

Street homelessness

Homelessness has a broad meaning; it can be used for people living in homes that are unsuitable, as well as for people who are sleeping rough. The Government has achieved its target of reducing the number of people sleeping rough by two thirds. In many parts of the country there are outreach teams to help those on the streets, hostels providing the first step off the streets, as well as day centres and other agencies offering training and support to access employment and cultural projects. However, still too many people are not receiving the help they need, at the time they need it, and end up sleeping rough on the streets.

This factsheet looks at how many people are sleeping rough; some of the main factors which make it more likely that somebody may end up sleeping on the streets; the crossover between homelessness and other street lifestyles; access to accommodation and support; government policies on rough sleeping and Shelter's own prevention work.

This factsheet is one of a series published by Shelter. Factsheets dealing with other housing and homelessness issues can be downloaded from www.shelter.org.uk/factsheets

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What is street homelessness?

Homelessness means not having a home. A home is a place that provides security, and links to a community and support network. It needs to be decent and affordable.

Under the law, even if someone has a roof over their head they can still be homeless. This is because they may not have the right to stay where they live or their home may be unsuitable to live in.

Rough sleeping is defined by the Government as ‘people sleeping, or bedded down, in the open air (such as on the streets, or in doorways, parks or bus shelters); people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or ‘bashes’)’.¹

Street homelessness is a much wider term than rough sleeping, taking into account the street lifestyles of some people who may not actually sleep on the streets. Street homeless people are those who routinely find themselves on the streets during the day with nowhere to go at night. Some will end up sleeping outside, or in a derelict or other building not designed for human habitation, perhaps for long periods. Others will sleep at a friend’s for a very short time, or stay in a hostel, night-shelter or squat, or spend nights in prison or hospital.

Although this factsheet explores many aspects of street homelessness from rough sleeping to street drinking and begging, it is important to be aware that much of the research referred to focuses specifically on rough sleepers.

How many people are street homeless?

Government figures

The Government uses the results of street counts, undertaken by local authorities and voluntary agencies, to estimate the number of people ‘sleeping rough’ on a single night. To be included in a count a person must be ‘bedded down’, eg sleeping in a place covered by street counts.

It is widely recognised that the counts do not reflect the full extent of rough sleeping. Count staff may not locate rough sleepers who have hidden themselves in disused buildings or stayed in areas away from those covered by the count. To avoid any double counting, people who are not actually sleeping at the time of the

¹ The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister’s definition of rough sleeping. A ‘bash’ is a makeshift shelter often comprised of cardboard boxes.

count are not included in the figures, even if it is likely that they will go on to spend the night sleeping rough.

The latest government figures estimate that there are 459 people sleeping rough on any given night in England.² Of these, nearly 50 per cent sleep rough in London. A report for the Office of Deputy Prime Minister, however, has acknowledged that the number of people sleeping rough over the course of a year is at least ten times higher than the snapshot on any given night provided by the street counts.³

Despite this, results from street counts do provide useful information about the relative extent of rough sleeping in different areas and also allow some analysis of trends in rough sleeping over time. According to figures from street counts, the number of people sleeping rough on any given night since 1998 has decreased by more than a third.

Other figures

Combined Homelessness and Information Network

The Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN), is a database used by agencies working with street homeless people in London. CHAIN figures show that during 2004/05 a total of 3,112 people were contacted on the streets of London by outreach teams (see 'Support Provided' on page 11). Of these, 45 per cent (1,400) were 'new contacts' eg people who had not been contacted on the street in previous years.

Shelter

During 2005, Shelter services in England worked with 4,000 single men, women and couples without children who were street homeless.

Demographic profile of street homeless people

Gender

Around 90 per cent of those sleeping rough are men. During 2004/05 the outreach teams in London contacted 3,112 people. Of these, 89 per cent were men (2,756) and the remaining 11 per cent were women (356).⁴

² Department for Communities and Local Government, National Rough Sleeping Estimated in England, 2005.

³ Randall G and Brown S, *Helping Rough Sleepers off the Streets: A Report to the Homelessness Directorate*, ODPM, 2000.

⁴ Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN), Rough Sleeping Report for London 2004/05, 2005.

Age

A large proportion of people sleeping rough are between 26 and 49 years old.⁵ For example, in London 73 per cent of those contacted by outreach teams during 2004/5 were between these ages. Eighteen per cent were aged 50 or over and 10 per cent were aged under 25.⁶

Ethnicity

Most surveys estimate that about 90 per cent of people sleeping on the streets are white, including significant minorities of white Irish and Scottish people. However, there is evidence that the profile of rough sleepers is becoming increasingly diverse.

