

Ending homelessness = [prevention + enough affordable homes]

At its simplest, the solution to homelessness is an equation. If the aim is to end homelessness, then on the other side of the equals sign must be tried, tested and effective homelessness prevention – plus, of course, sufficient truly affordable homes, of the right kind for each type of household, and with secure tenure.

An acute lack of truly affordable homes is increasingly a core systemic cause of homelessness in the UK. Private sector tenancies are insecure and – in many places – unaffordable. The result is a constant and increasingly unwinnable battle for the agencies tasked with helping people who face homelessness or are already homeless.

In London, the battle is not new; however, it is now a growing problem in other areas of the country, especially the South and Midlands. This is not least because homelessness is so pressing in London that its councils often actively aim to relocate households to the regions where rents are (relatively) cheaper.

Even where housing is available, it is not always appropriate or of good quality; for instance, in many areas there is an acute lack of affordable one-bed accommodation, even as changing patterns of adult living drive higher demand for such homes.








And, of course, supply of council housing and other socially rented housing continues to decline as right-to-buy sales cancel out the acquisition or building of new stock, and budget constraints shrink new supply programmes.

The result of all this is that local authorities who have an unavoidable statutory responsibility for relieving homelessness increasingly must rely on expensive temporary accommodation in the private sector. Inevitably, this focuses budget on crisis response and swallows funding for the preventative work that would offer much better value for money.

This report concludes that, at present, current government strategy is failing to balance this equation.

Policy asks

Homelessness is a complex policy area, but evidence from NFA members shows that there are clear policy adjustments that could greatly assist them in their duty to tackle homelessness. They ask government for a policy environment that delivers:

-  At least 100,000 new socially rented homes a year to make sure that everyone has access to a home they can genuinely afford.
-  A switch in budget focus from crisis response to prevention, particularly through government support for social housing that comes with guaranteed wraparound support for those who need it to prevent further homelessness.
-  An end to the private rented sector pathway to homelessness, through the removal of Section 21 'no fault' evictions and government implementation of proposed reforms to PRS regulation.
-  Permanent lifting of the LHA rates cap so that rates reflect the true cost of rent.
-  Urgent welfare reform to remove built-in homelessness triggers, such as the Benefit Cap which cuts benefit without taking account of housing costs.
-  Long-term, sustainable and sufficient funding for prevention and relief strategies, with built-in monitoring and evaluation to show what works.
-  Long-term funding for those with complex needs through Housing First projects.

‘Everyone In’ and COVID-19

The government’s ‘Everyone In’ response to COVID-19 was announced at the end of March 2020 to quickly house the vulnerable in emergency self-contained accommodation.

This included around 15,000 people who had been sleeping rough, people previously housed in night shelters and those made homeless during the pandemic. An initial £3.2 million of funding was set aside specifically for Everyone In, and £3.7 billion overall was promised to councils for the assistance of the vulnerable. Additional funding has been made available to provide new supported housing units and support those who had been placed in emergency accommodation during COVID-19.

The ‘Everyone In’ response during the early lockdown was successful, although currently it has stalled between a crisis response and the development of longer-term preventative strategies. However, it has shown what is achievable when political will, direction and funding is combined with local expertise, knowledge and service provision.

Solihull Community Housing (SCH) delivers homelessness services on behalf of Solihull MBC. Its Housing Register and general lettings were paused at the start of lockdown.

Their established Solihome team, which liaises with local private sector landlords, worked to find tenancies for those who needed an Everyone In placement. Rooms at a local hotel were block-booked for additional capacity, underpinned by the development of detailed move-on plans into more settled accommodation. Meanwhile Solihome is encouraging private landlords to contact them before serving notice on tenants. The aim is to offer a package of tenancy sustainment help to avoid evictions and further homelessness.

Colchester Borough Homes report that the pandemic response in their area has led to the development of a joint recovery plan across Essex and creation of the multi-agency Colchester Homeless Action Panel.

Homelessness relief

ALMO staff say the crisis has reinforced the vital importance of strong partnership working and integrated casework across all local partners for truly effective homelessness relief, and this must be supported by a top-level strategic commitment and vision. In essence, everyone from local authority to public health, from health to police, from housing to prison services, from DWP to local charities, have to be signed up to the same goal and working towards it together.

They also highlight **the importance of long-term sustainable support services that go to where the person is;** and the need to have a range of truly affordable **housing options that are a good fit for those in need of a home.** For example, in both Derby and Cornwall, there is a real shortage of single-bed accommodation for the single homeless.

Finally, and most importantly, **they have found that the most effective homelessness services are those designed in collaboration with those who have lived experience of using them.**

While work to end rough sleeping in our case study areas was well-developed before COVID-19, it is clear that the crisis has driven further innovation,

Derby has a multi-agency rough sleeping hub, SafeSpace, where services are delivered for people with complex problems, part of Derby City Council’s Rough Sleeping Strategy.

SafeSpace provides basic shelter and rapid assessment and support for rough sleepers. This well-established service has been honed by the crisis response, and the ALMO Derby Homes is now hiring a coordinator for the hub to help hold onto that learning; for instance, when lockdown severely limited movement around town, the provision of regular, constructive and absorbing activities greatly improved clients’ engagement and behaviour. After 90 days in lockdown, just £5,000 worth of dilapidations had to be dealt with in emergency accommodation that had housed more than 140 people.

The value of prevention



The moral imperative to stop households from becoming homeless through effective prevention is underpinned by a strong financial case for shifting resources from crisis services to prevention.


