

# **Single Homelessness**

**Research Paper 94/89**

**14 July 1994**



This paper updates Library Background Paper No 242. It outlines local authorities' duties to single homeless people, including duties under the *Children Act 1989*, and goes on to discuss evidence on the number of rough sleepers, the causes of homelessness and the characteristics of people who have experience of sleeping rough. The final part of the paper sets out the Government's response to single homelessness and includes comment on its achievements to date. This paper does not cover issues affecting homeless people who have a statutory right to rehousing under Part III of the *Housing Act 1985*; information on this aspect of homelessness and the current Government review of the homelessness legislation can be found in Research Paper 94/65.

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## I Local authorities' duties to the single homeless

### A. Part III of the *Housing Act 1985 (Housing the Homeless)*

Part III of the *1985 Housing Act* (previously the *1977 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act*) placed a statutory duty on local authorities to secure permanent housing for people who are assessed as being unintentionally homeless and in priority need. The priority need categories are:<sup>1</sup>

- a) A person with one or more dependent children living with him or who might reasonably be expected to live with him;
- b) A pregnant woman or person with whom a pregnant woman resides or might reasonably be expected to reside;
- c) A person who became homeless as a result of an emergency such as a fire, flood or other disaster;
- d) A person whose household includes members who are vulnerable as a result of old age, mental handicap, or physical disability. Persons may also be vulnerable as a result of any other special reason eg homeless young people who are at risk of sexual or financial exploitation.

Thus the 1985 Act places no statutory duty on local authorities to secure accommodation for homeless single people or couples who do not fall into any of the above categories. The Act does place a duty on authorities to provide these people with "advice and assistance" to enable them to obtain their own accommodation.<sup>2</sup> The *Homelessness Code of Guidance*, to which local authorities must have regard when assessing homeless applications, includes the following comments on the nature of the advice and assistance which should be given to non-priority applicants:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Section 59 of the *Housing Act 1985*

<sup>2</sup> Section 65(3) and 66(3) of the *Housing Act 1985*

<sup>3</sup> Department of the Environment *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities*, 1991, 3rd edition

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14.2 The nature of the advice given is likely to vary from case to case. Authorities should interview everyone for whom it has a duty to provide advice and should counsel them on the local accommodation options open to them, where appropriate referring them to other specialist agencies. Authorities should give active help to assist applicants to secure their own accommodation taking account of the local housing situation and individual needs. Authorities should ensure that the information provided is accurate and up-to-date.

14.3 In order to provide an effective range of advice and assistance, authorities might consider establishing their own housing aid centres or funding voluntary organisations to provide such services under **s.73 of the Act**. They should maintain close links, including up-to-date contact numbers, with local voluntary housing groups in the area providing advice and accommodation.

Agencies which deal with the single homeless have long argued for the inclusion of this group, particularly 16 and 17 year olds, as a priority need category. This issue has been raised in several responses to the Government's recently published consultation paper which sets out proposals to reform the homelessness legislation but which includes no proposals to redefine the categories of priority need.<sup>4</sup> Shelter's response to this paper states that the charity "would favour extension of the priority need categories within a clear statutory framework on homelessness". The London Boroughs Association's response suggests "the opportunity should be taken to clarify the current anomalies and conflicts between the different housing and social service Acts, especially in relation to assessment of need and definitions of vulnerability".

### **B. The *Children Act 1989***

#### **1. Social service departments' duties to young homeless people**

Agencies working with young homeless people welcomed the *1989 Children Act*, which came into force on 14 October 1991, as it seemed to provide greater potential for this group to obtain local authority housing and support. Section 20(3) of the Act (see below) is the key section in terms of accommodating homeless young people:

"Every local authority shall provide accommodation for any child in need in their area who has reached the age of 16 and whose welfare that authority considers likely to be seriously prejudiced if they do not provide him with accommodation."

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<sup>4</sup> DoE *Access to Local Authority and Housing Association Tenancies* 20.1.94

Section 20(1) of the Act outlines the duty of every local authority to provide accommodation for any "child in need" in their area who appears to them to require accommodation as a result of:

- a) there being no person who has parental responsibility for him;
- b) his being lost or having been abandoned;
- c) the person who has been caring for him being prevented from providing him with suitable accommodation or care.

Section 17(10) defines a young person as a "child in need" when:

"(a) he is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services by a local authority under this Part; or (b) his health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him of such services; or (c) he is disabled."

CHAR, the housing campaign for single people, is of the view that homeless 16 and 17 year olds "are clearly children in need under the definitions of the *Children Act*, as they are in no way able to maintain a reasonable standard of health or development."<sup>5</sup>

Although the Act refers to a consideration as to whether a young person's welfare would be "seriously prejudiced" if he were not provided with accommodation, the Act does not contain a clear definition of this term. CHAR argues that, for a homeless 16 or 17 year old, "in need" should be equated with "seriously prejudiced" to avoid the double hurdle of having to prove that both conditions apply in order to qualify for assistance.<sup>6</sup>

The *Children Act* also sets out the duties and powers which local authorities have to ensure that young people are adequately prepared for leaving care. Section 24 of the Act places a duty on local authorities to "advise, assist and befriend" young people leaving care up to the

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<sup>5</sup> CHAR *Reassessing Priorities: The Children Act 1989- A new agenda for young homeless people?* July 1993 p.11

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* p.11

age of 21, this can include the provision of accommodation. During a 1992 speech to a conference on housing the young the then Junior Housing Minister, Tony Baldry, stated: "The *Children Act* will go a long way to resolving the problems of those leaving care."<sup>7</sup>

Section 27 of the Act imposes a duty on local housing authorities to co-operate with social services in carrying out functions under the *Children Act* unless to do so would be incompatible with their own duties and functions.

### 2. The impact of the *Children Act*

CHAR is in the process of carrying out a national assessment of how the 1989 Act is being implemented to meet the needs of young homeless people. The first stage of this project involved a survey of social service departments throughout England and Wales, the results of which were published in July 1993. The survey findings led CHAR to conclude: "Social service departments are, in the main, failing to fulfil their responsibilities to homeless 16 and 17 year olds under the Children Act" and also:

"Lack of finance is seen by most departments as the major constraint preventing them from working with young homeless people. Another difficulty is the shortage of appropriate accommodation. When combined, these factors have had an enormous impact on how social services departments deal with this group. It means they are acting as gate keepers to services, and that their work with young homeless people is resource-driven rather than needs-led."<sup>8</sup>

CHAR's survey, which achieved a response rate of 74 per cent, found that only 40 per cent of responding authorities (33 out of 86) had a specific policy on working with homeless 16 and 17 year olds in relation to the *Children Act*.<sup>9</sup> These findings reinforced those of a telephone survey of all London Boroughs' social service departments carried out by Centrepoint Soho in October 1992. This survey, which obtained responses from 32 London authorities, found that 56 per cent of departments reported that they assessed all 16 and 17 year old homeless people who approached them for assistance; 44 per cent said they did not automatically carry out an assessment.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> DoE Press Release *Housing the Young* 7.7.92

<sup>8</sup> Ibid p.2

<sup>9</sup> Ibid p.18

<sup>10</sup> Centrepoint Soho *Housing Our Children* February 1993



Most recently, CHAR and the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIOH) carried out a survey of all local authorities in England and Wales in order to get a comprehensive picture of responses to the *Children Act*. The resulting joint report, *Conflicting Priorities*, was launched in April of this year; as the survey achieved a response rate of 89 per cent its findings have attracted particular attention.

