



Rough Sleeping 2026

Meet our speakers!



Keynote speakers and panellists

	<p>Rick Henderson, CEO, Homeless Link Rick is the CEO of Homeless Link and was appointed to that role in July 2012. He is a member of the new Government’s Expert Advisory Group of Homelessness and the London Mayor’s Rough Sleeping Task Group.</p>
	<p>Catherine Bennion, Deputy Director, Communities Strategy and Policy, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Catherine is Director of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. She is a senior civil servant with over a decade of experience in social policy, including rough sleeping, communities and prisons policy, with significant experience delivering in complex, high-profile policy and operational environments.</p> <p>Catherine’s key achievements to date include setting up the Rough Sleeping Initiative, a turning point in Government intervention on rough sleeping, with significant investment in interventions to support people off the streets, the ‘Everyone in’ pandemic response, which is widely recognised as a significant success and more recently developing and delivering the Government’s Pride in Place programme to support some of the UKs most disadvantaged communities.</p>
	<p>Matt Downie, Chief Executive, Crisis Matt Downie has been CEO of Crisis since 2022. He is one of the country’s leading experts on ending homelessness, serving on advisory bodies for the UK, Welsh and Scottish Governments, as well as international committees. He was awarded an MBE in the 2019 Queen’s birthdays honours, for ‘Services to tackling homelessness’.</p>

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	<p>Oliver Hilbery, Chief Executive, MEAM Ollie is Chief Executive at Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM), the national charity supporting practitioners, policymakers and people with lived experience to transform services and systems for people facing multiple disadvantage. Formed in 2009, MEAM work across sectors, across government, and with more than 50 local areas to improve responses and change lives.</p>
	<p>Mark Joyce, Senior Responsible Officer, Changing Futures Northumbria Mark Joyce is the Senior Responsible Officer for Changing Futures Northumbria. With operational and strategic experience across public and VCSE sectors in addition, homelessness, criminal justice, and youth work he has focused on developing cross-sector partnerships and relational learning-driven approaches to improving system responses for people facing multiple disadvantage.</p>
	<p>Joanna Mark-Richards, Director of People, Thames Reach Joanna has worked in Human Resources in various Housing Associations and universities including City University and Imperial College London. She was People Director at the Institution of Mechanical Engineers and now working as People Director at Thames Reach whose aim to end rough sleeping in London. She is Vice Chair at Hestia and on the Nominations Committee at St John Ambulance and the Priory of St John.</p>
	<p>Neelam Sunder, Head of Designing Out Homelessness, West Midlands Combined Authority Neelam has over 20 years' experience in the homelessness sector across voluntary and public organisations. She currently leads cross sector work addressing structural inequalities that contribute to homelessness, enhancing how services respond to people's needs and interact to ensure systems are inclusive and accessible to all, regardless of individual circumstances.</p>

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	<p>Ben Tomlin, Head of Strategic Housing, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council</p> <p>Ben Tomlin is Head of Strategic Housing & Partnerships at Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council. He leads a range of housing teams supporting residents threatened with homelessness, overseeing a range of accommodation provision including social and private rented as well as supported housing. As one of the largest Unitary councils in the country, the services deliver help to one of the largest concentrated areas of homelessness and rough sleeping demand outside of London.</p> <p>Ben is a Director of a local housing company delivering homes for people experiencing homelessness and a board member of a local youth homelessness charity.</p> <p>Previously he has worked as a commissioner of services for people experiencing or threatened with homelessness. Prior to that, a frontline practitioner delivery advice, support to residents in a similar field.</p>
	<p>Kira West, Director, Hjem til alle Alliancen</p> <p>Kira West is CEO of the Home for All Alliance, which is working to end homelessness by shifting the homelessness system towards a Housing First approach. She has many years' experience in the social sector, including working with people facing complex social exclusion, and is committed to achieving lasting change in policy and practice.</p>

Breakout session speakers

<p>Andrew Ashley, Lived Experience Volunteer, Expert Link</p> <p>Andrew Ashley is an Expert by Experience and a member of Expert Link. He took part in Homeless Link's Co-Creation groups helping to develop the Day Service Principles. Andrew also formerly volunteered with Crisis as one of their Expert by Experience and several other charities including St Mungo's. He has lived experience of</p>
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homelessness, rough sleeping and a long-term battle with mental health that has impacted him much of his life.

Iona Brown, Target Priority Group Womens Lead, St Mungo's

Iona Brown is the Target Priority Group Women's Lead within the Pan-London Navigators Team at St Mungo's. She specialises in supporting highly vulnerable female rough sleepers experiencing complex needs across borough boundaries. Iona chairs the Wanderers Forum, a multi-agency partnership coordinating responses for transient individuals who fall between local systems.

Lucy Campbell, Assistant Director of System Change (Women's Homelessness and Multiple Disadvantage) and Domestic Abuse Organisational Lead, Single Homeless Project

Lucy Campbell is Assistant Director for System Change at Single Homeless Project, and has been working in the homelessness sector for 18 years. Lucy is passionate about tackling the inequalities faced by people experiencing multiple disadvantage, through designing, testing and promoting innovative responses. Lucy has led on a number of successful initiatives, including the Women's Rough Sleeping Census, the Team Around Me approach, and a new Housing First model for couples.

