



Together
we will end
homelessness



Moving on

Improving access to housing for
single homeless people in England

Contents

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Foreword

All forms of homelessness have been on the rise in England. A key driver in many areas of the country is a lack of affordable and suitable housing. While this is a problem for all homeless households, through Crisis' services we know that for a significant number of single people their homelessness could be resolved quickly through immediate access to a home.

But single homeless people face a range of barriers which make it particularly difficult for them to find a home of any tenure. Restricted entitlement to Housing Benefit and insecurity of tenure in the private rented sector are key drivers of homelessness for this group.

And as new analysis for this report shows, as the supply of social housing in England has shrunk, and fewer and fewer new tenants get access to social rented housing, the effect on single homeless people has been particularly damaging. Restricted eligibility for social housing is a factor for some, alongside problems caused by the declining affordability of social housing, cuts to Housing Benefit entitlement and housing providers' responses to these.

We also know homelessness is not inevitable. Our experience shows that with the right assistance, single homeless people can successfully secure sustainable tenancies and

employment. We welcome the commitment that has already been made by the Government to tackle homelessness.

But the clear conclusion of this report is that more needs to be done to ensure the housing market works for single homeless people. This doesn't mean we're calling for the declining supply of social housing to be re-distributed to the detriment of others in housing need. Instead Government must take steps to increase the supply of homes at rents people on the lowest incomes can afford, and tackle barriers to access.

Crisis has already called on Government to improve access to privately rented housing with funding for Help to Rent projects, and measures to address the growing shortfall between Housing Benefit rates and rent levels. We call on National Government to end the use of blanket allocations restrictions that mean people in housing need can't get

access to social housing. We also urge that the new Homelessness Reduction Taskforce is required to set targets for the adequate supply of housing for single and other homeless people, and to ensure that all registered housing providers co-operate with local councils to deliver the Homelessness Reduction Act. Increased access to and investment in affordable housing can ensure homelessness is prevented for many and help us and others end homelessness for good.



Jon Sparkes
Chief Executive, Crisis

Glossary

- **Affordable rent:** social housing at a rent of no more than 80 per cent of the local market rent. It is typically more expensive than social rent.
- **Arms-length management organisation (ALMO):** an organisation set up by a council to manage council owned homes; a type of social housing provider.
- **Council landlord service:** a council that owns and manages council housing and a type of social housing provider.
- **DCLG:** Department for Communities and Local Government.
- **DWP:** Department for Work and Pensions.
- **General needs housing:** homes not designated or designed for specific client groups requiring support; the term is used interchangeably with the term "mainstream" housing in this report.
- **Homeless accommodation projects:** often referred to as homeless hostels, these provide both short- and long-term homelessness accommodation, delivered in a variety of forms which includes single rooms with shared facilities, bedsit flats or dispersed move-on houses for when people leave the accommodation.
- **Homes & Communities Agency (HCA):** the government-appointed body responsible for regulating private registered providers.
- **Housing association:** not for profit provider of housing and a type of social housing provider.
- **Housing First:** provides independent tenancies and comprehensive, but not compulsory, floating support for people with multiple support needs or who have been sleeping rough for some time.
- **Housing-related support:** support services provided to help people get access to or sustain their tenancies. Support services might be provided in supported housing, or to tenants living in mainstream/general needs housing. It can include a spectrum of support services from high intensity or specialist services for those with multiple or complex needs and low intensity services for those with a low level of need.
- **Main homelessness duty:** a 'main homelessness duty' is owed where a local authority is satisfied that a homeless applicant is eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and falls within a specified priority need group.
- **Mainstream housing:** homes not designated or designed for specific client groups requiring support; the term is used interchangeably with the term "general needs housing" in this report.
- **New social lets:** social lettings given to a new household that is not currently living in social housing.
- **Non-priority need:** Households which do not fall into a priority need group; many single homeless people are categorised as non-priority.
- **P1E:** The purpose of the quarterly P1E forms is to collect data from English local housing authorities on their responsibilities under homelessness legislation, in particular providing details of the households accepted as homeless and in priority need and the actions taken to house them. It also includes a section on homelessness prevention and relief.
- **Priority need:** The 'priority need groups' include households with dependent children or a pregnant woman, 16 and 17-year-olds not eligible for housing from social services, 18 to 21-year-old care leavers, people that have been made homeless by flood, fire or other natural disasters and people who are classed as vulnerable in some way e.g. because of mental illness or physical disability.
- **Private landlords:** we use this term to refer to for-profit, private sector landlords not registered with the HCA including buy to let and corporate landlords.
- **Private registered providers:** housing providers registered with the HCA including for-profit and not-for-profit providers, but excluding council landlord services.
- **SAR:** Shared Accommodation Rate. This is the level of Housing Benefit that can be claimed by someone renting a room in a shared property – the lowest band. This is the highest level of Housing Benefit that can be claimed by single under-35-year-olds in the private rented sector, and from April 2019 will apply to tenants of social landlords if they have taken up a tenancy since April 2016 or regardless of the tenancy start date if they are claiming Universal Credit. Tenants living in supported housing will be exempt from the SAR.
- **Single homelessness:** refers to homelessness experienced by households of working age, with no dependent children. In contrast to homeless families, most single homeless households are unlikely to be regarded as priority need by their local authority.
- **Social housing:** housing belonging to and managed by registered providers (often known as social landlords – generally local authorities or housing associations) and regulated by the Homes and Communities Agency (and ultimately DCLG).
- **Social housing provider:** a generic term used in this report to refer to not for profit registered social housing providers including housing associations, council landlord services and arms-length management organisations.
- **Social lets:** a let of a property/ residential unit to a household. A single household may account for more than one let in the course of a year.
- **Social rent:** social housing subject to guideline target rents, originally set with reference to local market rents and manual earnings.
- **Statutory homelessness:** refers to homeless households, to whom local authorities have a statutory duty to provide assistance.
- **Supported accommodation:** temporary or permanent housing designated or designed for people who need support with everyday tasks to help them live in their home.

Executive summary

Homelessness is on the rise in England. The number of households accepted by councils each year as homeless and in 'priority need' has increased by 40% since 2010,¹ while the number of rough sleepers has increased by 130% over the same period according to official counts.² Although the available evidence points to sustained recent increases in homelessness among single people, data on the actual scale of single homelessness is hard to source.³

This study has been produced to inform a wider programme of work being carried out by Crisis to improve the availability of homes that single homeless people can afford in both the social and private rented sectors.

It provides new estimates on the number of single homeless people in England to inform discussion about how to meet the housing requirements of this group. It also examines evidence on the main tenure destinations for homeless people when they find housing, and the barriers encountered

by single homeless people seeking to gain access to housing. While the report notes the evidence on access problems in the private rented sector, the difficulties single homeless people face gaining access to social housing are a particular focus. The report draws on new evidence from Crisis's own services, as well as our analysis of secondary data sources, to examine the barriers faced.

While single homeless people have a wide spectrum of needs, the subject of this report is the need for mainstream accommodation for people with low or no support needs; those for whom any need for support tends to be short term, of low intensity, and associated primarily with gaining access to housing. Being unable to gain access to housing is the main reason for homelessness amongst this group. It may include those who have at some point been judged as having a priority need under the homelessness legislation, but are now ready to live independently in mainstream housing, as well as those considered non-

priority.⁴ While there is evidence that the barriers to accessing housing described in this report are common to other types of homeless household, the focus of this report is the particular impact for single homeless adults of working age. These are adults who typically fall outside the protection of the housing duties provided by the current homelessness legislation.⁵

In focusing on access to social housing for single homeless people it is not the purpose of this report to call for a redistribution of a declining social housing stock to the detriment of others in housing need. Instead, the purpose is to highlight the disproportionate impact of structural barriers to housing, and the steps needed to tackle these. The barriers to accessing social housing identified by this report need to be understood against the backdrop of the fall in England's stock of social rented housing.⁶ While the focus of the report is access to housing, it is clear that the underlying shortage of homes that those on the lowest incomes can afford is strongly implicated in the access problems that all homeless people face.

The evidence of this report reaffirms the case for national Government to adopt a joined-up approach to reform of policy on access to housing, rent setting, housing supply and the role of Housing Benefit. It also points to the need to review the framework for ensuring all local authorities and social housing providers play their part in providing a supply of homes for those on the lowest incomes.

But while acknowledging that an increase in affordable housing supply is of critical importance to tackle all forms of homelessness, the evidence presented here highlights the risk that boosting affordable housing supply may not, of itself, improve the availability of housing for homeless people. This is because eligibility restrictions prevent some homeless people from joining housing registers, while problems with the affordability of social housing mean that even those who meet eligibility criteria may be unable to afford rent or the up-front costs of moving into an affordable home. To improve the availability of housing for homeless people both the shortage of housing supply and barriers to access must be addressed.

Key findings

- The number of single people who experience homelessness in England each year – often termed the flow – is around 200,000, with a minimum estimate of 120,000 and a maximum of 345,000.⁷ The average number of single people experiencing some form of homelessness on any one night (the stock) is estimated to be 77,000 – with a low estimate of 52,000 and a high estimate of 111,000. This group refers to a much wider cohort than those who are sleeping on the streets. It also contains people living in homeless accommodation projects (often referred to as hostels), including a growing proportion unable to move-on because of a lack of access to affordable housing, people living in squats and other makeshift arrangements and staying temporarily with friends and family because they have nowhere else to go.

1 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/613765/Statutory_Homelessness_and_Prevention_and_Relief_Live_Tables_2016_Q4.xls

2 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/593685/Rough_Sleeping_Autumn_2016_Final_Tables.xls

3 Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF

4 The priority/non-priority designation does not drive the definition of single homelessness with low support needs used in this report. The problems associated with applying the priority/non priority distinction in practice are explained in previous Crisis reports, such as Dobbie, S., Sanders, B. & Teixeira, L. (2014) *Turned Away: The treatment of single homeless people by local authority homelessness services in England*. London: Crisis.

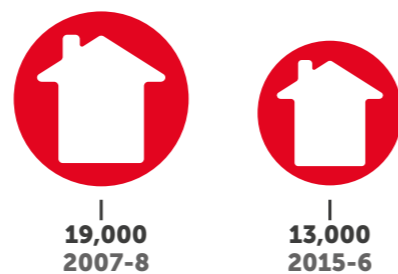
5 Crisis (2016) *The Homelessness Legislation: An independent review of the legal duties owed to homeless people*. London: Crisis

6 Wilcox, S., Perry, J. Stephens, M. and Williams P (2016) *UK Housing Review 2016 Briefing Paper Coventry: CIH*

7 This is based on analysis detailed in chapter 1 and methodology section which presents high, medium and low estimates for the stock and flow of single homeless people.

- Around two-thirds of single homeless people have support needs that mean their immediate destination should be some form of housing with tailored support such as supported housing or a Housing First solution. The rest have no acute support needs⁸ and the primary barrier to ending their homelessness is housing. It is difficult to precisely identify this group, but this report estimates that 75,000 single people with low or no support needs experience homelessness each year, with a minimum estimate of 40,000 and a maximum estimate of 140,000. The average number of single people with low or no support needs who are homeless on any one night is 26,000, with a low estimate of 17,000 and a high estimate of 38,000. These are people whose main cause of homelessness typically results from the shortage of genuinely affordable homes and reduced availability of Housing Benefit.
 - The report examines data on the tenure of housing accessed by homeless people. As the relative size of the social rented sector has fallen, the private rented sector has doubled its share of households from 10% to 20% in less than 20 years,⁹ and the number of people living in poverty in the latter has also doubled.¹⁰ As it has grown, the sector has become increasingly important as a source of housing for homeless people, accounting for roughly a third of mainstream housing for this group.¹¹
 - Homeless people face particular barriers when they try to access private housing. Many private sector landlords are reluctant to let their
- properties to homeless people, and it is difficult for those on the lowest incomes to save the money needed to cover rental deposits and rent in advance.¹²
- While private renting is often the only housing available to single homeless people, social housing still plays a critical role, although the number of lettings available to new tenants has been falling. An analysis of trends in lettings specifically to single homeless people of working age finds that since 2007-08 the number of new lets to this group has fallen continuously. This fall is disproportionate when compared to other household groups.
 - Social lettings to single homeless people in England fell from 19,000 a year in 2007-8 to 13,000 in 2015-16. The proportion of new lettings to single homeless people relative to the number of new lettings overall has fallen, from 12% to 8% of all new lettings over the same period. Although this reflects a broader long-term decline in the proportion of social lettings to all homeless households, since 2011 the proportion of lettings to homeless families has stabilised somewhat, while the proportion of lets to single homeless households has continued to decline.

Social lettings to single homeless people have fallen by almost a third



8 Support needs are identified as having at least one of the following issues: mental ill-health, physical health issue or disability, alcohol dependency or drug dependency

9 Wilcox, S., Perry, J., Stephens, M., Williams, P. (2017). *UK Housing Review 2017*, CIH

10 JRF Website (accessed 14th June 2017). Numbers in poverty by housing tenure. <http://www.jrf.org.uk/data/numbers-poverty-housing-tenure>

11 Crisis calculations based on P1E returns and CORE data.

12 Gousy, H. (2016) *Home no less will do. Improving access to private renting for single homeless people*. London: Crisis

- An examination of the reasons for this recent disproportionate decline in access to social housing for single homeless people identifies changes in policy on the allocation of social housing as a factor for some households, alongside problems caused by the reducing affordability of social housing, restrictions on Housing Benefit entitlement, and housing providers' response to these. The impact of these factors is as follows:
- **Restrictions on social housing eligibility and allocations.** Councils are encouraged by national guidance to restrict access to social housing to those with a local connection, and some councils and housing providers are using powers granted by the Localism Act (2011) to exclude applicants with a history of rent arrears, antisocial behaviour or criminal convictions (though such practices are not universal). Evidence suggests that where such restrictions exist and are enforced without consideration of applicants' individual circumstances, they can significantly affect homeless people and make it more difficult for them to find stable housing and take steps to find and sustain work. Blanket policies which exclude categories of applicant from eligibility for social housing and prevent people in housing need from joining housing waiting lists risk undermining homelessness prevention activity.

Such restrictions increase the risk of households sleeping rough or getting stuck in temporary supported housing, at significant cost to the individual and to society. In this context, the value of such rationing measures in areas of low housing

demand is particularly open to question. As councils prepare for the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) this is an opportune time to address the impact of social housing eligibility restrictions and adjust policy and practice.

- **Restrictions related to household income and affordability**

There is evidence that the use of affordability and other financial eligibility criteria by some housing providers has the effect of screening out those on the lowest incomes.¹³ While this reduces providers' exposure to the risks caused by higher rents and a sometimes-inadequate Housing Benefit safety net, it also reduces the supply of housing to those on the lowest incomes, including single homeless people. At times social housing providers have little choice; the impact of restrictions on Housing Benefit eligibility can mean that in parts of the country low income households are literally unable to pay their rent. The introduction of the shared accommodation rate (SAR) to social housing looks set to extend this problem to many more single people aged under 35.¹⁴ While there are some established shared housing schemes in the social sector and more social housing providers are now considering or piloting shared schemes, many social housing providers have adopted a very cautious approach towards this type of housing.¹⁵ If restrictions on the availability of Housing Benefit for the under 35s are indeed introduced for social housing in 2019, homelessness prevention strategies will need to prioritise the delivery of more shared or self-contained housing within SAR limits.

13 Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The homelessness monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF

14 National Housing Federation (2017) *Research briefing: Impact of applying Local Housing Allowance rates to general needs social tenants*; Cole, I., Green, S., Pattison, B., Reeve, K., Wilson, I., (2017) *Capping aspiration: the millennial challenge*, Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University.

15 Reeve, K. et al. (2017). *Capping aspiration: the millennial housing challenge*. Sheffield Hallam University; Crisis (2017) *Spare to Share* https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237291/crisis_spare_to_share.pdf

- Allocations policy and financial/affordability restrictions that limit access to social housing for homeless people exacerbate the underlying impact of the continued decline in the size of the social rented sector and the supply of homes available at social rent levels. Far fewer new tenants are getting access to social housing. There has been an absolute and proportionate reduction in social lettings to all homeless households which predates the policy changes introduced by the 2010 Coalition Government. The longer term declining trend in lettings to homeless people is likely to have been influenced by the increased focus on homelessness prevention since 2003 and associated changes in allocations practice in the years preceding the Localism reforms, as well as decreasing social housing supply.
 - Lettings to single homeless people have, however, declined disproportionately in recent years, suggesting that they have been particularly affected by the combined impact of the reducing overall supply of social lettings and changes in allocations policy and practice. As a consequence, some single homeless people are stuck, unnecessarily, in temporary supported housing or other temporary, insecure shelter with no route out of homelessness.
 - Crisis' evidence suggests that these restrictions affect single homeless people's access to social housing to at least some degree in all the areas in which Crisis operates, including areas of both low and high housing demand. It is particularly disappointing though that eligibility restrictions are restricting access in neighbourhoods with lower levels of social housing demand and a more readily available supply of social homes.
 - The access problems identified are not universal; some social housing providers, including those working with Crisis members, are continuing to enable single homeless people to gain access to social housing. The experience of Crisis members demonstrates that with the right assistance, single homeless people can successfully navigate the system and secure sustainable tenancies and employment.
- Next steps**
- The Government should take urgent steps to ensure there is a supply of housing available to single homeless people as well as others in housing need. In its recent Housing White Paper, the Government acknowledged that more needs to be done to tackle our dysfunctional housing market, and to help households currently priced out of the market.¹⁶ While it identified a range of measures to stimulate affordable housing supply and tackle the most severe problems with private renting, it needs to go much further to improve access to housing for single homeless people and others on the lowest incomes.
 - The evidence presented in this report helps explain why the Government's proposals to stimulate the supply of affordable rented, but not social rented, housing are likely to have only a marginal direct impact on the supply of homes available to single homeless people in many parts of the country.¹⁷ It also highlights the risk that current approaches to social housing allocations will undermine the Government's aim of preventing homelessness.
- This report identifies a cohort of in the region of 26,000 single homeless people with low or no support needs across England as a whole who require permanent housing on any given night. People move in and out of homelessness – around 75,000 people with low or no support needs will experience homelessness at some point over the course of a year, so the number who are homeless on any one night is likely to fluctuate.
 - A key challenge for Government now is to ensure that there is an adequate supply of homes across the social and private rented sectors to meet the needs of this group as well as others in housing need.
 - Translating the number of single homeless people identified here into an estimate of additional housing requirements is beyond the scope of this report. But national and local government must ensure that the specific needs of single homeless people are considered alongside the needs of other groups in their assessments of local housing requirements,¹⁸ and are reflected in affordable housing policy requirements for new housing provision as well as in local housing and homelessness strategies. While some of this present need could be met in the existing stock by addressing the barriers to access to both social and private rented housing examined in this report, to reduce the flow of newly arising homelessness the underlying problems of housing affordability, and related supply issues, need to be addressed. Wider debates about rent setting, Housing Benefit entitlement, and public subsidy for "bricks or benefits" are not the subject of this report, but they do provide the context within which the recommendations below have been formulated.¹⁹ Crisis is carrying out further work to identify cost-effective solutions to boost the supply of affordable housing that meets the needs of single homeless people, and will report separately on this.
 - In the short-term, and in view of the declining availability of social lettings to single homeless people at a time of continued recent rises in rough sleeping, there is a case for national government, working with local authorities or city regions, to set targets or quotas to ensure a supply of homes is available for single homeless people as well as others in housing need in every locality. At local level such targets would reflect the availability of lettings in both the social and private rented sectors (for example via help to rent schemes or social lettings agencies), taking account of local housing market conditions.
 - Registered housing providers are currently required by the Homes and Communities Agency Tenancy Standard to co-operate with local authorities, helping councils to meet their homelessness duties. The evidence of this report suggests that some housing providers are doing more than others to address the

¹⁶ DCLG (2017) *Fixing our broken housing market* London: DCLG. A commitment to deliver measures to boost housing supply set out in the White Paper was included in the 2017 Conservative Party Manifesto.

