

# Repeat Homelessness in Brighton

Picture the Change  
April 2015

# Contents

<b>Key findings</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
Methodology	
The housing system in Brighton	
<b>Chapter 1: Homelessness in Brighton</b>	<b>8</b>
Why do people become homeless in Brighton?	
Life on the streets in Brighton	
<b>Chapter 2: Why do people come to Brighton?</b>	<b>17</b>
Diversity and acceptance	
The quality of services in Brighton	
Relationships	
Positive memories of Brighton	
Leaving prison	
<b>Chapter 3: Accommodation in Brighton</b>	<b>21</b>
Access and support to hostel accommodation	
Experiences of hostel accommodation	
Pathways out of supported accommodation	
Local connection and out of area placements	
<b>Chapter 4: Support services in Brighton</b>	<b>26</b>
Support needs	
Support received	
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>28</b>

## Published by

Homeless Link in partnership with the CAIERS group in Brighton.



# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our interviewees who gave up their time to take part in the research. We are also grateful to members of the CAIERS group in Brighton, in particular BHT First base, CRI Rough Sleepers Street Service Relocation Team and Project Anti-Freeze who were instrumental in helping us set up and conduct the interviews with service users.

All names used in the report are pseudonyms to protect participants' identities.

Homeless Link's Picture the Change programme is funded by the Lankelly Chase Foundation.

# Key findings

As part of the Picture the Change programme, Homeless Link has conducted a qualitative research project in partnership with the CAIERS group who work with people sleeping rough in Brighton. Based on 29 in-depth interviews with clients using homeless services in Brighton during August and September 2014, key findings include:

- Causes of homelessness and repeat homelessness are divided into two main areas:
  - structural which included poor and unsuitable housing, insecurity in the private rented sector, transitioning/leaving accommodation or institutions (especially prison) and loss of employment; and
  - personal reasons which included mental health issues, experience of trauma, relationship breakdown, and fleeing domestic violence or abuse.
- There is a strong pull for people coming and returning to Brighton because they consider the city to be a place of diversity and acceptance. Many people had happy memories of Brighton, which stemmed from childhood or previous relationships. While people were positive about the homelessness services available in Brighton, they were more likely to talk about how much they liked the town itself rather than its services.
- Many people faced multiple disadvantages, including mental and physical health issues, drug and alcohol misuse and experience of violence and abuse. Living on the streets often exacerbated these needs. While some people described visibly sleeping out at night, many participants - especially women - described staying out of sight and moving around because they felt vulnerable. Many had been or knew someone who had been a victim of violence and/or abuse, including robbery, intimidation and rape.
- There were mixed experiences of the Brighton and Hove Integrated Support Pathway. Some people experienced barriers when they tried to enter the Pathway and there could sometimes be a gap in the length of time between approaching the local authority for homelessness assistance and accessing accommodation. Participants talked about the positive role that outreach services and day centres played in supporting them to access the Pathway. Individual support workers were also mentioned as being especially important in helping them to navigate the Pathway.
- There were particular issues associated with having low level support needs. Some participants spoke about the difficulties associated with living in hostel accommodation while trying to work, or if they were recovering from issues with alcohol or substance misuse. Other people spoke about the negative impact that living in hostel accommodation had on their health and wellbeing.
- Barriers also existed around exiting the Pathway. People found it difficult to access social or private rented accommodation. The lack of social housing in Brighton meant that for most people the only option was the private rented sector.
- However, high rents, a lack of landlords willing to rent to people on Housing Benefit and difficulties accessing rent deposit or bond schemes made it difficult for people to move on from supported

accommodation in the PRS.

- Although this finding clearly reflected the experience of participants, it should be noted that the effect of the cost of housing in Brighton is especially acute. Recent data provided by Centre for Cities suggests that Brighton is the fourth most expensive place to buy a home in the UK, with house costs 10.9 times the city's average salary.<sup>1</sup>
- There was a lack of understanding about local connection policies in Brighton. Many people travelled back to Brighton on the basis that they had previously held a local connection, only to find out that they were no longer eligible.
- Some of those who had been helped to relocate to a new area, either by the local authority or support services, had returned to Brighton because they had been unable to access the support they needed there. For others, the pull of Brighton meant that they were prepared to remain homeless if this meant remaining local to the area.
- Support needs and access to support varied. Mental health issues were commonly spoken about, but access to mental health services was frequently cited as difficult by participants. Day centres and outreach teams provided important services for people who were rough sleeping. These included sexual health clinics, opticians, doctors, and welfare benefits advice, as well as advocacy to access accommodation.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/housing-network/gallery/2014/nov/04/the-10-most-unaffordable-places-to-live-in-the-uk-in-pictures>

# Introduction

## Background

Picture the Change is a two year programme, funded by Lankelly Chase, designed to help homelessness organisations collect, understand and use compelling evidence to ensure the need and the impact of their work is understood locally and internally. One of the objectives of Picture the Change is to introduce the idea of systems change.

While homelessness can represent an isolated need, more often than not it will be symptomatic of a much wider set of issues, including mental ill-health, substance misuse and contact with the criminal justice system. Under the current support system, each of these areas has their own set of services and different pathways to support. This can make it difficult for people with multiple needs to access the full range of services they require, especially when these services come from different areas of the support system. Systems change aims to challenge this form of siloed working and reduce the complexities involved in supporting people who face severe and multiple disadvantage, by encouraging agencies to work together more cohesively. This involves recording and sharing different types of data, which can then be used to ensure that services are commissioned, and resources shared, more effectively.

Our work in the second year of the programme is focused on softer outcomes and how data is presented and visualised. As part of this we are working with homelessness agencies to support them to collect and analyse qualitative data, which can then be used to advocate for systems change or champion new services to meet the needs of their clients. As part of this project, we are working with a co-ordinated group of services in Brighton, the Coordinated Agency Interventions to End Rough Sleeping (CAIERS), who work with people sleeping rough. The organisations who took part in the research are BHT, First Base day Centre, Project Anti-Freeze and CRI Rough Sleepers Street Service Relocation Team.

The CAIERS group already collect a number of hard outcomes on the people they support, and they share information on the progress they make with their clients via a database. However, the group has become increasingly aware that people were returning to their services and sleeping rough again after being settled in permanent and semi-permanent accommodation. As a result, they were keen to explore the underlying reasons for repeat homelessness in Brighton and also why people who are placed out of area keep returning to Brighton. This information could then be used to feed in and develop their service delivery and how they work with the local authority and accommodation providers. Based on these requirements, the aims of the research conducted in Brighton were:

- To understand why people in Brighton have become homeless again in the past 12 months after being accommodated.
- To understand why people without a local connection who were accommodated outside of Brighton returned to the city.
- Explore attitudes towards the services they are using in Brighton and their expectations about accommodation in the future.

This report presents the findings from 29 qualitative interviews conducted during August and September. It looks at the housing system in Brighton and how the people who took part in the research navigated this, including the barrier to accessing accommodation. The report examines the causes of homelessness among

the participants and what life is like being homeless in Brighton. It finally looks at the support needs of the people we interviewed and their use and access to support services.

## Background

The aim of the project is to understand more about the street homeless community in Brighton, and more specifically, why repeat homelessness occurs among those that have been settled to into permanent and semi-permanent accommodation. The research aims to capture the experiences of those people who are using day centres and come into contact with Brighton's rough sleeping outreach team. The study is qualitative in order to focus on people's specific experiences, and give voice to those experiences. The person centred approach to the research provides an in-depth insight into how people feel, decisions that they have made, the understanding that they have of support services and their experiences of street homelessness in Brighton. The tools used to collect this information were a semi-structured topic guide and a housing history chart to assist the interviewer to talk through the past 12 months with the participant.

We have conducted the research in partnership with three organisations that are part of the Brighton CAIERS group – First Base, CRI and Project Anti-Freeze. This has involved training support workers to carry out qualitative interviews to supplement those that have been made by Homeless Link staff. One of the wider aims of Picture the Change is to equip voluntary sector homelessness agencies to be better able to carry out their own methods of gathering evidence, demonstrating their impact and understanding the needs of their client group.

