

Research Briefing

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Statutory homelessness (England): Causes and government policy



- 1 The causes of homelessness
- 2 Government homelessness research
- 3 Government policy and stakeholder comment

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Summary

Research indicates that homelessness can be caused by a complex interplay between structural, individual, and interpersonal factors.

This paper summarises what is known about the causes of homelessness and outlines the UK Government's approach to tackling homelessness in England, including its programme of commissioned research.

Causes of homelessness

Various structural, individual, and interpersonal factors can lead to homelessness or put someone at risk. Structural drivers include an undersupply of social rented housing, restrictions to benefit entitlement and rising living costs. Personal and interpersonal factors include, mental health issues (including substance dependence), relationship breakdown, and income levels. Poverty is an example of how personal and structural factors can interact to increase someone's risk of homelessness.

A distinction is recognised between events that immediately precede, or 'trigger' an experience of homelessness, and underlying causes that can increase someone's vulnerability to homelessness.

A lack of housing supply in England is widely acknowledged as an important driver of homelessness. The shortage is greater in some areas than others. Commentators argue that England is experiencing an 'affordability crisis' which requires solutions that extend beyond the number of homes built. There is growing concern about rising levels of homelessness in rural areas where significant undersupply of affordable housing is a prominent driver.

[A well-established model for estimating housing supply requirements in England](#) indicates a need for an additional 300,000 homes each year until 2030, of which 60-70,000 should be for social rent. The same analysis concludes that these figures should rise to a total of 350,000 new homes annually from 2030, with 90,000 of these being for social rent each year.

Various welfare reforms, including freezing Local Housing Allowance (LHA) levels, have reduced housing options for benefit claimants, especially in areas with high housing demand. LHA rates set the maximum amount of help people receiving benefits can claim towards their housing costs in the private rented sector. A wide body of research has shown that freezing LHA rates increases the risk of homelessness because it separates the link between housing benefit assistance and the evolution of local private rental prices. Rising living costs are compounding these effects.

A 2024 [value for money report from the National Audit Office](#) (NAO) highlights a "notable" increase in the number of households becoming homeless due to a private sector tenancy ending between 2018/19 and 2022/23. Many commentators argue that private landlords' ability to end a tenancy without

legal grounds, by serving a ‘valid’ notice under [section 21 of the Housing Act 1988](#), is driving up homelessness. This assertion is contested.

Evidence suggests that people in specific groups can be at greater risk and have distinct experiences of homelessness. For example, young people, women, and people from minority ethnic groups.

A commitment to tackling homelessness

[The 2024 Labour government’s manifesto \(PDF\)](#) includes commitments to:

- develop a cross-government homelessness strategy
- deliver “the biggest increase in social and affordable housebuilding in a generation”
- “immediately” abolish section 21 of the Housing Act 1988

The 2019 Conservative government said it had put tackling homelessness and rough sleeping [“firmly at the heart”](#) of its agenda. The focus was on implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, delivering the 2022 cross-government [Ending rough sleeping for good strategy](#), and supporting the delivery of more affordable homes and specialist services.

The 2022 rough sleeping strategy includes measures to address youth homelessness, including:

- support for care leavers to secure and maintain suitable accommodation
- investment in accommodation and support for single people
- funding for local youth services

Local authorities received increased funding over 2020/21 to tackle homelessness during the pandemic, with a particular focus on protecting rough sleepers.

The [Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021](#) confirmed an 85% increase in spending, compared with pre-pandemic levels, to tackle rough sleeping and homelessness. This brought total funding to £1.9 billion resource and £109 million capital investment over the SR21 period. Multiple, subsequent ‘top ups’ and ‘boosts’ to this funding brought the total government investment to an [“unprecedented” £2.4 billion over three years \(2022-25\)](#).

In September 2023, the Kerlake Commission on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping’s report, [Turning the Tide on Rising Homelessness and Rough Sleeping](#), concluded that the 2019 Conservative government would “not meet its goal to end rough sleeping by 2024.”

Calls for additional measures

Local authorities and homelessness organisations across England have expressed concern over the impact of increased numbers of households in temporary accommodation.

Local authorities in England have called on the government to re-establish the link between the amount they can claim back through Housing Benefit subsidy arrangements and the actual cost of providing temporary accommodation. The cost of providing temporary accommodation in 2022/23 was almost £1.7 billion.

The [NAO's 2024 report](#) highlighted that “dealing with homelessness is creating unsustainable financial pressure for some local authorities.” The NAO’s overall conclusion was that the government will not be able to demonstrate value for money, until it addresses funding constraints on local authorities’ capacity to prevent homelessness and invest in good-quality temporary accommodation or other forms of housing. They also note that while some areas have improved since their [2017 report](#), there is still no overarching government strategy or targets for reducing statutory homelessness, and delivery of new housing supply is behind scheduled targets.

There is a growing consensus about the link between rising homelessness levels and changes to benefit entitlement. For example, the periodic capping and freezing of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates for people renting in the private sector. Many commentators are calling for a long-term commitment to uplift LHA rates in line with the cheapest 30% of the private rented market to help prevent affordability challenges that can lead to homelessness.

Charities across the youth homelessness sector [launched a campaign](#) in 2023, calling on the government to develop a national cross-departmental youth homelessness strategy for England, informed by young people’s lived experience. These calls follow growing concerns about the number of young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and the capacity of local authorities to support this age group.

1 The causes of homelessness

Research has identified many inter-related factors that can cause or increase someone’s risk of experiencing homelessness, some of which are structural, and some personal or interpersonal.

This section provides an overview of the factors considered, by the government, politicians, academics and commentators, to be most relevant in the current context.

1.1 Structural factors

A number of structural factors can influence levels of homelessness and impact how local authorities respond. Some of these factors are outlined below.

Shortage of housing for social rent

Homelessness is understood to be the most visible manifestation of a long-term undersupply of housing. In particular, as noted by the Built Environment Lords Select Committee in the [report of their inquiry into meeting housing demand](#) (2022), there is a “serious shortage of social housing, which is reflected in long waiting lists for social homes and a large number of families housed in temporary accommodation.”¹

In 2023, local authorities reported they were finding it “progressively more difficult” to secure a social tenancy for people facing homelessness because of declining availability and rising demand. At the same time, sourcing private rented accommodation had become more challenging for authorities.²

The [final report of The Smith Institute’s Affordable Housing Commission](#) (2020) highlighted that housing unaffordability had become a particular problem for large numbers of low-income households and that homelessness is “one of the most depressing consequences of unaffordable housing”.³

¹ Built Environment Committee, [Meeting housing demand](#), January 2022, p37

² Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Glen Bramley, Lynne McMordie, Hal Pawson, Beth Watts-Cobbe, Gillian Young, [The Homelessness Monitor: England 2023](#), Crisis, July 2023, pp28-29

³ The Smith Institute, [Making Housing Affordable Again: Rebalancing the Nation’s Housing System: The final report of the Affordable Housing Commission](#), March 2020, p58

Answering the question of how we can make housing affordable again, the Commission argues:

... the government should take concerted action to rebalance the housing system, in particular to shift the tenure mix much more towards social housing as well as affordable home ownership. This would make the housing system fairer and more efficient.⁴

With rents linked to local incomes and typically set at around 50–60% of market rates, housing at ‘social rent’ levels is the most affordable type of social housing for low-income households.⁵

Research conducted for Crisis and the National Housing Federation (NHF), is widely cited as establishing the case for a large programme of social rented housing development. The study, published in 2018, identified a need for 340,000 homes in England over the period 2021–31, of which 90,000 should be for social rent.⁶ Updated analysis carried out for the UK Housing Review 2024 “broadly confirms the results of the 2018 study”.⁷ The updated figures indicate a need for an additional 60–70,000 homes for social rent per year up to 2030, rising to 90,000 each year from 2030.⁸

In April 2024, the Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities (LUHC) Select Committee published the [report of their inquiry into the finances and sustainability of the social housing sector \(PDF\)](#). The report restates a previous conclusion of the Committee:

The problem of a continuing chronic shortage of social housing that we identified in our 2020 Report, Building More Social Housing, remains. In line with the conclusions of our 2020 report, we conclude that the Government must support, regulate and invest in the social housing sector so that the country can increase delivery to 90,000 social rent homes a year.⁹

The end of an assured shorthold tenancy (AST)

Since 2010, there has been a steady increase in the proportion of homelessness applicants reporting the termination of an assured shorthold tenancy (AST) as the reason for losing their last settled home. The AST is the standard type of tenancy used in the private rented sector (PRS) in England.

Since April 2018, when the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 came into force, a new data recording system has required local authorities to record the reason for loss of an AST for households assessed as owed either the

⁴ As above, p18

⁵ Homes England, [Fact Sheet 9: What is affordable housing?](#), November 2023

⁶ Professor Glen Bramley, [Housing supply requirements across Great Britain: for low-income households and homeless people](#), Crisis and NHF, November 2018.