¹⁷ The Conservative Manifesto included a commitment to building more council and housing association homes, and in a press statement the Prime Minister committed to "a new generation of homes for social rent" see Birch, J., May 14 2017 *The Conservative manifesto plan for housing*. <https://julesbirch.com/2017/05/14/the-conservative-manifesto-plan/>. Subsequently however the then Housing Minister suggested that the intention was instead to build more homes for affordable rent – not social rent – see Barnes, S. 2 June 2017 *Inside Housing, Barwell: New homes for 'social rent' will be let at affordable rent levels*: <http://www.insidehousing.co.uk/barwell-new-homes-for-social-rent-will-be-let-at-affordable-rent-levels/7020225.article#>

¹⁸ In the Housing White Paper - DCLG (2017) *Fixing our broken housing market* London: DCLG- the Government indicated its intention to consult on proposals that will deliver a more standardised approach to assessing housing requirements.

¹⁹ Webb, K. (2012). *Bricks or benefits?*: London. Shelter; Capital Economics, Building new social rent homes (Capital Economics, London), 2015.

mainstream housing needs of single homeless people. Government must also acknowledge and address the significant challenges councils and social housing providers face in ensuring single homeless people can pay their rent against a backdrop of cuts to Housing Benefit entitlement and particularly the application of the Shared Accommodation Rate to mainstream social housing from April 2019 in the context of the affordable rent regime.

Recommendations

- Improving access to the private rented sector is of critical importance to provide homes for homeless people unable to gain access to social renting. Crisis has previously called on Government to improve access to privately rented housing for homeless people by:
 - Providing a funding stream to support the delivery of “Help to Rent” projects (providing pre- and in-tenancy support) and a nationally funded tenancy deposit scheme to increase access to private renting for homeless people.
 - Addressing deficiencies in the Local Housing Allowance regime which mean that rent levels are increasingly out of step with the amount of Housing Benefit that can be paid.
 - Ensuring local authorities are resourced and incentivised to develop their market stewardship role, providing effective oversight of the lower end of the private rental market and supporting their role in homelessness prevention.
- In addition, there is an urgent need to increase the supply of homes at rent levels those on the lowest incomes can afford and which, critically, are within Local Housing Allowance rates. Government must enable councils and other social housing providers to build new homes at social rent levels (or an equivalent formula set with reference to the National Living Wage or other appropriate measure of low earnings), and must set national and local/city region targets for this genuinely affordable supply.
- To address the additional barriers to social housing for single homeless people identified in this report, and to enable local authorities to ensure effective implementation of their new duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017):
 - 1. National government must end the use of blanket housing register exclusions that shut out people in housing need.** Government must revise national policy on social housing allocations in the light of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) to ensure that single homeless people and others in housing need are not prevented from joining housing registers.
 - 2. National government must ensure there is a supply of mainstream housing that single homeless people can afford.** To achieve this Government must instruct the new homelessness reduction task force to:
 - a. Set targets for the adequate supply of housing that is accessible and affordable to single and other homeless

people. This should include targets for the supply of shared housing accessible to single homeless people aged under 35 within the Shared Accommodation Rate.

b. Review arrangements for ensuring that all Registered Housing Providers fulfil their responsibilities to co-operate with local authorities specifically to assist the latter in meeting their homelessness duties.

3. City regions and local authorities, working with social housing providers, should:

- a. Monitor and report publicly on the flow of social housing lettings to single homeless people and other categories of household within Annual Lettings Plans, taking account of the outcome of nominations to social housing providers. This should be an integral part of the process of reporting on implementation of and outcomes achieved through councils’ Homelessness Strategies.
- b. Review the impact of social housing eligibility restrictions and restrictions related to affordability on the flow of lettings to homeless people, and consider whether adjustments are needed to policy and practice to ensure effective implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017).

Introduction

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Homelessness is on the rise in England. The number of households accepted each year as homeless and in 'priority need' by their local authority has increased by 40% since 2010,²⁰ while the number of rough sleepers has increased by over 130% during the same period according to official counts.²¹ Although the available evidence points to sustained recent increases in homelessness, data on the real scale of single homelessness is hard to source.²²

People become homeless for a range of complex reasons, and helping someone out of homelessness is about more than putting a roof over their head. But it is clear that the declining size of the social housing stock and restricted entitlement to Housing Benefit (or its Universal Credit equivalent) are key drivers of homelessness.²³ The individual problems that sometimes lead to homelessness are often associated with the impact of poverty and other forms of social disadvantage.²⁴ It is no

coincidence then that homelessness is rising during a period of weak economic growth, record housing costs, and cuts to the welfare safety net that used to insulate households from these factors.²⁵

Historically single people have often been unable to gain access to statutory homelessness services. Households without dependent children are not regarded as 'priority need' unless they are considered vulnerable because of age, disability or mental health problems. While the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) will give more single homeless people the right to meaningful advice and assistance, there are significant structural barriers to housing that need to be addressed.

Homeless people face particular barriers when they try to access housing, both in the private and social rented sectors. Many private sector landlords are reluctant to let their properties to homeless people, and it is difficult for those on the lowest incomes to save the money needed

to cover rental deposits and rent in advance. Crisis's report *Home: no less will do* sets out evidence on the scale of these access problems, and makes recommendations on how they could be addressed.

Improving access to private renting is, however, only part of the solution. Social housing still plays a critical role in housing those on the lowest incomes, including homeless people. Despite the decreasing size of the social housing stock, many thousands of single homeless people gain access to social housing each year; in England there were 13,000 social lettings to single homeless people in 2015/16.²⁶ It is, however, becoming increasingly difficult for single homeless people to get access to social housing.

The difficulties single homeless people face include the impact of council and social housing providers' restrictive policies on housing register eligibility and assessing applicants' likely ability to cover the cost of their rent. These difficulties are being exacerbated by the impact of reduced levels of public spending on services designed to help homeless people get back on their feet. While these barriers can affect access to social housing for all types of homeless household, including families, this report focuses particularly on the impact for single homeless people.²⁷

Alongside the examination of barriers to social housing access, this report sets out to estimate the number of single homeless people in England in immediate housing need. This group is a much wider cohort than

those who are sleeping on the streets. It also contains people living in homeless accommodation projects, including a growing proportion unable to move-on because of a lack of access to affordable supply, people living in squats and other makeshift arrangements, and staying temporarily with friends and family because they have nowhere else to go. As well as seeking to quantify overall housing need for single homeless people, this analysis also seeks to identify the number of households with low or no support needs – those for whom housing is the primary solution. While it is sometimes assumed that housing solutions for single homeless people necessarily involve some form of supported housing provision, it is our experience that a substantial proportion of the single homeless client group require general needs, mainstream housing solutions.

The barriers to accessing social housing identified by this report need to be understood against the backdrop of the fall in England's stock of social rented housing²⁸ and cuts to Housing Benefit entitlement, both of which are key drivers of recent increases in homelessness.²⁹ National Government policy prioritising investment in low-cost homeownership and affordable market rent at the expense of investment in homes at social rents, has resulted in a dramatic fall in the output of new homes affordable to those on the lowest incomes.³⁰ While the focus of the report is access to housing, it is clear that the underlying shortage of homes that those on the lowest incomes can afford is strongly implicated in the access problems that

20 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/613765/Statutory_Homelessness_and_Prevention_and_Relief_Live_Tables_2016_Q4.xls

21 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/593685/Rough_Sleeping_Autumn_2016_Final_Tables.xls

22 Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The homelessness monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF

23 Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The homelessness monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF

24 Bramley, G. and Fitzpatrick, S. (2017). Homelessness in the UK: Who is most at risk? *Housing Studies*

25 Fitzpatrick et al, *Homelessness Monitor Series*. London: Crisis/JRF

<https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/>

26 Department for Communities and Local Government. (2017). *Continuous Recording of Social Housing Lettings and Sales (CORE), 2007/08-2015/16*. [data collection]. 5th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 7603, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7603-7>

27 The Homelessness Monitor 2017 illustrates that allocations restrictions and affordability problems are affecting all categories of homeless household.

28 Wilcox, S., Perry, J. Stephens, M. and Williams P (2016) *UK Housing Review 2016 Briefing Paper* Coventry: CIH

29 Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF

30 Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF – a point illustrated in Figure 2.6

single homeless people face. Wider debates about rent setting, Housing Benefit entitlement, public subsidy for “bricks or benefits”³¹ and the tension between housing providers’ social purpose and commercial imperative³² are not the subject of this report, but provide the context within which the report’s recommendations have been framed.³³ Equally, in focusing on the needs of single homeless people it is not the purpose of this report to call for a redistribution of a declining social housing stock to the detriment of others in housing need. The evidence of this report reaffirms the case for a joined-up approach from national Government to reform of policy on access to housing, housing supply, rent setting and the role of Housing Benefit. It also points to the need to review the framework for ensuring all local authorities and social housing providers play their part in ensuring a supply of homes for those on the lowest incomes.

1.2 Objective

This report fills a gap in the evidence base by providing estimates for the scale of housing need for single homeless people in England. It then goes on to examine the key barriers single homeless people face in accessing housing.

There has been a longstanding debate in England about how to identify and meet housing requirements, focusing on the following issues:

- the number of houses that need to be built to sustain trend rates of household formation;³⁴ and

- the number of houses required to accommodate the ‘backlog of need’ - those in the most pressing housing need as judged by local authority housing registers, including people living in homes that are overcrowded or which do not meet their needs.³⁵

By contrast, this report focuses solely on single homeless people, and seeks to quantify the tip of the housing need iceberg specifically for this group. So, while acknowledging that there is a wider cohort of people in housing need because their current housing is inadequate, overcrowded, or shared with others, this analysis seeks to quantify the number of single homeless people without a home at all. Thanks to the statutory duties on local authorities, there are very few families with children in this situation, although many spend too long in temporary accommodation or are living in overcrowded conditions or unfit housing. This report focuses on the very different situation of those people without a right to housing at all.

Translating the number of single homeless people into an unmet housing need i.e. a deficit of homes is, however, beyond the scope of this report. The number of new homes needed depends on how much existing stock can be made available, and how the new homes are supplied.

31 Webb, K. (2012). *Bricks or benefits?*: London. Shelter; Capital Economics (2015) Building new social rent homes Capital Economics; London

32 Nicola Slawson *Profit or purpose? The fight over the future of social housing in Britain* (The Guardian) 14th August 2015; Gregory, J. Mullins, D. Murie, A. and Redmand P. (2016) *Social Housing and the Good Society*. University of Birmingham

33 This report presents the first phase of a programme of work by Crisis that will also develop recommendations on increasing the supply of mainstream housing affordable and accessible to single homeless people.

34 See for example: Holmans, A. (2013). *New estimates of housing demand and need in England, 2011 to 2031*. TCPA, London.

35 See for example: Clarke, A., & Burgess, G. (2012). *Mapping the number of extra housing units needed for young people*. University of Cambridge, Cambridge.

1.3 Defining homelessness

This report adopts the definitions of homelessness used in Crisis’s homelessness projections research³⁶. While some broader reference groups have also been considered, the report focuses on estimating the size of a “core” homeless group which lacks both a safe and private living space and security of tenure (see methodology section below for full classification). It does not, therefore, include all people living in unfit or overcrowded housing,³⁷ or those under threat of eviction. Further, this report does not include stock estimates of people who have been placed in suitable temporary accommodation following a homelessness application. It also aims to exclude those living in such conditions by choice i.e. able to access and afford adequate accommodation. As noted elsewhere, the focus is on single households.

1.4 Methodology

A multi-method design was adopted to identify the number of single homeless people in England with low or no support needs and the key barriers they face in accessing housing. The first stage of the research involved secondary data analysis on a number of household surveys to ascertain the scale of the cohort and the profile of how single homeless people currently enter and then leave the homelessness system. The second stage of the research examined secondary data sources and the Crisis client

database. Finally, the third stage used a qualitative survey with Crisis Skylights, quantitative analysis of lettings data, and a literature review of available data and evidence in relation to access to social housing. A full write up of the methodology and assumptions can be found in the technical report.³⁸

Stage one: Estimating the scale of single homelessness

Stage one quantifies the scale of single homelessness in England. The estimates have been calculated through a number of surveys: English Housing Survey, Understanding Society Survey, Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey, Family Resources Survey and Crime Survey for England and Wales. In addition, the figures draw on statutory homelessness data recorded by local authorities and managed by DCLG the Greater London Authority CHAIN database and the Homeless Link database and health needs audit. Findings from a number of studies on homelessness have also been used to inform some of the estimates and assumptions underpinning the figures. The household survey data was analysed in R using the survey package.³⁹ Maps were produced in QGIS.⁴⁰

The estimate of single homelessness adopts an eight-part classification of homelessness, with five core categories for which estimates of stock and flow are calculated (see table 1.1). A rough stock estimate for one

36 Bramley, G. (2017). *Homelessness projections: Core homelessness in Great Britain*: Crisis, London. This definition was ultimately produced with reference to the ETHOS definition of a home from the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA): an adequate living space which is accessible only to the household who live within it (the ‘physical domain’ of home); a living space in which a household can enjoy privacy and their emotional life (the ‘social domain’ of home); and a living space which a household has a legal title to occupy (the ‘legal domain’ of home).

37 Although this is one of the criteria we use to identify sofa surfers

38 A technical report detailing the full methodology for the quantitative sections of this report is available from Crisis on request.

39 R Core Team (2016). R: A language and environment for statistical computing. R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, Austria. URL: <https://www.R-project.org/>.

T. Lumley (2016) “survey: analysis of complex survey samples”. R package version 3.31-2

40 Quantum GIS Development Team (2017). Quantum GIS Geographic Information System. Open Source Geospatial Foundation Project. <http://qgis.osgeo.org>

Table 1.1 – Homeless categories to estimate

Category of homelessness ("core" homelessness)	
1	Rough sleepers
1A	Sleeping in tents, cars, public transport
2	Hostel residents
2A	Users of night/winter shelters
3	Sofa surfing – staying with others, on short term/insecure basis/wanting to move, in crowded conditions
4	Squatting (unlicensed, insecure)
5	Statutory homelessness (unsuitable temporary accommodation)
6	Unsuitable non-residential accommodation e.g. "beds in sheds"

further category is stated separately but are not included in the total.⁴¹ No estimates are available for the final category.

The estimates of the numbers of single homeless people proceed category by category. Two measures are calculated for each category:

- Stock: the number of people who are homeless on any one night.
- Flow: the number of people experiencing homelessness at some point during the year.

Stock figures can be added across categories but the overlap among flow figures is often unclear.

There is a high degree of uncertainty surrounding many of these categories, which has been addressed by drawing on multiple sources and methods to make each estimate. Even with such "triangulation", the estimates for the same category sometimes vary greatly, so high, middle and low estimates for most of the stock values are reported,

alongside a single flow estimate. All estimates are rounded to the nearest thousand.

The central or "medium" figure has been used as the best reasoned, prudent and evidenced estimate for the category in question. Typically, the 'low' figures are conservative, based on cases known to and recorded by local authorities or providers of homelessness services. It is clear from other sources such as retrospective surveys that a significant proportion of people who experience homelessness do not contact or apply to local authorities, and most commentators are clear that the rough sleeper count is an underestimate of the true figure but is still indicative of trends. The high figures are principally based on retrospective surveys.

This report sets out the most accurate estimate of current levels of homelessness, but the data used was collected between 2012 and 2016. For each category, the most recent available data has been used.

41 Night and winter shelters operate seasonally and generally accommodate those who sleep rough at other times of year, so are not additional to the rough sleeper estimates.

Finally, estimates of the subset of single homeless people with low or no support needs are presented. Most people in this subset will not be regarded as in priority need by their local authority. However, priority need is a broad definition that is very difficult to apply consistently⁴² and is not the basis of the distinction made in this report which is to identify those people who are ready to live independently in general needs housing.

Stage two: Housing options for single homeless people

Stage two examines housing options and pathways for single homeless people. Data on housing tenure was drawn from the English Housing Survey, DCLG statutory homelessness data (P1E data), CORE lettings data, the Poverty and Social Exclusion survey and data on benefits published by the DWP. In addition, data providing an overview of housing options and pathways for single homeless people are drawn from:

- the Annual Survey of single homelessness services conducted by Homeless Link and funded by DCLG providing longitudinal evidence on the profile of services and service users, and on the housing and other outcomes of service provision;⁴³
- the Crisis client database which records outcomes of single homeless clients ("Crisis Members") using Crisis's Skylight services.

Stage three: Single homelessness and access to social housing

Stage three examined single homeless people's access to social housing. The quantitative analysis is drawn from the CORE lettings database maintained by DCLG and available for the years 2007/08 – 2015/16. The discussion of barriers draws primarily on survey evidence from three key sources:

- A qualitative survey of staff working for Crisis Skylight services in eight locations across England, to identify the barriers they face in helping Crisis Members obtain access to housing. The survey was conducted in February 2017 and focuses on issues experienced in the previous six-month period;
- Evidence from an annual survey of local authority housing options staff conducted for the Homelessness Monitor England, an annual state of the nation report commissioned by Crisis and funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The Monitor provides longitudinal evidence on the impact of policy and economic developments on homelessness;⁴⁴
- Evidence from the above-mentioned annual survey of single homelessness services conducted by Homeless Link and funded by DCLG.⁴⁵

42 Dobie, S., Sanders, B. & Teixeira, L. (2014) *Turned Away: The treatment of single homeless people by local authority homelessness services in England*. London: Crisis.

43 Homeless Link (2016) *Support for single homeless people in England*. Annual Review 2016. London: Homeless Link

44 Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The homelessness monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF

45 Homeless Link (2016) *Support for single homeless people in England*. Annual Review 2016. London: Homeless Link

Data on the extent to which councils are using allocations restrictions is drawn from DCLG's council housing statistics. It was not within the scope of this study to examine a sample of allocations policies or conduct a systematic examination of local practice in their implementation by councils and social housing providers, though there may be value in such an examination to inform preparation for the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017).

1.5 Structure of this report

Chapter 2 of this report presents estimates of the number of single homeless people in England and in particular the subset with low or no support needs.⁴⁶ Chapter 3 reviews the housing options available to single homeless people and other groups at risk of homelessness in the context of broader changes in housing tenure in the English housing market. Chapter 4 focuses on access to social housing, and in particular the barriers faced by single homeless people. Chapter 5 provides the conclusions, summarising the scale of the problem of single homelessness and identifying key policy challenges in improving access to social housing for single homeless people.

⁴⁶ Defined as people who do not experience mental health problems and/or drug or alcohol abuse in addition to homelessness.

Scale of single homelessness

2. What is the scale of single homelessness in England?

2.1 Overview

This chapter presents estimates of the number of single homeless people in England, in particular identifying those with low or no support needs. It also provides evidence on the regional spread of homelessness based on statutory data. These estimates fill a gap in the evidence base which has arisen because the majority of single homeless people do not receive assistance under the main homelessness duty.⁴⁷ The report draws on a range of data sources to produce these estimates.

Identifying single homeless people

The estimates below are designed to exclude families with dependent children, but the scope for this and also for separating childless couples from single adults varies according to the data source used.

Families with children and childless couples have been excluded from the estimates for statutory homelessness and the current survey-based estimates of sofa surfers. Homeless hostel spaces can also be divided

between those for families and others, who are assumed to be single adults. For current data on rough sleepers and squatters, the whole cohort is assumed to be single adults, in the absence of meaningful breakdowns by household type and legislation which prevents families with children finding themselves in these situations.

Estimates based on retrospective reports of rough sleeping, sofa surfing and squatting cannot be broken down by household type (the survey indicates what type of household the respondent belongs to now, not at the time they experienced homelessness), so again the overall totals from these sources are used.

2.2 Estimating single homelessness

The estimates for each of the categories of single homelessness are presented in table 2.1. Stock figures for each of the categories have been added to produce a total estimate of 77,000 single homeless people, with a low estimate of 52,000 and a high estimate of 111,000.