The survey found that, despite some notable examples of innovative practices, most housing authorities were failing to adequately meet the housing and support needs of homeless 16/17 year olds. Less than one third of the responding authorities had developed joint criteria with social services on the mutual acceptance of a "child in need" and "vulnerability"; 29 per cent had established joint assessment procedures and only 23 per cent of authorities accepted that homeless 16/17 year olds were vulnerable by virtue of age alone. Fifty four per cent of the responding authorities stated that the *Children Act* had made no difference to the provision of services for young homeless people. The survey noted that failure to implement the Act appeared to be due to a number of factors including: under resourcing of social housing providers; negative perceptions of homeless young people; lack of liaison between social services and housing departments, and lack of appropriate accommodation to meet the needs of young people.<sup>11</sup>

CHAR has established the Children Act Housing Group (CAHAG) with a view to pursuing test cases under the Act on behalf of homeless 16 and 17 year olds; a case concerning Greenwich LBC's failure to assess a homeless 17 year old was dropped last year when the council carried out an assessment under the *Children Act* following the first High Court hearing.<sup>12</sup>

An analysis of information collected by Centrepoint projects for homeless young people between April to September 1993 revealed that 29 per cent of the young people seen over this period (199 individuals) had previously been in care. As young people in local authority care make up a very small proportion of the total under 18 population it appears that care leavers are disproportionately represented in the homelessness figures. Research by Centrepoint into the operation of the 1989 Act has concluded that "although some care leavers were getting an improved service from local authorities, overall services remained patchy".<sup>13</sup> A 1992 Centrepoint study found that: 37 per cent of social services departments did not have sufficient accommodation for care leavers; 65 per cent were using B&B for care leavers and 35 per cent did not have a specific budget for the *Children Act 1989*.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> CHAR/CIOH *Conflicting Priorities* April 1994

<sup>12</sup> see *Inside Housing* "Assessment staves off test case on Act" 28.5.93

<sup>13</sup> Centrepoint *Out of Care and on the Streets* May 1994

<sup>14</sup> Centrepoint *Housing our Children* 1993

## II The numbers of single homeless people

Regular official statistics on the number of homeless people are only maintained for households accepted as homeless under the 1985 Act. There are no equivalent comprehensive statistics available on the number of homeless people not covered by the Act or who do not apply to a local housing authority for assistance. However, in the 1980s it was generally accepted by researchers and policy makers that homelessness among single people had increased, as had "statutory homelessness".

A count of the number of people sleeping rough at 453 sites in England and Wales on the night of the 1991 Census (21-22 April) recorded a total of 2,703 people (1,275 in London and 1,428 elsewhere).<sup>15</sup> These figures only relate to people sleeping in the open air on Census night and do not include people of no fixed abode who spent Census night in shelters, hostels or squats etc. Voluntary organisations, local authorities and churches identified 1,312 sites prior to the Census; however, because of changed circumstances and the age of the list (up to 12 months) only 453 sites were confirmed as still being places where people slept rough. In addition, the preliminary report noted that "the poor weather on Census night affected the number of people sleeping rough".

Organisations working with single homeless people regard the Census figures to be an under-estimation of the problem; the fact that no one was recorded as sleeping rough in Birmingham and Cardiff was described by CHAR as "inconceivable".<sup>16</sup> A Birmingham MDC funded count of rough sleepers on known open-air sites in the city on one night in November 1992 found a total of 61 people sleeping out.<sup>17</sup> Voluntary organisations have called on the Government to co-ordinate a London-wide count of people sleeping rough and are concerned that inaccurate Census data are being used to determine the allocation of funds to deal with single homelessness.<sup>18</sup>

A follow up study of the 1991 Census returns by Ian Diamond, professor of statistics at the University of Southampton, has identified a group of "hidden homeless" people numbering between 200,000 and 500,000. These figures are based on an examination of Census forms which listed visitors staying temporarily at an address on Census night for which no

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<sup>15</sup> Office of Population Censuses & Surveys *1991 Census: Preliminary report for England and Wales 1991*

<sup>16</sup> *Guardian* "Sleeping out figure of 2,700 criticised as too low" 23.7.91

<sup>17</sup> University of Central England *Sleeping Rough in Birmingham* December 1992

<sup>18</sup> *Housing Association Weekly* "Homeless figures challenged" 3.12.93; *Housing Association Weekly* "SHiL calls for London rough sleepers survey" 1.10.93

permanent address was given or, if an address was given, their names were not recorded on the completed Census form from that address.<sup>19</sup>

A six month study carried out in a selected area of north-east Westminster by Dr Stuart Turner of Camden and Islington Community Health Services Trust recorded more than 2,150 contacts made by 1,640 homeless individuals with statutory and voluntary agencies within that area; the study estimated total hidden homelessness within the area over the period at 3,293.<sup>20</sup> This study is notable as it employed a counting technique similar to the "capture-recapture" method used by biologists to estimate animal numbers; this method was deemed more appropriate than traditional "exact count" attempts to measure the transient single homeless population.

Aside from the 1991 Census figures, the Government currently relies upon figures produced by an independent voluntary sector count conducted by the Homeless Network. The most recent count (18 November 1993) of rough sleepers at certain key London areas found a total of 287 people<sup>21</sup> compared with a similar count in June 1993 and March 1992 which found 358 people and 440 people respectively. Sir George Young, the Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction, welcomed the November count as confirmation that the numbers sleeping rough in central London are falling and stated that it "underlined the success of the Government's Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) in tackling the problem".<sup>22</sup>

In addition to counting the number of rough sleepers on the night of 18/19 November 1993, surveys were conducted of occupancy levels of direct access hostels in London and contacts made with advice centres in 18 of the 33 London Boroughs. These surveys recorded a total of 2,603 people resident in the 47 hostels included in the study and 601 single homeless people who sought housing advice from the 42 surveyed agencies, of which 315 had nowhere to stay that night; the agencies were unable to find a placement for 93 of the people who had nowhere to stay.<sup>23</sup>

While the Homeless Network identified a "clear reduction" in the numbers sleeping rough compared to similar surveys in the previous two years, the report on the survey findings notes: "we have no evidence that the flow of homeless people onto the streets is decreasing...just two

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<sup>19</sup> *New Scientist* "Hidden homeless who came to stay..." 18.9.93

<sup>20</sup> *British Medical Journal* 1.1.94

<sup>21</sup> Homeless Network *Central London Street Monitor* November 1993 p.3

<sup>22</sup> DoE Press Release *Sir George Young welcomes continuing fall in numbers sleeping rough in central London* 16.12.93

<sup>23</sup> Homeless Network *Central London Street Monitor* November 1993 p.4-5

agencies report that they have made contact with nearly 1,000 people for the first time in the last six months".<sup>24</sup>

### III The causes of single homelessness

#### A. Immediate causes

Professor John Greve's 1990 report on homelessness noted the "striking degree" to which single people and families share the same kinds of reasons for becoming homeless.<sup>25</sup> The report lists the most important immediate causes as the breakdown of relationships (including those between young people and their parents or guardians); the failure of sharing arrangements with accommodation, and unemployment.