⁷ Mark Stephens, John Perry, Peter Williams, Gillian Young, UK Housing Review 2024, Chartered Institute of Housing, March 2024, p20 [available to purchase via ukhousingreview.org.uk]

⁸ Glen Bramley, [Housing Requirements in England Revisited](#). Heriot-Watt University, March 2024

⁹ Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee, [The Finances and Sustainability of the Social Housing Sector](#), April 2024, p8

prevention or relief duty.¹⁰ Section 2 of the Library briefing on [Statutory homelessness \(England\): The legal framework and performance](#) provides an overview of official homelessness statistics.

Local authorities also record cases where homelessness is threatened because a private tenant has been served with a valid section 21 notice. Briefly, [section 21 of the Housing Act 1988](#) enables private landlords to recover properties let under an AST without having to establish fault on the part of the tenant.¹¹

22% of applicants owed a prevention or relief duty in 2018/19 gave the loss of an AST as the reason for their current/threatened homelessness (58,660 households). 19,380 of these applicants were owed a prevention duty after being served with a valid section 21 notice.

Evictions from most residential tenancies were banned between 26 March and 20 September 2020 in response to the Covid-19 outbreak.

Between 26 March 2020 and 31 May 2021, the government introduced a range of measures to protect tenants from eviction during the Covid-19 pandemic, including:¹²

- a temporary, complete ban on evictions for most residential tenancies
- limits to enforcement of eviction orders when the complete ban ended
- extending the notice period that certain tenants are entitled to receive when a landlord seeks to recover possession of their properties

In 2020/21 the number of households owed a prevention or relief duty due to an AST ending was 42% lower than in 2018/19. The number of households owed a prevention duty after being served a valid section 21 notice fell by 54%.

By 2022/23, the figures had risen above pre-pandemic levels.¹³

Crisis' [Homelessness monitor: England 2021](#) covered the period of the Covid-19 pandemic. It reported that government action to suspend evictions from social and private rented tenancies, alongside raising Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, "was identified by 87% of councils as very important in preventing and minimising homelessness."¹⁴

On 15 April 2019, then-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, James Brokenshire, [announced the government would consult on new legislation to abolish section 21 'no fault' evictions](#). Progress in taking

¹⁰ The official figures prior to the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 did not capture the reason for homelessness among all applicants, only those owed the main housing duty.

¹¹ Section 21 evictions was the subject of a Westminster Hall debate: [HC Deb 25 October 2022 vol 721WH](#)

¹² For more information about the measures introduced in response to Covid-19, see Commons Library research briefing CBP-8867, [Coronavirus: Support for landlords and tenants](#), 20 December 2021

¹³ DLUHC, [Statutory homelessness live tables](#), Table A1, 22 September 2022

¹⁴ Crisis, [The Homelessness Monitor: England 2021 – key findings](#), 1 March 2021

forward the commitment to abolish section 21 evictions is covered in section 3.3 of this briefing.

Why the end of an AST leads to homelessness

On 23 July 2024 the National Audit Office (NAO) published its value for money report, [The effectiveness of government in tackling homelessness](#). Within the context of a lack of social rented housing resulting in households “being pushed” into the private rented sector, characterised as being “typically more expensive” and providing less security of tenure than social housing, the report highlights:

The ending of a private rented sector assured shorthold tenancy is one of the biggest drivers of homelessness, accounting for around 23% of households owed a prevention or relief duty in Quarter 3, 2023-24.¹⁵

Some suggest that the end of an AST itself is not the reason for homelessness, pointing to other, underlying reasons. For example, the Residential Landlords Association (now the National Residential Landlords Association, NRLA) disputes assertions that section 21 is a cause of homelessness. The organisation has published several pieces of research arguing that the rise in homelessness from the PRS is linked more closely to rent arrears caused by changes to welfare policy, such as restrictions to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate and the roll-out of Universal Credit.¹⁶ The Commons Library research briefing, [The end of 'no fault' section 21 evictions \(March 2023\)](#), provides more information.¹⁷

In 2018, the Nationwide Foundation commissioned a [study to understand the incidence of vulnerability in the PRS in England](#). The authors assert that “demand for social housing has far outstripped availability, meaning that people who most need security, affordability and protection have no alternative but to live in the private rented sector.”¹⁸ They suggest that the increase in the number of homelessness cases because of an AST ending could simply reflect the increased size of the PRS. They go on to argue that rather than presuming that the end of an AST is a leading cause of homelessness:

It is equally valid to state that the homelessness figures indicate the number of tenants unable to secure alternative accommodation towards or after the end of a fixed-term AST. This failure may as well be regarded as an issue with

¹⁵ NAO, [The effectiveness of government in tackling homelessness](#), HC 119, 23 July 2024, p17

¹⁶ See Tom Simcock, 2017, [State of the PRS - 2017. Quarter 2 landlord survey report. State Intervention into Renting: Making sense of the impact of policy changes](#), Residential Landlords Association, p47; Dr Tom Simcock, 2018, [Investigating the effect of Welfare Reform on Private Renting \(PDE\)](#), Residential Landlords Association [accessed online via Thinkhouse 17 May 2024]; and Dr Chris O’Leary, Dr Susan O’Shea and Prof Kevin Albertson, 2018, [Homelessness and the Private Rented Sector](#), Residential Landlords Association

¹⁷ Commons Library research briefing CBP-8658, [The end of 'no fault' section 21 evictions](#), 29 July 2021

¹⁸ David Rhodes, Julie Rugg, [Vulnerability amongst Low-Income Households in the Private Rented Sector in England](#), University of York Centre for Housing Policy, 2018, Foreword.

access to social housing, or relate to an overall limitation in accommodation supply.”¹⁹

Commentators have also highlighted a need to consider the broader range of reasons why landlords might be ending ASTs. According to analysis of official homelessness figures conducted by the NRLA between July and December 2023, landlords wishing to sell their property was the most commonly recorded reason households were owed a prevention or relief duty due to the end of an AST.²⁰

Measures in the [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#) are aimed at addressing how local authorities deal with applications from tenants who have been served with a valid notice to leave an AST.²¹ The Library briefing on [Statutory homelessness \(England\): The legal framework and performance](#) provides an overview of the statutory homelessness framework.

Rising living costs

Local authorities and homelessness organisations have highlighted the impact of rising living costs on levels of homelessness.²²

Research has shown that rising living costs are having a disproportionate impact on low-income households both in and out of work, increasing their risk of homelessness. [Research from the Cost of Living Research Group at the University of York](#) (2023) offers insight into local government responses to the ‘cost of living crisis’. They suggest that financially constrained homelessness services are having to respond to a growing number of people threatened with homelessness due to rising living costs.²³

In 2022, Crisis carried out research into the impact of rising living costs on homelessness and housing security. They said:

This research shows how the 2022 cost of living crisis is driving thousands of people into homelessness. Unaffordable housing and other rising costs are forcing people to lose their homes and many people are trapped in homelessness as it becomes harder to cover the living costs of a new home.²⁴

¹⁹ As above, p14

²⁰ NRLA, [Landlords selling up biggest threat to renters](#), 15 May 2024

²¹ Commons Library research briefing CBP-6856, [Applying as homeless from an assured shorthold tenancy \(England\)](#), last updated 7 March 2023

²² Hannah Keilloh, [The economic crisis risks becoming a homelessness crisis](#), Inside Housing, 10 October 2022 [subscription required]

²³ University of York Cost of Living Research Group, [Sticking Plasters and Systemic Solutions: Cost of living responses in the UK](#), October 2023

²⁴ Michael Allard, [“I don’t know what the winter’s going to bring”: experiences of homelessness during a cost of living crisis](#), Crisis, 12 December 2022, executive summary

LHA rates set the maximum amount people renting from a private landlord can claim towards their housing costs via Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

Help with housing costs via the benefit system

Reductions and freezes to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates since April 2011, and other changes to the benefit system in the UK over the same period, are often linked to increasing levels of homelessness in England.²⁵

In July 2024, the National Audit Office (NAO) published a report [The effectiveness of government in tackling homelessness \(PDF\)](#). It describes how various welfare reforms, including capping and freezing LHA levels, have reduced household incomes at the same time as PRS rents have been rising faster than wage growth in many areas of the country. They refer to this impact as one of the “many inter-related factors associated with homelessness in recent years.”²⁶ This repeats a conclusion of [the NAO’s 2017 homelessness report](#).