A recent report by the London Housing Foundation shows that outreach workers and day centres in the capital frequently provide services to refugees from a large number of countries.⁷ Migrants from the EU accession states are also present in the rough sleeping population. A survey of London winter shelters in 2004 found that there was a total of 30 different nationalities represented amongst those staying in the shelters (see 'Support Provided' on page 11).⁸

Why do people become street homeless?

Although the reasons for becoming homeless differ between each person, there are common factors. Some are personal; related to the family, community and individual, and others are structural; relating to the economy, the law, social trends, and the national housing system. Homelessness is likely to be caused by a combination of structural and personal factors. There are, however risk factors which make it more likely that a person could become street homeless. These include:

- family conflict and/or relationship breakdown between partners
- leaving institutions
- mental health problems
- substance misuse
- dual diagnosis (mental health problem/s combined with substance misuse)
- financial problems
- having 'no recourse to public funds' (eg no social security)
- refugees or people seeking asylum

⁵ Warnes A et al, Homelessness factfile, Crisis, 2003.

⁶ Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN), Rough Sleeping Report for London 2004/05, 2005.

⁷ London Housing Foundation, Survey of homelessness sector services provided to asylum seeker and refugee clients: Executive summary, 2004.

⁸ London Housing Foundation, Give me shelter: The role of London's winter shelters for the homeless 2004/05, 2005.

It is important to note that while the above are risk factors, most people who experience these problems do not become street homeless.

Family conflict and/or relationship breakdown between partners

Family conflict and relationship breakdown can lead to street homelessness when people have to, or are asked to leave their home.

Family conflict: A high proportion of people who sleep rough have a history of family conflict. One study found that 21 per cent of homeless people gave this as the main reason for sleeping rough, rising to 37 per cent of people aged under 26. Furthermore, 33 per cent of homeless people gave this as one of their reasons for first sleeping rough.⁹

Relationship breakdown between partners: A survey among people who had slept rough found that 45 per cent of them reported experience of relationship breakdown. Twenty five per cent of these slept rough straight away after the relationship broke down.¹⁰

Leaving institutions

People leaving institutions can lack support networks from families or communities that may have helped them find accommodation, or prevented them from becoming street homeless.

Local authority care

Surveys carried out among people sleeping rough found that between a quarter and a third have spent time in local authority care.¹¹ Care leavers sometimes face difficulties both finding somewhere to live and accessing the support needed to live independently. Care leavers often do not have the financial and practical support offered by the family. A small-scale survey in 2001 found that still about a quarter of rough sleepers had spent time in local authority care, however, these were older rough sleepers who had spent time in local authority care as children, not generally young people who had just left care.¹²

Leaving prison or young offenders' institutions

Around half of people sleeping rough have either been in prison or to a young offenders' institution, and many have had repeated contact with the police and

⁹ Randall, G and Brown, S, *Prevention is better than cure*, Crisis, 1999.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Homes for Street Homeless People: An Evaluation of the Rough Sleepers Initiative*, 1999.

¹² Randall, G and Brown, S, *Helping rough sleepers off the streets: A report to the Homelessness Directorate*, ODPM, 2002.

courts.¹³ A survey among people sleeping rough in 2001 found that two thirds (64 per cent) had served a custodial sentence.¹⁴

People leaving prison often have nowhere to live on their release. Difficulties finding employment can make it harder to pay for accommodation. It is common for people to lose accommodation whilst they are in prison if they are unable to keep up rent or mortgage payments (see 'Shelter's work' on page 14).

Armed forces

Major research in 1997 showed that 25 per cent of people sleeping rough on the streets of London had served in the armed forces.¹⁵ Another survey in 2001 showed that only 14 per cent of rough sleepers had served in the armed forces. This may suggest that older rough sleepers have been moved off the streets, although the figure still remains relatively high.¹⁶ There are a number of reasons suggested for this, including lack of experience living independently; housekeeping and budgeting; spending years living an institutionalised life; the late entry into the housing market; a culture of heavy drinking while in the forces; and a lack of community ties.¹⁷

Mental health problems

The links between homelessness and mental health are complex; it can be a cause or a consequence of homelessness. Research undertaken in 1996 found that 60 per cent of people sleeping rough may have had mental health problems.¹⁸ Another survey found that 30 per cent of rough sleepers had a current diagnosed psychotic illness, and people who had slept rough for a year or more were more likely to have had multiple psychiatric admissions.¹⁹ For people sleeping on the streets it is very difficult to gain and sustain access to psychiatric and social services, which results in further deterioration of their mental health.