Out of the 29 interviews that were carried out, 10 were conducted by staff in the three agencies taking part in the research. All aspects of the planning and development were conducted jointly by Homeless Link and the CAIERS group.

Interviews were mainly carried out in private rooms in the day centres involved, but for those participants that were accessed through outreach teams some of these were conducted in cafes. Fieldwork took place between August and September 2014. Participants were originally selected by each organisation to take part in the research on the basis of whether they had experienced repeat homelessness in the past 12 months. However, as we continued with recruitment, we were unable to conduct enough interviews with this cohort and a wider group of people who were currently rough sleeping, and had experienced repeat homelessness over a longer period of time, were included in the sample.

The table below shows a breakdown of who was included in the interview:

Demographics	Number of people
CRI	9
BHT First Base	15
Project Antifreeze	4
Clock Tower Sanctuary (one interview was carried out before they dropped out due to a lack of resources)	1
Male	21
Female	8
16 - 25	4
26 – 35	4

36 – 45	9
46 and over	7
Age not recorded	5

The sample is not intended to be representative of the homeless population in Brighton. Instead, recruitment was based on people selected by services who met the criteria to be interviewed at a specific point in time. The CAIERS group were particularly interested in the experiences of women who sleep rough, so recruitment did involve some targeting of this group.

## The Housing System in Brighton

Brighton & Hove currently operates an Integrated Support Pathway to help people find accommodation, which reflects their differing levels of need. The diagram overleaf provides an overview of the services, which are available to people who become single homeless and those who sleep rough. It includes services commissioned by the local authority, as well as services that are commissioned by other agencies and those funded through charitable donations. The Integrated Support Pathway has been designed so that people can enter the pathway at different stages. They do not necessarily have to begin at the bottom and work their way to the top in a linear fashion. By contrast, the local authority will attempt to place people according to the severity of their support needs. The Pathway is, therefore, open both to people who are owed a full statutory duty and those who have been found to be homeless, but are not considered to be in priority need of assistance.

The research we have conducted through the qualitative interviews has looked at the experiences of individuals and support services in navigating the Integrated Support Pathway.

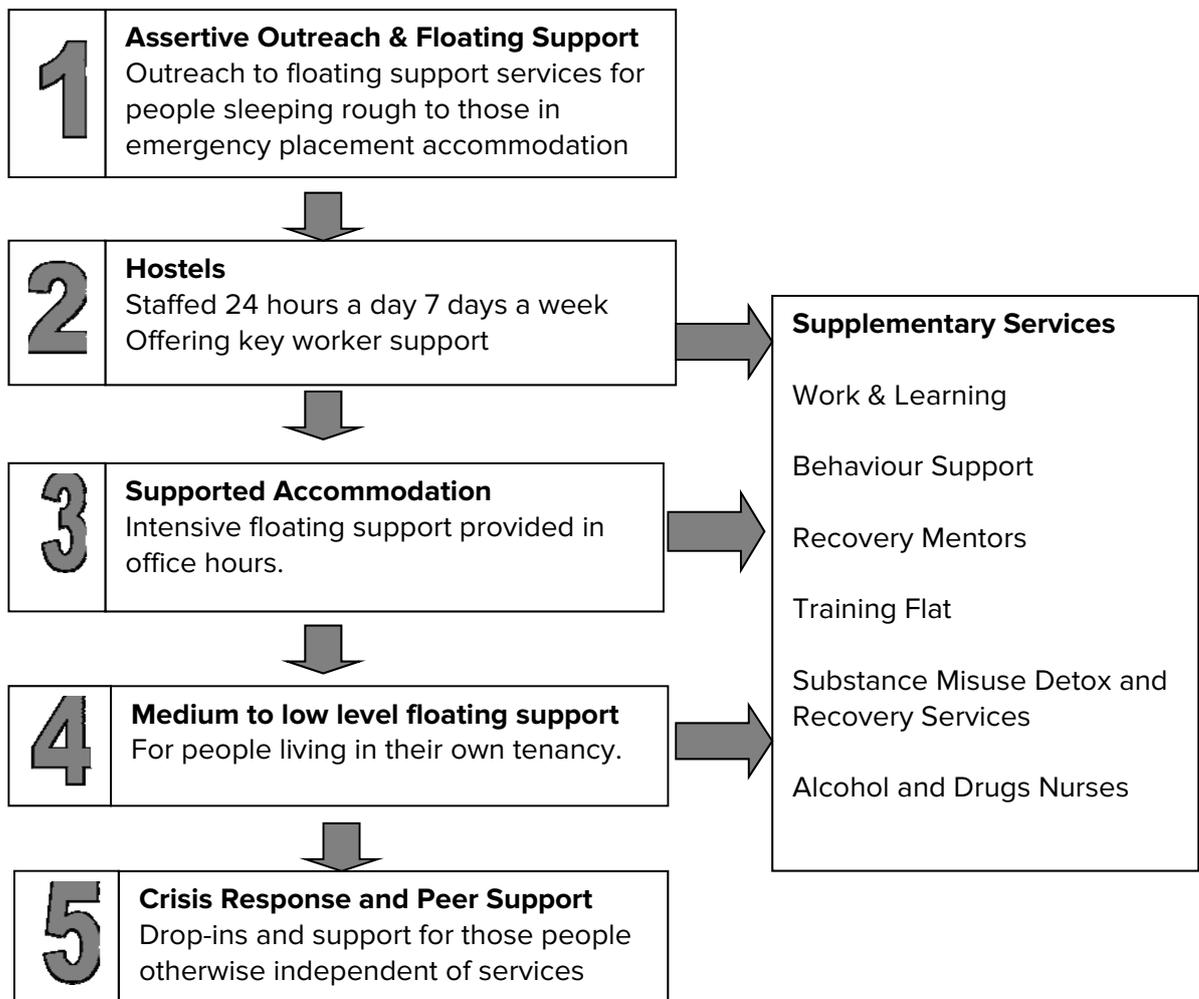


Figure 1: Brighton and Hove integrated support pathway

# Chapter 1: Homelessness in Brighton

## 1.1 Why do people become homeless in Brighton?

The table below represents an overview of the main causes and triggers of homelessness among participants in the study. However, as numerous other studies have noted, neither structural nor personal/individual causes are mutually exclusive. The causes of homelessness are complex, with participants invariably citing some combination of the two. This complexity was reflected by one participant who after losing his job experienced what he described as a “mental breakdown”. Around the same time, his relationship with his partner also broke down and he was forced to leave the home they shared, resulting in an ongoing period of homelessness.

Structural	Personal/individual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Transitioning/leaving accommodation or institutions</li><li>• Poor or unsuitable housing</li><li>• Insecurity in the private rented sector</li><li>• Loss of employment</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mental health</li><li>• Trauma</li><li>• Relationship breakdown</li><li>• Fleeing domestic violence or abuse</li></ul>

## Personal causes of homelessness

### Mental Health

Many people taking part in the research discussed mental health issues, particularly depression. Those suffering from poor mental health spoke of their inability to access appropriate support, or their difficulties in taking up the help when it was on offer. For some, an undiagnosed or untreated mental health problem was the root cause of their homelessness:

*“I don’t think I’m particularly that well sometimes and able to deal with certain situations. Do you know what I mean? I can only put it to that cos it’s not necessarily drugs, it’s not necessarily drink, it’s just something in me that kind of when things go wrong, it goes wrong, it seems to go really badly wrong... you kind of start believing, well this is what I deserve I deserve to be on the streets, I deserve to be, you know, alienated from society.”*

One female participant had been evicted from her hostel because she had stopped engaging, attributing this to feelings of depression and a general lack of motivation. She described how she was shocked by the decision to evict her, rather than trying to understand the root causes of her problem, specifically her mental health issues and her difficulties in accessing the appropriate support:

*I: “So what else was going on for you to miss the appointments? You mentioned using drugs.”*

*P: “Erm, depression, depression, really. Yeah, I think that is the main factor. Feeling shit, alone.”*

## Trauma

Several people talked about trauma, particularly in childhood, as a contributing factor in their homelessness. Specific episodes of trauma were also linked to wider feeling of depression and specific mental health issues. This included abuse and neglect, bereavement (especially the death of a parent at a young age), growing up in care or living with parents who had substance misuse issues.