Changes to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates

LHA rates were frozen in cash terms for four years from April 2016, with some provision for the highest rent growth areas through ‘targeted affordability funding’ (TAF). The TAF, alongside increased funding for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP), were intended to help mitigate some of the effects of the LHA freeze in the most affected areas.²⁷

Many organisations argue that freezing LHA rates increases the risk of homelessness because it separates the link between housing benefit assistance and the evolution of local private rental prices. In 2020, the Local Government Association (LGA) found that, at the time, “LHA effectively sits at the 13th percentile of market rents (compared to the 30th percentile it was set at in 2016).”²⁸ Work by Crisis, in 2019, highlighted that realigning rates to the 30th percentile would prevent a significant number of homelessness cases and would offer cost benefits by “reducing the need for expensive temporary accommodation and services”.²⁹

In April 2020, LHA rates were realigned to the 30th percentile of local rents (based on 2018-19 rent levels) in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The measure was widely welcomed by the homelessness sector. As previously noted, Crisis’ [Homelessness monitor: England 2021](#) recorded this as one of the “very important” measures in minimising homelessness during the pandemic.³⁰

²⁵ For more information about changes to the benefits system since the Coalition Government came to power in May 2010, see Commons Library briefing series, [Ten Years of Welfare Reform](#) [various publication dates between December 2020 and August 2021]

²⁶ NAO, [The effectiveness of government in tackling homelessness, HC 119 \(PDF\)](#), HC 119, 23 July 2024, p7

²⁷ See Commons Library debate pack, [Local housing allowance and homelessness](#), 17 July 2019

²⁸ Zoe Charlesworth, Dr Benjamin Fell, Fabiana Macor, [Evidencing the link between the Local Housing Allowance freeze and homelessness. \(PDF\)](#), LGA, 5 February 2020

²⁹ Crisis, [Cover the Cost: Restoring Local Housing Allowance Rates to reduce homelessness. \(PDF\)](#), August 2019, pp4-5

³⁰ Crisis, [The Homelessness Monitor: England 2021 – key findings](#), 1 March 2021

Following the April 2020 increase, LHA rates were re-frozen in cash terms. As with the previous freeze, commentators argued that the measure was making it more difficult for people who rely on housing benefit assistance to find and keep a home in the private rented sector.

According to [analysis conducted by Crisis in partnership with online property portal Zoopla](#) (October 2022) the average gap between LHA rates and advertised rents in the cheapest 30% of the PRS had grown by more than 40% between April and September 2022. Crisis, said their overall findings:

... represent an increasingly desperate situation in which people receiving housing benefit are being totally priced out of the rental market and are at real risk of homelessness. This is extremely concerning given the scale of the problem, with one in three private renters reliant on housing benefit to cover the cost of their rent.³¹

In November 2023, [London Councils published research](#) which estimated that:

...uprating LHA to the 30th percentile would prevent an additional 16,500 to 22,000 London households becoming homeless over the next six years, leading to savings of between £80 and £107 million per year for local authorities.³²

In the [2023 Autumn Statement](#), the government announced an end to the four-year freeze to LHA rates, which they said would “benefit 1.6 million low-income households, who will be around £800 a year better off on average in 2024-25.”³³ From April 2024 rates were realigned to the cheapest 30% of the PRS based on rents in the year to September 2023.³⁴

In March 2024, analysis by property company, Savills, indicated that average PRS rent rises across Great Britain continue to outpace LHA rates, even at the latest increased levels.³⁵

³¹ Crisis, [Properties affordable on housing benefit have declined by a third in the last five months – down to just 8%](#), 28 October 2022

³² London Councils, [Impact of unfreezing Local Housing Allowance rates in London](#), Alma Economics, September 2023

³³ HM Treasury, [Autumn Statement 2023](#), CP-977, November 2023, p4

³⁴ For more information about changes to LHA since 2008, see Commons Library briefing CBP-04957, [Local Housing Allowance \(LHA\): Help with rent for private tenants](#), 21 December 2023

³⁵ Savills, [Local Housing Allowance: what can claimants afford?](#), 19 March

For people affected by the benefit cap, the reduction in benefit is taken in the first instance from Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit.

Benefit cap

In 2013 the maximum amount working age households could receive in benefits was capped at £26,000 per year for families and £18,200 per year for single adults with no children. From 7 November 2016, the benefit cap was reduced from £26,000 to £23,000 in London and £20,000 elsewhere.³⁶

Research highlights that for people affected by the benefit cap the reductions to housing support means that a substantial proportion of the private rented sector in Great Britain is unaffordable.³⁷ The potential for this impact to be mitigated through Discretionary Housing Payments has been questioned due to “the scale of the losses”.³⁸

Other research highlights the impact of the benefit cap on homelessness, especially in areas with the highest housing costs. [Research carried out by Homeless Link](#) (2021) found that for single working-age benefit claimants in London the “benefit cap is a barrier to private rented sector accommodation” and “leads to increased rent arrears and/or other debt and risk of eviction in London”.³⁹

From April 2023, the benefit cap and other social security payment levels were increased for the first time since the cap’s introduction. The cap was uplifted by 10.1%, in line with inflation.⁴⁰

Benefit sanctions

Evidence indicates that people experiencing homelessness may be disproportionately affected by benefit sanctions.⁴¹ A benefit sanction is the withdrawal of a welfare benefit or a reduction in the amount of benefit paid for a certain period, when a claimant is deemed not to have complied with a work-related condition for receiving the benefit in question.⁴²

Benefit sanctions have also been linked to an increased risk of homelessness among groups considered most vulnerable to their effects, specifically within

³⁶ For further information about the aims the household benefit cap and how it operates, see Commons Library constituency casework article, [Benefit Cap](#), 14 June 2023

³⁷ Policy in Practice, [Mind the benefit cap: why families are still falling through our welfare system](#), 23 June 2022

³⁸ Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Hal Pawson, Glen Bramley, Jenny Wood, Beth Watts, Mark Stephens, Janice Blenkinsopp, [The Homelessness Monitor: England 2019](#), Crisis, May 2019, p55

³⁹ Trust for London, [Homelessness and Welfare Benefits in London: Practical guidance for people working to improve local responses to homelessness](#), Homeless Link, 9 April 2021

⁴⁰ Current levels are now £22,020 per year (or £14,753 for single adults with no children) nationally, and £25,323 per year (£16,967 for single adults with no children) in Greater London. See DWP, [Benefit cap statistics: background information and methodology](#), 19 September 2023

⁴¹ Christina Beatty, Mike Foden, Lindsey McCarthy, Kesia Reeve, [Benefit sanctions and homelessness: a scoping report](#), Crisis, 2015

⁴² See Commons Library debate pack CDP-0230, [Department for Work and Pensions policy on benefit sanctions](#), 12 December 2022

the context of “a raft of other reforms recently or currently being implemented.”⁴³

1.2

Individual and interpersonal factors

Experiences, behaviours and circumstances at both the individual and interpersonal level can increase someone’s vulnerability to homelessness.

Experiencing poverty

A [study carried out by academics at Heriot Watt University in 2017](#) argues that the most important driver of homelessness in all its forms is poverty, especially childhood poverty.⁴⁴ Expanding on the link between homelessness and low-income households’ difficulties in paying for market housing, the authors refer to a wider body of evidence to describe “the interaction between poverty and a range of other ‘social dislocations’ associated with homelessness”.⁴⁵ For example, physical and mental ill health, domestic violence, drug misuse, chronic offending.

Relationship breakdown

The immediate causes, or ‘triggers’, of homelessness reported in the [government’s official homelessness statistics](#) have remained constant over the years. Relationship breakdown is highlighted as a significant factor. This can include family or friends no longer being willing or able to provide accommodation, a non-violent relationship breakdown with a partner, and fleeing domestic abuse. The Library briefing, [Statutory homelessness \(England\): The legal framework and performance](#), provides an overview of official homelessness statistics.

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is a “significant contributor” to statutory homelessness, especially among women.⁴⁶ According to official homelessness figures for England up to the end of 2023, domestic abuse has been the second most frequent reason for an applicant becoming homeless from their last settled home in the last five years.⁴⁷ However, these figures are “in all likelihood, a significant underestimate”, because survivors of domestic abuse are “often

⁴³ As above, Executive summary

⁴⁴ Glen Bramley, Suzanne Fitzpatrick, [Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk?](#), Heriot Watt University online research portal, *Housing Studies*, 33(1), 96–116, 2018

⁴⁵ As above, p98

⁴⁶ Centre for Homelessness Impact, [What Works Evidence Notes: Domestic Abuse and Homelessness \(PDE\)](#), April 2024, p5

⁴⁷ DLUHC, [Statutory homelessness live tables](#), Table A2R, 13 October 2023

reluctant to report their experiences, and are also more likely to experience homelessness as ‘hidden’ or ‘concealed’.”⁴⁸

Health problems, including substance dependence

Poor mental and physical health problems, including substance dependence, can be both a cause and consequence of homelessness.

[Public health England’s \(PHE\) guidance, Health matters: rough sleeping](#) (2020) explains that common mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety “are over twice as high among people who experience homelessness”, and “almost all long-term physical ill-health needs are more prevalent in the homeless population”, compared with the general population.”⁴⁹

On substance dependence, the guidance notes:

Those who are dependent on drugs or alcohol may struggle to retain accommodation due to financial difficulties, problems with behaviour or family relationship breakdown. Homelessness can also be the route to substance dependence.⁵⁰

Offending behaviour

Evidence suggests a strong link between homelessness and offending. Several studies have also evidenced “the complex, and often bidirectional relationships between homelessness, offending behaviour, and substance use disorders.”⁵¹

Risk of homelessness among different groups

The circumstances and conditions that lead to an experience of homelessness can vary among different groups.