Substance misuse

People with substance misuse problems can sometimes lose their homes due to rent or mortgage arrears, others may find the practical aspects of managing a

¹³ Randall, G and Brown, S, *From Street to Home: an evaluation of Phase 2 of the Rough Sleepers Initiative*, The Stationery Office, 1996.

¹⁴ Baker, O, *Rough and Tumble: The Experiences of Rough Sleepers on England's Streets*, Vision 21, 2001.

¹⁵ Gunner, G and Knott, H, *Homelessness on Civvy Street: Survey of homelessness among ex-servicemen*, 1997.

¹⁶ Baker, O, *Rough and Tumble: The Experiences of Rough Sleepers on England's Streets*, Vision 21, 2001.

¹⁷ Randall, G, *Rough Sleeping: A review of the research*, DETR, 1998.

¹⁸ Gill, B, et al, *The prevalence of psychiatric morbidity among homeless adults*, OPCS, 1996.

¹⁹ Second Step and Missing Link, *Survival is not Trusting: Research into resettlement and support needs of Bristol rough sleepers with mental health problems*, 1998.

tenancy difficult and 'abandon' their homes. Substance misuse can also lead to family disputes and time spent in prison.

Research has also found that in some cases homelessness itself can trigger the commencement of, or an escalation in, drug use. About 20 per cent of young street homeless people reported in a survey that they started to use drugs after they became homeless, predominantly because it was the first time they were exposed to drugs. Other street homeless people use drugs as a coping strategy for dealing with the difficulties of homelessness.^{20/21} Fifty per cent of street homeless people taking part in research conducted by Crisis cited drug use as a reason for becoming homeless, and 36 per cent cited the use of alcohol as a reason.²² During 2004/05, 35 per cent of people contacted by outreach teams in London had a drug problem and 32 per cent had alcohol problems.²³ 'Dual diagnosis' is the term for the combination of mental health and alcohol and/or drug problems. The outreach teams in London recorded that 23 per cent of rough sleepers have a dual diagnosis.²⁴

Financial problems

Rent or mortgage arrears, or the loss of income due to unemployment or illness, are both common reasons why people lose their homes. In some cases, these kinds of financial problems can lead to street homelessness. In a study of rough sleepers, 26 per cent of those interviewed stated that arrears or other money problems were a reason for sleeping rough.²⁵

Refugees and asylum seekers

Recent research found that refugees and asylum seekers are over represented in the street homeless population.²⁶ In Leicester alone, over a five-week period in 2006, 308 refugees and asylum seekers approached agencies participating in the research reporting they were destitute. Of these, one third reported sleeping rough in locations such as underpasses, the train station and the market. The other two thirds reported sleeping on friends' floors.²⁷

²⁰ Wincup, E. et al, *Youth homelessness and substance use: report to the drugs and alcohol research unit*, Home Office, 2003.

²¹ Crisis, *Home and Dry?: Homelessness and Substance Use*, 2002.

²² *ibid.*

²³ Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN), *Rough Sleeping Report for London 2004/05*, 2005.

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ Randall, G and Brown, S, *Prevention is better than cure*, Crisis, 1999.

²⁶ Jackson, G and Dube D, 'What am I Living for?': A report on destitute asylum seekers and refugees in Leicester', Leicester refugee and asylum seekers' voluntary sector forum, 2006

²⁷ Jackson, G and Dube, D, 'What am I Living for?': A report on destitute asylum seekers and refugees in Leicester', Leicester refugee and asylum seekers' voluntary sector forum, 2006

The main reason found behind the destitution of asylum seekers was, following a failed asylum claim, a reluctance to sign up for voluntary return to countries they considered unsafe.²⁸ For refugees, one reason behind destitution is the requirement for individuals who are granted asylum to leave the accommodation provided by National Asylum Support Service (NASS) within 28 days.²⁹ New refugees may find it hard to access housing advice to help them find accommodation, as the time allowed is often not long enough. There is evidence that these factors can result in street homelessness for new refugees, especially single men who are not eligible for emergency accommodation from the local authority.³⁰

This research also found that many street homeless refugees had been long-term residents in the UK before they became homeless. Reasons for this might include problems integrating into a new culture and language barriers, which can result in difficulty accessing employment, education and other services. In some cases, there may be issues relating to the experiences which led the individual to seek asylum, which may affect their ability to find and keep a home, for example, suffering Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome.

