

Rough sleeping in England: Looking beyond 'Everyone In'

About this briefing

St Mungo's vision is that everyone has a place to call home and can fulfil their hopes and ambitions.

Each night our 17 outreach teams go out to help people sleeping rough and we provide a bed and support to more than 2,850 people in England.

The Government's response to rough sleeping during the pandemic has helped save lives, and we now have a unique opportunity to move towards ending rough sleeping for good. This briefing sets out the actions still needed to ensure everyone has somewhere safe to stay and the necessary support to rebuild their lives away from the street.

We urge all MPs to support our recommendations to help ensure no one has to sleep rough, both during the pandemic, and beyond.

Covid-19 response and 'Everyone In'

At the beginning of the pandemic, the Government charged local authorities with getting 'Everyone In', and supporting everyone sleeping rough to move into self-contained accommodation. St Mungo's has been heavily involved in this effort, helping clients find emergency accommodation, follow public health guidance, and access services including mental health support and drug and alcohol services.

We welcome the action already taken by the Government to help protect people sleeping rough during the pandemic. The Government initially committed £3.2 million for this and have recently announced a further £105 million in dedicated funding for emergency accommodation for people at risk of rough sleeping, and support to find alternative housing. A taskforce, led by Dame Louise Casey, has also been established to lead the Government's Covid-19 rough sleeping response. There are a number of key challenges this taskforce must address:

- **New people have continued to start sleeping rough during the pandemic** – St Mungo's outreach teams have reported that there has been an increase in the number of people who are new to rough sleeping. Night shelters have been forced to close due to the pandemic, and are unlikely to reopen for some time. This means that outreach teams must continue to work in extremely difficult circumstances.
- **The risk of rough sleeping is increasing** – There is a risk that homelessness will increase dramatically as a result of job losses, or reduced pay caused by the coronavirus crisis, particularly as the furlough scheme and evictions ban end.

Since the start of the pandemic:



2,635

people supported by St Mungo's in emergency hotels



588

people supported to move into a new home

Case study:

John, Bournemouth:

"St Mungo's found me a flat here in Bournemouth, and it's been amazing. ...I feel like a human being again. Not only can I apply for jobs now I have a permanent address, I can eat healthily and look after myself properly. I'm a guitar player, so I've been able to get my amps set up and my pedals in and start writing songs again.

"It's hard to know if I would have been helped if it wasn't for the coronavirus. I hate to say this, but if anything good has come out of this horrible crisis, it's people like me finding a place to live."

➤ **A high number of people currently in emergency accommodation will be unable to access ongoing support due to their migration status** –

Since the start of the pandemic, 45% of people supported by St Mungo's in emergency hotel accommodation have been non-UK nationals. Many will be seeking work again, but unable to claim housing benefit while they do. For people with unresolved immigration status, access to independent immigration advice will be crucial to finding a route out of homelessness.

➤ **Difficulty finding move on accommodation due to affordability and access to the right support** –

Many of our clients have complex needs, including women who have experienced domestic abuse and clients with mental health and substance use problems. People with higher support needs should be able to access appropriate supported housing or Housing First services. However, in most areas demand has long exceeded the services available.

Recommendations

To ensure the long-term safety of homeless people and that there is no going back to the streets, the Government should:

1) Ensure everyone who is homeless is offered suitable emergency accommodation. The Government should introduce a duty on local authorities (backed by sufficient funding) to ensure emergency accommodation is provided for everyone with nowhere safe to stay for at least the next 12 months.

2) Suspend the Benefit Cap and lift Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates in line with average rents. Despite the welcome increase in LHA rates in April 2020, housing benefits still fall short of the actual cost of rent in many areas of the country. The overall Benefit Cap also severely restricts the amount people can claim for housing costs in the areas with the highest rents, especially London. This is preventing people from moving on from emergency accommodation, and puts others at risk of losing their home.

3) Suspend 'no recourse' rules that restrict access to support for non-UK nationals for at least the next 12 months.

Beyond Covid-19: long term solutions to end rough sleeping

The recommendations in this briefing would help prevent a surge in homelessness resulting from the pandemic in the short to medium-term, however with uncertain times ahead, it is more important now than ever to consolidate this work to end rough sleeping for good.

Many people who have slept rough will need ongoing support to cope with complex issues such as poor mental health, substance use problems and domestic abuse if they are to avoid returning to the streets after the pandemic.

Last year councils in England spent nearly £1 billion less on services supporting single homeless people compared to a decade ago.¹

This funding hasn't been replaced by the coronavirus response. Without a significant increase in investment, these vital services will not be able to cope with demand and the Government is unlikely to keep its commitment to end rough sleeping by 2024.

The Government must use the forthcoming Spending Review to end rough sleeping for good. This means:

- **Building 90,000 social homes per year** for the next 15 years, and making them available to people who have slept rough
- Improving private renting to better suit the needs of people with a history of sleeping rough by **ending Section 21 evictions and permanently increasing LHA rates** to cover the cost of private rents
- **Investing an extra £1 billion per year** in homelessness services via a ring-fenced grant to local authorities.

How can you help?

As we approach the Spending Review and the Autumn Budget you can help by raising our recommendations with Ministers, and support the Government to achieve its commitment to end rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament. If you would like any more information on rough sleeping or would like to work with St Mungo's, please get in touch by emailing publicaffairs@mungos.org

¹ WPI Economics (2020), Local authority spending on homelessness: 2020 update <https://www.mungos.org/app/uploads/2020/02/Local-authority-spending-on-homelessness--WPI-Economics-research-report--February-2020-update.pdf>