Young people

Relationship breakdown with family, often influenced by other factors like employment, mental and physical health issues, is a major cause of homelessness among young people.⁵²

A range of issues is understood to have particular impacts on young people, increasing their risk of homelessness. These include:

⁴⁸ Centre for Homelessness Impact, [What Works Evidence Notes: Domestic Abuse and Homelessness](#) (PDF), April 2024, p5 cites Joanne Bretherton, Reconsidering Gender in Homelessness, European Journal of Homelessness 11:1, 1-21, 2017

⁴⁹ Public health England, [Health matters: rough sleeping](#), last updated 11 February 2020

⁵⁰ As above, [Drug and alcohol dependence](#)

⁵¹ Honor Sibthorp Prottis, Stephen Sharman, Amanda Roberts, [The challenges of comorbidities: a qualitative analysis of substance use disorders and offending behaviour within homelessness in the UK](#). Journal of Social Distress and Homelessness, 1–14. 19 May 2023

⁵² Centrepoint, [Failure to Act - The scale of youth homelessness in the UK - full report](#), 2023

The SAR limits the amount of housing benefit that single person under the age of 35 can receive if they are living in the private rented sector. [There are exemptions.](#)

- The cost-of-living crisis is having a disproportionate impact on young people’s housing situations and mental health.⁵³
- Young people who become homeless often have less resources because the minimum wage is lower for those under 23, and those under 25 receive lower benefit payments despite facing the same living costs as other adults.⁵⁴
- The shared accommodation rate (SAR) of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) for young people aged under 35 limits the proportion of homes in the private rented sector that young people can afford.⁵⁵
- Young people who live in supported accommodation face barriers to employment because the way their benefit is worked out can act as a barrier to young people working more hours and becoming financially independent.⁵⁶

[Research commissioned by the 2019 Conservative government](#) (2019) highlights that “young people who identify as LGBT experience more acute challenges and are more likely to find themselves homeless than their non-LGBT peers.”⁵⁷

Young people leaving care are a particularly vulnerable group who “are at significantly higher risk of homelessness than their peers who have not experienced care.”⁵⁸

The issue of youth homelessness was the topic of a [Westminster Hall debate, 1 May 2024](#). Leading the debate, Paula Barker (Labour MP for Liverpool, Wavertree), referred to the findings of a 2023 report from national youth homelessness charity, Centrepoin, and called on the government to change how data is collected and develop a national cross-departmental youth homelessness strategy.⁵⁹

Women

In August 2022, charity Homeless Link published a literature review, [Exploring women’s homelessness What we know](#). They concluded:

⁵³ Centre for Homelessness Impact, [Cost of living puts pressure on young people’s housing and mental health](#), 12 January 2023

⁵⁴ Youth Select Committee 2024, [The impact of the cost of living crisis on young people](#), 6 March 2024

⁵⁵ Centrepoin, [Failure to Act: the scale of youth homelessness in the UK – full report](#), 2023

⁵⁶ St Basils, [Living or Surviving? - Benefits, barriers, and opportunities for young people transitioning out of homelessness](#), WMCA & the Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University, February 2023

⁵⁷ MHCLG and DWP, [Homelessness. Causes of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping. Rapid Evidence Assessment](#), March 2019, p22

⁵⁸ Centre for Homelessness Impact, [The Impacts of Lifelong Links on Housing Outcomes for Young People Leaving Care: An evaluation using matching \(PDF\)](#), Michal Sanders, Vanessa Picker, November 2023, p3

⁵⁹ Centrepoin, [Failure to Act: the scale of youth homelessness in the UK – full report](#), 2023

“...that women experience homelessness differently to men and other distinct groups...Amongst women experiencing single homelessness, there are often significant histories of violence and abuse both before and after losing their home. Women also experience mental ill health, separation from child and certain types of physical health needs to a greater degree or differently to men.⁶⁰

People who have served in the UK armed forces

The experiences of people who have served in the UK armed forces can increase their vulnerability to homelessness. An [article published in the Journal of Veteran Studies in April 2024](#) examined the evidence about veteran experiences in the UK. The author notes that research exploring the reasons behind veteran homelessness is limited. Their review did identify some insights from the available literature:

One factor contributing to veteran homelessness is financial difficulties, encapsulating both employment difficulties and getting into debt Trades learnt within the military may not be applicable to a civilian context, with some stark differences in the ability to apply key skills within a civilian job. Cost-of-living difficulties, fuel poverty, and low support from key benefits may contribute to financial difficulties and reliance on “quick” fixes such as payday loans.⁶¹

Prison leavers

People being released from prison can be particularly vulnerable to homelessness if a suitable housing solution is not arranged beforehand and appropriate support is not provided following release. A prison sentence can also trigger an experience of homelessness if nothing is put in place to maintain an existing tenancy while serving a sentence. While the risk of homelessness may not be immediate upon leaving prison, a “high rate of housing precarity among ex-prisoners may increase risks of homelessness over time.”⁶²

People from minority ethnic groups

[Research from academics at Heriot Watt University](#) (November 2022) reported “overwhelming statistical evidence that people from Black and minoritised ethnic communities experience highly disproportionate levels of homelessness in the UK.”⁶³ Section 2 of the Library briefing paper on [Statutory homelessness \(England\): The legal framework and performance](#) summarises official homelessness data broken down by ethnicity and nationality.

⁶⁰ Homeless Link, [Exploring Women’s Homelessness What we know](#), August 2022, p15

⁶¹ Hannah Johnstone, [The Best Place to Be a Veteran”\(?\): An Examination of the Current Veteran Experience Within the United Kingdom](#), Journal of Veteran Studies, volume: 10, issue 2, 23 April 2024

⁶² European Observatory on Homelessness, [Comparative Studies on Homelessness 13: Leaving Prison and Homelessness](#), Brussels, December 2023, 26 January 2024, p5

⁶³ Glen Bramley, Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Jill McIntyre, Sarah Johnsen, [Homelessness Amongst Black and Minoritised Ethnic Communities State of the Nation Report](#), Heriot Watt University, Institute for Social Policy, Housing, Equalities Research, 21 November 2022, p30

1.3

Rural homelessness

Concerns have been raised about growing levels of homelessness in rural areas. Research published in November 2023, from countryside charity, Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), found that levels of homelessness in rural areas of England had risen by 40% in the five years to 2022/23. They point to “a chronic lack of genuinely affordable housing” as the prominent driver of this trend.⁶⁴

In July 2023, the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) published a blog setting out their views in response to the findings of the Rural Homelessness Counts Coalition’s [Homelessness in the countryside: A hidden crisis](#) report:

Ending rural homelessness requires a strategic approach. Firstly, we need to improve our understanding of the scale and distribution of rural homelessness. This involves developing more effective methods for counting and recording instances of homelessness in rural areas.

Secondly, we need to address rural poverty and high housing costs, which are key drivers of homelessness.

[...]

Thirdly, we need to challenge the stigma associated with homelessness in rural areas. This involves raising awareness about the issue and promoting a more inclusive and understanding attitude within rural communities.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ CPRE press release, [Our report: Housing crisis poses threat to survival of rural communities](#), 28 November 2023

⁶⁵ CIH, [Uncovering the hidden crisis: A comprehensive approach is needed to tackle rural homelessness in England](#), 6 July 2023

2 Government homelessness research

The 2019 Conservative government conducted a number of feasibility studies aimed at:

- improving its understanding of the wider causes of homelessness
- informing the development of a model for accurately forecasting levels of homelessness and appraising policy options
- ensuring government measures are informed by robust evidence

This section provides an overview of these studies and summarises their findings.

2.1 Predictive modelling feasibility study

The government published the [findings of commissioned research](#) on 25 March 2019. The research, conducted by Alma Economics, aimed to review evidence on the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping and explore options for modelling future homelessness trends and appraising policy options. Reports were published across three strands.

A rapid evidence assessment

The report summarised the evidence on the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping and advised on possible next steps for “developing a suite of quantitative, predictive models of homelessness and rough sleeping in England.”⁶⁶

Findings include:

- There is a complex interplay between different factors and an important difference between underlying causes, and ‘trigger’ events that immediately predate an experience of homelessness.
- There is broad consensus on:
 - the approach to categorising structural and individual causes of homelessness

⁶⁶ MHCLG, DWP, [Causes of homelessness and rough sleeping: rapid evidence assessment \(PDF\)](#), 25 March 2019, p4

- which causes are important
- the idea that causes “vary over a number of dimensions”
- There is a lack of clarity around the importance of different factors including how different causes interact and their effects.
- On developing a model for predicting homelessness:
 - identifying “leading indicators that can act as early warning signals” is required
 - an understanding of all the structural factors is not required, but if the policy focus is on prevention, it will be important to know which causal factors can be changed by policy levers

A review of existing models of homelessness

A review and assessment of various existing models used for:⁶⁷

- predicting future levels of homelessness
- appraising the potential effects of different policy scenarios
- identifying early risk indicators
- accurately estimating ‘hidden homelessness’

The review concluded that there is merit in applying different models for different purposes. For example, both economics-based simulation models and time-series models can be used to forecast future homelessness levels. However, the former are better suited to appraising the medium-to-long-term impact of policy changes, and the latter are more suitable for using past trends to produce accurate forecasts in the short to medium-term.