⁴⁷ Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The homelessness monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF

Table 2.1 – all single homeless people in England

	Category of homelessness	Flow estimate	Stock estimate		
			Low	Medium	High
1	Rough sleepers	89,000	4,000	8,000	11,000
1A	Homeless hostels	65,000	33,000	33,000	33,000
2A	Night & winter shelter†	N/A	1,600	1,600	1,600
3	Sofa surfers	120,000	10,000	25,000	50,000
4	Squatters	32,000	4,000	10,000	16,000
5	Statutory homelessness*	38,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
6	Beds in sheds	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Total	120,000 – 345,000	52,000	77,000	111,000

*for statutory homelessness this refers to single people with low or no support needs only.

† Excluded from totals.



33,000
Homeless
hostels



25,000
Sofa
surfers



10,000
Squatters



8,000
Rough
sleepers



1,000
Statutory
homelessness

Flow figures are likely to overlap across categories of homelessness, so we take the maximum flow figure for any individual category as the minimum overall flow of 120,000, and the sum of the flow estimates for each individual category as the maximum possible overall flow of 345,000. Based on the likely extent of the overlap between the different categories, an approximate estimate of the value of the overall flow is 200,000.

Rough sleeping

The only official source of data on rough sleeping which covers the whole of England is the annual rough sleeper count conducted by local authorities and co-ordinated by the DCLG.⁴⁸ These provide a snapshot

estimate of rough sleeping on a single night, either based on a street count or an informal estimate in consultation with local services.

The official estimate of rough sleeping in England in 2016 is a stock of 4,134 rough sleepers on any one night, which provides the low estimate. This is widely believed to be an underestimate because street counts are conducted according to a conservative protocol that only includes people who have been verified bedding down for the night. Only 14% of local authorities conducted a count in 2016 while, the rest were estimates produced in consultation with local services.⁴⁹

48 <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics>

49 DCLG (2010). *Evaluating the extent of rough sleeping: a new approach*. London: DCLG.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluating-the-extent-of-rough-sleeping--2>

By comparison, using evidence from the 2012 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey⁵⁰ (PSE) about the number of people who said they had slept rough in the previous five years, Crisis has found that approximately 89,000 people sleep rough throughout the course of the year, each year.

Assuming that the average rough sleeper spends around 45 nights in the year sleeping rough⁵¹ this equates to an any-one-night stock of around 11,000 rough sleepers, which is the high estimate. The medium stock estimate is the average of the high and low estimates: 8,000.

Beyond sleeping on the street, there is a broader group of people staying in tents, vehicles, sleeping on night buses and so on. For the purposes of this analysis separate numbers have not been attached to this group, but at least some should be included in the rather broad definition of rough sleeping employed in the PSE.

Homeless hostels

Based on the number of bed spaces and occupancy rate reported in the Homeless Link 2016 survey of homeless accommodation, around 33,000 homeless people are accommodated in hostels on any one night. There is no need for high or low estimates of this figure, as the capacity of homeless hostels is known and does not vary over the course of a single year.

The average length of stay of hostel leavers was 6 months, implying an annual flow of some 65,000 single people through homeless hostels.

During winter, some 1,600 people a night can be accommodated in seasonal shelters.⁵² However, this number is unlikely to be additional to the number of rough sleepers counted before such shelters open, so this number is reported separately but not added to the total.

Sofa surfers

“Sofa surfers” is the term used to describe people staying on a short-term basis with friends and family, often sleeping on the sofa, the floor or some other improvised arrangement. They meet the definition for homelessness for the purpose of this report because they have no private space, no security of tenure and are often living in insecure and dangerous situations with no alternative available to them.⁵³

There is no regularly collected source of data on sofa surfing. An estimate has been produced by triangulating the results of two methods: retrospective data from the PSE and close proxies for the sofa surfer group in household surveys.

Using PSE data in the same way as for rough sleepers produces an estimated annual flow of 120,000 sofa surfers. Based on the average sofa surfer spending a month staying with others,⁵⁴ this equates to a stock figure of around 10,000. If the average stay is five months, as other sources indicate,⁵⁵ this equates to a stock figure of around 50,000.

In order to further estimate the stock levels of sofa surfers, a proxy group in household surveys was constructed.

50 Gordon, D. (2016). *Poverty and Social Exclusion Living Standards Survey, 2012*. [data collection]. UK Data Service. SN: 7879. <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7879-1>. See also: <http://www.poverty.ac.uk/>

51 Bramley et al in their study of multiple exclusion homelessness find an average 46 nights per year spent sleeping rough, referenced in Appendix 4 of Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S., & Watts, B. (2015). *The homelessness monitor: England 2015*. Crisis / JRF, London. The estimated number of nights of rough sleepers in London in 2016 is 43, calculated by dividing the DCLG stock figure by the CHAIN flow figure.

52 Unpublished estimates provided by Homeless Link.

53 Reeve, K. (2011) *The hidden truth about homelessness: Experiences of single homelessness in England*. London: Crisis.

54 Clarke, A., Burgess, G., Morris, S., & Udagawa, C. (2015). Estimating the scale of youth homelessness in the UK Final Report. University of Cambridge, Cambridge.

55 This is the rough average length of stay of the sofa surfer proxy group across waves five and six of the Understanding Society survey.

The English Housing Survey^{56,57} and the Understanding Society Survey⁵⁸ were used to identify individuals who:

- are concealed singles living in larger households, or single people sharing accommodation
- are living in overcrowded accommodation⁵⁹
- joined the household⁶⁰ in the last 12 months, and
- wish to leave

No income screens were applied, nor have student households or non-dependent children been excluded. The detail of how individuals matching these criteria were identified varied depending on the information available in the survey.

Based on the household surveys the estimated stock lies between 10,000 and 25,000 – depending on the survey and the year in which it was conducted.

Based on this criteria and analysis the report adopts a low stock estimate of 10,000, a medium estimate of 25,000 and a high estimate of 50,000.

Squatters

Based on the PSE, and applying the same method as for rough sleepers and sofa surfers, the annual flow of squatters is estimated to be 32,000. An average stay of six months in a squat was assumed, which equates to a stock of 16,000.

The stock of squatters was also estimated from three separate household surveys: the English Housing Survey, the Crime Survey for England and Wales,⁶¹ and the Family Resources Survey.⁶² These generated estimates of 0, 4,000 and 10,000 respectively. Since squatting in residential properties was criminalised in 2012, squatters are unlikely to co-operate with enumerators and thus household surveys are likely to underestimate squatting. Moreover, household surveys will not pick up squatting in commercial/industrial premises, which squatters are now likely to prefer over residential premises.

For the stock estimates, the low survey estimate of zero, which is known to be untrue, is discarded. The remaining two estimates are adopted as the low (4,000) and medium (10,000) stock estimates and the PSE-based figure is adopted for the high stock estimate (16,000).

56 Department for Communities and Local Government. (2016). *English Housing Survey, 2014-2015: Household Data: Special Licence Access. [data collection]. 2nd Edition.* UK Data Service. SN: 8067, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-8067-2>

57 Department for Communities and Local Government. (2015). *English Housing Survey, 2013-2014: Household Data. [data collection].* UK Data Service. SN: 7801, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7801-1>

58 University of Essex. Institute for Social and Economic Research, NatCen Social Research, Kantar Public. (2016). *Understanding Society: Waves 1-6, 2009-2015. [data collection]. 8th Edition.* UK Data Service. SN: 6614, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-9>

59 We calculate the number of bedrooms required according to the "bedroom standard", that is:
one bedroom for each adult couple
one bedroom for each lone adult
one bedroom for each pair of children under 10, regardless of sex
one bedroom for each pair of children under 16 of the same sex
and classify as overcrowded all occupants of any dwelling where the number of bedrooms is lower than the required number of bedrooms.

60 In the case of the EHS, this is not recorded so instead the household's length of residence at the address was used.

61 Office for National Statistics. (2016). *Crime Survey for England and Wales, 2014-2015. [data collection].* UK Data Service. SN: 7889, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7889-1>

62 Department for Work and Pensions, National Centre for Social Research, Office for National Statistics. Social and Vital Statistics Division. (2016). *Family Resources Survey, 2014-2015. [data collection].* UK Data Service. SN: 8013, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-8013-1>

Table 2.2 – single homeless people with low or no support needs in England

	Category of homelessness	Flow estimate	Stock estimate		
			Low	Medium	High
1	Rough sleepers	30,000	1,000	3,000	4,000
2	Homeless hostels	22,000	11,000	11,000	11,000
2A	Night & winter shelters †	N/A	1,600	1,600	1,600
3	Sofa surfers	40,000	3,000	8,000	17,000
4	Squatters	11,000	1,000	3,000	5,000
5	Statutory homelessness	38,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
6	Beds in sheds	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Total	40,000 – 140,000	17,000	26,000	38,000

† Excluded from totals.

Statutory homelessness

Statutory P1E returns provide a source of administrative data on homelessness decisions and remedial actions taken by local authorities when households approach them for homelessness assistance.⁶³ Households will often be placed in temporary accommodation while they wait for a permanent solution to their housing problem, and where this temporary accommodation is unsuitable i.e. bed and breakfast-style accommodation without cooking and cleaning facilities, or in another local authority, the household is classed as still homeless for the purposes of this study.

Unfortunately, the data is highly aggregated. A rough estimate of the number of single homeless people with low or no support needs staying in unsuitable temporary accommodation is around 1,000 on any one night. This is based on the proportion of homeless households placed in temporary accommodation, the proportion of this which is "out

of area" (and hence unsuitable), and the average length of stay. That constitutes a single stock estimate for this category.

The flow estimate for single homelessness through the statutory system is based on responses in the English Housing Survey. Based on this around 38,000 single homeless people with low or no support needs were housed by their local authorities over the course of a year. Most of these individuals are likely to have been housed under "prevention and relief" measures as the majority would not have qualified as "priority need" cases owed a statutory duty by their local authority.

Beds in sheds

This refers to people staying in structures not designed for human habitation like sheds or garages, usually by means of an illegal let. Reports in the media suggest the practice is widespread in localised areas of London,⁶⁴ particularly amongst immigrant communities.

63 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

64 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/may/25/london-property-squeeze-affordable-housing>

However, there is no systematic data collection on this phenomenon.

London Councils conducted a survey of boroughs in 2012 to assess the extent of the problem in the city.⁶⁵ It found that around two out of five boroughs considered the issue as “significant and growing” and another one in five expected it to get worse. We have not enumerated this in our report due to lack of data.

2.3 Support needs

The subset of the above estimates for single people with low or no support needs is presented in table 2.2. Stock figures can again be added to produce a total estimate of 26,000 single homeless people with low or no support needs, with a low estimate of 17,000 and a high estimate of 38,000.

The overall flow is calculated in the same way as before, with a minimum overall flow of 40,000, and a maximum overall flow of 140,000. Again, the extent of the overlap between categories is uncertain, but a plausible estimate of the overall flow is around 75,000.⁶⁶

Estimation of support needs

Many single homeless people have support needs such as mental health issues, or drug and alcohol dependency and are likely to require housing with tailored support such as supported housing or a Housing First solution, at least for a time. As noted above, the focus of this study is however on those whose primary need is housing; those for whom any need for support tends to be short term, of low intensity, and associated primarily with gaining access to housing, including people ready to “move-on” from homelessness projects. A key

part of this analysis is therefore to quantify in broad terms the size of the cohort of single homeless people with low or no support needs who require general needs housing, regardless of tenure.⁶⁷ While their primary needs are for housing, this low/no support needs group may still need access to services that help them navigate access to housing and to claim appropriate benefits (including in-work benefits), and to financial/budgeting assistance where appropriate. While the report uses a broad-brush categorisation of support needs - “low or no support needs” or “high support needs,” - it is acknowledged that in practice the spectrum of support needs is more nuanced, and that some people move from having complex support needs to having lower intensity support requirements over time.

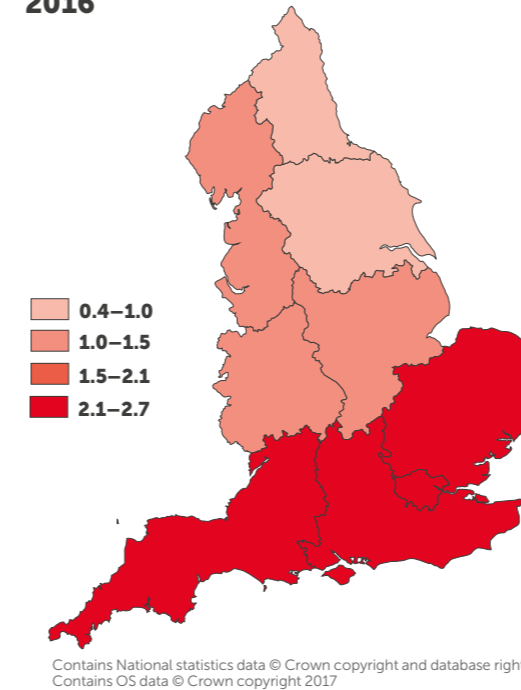
A number of data sources on support needs were considered for the different categories, but there was a high degree of variation amongst them. Surveys of currently and recently homeless people found a very high proportion with high support needs: 75-85%. These surveys most accurately reflected the definition of support needs adopted in this report but may be a better reflection of rough sleepers and people who have been homeless for an extended period than of the wider group experiencing other forms of homelessness and/or being homeless for relatively brief periods. On the other hand, of the subset identified as homeless in household surveys, 25-50% were judged to have high support needs. However, this is based on questions about long-term illness or disability and is an unsatisfactory proxy for high support needs.

⁶⁵ <http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/node/1380>

⁶⁶ As stated above, this figure takes no account of the fact that homeless people with low or no support needs are likely to be less entrenched, experience briefer spells of homelessness and therefore have a higher flow to stock ratio than the overall group including those with high support needs.

⁶⁷ General needs housing refers to homes not designated or designed for specific client groups requiring support (“mainstream” housing)

Map 2.1: Levels of rough sleeping in England per 10,000 households, 2016



To keep the estimates simple and tractable, for the purposes of this report it is simply assumed that two-thirds of single homeless people have high support needs. This blanket proportion of two-thirds is applied to all the estimates, except the statutory estimates, which are already based on those with low or no support needs. This ignores subtleties like the fact that rough sleepers with high support needs are likely to be more entrenched and therefore over-represented in the stock and under-represented in the flow. There simply is not enough data to make reliable adjustments for this sort of complexity.

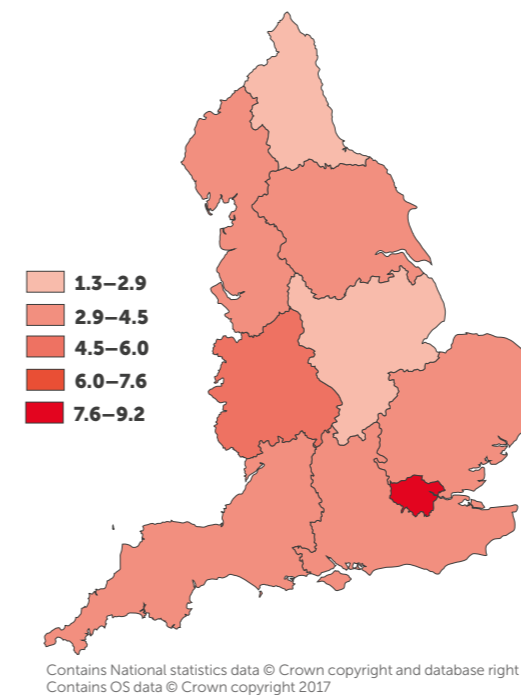
2.4 Where is homelessness concentrated?

Crisis analysis set out in the previous section cannot be broken down by regions due to the small sample sizes in some of the sources being used. Drawing on statutory data, regional patterns can be examined in relation to rough sleeping counts and estimates and single households approaching their local authority for assistance. As set out above, whilst these are an underestimation of true levels they are able to demonstrate geographical variation.

Map 2.1 shows the number of rough sleepers per household in each region, according to the DCLG count.⁶⁸ The map shows a clear North-South divide, which is also reflected in the absolute numbers of rough sleepers in England.

Map 2.2 shows that single homeless households accepted as owed the main homelessness duty are spread more evenly around the country, although with much higher numbers in London, and to a lesser extent the South West / West Midlands.

Map 2.2: Levels of statutory single homelessness levels in England per 10,000 households



⁶⁸ All maps contained in this report were produced using UK Data Service boundary data for the government office regions:
Office for National Statistics (2011). 2011 Census: boundary data (England and Wales) [data collection]. UK Data Service. SN:5819 UKBORDERS: Digitised Boundary Data, 1840- and Postcode Directories, 1980-.
<http://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/?sn=5819&type=Data%20catalogue>, Retrieved from <http://census.ukdataservice.ac.uk/get-data/boundary-data.aspx>.
Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.

These are likely to be individuals with high support needs as the statutory homelessness system excludes single homeless people unless they have a 'priority need' such as: homeless as a result of a disaster, aged 16-17 (or up to 20 if they grew up in social care), or vulnerable because of a mental health problem, physical disability, learning disability, old age, being in care, at risk of violence, leaving the Armed Forces, leaving prison or some other special reasons.

(Note that, as the statutory homelessness figures record the flow of homeless acceptances throughout the course of 2016, while the rough sleeper figures present an estimated stock at one point in time, the rates cannot simply be compared to assess the relative size of the two groups.)

These maps show the most recent available levels of homelessness around the country, but not the trends. The Homelessness Monitor's local authority survey suggests that after growing rapidly in London in recent years, the number of people seeking assistance from homelessness services is now rising fastest in the South and, to a lesser extent, the Midlands.⁶⁹

2.5 Summary of key points

An estimated 200,000 people experience single homelessness in England each year, with the true value lying between a minimum of 120,000 and a maximum of 345,000. On an average night, 77,000 single people are homeless, with a low estimate of 52,000 and a high estimate of 111,000. The majority are staying in homeless hostels or with friends and family because they have no place of their own.

Data on support needs are patchy and inconsistent. For the purposes of this report the proportion of single homeless people with low or no support needs, and therefore in need of general needs accommodation, is assumed to be two-thirds. An estimated 75,000 single people with low or no support needs experience homelessness each year, with the true value lying between 40,000 and 140,000. On an average night there are an estimated 26,000 single homeless people with low or no support needs, with a low estimate of 17,000 and a high estimate of 38,000.

People living in the South of England, particularly London, are more likely to experience homelessness and especially rough sleeping.

Housing options

3. Housing options for single homeless people

3.1 Overview

Gaining access to housing of any type is becoming increasingly difficult for low income households and particularly single homeless people. In practice, a significant proportion of single homeless people have no choice but to look for housing in the private rented sector. Despite the overall decline in the relative size of the social housing sector, most homeless households that are housed under the main homelessness duty, or under homelessness prevention and relief measures, are placed in social housing. While the private rented sector is playing an increasingly important role in meeting the needs of this group, it is also a growing source of homelessness. This chapter presents evidence on housing tenure after people experience homelessness.

3.2 Changes in housing tenure

Social housing (including both local authority and housing association properties) has been in continuous decline since the mid-1970s: standing

at 17% it has nearly halved in 40 years, becoming the smallest of the three sectors in 2011, as shown in figure 3.1.

From the mid-1970s to the turn of the century, the decline in social housing was offset by a rise in home ownership. Since then, both sectors have been in decline, the dominant trend being the rise of the private rented sector which has doubled its share of households from 10% to 20% in less than 20 years.