*“The children’s home well I was just running away from them, cos you know, two sexual attempts of abuse on my life, do you know what I mean, from them, as well as being traumatised, you know my Mum and Dad went to court, I’ve just saw nothing but trauma, I can ’t even honestly put my hand on my heart and say one good thing about my youth, not one good thing.”*

*“I had a hard time with my mum. She used to hit me a lot when I was growing up. Um, she used to drink a lot, well she still does drink a lot.”*

In many cases, participants who had experienced trauma in their childhood, or as young adults, discussed how a lack of support at the time had developed into an issue with drinking or drug use. One participant talked to us about how his mum had died of cancer when they were 10 years old, only for his father to remarry quickly. The impact of his mother’s death and having a new stepmother meant that he would stay out late and not go home. He spoke about how this had progressed into staying temporarily with friends, and eventually to sleeping rough and drug use:

*“Before I knew it my mates were working and I wasn’t doing anything and I wouldn’t go back home. Yeah it was progressing and starting using drugs and it just distanced me from the rest of my family. I just ended up staying on the streets and that is how it went, it still like throws me today how it happened.”*

Other people had experienced trauma in their adult life, which had led to their homelessness. Deaths of children, rape or domestic abuse had been experienced by research participants. One participant talked about how after the death of her son when he was 15 months old she began to drink heavily. This had led to social services taking away her other child and, a little later, to the loss of her two bedroom home.

## Relationship breakdown

Relationship breakdown was a key reason for people losing, leaving or fleeing from their accommodation. Difficulty in maintaining a relationship was particularly common among male participants. For the female interviewees often the relationships they entered into were not a positive influence on their lives and led to abuse or controlling behaviour:

*“I decided to leave because things just weren’t happening, we were arguing too much, towards the end of the relationship and me coming from a broken home anyway, somebody had to make a decision, now it was either to try and salvage the relationship, which was possible, it was definitely possible, but I think it just, it fizzled out.”*

Relationship breakdown also featured as a reason why people moved out of area and ended up in Brighton. One participant talked about how he had moved from Bournemouth to Brighton in order to avoid bumping into his ex-partner, with whom he shared a turbulent relationship.

## Fleeing domestic violence or abuse

Fleeing domestic violence was particularly noticeable among the women who took part in the research. Participants spoke about how sexual and physical violence, as well as emotional and mental abuse, had led to them becoming homeless.

*“I had a house, with a boyfriend, he was mentally abusing me and partially sexually [abusing me], horrible things like waking up in the night and my trousers round my ankles, things like that but I got away from it all and started living my life again...and that’s why I came to Brighton, I ran from that.”*

Violent behaviour that had caused damage to property also meant that some people became homeless. One person spoke about how a family member of his ex-girlfriend was persistently threatening him and broke into his property by kicking the door down. He refused to replace the door and eventually the landlord evicted him from the property as a result of the damage.

## Structural causes of homelessness

### Transitioning/leaving accommodation or institutions

For many of our participants, moving or leaving services or supported accommodation was a transition point that resulted in homelessness. Often this was down to inappropriate referrals or assessments, which failed to identify their full range of support needs. One person spoke of how this had meant that they were asked to leave their accommodation before they felt ready:

*“I was taken in for exactly 28 days, and those 28 days from the point of view of me and the staff were very positive days. But they just kicked me out of that situation too soon, you know, and I was beginning to pick myself up again and they were trying to move me on. I just wasn’t ready for it.”*

Some participants talked about the need to be able to move in and out of different stages of the Integrated Support Pathway, depending on their circumstance. This inability to move back along the Pathway, if something went wrong with their progress, was identified as a trigger point for ending up back on the streets.

A lot of participants had spent some time in prison and this prompted a difficult transition period. Many people struggled to access accommodation before release, resulting in homelessness once they left prison:

*I: “Has it been difficult for you having to wait until you get out of jail before you make arrangements?”*

*P: “Yeah, it is really, it is really, they should put something in line for when you land so you’re not just straight back where you started”.*

Access to housing advice and support in prison was not described as constructive by some participants. One person spoke about how he was told the only option was to move back in with his family, from whom he was estranged. As a consequence, he was street homeless for the first two weeks after leaving prison:

*“I just came out and it was my first night which I spent down on the sea front. I spent about ten, eighteen days on the streets, and just obviously trying to find my way and then just by sheer sort of determination I got a crisis loan in. I had some prison money when I come out. When you work in prison, you got a prison bank account. I had a couple of hundred quid so I was able, fortunately, to go out and find a private rented. But didn’t last long and turned into a bit of a nightmare. So there was not really much support.”*

Finding appropriate accommodation after leaving care also caused problems for certain participants:

*“My homelessness mainly stemmed from when I was younger. I left care when I was 16 and I moved into bedsits then went from there to London then ended up homeless for years from 16 / 17 until the present day [participant is now 37] when they gave me Buckingham Row, my first flat - and then I kept that for two and a half years.”*

### Poor and/or unsuitable accommodation

Some participants spoke about leaving or abandoning accommodation they felt was unsuitable. This was both in terms of the condition of the property and their general living environment. Several participants expressed concerns over the use of hostel accommodation. These concerns were often linked to the perceived behaviour of other residents and the high frequency of substance misuse in hostels. Security was also cited as an issue in regard to the safety of personal belongings:

*“The people [at the hostel] weren’t particularly nice, the staff weren’t friendly. My room never locked and in my room were all my most important things like my make-up and perfumes and nice shoes, nice clothes but my phone as well. I wanted them to change the locks and make sure it locked so that when I left the room it was all safe cos I was hiding things away in the room. Anyway I came back one day and, pretty much everything had gone apart from a few items of clothing and I just thought to myself I can’t, I just can’t stay here, I’d rather just be walking about, the weather wasn’t too bad at the time and I ended up just leaving with my bag, walking about, not really knowing what I was doing, probably drinking too much at the same time cos of everything that had just happened.”*

### Insecurity in the private rented sector

There were also characteristics of the private rented housing market that caused homelessness among participants. A lot of the issues identified are not unique to Brighton and affect many parts of London and the South East. In addition to problems of affordability and access, the behaviour of certain landlords in refusing to accept tenants claiming Housing Benefit was also identified as a significant barrier to people trying to access the private rented accommodation:

*“As I say the landlord wouldn’t accept housing benefit, just wanted working tenants so I just like ended up on the street basically.”*

How the lower ended of the private rented sector operated also raised a number of issues. One person spoke about being evicted for no reason from private rented housing:

*“I was housed for a short amount of time then I was evicted by an unscrupulous landlord which I ended up spending a certain amount of time on the streets then I went on the streets again, which is the bigger amount of time.”*

Another participant was living in a property where the deposits were passed from one tenant to another, rather than through an official tenancy deposit scheme. The arrears accumulated from other residents meant the landlord did not give the deposit back:

*“The landlord got, obviously, got quite upset about that when it came to the point of me trying to get my deposit back he said that we’re all responsible so whatever deposit you had is going to get swallowed up by, so I ended up with absolutely no money, no deposit and basically ungraciously kicked out onto the street with nothing.”*

## Case study one: Adele

### Women’s experience of street homelessness

Adele, 24 grew up in an abusive household and had already experienced homelessness several times in her life before becoming street homeless earlier this year. She fled the home she rented with her violent ex-partner who beat her “black and blue daily” and began sleeping in a tent in a park with a new partner. Adele described sleeping rough as:

*“Horrible, I felt alone, felt depressed, I felt like no one gave a crap about me to be honest. I wouldn’t have been able to do it [sleeping rough on my own] I would have ended up in hospital because I would have hurt myself.”*

After sleeping rough Adele was able to return to her family home to live with her father but was asked to leave again after an argument. She says her family have disowned her and she spoke about her partner as being her only family now.

This led to another short period of rough sleeping before she was helped by the Rough Sleepers Team to access a backpackers hostel. She was then referred into the same hostel accommodation as her current partner. However, he was recently evicted and now sleeps across the road from the hostel.