Feasibility study

Informed by the outcome of the rapid evidence assessment and critical review of existing models (above), the feasibility study sought to identify available options for developing a model, or a suite of models, that could assess the impacts of government intervention on levels of homelessness.⁶⁸

Recommendations include:

- Using different models to address different objectives is likely to be more effective than using one complex model to accommodate all objectives.

‘Hidden homelessness’ refers to people whose circumstances are hidden from official statistics and services because they are dealing with their homelessness situation informally.

⁶⁷ MHCLG, DWP, [Causes of homelessness and rough sleeping: review of models of homelessness \(PDF\)](#), 25 March 2019

⁶⁸ MHCLG, DWP, [Causes of homelessness and rough sleeping: feasibility study \(PDF\)](#), 25 March 2019

- Improving official data collections on homelessness and rough sleeping will enable a more robust estimation of homelessness levels and policy appraisal.
- Models used should be well-designed, easy to use, be straightforward to update, and produce a high level of detail.

2.2 Test and learn programme and system-wide evaluation

The 2019 Conservative government's [cross-government rough sleeping strategy, Ending rough sleeping for good](#) (2022) announced plans to conduct two strands of research: a £12 million 'test and learn' programme and a £2.2 million evaluation of the statutory homelessness system. In December 2023, the [Centre for Homelessness Impact \(CHI\) confirmed they had been commissioned](#) to deliver the test and learn and systems initiative.

In January 2024, [DLUHC published feasibility studies](#) for the homelessness and rough sleeping system (HRS) systems-wide evaluation, and the test and learn programme.

HRS systems-wide evaluation feasibility study

The [study, conducted by Alma Economics \(PDF\)](#), explored the relationship between local interventions and the system as a whole, and to assess different interventions aimed at tackling homelessness and rough sleeping.

Alma Economics proposed:

...creating a consistent framework for evaluating the HRS system across two areas:

policy making at the central government level – including decisions about funding, policies and programmes, and collaboration across government departments and

service delivery at the local level – including local authorities, commissioned and non-commissioned third sector organisations, and services by other public bodies.⁶⁹

Test and learn feasibility study

CHI carried out the [study to assess the viability of a research programme \(PDF\)](#) aimed at ensuring all government decisions relating to its work on homelessness are based on robust evidence. They concluded that “there is both a need and a demand” for an initiative made up of a portfolio of

⁶⁹ MHCLG, DWP, [Causes of homelessness and rough sleeping: feasibility study \(PDF\)](#), 25 March 2019, p5

randomised control trials to test the effectiveness of nine interventions.⁷⁰ The interventions were chosen following a “comprehensive exercise”, and include personalised budgets and cash transfers, and the Department for Education’s programme for care leavers at risk of homelessness.

⁷⁰ DLUHC, [Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Systems-wide evaluation feasibility reports. Test & Learn feasibility study](#), January 2024

3 Government policy and stakeholder comment

The 2019 Conservative government [said that it had put tackling homelessness and rough sleeping “firmly at the heart” of its agenda](#). They committed to end rough sleeping by the end of the parliamentary term, which was three years earlier than the commitment of the previous government. They also committed to continue supporting people at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping through the ongoing implementation of the [Homelessness Reduction Act \(HRA\) 2017](#).

This section discusses the various policies implemented by the 2019 government to achieve this aim. It also reflects on policies introduced by Conservative governments since 2015.

The Commons Library briefing, [Statutory homelessness \(England\): The legal framework and performance](#), summarises progress with implementing the HRA to date.

3.1 Rough sleeping strategy

The 2019 government published its updated rough sleeping strategy, [Ending rough sleeping for good](#), on 3 September 2022. It is “a cross-government strategy setting out how the government and its partners will end rough sleeping for good.”⁷¹ The government committed to acting across four areas:

Prevention

- increasing affordability and security of housing
- empowering local authorities to better prevent rough sleeping – including fully embedding the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- committing to working with stakeholders from local authorities and the service delivery sector to establish an operational risk assessment tool to assist with the prevention of rough sleeping
- supporting the ambition that no one is released from a public institution to the streets through the following commitments:

⁷¹ DLUHC, [Ending rough sleeping for good](#), 3 September 2022

- No-one should leave prison homeless or to sleep rough.
 - Young people leaving care will receive the support they need to secure and maintain suitable accommodation.
 - No-one should be discharged from hospital to the streets.
 - No-one who has served in the UK armed forces should have to sleep rough.
 - Reviewing the impact of the new asylum dispersal system on homelessness and rough sleeping.
- supporting recovery to prevent rough sleeping recurring

Intervention

- extending investment into co-ordinated local rough sleeping services and ensuring tailored support to meet individual needs
- building on the ‘exhaust all options’ approach with non-UK nationals sleeping rough to make sure those who have restricted eligibility for public funds have a clear pathway off the streets
- providing local authorities, police and other agencies with the tools they need to work effectively together to address rough sleeping, protect the public and make communities safe for all
- making it easier for the public to play their part in supporting people sleeping rough

Recovery

- supporting both housing-led approaches and the Housing First model, and making sure specialist homes are in place for people experiencing rough sleeping
- addressing unacceptable, poor quality supported housing and increasing supply, including through a new £200m Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme
- improving the support available to help people with experience of rough sleeping into employment
- providing “significant levels” of investment into drug and alcohol treatment to support people experiencing rough sleeping and improve mental health provision

A transparent joined-up system

- introducing a new national data-led framework to measure progress towards ending rough sleeping

- ensuring robust but flexible accountability structures are in place
- improving the evidence base and understanding of which interventions work to end rough sleeping
- supporting the voluntary, community and faith sectors to play their part alongside other delivery partners
- improving how different services work together for people sleeping rough, particularly people facing multiple disadvantage, including supporting partners within the new Integrated Care System to develop joined-up local strategies that bring together housing, homelessness and healthcare⁷²

In September 2023, the Kerlake Commission on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping published a report, [Turning the Tide on Rising Homelessness and Rough Sleeping](#):

Following this evidence gathering, it is the conclusion of the Kerlake Commission that the Government will not meet its goal to end rough sleeping by 2024. Rough sleeping is on the increase and at the heart of it are chronic and unresolved systemic issues, which have left the country vulnerable to new pressures.⁷³

On 29 April 2024, Felicity Buchan, then-housing and homelessness minister, responded to a written parliamentary question on what progress the department has made on ending rough sleeping and whether it remains their policy to end rough sleeping this year:

The Government is committed to ending rough sleeping and we have made good progress towards this goal. Despite the challenging context, the long-term rough sleeping trends show the progress that government and local partners have made. Rough sleeping levels are 18% lower in 2023 compared to the peak in 2017 and 9% lower than they were in 2019 before the pandemic.

We are providing an unprecedented £2.4 billion to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, including over £547 million via the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) 2022-25. This includes a total additional investment of over £47 million announced in September 2023 and January 2024 for the RSI, and a further investment of up to £10 million through Rough Sleeping Winter Pressures funding, which is targeted at areas with the highest pressures.⁷⁴

The House of Commons Library briefing, [Rough sleeping \(England\)](#) (28 March 2023) provides information about the policies aimed at meeting the government's target of ending rough sleeping by 2024.

⁷² Integrated care systems are responsible for improving the health of the local population, and for integrating health and social care services. For more information see Commons Library Insight, [NHS reform: Integrated Care Systems](#), 17 December 2019

⁷³ The Kerlake Commission on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping, [Turning the Tide on Rising Homelessness and Rough Sleeping](#), September 2023, executive summary

⁷⁴ PQ 22718 [on [Sleeping Rough](#)], 29 April 2024

3.2

Increasing affordable housing supply

One of the main ways in which governments seek to tackle and prevent homelessness is to stimulate housing supply. The 2019 Conservative party manifesto committed to “continue our progress towards our target of 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s”⁷⁵ and build “at least a million more homes over this Parliament.”⁷⁶

Background on this aspect of government policy can be found in the following Commons Library briefings:

- [Stimulating housing supply - government initiatives \(England\)](#) (CBP-6416)
- [Tackling the under-supply of housing in England](#) (CBP-7671)
- [What is affordable housing?](#) (CBP-7747)
- [Social rented housing \(England\): past trends and prospects](#) (CBP-8963)

Funding for affordable housing

Various government investment decisions since 2017 intended to help deliver more homes for social rent.