Samantha Hall, Director of Housing and Environmental Health, Test Valley Borough Council

Samantha is the Director of Housing and Environmental Health at Test Valley Borough Council, with over 20 years' experience in housing and homelessness. I truly believe everyone deserves a safe home where they can thrive and be their best selves. I am passionate about prevention, compassion and partnership working to create practical solutions that keep people supported, secure and housed.

Matt Harris, Centre Manager, The Booth Centre

Andrew Ashley is an Expert by Experience and a member of Expert Link. He took part in Homeless Link's Co-Creation groups helping to develop the Day Service Principles. Andrew also formerly volunteered with Crisis as one of their Expert by Experience and several other charities including St Mungo's. He has lived experience of homelessness, rough sleeping and a long-term battle with mental health that has impacted him much of his life.

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Shirley Hilton, Rough Sleeper Resettlement Manager, Cornwall County Council

A former electronics engineer, Shirley has been working in housing and living in Cornwall since 2010 and in the Rough Sleeper team since its creation in 2018. A keen SCUBA Rebreather diver, she takes advantage of the many shipwreck sites around Cornwall, all year round.

Kas, Community Ambassador, NACCOM

Kas is volunteering as a community ambassador at NACCOM and was rough sleeping for over two years.

Gaynor Lester, Service Manager, Nacro

Gaynor has been a manager at Nacro for six years, prior to this she worked in HMP Moorland as a Delivery worker supporting prisoners with Finance, benefit and Debt, Accommodation and Employment, Education and Training. She previously worked in substance misuse prior to her employment with Nacro.

Eve McCallam, Programme Lead, Housing Justice

Eve is the Director of Housing and Environmental Health at Test Valley Borough Council, with over 20 years' experience in housing and homelessness. I truly believe everyone deserves a safe home where they can thrive and be their best selves. I am passionate about prevention, compassion and partnership working to create practical solutions that keep people supported, secure and housed.

Fraser Nicholson, Homelessness Partnerships Coordinator, BCP Council

Fraser is originally from Glasgow and started his career in the homelessness sector in 2004. After ten years working in the VCSE he moved to what is now BCP (Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole) Council, where he has worked for the last 11 years, with a passion for partnership, innovation, improvement and co-production.

Karen Ransted, Head of Housing Operations, Aster

A Chartered and Social Housing professional with extensive experience of working in frontline housing management, significantly anti-social behaviour and including; public sector, strategic planning, policy, service improvement, business case development and change management. Has a keen interest in social housing and ensuring that people in the community have the best possible home. An experienced leader of housing groups, with a proven track record in developing strategies to deliver effective outcomes.

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Sarah Reynolds, Housing, Health and Social Care Service Manager, BCP Council

Sarah is a registered Social Worker with 14 years' experience in statutory adult services. A qualified Best Interest Assessor and Practice Educator, she previously managed the Homeless Social Work Team before joining BCP housing in 2025. She is committed to staff development, safeguarding adults, and working collaboratively to develop services.

Jas Sahota, Head of Operations and Community Relations Manager, Woolwich Service Users Project

Jas is nearly 20 years into recovery from heroin addiction and now draws on his lived experience to support others on their own journeys. As Service Delivery Manager at WSUP, he is committed to helping people rebuild their lives with dignity and hope. Above all, Jas is a proud and devoted grandad.

Amy Smith, Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation Manager (Homelessness & Supported Accommodation), Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse (STADA)

Amy is the DAHA Accreditation Manager at STADA. She supports homelessness organisations to embed an effective domestic abuse response into their services - focusing on how domestic abuse intersects with multiple disadvantage. Amy has a strong knowledge of the challenges in frontline services, from her experience working in and managing homelessness and domestic abuse services.

Helen Thompson, Resettlement Advisor, Nacro

Helen is a resettlement advisor in the Departure Lounge and she has been with Nacro for 3 years. Helen started as a volunteer whilst at university and then progressed to full time employment. Helen continues her volunteering with the homeless in her own time on an evening, providing food and drink to individuals who are sleeping rough.

Jo Walby, CEO, Mustard Tree

Jo Walby is Chief Executive of Mustard Tree, one of Greater Manchester's most influential poverty prevention and homelessness charities. Since 2017, Jo has transformed the organisation into a multi-site, award-winning anchor of community support, leading services that welcomed over 116,000 visits last year and helped more than 8,383 people out of poverty.

Under Jo's leadership, Mustard Tree has expanded its training, employment and housing pathways, launched innovative programmes such as the New Welcome Hub supporting refugees, and delivered national campaigns including 'The Homeless

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Listings', which won a Clio Health Award for exposing the realities of the UK housing crisis.

Jo sits on the GM Reform Board, the Social Housing Commission and the Homelessness Prevention Action Group, where she influences regional strategy on housing, welfare, poverty and community resilience. She is a regular contributor to public discourse, appearing across the BBC and national press.

Barney Wells, Director, Enabling Assessment Service London

Barney Wells is a mental health social worker whose work has related to homelessness since the 1990s. He is executive director of Enabling Assessment Service London. He has been involved in the development of various guidance and toolkits, particularly in relation to mental capacity.

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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.

Homeless Link

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www.homeless.org.uk

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Let's End Homelessness Together



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