Having 'no recourse to public funds'

Foreign nationals who don't have recourse to public funds are sometimes ineligible for services available to other rough sleepers. This exacerbates their problems by making it harder for them to move off the streets.

People arriving from EU accession states are not entitled to housing benefit until they have been working continuously in the UK for a year. This means they sometimes sleep rough before they are able to secure employment and therefore money for accommodation and, after a period of time, the right to welfare benefits.

Failed asylum seekers who are moved out of NASS accommodation while they wait for a safe passage home are another group represented in the street population without recourse to public funds.³¹ This group is not legally allowed to work in the UK and so cannot seek employment as a means to securing money for accommodation.³²

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ London Housing Foundation, *Survey of Homelessness Sector Services Provided to Asylum Seeker and Refugee Clients: Summary of Findings*, 2004.

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ NASS is the department of the Home Office responsible for providing housing and support to asylum seekers.

³² *Housing Today*, 5th November 2004.

Those with no recourse to public funds cannot access hostels for single homeless people, although there are some night shelters and day centres for street homeless people they can use.

Street lifestyles

There is a lack of clarity about the relationship and crossover between rough sleepers and other people who participate in the following street-based activities, but who have accommodation. A street lifestyle can precede, accompany or follow periods of street homelessness, or be maintained while a person has long-term accommodation. Street lifestyles can also encourage rough sleeping and provide a route into sleeping on the streets.³³ Agencies who traditionally work with rough sleepers are increasingly expanding their services to reach people who are in accommodation but living a street lifestyle.

Street drinking

Alcohol Concern's definition of a street drinker is 'a person who drinks very heavily in public and, at least in the short term, is unable or unwilling to control his or her drinking'.³⁴ Many street drinkers consume alcohol in groups known as drinking schools, which are a source of companionship for members. A survey among people who beg and/or drink found that of all those surveyed, over half had slept rough the previous night. People who beg were more likely (67 per cent) than people who drink (21 per cent) to sleep rough.³⁵

Begging

Although begging and homelessness are inextricably linked, not all rough sleepers beg or visa versa. However, the vast majority of those who beg are in unstable accommodation. Research found that only six individuals, out of a sample of 260 people who beg, were living in their own home.³⁶

Sex work

Another group that overlaps with the street population are people who are engaged in street-based sex work. Research has found that female sex workers form one of the most excluded and marginalised groups of homeless people. These women often sleep in cars, parks, crack houses, on friends' floors and sometimes on the streets, but are generally not engaged in programmes set up to assist street homeless people.³⁷

³³ Randall, G and Brown, S, *Helping Rough Sleepers off the Streets*, ODPM, 2002.

³⁴ Alcohol Concern, *Street Drinking*, Factsheet 19.

³⁵ Danczuk, S, *Walk on by...: Begging, street drinking and the giving age*, Crisis, 2000.

³⁶ Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, *Looking for a change: The role and impact of begging on the lives of people who beg*, 2001.

³⁷ Davis, J, *Off the Streets: Tackling homelessness among female street-based sex workers*, Shelter, 2004.

Access to accommodation

Some street homeless people are not entitled to housing from the council. Many of them do not meet the local authorities' homelessness criteria and therefore are not considered a priority for rehousing (for further information see the [Housing and homelessness factsheet](#)).

Many rough sleepers use the following types of accommodation:

Hostels

These are the principle source of temporary accommodation for rough sleepers. They are generally run by specialist agencies. They are often funded by local authorities who are obliged to try and reduce all forms of homelessness in their area. In some instances hostels are funded by the government and/or charities. In London there are about 110 hostels providing over 5,000 beds.³⁸

For many rough sleepers, hostels are the first step off the streets. Hostels provide accommodation for people with a wide range of needs. Some hostels are set up for people with 'low support needs' while others specialise in supporting people with 'medium to high support needs', specifically around mental health, drugs and alcohol. Some hostels are set up to accommodate certain groups, such as older or younger rough sleepers.

