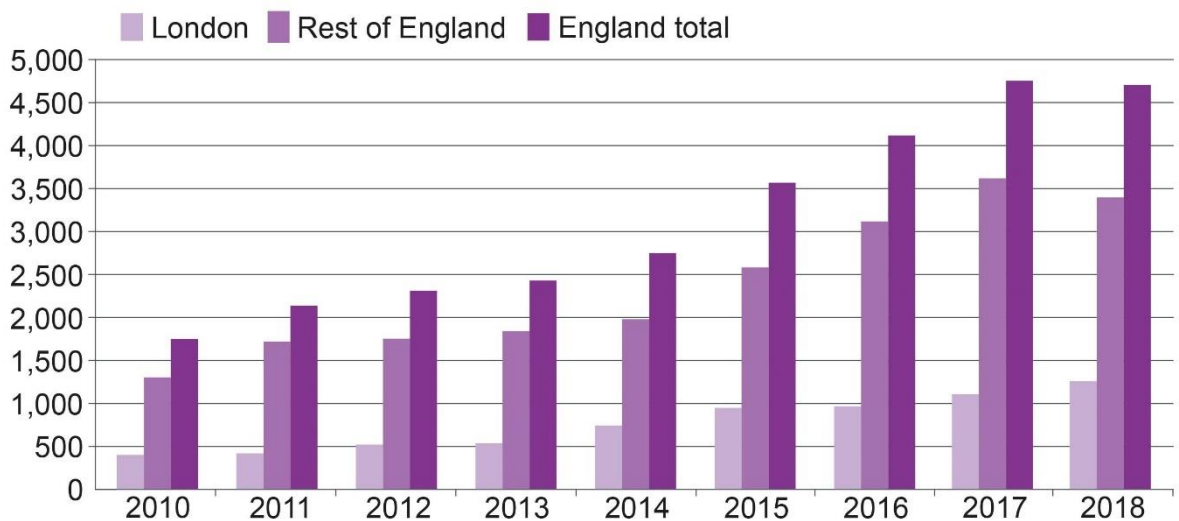


Westminster Hall debate on rough sleeping: Briefing for MPs February 2019

On 31 January the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), published the rough sleeping statistics for 2018, which showed that 4,677 people were sleeping rough in England on a single night.

What can you do to help?

St Mungo's is asking MPs to attend a Westminster Hall debate on rough sleeping on 7th February, to make the case for further government action and put forward the solutions that are needed to end rough sleeping for good.



Key points to raise in the debate:

- Rough sleeping has risen by 165% since 2010. 597 people died while homeless in England and Wales in 2017, up 24% compared to 2013.
- While the 2018 figures show a welcome end to the shocking rise in rough sleeping in recent years, there can be no doubt that rough sleeping remains a national crisis.
- The total number of people sleeping rough in England in 2018 is down by 74 (2%), but across the country the picture is mixed, with a 60% increase in Birmingham, a 31% increase in Manchester and a 13% increase in London.
- Key drivers of the increase in rough sleeping include spiralling housing costs, insecurity for private renters and cuts to homelessness services.
- In order to meet their goal of halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it altogether by 2027, the Government need to:
 - Build more social homes and make them available to people who have slept rough;
 - Improve private renting to better suit the needs of people who have slept rough;
 - Guarantee long-term funding for homelessness services.

More detailed information is included in the full briefing below.

Rough sleeping is harmful, dangerous and ruins lives

In December 2018, for the first time, the Office for National Statistics published data on the number of people who died while sleeping rough or in emergency accommodation. They found that 597 people died while homeless in England and Wales in 2017, an increase of 24% compared to the number of deaths in 2013.

Overwhelmingly, these deaths are premature and entirely preventable. The ONS data shows the average age of death for people who died while homeless in 2017 was 44, for women it was just 42. Over half of all deaths were due to drug poisoning, liver disease or suicide.