In November 1990 the DoE commissioned the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York to conduct a survey of single homeless people in order to collect comprehensive and up to date information on single homelessness in England. The results of this research, which involved interviews with 1346 hostel or bed and breakfast dwellers, 351 users of day centres and 156 users of soup runs who were sleeping rough, were published last year; the survey's findings on immediate causes of homelessness are set out in the table opposite.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, a 1991 study of the experiences of 400 young people in the Surrey/Hampshire area who had left their family home<sup>27</sup> found that over 50 per cent had left before the age of 16, mostly to go into care, and nearly a quarter left at 16; the most commonly cited reason was "because of arguments", but the researchers noted that this sometimes concealed reasons such as physical or sexual abuse. Over one quarter left home as a direct result of violence and 13 per cent indicated that they left (unprompted) because of sexual abuse. Over 80 per cent intimated that they would not return home or were unable to do so. Over half of the young people in the study had experienced some kind of family breakdown at some stage.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.6

<sup>25</sup> Professor John Greve *Homelessness in Britain*, February 1990 p.15

<sup>26</sup> DoE *Single Homeless People* 1993 p.71

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation Housing Research Findings No 89, *Young people at risk of homelessness*, May 1993

	Hostels and B&Bs		Day centre		Soup run	
	Main reasons %	Final reason %	Main reasons %	Final reason %	Main reasons %	Final reason %
<i>Family/relationship reasons</i>						
Relationship breakdown	14	11	19	16	10	7
Domestic violence/abuse+	2	2	1	2	5	5
Parents - conflict	8	6	8	8	8	5
Parents - positive decision	5	6	6	5	5	2
Death	5	4	5	4	5	5
<i>Accommodation related reasons</i>						
End of tenancy/sharing	3	2	3	3	-	1
Move into other accommodation	3	3	1	1	2	2
Problems with rent/HB	5	4	12	8	6	5
Problems with mortgage	1	1	*	*	1	2
Eviction	5	7	8	8	8	9
Accommodation closed/changed	3	3	3	3	2	2
<i>Employment related reasons</i>						
Look for/take up job	10	9	9	8	13	10
Lost job/tied accom	5	3	5	4	3	3
Left armed forces	*	*	-	-	2	2
<i>Institutional related reasons</i>						
Discharged from psychiatric care	*	*	-	-	-	-
Discharged from custody	*	*	1	1	2	2
Discharged from hospital	*	*	1	1	2	1
Given custodial sentence	2	3	*	1	2	2
Had to leave care	1	1	1	*	2	2
<i>Other specific reasons</i>						
Political situation	7	7	1	*	-	-
Harrassed/insecure in accom	5	3	6	4	7	9
Health reasons	3	3	2	1	2	2
Drink problem	3	3	6	4	4	4
Wanted to travel/change	7	5	7	7	8	8
Other	15	14	12	13	12	9
Vague	1	1	3	2	1	2
Total	na	100	na	100	na	100
Base	1051	1031	315	313	134	129

Base: All three samples (those who stated a last home)

na - not applicable as more than one response possible

+ This category includes both domestic violence by a partner, and physical/sexual abuse of a young person by a parent/guardian.

### B. Underlying causes

This section aims to look at those factors which prevent single people from finding suitable accommodation once they become homeless for whatever reason.

#### 1. Supply and demand

The number of households accepted as homeless by English local authorities under Part III of the *1985 Housing Act* increased steadily from 1977 (the date the legislation was introduced) to a peak in 1991 of 149,800 (this includes those deemed intentionally homeless and placed in temporary accommodation); this compares with a figure of 62,290 households accepted as homeless in 1980.<sup>28</sup> It is likely that many of the factors behind this increase are relevant to the growth in single homelessness.

A 1989 report by the Audit Commission<sup>29</sup> analysed supply and demand factors leading to an increase in acceptances of homeless households by local authorities in the 1980s. The demand factors were:

- Growing numbers of people in their 20s - the time at which new households are formed. The report noted that the number of people in the 20 to 29 age group was at its peak and would fall over the next decade. Clearly, this demographic trend affects the number of single homeless as well as those with children.
- Mortgage default owing to the extension of home ownership amongst lower income buyers; sharp rises in interest rates and increasing levels of unemployment. This appears to be less relevant for the young single homeless as few have already owned a house themselves before becoming homeless. Young people under 21 rarely have access to owner-occupation because their incomes cannot support a mortgage.
- Care in the community policies which place extra demands on social housing organisations as the number of people living in institutions declines.

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<sup>28</sup> DoE *Statistical Bulletin* 15.3.94 and earlier issues

<sup>29</sup> Audit Commission *Housing the Homeless: The Local Authority Role*, 1989

The supply factors were:

- The vitality of the private rented sector. The Audit Commission pointed out that since the First World War, "the private rented sector has declined steadily both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the stock even during those periods when the market has been deregulated."<sup>30</sup> As the private rented sector has traditionally been the tenure which served the need of single people for instantly accessible accommodation, its decline has been of critical importance. (The impact of the deregulation of private sector rents under the *Housing Act 1988* is discussed later in this paper).
- The relationship between house prices and income. The Audit Commission noted that there tended to be a long-term difference in the ratio of house prices to average incomes in different regions, with London and the South East having higher prices in relation to income, creating greater difficulty for low-income people to enter owner-occupation. As noted above, few young people have the opportunity to purchase, and this is even less likely an option in London.
- The provision of social housing for rent. The Audit Commission noted that there had been a decline in England in the number of new lettings by local authorities and an increase in allocations to the statutorily homeless. In 1979 English local authorities completed 66,724 new dwellings; the provisional equivalent figure for 1993 is 1,235.<sup>31</sup> Although construction by housing associations has increased over the same period from 16,275 dwellings to 29,578, there has been an overall reduction in the development of social rented housing. In addition, around 1.5 million public sector homes have been bought by sitting tenants since 1979.<sup>32</sup> Decline in the availability of council accommodation is likely to have a significant effect on the young homeless, despite the sector's traditional concentration on the provision of family accommodation, because it represents an important source of accommodation for those on a low income.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, para 43

<sup>31</sup> Housing and Construction Statistics: Great Britain: 1979-89 and December Quarter 1993 Part 1

<sup>32</sup> HC Deb 1.12.93 c.1019

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In *Homelessness in Britain* Professor John Greve<sup>33</sup> concluded that the principal cause of homelessness is "a critical shortage of affordable rented housing". He identified two key and mutually reinforcing factors behind the growth of homelessness which had emerged since 1979: "the sharp reduction in council house building, accompanied by a massive switch in finance away from new building to other forms of incentive and support; and the vigorous campaign by the government to compel local authorities to sell council houses to individual tenants".

### 2. Income Support entitlement

A factor which, it has been argued, has caused young single people particular difficulty in finding and maintaining accommodation is the impact of the 1988 social security changes: an outline of these changes is set out below; further information is given in Library Background Paper No 242.<sup>34</sup>

The *1988 Social Security Act*, which came into force in September 1988, restricted the entitlement of 16 and 17 year olds to Income Support so that most under 18s do not qualify for benefit in their own right. The Conservative Party's 1987 Election Manifesto included a commitment that those under 18 who choose to remain unemployed should not be eligible for benefit. A minority of 16 and 17 year olds may qualify for Income Support if they are not required to be available for work to claim benefit (eg lone parents, carers etc); or if they have registered for work or YTS and are waiting for a place **and** they are either married **or** not living with parents; or if they have short-term eligibility arising from having a short-term incapacity or being a discharged prisoner, or the Secretary of State directs that unless Income Support is paid severe hardship will result.