£11.5 billion was allocated to the [Affordable Homes Programme 2021-26](#), to provide 180,000 new affordable homes in England, of which 32,000 would be for social rent.⁷⁷ However, in September 2022, the [National Audit Office forecasted](#) a shortfall of 23,000 homes against this target. Giving evidence to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee inquiry into the finances and sustainability of the social housing sector, Chief Executive of Homes England, Peter Denton, said increased inflation and construction costs, as well as greater emphasis on homes for social rent, had reduced the programme’s output.⁷⁸

The [Autumn Budget 2017](#) announced that councils in areas of high housing affordability pressures could bid for increases to their borrowing caps so they so they could “build more council homes.”⁷⁹

⁷⁵ [Conservative Party Manifesto 2019 \(PDF\)](#), p31

⁷⁶ [Queen’s Speech Background Briefing Notes \(PDF\)](#), 19 December 2019, p48

⁷⁷ PQ 147083, [on [Social Rented Housing: Coronavirus](#)], 4 February 2021

⁷⁸ [Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee Oral evidence: Financial Distress in Local Authorities \(PDF\)](#), HC 60, Q210

⁷⁹ [Autumn Budget 2017, HC 587 \(PDF\)](#), November 2017, para 5.23

Before 29 October 2018 government restricted how much local authorities could borrow against their Housing Revenue Account assets to fund new developments.

In October 2018, then-Prime Minister, Theresa May, announced that council borrowing caps would be removed altogether, to support more housebuilding.⁸⁰ The [Budget 2018](#) confirmed that borrowing caps would be abolished, with effect from 29 October 2018.⁸¹ The Local Government Association (LGA), on behalf of local authorities, welcomed this but also called for the ability to retain 100% of receipts from Right to Buy sales to ensure their replacement.⁸²

A [letter was sent to all councils in England 31 March 2023 on behalf of then-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Michael Gove \(PDF\)](#). It confirmed that for the two financial years, 2022-23 and 2023-24, local authorities were permitted, [subject to conditions](#), via formal agreement with the Secretary of State, to retain the share of RTB receipts that would usually have been returned to the government. The timeframe within which local authorities must spend the money on new homes was also extended from three to five years. Responding to the news, CIH welcomed the change but called on the government to “consider making the change permanent”.⁸³

In its [Spring Statement 2019](#), the government announced it would guarantee up to £3 billion of borrowing by housing associations in England to support delivery of around 30,000 affordable homes through its Affordable Homes Guarantee Scheme. In February 2024, the government announced an increase in funding for the scheme of £3 billion and an expansion which would permit housing providers to use the scheme to upgrade existing properties as well supporting new housing delivery.⁸⁴

Sector comment

Commentators continued to question the balance of the Affordable Homes Programme. In a blog post for Red Brick ahead of the 2024 General Election, Rachael Williamson, head of policy and external affairs at the Chartered Institute of Housing, said:

The next government should provide a much-needed boost to affordable housing supply by rebalancing DLUHC’s capital spending and allocating a more significant proportion of the programme to social rented homes. This would have little to no effect on overall government spend.⁸⁵

[Research published by CIH and the Centre for Homelessness Impact \(PDF\)](#) in October 2021 found that £572 million in Housing Benefit and the housing element of Universal Credit could be saved each year if councils could

⁸⁰ PoliticsHome, [Theresa May’s speech to the 2018 Conservative Party conference](#), 3 October 2018

⁸¹ [HM Treasury, HC 1629, 2018 Budget \(PDF\)](#), para 4.56

⁸² [Local Government Association Briefing for Lords Debate 31 January 2019 \(PDF\)](#)

⁸³ CIH, [CIH responds to government decision to allow councils to keep right to buy receipts for the next two years](#), 3 April 2023

⁸⁴ MHCLG press release, [£3 billion affordable housing boost to deliver 20,000 new homes](#), 12 February 2024

⁸⁵ Red Brick, [What could the next government do on housing in its first 100 days?](#), 2 July 2024

substitute social rented accommodation for the 73,700 private rented lettings currently used for temporary accommodation.⁸⁶

The Local Government Association (LGA) have highlighted the link between a “severe shortage of social housing” and the rising cost of providing temporary accommodation. They add that the shortage is compounded by rising living costs and frozen Local Housing Allowance rates which are “driving increases in homelessness and reducing councils’ ability to source suitable accommodation.” For more information about temporary accommodation see section 3.7 of this briefing.

During a [House of Lords debate on affordable housing supply 25 April 2024](#), the Conservative government stated that “the current global context and the significant economic challenges we are facing are making our objectives on homelessness more challenging. We remain committed to preventing homelessness where possible and helping people to stay in their homes.”⁸⁷

3.3 Insecure private rented sector tenancies

In England, a private landlord can end an assured shorthold tenancy (AST) without proving any ground for possession by serving a tenant with a valid section 21 notice.

Many commentators have argued that rising homelessness is linked to private landlords’ ability to end an assured shorthold tenancy by serving a valid notice under [section 21 of the Housing Act 1988](#).

The [2024 Labour government has committed \(PDF\)](#) to “immediately” abolishing section 21. This measure will be included in the Renters Rights Bill, announced in [The King’s Speech 2024](#).

Government plans to abolish section 21, alongside a package of other measures to reform the private rented sector (PRS), first emerged in 2019, following calls on the government to increase private tenants’ housing security within the context of social housing undersupply and affordability constraints among lower income households.

The 2016 [report of the Communities and Local Government \(CLG\) Select Committee’s inquiry into the causes of homelessness \(PDF\)](#) called on the government to:

...explore measures to give greater confidence both to tenants and to landlords to encourage them to let to homeless people. Local Housing Allowances levels should also be reviewed so that they more closely reflect market rents. Landlords should be encouraged to offer longer Assured Shorthold Tenancies which allow tenants to leave early without penalty.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ CIH, [Housing for people on low incomes – how do we make the best use of government subsidies in England?](#), October 2021

⁸⁷ [HL Deb 25 April 2024, c1684](#)

⁸⁸ As above.

On 15 April 2019 the then-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, James Brokenshire, said the Government would consult on new legislation to abolish section 21 ‘no fault’ evictions, saying:

This will bring an end to private landlords uprooting tenants from their homes with as little as 8 weeks’ notice after the fixed-term contract has come to an end.⁸⁹

The [consultation](#) was launched in July 2019 and the government’s [response](#) was published 16 June 2022, along with the white paper, [A fairer private rented sector](#), which set out a 12-point action plan to deliver “a fairer, more secure, higher quality private rented sector.”

The 2019 Conservative government introduced [the Renters \(Reform\) Bill](#) to Parliament in the House of Commons on 17 May 2023. Among other aims, the bill intended to abolish so-called ‘no-fault’ section 21 notices.⁹⁰ The Bill did not progress beyond its second reading in the House of Lords, following [the announcement](#) that there would be a general election 4 July 2024.⁹¹

3.4 Youth homelessness

The [2019 government’s cross-government strategy Ending rough sleeping for good](#) (September 2022), aims to deliver the following to help address youth homelessness:

- a package of measures intended to improve support for young people leaving care to secure and maintain suitable accommodation⁹²
- £200 million investment in the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP) which the government expects will deliver up to 2,400 homes and wraparound support by March 2025, including for young people at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping
- £2.4 million of Rough Sleeping Initiative funding for 2022-2025 to support youth services in local areas
- bringing forward regulations and over £140m funding to introduce mandatory national standards and Ofsted registration and inspection for currently unregulated providers who accommodate 16- and 17-year-old children in local authority care and care leavers

⁸⁹ MHCLG press release, [Government announces end to unfair evictions](#), 15 April 2019

⁹⁰ The House of Commons Library briefings provide further information on the Bill: [Renters \(Reform\) Bill 2022-23](#) [CBP-07856] and [Renters \(Reform\) Bill 2023-24: Progress of the Bill](#) [CBP-10004]

⁹¹ BBC News, [Rishi Sunak announces 4 July general election](#), 22 May 2024

⁹² DLUHC, [Ending rough sleeping for good](#), September 2022, pp.45-47

[Chapter 22 of the Government's statutory homelessness code of guidance](#) advises local authorities on providing homelessness assistance to care leavers.

Care leavers

In February 2024 the government said, in response to a parliamentary question, that “Supporting care leavers to make a successful transition from care to independence is a priority for this government.”⁹³

In October 2020, [the government published 'good practice' guidance](#) for councils to support the development of joint protocols that can help local authorities to meet the accommodation needs of care leavers. Their children's social care strategy, [Stable Homes, Built on Love](#) (February 2023), includes a 'mission' to increase the number of care leavers in safe, suitable accommodation and to reduce care leaver homelessness, by 2027.⁹⁴

Bespoke support

The government has put in place bespoke support for local authorities through their Homelessness Advice and Support Team, which includes dedicated youth homelessness advisors who work with local authorities to proactively promote positive joint working across housing authorities and children's services, offering training, advice and support to all local authorities.⁹⁵

Positive pathway framework

The 'positive pathway' is a nationwide framework created in 2012 by youth homelessness charity St Basils, to help local authorities and their partners to work together to prevent youth homelessness.⁹⁶ The government funded St Basils to update the framework in 2015.