Homelessness is not inevitable. By 2010, 20 years of government action meant the end of rough sleeping was in sight. Since then spiralling housing costs, increasing insecurity for private renters and cuts to homelessness services have seen rough sleeping more than double.

- Analysis of government statistics shows that between 2011 and 2017 rents in England grew 60% quicker than wages.¹ Meanwhile, welfare reforms have made renting from a private landlord increasingly unaffordable for households who rely on housing benefit to help pay their rent. In the private rented sector, housing benefit is only paid up to the rate of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), but there is no requirement for landlords to let their properties at this level.
- Since 2011 LHA rates have been calculated based on the 30th percentile of local rents, but rates have been frozen since 2016 as rents have continued to rise. LHA rates are not due to increase again until 2020. Research by Shelter suggests that 83% of areas in England will be unaffordable to LHA claimants by 2019/20.² If people can't afford to pay their rent, it is much harder for them to hang onto their tenancy.
- The Supporting People programme was launched in 2003 as a £1.8 billion ring-fenced grant to local authorities to provide housing related support services for vulnerable people. In 2009 the ring fence on this funding was removed and since then spending on Supporting People services has been cut dramatically. The National Audit Office found that local authority spending on housing related support services has fallen by 69% between 2010 and 2017.³
- Floating support – sometimes called tenancy sustainment support – helps people, who might otherwise struggle to cope, to live independently in their own home. It is focused on preventing people from losing their home and, in the case of people who have slept rough, can prevent a return to the street. Recent research by St Mungo's revealed an 18% decrease in funding for floating support services between 2013/14 and 2017/18 in areas of England with the highest levels of rough sleeping. In London, funding for these crucial services decreased by 41% during the same period.
- In 2017 Homeless Link found the number of accommodation services for single homeless people in England had decreased by 12% since 2014 (from 1,271 to 1,121) and the number of bed spaces had decreased by 10% (from 38,534 to 34,497) in the same period.⁴

The Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy is a welcome start, but additional, long-term reforms to housing and support services are needed to end rough sleeping for good. Further mitigating measures must be put in place while these reforms take effect. Short-term investment and pilots will not make a big enough impact.

¹ http://blog.shelter.org.uk/2018/08/flatlining-wages-surg-ing-rents-and-a-national-affordability-crisis/#_ftn1

² https://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1391701/2017_06_-_Shut_out_the_barriers_low_income_households_face_in_private_renting.pdf

³ <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Financial-sustainability-of-local-authorities-2018.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/annual-review-of-single-homelessness-support-in-england>

Everyone deserves a Home for Good



Everyone who has slept rough should be able to get the right housing and support to end their homelessness for good. St Mungo's Home for Good campaign is calling for the following changes to end rough sleeping. We urge MPs to put these forward during the debate.

1. Increase the number of social homes available to people with a history of rough sleeping

- **Increase investment in social housing to help build 90,000 homes for social rent every year for 15 years.** Research from Crisis and Heriot-Watt University suggests that 91,000 new units of social housing will be needed per year in England for the next 15 years to address the housing crisis. To achieve this, the Government should stop changing social rents to 'affordable rents'⁵, review the Right to Buy, and provide much more funding to build new social housing.
- **An increase in social housing must mean more homes for people who have a history of rough sleeping** and ongoing support needs. These homes can be used to expand Housing First services and the 'Clearing House' programme, through which nearly 4,000 social homes are reserved for former rough sleepers in London.
- **Housing allocation policies should ensure people with a history of homelessness are not excluded from social housing**, regardless of their local connection, offending history, or rent arrears (so long as they are engaged in a repayment plan).