The number of households living in poverty in the private rented sector has grown in the past decade, rising from 2.8 million people in 2007/08 to 4.7 million people in 2015/16.⁷⁰ There are now as many people living in poverty in the private rented sector as there are in social housing.⁷¹ More than 70% of private renters in the poorest fifth of the population spend at least a third of their income on housing, compared with under 50% in the social rented sector.⁷² This has particular significance for the incidence of homelessness

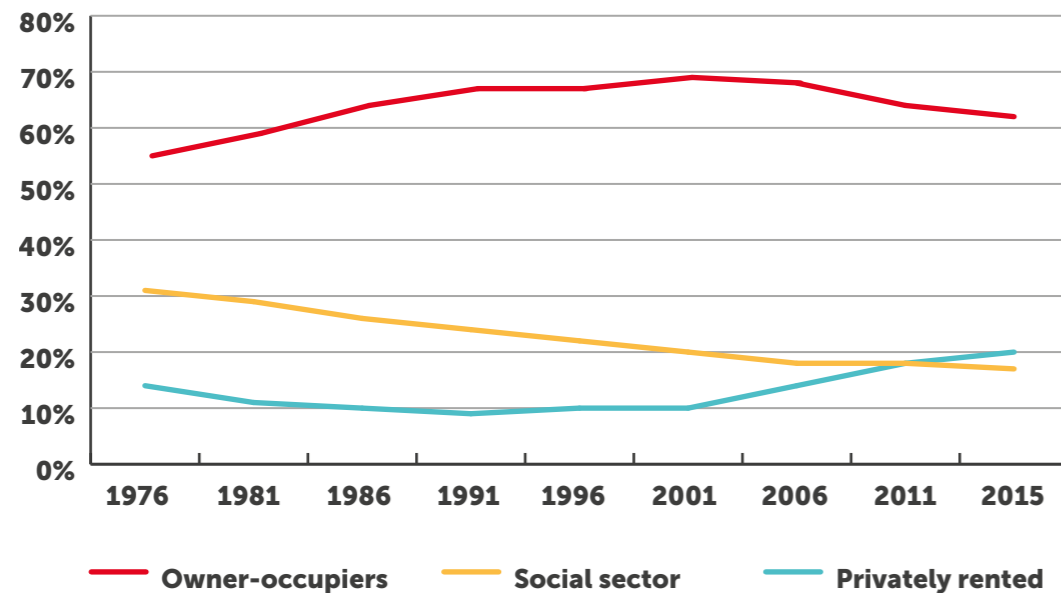
69 Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The homelessness monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF, p62 & Appendix 2

70 Wilcox, S., Perry, J., Stephens, M., Williams, P. (2017). UK Housing Review 2017, CIH

71 JRF Website (accessed 14th June 2017). Numbers in poverty by housing tenure. <http://www.jrf.org.uk/data/numbers-poverty-housing-tenure>

72 Tinson, A., Ayrton, C., Barker, K., Born, T.B., Aldridge, H. and Kenway, P. (2016), *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2016*. York: JRF.

Fig. 3.1 - Trends in tenure in England



Source: UK Housing Review 2017⁷⁰

because of the association between poverty and homelessness.⁷⁴

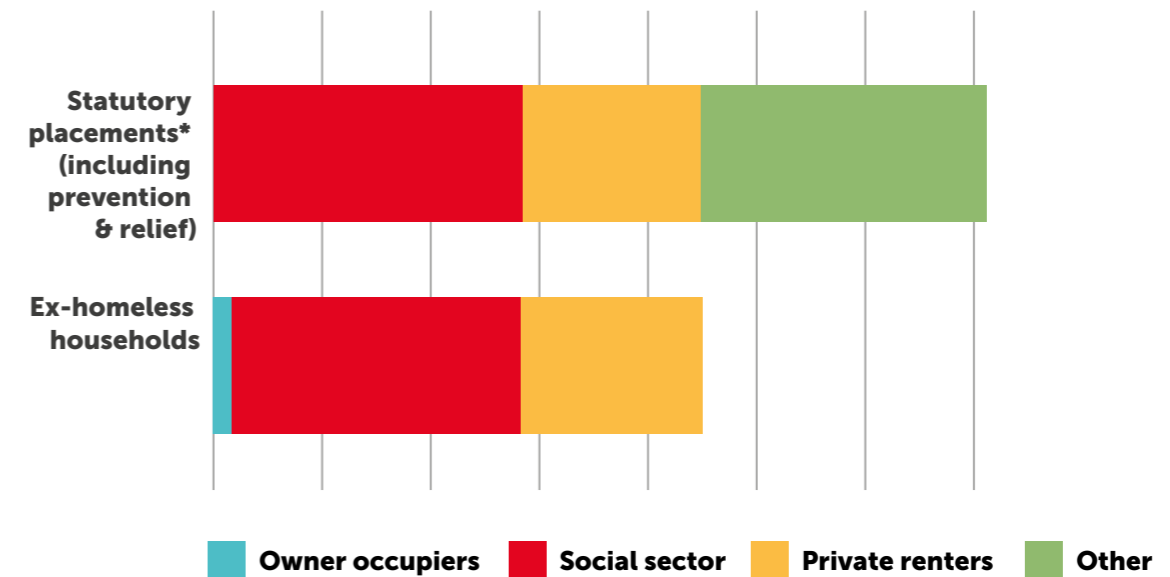
Increasingly, households are becoming homeless because they cannot afford to sustain their tenancy or find a new one. The loss of an assured shorthold tenancy (in the private rented sector) now accounts for 32% of statutory homelessness acceptances, more than double its share in 2010. The private rented sector also accounts for the largest proportion of the last settled accommodation of rough sleepers recorded by CHAIN. The private rented sector is both a cause of as well as a solution to homelessness, so the substantial reliance on the sector for housing homeless households discussed in the next section warrants careful consideration.

3.3 What tenure do homeless people go to?

Figure 3.2 shows the tenure distribution of ex-homeless households. The statutory data does not provide breakdowns of tenure for each household type; these figures are for all homeless households. While less than 10% of all those housed under the main homelessness duty in 2015/16 were placed in the private rented sector,⁷⁵ the social sector here includes supported accommodation, which accounts for a third of all social lets to homeless households according to the CORE lettings database for social housing.⁷⁶

After excluding supported accommodation and including placements under homelessness

Fig. 3.2 - Tenure distribution amongst homeless households



Source: Top bar: Department for Communities and Local Government (Statutory homelessness live tables & CORE)⁷⁷ Bottom bar: Poverty and Social Exclusion survey

*Including relief of homelessness and prevention of homelessness by obtaining alternative accommodation

prevention and relief measures, over a third of the 90,000-plus placements into general needs housing are in the private rented sector, with the remainder in the social rented sector (other than a few hundred cases where households enter the owner-occupier sector through low-cost home ownership).

In addition, there are approximately 20,000 prevention and relief cases resolved by finding accommodation in a hostel or with friends and family – situations in which the household would remain homeless according to the definitions adopted in this report. Moreover, there are several thousand cases with an “other” resolution, where final tenure cannot be established. All these cases are grouped under “other” in figure 3.2.

The PSE survey shows a very similar picture. For people who had experienced homelessness in the last five years, there is essentially a 60-40 split between the social and private rented sectors, with a small number in owner-occupation, as shown in the top bar of figure 3.2.

Move-on from homelessness projects

In 2015, 22% of people leaving homelessness projects moved on to live with family or friends and 15% to longer-term supported accommodation.⁷⁸ Social housing provided a greater proportion of move-on accommodation in 2015 (22%) than private renting (at 10%);⁷⁹ but both these housing options were available to a lower proportion of those leaving accommodation

74 Fitzpatrick, S., Bramley, G., Sosenko, F., Blenkinsopp, J., Johnsen, S., Littlewood, M., Netto, G., Watts, B. (2016). *Destitution in the UK*. JRF.

75 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

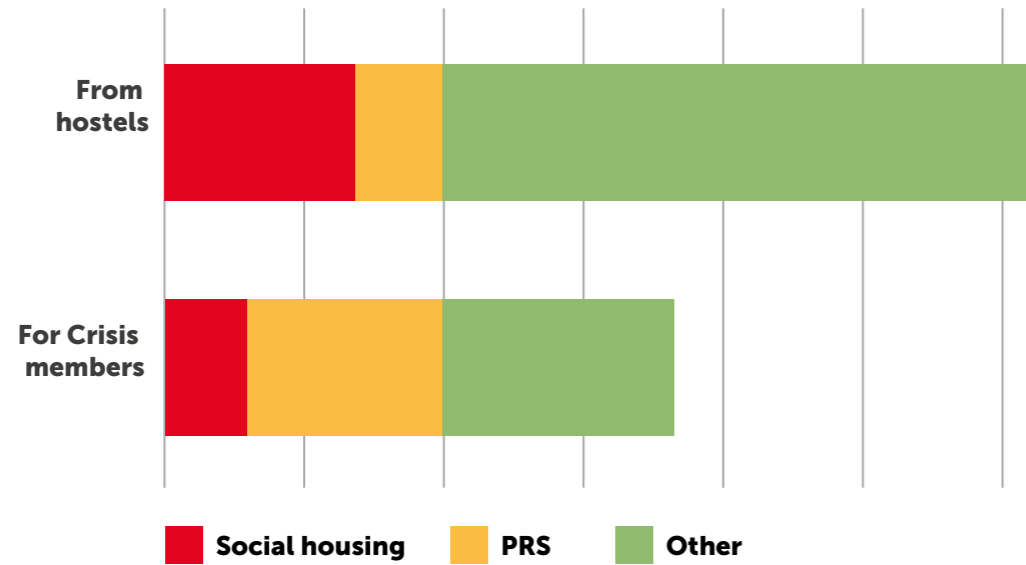
76 Department for Communities and Local Government. (2017). Continuous Recording of Social Housing Lettings and Sales (CORE), 2007/08-2015/16. [data collection]. 5th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 7603, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7603-7> <https://core.communities.gov.uk/>

77 Data pertains to financial year 2015-16. Data on the proportion of “main duty” homelessness decisions placed in supported housing was taken from CORE, and applied to P1E statutory data to estimate total placements in general needs social housing. General needs housing has been normalised to 1 in both series to ease comparison.

78 Homeless Link. (2016). *Support for single homeless people in England – Annual Review 2016*. London: Homeless Link

79 Homeless Link. (2016). *Support for single homeless people in England – Annual Review 2016*. London: Homeless Link (and 2015 edition)

Fig. 3.3 - Move-on from hostels and Crisis Skylight services



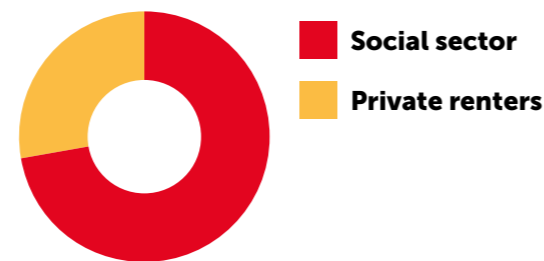
Source: Top bar: Homeless Link 2016. Bottom bar: Crisis Skylight records, second half 2016

projects in 2014 than the previous year when 24% of people moved on to social housing and 15% to private rented housing.⁸⁰ The proportion of clients ready to move on from accommodation projects but were unable to was 25% in 2014, but increased to 30% in 2015.⁸¹ Focusing only on those moving on to general needs housing reproduces the now-familiar 2:1 split between social and private rented housing, shown in the top bar of figure 3.3.

However, private renting provides a housing solution for a greater proportion of single homeless people supported by Crisis Skylight services than other housing pathways, as shown in the bottom bar of figure 3.3, above. While social housing was available to a significant minority of Crisis members (16%), Crisis services report that some members are facing particular barriers in obtaining access to this tenure. These barriers are considered further in Section 4.3.

Client records from Skylight services show that for those whose housing situation improved between July and December 2016, private renting provided housing for the largest group (38%) compared with social renting (16%), night shelter (17%), hostel (12%), supported housing (11%) and B&B (5%). In contrast to other specific cohorts, the roles of the two sectors are reversed, with the private rented sector accounting for two-thirds of moves into general needs housing.

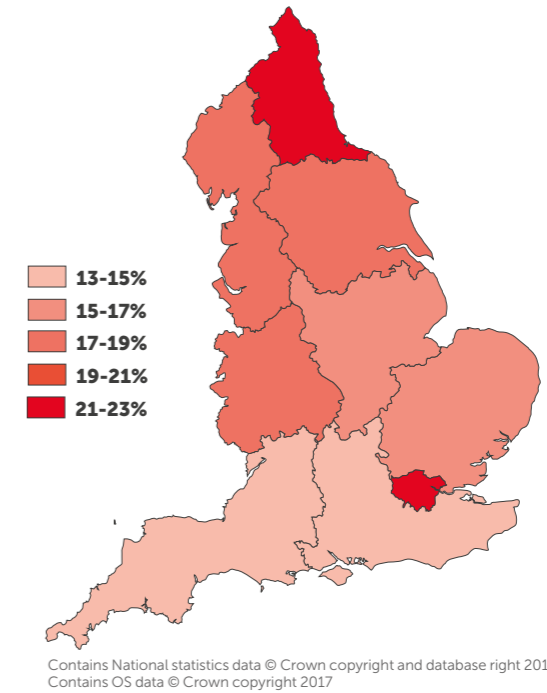
Fig. 3.4 - Tenure distribution amongst Housing Benefit recipients



Source: Department for Work and Pensions (Stat-Xplore)⁸²

80 Homeless Link. (2016). *Support for single homeless people in England – Annual Review 2016*. London: Homeless Link (and 2015 edition)
 81 Homeless Link. (2016). *Support for single homeless people in England – Annual Review 2016*. London: Homeless Link (and 2015 edition)
 82 Recipients as of November 2016. <http://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk>

Map 3.1: Proportion of social rented accommodation by region



Source: English Housing Survey, 2013-2015

Figure 3.4 shows the tenure split of the 2.2 million single claimants of Housing Benefit (and its Universal Credit equivalent) in England. Just over a quarter live in the private rented sector. (Nearly half of the relatively small number of claimants of Universal Credit housing entitlement are in the private rented sector, but this is almost certainly a temporary phenomenon related to the roll-out of UC by location and claimant type.)

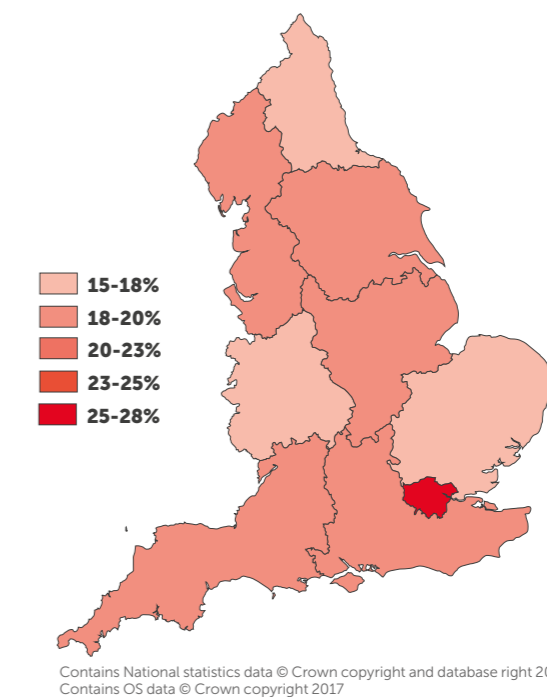
Homeless people are more likely to be in the private rented sector than the wider population of Housing Benefit claimants (and its Universal Credit equivalent). A review of the regional spread of the two rental sectors may explain why, with an association between the likelihood that homeless households will be placed in the social or private rented sector and the relative size of each tenure in any given region.

Social housing is now the smallest tenure in England (both in absolute numbers and proportion of households) and in every individual region except the North East and North West. The proportion of households in the social rented sector is larger in the North of the country. By contrast, the private rented sector is more-or-less evenly spread across the country, as shown in map 3.2.

In terms of levels of homelessness, households experiencing rough sleeping (see map 2.1 in the previous chapter) are mainly concentrated in regions where the social housing stock is the smallest. Local authorities in those areas rely heavily on the private rented sector when placing statutory homeless cases in housing.

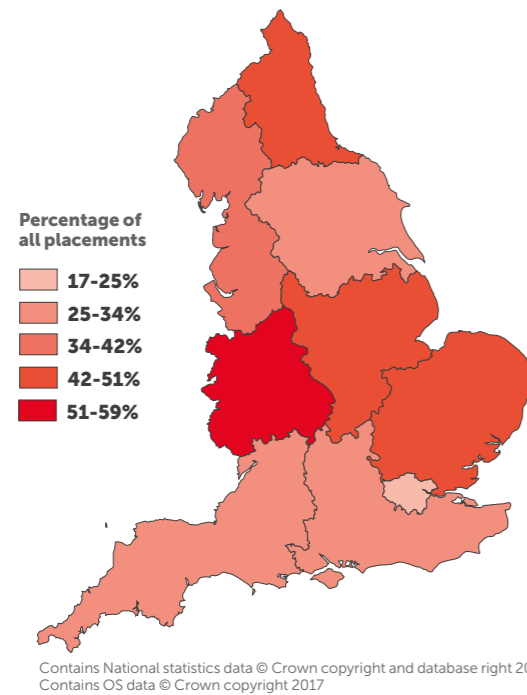
London is an exceptional case. The small size of the owner-occupied sector in London means that both the social and private rented sectors are much larger than in other regions, reflecting the extreme affordability and demand pressures in the capital.

Map 3.2: Proportion of private rented accommodation by region



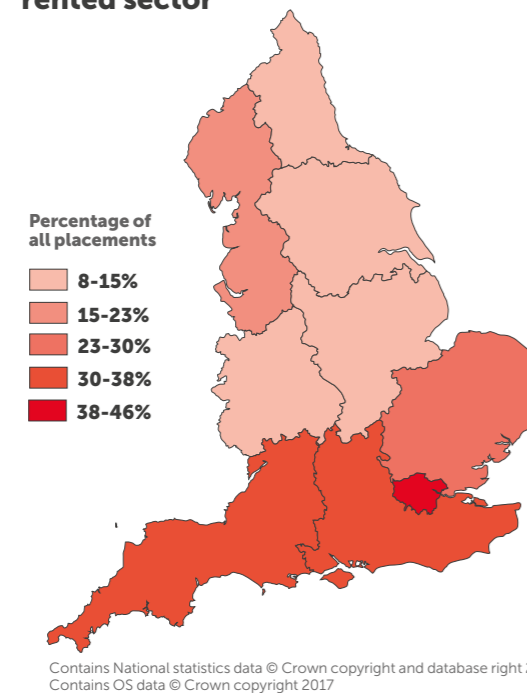
Source: English Housing Survey, 2013-2015

Map 3.3: Proportion of homeless households placed in general needs social housing



Source: Own calculations based on Department for Communities and Local Government (Statutory homelessness live tables & CORE)⁸³

Map 3.4: Proportion of homeless households placed in private rented sector



Source: Own calculations based on Department for Communities and Local Government (Statutory homelessness live tables & CORE)

Given the regional distribution of tenures, there is a stark regional split in the likelihood of a homeless household being placed in social housing. As map 3.3 shows, in the West Midlands, 59% of homeless households were placed in general needs social housing in the last quarter of 2016, while in London it was only 17%, possibly because of the extreme pressure on social housing.

As map 3.4 shows, placements to the private rented sector are the mirror image of this – with homeless households more likely to be placed in the private rented sector than any other sector in London and the South East. A handful of cases, also concentrated in London and the South East, are resolved through low-cost home ownership, although these account for less than 1% of placements. Other destinations, such as supported accommodation, hostels and staying with friends or family together account for nearly 40% of all homeless placements across England.

Housing pathways for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

Analysis for the JRF projecting the change in housing options for young people by 2020 examined the housing pathways of young people in a range of household types and income levels, and provides some insights into the changing housing pathways available to young adults without dependent children on the lowest incomes, including single homeless people.⁸⁴ It projects that the number of young people living in their own social rented tenancies in 2020 will decrease by between 360,000 and 780,000 between 2008 and 2020, while

⁸³ Data pertains to the last quarter of 2016. Regional share of social sector calculated in the same way as for figure 5 above.

⁸⁴ Clapham, D., Mackie, P., Orford, S., Buckley, K., Thomas, I., et al. (2012) *Housing Options and Solutions for Young People in 2020*, York 2012. The analysis defines young people as those aged 18-30 years in 2020.

those with private rented tenancies will increase by between 1.3 and 3.7 million. For young people on the lowest incomes the analysis suggests:

- competition for the limited supply of social housing will worsen; and
- the 75,000 16-24-year olds who were likely to have been homeless in 2008 may spend time in both the social and private rented sectors, but that those becoming homeless in 2020 are more likely to be housed in the private rented sector at the lower-priced end of the market.