Adele suffers from severe depression and told us she has been having suicidal thoughts:

*“At the moment I’ve got depression, I’m having suicidal thoughts, but I’m getting help with what I need through support work and stuff like that as well. I’ll be starting to go to different organisations that can help me with it so I’m able to cope in the future.”*

She values the help she receives from homelessness services in Brighton and in particular the female support workers in the hostel, who have provided support and helped her to access services elsewhere.

*“They’ve been great, my concentration to get my house sorted out and for me to be a better person in life.”*

However, she also feels that the help she receives from homelessness services is more favourable towards men than women.

*“I see men getting more help with getting housed, getting more priority than women so it just kind of stresses me out a lot more. Knowing that there’s few more women that I’ve seen recently becoming on the streets, I don’t know how they can cope to be honest. Personally I’ve found it cope-able due to me having my partner, if I didn’t have my partner then I wouldn’t be able to do it.”*

## 1.2 Life on the streets in Brighton

The study also provided a window into homelessness and street-life in Brighton. The interviews revealed a snapshot of how people cope and adapt to the problems they face when experiencing rough sleeping. A significant number of the participants faced multiple disadvantages. In addition to their homelessness, they also spoke about drug and alcohol misuse, mental health issues and experiences of violence and abuse. Living on the streets in many cases exacerbated these complex needs.

### Visible and hidden homelessness

The research revealed that homelessness in Brighton takes on different forms and much of it is hidden from view. More than half of the people we spoke to were currently street homeless and for some of our participants this meant sleeping rough in a traditional way, such as bedding down with a sleeping bag on a park bench.

*“At the moment I’m sleeping, like, out on the street, sleeping on the beach by the bandstand.”*

*“Well, I’ve been sleeping at the Peace statue right, since I been down here, and I’ve had no trouble, no one’s bothered me, it’s lovely and calm.”*

However, many of our other participants would have been less visible. Some of the people we spoke to split their time between sleeping out and sofa surfing, while others were managing to sofa surf all the time.

*“I’ve got a friend who puts me up. I do sleep out maybe two days a week.”*

*“I’m actually staying at, sometimes at a friend’s, sometimes sleeping rough.”*

Several other people we spoke to were sleeping out in tents and would have only been visible to those who knew where to look. Tents seemed to be a common choice for couples who were sleeping rough together:

*“So, me and my girl, my [participant’s girlfriends name] we got the tent. But everywhere we put the tent - we had to move.”*

Several participants had spent time living in insecure or unsafe accommodation such as backpacker's hostels or in squats and we interviewed one person who was sleeping in a camper van that was parked on a friend's drive. One respondent told us he was involved in street based sex work at night, which meant he wasn't always rough sleeping.

Women who had slept rough felt particularly vulnerable and would try and stay out of sight when sleeping out alone:

*“Cos I used to think oh, I'll sleep in a car park, it's better than being in a doorway because it's more out of the way and then sometimes it's maybe not, because you're out of the way if something happened people can't see.”*

*“Yeah, intimidating is the main word I would say, very intimidating, maybe naive and vulnerable but I would sleep anywhere, I wouldn't know. There's no rule book to say where you should go and what you should do so you end up just sort of following other peoples lead or if I was on my own one night I would sort of go to somewhere where I thought would be safe that wasn't necessarily the right place to be, you know, probably the worst of all.”*

We found that another common feature of rough sleeping for women was moving around, rather than staying in the same spot and this adds to the difficulty of identifying women who sleep rough.

*“You know, there was certain doorway or alleyway or somewhere where you'd find that was safe to sleep and that would be your home for a night or two and then you'd go back there a few weeks later so it wasn't obvious that you were, you know living there basically.”*

## The impact of rough sleeping on health and wellbeing

Our research also revealed what people were feeling when they were sleeping rough. Many participants talked about how it made them feel stressed and anxious.

*“It was like hell, really hard to deal with actually. Feeling like I had no place to be, you know, nowhere to go. It was a really hopeless feeling actually.”*

*“Horrible, I felt alone, felt depressed, I felt like no one gave a crap about me to be honest.”*

*“The depression also is partially also down to the fact that, the day to day struggle of being on the streets and living on the streets.”*

Linked to anxiety and depression, some people felt degraded by their experiences:

*“Being on the streets, you do feel like a piece of dirt, literally, you are looked upon, frowned upon, you know, literally, spat upon, it's not a nice place to be.”*

Women also talked about receiving unwanted attention while on the streets. They felt particularly isolated and described how difficult it could be to talk to other woman about their experiences.

*“I only saw one or two other women, in [name of homeless service] very, very rare, very rare, one or two and then there was me, so of course. Any kind of woman walking around at that sort of situation is gonna get that sort of, attention.”*

These feelings of stress and instability, accompanied by a loss of self-respect were also experienced by the men we spoken to:

*“One of the various things about homelessness is the instability. That’s what really stresses, not knowing what you’re going to be doing in an hours’ time let alone tomorrow. Trying to get some organisation and being able to commit yourself to anything is a really difficult thing to do, because you don’t know what’s happening next.”*

*“In the past, that I walked past people on the street and, and looked down on them, in the past. And now I ’m thinking, god, that’s where I am and that’s a place I never thought I’d be. You know and when you’re walking around in the same clothes, and you’re dirty and you can’t afford to go and buy yourself a sandwich or a cup of coffee. I used to have a successful career, and I’ve lost all that and I’ve lost all self-respect at the moment and I don’t like that.”*

A small minority described being homeless as a positive experience. Despite the evident dangers, street homelessness was a liberating experience. One of our participants described his experience as “a weight off my shoulders” and how it had given him a fresh perspective on life. However, even when people described the more positive elements of life on the streets, it was hard to escape the presence of a more sinister undertone:

*“The real crunch for me really was when a pal of mine was murdered on the seafront, that kind of ended that kind of little romantic kind of view of being out, you know, sleeping under the stars.”*

## **Violence and abuse**

As well as being a cause of homelessness, our research found that violence is a key feature of street life in Brighton. Nearly all our participants have been affected directly or indirectly by violence and abuse while sleeping on the streets. We spoke to people who had been both victims and perpetrators of violence and abuse and we heard about robbery, beatings, murder, rape, domestic abuse, abuse from the public, intimidation, threats of violence, theft of their property and violence against their property.

*“I’ve had drink poured over me, I’ve been punched and kicked while I’ve been asleep.”*

*“I’ve had all my items, my property pinched, my rucksack, my sleeping bag all my ID.”*

Unsurprisingly, people were clearly anxious about their safety when they were sleeping rough:

*I: “What is it that worries you about being on the street?”*

*P: “Just in case I get my head kicked in or something”.*

The fear of violence featured highly in people’s decisions about where they went at different points of the day. One person told us that he felt unsafe sleeping out so he liked to keep on the move at night and sleep during the day in places like libraries and day centres. Another noticeable feature of street homelessness in Brighton was how people would group together or get into pairs, as friends or couples, often as a response to the dangers they perceived about street life in Brighton.

*“When you’re with the homeless scene you tend to meet certain people and you buddy up, bit like being in prison or whatever, you school, you kind of buddy up with alright people and you feel a little bit safer in that respect because at the end of the day sleeping in the streets is a dangerous occupation, even in Brighton.”*

This survival tactic didn’t always keep people safe. After one of our female participants formed a friendship with a man who was sleeping rough, she was seriously assaulted by him and ended up in hospital. Sleeping in tents or out of the way places didn’t always guarantee safety either. One of our participants talked about having his tent trashed and another talked about being involved in a squat fight that resulted in her having to sleep out in a tent.

## **Begging, criminality and street work**

When we began our research, the services involved expected us to find significant numbers of people who were involved in begging. Although we did find people engaged in begging, we found far fewer than was expected. At the most severe end of the informal employment scale, we interviewed a man who was street sex working to get money. Many of those who were involved in informal work or begging talked about their motivation in terms of getting by without benefits, or surviving when their benefits had been sanctioned.