Further concessions to these categories were announced on 13 March 1989<sup>35</sup> and came into effect on 10 July 1989<sup>36</sup>. The concessions included the addition of a category of those "genuinely estranged" from their parents who would be entitled to Income Support during the Child Benefit extension period; an increase in the level of Income Support for those 16-17 year olds who for good reason live independently; an increase in housing benefit levels for all 16-17 year olds; automatic consideration for severe hardship payments for those in emergency night shelters; and the disregard of discretionary payments from social service

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<sup>33</sup> Professor John Greve *Homelessness in Britain*, February 1990

<sup>34</sup> *The Young Single Homeless*, March 1990

<sup>35</sup> HC Deb 13.3.89 cc27-8W

<sup>36</sup> The Family Credit and Income Support [General] Regulations 1989 (SI 1989/1034)



departments for those leaving care. These concessions were introduced as the Government "recognised that a "significant number" of young people were experiencing problems".<sup>37</sup>

Since November 1989 local Benefits Agencies have been required to interview all 16 and 17 year olds who seek to claim Income Support and unless they are eligible on other grounds, young people's cases should automatically be referred to the Severe Hardship Claims Unit. In July 1991 it was announced that care leavers who live independently and who continue in full-time non-advanced education would automatically be entitled to Income Support; Income Support eligibility for up to eight weeks was given to care leavers registered as looking for work or a Youth Training place. The latter changes were implemented from April 1992.

Many of these changes to the rules governing entitlement to severe hardship payments and Income Support for young people came about as a result of adverse findings by MORI,<sup>38</sup> who were commissioned by the Government to carry out research into severe hardship claims, and the Social Security Advisory Committee.<sup>39</sup> Recent research into the issue of benefit claims and young people concluded that the above changes were welcome but, "further changes are needed to provide a fully adequate safety net for young people. At present, many young people are left without any visible means of support".<sup>40</sup> In regard to severe hardship claims by young homeless people the study found:

"Successful applications from people sleeping rough have increased substantially, from 2893 in the 12 months up to and including September 1991 to 4049 in the 12 months to September 1992. Although the success rate for this group is higher than average, it is still surprising how many young people can be in this situation and yet not qualify for Income Support on grounds of severe hardship."<sup>41</sup>

Prior to the implementation of the *Social Security Act 1986* which introduced Income Support from April 1988, Supplementary Benefit was paid at a rate which depended on whether a person had "householder" or "non-householder" status, rather than their age. The Income Support scheme removed this distinction and introduced a series of age related personal allowances (16-17, 18-24 and 25 and over) and premiums. From July 1989 the 16-17 year

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<sup>37</sup> Nicholas Scott on BBC 1's "On The Record" 19.2.89

<sup>38</sup> MORI *A Survey of 16 and 17 Year Old Applications for Severe Hardship Payments*, July 1991

<sup>39</sup> Social Security Advisory Committee, *Eighth Report*, 1992

<sup>40</sup> Youthaid and Barnardos *Four years' severe hardship* March 1993

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p.44

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old rate of Income Support and Housing Benefit was increased to the 18-24 year old rate for those living independently; however, the distinction between those under and over 25 remains.

Research commissioned by the DoE in 1990 into the nature of single homelessness found that the main problem encountered by single homeless people trying to find accommodation was related to their inability to afford the accommodation on offer.<sup>42</sup> This survey also found that compared with the general population of adults over 16, there were more single homeless people under 25 years of age and fewer people aged 60 or over.<sup>43</sup>

The Government's position on young people and benefits is set out below:<sup>44</sup>

The organisations involved have welcomed the improvements that we have made. With their help there is now a much wider knowledge of the severe hardship provision. This goes some way to explain the increase in the numbers applying under it. Nevertheless, it is important to place this in context: the numbers involved are small - about 10,000 successful claims each month. This is less than 2 per cent of the total population of 16 and 17 year olds, the vast majority of whom are either in education, work or training.

Income support levels for young people are based on the fact that most of them live in someone else's household - usually that of their parents - and they have fewer financial responsibilities and lower earnings expectations than those who are older. As there is only a finite amount of money available, this must be targeted to those most in need.

We know, however, that some young people cannot live at home and are not able to grow up in a stable and caring environment. That is why 16 and 17 year olds forced to live independently qualify for income support at the higher 18-24 year old rate. Similarly, where they are liable to pay rent, 16 and 17 year olds are assessed for housing benefit at the same rate as 18-24 year olds. We have no plans to alter these arrangements.

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<sup>42</sup> DoE *Single Homeless People* 1993 para 6.10

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid* para 2.3

<sup>44</sup> HL Deb 23.6.93 c.427

### 3. Housing Benefit entitlement

16-24 year olds who have an income at or below the Income Support level are entitled to have 100% of their rent met by Housing Benefit; however, those in low paid work receive Housing Benefit at a lower rate than people of 25 or above.

Shelter is of the view that the benefits system discriminates against young people by making access to private renting particularly difficult.<sup>45</sup> A Shelter briefing paper prepared in 1992 noted: "It is hard to see how young people under 25 continue to be singled out for a lower level of Housing Benefit. Rents do not distinguish between the ages of tenants".<sup>46</sup>

The *Housing Act 1988* abolished rent control for new private sector lettings; the Act introduced a new type of assured tenancy on which landlords can charge market rents. This was accompanied by measures to ensure that landlords could not take advantage of the availability of housing benefit by charging unreasonably high rents when their tenants are on benefit. Local authorities are now required to refer all applications for housing benefit in respect of tenancies taken out since January 1989 (the enactment of Part I of the 1988 Act) to the rent officer for assessment. The rent officer advises on whether the rent is unreasonably high compared with rents for suitable alternative accommodation elsewhere and also whether the size of the accommodation "exceeds the needs" of the tenant. A report by Shelter notes that rent officers assess private rents below the level charged by the landlord in three out of ten cases.<sup>47</sup>

Local authorities receive rent officer decisions and are under a duty to consider, on different criteria, if the asking rent is unreasonably high; the accommodation is "unreasonably large"; or a rent increase is unreasonable. Authorities may use the rent officer figures or may set figures of their own on which to pay benefit. While authorities may pay housing benefit on rent above the rent officer's determination, if they do so they receive a reduced, or in some cases no, subsidy from the DSS. Research carried out by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that on average, local authorities were using the rent officer determinations for 86 per cent of housing benefit claims.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Shelter Briefing for Lords Debate on 16/17 year olds, 4.6.92

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Shelter *For whose benefit?* March 1993 p.37

<sup>48</sup> JRF Housing Research Findings No 70, *Unreasonable rents and housing benefit*, November 1992

If a local authority restricts the level of rent on which it will pay housing benefit the tenant is faced with the option of negotiating a lower rent with the landlord or meeting the shortfall from his own resources. A study carried out by SHAC (The London Housing Aid Centre), involving 15 local authority and voluntary sector advice agencies across London, recorded the details of nearly 300 private tenants who sought advice about housing or housing benefit problems during 1990. One fifth of the tenants in the study reported rent arrears; the most common reasons given for arrears were delays and shortfalls in housing benefit payments. Over a quarter of the tenants were being harassed or had been illegally evicted; once again this was largely attributed to housing benefit restrictions and processing problems.<sup>49</sup>

Delay in the payment of housing benefit is frequently cited in studies of single homelessness as a factor which is instrumental in evictions and a reason why landlords are reluctant to grant tenancies to people who need to claim. Although authorities are legally required to process housing benefit claims within 14 days of receiving applications, an Audit Commission study found that in about 25 per cent of authorities only half or fewer claims are processed with this period even after all the information needed had been submitted by the tenant<sup>50</sup>.

#### 4. The Social Fund

The Social Fund, which was introduced in April 1988, replaced the regulation-based system of Single Payments under which claimants could receive lump sum payments from the DSS for exceptional needs. The pre-1988 system enabled people moving into a new home to get a lump sum as of right to cover rent in advance and security deposits on rented accommodation. The Social Fund is a discretionary, cash limited Fund which issues community care grants (non-repayable), crisis loans (repayable) and budgeting loans (repayable) to Income Support beneficiaries with limited capital to purchase expensive and essential items. Loans are obtainable for rent in advance but available evidence suggests that these applications receive low priority and are rarely given owing to local budget restrictions;<sup>51</sup> there is now no benefit help with deposits and there has never been any for accommodation agency fees or key money.