In its 2016 homelessness inquiry report, the Communities and Local Government Select Committee recommended that the government should take steps to encourage and facilitate the development of positive pathway schemes across the country. In response, the government said:

42. The Government has already funded St Basils, a youth homelessness charity, to develop the Positive Youth Accommodation Pathway model, a flexible framework for local authorities and their partners to support young people to remain in the family home where it is safe to do so and offer tailored support options for those that cannot.

43. The Positive Pathway has proved an effective tool for authorities to re-work their services to target action upstream to prevent youth homelessness and roughly two thirds of areas have now adopted it.⁹⁷

⁹³ PQ 11539 [on [Care Leavers: Housing](#)], 1 February 2024

⁹⁴ Department for Education, [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation: Children's Social Care Reform 2023](#), February 2023, pp20 and 112-113

⁹⁵ Government response to petition, [Create a national strategy to end youth homelessness](#), 21 March 2024

⁹⁶ St Basils, [The Positive Pathway](#), 2015 [accessed 29 April 2024]

⁹⁷ DCLG, [Government response to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee Reports: Homelessness and Homelessness Reduction Bill \(PDF\)](#), 2017, p16

An independent evaluation of the framework's impact found that "Where implemented, the Positive Pathway Model does make a significant impact on youth homelessness prevention and makes significant improvements to the housing pathways of young people who experience homelessness."⁹⁸

Youth Voice Programme

On 26 August 2020, the government announced that it would provide £90,000 in funding to St Basils to enable it to:

...continue its Youth Voice Programme where selected young homeless people from across the country feed their experience into government and other public sector organisations, ensuring their voices are heard.

[...]

The insights, recommendations and learnings from St Basils' study will be shared, to build on the government's ongoing evidence base on what works to prevent future homelessness amongst young people.⁹⁹

The SAR affects people aged under 35 who receive Housing Benefit or Universal Credit to help pay their rent in the private rented sector.

3.5

Housing benefit entitlement

The [March 2020 Budget](#) announced some additional exemptions from the [Shared Accommodation Rate](#) (SAR) of Local Housing Allowance. The changes enable 16–24-year-old rough sleepers, care leavers up to the age of 25, and victims of domestic abuse and human trafficking "to live on their own, supporting their recovery from homelessness."¹⁰⁰ The new exemptions for care leavers and former hostel residents were implemented from 31 May 2021.¹⁰¹ The remaining changes were implemented in October 2022.¹⁰²

Resettlement programmes

There are specific schemes in place to support Ukrainian nationals and some Afghan citizens and their households to settle in the UK.

Ukrainian nationals seeking refuge from the war

On 14 March 2022, the UK government launched the [Homes for Ukraine scheme](#), following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The scheme enables UK residents to act as sponsors for Ukrainian nationals and their families seeking refuge from the war. Sponsored individuals can be granted three-year visas to stay in the UK, with full access to public services, benefits, and other support, including eligibility for homelessness assistance.

⁹⁸ Dr Stephen Green and Dr Lindsey McCarthy and others, [The Positive Pathway Model: A Rapid Evaluation of its Impact \(PDF\)](#), April 2017, Sheffield Hallam University

⁹⁹ MHCLG, [Government funding for St Basils' youth homelessness programme](#), 26 August 2020

¹⁰⁰ Budget 2020, [HC 121](#), March 2020, para 1.190

¹⁰¹ [PQ 12104 \[Local Housing Allowance: Shared Housing\], 16 June 2021](#).

¹⁰² HM Treasury, [Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021 Policy Costings \(PDF\)](#), October 2021, p15

A [National Audit Office \(NAO\) report](#) (2023) on the scheme found that, while the government gave early consideration to the risks of the scheme and put measures in place to manage them, a threat of rising homelessness among the Ukrainians using the scheme remains.

In February 2024, [the Public Accounts Committee, raised concerns](#) about a potential increased risk of homelessness among Ukrainians in the UK under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, as more arrangements between Ukrainian guests and their UK sponsors end or break down. They also highlight concerns about an apparent lack of data:

At the end of August 2023, councils reported that 4,890 Ukrainian households in England who were in the UK on Homes for Ukraine visas had been homeless or come close to being so. Government's planning assumption was that 50% of sponsorships could break down. However, it does not have complete data on how many relationships have done so; around 30% of English councils do not regularly provide homelessness data to Government on those Ukrainians in the UK under the scheme.

The PAC is therefore calling on Government to set out what action it will take to increase the number of local authorities that regularly provide homelessness data returns, and secure an adequate supply of sponsors for the scheme in the future in a cost-effective way.¹⁰³

There are two further schemes that allow people affected by the war in Ukraine to settle in the UK:

- The [Ukraine Family Scheme](#) allowed Ukrainian nationals and their immediate family members to apply to join a family member living in the UK. The scheme closed for new applications on 19 February 2024.
- The [Ukraine Extension Scheme](#) permits Ukrainian nationals or close family members of a Ukrainian national to remain in the UK if they had previously been given permission to be in the UK under one of the Ukraine Schemes. The Ukraine Extension Scheme closed 16 May 2024 to new applications except those made for children who are born in the UK.

People from Afghanistan

The [Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme](#) (ACRS) is the main scheme for resettling people from Afghanistan. People who arrived in the UK as part of the 2021 evacuation can be referred to the scheme. Other referral pathways exist for Afghan refugees in neighbouring countries, referred by the UN Refugee Agency, and for people who worked for certain organisations who are at risk.

The [Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy](#) (ARAP) scheme is for people who worked for or with the UK Government or armed forces in Afghanistan.

¹⁰³ UK Parliament, [Homes for Ukraine: Risk of homelessness in scheme likely to increase, PAC report warns](#), Public Accounts Committee, 23 February 2024

Applicants under these schemes are granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK and are therefore eligible for statutory homelessness assistance.

On 28 March 2023, Johnny Mercer, then-Minister for Veterans' Affairs, [informed MPs of the government's plans to withdraw bridging accommodation by the end of summer](#). He also detailed extra funding which the government would provide to local authorities to support Afghans with finding alternative accommodation.¹⁰⁴

In August 2023, the Local Government Association (LGA) said:

Councils share the Government's determination to get Afghan families out of hotels and into permanent homes. Hotels have already begun to close to Afghan households across the country and - as we feared - councils are already seeing families presenting to them as homeless as a result.¹⁰⁵

[Updating the House in September 2023](#), Johnny Mercer reported that "the overwhelming majority" of people resettled from Afghanistan had "moved into settled accommodation or been pre-matched to a property."¹⁰⁶ He went on:

Despite that support, however, some families have moved into temporary accommodation under local authority homelessness provision. That is less than 5% of the 24,600 people we have relocated from Afghanistan. Of those families in temporary accommodation, around a quarter have a property to move into in the coming weeks.¹⁰⁷

See section 3.6 below for details of government funded accommodation to help prevent homelessness among people who are in the UK via the above programmes.

¹⁰⁴ [HC Deb 28 March 2023 c840-2](#)

¹⁰⁵ LGA, [Afghans already presenting as homeless – LGA statement](#), 4 August 2023

¹⁰⁶ [HC Deb 19 September 2023 c1254](#)

¹⁰⁷ As above

3.6

Funding to tackle homelessness

The temporary accommodation management fee was replaced by the flexible homelessness support grant in 2017, to give councils greater flexibility to prioritise homelessness prevention.

The 2024 National Audit Office's value for money report on the effectiveness of government in tackling homelessness concluded:

Funding remains fragmented and generally short-term, inhibiting homelessness prevention work and limiting investment in good-quality temporary accommodation or other forms of housing.¹⁰⁸

In September 2017, the NAO summarised the financial support aimed at tackling homelessness between April 2016 and 2020:

The Department is distributing homelessness funding of £754 million between April 2016 and March 2020 through a combination of the local government financial settlements, new burdens funding, and a grant to replace the temporary accommodation management fee previously paid by the Department for Work & Pensions. In addition, it has developed a £50 million Homelessness Prevention Programme to encourage innovative approaches by local authorities to homelessness prevention.¹⁰⁹

On 23 December 2019, the government announced additional funding of £263 million for local authority homelessness services for 2020-21, of which £200 million came from the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and £63 million via a new Homeless Reduction Grant to help councils "fulfil their duties".¹¹⁰

[Spending Review 2020](#) announced further funding, mainly to support a reduction in rough sleeping. An additional £254 million was made available, which included £103 million announced earlier that year for accommodation and substance misuse, to support rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness during Covid-19. This brought total resource funding for homelessness in 2021-22 to £676 million. The government also committed £87 million of capital funding in 2021-22 "primarily to support the delivery of long-term accommodation for rough sleepers."¹¹¹

The Local Government Association (LGA) welcomed the additional funding and added:

In the longer-term, it is also important that there is a shift towards investing in homelessness prevention services. With council housing waiting lists set to potentially nearly double as a result of COVID-19, we are calling for councils to be given powers to kickstart a post-pandemic building boom of 100,000 new social homes for rent each year, including reform of Right to Buy.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ NAO, [The effectiveness of government in tackling homelessness](#), HC 119, 23 July 2024