*“I have to go out penniless, so at the moment as soon as I leave here, I’ve now got to try and present myself to four or five people on the streets hoping I’ve chosen the right one to talk to so I can end up with some money in my pocket and that’s basically been my whole, my preoccupation every afternoon and so by the time I’ve finished the afternoon I’ve got enough money to see me through the night.”*

As we will see in the next chapter begging and criminality did not feature as a reason for coming to Brighton. While some participants had a perception that this was motivation for others, it was not cited as a reason for the people we spoke to.

## **Use of drugs & alcohol**

A significant number of our participants had problems with substance misuse, crack and heroin in particular. An emerging issue and one which was spoken about quite frequently among participants was the use of legal highs. One person talked about going to hospital eleven times after overdosing on legal highs while living in hostel accommodation. Interestingly, people’s attitudes differed towards legal highs. For some, it was a legitimate replacement for illegal drugs and for others it was having a disruptive influence.

*“It’s not great that everyone’s smoking that legal highs now.”*

*“I’ve done a bit of speed, in my past days and I’ve done a bit of coke but I’ve never done anything hard, I don’t really like alcohol and I don’t smoke anything now, I just do legal highs, so it’s a drug but it’s a legal drug.”*

There was also discussion about the inevitability of turning to drugs and/or alcohol while sleeping rough; that living on the streets could only lead to worse things:

*“If you leave someone who’s sane headed on the streets to survive constantly, yeah, he’s sooner or later, not everyone does, but sooner or later they’re either gonna get some problems, either with drink or drugs cos you’re hanging around with the wrong people and you’re loitering all day and you will get messed up. Either end up committing crime or messed up in the head.”*

# Chapter 2: Why do people come to Brighton?

Brighton continues to be a draw for people experiencing homelessness from across the country. One of the objectives of our research was to understand why people experiencing homelessness, who aren't from Brighton, come to the city – and why they return to Brighton after being relocated or leaving of their own accord. Our questions explored people's motivations, as well as what they like about Brighton itself. Five main themes emerged from our interviews:

- Diversity and acceptance
- The quality of homelessness services
- Relationships – familial and other
- Positive memories of Brighton
- Leaving the local prison

## 2.1 Diversity and acceptance

One of the key themes to emerge from our interviews was the value that participants placed on Brighton as a place of diversity and acceptance.

*“I love this place because there's so many people from other countries come here, it's not really England. England in many ways depresses me a bit really. I feel like it's in England but it's not England really. It's very, very international.”*

One person specifically said he came to Brighton because he felt he would find more acceptance and safety being gay and homeless:

*“I just thought, it's a warm and open city, I feel safer. Sometimes, because I'm only small and on the street, so I feel vulnerable anyway. So I just am more safe probably down here. That's one of the main reasons.”*

Interestingly, our participants also spoke about Brighton holding appeal as a place where cultural opportunities are available, something not often considered as being a factor:

*“It's got a lot of interest for everybody really, plenty of restaurants, clubbing, theatre, you know whatever you want. You know you can't be bored in a place like this.”*

*“It's just, it's got a lovely feel to it, it's friendly, it's got so many arts and crafty things going on, which is my area and I just feel like I'm me here.”*

As a result, participants were often determined to stay in Brighton, even after they had been homeless or suffered other poor experiences. One woman who had been attacked by a friend whilst sleeping rough in Brighton had no intention to leave.

*“I don’t want to leave Brighton at all, I’m not gonna let these bad things effect my future because I’ve always wanted to live here, I’m gonna live here, come hell or high water.”*

*“Well I presume they’re gonna to do or they’re gonna tell me I gotta go back up to Lincolnshire or whatever. I mean, but, I’m not gonna go. Even if I have to go back on my bench where I was I’ll be back there I don’t mind, I’ll sleep out there.”*

One interviewee who was about to be relocated having accepted a place in an accommodation project in a different part of the country was already planning his return to Brighton.

*“I’m going to save up as much as I can cos they give you a wage, in [name of accommodation project], they take six pound out of your money and they put that away and when you leave, you’ve got money behind ya, I’ll probably come back and get a flat down here cos I like Brighton. But I’d make sure I get a flat first.”*

## 2.2 The quality of services for people experiencing homelessness

As an urban centre surrounded by rural areas, the amount of support services available to people who are homeless in Brighton is often seen as a big draw for people sleeping rough. By contrast, we found that people rarely talked about the quality of services on offer when listing the reasons why they were keen to move to Brighton. However, as with our participants’ responses around begging, there was a perception that this may have played a role for others in deciding to relocate to Brighton.

*“That’s another reason people flock down here because of, because of what’s available help-wise, that’s why people are coming down here because if you give ‘em food people are going to turn up. I’ve heard that a million times off people, you know.”*

Despite the presence of support services not playing a central role in people’s decision to come to Brighton initially, participants were often very positive about the support they had received.

*“Maybe the services as well. They feel more helpful than anywhere else I’ve been maybe, you know, cos I did get a lot of help when I first came here ... it probably did to be honest, so yeah, you know probably services ... maybe because there was more services here than somewhere else where I’ve been. So I’ve been in a lot of places where there’s been nothing, you know, so, maybe that’s it, but I couldn’t give you a definitive answer to be honest.”*

This perhaps goes some way to explaining why the quality of services was likely to play a more significant role in people’s decision to return to Brighton after a period away. For example, one participant had been homeless in Brighton five years earlier and had received help to relocate. Once he became homeless again, he travelled back to Brighton as he thought it would be more likely that he would receive help there.

*I: “What was it you were hoping for by coming back to Brighton?”*

*P: “I don’t know really, I, possibly, advice and see what, if they could do anything else for me, which they have done, they’ve really helped me a lot.”*

## 2.3 Relationships

Some participants came to Brighton due to existing relationships. This was either because a partner was already living in Brighton or they had followed a partner who wanted to move here:

*“I don’t know, I just, my ex made an ultimatum one night – come to Brighton, [so I] came to Brighton stayed a couple of years but it was too close to London so then I just went out to Blackpool and then come back down here couple of years later and now I’ve been here seven years, that’s it.”*

Some participants already had family in the area and this provided them with either a local connection or support. Family ties included parents, siblings and/or a child from a previous partner.

*“Yes, also I’ve got family here as well, I’ve got a brother who’s here as well.”*

For others, relationship breakdown and fleeing domestic abuse was a key factor:

*“I didn’t want to go back to [name of town] where we’re both originally from I knew that’s where he was going to go back to. He caused me a lot of problems in [name of town] so I didn’t want to stay there and I had a few friends here so I come over this way. I liked it here so I stayed here and tried to make something of it.”*

## 2.4 Positive memories of Brighton

Another significant theme which emerged was that in difficult times people are drawn to Brighton because of happy memories, often from childhood visits or linked to past relationships with family or partners.

*“Brighton is the only place I’ve ever been happy in my life. You know every time I come down this place it doesn’t matter what situation I’m in. This place is where my grandparents were born, my parents brought me down here every summer. I, I spent ages down here as a child, I associate the place with, no matter how grim my situation, I associate Brighton with a feeling of wellbeing. It’s a strange thing I may be homeless on the street, roaming the streets of Brighton but I still don’t feel bad about the place.”*

*“I come to Brighton because obviously, when I used to run away from home a lot I used to come here.”*

Liking Brighton as a city to live in reflected a lot of the reasons that would be expected if the research was conducted with the non-homeless population; for example people spoke about it being a nice holiday destination, having good restaurants, the people being friendly, the wide range of cultural activities available.

Significantly, many of the reasons offered by participants for liking Brighton reflect views which we would expect to find among the general population, which may challenge some of the existing assumptions about why people choose to come to Brighton. For example, people spoke about the city as being a nice holiday destination, having good restaurants, the people being friendly and the presence of a range of cultural activities.

*“It’s like so many people looking for property you know and it seems to me that it, you know, Brighton is a Mecca and people are drawn here. They come here it’s like you know, it’s like to the homeless sort of fraternity. Brighton is the sort of destination and I know that for a fact because I’ve, people come from all over the country and it’s like Brighton, Brighton, Brighton.”*

## 2.5 Leaving the local prison

A number of our participants said that they came to Brighton after leaving nearby Lewes Prison. Despite the need for arrangements to be made before their release, several of the participants had not received any support regarding accommodation and had ended up on the streets.