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<sup>49</sup> JRF Housing Research Findings No 28, *Homelessness, housing benefit and the private rented sector*, March 1991

<sup>50</sup> Audit Commission *Remote Control: The National Administration of Housing Benefit*, 1993

<sup>51</sup> *Shelter For whose benefit?* March 1993 p.32

A recent study of the experiences of 162 homeless people who applied for help from the Social Fund concluded:<sup>52</sup>

"In all too many cases, people received no help at all, or did so only after a lengthy process of review and long after they had moved into their tenancy. Applicants who did not qualify for a grant and already had substantial debts received no help at all. People on low incomes, but who do not qualify for Income Support, also got no help."

"In the case of both homeless families and single people undergoing re-housing, grants are only being paid to a minority of those who apply. The amounts awarded vary, but are too low to buy all basic necessities. Loans are available to more applicants, but the variable amounts awarded are also low a double edged sword in that starting out a new tenancy with a debt to the Social Fund may exacerbate existing difficulties or cause budgeting problems."

Housing agencies concerned with the single homeless believe that the lack of assistance available towards rent in advance and deposits, which landlords invariably ask for, presents a major and often insurmountable hurdle to people trying to obtain private rented accommodation. The DoE's survey of single homeless people found that an "overwhelming majority" of those interviewed had encountered difficulties in trying to get somewhere to live;<sup>53</sup> 62 per cent of all respondents who were currently looking for accommodation (805) stated that they could not afford the deposit/rent in advance.<sup>54</sup>

## IV The characteristics of single homeless people

This section provides an overview of the main characteristics of single homeless people based on the findings of the DoE survey conducted by the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> CHAR, Homeless Network and London Homelessness Forum *The Bare Necessities: the experience of homeless people and the discretionary Social Fund*, May 1994, p.8 & p.10

<sup>53</sup> DoE *Single Homeless People* 1993 para 6.9

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, table 6.4

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

## A. Gender

The majority of single homeless people interviewed in the survey were men; 23 % of those interviewed in hostels and B&Bs were female as were 13% in the soup run sample and only 7% in the day centre sample. Earlier large scale surveys of single homeless people have also found the majority of this group to be made up of men.<sup>56</sup>

## B. Age

Compared with the general population of adults aged over 16<sup>57</sup> the survey found that there were more people under 25 years of age and less people aged over 60 or over in all three samples. One possible reason for the low number of homeless elderly people is the fact that they will usually qualify for rehousing under the provisions of the *1985 Housing Act*. In all three samples a higher proportion of women than men were aged under 25.

	Hostel and B&B %	Day centre %	Soup run %
16-17	5	2	3
18-24	25	13	16
25-44	36	47	46
45-59	18	28	28
60+	14	10	7
DK	1	1	1
Total	100	100	100
Base	1,262	347	154

*Base: all respondents*

<sup>56</sup> Drake et al, *Single and Homeless*, 1981

<sup>57</sup> comparisons were made with information from the *General Household Survey 1989*, Breeze et al, 1991

### C. Ethnic group

The majority of single homeless people interviewed in the survey were white. A higher proportion of people living in hostels and B&Bs identified themselves as being black or from another minority ethnic group than those in the general population;<sup>58</sup> this may be partly due to the above average proportion of people from ethnic minorities in the study areas.

	Hostel and B&B %	Day centre %	Soup run %
White	73	96	99
Black-African origin	11	-	-
Black-Caribbean origin	5	1	-
Black - other	-	-	-
Indian	1	*	-
Pakistani	1	1	-
Bangladeshi	*	-	-
Chinese	1	*	-
Other	7	1	1
Rather not say	1	1	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Base</b>	<b>1,270</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>154</b>

*Base: all respondents*

### D. Employment

An overwhelming majority of the respondents in all three samples had not done any paid work in the previous week; 89% of those living in a hostel or B&B, 91% of those who attended a day centre and 93% of those who visited a soup run. Few people in the survey had worked within the previous month and over half in all three samples had not worked in the previous 12 months. At least one sixth of the respondents in all three samples had never worked or had not worked in the previous ten years.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

### **E. Income**

The most common source of income for respondents in all three samples was Income Support. The proportion of rough sleepers receiving Income Support was noted to be relatively low given that seven out of ten were unemployed; the researchers believed that this may be due to difficulties experienced in claiming benefits when lacking a permanent address.

The survey found that the average income received by respondents in the previous week was low; even amongst those in paid employment the median amount of income received was only £55 for those interviewed at the soup runs, £60 for those in day centres and £72 for those in hostels and B&Bs. One in five interviewed in day centres or at soup runs reported that they had received no income at all in the previous week. The average total income from all sources was similar across the three samples: £39 in hostels and B&Bs, £39 in day centres and £37 at soup runs.

The average income of hostel residents was found to vary with age; young adults had a significantly lower average income (£31) while those aged 60 or over had a higher income (£53). The researchers noted that these differences reflect the lower rate of Income Support which is paid to people under 25.

### **F. Educational qualifications**

Of the hostel and B&B residents in the survey 46% said they had qualifications, as did 38% of people in day centres. This compares with 66% of people over 16 with educational qualifications of some sort in the general population.

Those with qualifications in the survey tended to have reached a lower level of attainment than the general population; one in five of the general population have either a degree level qualification or a higher education qualification below degree level compared with one in twenty in the single homeless survey.

### **G. Health**

The majority of single homeless people in the survey reported that they knew of a doctor or medical centre where they could go if feeling unwell. A majority also stated that they had



health problems; a higher percentage of people sleeping rough reported health problems (82% of those in day centres, 80% at soup runs) than those in hostels or B&Bs (66%).

The type of health problems described are set out in the table below:

	Hostel and B&B %	Day centre %	Soup run %
Chronic chest condition/breathing problems	18	24	29
Heart problems	5	6	5
Wounds/skin ulcers/other skin complaints	11	17	20
Difficulty in walking	15	23	25
Problems in getting to the toilet in time	5	6	7
Difficulty in hearing	10	12	11
Difficulty in seeing	11	20	18
Fits or loss of consciousness	5	14	13
Digestive problems	9	14	14
Frequent headaches	16	19	19
Diabetes	2	3	1
Painful muscles or joints	18	28	31
Constant colds or 'flu	8	14	14
HIV or AIDS	*	1	1
Problems with memory	12	25	16
Heavy drinking/alcohol related problems	13	33	31
Dependency on non-prescribed drugs	4	7	9
Mental handicap	1	4	2
Depression/anxiety/nerves	29	37	43
Other health problems	7	6	7
At least 1 health problem	66	82	80
No health problems	34	18	21
Base	1,264	347	152

*Base: all respondents*

*\* Percentages do not sum to 100% because respondents could state more than one health problem.*

## H. Experience of rough sleeping

Everyone in the rough sleeping samples had slept rough within the previous week. More than 40% of those in the hostel/B&B survey, who had been living in their accommodation for less than 12 months, had slept rough at some time in the previous 12 months.