2. Improve the private rented sector (PRS) to better support people with a history of rough sleeping

- **The Government should re-align Local Housing Allowance rates to the cheapest 30% of homes in every area to make private renting more affordable.** The rates should rise annually in line with rent increases. People with a history of rough sleeping should also be exempted from the Shared Accommodation Rate and the benefit cap to help ensure there is sufficient, suitable housing available.
- **The Government should review the Scottish system of private residential tenancies and introduce a similar system in England.** This would introduce open-ended tenancies as standard and require the landlord to give three months' notice citing a permitted reason if they wish to end the tenancy agreement. The tenant should be able to end the tenancy with one months' notice. New legislation should also abolish Section 21 'no fault' evictions and reform Section 8 of the Housing Act 1988 to streamline and update the evictions process, for the benefit of landlords and tenants. Rent increases should be limited to one annual change, linked to inflation.
- **The Government should provide funding for Help-to-Rent schemes** in every area to improve access to private rented housing for households who need help to pay a deposit and support to maintain their tenancy. The Government should also ensure automatic use of direct rent payments to landlords for people who rely on Universal Credit and who have a history of rough sleeping. Financial incentives for landlords to let to people with a history of homelessness, including payments or tax relief, should also be explored.

3. Restore a long-term, strategic and co-ordinated approach to funding the services that support people to move on from homelessness and live independently

- The Government should use the 2019 Spending Review to provide long-term investment in homelessness services, including accommodation-based services, floating support and Housing First. This should be in addition to funding commitments already announced⁶ and must ensure that local authorities have

⁵ 'Affordable rents' can be up to 80% of market rent, while social rents are set in accordance with a government formula linked to local earnings and are typically closer to 50% of market rent.

⁶ Including the Government's existing commitments to review Supporting People services (also known as housing related support services) and the £19 million investment in floating support for people with a history of rough sleeping. MHCLG (2018) *Rough Sleeping Strategy* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-rough-sleeping-strategy>

sufficient funding to meet local need on a long-term basis. The funding should also encourage partnership working to deliver specialist services, such as homelessness mental health services and support for homeless women who have experienced violence and abuse.

The Government should implement these recommendations in order to prevent rough sleeping in the first place and stop people returning to the streets for good.

The Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy

The interventions and funding in the Government's new Rough Sleeping Strategy are welcome, and will ensure help reaches more people sleeping rough. Crucially, the Somewhere Safe to Stay pilots should stop people from having to sleep rough in the first place before receiving the assessment and support they need.

The recognition of issues such as the need to improve healthcare provision for people who sleep rough, the need to review and learn from deaths and the need to have specific, tailored solutions for non-UK nationals and women who sleep rough are extremely welcome, but need to be acted on.

Delivering the Rough Sleeping Strategy relies on several different government departments meeting their commitments, especially MHCLG, DHSC, DWP, MoJ and the Home Office. The Rough Sleeping Strategy must mark a turning point in the Government's approach to rough sleeping by tackling it on a cross-government basis, with a joined up approach to policy and service delivery and a recognition of the complexity of people's needs.

The Government has acknowledged that the Rough Sleeping Strategy is a first step. The next stage must be to address the factors driving more people onto the street with the recommendations outlined above. The 2019 Spending Review and promised annual update of the Rough Sleeping Strategy provide a real opportunity to make further progress towards ending rough sleeping for good.

A note on the rough sleeping statistics

Every autumn local authorities in England carry out a count or estimate of the number of people sleeping rough on one particular night, and there are some limited demographic details captured as part of this process. This is the only standardised and comparable data available on rough sleeping covering all parts of the country. This data provides a very useful indicator of the relative size of the problem and particular trends which can be monitored over many years. More should be done to improve local data on the number, profile, support needs and outcomes of people sleeping rough, but this should add to the national snapshot data rather than replace it.

St Mungo's services for people sleeping rough

St Mungo's vision is that everyone has a place to call home and can fulfil their hopes and ambitions. As a homelessness charity and housing association our clients are at the heart of what we do.

We provide a bed and support to more than 2,800 people a night who are either homeless or at risk, and work to prevent homelessness. We support men and women through more than 300 projects including emergency, hostel and supportive housing projects, advice services and specialist physical health, mental health, skills and work services.

We work across London and the south of England, as well as managing major homelessness sector partnership projects such as StreetLink and the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN).

We influence and campaign nationally to help people to rebuild their lives.

For more information, please contact publicaffairs@mungos.org