



Homeless Link

A large graphic of a human silhouette, composed of many small circles in various shades of pink and white. The circles are arranged to form the outline and internal structure of a person, with the head at the top and the feet at the bottom. The circles vary in size and color, creating a textured, pixelated effect. The overall shape is centered on the page and occupies most of the lower half.

A Home for Everyone

Our manifesto to
end homelessness together

Contents

- ③ Foreword
- ④ Executive summary
- ⑥ Our movement to end homelessness
- ⑦ Homelessness in England today
- ⑪ Our ambitions for the next Government
- ⑮ References

Homelessness and rough sleeping are rising while services are struggling to make ends meet. But the next Government can act to change this, introducing policies that ensure a Home for Everyone.

Foreword

The heroic efforts of the homelessness sector during the pandemic showed what could be achieved with the right resources and attitude. As I visit homelessness services across England I have been in complete awe of their resilience over the past few years. But, in recent times, the combination of prolonged inflation and long-standing funding challenges have forced many services to scale back, or even close altogether, while homelessness and rough sleeping have risen sharply.

The pandemic response showed us that homelessness is not a sad fact of life, but instead an eminently solvable problem. This viewpoint is at the core of this manifesto for change. The next Government can act to end homelessness in England, creating a society with a home for everyone. We don't call for these policy changes for ourselves, but for the people who are currently homeless, or at risk of homelessness, who deserve better.

Of course, there is no one magic wand quick fix, but government at its best sees all facets of complex problems such as homelessness, embedding solutions that both alleviate it in the short-term and prevent it occurring in the future.

From building 90,000 social homes per year for the next decade, to creating a homelessness system that works for all through sustained investment, to adopting a cross-government strategy to end homelessness, our manifesto is ambitious.

The impact of ending homelessness would be huge. Ending the trauma of thousands of people experiencing homelessness and allowing local authorities to stop funding expensive 'crisis' solutions. Reducing strain on health and social care services. And ensuring access to a suitable, secure, affordable home would provide the foundation and opportunity everyone in our country deserves to unlock their true potential.

But this can only happen if the homelessness sector comes together and makes itself heard. If our campaign is successful, it will be driven by our members up and down the country. Meanwhile, politicians must be ready to listen and to act to make the change that is so sorely needed.



Rick Henderson
Chief Executive

"I've seen first-hand the abundance of passion and knowledge bubbling within people who work in homelessness services. Now is the time to take this to the corridors of power, making the case for a society where everyone has a home and the support they need to keep it."



A Home for Everyone

There is no reason why anyone should be homeless in England.

Having a safe place to live, and support when you need it, should be the foundation of any healthy society. But homelessness is rising, with hundreds of thousands of people in the UK forced to live with its insecurity and trauma, deeply impacting both their health and wellbeing and that of local communities.

At Homeless Link, we have a unique view of homelessness in this country. As the membership body for over 800 homelessness organisations across England, we hear first-hand about the devastating circumstances faced by people experiencing homelessness and the services designed to support them.

For people experiencing homelessness, the impacts are grave. The trauma of homelessness disrupts almost all aspects of a person's life – their family and relationships, their health and wellbeing, and their ability to sustain employment. This trauma and the stigma surrounding homelessness compound with the shrinking social safety net to lock people out of support, trapping people in long-term, repeating cycles of homelessness.

It doesn't have to be this way.

For too long the root causes of homelessness have been ignored.

For too long homelessness services have seen their funding fall while homelessness rises.

For too long fragmented government departments working in silos have created policies which widen the cracks people can fall through.

The next Government can and must act to change this.

Our 4 ambitions

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Everyone has a safe, secure, suitable home in which to thrive

Safe and suitable housing is essential to ensure everyone can live happy, healthy, stable lives. Ensuring people on low incomes have access to truly affordable housing is the single biggest step we can take to prevent homelessness, both now and in the future.