The main reasons given for sleeping rough by people in all three samples were that they could not find anywhere else to stay and that they could not afford anywhere else to stay. The respondents generally viewed sleeping rough as an unpleasant experience; the researchers concluded that "sleeping rough was not a preferred lifestyle; rather it was associated closely with low income and poor bargaining power in the housing market."<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Ibid para 4.23

## V The Government response to single homelessness

### A. The Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI)

#### 1. Background

The RSI was originally developed in 1990 as a short term response to the growing numbers of people sleeping rough in London. After consulting a variety of voluntary organisations the Government announced that £96 million would be made available over 1990/3 for a range of initiatives which are now referred to as the RSI. The RSI programmes have included advice and outreach work with homeless people, the development of new emergency hostel places and a range of temporary and permanent accommodation comprising properties leased from private landlords and permanent lettings provided by housing associations. The broad aim of the RSI was to make it unnecessary for people to sleep rough on the streets of London. Details of how the £96m has been spent are set out below:<sup>60</sup>

- £69m on housing association grant (HAG) and, in some instances, special needs management allowance (SNMA) for 2,200 places in permanent accommodation provided by housing associations;
- £9.6m to finance the costs of leasing 700 places in flats and houses from private landlords and to cover the excess management costs of associations or specialist voluntary organisations to manage this accommodation;
- £14.8m to finance HAG, SNMA/HDG (hostel deficit grant) and topping up grant for 950 places in temporary hostels;
- £3.9m to finance 460 places in emergency shelters in 1990-91, 410 places in winter shelters in 1991-92 and 400 in 1992-93;
- £1.2m to voluntary organisations for outreach and resettlement work;

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<sup>60</sup> DoE *The Rough Sleepers Initiative The Next Three Years* 18.1.93, Annex A

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- £0.7m to finance an accommodation clearing house, a hostels vacancy project, a pilot rent deposit fund, 2 posts at Homeless Network and the Lincoln's Inn Team.

The initial strategy adopted under the RSI involved a process of moving rough sleepers from the streets of central London through regular contact by voluntary sector outreach and resettlement workers funded by the initiative. Workers sought to persuade people to take up offers of accommodation provided by housing associations funded by the RSI. A list of agencies known to work with people sleeping rough was compiled and a clearing house established at Housing Services Agency (HSA) to ensure as far as possible that the target group was reached and that the accommodation provided for rough sleepers was "ring fenced" for that group within the associations' stock.

The RSI was due to end in March 1993; however, in his Autumn Statement on 12 November 1992 the then Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that a further £60m would be made available to continue the RSI in central London for an additional three years. Together with provision made prior to the Autumn Statement this brought total public expenditure available over 1993/96 up to £86m. This extended initiative is expected to provide a further 1,500 places in permanent accommodation.<sup>61</sup>

Independent research commissioned by the DoE into the effectiveness of the RSI was published in January 1993<sup>62</sup>; this report concluded that the RSI "was successful in providing accommodation for several thousand single homeless people, most of whom had a history of rough sleeping. As a result there was a significant reduction in the number of people sleeping rough in the target area."<sup>63</sup> However, the report also noted: "the initiative has not yet achieved its objective of making it unnecessary for anyone to sleep rough in central London. A continuing programme will be necessary to achieve this."<sup>64</sup> The DoE issued a discussion document in January 1993 on the future development of the RSI which drew heavily on the recommendations of the independent research.<sup>65</sup> A central aim of this paper's proposals was to ensure the closer targeting of resources on the client group.

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<sup>61</sup> DoE *Annual Report 1994* para 6.78

<sup>62</sup> DoE *The Rough Sleepers Initiative: An Evaluation 1993*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, summary para 3

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, summary para 102

<sup>65</sup> DoE *The Rough Sleepers Initiative the Next Three Years* 18.1.93

On completion of the consultation exercise Sir George Young outlined the future direction of the RSI in the following Parliamentary Answer:<sup>66</sup>

**Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the outcome of the recent consultation exercise on the next phase of the Government's rough sleepers initiative, and if he will make a statement.

**Sir George Young:** Under the first phase of the rough sleepers initiative, from 1990-91 to 1992-93, the Government provided resources of £96 million to assist people sleeping rough in central London.

Independent research, funded by this Department, into the effectiveness of the rough sleepers initiative, shows that it has been a success. Through the initiative, several thousand people with a history of sleeping rough have been provided with accommodation. The number of people sleeping rough in central London has fallen by more than a half, from estimates of over 1,000 before the initiative began, to around 420 at a count in November 1992.

The Government have made available a further £8 million over the next three financial years, 1993-94 to 1995-96, to continue the rough sleepers initiative in central London. On 18 January 1993 I issued a discussion paper "The Rough Sleepers Initiative: The Next Three Years". It contained a range of proposals, based on recommendations from the independent research, aiming to ensure closer targeting of resources on central London's street homeless.

Almost 100 organizations responded to the paper. There has been a broad measure of support for the main thrust of our proposals. In the light of those responses, I am today issuing a strategy document that outlines the way forward for the rough sleepers initiative over the next three financial years until 1995-96, to assist our aim to make it unnecessary for people to sleep rough in central London.

We will continue to concentrate on funding permanent accommodation in houses and flats, with outreach work and resettlement support from voluntary organisations, to allow people sleeping rough to make a successful transition to a settled life. To ensure the better targeting of resources we are concentrating help on a limited number of specialist agencies with referral rights into RSI permanent accommodation; making referral agencies responsible for upholding the eligibility criteria; focusing some of the resources on zones, commencing with the Strand, with particular encouragement for consortia to come forward with proposals to reduce significantly the numbers sleeping rough in a specific area; and reducing the number of housing associations to develop permanent move-on accommodation under the initiative. Also, we are aiming to move towards a more contractual relationship with agencies, in the form of grants with tight, clearly-defined objectives. This, along with regular counts of the number of people sleeping rough in central London, will assist the better monitoring of the initiative.

The further £86 million made available for this initiative, and the proposals in the strategy document to target resources more closely on those in need, will ensure that people sleeping rough in central London will continue to be helped to start a new life away from the streets. I am keen that this initiative should make a further significant impact on the problem of people sleeping rough in the capital.

Detail on the future strategy of the RSI is set out in *The Rough Sleepers Initiative: The Next Three Years* (16.6.93). The RSI is now due to be wound up in March 1996.

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<sup>66</sup> HC Deb 16.6.93 c.569-70W

### 2. Comment

Organisations which work with single homeless people have generally welcomed the RSI and are of the view that it has been successful in reducing the number of rough sleepers on the streets of central London. However, there is concern that the initiative, despite its three year extension, is of a short term nature and does not address the underlying causes of homelessness amongst young single people.

Centrepoint Soho director, Nick Hardwick, has consistently argued for a co-ordinated and strategic approach to homelessness to stem the flow of people onto the streets. A 1992 Centrepoint report concluded that DoE measures to curb street homelessness were being frustrated by other Government policies, such as the removal of benefit entitlement from 16 and 17 year olds.<sup>67</sup> Evidence from frontline agencies suggests that the flow of newly homeless people has continued unabated; Centrepoint saw 502 young homeless people for the first time at its Soho emergency night shelter between April and September 1993. Commentators believe that the numbers of rough sleepers will simply increase again if funding under the RSI is removed in 1996.<sup>68</sup> The Chartered Institute of Housing has criticised Government policy on street homelessness for its failure to address the links between housing, employment, benefits and training policies and has suggested that it is "disingenuous" to attempt to discuss homelessness in isolation from this wider background.<sup>69</sup>

Throughout the life of the RSI agencies outside London have campaigned for the development of similar schemes to deal with the needs of rough sleepers in other large cities. The Government has rejected these requests on the ground that it views homeless people to be a local authority responsibility.<sup>70</sup> Requests to extend the scope of rough sleeper audits to outer London and other areas and to include counts of people in temporary accommodation, squatting, or staying with friends have been refused; the Government responded in its June 1993 strategy document: "such an extension would prove daunting in practical terms and would not yield useful information for an initiative that is targeted at central London's street homeless."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Centrepoint Soho *No way back* December 1992