*“I came to Brighton in September 2011, I was prison in Lewes, I came out of prison, obviously I’d lost my home, I’d lost everything that I’d had, so I came to Brighton because it was the nearest place to come to.”*

### Case study two: David

#### Repeat homelessness and leaving the prison system

David, is 37 and was brought up in the care system. He feels that his homelessness is mainly due to when he was younger. At 16 he left care and moved into a bedsit, from there he went to London and became homeless from the age of 17 until now.

He has been homeless in Brighton twice this year. Both periods of homelessness were as a result of being released from prison with no accommodation to go to. He was given a fifteen month sentence for burglary and initially released on license in January. He asked for help before he was released but was told to seek help when he got out.

*“[they said] there’s nothing they can do, they just said go and see BHT and see Rough Sleepers, so that’s it.”*

Homeless on his release, David began sofa surfing and sleeping out but got into trouble again and was returned to prison after only a month. He felt that it was inevitable he would get into trouble and be returned to prison if he was on the streets.

*“I get in more trouble when I’m wandering the streets at night. If you’re hanging around all night doing nothing, you’re going to get into trouble.”*

Before he was released from prison over the summer he was advised to speak to probation when he got out. All probation were able to do was put his name on a waiting list for a hostel bed. David was told he could get help with accommodation from the Rough Sleepers Team but he was struggling to get verified by them as someone who was actually sleeping out.

*“Rough Sleepers are trying to get hold of me but they’ve got some rules that they*

*have to find you sleeping out but I can't see why if your saying you're rough sleeping, you're rough sleeping. My clothes, my blanket, that should be enough, they have to find where you are but for some people that's quite difficult if you're just chipping around all the time."*

We asked David how he was getting by for money and he told us he was doing street work, which could explain why he wasn't visible to the Rough Sleepers Team at night. David has a partner in prison who was nearing his release. David was worried about how this would impact on his own drug use.

*"My partner coming out in three weeks, I'm worried about drug use is going to go back up. I've been staying away from it for the past couple of weeks a bit."*

# Chapter 3: Accommodation in Brighton

## 3.1 Access to appropriate information

Despite the Integrated Support Pathway being open for people affected by both statutory and non-statutory homelessness, in practice those who are found not to be in priority need by the local authority are not always offered advice about alternative ways to access the Pathway. One participant spoke of their dissatisfaction with the advice they had received after being evicted from their private rented tenancy.

*I: “When you were evicted from the private rented place did you seek any support at that point?”*

*P: “How do you mean by support, you mean from the Council? I mean I went down to the Council with my eviction notice because if you make yourself intentionally homeless then you’re not helped so obviously I know all these things, so I’ve gone down there with, with the piece of paper, my eviction notice, blah, blah, blah, gave it to them, and then they just like I said the first two times, they were just like, well, almost like go away really, do you know what I mean?”*

A number of these same participants were able to gain access to the Integrated Support Pathway through the rough sleeper team and day centres. The efforts of individual key workers were highlighted as being especially important in facilitating this process.

*“It was [name of support worker] from [name of service], my keyworker that, that actually got me into [name of hostel]. So praise the Lord to him, it’s only for him I think that I got somewhere.”*

Some people experienced barriers when they tried to enter the pathway and there could sometimes be a gap in the length of time between approaching the local authority for homelessness assistance and accessing accommodation. One participant told us they had waited four months before being placed in a hostel and had been sleeping rough in this period. These hardships were a particular source of distress for female participants. One talked of the difficulties of maintaining basic standards of personal hygiene while living on the streets and the impact it had.

People reported that there was also often a significant gap between being turned away by the local authority and accessing support through a day centre or via the local outreach team. One participant told us that they had been forced to wait for four months before being placed in a hostel by services and that they had been sleeping rough in the interim.

These gaps in support were a regular cause of unnecessary hardship for people and for women sleeping rough in particular.

*“Sometimes you get caught short and you have to go, like, behind a tree and it’s not pleasant at all. Some people don’t clean it up, but I did clean my mess up. And it’s not nice for a woman at all. Especially on their monthly, but to have to do that in the first*

*place it's not nice ... Both me and [name of partner] had to miss a couple of our contact visits with our children because we had nowhere to wash and we had nowhere to wash our clothes and we didn't have clean clothing."*

## 3.2 The banding system

The banding system used by the Integrated Support Pathway also created some problems for people whose needs did not fit easily into one category or the other.

*"It's very difficult when you don't have a lot of issues to actually find somewhere where you can get a placement. That's what I found because I didn't fit into this category. I was too old to go down the YMCA, I was too this and too that, so it was a, it was kind of like a waiting game to find somewhere where there would be, would kind of accept me really."*

This proved a particular problem for those with lower levels of support need. Many of our participants had found themselves in a position where their needs were not severe enough to enter the Integrated Support Pathway at Bands 1, 2 or 3, yet they were unable to access Bands 4 or 5 because they did not quite fit the required criteria.

*"I've been clean for nine years and I'm coming to ask for help in some respects and been having the door shut on me, do you know what I mean? Which I find very, very strange that somebody that can do them things and make himself, you know, heal himself, but when it comes to ask for help because you don't have a drink, a drug problem, the doors closed on you. You fill out the forms, have a little chat and it's, sorry we can't help you, sorry we can't help you."*

## 3.3 Experiences of hostel accommodation

There were mixed experiences of hostel accommodation in Brighton. For those with lower levels of support need, or people who were attempting to recover after periods of alcohol or drug use, there was a reluctance to engage with the Integrated Support Pathway if the most likely outcome was deemed to be a hostel placement. One participant detailed the difficulties associated with living in a hostel, while trying to hold down a job:

*"You just can't live in that environment and go to work ... I did try that when I was there, just try and get a proper job, but it just didn't work, cos people have got like behavioural, you know behavioural issues as well and when you go into them places ... they don't like look at your background and see where you are, like say, I've come off the drugs and I'm clean, I've been clean, they just move you in there put you in a room they don't kind of like vet who's next door to you and some people are like up to four in the morning playing their music full blast and you've got work in the morning and, it just doesn't work."*

Another participant talked about the importance for their recovery of not being in an environment where drugs and alcohol were readily available. He had been placed in a dry hostel and was keen to emphasise the importance of being surrounded by people who were not drinking heavily or using drugs.

*“I haven’t got a local connection so this is the only place really that takes you without a local connection and I wouldn’t have got in there if I weren’t drug free.”*

Others detailed how certain residents’ drug use had actually been exacerbated after living in hostel accommodation.

*“Yeah, it is, because it keeps me away from it, a lot of the people that I know that haven’t been on things like harder drugs also moved into [place of residence] and then turned to harder drugs, so they’re now injecting and things like that and they never used to do that they just used to sniff a bit of cocaine ... your environment influences a lot of what you do, cos you spend so much time with them people in them hostels.”*

A number of participants spoke about how living in hostels about negatively impacted in their mental health and wellbeing. This included one female participant who was suffering from post natal depression.

*“They suggested [name of hostel] and it was cheap and I had enough money to sort of cover me for a little while until I found work. But obviously I moved into [name of hostel] and became even more depressed.”*

### 3.4 Pathways out of supported accommodation

In addition to the problems of gaining access to the Integrated Support Pathway, people also mentioned their difficulties in attempting to access social housing or private accommodation. Some talked of their frustrations at being ready to move on, but having nowhere to go.

*I: “How long have you been in the move-on accommodation for?”*

*P: “Now, I’ve been there, well, at this point, nearly two years.”*

*I: “So do you know what the exit route is? Is there a planned exit route?”*

*P: “No, I don’t, I don’t really know and I think I’ve had four different keyworkers in the space of eight months.”*

A number of participants expressed their disappointment that people in supported housing were no longer offered the incentive of access to Band A on the local authorities waiting list for council housing if they abided by a certain set of obligations.