Some people sleeping rough do not accept hostel places. A survey undertaken in 1996 found that about 40 per cent of people sleeping rough would not accept a hostel place because of other residents' behaviour and feeling unsafe. Among other reasons were the use of alcohol and drugs by other residents, lack of privacy and restrictive rules.³⁹

Some hostels are direct access, meaning people can obtain a bed for that night without an agency referral, provided that beds are available. They provide accommodation for a relatively short period whilst other hostels provide for a longer stay. A study found that residents staying more than three months are more likely to be successfully resettled (see 'Resettlement and tenancy support services' on page 12).⁴⁰

Hostels are designed to be temporary; a stepping stone into permanent accommodation. Once a hostel resident is ready to move on into permanent

³⁸ Warnes, T et al, *London's Hostels for Homeless People in the 21st century*, The Pan-London Consortium of Homeless Services Providers, 2004.

³⁹ Randall, G and Brown, S, *From Street to Home: an evaluation of Phase 2 of the Rough Sleepers Initiative*, The Stationery Office, 1996.

⁴⁰ St Mungo's Press Release, Major Survey Reveals Homeless Need Extra Help, 1998.

accommodation they can apply for long-term housing (see 'Permanent accommodation' below), or seek private rented accommodation. There is, however, a well-documented deficit of suitable move-on accommodation for former rough sleepers. One study by Homeless Link found that just under half of people in homelessness hostels were ready to move on but had no settled accommodation to move to.⁴¹ This causes hostel beds to be filled with people who no longer need this type of accommodation.

Night shelters and winter shelters

Night shelters provide a free and accessible overnight shelter with more flexible regimes than hostels. For example, people are often not obliged to have identification when they book into a night shelter, in contrast to hostel booking procedures. Many of these shelters have been established to serve as a stepping-stone to hostels for those rough sleepers who do not feel ready to take a hostel place or have yet to find a hostel that meets their needs. Accommodation in night shelters is often very basic. Recent research found that London's winter shelters provide accommodation for more than 1,300 people in 2003/04.⁴²

Permanent accommodation

As part of the Rough Sleepers Initiative, (see 'Government policies' on page 13) the Government ring-fenced a pool of permanent accommodation for former rough sleepers. In London, this provides space for around 4,000 former rough sleepers.⁴³ The funding comes from central government and the accommodation is provided by housing associations. Allocations are managed by an organisation called the Clearing House. People who access this accommodation receive automatic support from Tenancy Sustainment Teams (see 'Resettlement and tenancy support services' on page 12). Outside London, the main source of permanent housing is available through housing associations and local authorities.⁴⁴

Support provided

Support services for homeless people have been transformed over the last thirty years. There has been a shift away from helping people to survive by distributing food and blankets, to an emphasis on encouraging people to move into a more long-term accommodation, where resettlement and support services are provided to enable people to maintain their tenancies.

⁴¹ Homeless Link, *Do you want to end homelessness?*, 2005.

⁴² London Housing Foundation, *Give me shelter: The role of London's winter shelters for the homeless 2004/05*, 2005.

⁴³ Randall, G and Brown, S, *Helping Rough Sleepers Off the Streets*, ODPM, 2002.

⁴⁴ Randall, G and Brown, S, *Homes for Street homeless People: An Evaluation of the Rough Sleepers Initiative*, DETR, 1998.

Outreach work

Outreach teams or Contact and Assessment Teams (CATs) are multi-disciplinary teams that work with street homeless people. These teams often include mental health and substance misuse workers, and youth and resettlement workers. They offer support by helping people access accommodation and treatment for drug, alcohol or mental health problems. They also provide advice on jobs, training, education and benefits. Outreach workers often work with clients in day centres as well as on the streets.

Day centres

Day centres provide a range of services for rough sleepers and other homeless people. These range from providing low cost or free food, showers and laundry facilities, to advice about accommodation, benefits and health services. Some day centres also offer other services such as confidence building and training in life skills such as budgeting and cooking.

Resettlement and tenancy support services

Resettlement and tenancy support services help homeless people to make the transition from hostels to living in their own accommodation. This includes personal and practical support, as well as advocacy and assistance to ensure that homeless people can maintain their tenancies. For example, a resettlement worker might help someone to manage their bills and register with their local GP.

Employment and training services

A study found that people who sleep rough have often had a disrupted and poor quality education, and as a result have few qualifications and have experienced high levels of unemployment. Only 38 per cent of people sleeping rough had any educational qualifications, compared to 66 per cent of people aged over 16 in the general population.⁴⁵ It is estimated that around 90 per cent of people sleeping on the streets are unemployed.⁴⁶ In response to this, many agencies working with street homeless people and former street homeless people offer access to education, training and employment. Services range from on-site literacy and numeracy tuition in day centres, to support with application forms and interview techniques. Not all training is based around employment or qualifications. Pre-tenancy training, for example, covers more general skills such as budgeting, furnishing a home and reading a meter.