<sup>68</sup> *Roof Magazine* "Quit running the streets" May/June 1994

<sup>69</sup> CIOH *Response to the DoE's January 1993 RSI discussion paper* 10.3.93

<sup>70</sup> Sir George Young interviewed on Radio 4's *Today* programme 12.11.93

<sup>71</sup> DoE *The Rough Sleepers Initiative: The Next Three Years* 16.6.93

The evaluation of the RSI carried out on behalf of the DoE found that hostel referral agencies were still experiencing problems in finding applicants suitable vacancies on many nights.<sup>72</sup> The researchers felt this was due to "silting up" of existing hostel places because of the lack of move-on accommodation. The 22 hostels funded under the first phase of the RSI are due to close over the next two years. It is accepted that the second phase of the RSI, which will concentrate on the provision of permanent accommodation, should ease the problem of placing rough sleepers; however, housing agencies believe there is still a need for maintaining the hostel spaces developed under the first phase of the scheme as they are able to assist homeless people in adjusting to a more settled way of life. The evaluation of the RSI found that only 10% of the long-term homeless could be resettled quite quickly.<sup>73</sup>

Despite the successes of the RSI there is concern over what will happen when funding is withdrawn in 1996. The independent evaluation of the RSI concluded that "the programmes it [*the RSI*] has set up will need to continue in order to achieve fully those objectives and to ensure that the numbers of people sleeping rough in central London does not begin to rise again."<sup>74</sup>

## **B. The Homeless Mentally Ill Initiative (HMI)**

On 12 July 1990 Stephen Dorrell announced that resources would be made available for the development of accommodation and psychiatric care for mentally ill people sleeping rough in central London. The initial programme included the funding of 60 short-term hostel places and the setting up of community-based psychiatric teams, with the provision of longer-term accommodation through the Housing Corporation.<sup>75</sup> The HMI was developed in recognition of the large number of rough sleepers in London who were suffering from some form of mental illness and was meant to complement the RSI.

The HMI has gradually been expanded; by the end of the current financial year (1994/95) £20 million will have been spent on providing specialist hostel places and developing community psychiatric teams. The DoH has also spent £3 million on a scheme to assist the development of primary health care for homeless people. In 1992 William Waldegrave announced that the Housing Corporation had agreed that housing associations would provide 750 units of

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<sup>72</sup> DoE *The Rough Sleepers Initiative: An Evaluation* 1993 para 6.3

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> Ibid para 6.40

<sup>75</sup> DoH Press Release No 09/352 12.7.90

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permanent accommodation for people who were able to move out of the specialist HMI hostels.<sup>76</sup>

Reports have indicated that the HMI has hit some problems over the revenue funding of care provided to people moving on from short-term hostels. Local social service authorities are responsible for this funding but have argued that they cannot afford it; in March 1992 the Joint Forum on Mental Health and Homelessness, representing 37 organisations, reported that not one of the 150 permanent units promised by this date had materialised.<sup>77</sup> In March 1993 the Government stated that discussions over revenue funding with relevant authorities were ongoing and that the DoH might consider meeting some costs on an interim basis if longer-term guarantees of funding could be secured.<sup>78</sup>

Agencies involved in the RSI have reported that an increasing proportion of the people they are dealing with have mental health problems as many of those without problems have been resettled successfully.<sup>79</sup> Requests for more specialised hostels like those provided under the HMI have been rejected by the DoE as, in the Department's view, the RSI cannot become a special needs housing programme.<sup>80</sup>

The Homeless Network's audit of rough sleepers on November 18/19 1993 found that 91% had one or more special needs; 1 in 3 had mental health problems.<sup>81</sup>

### C. Community care

The DoE's January 1993 discussion paper on the future of the RSI outlined several complementary measures which had been introduced since 1990 to deal with single homelessness; on community care provisions the paper states:

"Since April 1991, local authorities have been required to have in place a programme to provide co-ordinated care for people chronically disabled by mental illness who are living in the community. The discharge of psychiatric

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<sup>76</sup> DoH Press Release No 92/31 21.1.92

<sup>77</sup> *Housing Associations Weekly* "Lack of funds threatens mentally ill initiative" 10.4.92

<sup>78</sup> HC Deb 2.3.93 c.92W

<sup>79</sup> DoE *The Rough Sleepers Initiative: The Next Three Years* 18.1.93 para 33

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid* para 37

<sup>81</sup> Homeless Network *Central London Street Monitor* 18.11.93 p.3



in-patients should only take place when suitable arrangements have been made for their accommodation and welfare outside the hospital.

From April 1993, when the main community care provisions are to be implemented, social services departments will also be responsible for community care assessments of people with disabilities. Social services departments will be expected to involve housing departments whenever an individual's assessment indicates a possible housing need."<sup>82</sup>

With the implementation of the third and final stage of community care arrangements in April 1993 under the *1990 NHS and Community Care Act*, responsibility for the funding of residential care, which had previously been funded by the DSS, was transferred to local social services authorities. Local authorities must now carry out assessments of care needs and also provide care management, ie supervise care services purchased. The term "care needs" is not defined in the Act and while it could include services to homeless people it is likely that authorities are interpreting it to cover the needs of elderly and disabled people. Guidance which accompanied the 1990 Act suggested that consideration be given to homeless and transient people in the planning of services; however, a 1992 DoH circular states that: "community care in itself creates no new category of entitlement to housing".<sup>83</sup>

The Acts of Parliament under which community care services are defined for the purposes of the *NHS and Community Care Act 1990* are:

*The National Assistance Act 1948*, Part III, section 21(1) places a duty on every local authority to provide: (a) residential accommodation for persons who, by reason of age, illness, disability or any other circumstances are in need of care and attention which is not otherwise available to them; (b) temporary accommodation for persons who are in urgent need thereof. It is under this section that homeless people are most likely to qualify for assistance under the community care provisions. Section 47 provides for the compulsory removal from home to hospital or other suitable place of people for whom it is necessary to secure care and attention.

*The Health Services and Public Health Act 1968*, section 45(1) gives authorities powers, with the approval of the Secretary of State, to make arrangements to promote the welfare of old people.

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<sup>82</sup> DoE *The Rough Sleepers Initiative: The Next Three Years* 18.1.93 paras 9-10

<sup>83</sup> DoH Circular *Housing and Community Care* September 1992

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*The National Health Service Act 1977*, Schedule 8, para 3(1) places a duty on local authorities to provide or arrange provision of adequate home help facilities for a person who is suffering from illness, lying-in, an expectant mother, aged or handicapped. Schedule 8 also gives local authorities powers to provide other services for people who are physically or mentally ill, eg day centres, meals and social work support.

*The Mental Health Act 1983*, section 117 places a duty on the District Health Authority and social services department to provide aftercare services for certain patients. These services must be included in the community care plan of the local authority.

CHAR has completed the first stage of a two year project on community care and single homelessness the aim of which is to investigate how easily single homeless people can gain access to community care services, and to facilitate community care planning. The research involved a sample survey of 1993/94 community care plans from social services departments across a range of local authorities in England and Wales; obviously these plans may not be fully implemented by the authorities concerned.