3.4 Access to Private Renting for Single Homeless People

For people who are unable to gain access to social housing because of eligibility restrictions or affordability considerations, the only other pathway to stable accommodation is private renting.

Although private renting is playing an increasingly important role in housing homeless people, many struggle to obtain access to homes let by private landlords⁸⁵. Barriers include landlords' concerns regarding letting to tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit and the difficulties of saving for extremely high deposits, rent in advance and letting agency fees. These problems are particularly pronounced in markets where demand is especially high.⁸⁶ See box 3.1 for more details.

The inability to access secure, long term accommodation in the private rented sector prevents people from breaking out of homelessness and comes at huge personal cost to the individual. There are also significant cost implications, with increasing numbers of people living in more expensive temporary and hostel accommodation, and a cycle of repeat homelessness caused by the insecurity of tenure faced by many residents.

⁸⁵ Gousy, H. (2016) *Home no less will do*. Improving access to private renting for single homeless people. London: Crisis

⁸⁶ Reeve, K. et al (2016) *Home no less will do*. *Homeless people's access to the Private Rented Sector*. London: Crisis

Problems with private renting do, however, provide important context for the evidence provided in this report of the difficulties faced by single homeless people seeking access to social housing. The grounds for exclusion from social housing sometimes experienced by homeless people, such as a history of rent arrears or previous criminal convictions, can also be barriers to accessing private rented accommodation.

3.5 Summary of key points

As the private rented sector grows in size and importance, it is increasingly becoming the destination for those exiting homelessness, accounting for roughly a third of them. While this is to some extent natural as the sector grows, homeless people are more likely to be in the private rented sector than other vulnerably housed groups. This is something of a concern as the end of tenancies by private sector landlords has become the leading cause of homelessness.

This increasing reliance on the private rented sector to resolve homelessness is also problematic given the significant barriers to accessing the sector. High deposits and fees and the simple refusal by many landlords to let to people who they perceive as a risk, make it more difficult for homeless people to find private tenancies.

Crisis's recommendations for measures to improve access to, and the quality and security of, private rented tenancies for homeless people are outlined in the box above.

In the past, the social rented sector acted as a safety net but as the next chapter will discuss, single homeless people are increasingly confronted with barriers to the social rented sector too.

Box 3.1: Barriers to single homeless people accessing private renting
Crisis's 2016 study of the private rented sector's role in ending homelessness identified the following:

- 55% of landlords said they were unwilling to let to tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit. 82% were unwilling to rent to homeless people.
- Landlords are putting additional safeguards in place when renting to homeless people, making it even more difficult for them to rent privately. This includes:
 - increasing the deposit required;
 - increasing the rent;
 - asking for rent further in advance; and
 - requiring additional referees and/or guarantors.
- 84% of local authorities surveyed said it had become more difficult for single homeless people to access private rented accommodation over the previous five years.
- 42% of homeless people surveyed said they had experienced landlords or letting agents refusing to let to homeless people.
- 72% of homeless people surveyed said the difficulties they had encountered prevented them from securing a tenancy.

Recommendations

- Provide a funding stream to support the delivery of "Help-to-Rent" projects and a nationally funded tenancy deposit scheme to increase access to private renting for homeless people.
- Legislate to create longer tenancies of 3-5 years for private renters, with provisions to limit rent increases to inflation during the tenancy term.
- Introduce a nationally operated register of landlords with associated requirements on property safety and management.
- Address deficiencies in the Local Housing Allowance regime which mean that rent levels are increasingly out of step with the amount of Housing Benefit that can be paid.
- Ensure local authorities are resourced and incentivised to develop their market stewardship role, providing effective oversight of the lower end of the private rental market and supporting their role in homelessness prevention.

Reference: Reeve, K., Cole, I., Batty, E., Foden, M., Green, S. & Pattison, B. (2016) *Home No less will do Homeless people's access to the Private Rented Sector*. London: Crisis.

Access to Social Housing

Single homelessness and access to social housing

4.1 Overview

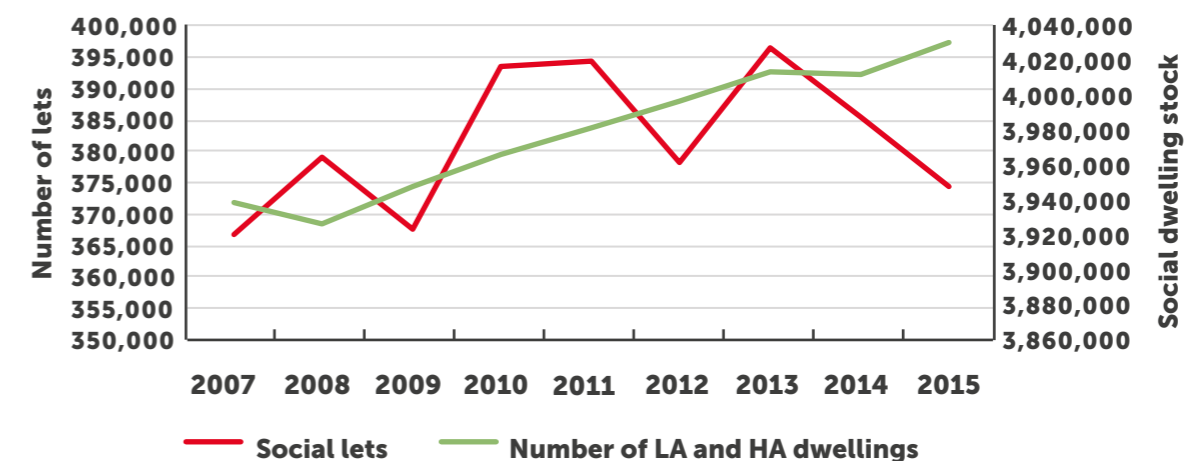
Social housing remains the housing tenure taken up by most homeless people. However, single homeless people are facing an increasing range of barriers that prevent them from getting access to social housing. With rising barriers to both private and social rented housing, increasing numbers are finding that there is simply nowhere else to go. This chapter reviews the number of social lets to single homeless people and qualitative evidence on the barriers they encounter trying to access social housing.

4.2 How many single homeless people are accessing social housing?

Interpreting lettings data

The share of social housing in the total dwelling stock has been declining over the last 40 years, and continues to fall, despite the fact that the social dwelling stock in absolute terms has increased by about 100,000 dwellings since 2007, as shown in figure 4.1. However, analysis by the Chartered Institute of Housing suggests the stock of social homes let at social rents has actually been falling since the introduction of more expensive "affordable rents" in 2011.⁸⁷

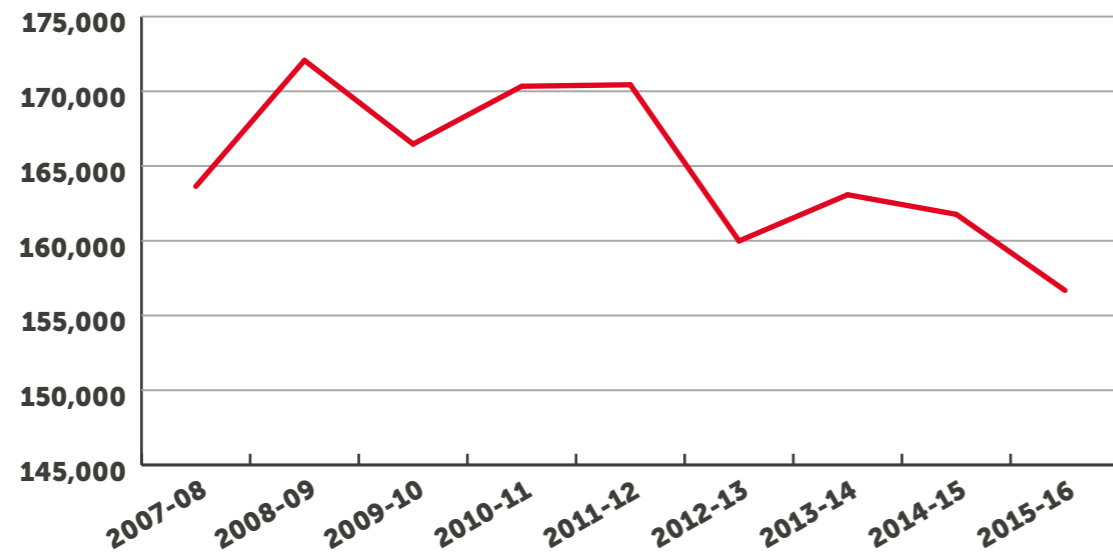
Fig. 4.1 - Social lets vs. social homes



Source: CORE and Live Tables on Dwelling Stock (Table 104)

⁸⁷ Barnes, S. 250,000 social homes lost by 2020 Inside Housing, 18 January 2017 <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/home/home/250000-social-homes-lost-by-2020-49610>

Fig. 4.2 - New social lets to general needs housing



Source: CORE

The total number of social lets (including general needs and supported housing) has been increasing at a similar rate to the social dwelling stock for most of the period since 2007-08, as shown in figure 4.1⁸⁸ (despite the fall in the last two years). This indicates a broadly stable turnover of tenancies overall – but it is impossible to determine the rate of turnover for any particular subgroup, and this should be borne in mind when interpreting lettings data.

However, many of these lettings are to households moving from one social home to another. The number of new social lets⁸⁹ to general needs housing has been falling – albeit on an uneven trend – for most of the period since 2007-08, from a high of over 170,000 lets per year in 2008-09 to a low of around 155,000 in 2015-16, as shown in figure 4.2.⁹⁰ Fewer and fewer new tenants are getting access to social housing.

Social lets to homeless households

The best available indicator of ease of access to social housing for homeless households is to look at the number of new lets to homeless households and compare this with the number of lets going to other groups.

The number of new lets to single homeless households of working age has fallen continuously – albeit on an uneven trend – from 19,000 in 2007-08 to 13,000 in 2015-16. The fall as a proportion of all new lets is similar, from 12% to 8% as shown in figure 4.3. This is a falling share of falling new lets to the social housing stock.

Dual adult households

The trend is similar, if somewhat less pronounced, if dual homeless households – i.e. homeless couples without children – are included as is shown in figure 4.4.

88 Years on the x axis refer to calendar years for the number of social homes in England, and financial years for lettings (where 2007 indicates financial year 2007-08, and so on).
 89 This refers to lets to households coming from outside the social sector i.e. filtering out transfers within the social sector.
 90 Years on the x axis refer to calendar years for the social housing share of English dwelling stock, and financial years for lettings (where 2007 indicates financial year 2007-08, and so on).

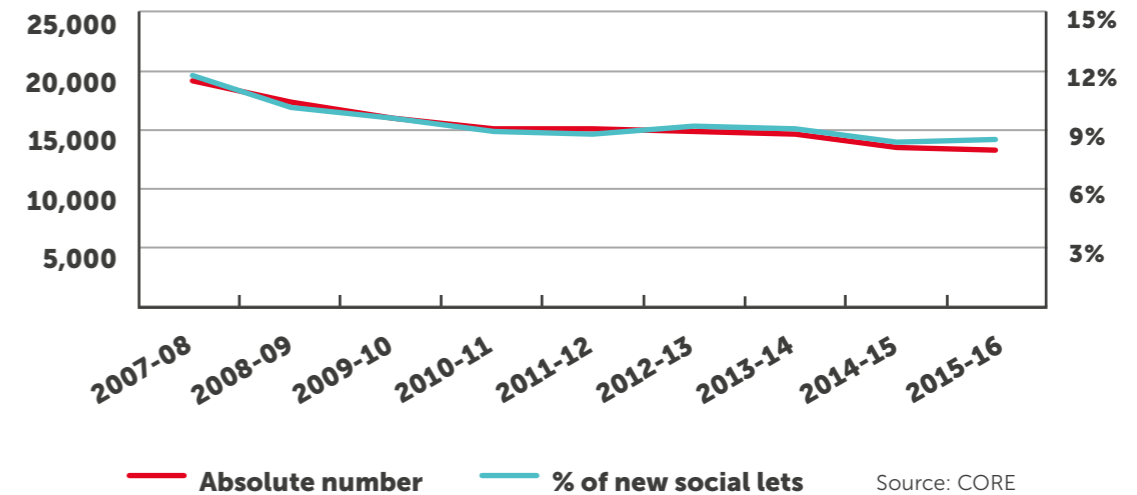
As figure 4.5 shows, the proportion of new lets to homeless households of all types (including families with children and pensioners) also fell sharply between 2007-08 and 2010-11, falling from 33% to 23%. While disaggregated CORE lettings data is only available from 2007/08, other analysis shows that the proportion of allocations to all homeless households had been falling since at least 2004/05.⁹¹ As the total number of lets is falling, this indicates an absolute reduction in lets to homeless households over this period.

Lettings to homeless households have proportionally recovered some ground since 2010-11, standing at 25% in 2015-16. However, virtually all of that very limited recovery has accrued to homeless families – who suffered an even sharper initial fall – while single homeless households have lost ground more-or-less continuously.

General needs vs. supported accommodation

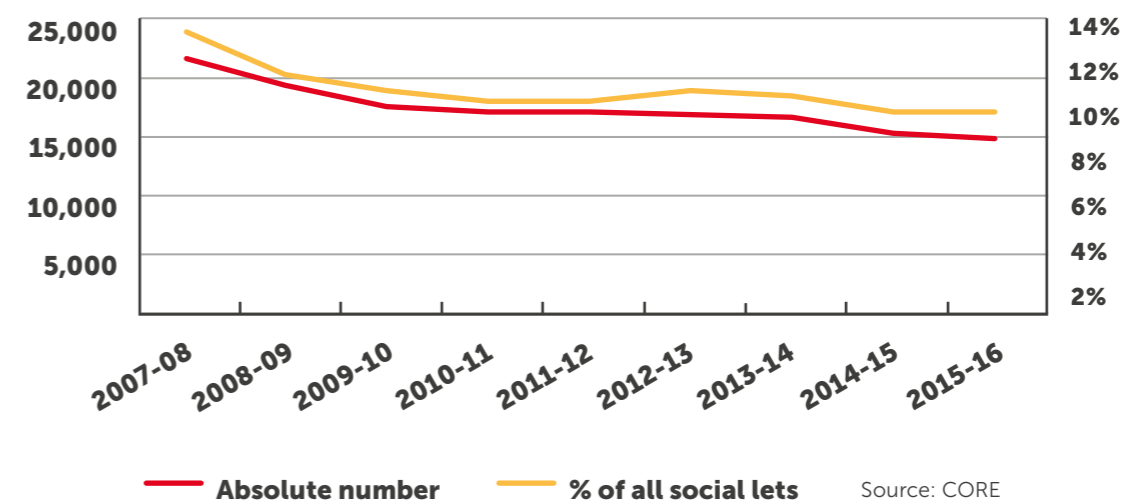
The consistent downward trend in access to general needs housing for

Fig. 4.3 Social lets to single homeless households



Source: CORE

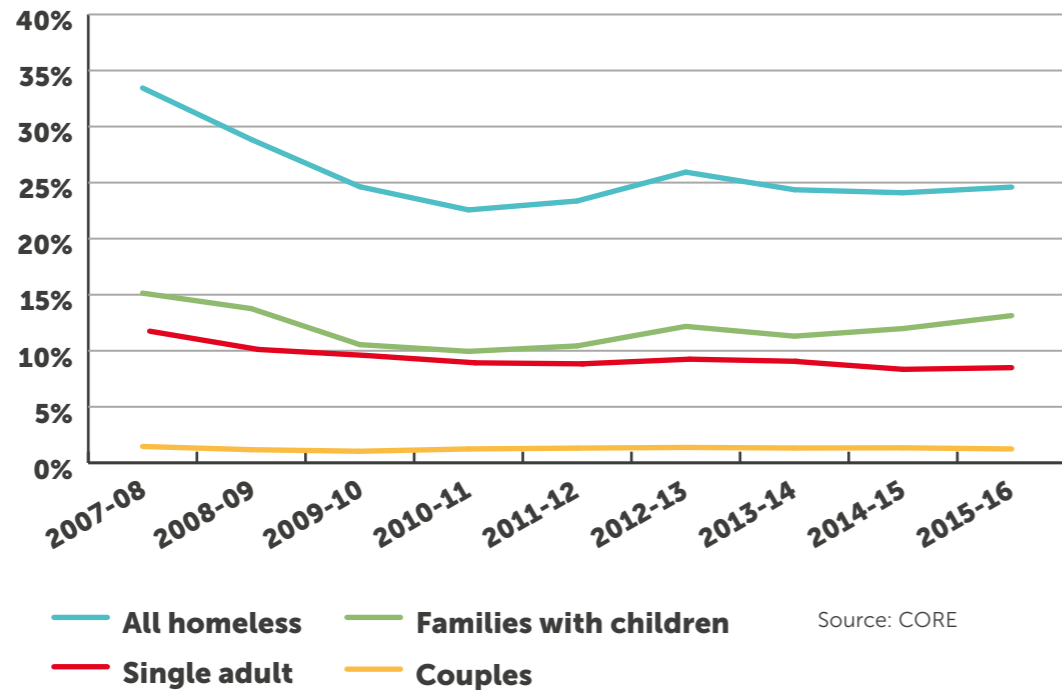
Fig. 4.4 Social lets to single/dual homeless households



Source: CORE

91 Wilcox, S., Perry, J., Stephens, M. and Williams, P. (2017). *UK Housing Review*, CIH

Fig. 4.5 Proportion of new social lets to homeless households

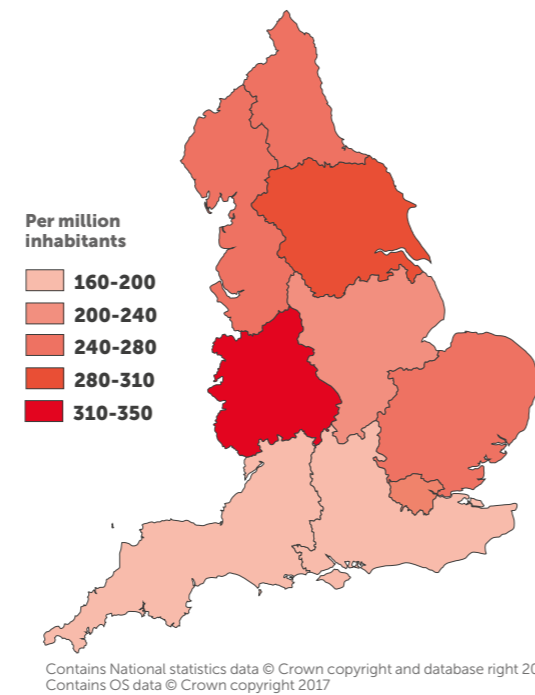


single homeless households has not been replicated for supported housing, which has fluctuated but stands only slightly lower in 2015-16 than it was in 2007-08, at around 32,000 new lets per year compared to 35,000, as shown in figure 4.6.

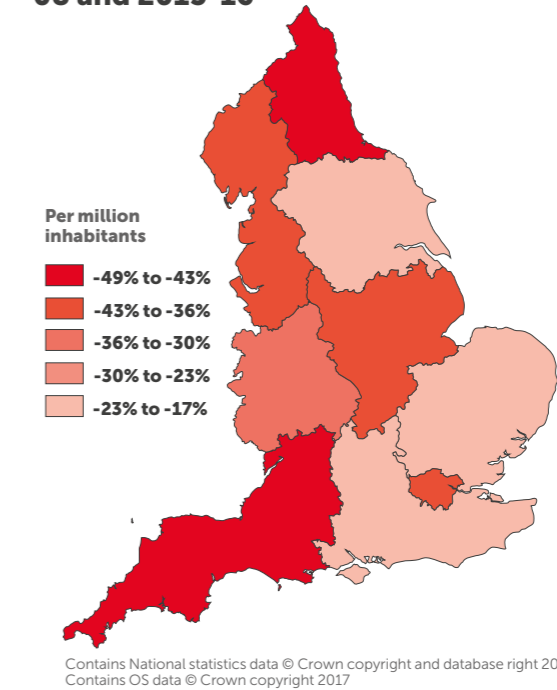
Regional trends in social lets to single homeless households

Map 4.1 shows the number of new general needs social lets to single homeless households, per million inhabitants, in each region in 2015-16. While it varies greatly by region, it is generally higher in areas where more social housing is available. However, there is no obvious relationship with the regional distribution of homelessness, with regions like the South West and South East, which account for a high proportion of the homeless population, offering only modest numbers of new lets to single homeless households.

