These restrictions are likely to have a disproportionate impact on people who have slept rough, given their increased rates of conviction, debt and the fact that many people do not sleep rough near areas where they have a local connection. Rent arrears also often build up when a vulnerable person faces a crisis.
- People with these experiences should be offered support, not punitive bans from social housing waiting lists.

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

- The Chartered Institute for Housing (CIH) has found that 71% of social housing providers carry out a pre-tenancy assessment before handing over the keys to a property. Even for those who make it to the top of a social housing waiting list, the promise of a social home may be taken away if they fail these checks.
- The most common reason for these assessments was to check whether the prospective tenant could afford the tenancy (96%), followed by the identification of support



## Gosport local lettings scheme

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

It has a quota of properties for this group, which is determined by need in the previous year and adjusted on an on-going basis if more people than expected are identified. It has been run since 2001, and over 670 people have been rehoused using the scheme.

The scheme has helped to house people with learning disabilities, a history of homelessness, physical and mental health needs, and substance use issues. It helps these tenants to acquire the skills they need to live independently, as they have a needs assessment before they move in to their new home, and support is provided for at least six months.

needs (87%), a history of rent arrears (87%) and the ability to sustain a tenancy other than affordability (85%). A history of anti-social behaviour was also a common response (84%).

- In focus groups run by the CIH, it was reported that rejection due to unmet support needs following a pre-tenancy check is, unfortunately, a growing issue. Having locally available floating support services would make a difference to these decisions, but opportunities to access support have been restricted by local authority funding cuts.<sup>8</sup>

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

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

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

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

### Central Government

- **Build 90,000 new social homes a year** – The starting point for any policy which seeks to address access to affordable housing must be to increase the supply of new housing available at social rents. Without this, it is unlikely that housing need in England can be resolved. The Government should commit to building at least 90,000 new social homes in England every year for the next 15 years to meet housing need.



<sup>8</sup> Chartered Institute for Housing (2019) *Rethinking Allocations* <http://www.cih.org/resources/Rethinking%20allocations.pdf> and St Mungo's (2018) *Home for Good: the role of floating support in ending rough sleeping* <https://www.mungos.org/publication/home-for-good-the-role-of-floating-support-in-ending-rough-sleeping/>

- **Invest in homelessness services** – £1 billion less is being spent per year on homelessness services compared to in 2007-08. This funding must be restored so local authorities can plan and deliver support services that prevent and relieve homelessness, including tenancy sustainment services for people who are moving into independent housing.
- **Make more social homes available to people who have slept rough** – to achieve its goal of ending rough sleeping in this Parliament, the Government must urgently support the delivery of social homes which are specifically available to people with a history of sleeping rough or homeless people whose multiple needs put them at risk of repeat homelessness.
- **Change guidance on allocations policies** – Government guidance currently recommends that local authorities should exclude certain groups from restrictions to accessing social housing e.g. those who are escaping domestic abuse. We recommend that additional guidance be published which explicitly extends exemptions to people with a history of rough sleeping or people who are at particular risk of rough sleeping, particularly to remove restrictions about local connections and a history of rent arrears. We also

recommend that the Government issue new guidance to local authorities which encourages them to retain some of their social housing stock for the delivery of housing-led responses to homelessness, such as Housing First and the Clearing House scheme in London.

### Local authorities and housing associations

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

### Clearing House

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

Around 8 in 10 people accepted for Clearing House properties have needed support with drugs, alcohol or mental health. Since 2000, Tenancy Sustainment Teams (TSTs) have supported tenants to learn crucial living skills such as budgeting and cooking, achieve financial independence and access training and employment.

Risk assessments for tenants are undertaken, but requirements such as local connections or residency tests are not applied to this group. A history of rent arrears or anti-social behaviour is also not necessarily a barrier to accessing a Clearing House property, as a support plan can be put in place to manage these issues.

In the first 25 years of operation, 92% of Clearing House tenants never returned to rough sleeping. Before this, the same individuals had spent 110,000 nights sleeping rough.

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



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