The next Government should commit funding to build 90,000 social homes per year for the next 10 years and immediately unfreeze Local Housing Allowance, restoring it to a level that will cover the lowest 30th percentile of market rents.

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Every arm of government working together and playing their part

Preventing and ending homelessness cannot be the responsibility of just one government department. A joint approach across government, which draws on the strength of teams, is the only way we can do this.

The next Government should adopt a cross-government strategy to end homelessness, led by a new task force directed by the Cabinet Office, with representatives from across government ensuring that all departments' policies and programmes work consistently and holistically to end homelessness.

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A homelessness system that works for all

Solutions to homelessness are never one-size-fits-all. We must ensure services are as diverse as the people they support. We know that if personalised, trauma-informed care is embedded as standard, we can find the solutions to ensure no one is left behind.

The next Government must ensure there is a diverse network of services available, and that sustainable housing options are accessible for every person who experiences homelessness. As a minimum standard, these services should embed person-centred, trauma-informed care.

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Sustained investment preventing and ending homelessness – for good

Morally and financially, ending homelessness makes sense. Sustainable investment now will prevent people from losing their homes and ensure services have the resources they need to provide effective, efficient support that works.

The next Government should commit to reviewing all spending across government linked to homelessness, and replacing the existing piecemeal and short-term funding structures with a long-term, ring-fenced homelessness support fund, designed to flexibly adapt to local and individual needs.



Our movement to end homelessness

Homeless Link is the membership body for frontline homelessness services in England. We work to improve policy and practice within the homelessness sector, produce original research and campaign to secure policy change to both reduce and prevent homelessness.

Together our members are a movement of over 800 organisations from all across the country, united in a belief that everyone deserves a safe place to live and the support they need to keep it. A belief that we can end homelessness in this country.

This manifesto draws on our body of work with our members, on engagement with specialists and experts, and on the rich body of evidence on what works to end homelessness.

It has been supported by a series of in-depth focus groups, speaking with organisations from across the breadth of the homelessness system. This diversity of voice has allowed us to hear both the immediate needs of a sector in crisis, and the long-term ambitions to end homelessness altogether.

Our members' voices run through our manifesto - their skills, their experiences and their passions.

Our members range from national accommodation and service providers to small local day centres. They span every region of England, serving communities across urban, rural and coastal areas, in our cities, towns and villages.

They know better than anyone the true nature and scale of the challenge to end homelessness, and that by working hand in hand with the next government we can achieve our vision of a country free from homelessness.

They know better than anyone what needs to change.

Homelessness in England today

Homelessness is rising and needs are becoming more complex

After the significant success of Everyone In during the pandemic, it has been disheartening to see the numbers of people facing homelessness on the rise again. In 2022/23 156,190 households in England were owed a homelessness relief duty by their local authority – meaning they have been assessed as homeless and eligible for statutory assistance – this is a 28% increase over the last five years.¹ Annual rough sleeping figures show that in 2022 rough sleeping rose by 26% from the previous year and is 74% higher than in 2010.² This increase is driven by a failure to tackle the systemic causes of homelessness such as the lack of truly affordable housing, at the same time as households across the country face increased pressures due to the rising cost of living.

Reported statistics are only the tip of the iceberg, with a significant but unknown number of people experiencing 'hidden' homelessness. Out of sight from services, this population – disproportionately comprised of women, young people, asylum seekers and other disadvantaged groups – are often locked out of support while navigating precarious and high-risk situations of homelessness.

As the number of people seeking support has risen, our members have also reported an increase in the complexity of need. Members have consistently told us they are seeing a higher proportion of people with multiple unmet needs, including severe mental and physical health problems. This increase is largely explained by an absence of appropriate specialist services. With this, the homelessness sector becomes the primary source of support for many in need of more intensive support.

Rough Sleeping up

26%
last year

and up

74%
since 2010

A housing emergency

For many people who become homeless, economic drivers are the most significant. Successive governments have failed to keep pace with the need for social rented housing. This means an increasing number of low income households are forced into the private rental sector and become reliant on housing related benefits to cover their rent.