Map 4.1: New social lets to single homeless households, per million inhabitants, 2015-16



Map 4.2: Change in new social lets to single homeless households, per million inhabitants, between 2007-08 and 2015-16



While the number of new general needs lets to single homeless households has fallen by over a third nationwide in per capita terms since 2007-08, this has not been evenly distributed across the country. The steepest falls have been seen in the North East and South West, seeing decreases over twice as steep as regions like the East of England, as shown in map 4.2. London, the region that accounted for most lets at the start of the period, was no longer the largest by 2015-16, after seeing an above-average decline of 40%.

Focusing now on total lets rather than per capita lets, while the total number of new lets to single homeless households in England fell continuously over the last eight years, the falls were concentrated in particular years and particular regions, as shown in figure 4.7. While some, like the North East, saw more-or-less continuous declines in lettings, the pattern elsewhere was more erratic. London and the North West saw steep falls after 2011, following a period of relative stability or even growth in lets to single homeless people. The South East and West Midlands recovered some ground after 2011, following steep declines earlier on. However, in every region, lettings to single homeless people stood at a lower level in 2015-16 than they had in 2007-08.

4.3 Barriers to social housing

Single homeless people face a range of barriers that limit their access to social housing. These barriers include restrictions on social housing eligibility, particularly following the Localism Act (2011), and restrictions related to rental affordability and household income. These barriers are associated with and exacerbate the impact of the underlying decline in the size of the social rented housing stock. This section of the report looks at the evidence on the impact of these barriers for single homeless people.

Potential barriers to social housing

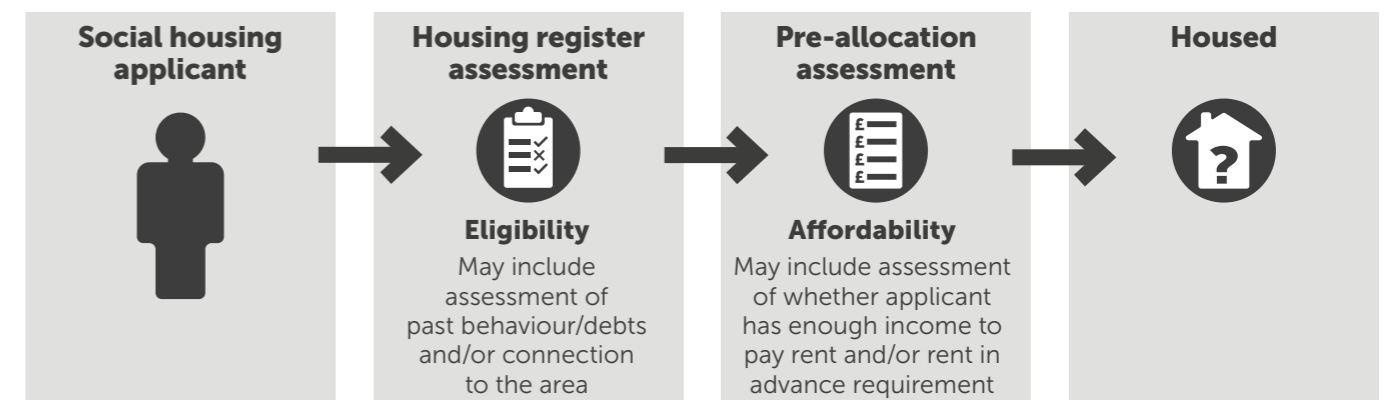
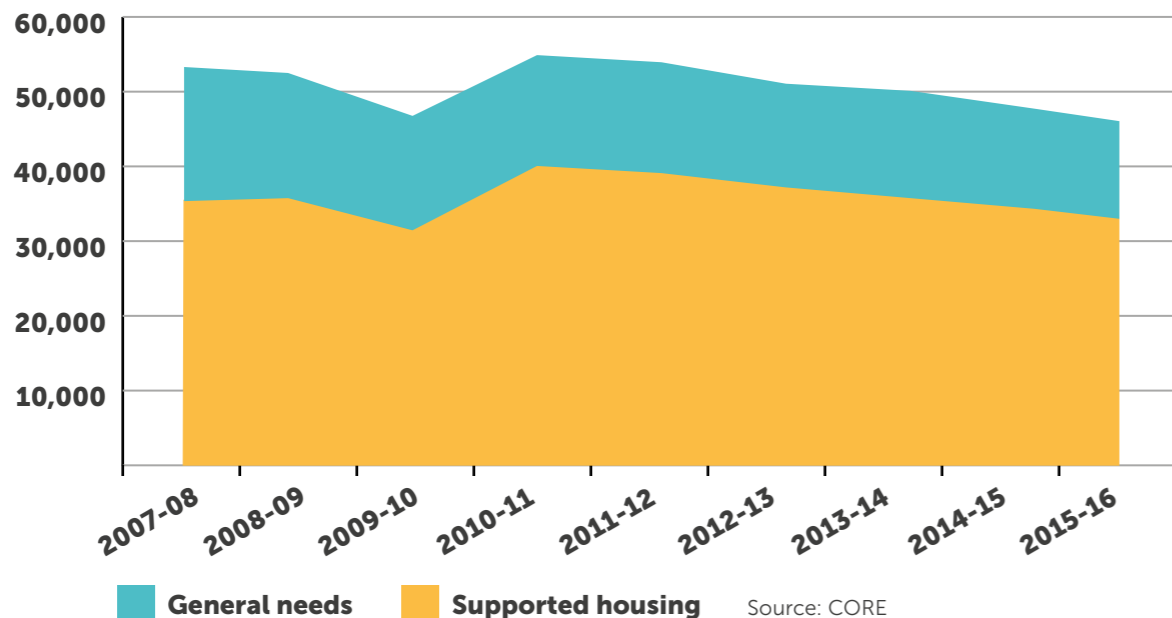


Fig. 4.6 General needs vs. supported accommodation



Restrictions on social housing eligibility and allocations

Housing register eligibility restrictions being imposed by some councils and social housing providers are making it difficult for some single homeless people to gain access to social housing, even in areas where there is a supply of housing that is immediately available in low demand neighbourhoods.

The grounds for exclusion considered in more detail below are a history of rent arrears, criminal convictions or a history of anti-social behaviour, and local connection requirements including residency.

Housing register eligibility restrictions limit the ability of single homelessness projects to help clients move-on from supported accommodation.⁹² Of the three in ten hostel residents in England who were ready to move

on but unable to, nearly a fifth (18%) were recorded as being excluded by housing providers due to a history of debt, rent arrears or anti-social behaviour.⁹³ At the same time, more homeless people are being turned away from hostels because of a lack of bed spaces: in 2015, 66% of refusals were because projects were full, compared with 59% in 2014.⁹⁴

Allocations restrictions and the Localism Act 2011

The Localism Act (2011) increased councils' discretion over how to allocate housing, addressing both allocations to council-owned homes and nominations to homes provided by social housing providers.⁹⁵ The Act did not alter the pre-existing requirement that councils must have an allocations scheme to determine priority between applicants, and that this must meet with certain legal requirements, including the requirement to give 'reasonable

92 Homeless Link (2016) *Support for single homeless people in England – Annual Review 2016* London: Homeless Link
 93 Homeless Link (2016) *Support for single homeless people in England – Annual Review 2016* London: Homeless Link
 94 Homeless Link (2016) *Support for single homeless people in England – Annual Review 2016* London: Homeless Link (and 2015 edition)
 95 Changes introduced by Sections 145-147 of the Localism Act which amended Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996. In Section 167 of the Housing Act 1996, as amended, the reference to "behaviour" is "any behaviour of a person (or member of his household) which affects his suitability to be a tenant".

preference' to people with greatest housing need. But the Act gave councils the power to restrict access to social housing allocations by excluding groups of people designated as non-qualifying persons.⁹⁶

The accompanying statutory allocations guidance identifies the range of factors included in the Act that might be used by councils to determine priorities between households "with a similar level of need":

- "Financial resources available to a person to meet his housing costs;
- "Behaviour; and
- "Local connection."⁹⁷

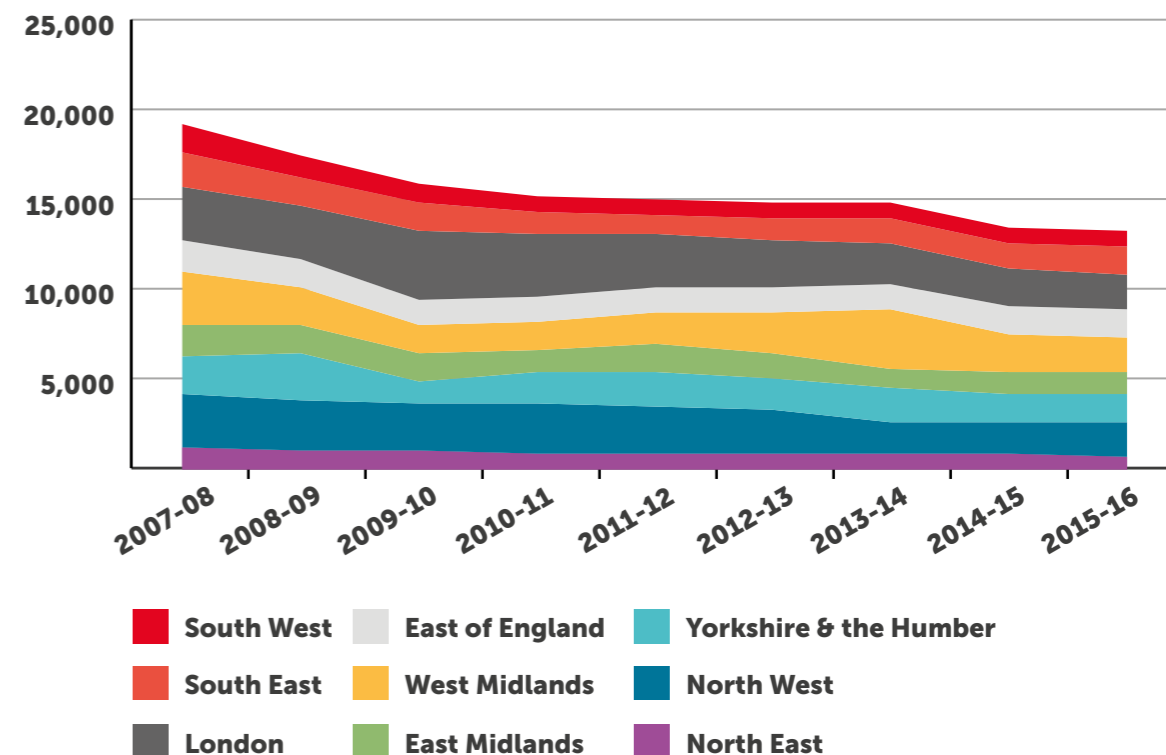
Subsequently further guidance was issued in which the then Government

strongly encouraged all housing authorities to adopt residency requirements of at least two years, and to consider whether to adopt other local connection qualification criteria to enable non-residents with a strong association with an area to qualify.⁹⁸

While allowing councils to exclude categories of applicant from housing registers, the allocations guidance is explicit that councils must ensure their policies:

- do not discriminate against those groups of people identified as "protected" under the Equality Act (2010)
- avoid setting criteria which disqualify groups of people who should be given reasonable preference, though they may adopt criteria that

Figure 4.7 General needs lets to single homeless households



96 These powers are in addition to a duty only to allocate housing to people defined as eligible for an allocation of housing, which excludes certain people from abroad as defined by section 160ZA of the 1996 Housing Act (introduced by SI 2006 No. 1294)
 97 DCLG (2012) *Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England*. London: DCLG
 98 DCLG (2013) *Providing social housing for local people. Statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England*. London: DCLG

disqualify individuals who satisfy the reasonable preference requirements (see Annex: Housing Allocations – statutory and regulatory requirements).⁹⁹

Prior to the Localism Act (2011), councils already had some flexibility to determine relative priority between applicants (see The impact of allocations restrictions on single homelessness in the present section), and to judge individual applicants as ineligible for an allocation in specific circumstances (see text box “The unacceptable behaviour test”). The latter test included powers to determine certain types of applicant ineligible for housing on the grounds of types of “unacceptable behaviour” that would be serious enough to entitle the authority to a possession order. Before the 2011 Act took effect, councils were not, however, permitted to apply so-called blanket exclusions that ruled certain categories of

applicant ineligible for housing.¹⁰⁰

The stated aim of the new allocations powers in the Localism Act (2011) was to enable councils to better manage their waiting lists and target the “scarce resource” of social homes on people who ‘genuinely need and deserve them’.¹⁰³ These powers were accompanied by other changes which Government argued would enable the more efficient targeting of social housing, and its use as a fixed-term intervention rather than as a tenure for life:

- enabling councils to discharge the main homelessness duty with an offer of a private rented tenancy;
- giving councils the option of using “flexible”, fixed term, tenancies instead of permanent secure tenancies in social housing and increasing rents for households on higher incomes;¹⁰⁴ and

The “unacceptable behaviour” test

Before the Localism Act (2011), councils had discretion to determine certain applicants as ineligible for an allocation of housing where they could be shown to meet the “unacceptable behaviour test”; that is where:

- the applicant or a household member had been guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make the person unsuitable to be a tenant, and at the time of application was considered still unsuitable because of that behaviour, and;
- the behaviour would entitle the authority to a possession order.¹⁰¹

Research by Shelter into the impact of the test in Tyne and Wear found evidence that it was being inappropriately used by some councils to exclude groups of households from housing register eligibility.¹⁰²

99 DCLG (2012) *Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England*. London: DCLG

100 The 2002 Homelessness Act removed powers enabling councils to implement blanket exclusions from housing registers, described in ODPM Allocation of Accommodation Code of Guidance for Local Authorities 2002

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919132719/http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/157737.pdf>

101 Introduced by the 2002 Homelessness Act, see section 160A(7)

102 Shelter (2006). *Exclusions in Tyne & Wear: An investigation by Shelter's NEHAC into why applicants are being excluded from social rented housing*. https://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/39506/20824.pdf

103 DCLG (2013) *Providing social housing for local people. Statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England*. London: DCLG

104 DCLG (2010) *Local decisions: a fairer future for social housing*. London: DCLG https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/8512/1775577.pdf

- changes to welfare benefits for social housing tenants that restrict the amount of benefit payable to reflect occupancy levels.¹⁰⁵

The literature introducing the localism proposals provides only limited consideration of the housing options available to those prevented from joining housing registers. There is the suggestion in the guidance that those excluded from registers because of insufficient local connection should be offered advice and assistance to find appropriate alternative solutions (though the guidance does not say what these solutions should be).¹⁰⁶ The 2011/12 reform of homelessness duties was underpinned by an assumption that the needs of homeless people could be met in the private rented sector. The Localism White Paper did not, however, address the implications of welfare reform proposals on the ability of homeless people to obtain access to private renting. Research evidence demonstrates that in practice reforms and cuts to Housing Benefit mean that a growing proportion of private rented housing is out of reach of people on low incomes, including those in low paid employment (see text box The impact of Housing Benefit reforms on access to private renting for homeless people).¹⁰⁷ The

plain English guide accompanying the Localism Act (2011) highlights that councils would now be “able, if they wish, to prevent people who have no need of social housing from joining the waiting list”.¹⁰⁸ The evidence presented in this report demonstrates, however, that in addition to limiting exclusions to those with no housing need, many councils have chosen to adopt criteria that in effect prevent homeless people with the most acute housing need from gaining access to or even registering for social housing.

There remains an unresolved tension in national and local allocations policy between addressing housing need and using social housing to incentivise or reward certain behaviours, continuing a longer standing debate about the role of social housing in creating “mixed and sustainable communities”.¹⁰⁹ There are also broader economic tensions which arise as a consequence of the declining size of the social housing sector; increased use of private renting to house homeless people has a cost to the public purse though Housing Benefit,¹¹⁰ while recent increases in homelessness caused by the end of assured shorthold tenancies creates additional costs both for the individuals affected and the Exchequer.¹¹¹

105 Welfare Reform Act 2012: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/5/contents/enacted>

106 DCLG (2013) *Providing social housing for local people. Statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England*. London: DCLG

107 DCLG (2013) *Local decisions: a fairer future for social housing*. London: DCLG https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/8512/1775577.pdf

108 DCLG (2011) *A plain English guide to the Localism Act* London: DCLG

109 This predates the Coalition Government’s housing reforms and is associated with the impact of the long term decline in the size of the social housing stock described in Chapter 2, as well as the “residualisation,” of the sector and related policy debates about the role of social housing and the relationship with homelessness prevention. In 2009, the then Government published Allocations Guidance in the wake of a House of Lords ruling in Ahmad vs Newham LBC ruling that councils were not obliged to award cumulative preference for multiple types of housing need. The Guidance encouraged councils to use their newly confirmed flexibility to address broader housing policy objectives of creating “more mixed and sustainable communities,” and “greater choice for prospective and existing tenants” alongside providing support for those in greatest need, including homeless people; see, DCLG (2009) “Fair and flexible: statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England.” London: DCLG. The allocations policy context at that time is summarised in Thornhill, J. (2010) *Allocating social housing: opportunities and challenges* CIH, noting that some commentators were expressing concern that increasing the proportion of lettings to priority homeless households created a “perverse incentive” for people in housing need to view the homelessness route as the only way to obtain social housing. Changing policy positions on the role of social housing and use of conditionality to regulate the conduct of low-income populations are summarised in Fitzpatrick, S, Watts, B. and Johnsen, S. (2014) *Conditionality Briefing: Social Housing*. (Welfare Conditionality study briefing papers). York: University of York.

110 National Housing Federation (2016) *Briefing: The growing Housing Benefit spend in the PRS*.

111 Clarke, C. Hamilton, C., Jones, M and Muir K., (2017) *Poverty, evictions and forced moves* York: JRF

How widespread are allocations restrictions?

Data collected by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) shows that 90% of English councils (295 councils) restrict access to housing registers on the grounds related to local connection; either because people have not lived in the area for long enough (177 councils) or because they do not have another connection to the area (118 councils).¹¹² Over 50% of councils (184 local authorities) exclude people from joining the register if they have a rent arrears disqualification.¹¹³

DCLG housing statistics do not collect information about councils' use of exclusions relating to previous criminal convictions and anti-social behaviour.

The impact of allocations restrictions on council waiting lists

One impact of the changes introduced by the Localism Act (2011) has been a fall in the number of people registered on council waiting lists:

- The number of people registered on council waiting lists rose steadily between 2001 and 2012, peaking at 1.85 million. This rise followed the introduction of a requirement in the Homelessness Act 2002 that councils should consider all housing applications;
- Between 2012 and 2015, after the changes introduced by the Localism Act (2011), the number registered fell by 33% to 1.24 million.¹¹⁴

While some of those being excluded from housing registers may have the resources to secure their own market housing and can be considered not to have a housing need, it is probable that many of those excluded do have a housing need, but do not meet the restricted eligibility criteria now set by many councils.¹¹⁵ The evidence presented below suggests a likelihood that this includes households without a local connection, people with a history of rent arrears and those with past criminal convictions.