¹⁰⁹ NAO, [Homelessness](#), HC 308 (PDF), September 2017, para 19

¹¹⁰ MHCLG press release, [Prime Minister pledges new action to eliminate homelessness and rough sleeping](#), 23 December 2019

¹¹¹ [CP-330, Spending Review 2020 \(PDF\)](#), 25 November 2020, para 6.58

¹¹² LGA, [LGA responds to Spending Review rough sleeping and homelessness funding](#), 25 November 2020

In 2021/22, £310 million of Homelessness Prevention Grant funding combined and uplifted (by £47 million) what was previously the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and Homelessness Reduction Grant.¹¹³ On 25 October 2021, [a further £65 million was announced](#) as an “exceptional one-off payment” to “support local authorities to help vulnerable households with rent arrears to reduce the risk of them being evicted and becoming homeless, including helping households to find a new home where necessary.”¹¹⁴ This brought overall investment of more than £750 million to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in 2021/22.”¹¹⁵

The [Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021](#) confirmed an increase in spending over pre-pandemic levels to tackle rough sleeping and homelessness:

SR21 provides £639 million resource funding by 2024-25, a cash increase of 85% compared to 2019-20. This brings total funding to £1.9 billion resource and £109 million capital investment over SR21.¹¹⁶

In October 2022, Homeless Link coordinated 32 homelessness organisations from across England to write [a letter to the Chancellor Jeremy Hunt](#). The letter called for a rise in inflation for homelessness financial support in the forthcoming Medium-Term Fiscal Statement.¹¹⁷ The organisations referred to an increase in homelessness as a result of the rising cost of living and said “we are simply asking for you to increase the funding for homelessness services, as outlined in the Comprehensive Spending Review in 2021, in line with current levels of inflation.”¹¹⁸ [The Autumn Statement 2022](#) did not refer to homelessness funding.

On 28 November 2022, the government responded to a parliamentary question on the impact of inflation on homelessness support services:

This Department is aware of the increasing concerns people are facing as a result of inflation and continues to monitor its effects. Local authorities have received £316 million through the Homelessness Prevention Grant in 2022/23. This is part of the £2 billion of funding committed to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping over the next three years.¹¹⁹

In recognition of additional cost of living pressures on some ‘vulnerable’ households, [a “top up” of £50 million in homelessness prevention grant funding over 2022/23 was announced on 5 December 2022](#). This brought the total homelessness prevention grant funding for local authorities in 2022/23 to £366 million.

¹¹³ MHCLG, [Homelessness Prevention Grant: 2021 to 2022](#), 21 December 2020

¹¹⁴ [HC Deb 25 October 2021, vol 702](#)

¹¹⁵ [HC Deb 25 October 2021, vol 702 c2WS](#)

¹¹⁶ HM Treasury HC 822, [Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021 \(PDF\)](#), October 2021, para 4.50

¹¹⁷ Homeless Link, [Over 30 homelessness charities write to the Chancellor](#), 20 October 2022

¹¹⁸ As above

¹¹⁹ [PQ 94899 \[Homelessness\] 28 November 2022](#)

On 1 July 2022, the government launched a consultation on a [review of funding arrangements and conditions for the Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2023/24 onwards](#). The aim was to “review a new funding formula based on current homelessness pressures to make sure that funding is distributed fairly to local authorities and is driven by a current picture of need.”¹²⁰

The government published its [response to the consultation](#) on 23 December 2022, in which they confirmed a new simplified funding formula, which would “account for areas where high costs make it difficult to prevent homelessness.”¹²¹ The government also introduced a condition requiring local authorities to report grant spending on temporary accommodation, staffing, statutory prevention and relief interventions, and ‘other’.

In 2023/24 the total Homelessness Prevention Grant allocation was £322.8 million, including £14.2 million “allocated via domestic abuse new burdens funding”.¹²²

The total funding made available via the Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2024/25 is £331.3 million and includes a £109 million top-up to help councils address homelessness pressures and support Ukrainians into settled accommodation.¹²³

On 28 February 2024 a [“funding boost” of nearly £220 million was announced, to target areas most in need](#), bringing the total investment to tackle homelessness between 2022-25 to £2.4 billion.

Funding accommodation for resettlement programmes

A total of £1.2 billion has been made available to local authorities via the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) since the funding was first announced in December 2022.¹²⁴ The LAHF provides capital funding for authorities to obtain housing for people on resettlement schemes who are unable to secure settled homes. Funding is divided across three rounds:

- Round 1 provided £500 million of funding for local authorities, for the financial years 2022/23 and 2023/24, to obtain accommodation for families with housing needs who arrived in the UK via Ukrainian and Afghan resettlement and relocation schemes.¹²⁵
- Round 2 ran until 29 March 2024, and provided £250 million to help provide accommodation to people on Afghan resettlement schemes who

¹²⁰ DLUHC, [Government launches consultation on reforms to the funding arrangements for the Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2023/24 onwards](#), 1 July 2022

¹²¹ DLUHC, [Homelessness Prevention Grant 2023/24 onwards: government response](#), 23 December 2023, para 85

¹²² DLUHC, [Homelessness Prevention Grant 2023 to 2025: technical note](#), 28 February 2024

¹²³ DLUHC, [Homelessness Prevention Grant: 2023 to 2025](#), last updated 28 February 2024

¹²⁴ DLUHC, [Local Authority Housing Fund](#), last updated 7 March 2024

¹²⁵ DLUHC, [Local Authority Housing Fund: Round 1](#), 31 March 2023

were staying in bridging accommodation. Some of the funding could also be used to ease wider homelessness pressures.¹²⁶

- Round 3 makes £450 million of funding available, over two financial years: 2024-25 and 2025-26, to support local authorities to obtain “better quality temporary accommodation” and provide “safe and suitable housing” for people on the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme (ACRS) who cannot secure their own housing.¹²⁷

3.7 Temporary accommodation

Local authority expenditure on temporary accommodation (TA) has attracted specific attention.

In August 2018, [Inside Housing reported on the results of Freedom of Information requests received from 290 English authorities](#) which showed that together they spent £937 million¹²⁸ on TA for homeless households in the financial year 2017/18. Costs were estimated to have risen by 56% between 2013/14 and 2017/18.¹²⁹ [Results of analysis carried out by the Local Government Association \(LGA\), published 26 October 2023](#), concluded that in 2022/23 the figure had risen to £1.74 billion.

[Pre-pandemic analysis by the LGA](#) reported that “Rising levels of homelessness and the increasing cost of using expensive bed and breakfast accommodation to place families have plunged more than two-thirds of all council homelessness services in England into the red”. The shortage of affordable housing and the gap between rents and Housing Benefit, were identified as reasons why households were spending longer in expensive temporary accommodation.¹³⁰

In June 2024 campaign group Generation Rent published the findings of their [research into local authority spending on TA](#). Their analysis found that in 2022/23 nearly one quarter of councils in England spent £1 in every £20 of their budgets on temporary accommodation, and 8% spent at least £1 in every £10.

[Questions have been raised](#) over the adequacy of financial support to local authorities via the Housing Benefit subsidy for temporary accommodation, which has been frozen since 2011.¹³¹ [District council leaders have expressly called on the government](#) to increase the amount that local authorities can

¹²⁶ DLUHC, [Local Authority Housing Fund: Round 2](#), 7 June 2023

¹²⁷ DLUHC, [Local Authority Housing Fund: Round 3](#), 7 March 2024

¹²⁸ The total figure refers to gross spend and does not take account of money recouped in the form of Housing Benefit.

¹²⁹ Inside Housing, [The cost of homelessness: council spend on temporary accommodation revealed](#), 31 August 2018 [subscription required]

¹³⁰ LGA, [Over two-thirds of council homelessness services pushed into the red](#), 29 January 2020

¹³¹ HL Deb 28 February 2024, vol 836

claim for temporary accommodation through the Housing Benefit subsidy.¹³² The NAO's 2024 report on the effectiveness of government in tackling homelessness also raised this issue:

The Temporary Accommodation Subsidy for local authorities is based on Housing Benefit rules and the LHA rate from January 2011, and has not kept up with rising costs. This gap in funding, commonly known as 'Temporary Accommodation Subsidy loss', is generating significant and increasing financial pressures. In 2022-23, local authorities in England experienced a subsidy loss of £204.5 million, compared with £41.4 million in 2012-13 (both expressed in 2022-23 prices).¹³³

Section 3 of the House of Commons Library briefing, [Households in temporary accommodation \(England\)](#) (30 January 2023), provides more information about temporary accommodation funding.

¹³² District councils are 'lower tier' local authorities. This means any local authority which is not an upper tier County Council. See Commons Library Briefing CBP-07104, [Local government in England: structures](#), 2 May 2024

¹³³ NAO, [The effectiveness of government in tackling homelessness, HC 119](#), 23 July 2024, p11

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