However, Local Housing Allowance (LHA), which determines the level of housing-related benefits that can be claimed by private tenants, remains frozen at 2020 levels. Due to rapidly rising rent, LHA recipients are now only able to access the cheapest 5% of the rental market, which is far behind the 30% of market rents DWP set LHA rates to cover in 2020/21.³ This risks more and more households falling into debt and arrears as rents rise beyond welfare levels leaving households – often families with children – facing eviction.

95%
of rented
houses are
unaffordable
for people on benefits

Funding is insufficient and inefficient

Investing to end homelessness has been proven to work. Efforts across the last five years – beginning with the introduction of the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) and accelerated by the £223.5 million Everyone In pandemic response – temporarily reduced rough sleeping numbers significantly. In many cases this investment resulted in people engaging with services and leaving homelessness behind for good.

However, for many of our members service-level funding has remained static despite headlines of new funding for homelessness. That money is expected to stretch further each year, holding down wages and creating unsustainable demands that have seen providers and staff leave the sector.⁴ Ultimately, pushed to financial unviability, half our members have told us they are at imminent risk of closing services. Competitive commissioning and stretched local authority budgets have encouraged a ‘race-to-the-bottom’ approach, with contracts awarded with more regard to price than quality. Services are unable to plan strategically, with managers constantly chasing shoestring, short-term funding from a patchwork of funders.

Homelessness services have proved to be fantastically innovative and resilient, but cost pressures have combined with long-term underinvestment causing numerous Homeless Link members to describe their own services as ‘inadequate’. Providers have to focus on survival ‘rather than the job we should be doing’.

“You also reach a point with services where they are under resourced and unviable, but the impact of closing or losing that funding is also unviable, so you find a way – you make a substandard offer even if it isn’t the offer you want to make. You end up running services you know are substandard, but they’re the best you can do.”

Homelessness Service Provider

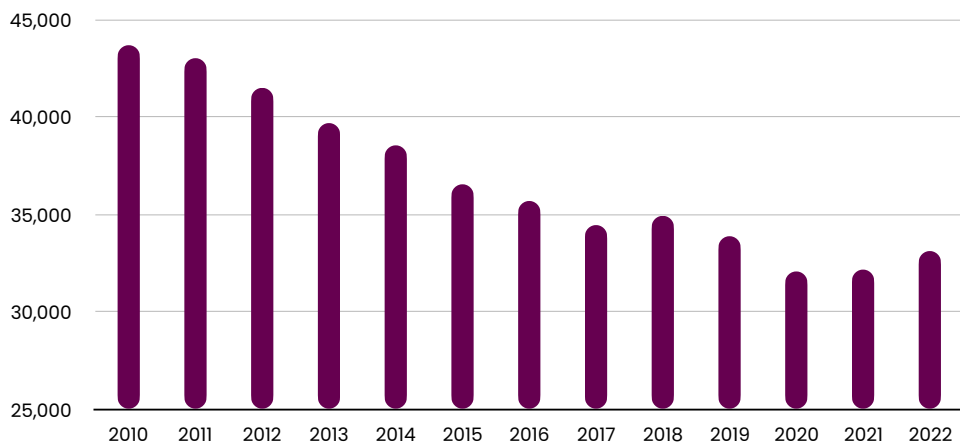
The state of the sector – increased demand but reduced supply

As a result of these changes in funding, the homelessness sector has shrunk. Homelessness services report chronic underfunding, compounded by high inflation and the rising cost of service delivery. This has caused a significant contraction in service capacity, reflected in Homeless Link’s ‘Support for Single Homeless People in England: Annual Review 2022’ report. The study found that bed spaces for homeless adults have reduced by 24% since 2010, during which time rough sleeping figures rose by 74%.⁵