The impact of Housing Benefit reforms on access to private renting for homeless people

Independent research commissioned by Crisis is clear that reforms and cuts to Housing Benefit are significantly contributing to the recent rise in homelessness in England.¹¹⁶ Private rented homes in particular are becoming increasingly unaffordable to people in receipt of Housing Benefit, as a result of the link being broken between the amount of Housing Benefit that private tenants can claim and actual rents. Almost half (47 per cent) of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates in England have now fallen at least £10 per week below the estimated 30th percentile of market rents. Almost a quarter (24 per cent) have fallen at least £20 per week below.¹¹⁷ This is in turn deterring landlords from letting to people in receipt of benefits. Nearly half of private landlords say the four-year freeze on LHA rates has made them more reluctant to rent to people in receipt of Housing Benefit.¹¹⁸

People aged under 35 face additional difficulties gaining access to private rented housing because in most cases they are eligible only for Housing Benefit at the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR).¹¹⁹

¹¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/local-authority-housing-data#2015-to-2016>

¹¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/local-authority-housing-data#2015-to-2016>

¹¹⁵ Wilson, W. and Barton, C. (2017) *Allocating social housing (England)* House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 06397

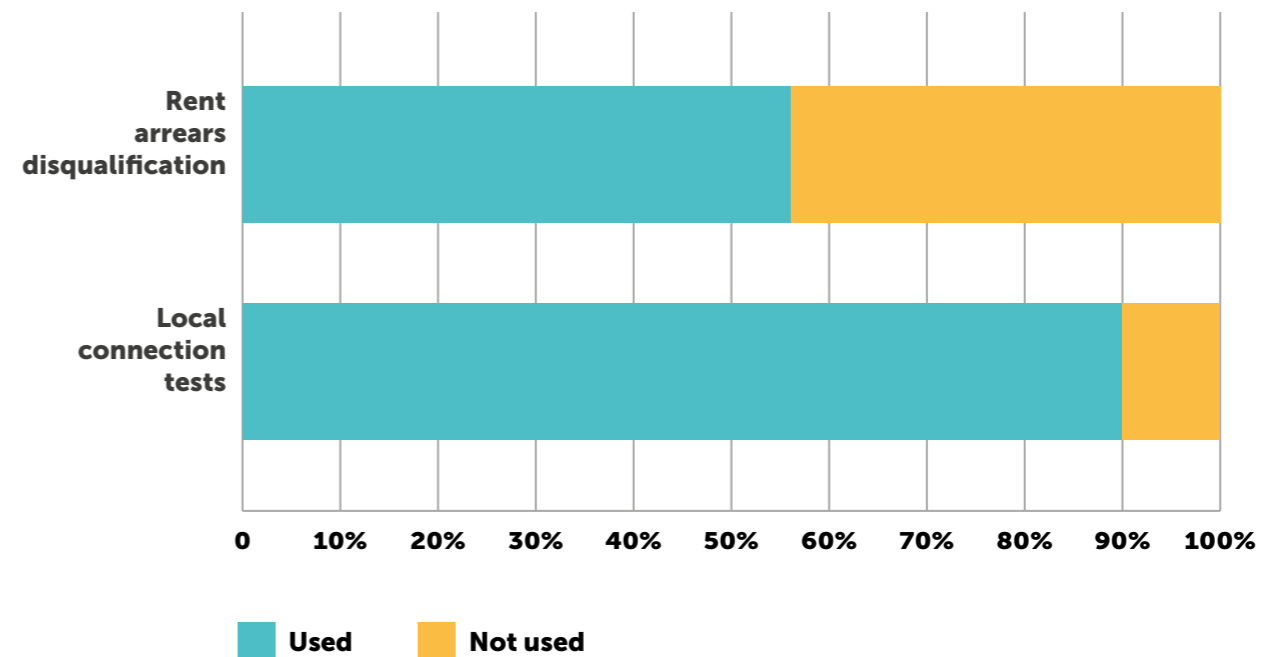
¹¹⁶ Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The homelessness monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF

¹¹⁷ Crisis analysis of Valuation Office Agency data

¹¹⁸ Reeve, K. et al (2016) *Home No less will do Homeless people's access to the Private Rented Sector*. London: Crisis

¹¹⁹ Crisis, *Shut Out Briefing*, 2015 https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/20533/shut_out_briefing_2015.pdf

Fig. 4.8 Local authority housing register restrictions



Best practice guidance on housing allocations published by the Chartered Institute of Housing urges housing providers to assess the potential unintended consequences of housing eligibility restrictions.¹²⁰ It warns that allocations restrictions might:

- make it more difficult to manage a fall in demand for social housing;
- adversely affect people's ability to move areas to obtain work, adversely affecting the local economy; and
- discriminate against certain groups of people.

There have been a series of legal challenges against local authorities that have set blanket restrictions on eligibility since the Localism Act (2011)

came into force.¹²¹ This has included challenges to residency requirements and the disqualification of households on the grounds of their homelessness status.¹²² A separate area of challenge has focused on the relative priority accorded by a council to households working at least 24 hours a week; this was held to have indirectly discriminated against women, disabled people and older people.¹²³

There may then be circumstances in which the application of blanket eligibility restrictions would be challengeable. As noted in figure 4.8 however, the use of blanket restrictions remains common and the evidence presented below suggests that in some cases councils and social housing providers are failing to ensure they put in place systems to take account of individual circumstances.

¹²⁰ Spurr, H. *Inside Housing*, Councils bar 113,000 from waiting lists, 25 April 2014

¹²¹ Wilson, W. and Barton, C. (2017) *Allocating social housing (England)*, House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 06397

¹²² Wilson, W. and Barton, C. (2017) *Allocating social housing (England)*, House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 06397

¹²³ Wilson, W. and Barton, C. (2017) *Allocating social housing (England)* House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 06397

The impact of allocations restrictions on homelessness

A survey of local authorities conducted for the Homelessness Monitor 2017 explored local authority views on the impact of the localism agenda.¹²⁴ A minority of local authorities (15%) reported that the localist approach to allocations had been entirely negative in terms of its impact on homelessness. Staff in these authorities reported that lengthy residency requirements and other allocations restrictions mean fewer move-on opportunities and a rise in the number of people in temporary accommodation.

Two thirds of councils reported that the localism agenda had had an impact on homelessness, and just under half said the consequences were mixed – that is both exacerbating the problem, and helping councils to manage it. The main “positive” highlighted by councils was the ability to better manage demand by restricting access to the housing register, as well as the ability to discharge full homelessness rehousing duties in the private rented sector. However, some councils also noted that the impact of welfare reform had undermined access to private renting, thereby limiting the effectiveness of localism reforms as a way of managing access to social housing.¹²⁵

Impact of housing register restrictions on single homelessness

Lettings to single homeless people have fallen across the country, but to differing extents in different regions and local authorities and with the pace of decline fluctuating. As noted above, this reflects a wider decline in

the proportion of new lets to homeless households of all types (including families with children and pensioners). It is likely that this longer-term trend reflects a combination of factors, including:

- and the increasing emphasis from around 2003 on homelessness prevention as a preferable alternative to the statutory homelessness route, which may have reduced the number of lettings to households with a homelessness designation;
- changes to allocations guidance introduced by the pre-Coalition Government, such as the introduction of statutory guidance in 2009 that encouraged councils to make greater use of allocations flexibilities.¹²⁶

Our analysis suggests, however, that while the proportion of lettings to homeless families has stabilised in recent years, the proportion of lets to single homeless households has continued to decline since 2011, albeit at a less rapid rate.

It is not possible to pinpoint to what extent the changes in lettings trends since 2011 reflect the particular impact of new allocations powers in the Localism Act (2011), which came into force in June 2012, following publication of the Localism White Paper in November 2010.¹²⁷ Other changes in housing policy at that time, particularly the reduction in overall capital spending on new affordable rented housing, the introduction of affordable rents in 2011/12 and the associated disruption to the supply of new social housing, are likely to have

¹²⁴ Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF

¹²⁵ Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF

¹²⁶ As noted above, the 2009 Guidance encouraged councils to use their newly confirmed flexibility to address broader housing policy objectives of creating “more mixed and sustainable communities,” and “greater choice for prospective and existing tenants” alongside providing support for those in greatest need, including homeless people. See: DCLG (2009) *Fair and flexible: statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England*. London: DCLG.

¹²⁷ DCLG. (2010). *Local decisions: a fairer future for social housing*. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/8512/1775577.pdf

contributed to the changing pattern of lettings to single homeless households. Welfare reform changes impacting on access to housing are also likely to be implicated in the continuing fall in access. Barriers to access associated with the unaffordability of housing and Housing Benefit restrictions are considered later in this chapter of the report.

However, while acknowledging that the barriers to access associated with housing register eligibility are not the only factors limiting homeless people’s access to social housing, there is a growing body of qualitative evidence that the use of blanket housing register exclusions is creating a particular barrier to access for single homeless people. This evidence is considered in the following paragraphs of the report.

Rent arrears restrictions and single homelessness

Single homeless people using Crisis services are frequently unable to gain access to social housing because of a history of rent arrears; in a recent survey of Skylight staff, it was the most cited barrier to housing register eligibility. Crisis staff note that sometimes arrears that arose many years previously are the basis on which Crisis Members are prevented from joining a housing register. It can be difficult to establish the circumstances in which arrears arose where they are historic; circumstances which may include a mix of employment and personal difficulties and in some cases, problems with benefit claims.

Research for the JRF exploring the impact of evictions on the lives of those affected noted that a few tenants in the survey sample were judged ineligible for social renting because rent arrears accrued during a previous tenancy were too high.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Clarke, C. Hamilton, C., Jones, M and Muir K., (2017) *Poverty, evictions and forced moves* York: JRF

Case study example: a flexible policy on former tenancy rent arrears

One major social housing provider (an ALMO) has put in place liaison arrangements with the Crisis Skylight to enable homeless applicants with former tenancy arrears to apply for social housing. The lettings policy explains in broad terms the way that the decision about eligibility will be made:

“An application may be suspended in circumstances where an applicant has former tenant rent arrears, tenancy related debts, or mortgage arrears, where they have not made regular payments to reduce arrears in the past but, upon making an application to join the Housing Register, they make arrangements to clear their debt by instalments.

- *Where such applicants demonstrate that regular payments have been maintained during the period that their application has been suspended, their application will be reinstated with the original date of application or the original priority date as appropriate.*
- *Where such applicants do not keep their promise to make regular payments to reduce their former rent or mortgage arrears, the application may be excluded or be subjected to a further period of suspension when it is reviewed.”*

The Skylight and ALMO have put in place liaison arrangements that allow former tenant arrears repayment arrangements to be established quickly where an applicant is being actively supported by the Skylight. This has had positive results for those individuals, providing a pathway to rehousing for single homeless applicants who might otherwise be excluded from obtaining access to a social housing tenancy.

Some providers operate processes that enable them to consider the circumstances that gave rise to arrears at the point of a housing application, and/or to enable applicants to join the register once arrears repayment arrangements are in place. In some cases, a proportion of the arrears may be written off by a council or social housing provider if an amount is cleared; some applicants may benefit from assistance from Crisis's charitable or other funds to help clear arrears and so provide a pathway to joining a housing register. But there are also examples of councils and housing providers that have established conditions making it very difficult for households with former tenancy arrears and on the lowest incomes to qualify for housing eligibility (see case study examples).

Rent arrears disqualifications particularly disadvantage homeless people. The traumatic life events that may contribute to homelessness can also be associated with the creation of rent arrears. For example, relationship breakdown or loss of employment can lead to loss of income and play a role in creating rent arrears. This in turn can result in a need to claim benefit, or adjust benefit awards to reflect a change in circumstances; but delays or other difficulties resolving benefit claims may further contribute to rent arrears or benefit overpayments that then have to be repaid through earnings or benefit deductions. Benefits sanctions also play a role in causing arrears and homelessness.¹²⁹ Where homelessness follows, affected households sometimes then face a double penalty when they attempt to

Case study example: exclusion on the grounds of a previous criminal conviction

A Crisis Member ("B") who had trained as a chef during her time in custody was able to secure full time employment as a hotel chef on release. She was staying in a hostel, but was struggling to meet the cost of her supported housing rent. She applied for social housing via the sub-regional housing scheme but was judged ineligible to apply at that time. The sub-regional allocations policy states:

"In the case of criminal acts, the length of time an application is held to be non-qualifying due to unacceptable behaviour will initially be for a 12-month period. The period will start from the date of the offence or the date of conviction or the date of release from prison whichever is the later. A fresh application may be submitted after 12 months provided the applicant can provide satisfactory evidence to demonstrate that they have modified their behaviour."

"B" approached Crisis for help to find housing, having moved temporarily into a relative's home. With support from Crisis, and a private landlord who did not rule out accepting tenants with a past conviction, she was able to secure a six-month tenancy in the private rented sector. While in this case the outcome was positive, this is not a typical example. Private landlords are often unwilling to accept tenants with a criminal record, leaving those unable to access social housing at significant risk of homelessness. "B" could have appealed to the administering authority to review the decision, but this would have taken time – when homeless people stay temporarily with relatives they may be reluctant to jeopardise the relationship with relatives by prolonging their stay. This illustrates the challenge homeless people can face as a consequence of the use of blanket exclusion policies. Even though the policy states that "each application will be considered on its individual merit", there was no evidence that such consideration had been given, and the time taken to appeal may deter homeless applicants.

¹²⁹ Beatty, C., Foden, M., McCarthy, L. & Reeve, K., (2015) *Benefits Sanctions and Homelessness: A scoping report*. London: Crisis

reapply for housing and find that the existence of arrears renders them ineligible.

Research by Sheffield Hallam for five housing associations to examine the reasons for arrears-related tenancy failure found that factors associated with low income were a more significant influence on tenancy failure than poor tenancy management.¹³⁰ The same study highlighted the five principal causes of rent arrears as insecure and casual employment, benefit claims and suspensions, surviving on a low income, setting up home and life events.¹³¹

The Sheffield Hallam report noted the high cost to landlords associated with tenancy failure as a consequence of unpaid rent and the cost of eviction.¹³² It also noted that effective in-tenancy support can help tenants in mainstream housing manage the impact of low incomes and financial difficulties, sustain their tenancies, and thus prevent homelessness arising from rent arrears.¹³³ The same study found that the availability of support is not, however, the biggest determinant of arrears-related tenancy failure, which is associated above all with tenants' financial circumstances. While the prevention of homelessness from the social housing stock is not the subject of this study, the experience of Crisis members excluded from social housing on the grounds of former tenant arrears suggests that there may be value in local authorities and social housing providers identifying whether more could be done to prevent

homelessness through interventions that help tenants develop financial stability and prevent rent arrears. Where eviction results in homelessness there is an additional cost to the taxpayer; research for Crisis has shown that the average cost of one case of homelessness is £8,630 a year, but can cost the taxpayer up to £35,000 a year in spending on homelessness services, the criminal justice system, the NHS and mental health, drug and alcohol services.¹³⁴

Rent arrears can be a common factor in cases where homeless households are judged intentionally homeless, and research evidence from Wales illustrates the parallels between intentionality decisions and the exclusion of households from housing registers.¹³⁵ Research into the causes and impact of intentional homelessness decisions found that rent arrears arose for a number of complex and sometimes inter-related reasons, and frequently reflected a combination of "behavioural" related factors (such as substance abuse, anti-social behaviour, lack of budgeting skills and failure to prioritise rent payments) and "structural" factors such as lack of affordable housing, and lack of education impacting on employment. People judged intentionally homeless are expected to look for private rented housing, but for those with a history of rent arrears privately rented housing can be even more difficult to find in many parts of the country. Without support, many single homeless people face a cycle of rough sleeping and sofa surfing.

¹³⁰ Ambrose, A., Eadson, W., Hickman, P. and McCarty, L. (2015) *Tenancy Sustainment amongst those aged under 35: final report*. Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University

¹³¹ Ambrose, A., Eadson, W., Hickman, P. and McCarty, L. (2015) *Tenancy Sustainment amongst those aged under 35: final report*. Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University

¹³² Ambrose, A., Eadson, W., Hickman, P. and McCarty, L. (2015) *Tenancy Sustainment amongst those aged under 35: final report*. Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University

¹³³ Ambrose, A., Eadson, W., Hickman, P. and McCarty, L. (2015) *Tenancy Sustainment amongst those aged under 35: final report*. Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University 2015

¹³⁴ Pleace, N. & Culhane, D.P. (2016) *Better than Cure? Testing the case for Enhancing Prevention of Single Homelessness in England*. London: Crisis

¹³⁵ Cambell, J.A. (2011). *The Impact of Intentional Homelessness Decisions on Welsh Households' Lives*. Swansea: Shelter Cymru, 2011

Case study example: comparing City-region and individual provider policies

A City-region allocations policy disqualifies households with housing-related debts from the allocations scheme, limiting access to social housing owned by most of the region's major landlords. Under the city-region scheme applicants are disqualified:

- if housing related debts are equivalent to 8 week's gross rent or more.
- until such a time that the applicant can provide evidence of having adhered to a repayment plan for a minimum of 52 weeks or having reduced the debt to below the equivalent of 8 weeks rent.
- Account will be taken of arrears arising due to delays in payment of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.
- The qualification may be waived if the rent arrears have accrued solely as a consequence of the under-occupation reductions and the applicant actively bids for smaller properties.

For homeless people who have a history of arrears, the threshold for qualification to the regional allocation scheme can be very difficult to meet. One Crisis client, "A" who had an arrangement in place to cover arrears and was working was still unable to meet the City region's threshold of reducing the amount owed to below the equivalent of 8 weeks rent. He was enabled to obtain social housing with a housing association that isn't a partner to the regional scheme.

Criminal convictions and a history of antisocial behaviour

Prior to the introduction of the Localism Act (2011) councils already had the power to rule that an applicant could not receive an allocation of housing in cases where the unacceptable behaviour was serious enough to make the person unsuitable to be a tenant and the behaviour would entitle the authority to a possession order¹³⁶ (see text box Case study example: exclusion on the grounds of a previous criminal conviction). As noted above, there was evidence that these grounds were being used as a *de facto* blanket exclusion in some parts of the country.¹³⁷ It is likely that such blanket exclusions have become more common since 2011, although DCLG statistics do not record the number of councils excluding applicants on grounds relating to a history of criminal convictions or anti-social behaviour.

Nearly a quarter of residents of homelessness accommodation projects are prison leavers or ex-offenders (23%).¹³⁸ A third of people recorded as sleeping rough in London in 2015/16 had spent time in prison.¹³⁹ The incidence of previous criminal convictions is somewhat greater amongst the cohort of people using Crisis services: 38% report having a criminal conviction, and 30% report having been in prison at first contact with Crisis. So a significant proportion of homelessness service users are at risk of exclusion on "behavioural" grounds in areas where social housing providers adopt blanket exclusion policies, unless providers adapt policies to give appropriate consideration to individual circumstances.

¹³⁶ Homelessness Act 2002

¹³⁷ Shelter (2006). *Exclusions in Tyne & Wear: An investigation by Shelter's NEHAC into why applicants are being excluded from social rented housing*. https://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/39506/20824.pdf

¹³⁸ Homeless Link (2016) *Support for single homeless people in England – Annual Review 2016* London: Homeless Link Graph 5

¹³⁹ Greater London Authority. (2016). *CHAIN Annual Report Greater London April 2015 - March 2016*. London: GLA.

The case study below illustrates the impact of blanket exclusions, and the failure of appeal mechanisms to ensure that individual circumstances are adequately considered.

Feedback from Crisis Skylight staff is that the impact of exclusions relating to criminal convictions and a history of anti-social behaviour varies considerably from area to area, depending on local policy and practice. Some services report that such exclusions are frequently a barrier to accessing social housing, while others report that this is not a particular barrier for Crisis clients.

Evidence presented to the All Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness also highlighted the impact of criminal conviction exclusions as a barrier to social housing.¹⁴⁰ It noted that given the reluctance of many private sector landlords to let to ex-offenders in receipt of Housing Benefit, social housing eligibility restrictions are particularly problematic where prison leavers do not have a home to return to on release.