*“Yeah, I mean it’s a double edged sword this whole kind of move-on thing ... When I moved into [Band] Three [property in the Integrated Support Pathway] one of the first things I was told was you know, if you move into a [Band] Three, if you do this, you do that, you do voluntary work, you do these life skills course ... that we will then be able to get you a Band A [on the council’s waiting list] and you will be able to get a council flat ... I started to do this, do that and when I got to the point of almost completion, the council pulled the rug from under there, said we’re not going to give you any more Band As ... that’s not going to happen, so now I’m sort of languishing in there, again, back to square one.”*

Due to the evident shortage of social housing in Brighton, the only other option for most participants in the study was the private rented sector. However, as noted in the key findings, Brighton’s housing market is

under significant pressures, particularly in terms of affordability. One of the main ways in which this had impacted on those we interviewed was the lack of landlords who were now willing to accept Housing Benefit. One person recalled how this was not always the case.

*“I’ve had a lot of private rented places, but a lot of the jobs I’ve been doing have kind of like ended and the landlord hasn’t or won’t take housing benefit, so it’s kind of made me homeless ... Years ago most landlords did take housing benefit, but it has really changed over the last ten years in Brighton.”*

The initial deposit required to move into private rented accommodation was also a problem for people. Although the local authority has been operating a successful private sector leasing scheme, most interviewees remained unaware of the initiative.

*“If it was easier for people like me and [name of friend] to approach the Council and they give us like, some sort of deposit scheme it would be easier for us to find somewhere and get the other bit that we need, and get somewhere but it’s also finding places that take housing benefit.”*

Another person spoke about the challenges of finding a guarantor to underwrite their tenancy.

*“Yeah, I mean, I can, I can explain this literally. You know from Kemp Town all the way through, past St Pat’s right out George Street way, I’ve asked every single, what they called, letting agency. I’ve asked for flats in there, I’ve asked for everything, I can’t get a guarantee, guarantor, whatever they’re called, I can’t get that, and it’s like, oh no, we don’t take DSS and I have been literally every single one of them, I’ve left my number, not one of them’s called me back, not one.”*

### 3.4 Local connection and out of area placements

There was a lot of confusion expressed by participants about local connection criteria and policies in Brighton. A number of people mentioned travelling to Brighton on the basis that they had previously possessed a local connection, only to find that they were no longer eligible. One person spoke of returning after time spent in care:

*“I used to live here, I’ve got a job now, I’ve got two jobs now, really trying to hammer home this and you say I can’t get a place because this isn’t my local authority. I appreciate that but I used to live here, like years ago.”*

Another had returned to Brighton after time spent away caring for their dying father.

*“I’d been staying with my parents because my dad had been ill so I stayed with my Mum for about a year after he died just to make sure she was back on her feet really ... I returned to my home, my home area to be told I was disconnected because I’d spent too long up with my parents and they couldn’t house me.”*

In the absence of a local connection, several of the participants had been offered out-of-borough placements at different services.

*“Have you got a local connection? No, well here’s a train ticket, go here, go there, that seems to be the way.”*

However, for some the impact of moving to a new area could be stressful. This anxiety was often enhanced by a lack of support to help manage the transition.

*“Oh, I felt like I’d just been dumped, to tell you the truth. It’s weird. Lincolnshire is the worst place in the country for any disabled person to be. The council cannot even spell my name right. My bus pass, my name is spelt wrong. I’m just a number to them, not a person. [I had] no help whatsoever, I mean, I had five boxes full of letters I had not read because I had no help. Cos I’m not gonna struggle reading small tiny print in a letter cos it’s that bad, my eyes are that bad and they don’t realise that there.”*

Even those who expressed initial optimism about the move struggled to cope without support:

*I: “How did you feel when they said they could re-house you in Birmingham?”*

*P: “I thought yeah, great, I’ll give it a go and then, for the first week there it was alright and then after that all the bullying started, money getting taken off me, mobile phones getting taken from my room.”*

*I: “Could anything have been different? What could have made it a happier experience?”*

*P: “Possibly if staff did something about the bullying.”*

The difficulties of adjusting to their new environments, combined with the appeal of Brighton, meant that all of the interviewees who had experienced an out of borough placement had returned to the city, either immediately or at a later date. Some were even prepared to remain homeless if this allowed them to stay in Brighton.

*“Well, I presume they’re [local authority] gonna do [find somewhere to live] or they’re gonna tell me I gotta go back up to Lincolnshire or whatever. I mean, but I’m not gonna go. Even if I have to go back on my bench where I was, I’ll be back there I don’t mind, I’ll sleep out there.”*

# Chapter 4: Support services in Brighton

## 4.1 Support needs

Participants reported a number of needs in relation to their housing situation, but also their personal wellbeing. The support needs we identified in the research were:

- Access to accommodation
- Mental health
- Physical health
- Employment and training
- Financial support, including money management and help with welfare benefits
- Substance misuse
- Personal wellbeing, including coping with trauma and forming relationships

A number of participants had multiple needs, with mental health issues, particularly depression, a common finding. In many cases, these issues were self-diagnosed and, as a result, people had struggled to access any formal support or treatment.

*“When I have a low point in my life ... I have a lot of trouble putting roots down, and things like this, I think it’s because I’m ... and this is really, this is down to really a mental health issue, I don’t know, I don’t feel equipped to deal with it on my own, whatever it is, but you know, er, I’m tired of having trouble in relationships when I’m not a troublesome person actually you know I’m tired of finding myself always struggling with issues all the time. I probably come over as someone who can think things through but, you know, I really do want some mental health assistance really.”*

People also expressed a desire to form new, or rebuild existing, relations with family, friends and partners. For many, a lack of familial ties was indicative of the trauma they had suffered, either earlier in their lives or while they were homeless. These needs were clearly linked to people’s mental health and a general inability to move on with their lives. One participant described how the loss of their parents at a young age had significantly affected their confidence and left them feeling isolated.

*“I think me personally is, I’m a loner by nature which is why maybe I don’t like being in, in groups so hence work related stuff like that doesn’t appeal to me so I don’t tend to go for that kind of thing and it’s the same with relationships, it seems to be when I’m in a, in a major relationship, it kind of always ends badly because I’m not able to give that person what they want, and I think it’s the same with friendships and all that sort of thing, so I tend to sort of be mostly I, I keep people at arm’s length all the time I don’t really have any friends, I have people that are acquaintances, I have people who come in here but you know, you know most of the time I’m walking round the streets on my own.”*

Others talked about their need for practical support with finding employment or training and improving their money management skills. Lacking the skills needed to find work above the national minimum wage was cited as a particular problem.

*I: “What’s been the barrier for you getting into work?”*

*P: “Erm, confidence I suppose really, a lack of, kind of work that I can do, I’m not skilled to do, you know. I mean obviously a lot of people have got practical skills and obviously they can work machinery they’ve got tickets to work this, they can do that, I don’t have any of that, you know, all you have is, you know, and A-levels don’t mean much to anybody any more so really it’s just the kind of work I have been offered is minimum wage, but unfortunately because of the nature of what I live in, you know, for me to go back to work and work the minimum wage, then have to pay my rent on top of that as well, you know, because it doesn’t work out in, the rent where I am is extortionately expensive for what it is and that’s another bone of contention.”*

Substance misuse issues were common among the cohort. Problems varied from long term addictions, which had played a direct role in people’s homelessness, to habits developed while sleeping rough.

*“I took a lot of drugs in my younger days but that’s only a counter reaction to being homeless to being felt like my parents disowned me, you know. When you’ve got nobody giving you guidance and care at that age and you’ve got drugs around you, and you’ve got certain peers, certain peers looked after me very well, but certain peers are, don’t really give a fuck, right, excuse my language but, you know, what do you turn to, you know, you’ve got authorities who don’t want to know.”*

In some cases the continued use of drugs or alcohol had led to physical health problems.

*“Yeah, I do, I do, I have a lot of ill health issues and that, I mean I was a drug user for a lot of years and like when I stopped and I’ve seen the doctors they kinda made me put it down to that as well, coming off the drugs about two years ago so I was using heroin for about 18 years, it was a long time.”*

## 4.2 Barriers to support

Participants had opportunities to access a range of support services through day centres and outreach services in Brighton. These included:

- Mental health and counselling
- Access to accommodation
- Reconnection and moves out of area
- GP and other health services
- Benefits advice
- Substance misuse
- Work and training
- Showers and wash facilities

While experience of support services varied across the group, mental health was most frequently referred to as being difficult to access when participants needed it.