Rough sleeping in England



Bed spaces in England



The shrinking of the homelessness sector has reflected a wider picture of reduced funding for public services. Local authorities are often left balancing competing priorities across different departments. Housing departments were subject to some of the most severe cuts between 2008 and 2017.⁶

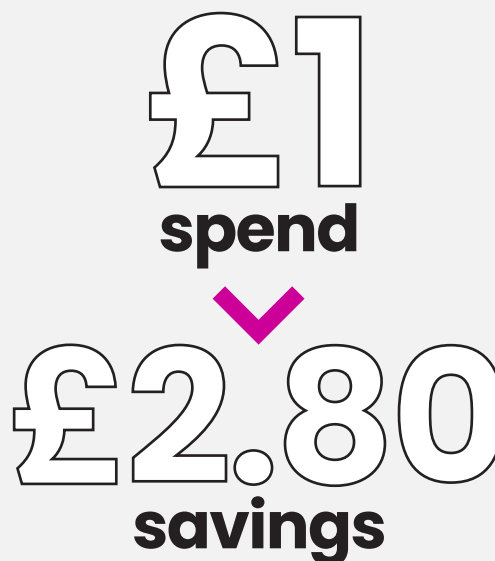
“I can’t describe our services as adequate. We do the best we can, but my standards are higher than we can deliver under current funding.”

Homelessness Service Provider

The best services see the whole picture

For some people, housing is just one aspect of their unmet support needs. People can be driven into homelessness by histories of trauma, by complex physical and mental health conditions, and by shortfalls in state support.⁷ They may find themselves without adequate support and in debt in a tenancy they cannot manage independently. Whatever the reason, a large proportion of adults supported by the homelessness sector will have cross-cutting support needs that lead them to engage with multiple public services, government departments and agencies before they approach homelessness services.⁸

Specialist homelessness support provides wide-ranging benefits, reducing contact with other public services including healthcare, justice and addiction support. Research from PwC shows that every £1 invested in ending homelessness generates an estimated £2.80 in wider savings and benefits across departments.



“A lot of people have experienced trauma at a young age, and you think if those services had been there at the earliest opportunity, rather than waiting for critical point, it might have stopped people coming into services in the first place.”

Homelessness Service Provider

Becoming homeless is traumatising in itself, and its outcomes are stark. The longer someone remains homeless, the more complex or chronic their needs are likely to become.^{9,10} Those who experience homelessness in childhood are much more likely to develop complex support needs later in life.¹¹ Homelessness can cause or exacerbate physical and mental health conditions, meaning people experiencing homelessness have the worst health outcomes of any group.¹² Faced with stigma and exclusion from health services, healthy living and routine condition management can be almost impossible.¹³ For people experiencing homelessness, the average age at death is 45.4 for men and 43.2 for women, more than 30 years lower than the general population and often from preventable, easily treated conditions.¹⁴

Preventing homelessness in the first place must be the priority.

“In an ideal world – we wouldn’t exist! There is more affordable social housing, the benefit cap is lifted, mental health support readily available to those who need it.”

Homelessness Service Provider

Our ambitions for the next government

1

Everyone has a safe, secure, suitable home in which to thrive

There is a significant shortage of safe, affordable housing for people who need it. The lack of truly affordable housing is a significant barrier, which causes people to lose their homes and prevents people from moving on from temporary accommodation.¹⁵ This forces many of the 100,510 people living in temporary accommodation to remain there for prolonged periods, with 61% staying for more than a year and some remaining for decades.^{16,17}

At a time when local authority budgets remain under significant pressure, the cost of temporary accommodation is high and continuing to increase. In 2021/22, local authorities spent £1.6 billion on temporary accommodation for homeless households, up 39% on the previous year.¹⁸ As more people present to their local authority in need of accommodation, the limited availability of truly affordable housing means homelessness is set to continue growing whilst the price of support also continues to rise.¹⁹

Solving these challenges requires a two-pronged approach. Preventing homelessness and keeping people in their own homes is always the best and cheapest solution. Measures to achieve this should be an urgent commitment of our next Government.