Stemming the flow of people into homelessness is an absolute priority. ALMOs do much preventative work before statutory homelessness legislation kicks in. They focus on supporting people to find affordable accommodation, to sustain their tenancies, and improve their life chances through programmes that support financial and health wellbeing and employability.

They could do more with the support of policymakers: changes to how Universal Credit is paid; targeted funding for housing providers to deliver employment and wellbeing initiatives; and greater integration between health, social care, public health and housing would all significantly improve value for public money.

Highly targeted housing services can effectively head off homelessness before it happens.

Newcastle City Council has committed itself to ending rough sleeping by 2022 and ending all homelessness over the next 10 years. They are working through their ALMO, Your Homes Newcastle. As a result, Newcastle's homelessness rate is among the lowest in the country and the city is one of three areas partnering with Crisis in their 10-year project to end homelessness.

Stockport Homes has member of staff based at the local general hospital and one in the community to plan hospital discharges and prevent a costly cycle of hospital-homelessness-hospital. Its proven efficacy has won further funding. Stockport is also part of the successful Greater Manchester-wide Housing First initiative which aims to settle long-term rough sleepers into a home before helping them with their often complex needs.



In Eastbourne, the jump from renting a council house to home ownership is too great for most. The average price for a flat is £205k – a mortgage lender would require annual income of above £60,000 to service a loan even with a 10% deposit.

Between January and March 2020, 28% of those owed a prevention or relief duty under the HRA were facing the end of their Assured Shorthold Tenancy; 58% of these had been told their landlord wanted to sell or re-let. Nearly half of those owed a prevention duty had been served a 'no-fault' Section 21 notice to quit.

In the London Borough of Barnet, close to half of those who asked for help because they were threatened with homelessness were facing the end of their private sector tenancy. Another 30 per cent were living with family or friends who could no longer accommodate them.

The growing problem of affordability

In many parts of the country, the issue of affordability is a clear structural cause of homelessness, putting home ownership, private rental and even shared ownership beyond the reach of many, including key workers. A recent Shelter report suggested that the ratio of social housing supply to households wanting social housing is currently around 96:1.

National Housing Federation figures suggest nearly eight million people in England have some form of housing need; for 3.8 million of them (1.6 million households) social rented housing would be the most appropriate tenure. Interviews for this report showed that even in areas where there was more housing, there were not enough affordable one-bed homes for the single homeless.

As the housing shortage becomes ever more acute, local supply is also being disrupted by the placement of homeless households from councils elsewhere. With not enough stock to meet their obligations, some look to ease budget pressures by avoiding their own area's higher private rents.

This report focuses on the work of the ALMO sector – council-owned housing management companies – and is based on interviews with frontline practitioners who manage some or all homelessness services on behalf of their parent local authorities.

The scale of homelessness

- 📌 In 2019, more than a quarter of a million households in England were assessed as homeless
- 📌 An estimated 4,266 people were sleeping rough in Autumn 2019, up from 2,498 people in 2010
- 📌 In December 2019, 88,330 households were in temporary accommodation with 128,340 children - the equivalent of 455 primary schools
- 📌 Local authorities spent £1.1 billion on temporary accommodation between April 2018 and May 2019; more than 30% of this was spent on emergency B&Bs
- 📌 Core homelessness rose from 120,000 in 2010 to 153,000 in 2017 (an increase of 28%)

Homelessness is not an unsolvable problem. There is a clear consensus on the structural causes and triggers of homelessness. Certain groups are over-represented and individual triggers of homelessness such as family breakdown, domestic abuse and life-controlling dependency are part of this wider picture.

However, the core structural cause of homelessness is, increasingly, the lack of affordable housing, driving increased reliance on insecure tenancies in the private rented sector. These problems have been amplified by austerity-driven cuts to wraparound community services.

ALMOs, with their close links to the local authorities who have statutory responsibility for homelessness, have developed a range of highly targeted prevention-focused programmes. Some, for example, work specifically with care leavers, those discharged from hospital and people at risk of domestic abuse. Many also work closely with the private sector to maintain tenancies – the sector is both a leading cause of homelessness and yet still a necessary solution.

Policy environment

Both the 2017 and 2019 Conservative manifestos pledged to eliminate rough sleeping

...yet £5 billion has disappeared from local authority expenditure on homelessness-related services since 2008/2009. Meanwhile, local authorities' temporary accommodation costs increased by 66% between 2011/2012 and 2017/2018.

Funding pots for prevention initiatives are often short-term and uncoordinated while forced cuts to services such as mental health support push more people towards crisis. Housing providers are perfectly placed to

fill such gaps, but they need sufficient, long-term funding to do so.

The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) came into force in April 2018 and gave local authorities new duties to take all reasonable steps to prevent and relieve homelessness.

The HRA's encouragement of more prevention and faster response to homelessness was widely welcomed; but the first independent review of its impact says that 'the intention and ambition of the HRA is being constrained by the housing market, welfare system and funding...'

A report for London Councils drew similar conclusions. In 2017-2018, London local authorities spent over £900 million assessing, assisting and accommodating homeless households, £200 million from their own General Funds. This is expected to rise to £226 million in 2020/21 and £237 million by 2022/23.

Government rhetoric has focused largely on the visible problem of homelessness. There is no coherent strategy to tackle wider systemic issues, such as:

- 📌 The scarcity of genuinely affordable housing
- 📌 Failure to introduce promised legislation to abolish Section 21 no-fault evictions in the private sector
- 📌 The impact of wider austerity cuts that have taken away wraparound community services, including mental health, social care and probation service support
- 📌 Lack of a consistent national strategy to tackle domestic abuse – the primary factor in the loss of home for almost one in ten households owed an HRA duty by their local authority