While CHAR's survey found evidence of good practice across the local authorities sampled and also signs of housing becoming more integrated into community care arrangements, the report concludes that: "examples of planning that are geared to single homeless people remain rare, and are concentrated in areas with highly visible homeless populations."<sup>84</sup> The survey found a dilemma in social service departments between commitment to homeless people and the ability to deliver services to them, the report notes: "they [*the single homeless*] will only become part of the community care process if it is relevant, sympathetic and most importantly, can guarantee access to the services that homeless people need."<sup>85</sup>

Comment on the impact of community on providers of residential services for alcohol and drug misusers, groups which are highly represented amongst the single homeless, can be found in Library Research Paper 93/21<sup>86</sup> and a report published by Goldsmiths' College of the University of London.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> CHAR *Right to Care* September 1993

<sup>85</sup> Ibid

<sup>86</sup> *Funding for Residential Services for Drug and Alcohol Misusers*

<sup>87</sup> *Who Cares Now?* July 1993

## D. The private rented sector

Increasing the supply of private rented accommodation is an important aim of Government housing policy. This sector has traditionally been the tenure which has served the need of single people for instantly accessible accommodation and its decline has been identified as an underlying cause behind the growth in homelessness amongst this group.<sup>88</sup>

Part I of the *1988 Housing Act* deregulated rents on all new private sector tenancies created after 15 January 1989; in addition, the Act made it easier for landlords to regain possession of their properties when let under new style assured shorthold tenancy agreements. The aim of these measures was to encourage private landlords back into the market by enabling them to charge market rent levels and by reducing tenants' security of tenure. While there is recent evidence of an increase in private sector provision, it is not yet clear whether this upturn will be sustained and particularly whether it will survive a revival of the general housing market.

Research carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS), on behalf of the DoE, found that 483,000 new lets were created between 1988 and 1990; however, most of these had been rented prior to 1988 Act coming into force. The OPCS also found that some 175,000 tenancies were created in property that had not been let prior to 1988 but the researchers could not identify whether these lets had come from a pool of privately-owned empty homes or from owners letting their homes as a result of the downturn in the housing market.<sup>89</sup>

A survey of managing agents carried out by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) and the Association of Residential Letting Agents in March/April 1993 found that lettings per agent increased in 1992 by an average of 13 per cent; however, the survey noted that about one fifth of landlords were ex-owner occupiers who were unable or unwilling to sell their homes and that the number of lettings could fall when house prices pick up.<sup>90</sup> A number of housing commentators believe that significant growth in the private rented sector will come about only as a result of investment incentives such as capital allowances.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Audit Commission *Housing the Homeless: The Local Authority Role*, 1989

<sup>89</sup> OPCS *Private Renting in England in 1990* September 1992

<sup>90</sup> JRF Housing Research Findings No 90, May 1993

<sup>91</sup> see JRF Housing Research Finding No 95, July 1993; *Financial Times* "In search of the private landlord" 1.6.93

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Other Government measures to stimulate the private rented sector include:

- The "Rent a Room" scheme to encourage people to take in lodgers by enabling them to receive the first £3,250 of rent tax free;
- The Housing Associations as Managing Agents (HAMA) scheme under which associations offer to manage or lease homes on behalf of private owners. Owners gain a guaranteed rental income and are relieved of day to day management concerns. By the end of 1995/96 it is aimed to have 10,000 properties under management;<sup>92</sup>
- The Flats Over Shops initiative was launched in October 1991 and involves local authorities in leasing empty flats above shops, renovating them and managing them, or passing management over to a housing association, on behalf of their owners. The DoE has made £25 million in supplementary credit approvals available for this scheme over three years from 1992/93. In 1992/93 the programme produced 269 new homes; similar schemes financed by the Housing Corporation produced 223 new units.<sup>93</sup>

Despite evidence of an increase in the availability of private rented accommodation organisations working with the single homeless believe that the benefits system creates a barrier which prevents the single homeless from taking advantage of this increase in supply. Specific problems which have been highlighted include:

- Difficulty in paying the rent in advance/deposit requested by landlords (see section on the Social Fund pp 16-17);
- Restrictions on the rate of Income Support and Housing Benefit payable to people under the age of 25 (see pp 12-16);
- Housing Benefit limits on "unreasonably high rents" and accommodation which "exceeds the needs" of the tenant (see pp 15-16);

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<sup>92</sup> DoE Press Release *HAMA is key element in building confidence in private rented sector-Sir George Young* 7.3.94

<sup>93</sup> HC Deb 7.3.94 cc43-4W

- Delays in paying Housing Benefit resulting in landlords being less willing to accept claimants as tenants and increasing the likelihood of eviction (see p.16).

The Government is currently reviewing Housing Benefit expenditure, which is forecast to be in the region of £12 billion by the turn of the century, but has stated: "we recognise the importance of Housing Benefit to those who need help with their housing costs and we will continue to examine all aspects of the scheme to ensure that help is given to the best effect."<sup>94</sup> Suggestions that only a percentage of claimants' rents should be met by benefit have been greeted with alarm by housing organisations who believe that this would worsen the housing prospects of the poorest people in society.<sup>95</sup>

## E. Foyers

This initiative has been imported from France where a network of hostels (foyers) for young people which provide accommodation linked to employment and training is well established. The aim of foyers is to prevent young people ever becoming homeless. The 500 French foyers are run independently but have an integrated referral system to enable young people to move around the country for employment or training with guaranteed accommodation.

In 1991 a pilot programme of foyers was set up in England with the aim of breaking the "no job, no home, no job" cycle. This programme has involved the development of day-to-day training and jobsearch support services for young people by five existing YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) hostels; the second stage of the programme is concerned with two new-build foyers which are being built by London and Quadrant Housing Trust in South London (Lambeth) and North British Housing Association in Salford. Funding for the employment and training elements of the five pilot foyers, which came into operation between March to August 1992, has been supplied by the Department of Employment; almost half a million pounds had been contributed by March 1994.<sup>96</sup> The DoE, through the Housing Corporation, is providing capital and revenue support for the new-build foyers.

A full evaluation of the pilot foyers is being carried out by the Centre for Housing Policy (CHP) at the University of York; an interim report on the first six months of the CHP's

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<sup>94</sup> DSS Press Release *Housing Benefit review focuses on rising expenditure* 15.6.94

<sup>95</sup> *Independent* "A big benefit of smaller rents" 9.6.94

<sup>96</sup> HC Deb 15.3.94 c.728

findings was published in the March 1994 edition of *Employment Gazette*.<sup>97</sup> Within the first six months of operation 300 people were referred to the foyers of which the majority were unemployed and in the age range of 18-24. By the end of the six months 204 people were participating in the foyers; 10% were in work; 20% were in training, the majority were involved in jobsearch activities. Although a key objective of foyers is to enable clients to live independently the pilots were generally found to have not given the development of move on accommodation much active consideration. Problems identified with moving people out of the foyers included the lack of suitable move on accommodation and finance for deposits.

Recent research by Youthaid is critical of the foyer pilot schemes on the grounds that they are not aimed at people who need the most support in finding employment and housing, ie 16/17 year olds and people with special needs; residents are fearful of losing their accommodation if they leave unsuitable jobs or training and they may divert resources from young people.<sup>98</sup>

### **F. Voluntary organisations**

Under section 73 of the *1985 Housing Act* the DoE issues grants to support the national homelessness advice service and some 150 projects run by voluntary organisations throughout the country that provide direct, practical help to homeless people. Over 1993/94 £6.5 million was made available for these grants.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *Employment Gazette* "Homeless young people into jobs and homes - a study of the Foyer pilots" March 1994

<sup>98</sup> Youthaid Press Release 10.3.94

<sup>99</sup> HC Deb 18.11.92 c.209W

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