The most instant and meaningful means to achieve this is by restoring Local Housing Allowance to a level that covers the lowest 30% of market rents.

However, it is increasingly clear that pushing low-income renters into the private rented sector is no longer sustainable or cost-effective, and so the Government should also commit to a significant programme of social house building over the next ten years. Modelling shows that doing so creates £2.84 of benefit per £1 invested,²⁰ and the initial cost will be more than recouped through reduced use of temporary accommodation over time.

A large programme of truly affordable housing is desperately needed to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness. As a start, government should:

- **Unlock access to the private rental sector by immediately unfreezing and restoring LHA to cover the lowest 30th percentile of market rates.**
- **Commit funding to build 90,000 social homes per year for the next ten years.**

“Supported housing should be a transitional thing – we are keeping people in it long after they need to, because of a lack of move-on options.”

Homelessness Service Provider

Every arm of government working together and playing their part

Time and time again, our members tell us that the best outcomes are achieved when services work hand in hand. We know this is as true nationally as it is locally.

Homelessness cannot be ended by one government department alone. For a significant proportion of the people supported by our members, their homelessness is about far more than housing. Experiences of trauma and multiple disadvantages throughout people's lives²¹ can lead to a network of interconnected support needs that leave people at much higher risk of losing their homes.²²

Contradictory government policies from different departments – often developed to achieve distinct aims – can even be the reason someone loses their home. For non-UK nationals with immigration restrictions for example, restrictive policies aimed at tackling immigration numbers leave often vulnerable people seeking safety in the UK without anywhere to turn. Despite some positive policy commitments on improving pathways for people being discharged from state institutions, people leaving hospitals, prisons and care are still frequently discharged without any housing to go to.^{23,24} Welfare conditions and sanctions can push people's essential expenditure beyond their income²⁵ and, counter-intuitively, can drive them further from engaging with employment.²⁶ Beyond this, delayed reforms to private renting mean that many continue to face Section 21 evictions through no fault of their own. They are threatened with homelessness at extremely short notice and may not have the funds to find alternative housing.²⁷

Furthermore, interactions with different statutory bodies from across government frequently present missed opportunities to identify and prevent homelessness before it happens. Once someone has lost their home, solutions too often focus solely on housing rather than treating this network of intersecting support needs. This leaves people at high risk of a cycle of repeat homelessness.

Modelling from PwC has shown the long-term savings of ending homelessness as being over £53.9 billion over 23 years.²⁸

£53.9b over 23 years
Saved by ending homelessness

12% of the projected savings benefit public services directly through reduced use of NHS and other public services. Departments across government have a responsibility – and an interest – in building a system which prevents and ends homelessness and responds effectively to multiple disadvantage.

To encourage the partnership, collaboration, and accountability across government that is required to truly end homelessness, we ask Government to:

- **Commit to a cross-governmental strategy to tackling homelessness, led by a new homelessness task force directed by the Cabinet Office and with representatives from the Ministry of Justice, Department for Education, Department for Work and Pensions, Department of Health and Social Care, Home Office, Ministry of Defence and Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.**
- **Ensure a homelessness impact assessment is included as a standard part of the policy development processes across all departments to ensure that new policies do not cause or increase homelessness.**

“It's cross departmental – solving homelessness by just housing isn't going to do it. Whatever policy is being considered has to be looked at through a homelessness lens.”

Homelessness Service Provider

A homelessness system that works for all

There is no single solution to end someone's homelessness. The identities and needs of people experiencing homelessness are incredibly diverse, and the best support is often that which can flexibly, holistically adapt to these on an individual basis. Specialist, person-centred services across the country can – and do – deliver amazing support every day. Despite this, the current system pushes providers towards one-size-fits-all approaches, and access to specialist support is often based more on where you live rather than what you need. The drive towards general needs services can make support inaccessible for many, unable to address the root causes that will help them leave homelessness for good.

