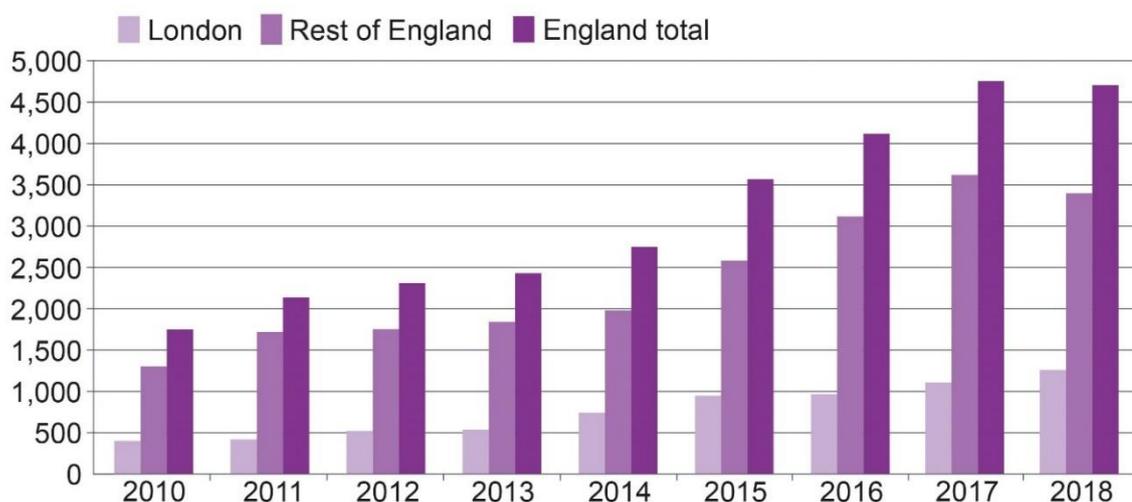


June 2019

This briefing has been developed to support the Backbench Business 'General Debate on Social Housing', led by Matt Western MP on Thursday 13 June 2019.

Rough sleeping is harmful, dangerous and ruins lives

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. While this marked a fall of 2% compared with 2017, it is still a 165% increase since 2010, when the new methodology for rough sleeping statistics was introduced.



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. This briefing is focused on the impact of housing policy on levels of rough sleeping.

Access to secure and affordable housing

Analysis of government statistics shows that between 2011 and 2017 rents in England grew 60% faster 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.

¹ http://blog.shelter.org.uk/2018/08/flattening-wages-surging-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

One solution to problems with the affordability and stability of the private rented sector is to increase access to social housing. This type of housing can play a big role in helping people stay off the streets by providing secure and affordable homes. It can also be easier to provide support to people living in social housing. However, it has actually become more difficult for people with a history of rough sleeping to access social homes over the past decades.

Research shows the difference social housing can make. A comprehensive study³ which followed hundreds of people for five years after homelessness found that:

- People were much less likely to become homeless again if they moved into social housing rather than private rented housing
- People living in social housing were more likely than those living in private rented housing to have received support after moving out of homelessness
- People who moved into private rented housing were three times more likely than those in social housing to have moved at least four times over the five year period.

Social housing offers more stability

Tenants in social housing are traditionally offered secure, long-term tenancies which can make the difference between someone keeping their home or being forced to return to the streets.

Unlike private landlords, social housing providers are also highly likely to offer support to prevent their tenants becoming homeless, or returning to homelessness. In a recent survey, the National Housing Federation found that 79% of housing associations offered tenancy sustainment advice and support.⁴

Social housing is more affordable

Social housing offers cheaper rents that are linked to local earnings, making them more affordable to people on low incomes. Any rent increases are limited by the Government. Unlike more expensive private sector rents, the rent in social housing is usually fully covered by Housing Benefit (if the person receives it), reducing the risk of people being made homeless because they can't afford to pay their rent.

Social housing is needed to support new approaches to ending rough sleeping

Innovative new services to end rough sleeping are increasingly 'housing-led', meaning they provide support to people living in ordinary housing rather than homeless hostels. One model is Housing First, which provides intensive support to people who have a long history of homelessness and high support needs after they have been given a home.

St Mungo's is one of the largest providers of Housing First services in England. Our experience shows that short-term tenancies, which are common in private rented housing, are disruptive to the delivery of support. Housing First works better in social housing because tenants have the stability they need to focus on rebuilding their lives away from the street.

However, the number of homes for social rent (the most affordable type of social housing) in England is actually falling⁵ and waiting lists are extremely long.

³<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/policy-institute/scwru/pubs/2016/reports/RebuildingLives2016Report.pdf>

⁴ http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/pub.housing.org.uk/Homelessness_discussion_paper.pdf

⁵ http://www.cih.org/news-article/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/newsarticle/data/More_than_150000_homes_for_social_rent_lost_in_just_five_years_new_analysis_reveals

Worryingly, people with a history of rough sleeping often struggle to even access local authority waiting lists for social housing. This is because local authorities are able to restrict access to groups they don't think should qualify. In practice this means that people with a history of rent arrears, previous convictions or no local connection often face exclusion.⁶ In this way, people who have already faced a crisis in their lives are further punished and condemned to instability.

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, including access to social housing. St Mungo's Home for Good campaign is calling for the Government to **increase the number of social homes available to people with a history of rough sleeping.**



To ensure this becomes a reality, the Government must:

- **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'⁷, 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).

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

⁶ https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237833/moving_on_2017.pdf

⁷ '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.