*“I’ve had over the years various counsellors who reckon it’d be a good idea to get help but I’ve never been in a situation where I can actually get the ball rolling. I’ve even been to doctors who have agreed that it would be a good thing but somehow my situation has changed and interrupted the whole thing.”*

In particular, access to mental health services was very difficult if people were also substance users. One interviewee, who had been a heavy drinker for many years, told us that he had approached a mental health service after suffering from depression since he was a teenager. However, after making contact, the service had told him that he would have to free from alcohol for at least three months before they could begin treating him.

Accepting help for mental health issues could also be a barrier for people. One participant told us how difficult he found it to take up an offer of counselling.

*“I’ve had the offer of like counselling and stuff but I just find it hard to be honest, you know, it doesn’t, I suppose because its suppressed, you know what I mean, over all the years I’ve just kept it down there and I’ve just forgot about it, you know.”*

Another talked of how afraid he was of turning to others for help.

*“Not probably something that I will do [seek help] but I do shy away from it because it scares me. I don’t want to, I suppose maybe I’m deluding myself really that I’m probably need more help than I’m probably asking for ... I’d rather try and deal with myself, and most of the time it’s okay, but I do struggle with it, and I am struggling with a lot at the moment because obviously the extra worry of not knowing what’s going to happen in the future and just wanting to get out, get out of that system and you know go onto sort of living independently.”*

There was also some frustration expressed about lack of access to accommodation and difficulty in receiving the support they needed. One participant described how they had originally accessed a service for young people but had been turned away and ended up sleeping in a tent for a month until they were picked up by a street outreach team and offered nightstop accommodation.

### 4.3 The importance of support services

Despite the evident barriers to support, participants also provided us with a lot of positive feedback concerning their use of day centres and outreach services in Brighton. This praise often centred on people’s relationships with individual key workers.

*“They’ve been absolutely amazing, I couldn’t have hoped for [more], I was police escorted at one point because of the assault, anywhere I wanted to go and [the key worker] would come shopping with me and make sure that I did what I needed to do, eat my bananas and you know, do this, do that and help. She was just amazing and I looked forward to sort of meeting her and seeing her.”*

*“[Name of day centre] has been a wonderful place. This place is an absolute godsend, it really is. They work hard, tirelessly, all the time. It’s what community is about, these people bring people together and they are worthy, more than worthy of being praised. Other services are slightly different, have a slightly different attitude, some of them don’t help. Now I don’t know if that’s because behind closed doors internally, whatever.”*

People were also positive about the support that services provided in brokering access to accommodation for those sleeping rough. This included acting as an advocate when dealing with the local authority, help to move through the Integrated Support Pathway and gaining access to specific accommodation projects.

*I: “Okay, that’s good ... so, right, from when you were homeless you went to the Council, they said no, your support worker got involved, then they said yes, they put you in...”*

*P: “[name of temporary accommodation] for a few months, it was my keyworker that persisted saying that I’m vulnerable, could get exploited and all these things.”*

The role of day centres was especially important in providing services that would have otherwise been unavailable to people who are homeless, including sexual health clinics, opticians, doctors and showers and food:

*“If [name of day centre] wasn’t here nobody would be able to cope, no one, no one on the streets would be able to cope if [name of day centre] wasn’t here. That is just the simple fact of it all, cos you’ve got your sexual health for one, you’ve got opticians, you’ve got doctors who come here, you’ve got breakfast because it gets cooked and you get to have a shower and use the toilet or whatever, so you’ve literally got your house here, with staff. What better way to wake up in the morning, to come here and be able to chill out, have a shower and feel fresh for the day. You ain’t gonna get anything better than that, not at all.”*

There was also an important role for key workers in providing welfare benefits advice such as helping with new claims, reassessments and appeals.

*“Well, tried getting me on the right track, I was a little madam when I first arrived in Brighton. I’ve grown up a lot, er, but they, [name of support worker], most of all, from [name of day centre], he’s a big help, got me things like my benefits sorted, got me up and going on my feet, got me back to a happy state so when I was down they then brought me back up, that’s what. They, they then got me the housing opportunity, and then he come to my, then he come to all my interviews with me when I went down there.”*

Outside of the support provided by day centres and outreach teams, participants were generally very positive about services provided by GPs.

*“Oh yeah, definite. I can just go in there and speak to the secretary, and they’ll speak through to the doctor, I don’t even have to see the doctor and they’ll go, right there’s a repeat prescription. There you go, you’ll be done in 10 minutes. So yeah.”*

# Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings and subsequent discussions from an event facilitated by Homeless Link and the CAIERS group, with service providers, commissioners and other local stakeholders.

## Accommodation

To improve access to accommodation in Brighton for people experiencing homelessness the local authority, in partnership with voluntary sector agencies, should:

- Continue and expand (based on learnings from the pilot) the Housing First model in Brighton. This will provide another housing option for the most vulnerable people straight from the street or emergency accommodation without moving through the traditional Integrated Support Pathway.
- Improve the quality of interim accommodation available in Brighton, and the support that is available to people living in temporary accommodation, to ensure the most vulnerable people are not being placed in poor quality accommodation with unsatisfactory support available.
- Continue to work proactively with private landlords and letting agents in the area to improve the numbers who will accept tenants on housing benefit. This should include expansion of the advertising campaign to increase awareness of Brighton's private sector leasing scheme.
- Reassess the eligibility criteria for Bands 4 and 5 of the Integrated Support Pathway, so that those with lower level support needs are better able to access independent accommodation.
- Continue to assess the suitability of hostel accommodation for clients on a case-by-case basis, with further emphasis on the negative impacts of communal living for those who are in recovery from substance misuse issues.
- Develop more responses and therapy to people dealing with trauma, depression, and/or personality disorders. This should include services being commissioned to Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE) standards and further examination of current access to and suitability of mental health services for people using homelessness services.

## Partnership working

- There should be better links between the local authority and support services to identify people who are non-statutory homeless, but still eligible to be referred into the Integrated Support Pathway.
- Partnership arrangements need to be strengthened between the local authority and local prison to ensure that people in custody do not become homeless upon release from prison.

- There should be continued partnership working with local organisations which provide specialist services for marginalised and vulnerable groups in Brighton, including women and the LGBT community.
- Clearer and regularly updated guides and resources should be published by the local authority to enable frontline workers to know which services are available and how their clients can access them.
- Opportunities to commission services for people using homelessness services should be taken jointly with Public Health, Clinical Commissioning Groups, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, and Adult Social Care.
- Commissioners from different sectors within Brighton should examine the strategic roadblocks that exist within current commissioning culture and look for opportunities to increase joint commissioning that takes into account the needs of people using homelessness services.

## Support and advice

- Ensure that the local authority provides those who are found to be homeless, but not in priority need, with appropriate and timely information on alternative ways to access the Integrated Support Pathway.
- Maintain the flexibility of the Integrated Support Pathway in allowing people to move back and forth between higher and lower bandings as their needs dictate. This is especially relevant for those who do not immediately adapt to the demands of independent living.
- Develop a peer support model, especially for women experiencing homelessness.
- Review the efficacy and availability of community based mental health services, particularly those dealing with lower level mental health issues, such as depression.
- Ensure there is continued workforce development around continuity of care, substance misuse and mental health issues for staff working with people using homelessness services, in generic as well as specialist homelessness services such as supported accommodation and day centres.
- Ensure that people who are relocated to a new area of the country receive the correct support on arrival. This could involve detailed discussion with the relevant service provider or local authority prior to the move.



## What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless in England. We work to make services better and campaign for policy change that will help end homelessness.

## Let's end homelessness together

Homeless Link  
Gateway House, Milverton Street  
London SE11 4AP

020 7840 4430

[www.homeless.org.uk](http://www.homeless.org.uk)

Twitter: @Homelesslink

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/homelesslink](http://www.facebook.com/homelesslink)

© Homeless Link 2014. All rights reserved.  
Homeless Link is a charity no. 1089173 and  
a company no. 04313826.