We have a wealth of evidence on best practice when delivering support in homelessness settings, but these require bolder governance and better resourced commissioning to achieve consistently. As a baseline, we know that trauma-informed approaches are essential at all levels of the system. Government should ensure that all organisations are able to embed trauma-informed principles as a minimum standard. Delivering trauma-informed support consistently requires a shift in thinking on how support travels with an individual, with funding assigned to the person rather than the building they reside in.

The diversity of need within the homelessness sector requires an ecosystem of services working together. Day centres, emergency and supported accommodation each play a crucial role in supporting people on their journey. Providers need the resources to deliver the exceptional support we know is possible, with the freedom to develop a

menu of options to meet different needs. Specialist provisions such as women's and young people's accommodation, or housing that can flex depending on health needs or addiction recovery, can be crucial in safeguarding residents and unlocking support that works.

We also know there is a cohort of people for whom the enduring health needs caused by trauma and homelessness mean they require long-term, continuous care. The open-ended, evidence-based support of high-fidelity Housing First should therefore be available to everyone who needs it.

Ultimately, the system should be designed so that everyone can access a solution that works for them, with every case of homelessness treated as the emergency it is. To build a homelessness system that works for everyone who needs it, the next Government must:

- Ensure the system is able to deliver a diverse network of services that are accessible to everyone in need and adaptable to individual circumstances.
- Embed trauma-informed care at the centre of the national homelessness strategy and ensure the system is adequately resourced to deliver this at all stages of service delivery.
- Building on the existing Housing First pilot delivery, commit to deliver a full-scale rollout of Housing First across England.

“At the moment everyone gets shoved into the same service because it’s all that is available. NRPF, older men, young people, care leavers – they all have different needs, we need a more sophisticated, diverse offer.”

Homelessness Service Provider

Sustained investment preventing and ending homelessness – for good

We know that a well-resourced system is essential if we want to end homelessness. The world-leading success of the Everyone In pandemic response showed us what is possible when we focus funding and attention on supporting the most vulnerable. Investment is essential if we are to sustain this legacy and achieve a country free from homelessness.

The homelessness sector has seen an enormous shift in the composition of its funding in the last decade. Historically, local authorities received ring-fenced funding which enabled them to invest in homelessness services and other support provisions.²⁹ The security of ring-fenced funding meant services could receive long term contracts from local authorities which flexed to local need.

Today, services largely receive funding through housing benefit (locking support to accommodation), supplemented through short-term support contracts and other grants. This can leave providers contending with volatile market changes, reduced government spending and competing local authority budgeting priorities. After years of funding shortfalls, many services have reached crisis point as they struggle to maintain adequate support standards, while contracts fall behind increasing demand and the rising cost of delivery.

The only way we can ensure the system sustainably and efficiently delivers the high quality support that really works, is for the Government to ring-fence homelessness funding. Ring-fenced funding would enable local authorities to adequately address support needs in England. This must be a long-term, minimum five-year commitment, matched to inflation. To combat the existing model of race-to-the-bottom local authority commissioning, local services should be codesigned in partnership with VSC organisations and service users. Funding should be allocated with at least as much focus on quality as cost, with transparent agreements between commissioners and voluntary and community sector organisations about how funding decisions are made.

To create a sustainable funding model that prevents and ends homelessness for good, the next Government should:

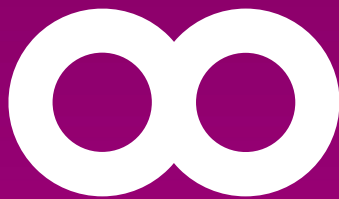
- **Conduct a review of all current outgoing expenditure from different departments to fund support related to homelessness.**
- **Replace the existing homelessness funding structure with a single ring-fenced homelessness support fund, designed to flexibly adapt to local and individual needs.**

“It needs to be a safe place to say we are providing this service, but in order to provide it well, we need this many more staff, and this much more money”

Homelessness Service Provider

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Homeless Link

What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

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