⁴⁵ Anderson, I, et al, *Single Homeless People*, HMSO, 1993.

⁴⁶ Randall, G and Brown, S, *Homes for Street homeless People: An Evaluation of the Rough Sleepers Initiative*, DETR, 1998.

Social and cultural activities

Organisations working with street homeless and former street homeless people often provide social and cultural activities such as arts and crafts, music and trips away. Recent research has found this type of activity has significant health benefits for street homeless people.⁴⁷

Government policies on street homelessness

Since the 1990s, successive governments have attempted to combat rough sleeping. Key developments in policies around street homelessness over this period are outlined below.

Rough Sleeping Initiative

In response to the increased visibility of rough sleeping in late 1980s, the Government launched the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) in 1990. The RSI operated in central London from 1990 to 1999 and was extended to 36 other areas in England in 1997. The programme funded outreach work, hostel places, move-on accommodation and resettlement services.

Rough Sleepers' Unit (Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate)

In 1999, the Rough Sleepers' Unit was established to carry out the Government's strategy to reduce the number of people sleeping rough by two-thirds by 2002. This target was achieved and the unit, now called the Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate within the Department for Communities and Local Government, continues to lead on homelessness issues.

Contact and Assessment Teams

The Rough Sleepers' Unit set up 22 Contact and Assessment Teams (CATs) around the country. Seven of these were assigned to London. The CATs comprise of mental health and substance misuse workers, generic street workers, and youth and resettlement workers. In certain local authorities the remit of outreach teams has widened. For example, in the London borough of Camden, the CAT deals with issues such as begging and street drinking, as well as rough sleeping.

Homelessness Act 2002

During 2002 the homelessness legislation was amended to extend the groups of people who are considered to be in priority need for rehousing. This includes several groups who are over-represented in the street homeless population. These new groups include young people between 16 and 17 years old, care leavers aged 18, 19 and 20, and people who are vulnerable as a result of being in prison, in the armed forces and those who are vulnerable as a result of fleeing violence.

⁴⁷ http://www.westminster-pct.nhs.uk/pdfs/Broadway_Key%20Findings.pdf

Hostels' improvements and performance indicator

In March 2005, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister launched its five-year homelessness strategy. One aim of the strategy is to help more people to move out of rough sleeping. To help deliver this, the Government is investing £90 million in the Hostels Capital Improvements' Programme which will seek to improve the physical standards of hostels, and also ensure that services offered respond to current needs.⁴⁸

A Best Value Performance Indicator on rough sleeping was introduced in 2004, to ensure that local authorities are aware of rough sleeping (based on street counts) in their area.

Shelter's work

We help 170,000 people in housing need each year, through our Housing Aid Centres and practical projects, and via our free housing advice helpline. We campaign for new laws and policies – as well as more investment – to improve the lives of homeless and badly housed people, now and in the future. As a leading expert on housing in Britain, we develop practical solutions to address the housing crisis. We also work in conjunction with the housing sector, to promote good practice, publish reports and deliver professional training.

Shelter's work specifically for street homeless people

Street Homelessness Project

Shelter's Street Homelessness Project (SHP) identifies and promotes strategic and operational responses to street homelessness, by working in partnership with a range of agencies to develop and disseminate innovation and good practice in the delivery of services to street homeless people. It promotes multi-agency approaches to street homelessness. The project assists local authorities and voluntary agencies to work in partnership to find effective solutions for street homeless people. The core aims of SHP are:

- to influence local, regional and national policy, as it relates to street homelessness
- to raise awareness of continuing street homelessness
- to promote innovation and good practice in the provision of housing and support services to street homeless people, and
- to assist and support Shelter Services and external agencies in improving their provision to street homeless people.

⁴⁸ Office of Deputy Prime Minister: Sustainable Communities: Settled Homes: Changing Lives, A Strategy for Tackling Homelessness, London, 2005.

Prison Housing Advice Service

The aim of Shelter's Prison Housing Advice Service (PHAS) is to improve the housing prospects of prisoners and to enhance opportunities for rehabilitation and community integration. It assists prisoners with no fixed abode to obtain accommodation. PHAS provides a range of housing advice, information and advocacy services to prisoners to enable them to preserve or secure accommodation. Upon release, prisoners can be linked with a range of appropriate services, through community-based Shelter schemes and other service provisions.

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