In areas with fixed periods of exclusion from social housing entitlement, people leaving custody are at significant risk of homelessness. Restrictive eligibility policies may therefore help undermine effective resettlement and the chances of securing work, which in turn increases the risk of reoffending. Ministry of Justice evidence suggests that reoffending rates are higher amongst people who are homeless on release (79% reoffend) compared with those with accommodation (47% reoffend).¹⁴¹

Local connection & residency criteria

Crisis Skylight services report that local connection restrictions are sometimes a barrier to accessing social housing for single homeless people. Even in areas where choice based lettings schemes are administered on a cross-boundary basis, local connection restrictions may still limit access to housing to those with a borough or district connection; this has caused confusion amongst some Crisis members who do not realise that they are unlikely to access social housing outside their home borough. Research for the JRF noted that some households affected by eviction or forced moves were unable to apply for social housing because they had not lived in an area long enough to have a local connection.¹⁴²

Local connection criteria, and in particular, lengthy residence requirements, can particularly disadvantage groups in the population that are more transient. This might include homeless people who move to urban centres to find work and a supply of shared rental housing or to access hostels. As noted above, legal challenge has particularly focused on the way that blanket bans on those who don't meet residency criteria potentially exclude homeless people who should be given reasonable preference.¹⁴³

According to DCLG statistics, just over half of councils exclude people from housing registers if they have not been resident in the area for a specified period of time. As noted above, Government guidance "strongly encourages" all housing authorities to

¹⁴⁰ APPG for Ending Homelessness Minutes, 25 January 2017 <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/appg-for-ending-homelessness/>

¹⁴¹ Prison Reform Trust (2015) *Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile. Autumn 2015* page 60 <http://www.thebromleytrust.org.uk/files/bromleybriefingsautumn2015.pdf>

¹⁴² Clarke, C. Hamilton, C., Jones, M and Muir K. (2017) *Poverty, evictions and forced moves York*: JRF

¹⁴³ Wilson, W. and Barton, C. (2017) *Allocating social housing (England)* House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 06397

adopt residency requirements of at least two years;¹⁴⁴ some councils have residency requirements of as much as ten years.¹⁴⁵ A further 36% of councils operate broader local connection requirements; these allow people who do not meet residency criteria to register for housing if they have other connections to an area, for example on the grounds of employment or family association. In total, nine in ten English councils restrict access to housing registers on the grounds that people either have not lived in the area for long enough or because they do not have other types of connection to the area, such as employment.

While Government has encouraged use of residency restrictions, guidance also states that councils should “retain the flexibility to take proper account of special circumstances”, including for “those who need support to rehabilitate and integrate back into the community”.¹⁴⁶ The same guidance acknowledges that there are circumstances where such restrictions can undermine effective use of housing, for example in the case of hard to let properties; guidance notes there may be “sound housing management reasons to dis-apply a residency test for hard to let stock”. The experience of Crisis Skylight services is that some councils are failing to implement this flexibility, and thus failing to ensure that housing allocations practice is deployed effectively to tackle and prevent homelessness. Such practices particularly merit review in the light

of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) under which the prevention duty is blind to local connection for those eligible for assistance.¹⁴⁷

Restrictions related to household income and rental affordability

Changes to Housing Benefit entitlements are making it more difficult for homeless people to gain access to and sustain housing because Housing Benefit is less likely than in the past to cover the cost of renting.¹⁴⁸

The evidence presented in the following paragraphs demonstrates that problems with the benefits system are in turn affecting the allocations practices of some housing providers, making it more difficult for homeless people to gain access to social housing and the stability they need to find and retain work.

Problems with access to housing caused by the benefits system are being compounded by government policy on rent setting for social housing. Since 2010 registered providers and local authorities wishing to receive Government affordable homes funding have been required to convert a proportion of tenancies and deliver most new build homes at so-called affordable rents, defined as being up to 80% of local market rents. This link to market rents means there is considerable variation in affordable rent levels and the extent to which affordable rents are actually affordable, taking account of local incomes, also varies around the country.¹⁴⁹ Our

144 DCLG (2013) *Providing social housing for local people. Statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England*. London: DCLG. See Paragraph 13.

145 Wilson, W. and Barton, C. (2017) *Allocating social housing* (England) House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 06397

144 DCLG (2013) *Providing social housing for local people. Statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England*. London: DCLG. See Paragraph 13.

145 Wilson, W. and Barton, C. (2017) *Allocating social housing* (England) House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 06397

146 DCLG (2013) *Providing social housing for local people. Statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England*. London: DCLG. See Paragraph 19.

147 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/592995/170203_-_Policy_Fact_Sheets_-_Prevention.pdf

148 Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The homelessness monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF

149 Luton, M. and Collins, C. (2015) *Living Rents – a new development framework for affordable housing*. Savills

analysis of social housing providers' lettings data suggests that single homeless people have less access to affordable rent housing than other types of households (see text box: Affordable rent lettings to single homeless people). While Government policy assumes affordable rent will fulfil the same roles as social rent, research into the practices of social housing providers revealed some “uncertainty” as to who affordable rent housing should be for: while some saw it as having the same role as social housing to house those in the most need, others saw it as a tenure primarily for working households.¹⁵⁰ These differing viewpoints are reflected in varying approaches by social housing providers to handling nominations from local authorities, with some providers viewing affordable rent as a product suitable only for employed households.

Local authorities have identified the switch to affordable rent levels as a particular barrier in providing social housing to homeless households.¹⁵¹ In response to the Homelessness Monitor survey one council made the following observation:

“We have a decreasing stock of social rented housing and an increasing supply of unaffordable “Affordable Rented” housing. Demand outstrips supply and therefore social housing is not as accessible as a means of preventing homelessness” (South region LA, 2016).

The combined effect of changes to the benefits system and higher affordable rents can mean that new tenants need access to support to claim Housing Benefit to pay their rent and to manage any changes in circumstance that affect benefit entitlement (especially when just entering work or managing fluctuating earnings). However, these changes to the benefits and rent setting systems have happened at a time when housing-related support is less readily available and when housing providers themselves are operating under much tighter financial constraints.¹⁵²

The evidence below suggests some housing providers have responded by adopting financial criteria which in effect make it more difficult for homeless people to gain access to social housing.¹⁵³

Affordability assessments and other criteria restrict access to social housing

Social housing providers need to ensure that prospective tenants can pay their rent, and as entitlements to housing and other benefits have been increasingly restricted, affordability assessments are more routinely used to assess whether applicants can afford their rent liability. While such affordability assessments are an important management tool against a backdrop of reduced access to welfare benefits, if used inflexibly they can also have the effect of excluding single homeless people from getting access to social housing,

150 Clarke, A., Morris S. and Williams, P. (2015) *How do landlords address poverty* York: JRF

151 Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The homelessness monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF

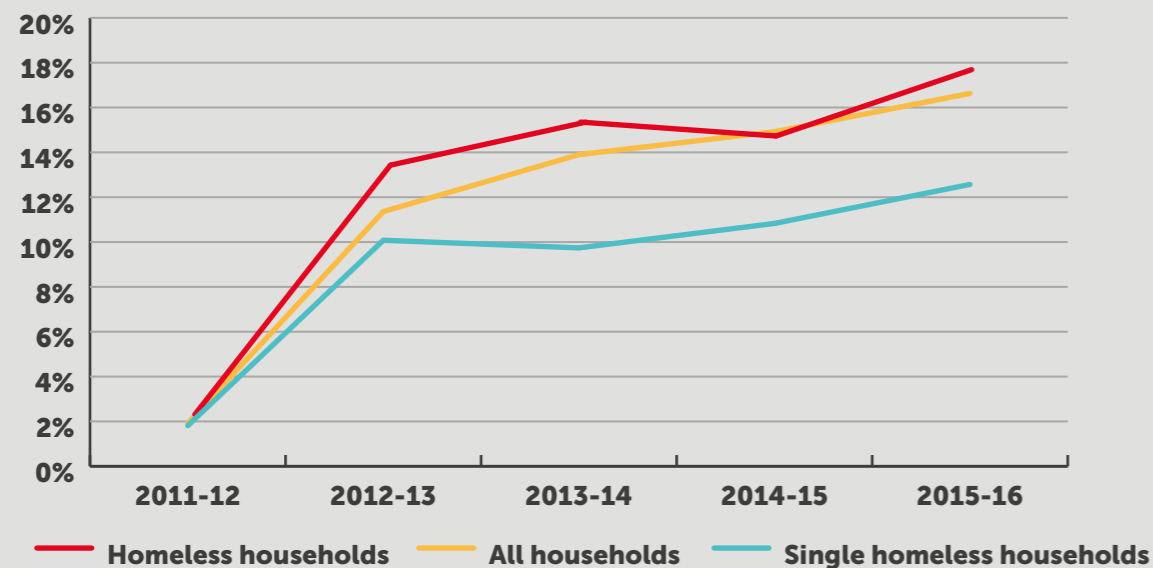
152 Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The homelessness monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF. With regard to cuts to budgets for housing-related support, the Homelessness Monitor documents significant reductions in the availability of funding for “Supporting People” services, which include the provision of accommodation based services for single homeless people, pre-tenancy assistance to help homeless people gain access to housing and in-tenancy floating support for resettled households. While spending on homelessness interventions has increased by 13% since 2010, this increase needs to be understood against a backdrop of a cut backs in overall council spending on non-landlord housing services of 46%. Of particular relevance to services for single homeless people is the cutback in spending on housing-related support (through the former “Supporting People” programme) which has decreased by 67% in real terms since 2010

153 Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The homelessness monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF

Affordable rent lettings to single homeless people

Since their introduction in 2011-12, higher “affordable rents” have been introduced in place of social rents. While 17% of new social lets were at “affordable rents” in 2015-16, affordable rent lettings to single homeless households lag significantly behind this trend, standing at around 13%. This may be because single-income households are unlikely to pass affordability tests set by housing providers for these more expensive homes. On the other hand, “affordable rents” make up a slightly higher proportion of new lets to all homeless households than average.

Figure 4.9 - Affordable rent



Source: CORE

even where they would be able to meet their rent liability.

Problems with the inflexible use of affordability tests were documented in the above mentioned 2015 research for the JRF examining social housing providers' policy and practice in relation to poverty.¹⁵⁴ The study found that some social housing providers are judging rental affordability by using fixed affordability ratios, potentially excluding households who would be able to afford their rent with assistance from Housing Benefit.¹⁵⁵ Similar problems were recorded by the 2017 Homelessness Monitor's survey of

council housing options staff, with a concern that some providers are no longer seeking to provide housing for the whole of the community.¹⁵⁶

Staff in Crisis Skylight services also report problems for Crisis members because of the way that some social landlords are applying financial criteria, such as rent in advance and rent guarantor requirements, without flexibility and without considering the particular circumstances of single homeless people. While the requirement to pay rent in advance is a typical obligation of being a tenant, at the start of a tenancy it can become

154 Clarke, A, Morris S and Williams, P, (JRF 2015) How do landlords address poverty

155 Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The homelessness monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF p42

156 Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The homelessness monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF

a barrier to access those on the very lowest incomes, including homeless people, who have been unable to save enough money to pay rent in advance. While in Crisis's experience many providers adopt practices that are sensitive to individual circumstances, such as allowing payment of a reduced sum of rent in advance or waiving the requirement while a benefit claim is resolved, such flexibility is not universal.

Crisis provides incentive funding to help homeless people who are engaging with services to meet the up-front costs of accessing housing, usually in the private rented sector. Recently, Skylight staff have on occasion used this funding to help single homeless people pay rent in advance to a social housing provider. Crisis incentive funds have also been used to mitigate the impact of social housing providers requiring full payment of rent in advance to secure a tenancy, leaving applicants unable to cover their basic living costs in the period until wages or benefits are paid. While individual Crisis members are thus helped to overcome the impact of such financial barriers, it is likely that many more single homeless people, those without access to the support of an intermediary, are effectively excluded from getting access to social housing.

Where social housing providers do not adapt their practices to enable access by those on the lowest incomes and specialist advice services are not available to help overcome these financial barriers, homeless people are effectively prevented from getting access to social housing.

Under 35 face additional affordability restrictions because of the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR).

There is evidence that homeless people aged under 35 are being particularly disadvantaged by the planned introduction of the SAR to social housing.¹⁵⁷ Research by Sheffield Hallam University for a consortium of housing associations operating in the South East of England found that existing problems with social housing affordability for young people will be exacerbated by the introduction of the SAR.¹⁵⁸

From April 2019, single people under 35 will only receive Housing Benefit at the rate set for shared accommodation if they have taken up a new social tenancy since April 2016.¹⁵⁹ Tenants with an existing Universal Credit claim will also be affected, regardless of the date their tenancy started. Some tenants will be eligible for an exemption from the SAR, in which case they will receive the LHA rate for self-contained housing. Tenants living in supported housing will be exempt from the SAR. There is, however, a scarcity of general needs shared housing in the social rented sector.¹⁶⁰ While there are some established shared housing schemes in the social sector and more social housing providers are now considering or piloting shared schemes,¹⁶¹ (see Providing Housing Options for Single People Under 35), many social housing providers have adopted a very cautious approach towards this type of housing.¹⁶²

Although the SAR will not directly affect entitlement to Housing Benefit until its introduction in April 2019, it is

157 Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The homelessness monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF p.52; Reeve, K. et al. (2017). *Capping aspiration: the millennial housing challenge*. Sheffield Hallam University

158 Reeve, K. et al. (2017). *Capping aspiration: the millennial housing challenge*. Sheffield Hallam University.

159 https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/20534/briefing_lha_caps_in_the_social_sectordec2016.pdf

160 Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The homelessness monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF

161 Reeve, K. et al. (2017). *Capping aspiration: the millennial housing challenge*. Sheffield Hallam University; Crisis (2017) Spare to Share https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237291/crisis_spare_to_share.pdf

162 Reeve, K. et al. (2017). *Capping aspiration: the millennial housing challenge*. Sheffield Hallam University;

Case study example:**Providing Housing Options for Single People Under 35**

In preparation for the LHA cap and introduction of the SAR for single households under the age of 35, a partnership has been created between social landlords and private landlords in a local authority area. The partnership vehicle will advertise, prioritise and let shared accommodation to housing applicants. In its pilot phase 6x two and three-bedroom shared properties are being made available by the lead partner housing association to trial aspects of shared tenancy management, including the use of individual and joint tenancies, and assured shorthold tenancies and licences. Individually tenanted properties have utilities included in their service charge whereas joint tenants remain responsible for their own utilities. Individually tenanted properties are also fully equipped with white goods, carpets and other household essentials.

All applicants are required to complete a Shared Accommodation Tenancy Ready Workshop which will cover: rights & responsibilities; managing finances/budgeting; living in a shared property; setting house rules; acceptable/unacceptable behaviour; future housing options; employment & training

The housing association's in-house management service will include: monthly visits by the Housing Officer for an initial three-month period to ensure tenants are settled, have house rules in place, and support needs are being managed; each tenant to meet the Financial Inclusion Officer to discuss budgeting and identify income maximisation and any support needed to manage rent account; each tenant offered support from the Community Regeneration Officer with digital inclusion; and for tenants seeking work, assistance from the Employability Officer with CV writing skills, job applications, and access to training and work experience.

already limiting the range of housing options available to young homeless people and making it more difficult for council housing options teams and third sector homelessness services to prevent homelessness.¹⁶³ Staff working in Crisis Skylight services report that some housing providers are already restricting access to single homeless people aged under 35s in anticipation of the SAR applying to social renting.

The Homelessness Monitor: England 2017's survey of housing options teams found that helping under-35s get access to shared housing is almost universally problematic. Scarcity of shared housing in the social sector is an even greater problem than scarcity

in the private rented sector; 74% of councils find it very difficult to help people aged under 35 access social rented housing compared with 64% for shared private rented housing. But in London finding shared housing is always problematic; as one council respondent to the Homelessness Monitor reported:

"There doesn't appear to be the appetite with RPs [registered providers] to provide shared accommodation, and for the SAR in the private sector, the issue is that the rate falls short of market rates" (LA respondent, London).

The impact of the SAR is also being reported by hostel providers as a

¹⁶³ Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The homelessness monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF

barrier for single people ready to move on from supported housing.¹⁶⁴ While there is a possibility that people who have lived in homeless hostels will qualify for exemptions from the SAR, social housing providers may not be willing to place people into self-contained housing without a specific assurance of SAR exemptions. This is evidence that the perceived risk associated with providing permanent social housing for young people is already having an impact on efforts to tackle homelessness, even in cases where the SAR may not actually apply.

The proposed introduction of the SAR to social housing therefore risks exacerbating the already significant difficulties faced by single homeless people seeking permanent accommodation in the private rented sector (see text box: Case study example: Providing Housing Options for Single People Under 35).

4.4 Summary of key points

The number of lettings to single homeless people has been consistently falling over the last ten years.

There is evidence that single homeless people are finding it more difficult to gain access to social housing because of the combined impact of council and housing provider policies restricting eligibility for housing allocations, as well as financial checks that sometimes screen out those on the lowest incomes.

These barriers are associated with and exacerbate the impact of the underlying decline in the size of the social rented housing stock, and the introduction of affordable rents for most new social housing. The effect of housing register restrictions on single homeless people is seen in

all parts of the country, including in neighbourhoods with low relative demand for social housing. It is particularly disappointing that even in neighbourhoods with a supply of social homes that are immediately available, some councils and social housing providers are restricting access to social housing for some homeless people on the grounds of blanket eligibility rules.

The access problems identified by the study are not universal; some social housing providers working with Crisis members are continuing to enable single homeless people to get access to social housing. The experience of Crisis members demonstrates that with the right support single homeless people can successfully sustain their tenancies, and find sustainable employment.

¹⁶⁴ CLG Select Committee. *Future of Supported Housing*. May 2017

Conclusions

5.1 The scale of single homelessness

An estimated 200,000 single people¹⁶⁵ experience homelessness in England each year. The average number of single people experiencing some form of homelessness on any one night is estimated to be 77,000 – whether this is sleeping rough, staying in a homeless hostel, staying on a friend's sofa with nowhere else to go, squatting, or staying in a B&B while waiting for permanent housing from their local authority.

Broadly speaking around two-thirds of single homeless people will have support needs that mean their immediate destination should be some form of housing with tailored support such as supported housing or a Housing First solution, at least for a time. The remaining group of single homeless people have low or no support needs and their primary requirement is a place to live in mainstream housing. For this group, any support requirements are likely to be low-intensity and short-term, focused on gaining access to housing, budgeting for housing costs, navigating the Housing Benefit (or the Universal Credit equivalent) claim process, and adjusting to managing a tenancy after a period of homelessness. These are people whose homelessness results primarily from the shortage of genuinely affordable homes and reduced availability of Housing Benefit, so that even those in work cannot always find a place to live.

Around 75,000 single people with low or no support needs are likely to experience homelessness each year. The average number of single people with low or no support needs who are homeless on any one night is around 26,000. Of these, the majority are likely to be staying in a homeless hostel or in someone else's home. While statutory homelessness is spread (albeit unevenly) across the country, there is a clear North-South divide for broader forms of homelessness, with rough sleeping in particular being concentrated in the South.

5.2 Housing options for single homeless people

Gaining access to housing of any type is becoming increasingly difficult for single homeless people. As the size of the social housing sector continues to shrink, the private rented sector is increasingly important as a source of housing for homeless people; our analysis suggests that around a third of homeless households finally find accommodation in the private rented sector. But privately rented homes are often not fit for purpose and increasing numbers of people are being made homeless as a consequence of private tenancies ending: a third of statutory homeless acceptances follow the (no-fault) loss of an assured shorthold tenancy.

5.3 Access to social housing for single homeless people

The number of general needs social lettings to single homeless people in England fell from 19,000 a year in 2007-8 to 13,000 in 2015-16 at a time when the number of new lettings overall has been in decline. The proportion of lettings to single homeless people has also fallen, however, over the same period, from 12% to 8% of all new lettings. Although this reflects a long-term decline in the proportion of social lettings to all homeless households, since 2011 the proportion of lettings to homeless families has stabilised somewhat, while the proportion of lets to single homeless households has continued to decline.

Barriers to social housing

The evidence in this report illustrates the difficulties faced by single homeless people seeking access to social housing, which help to explain the continuing recent decline in lettings to this group:

- **Restrictions on social housing eligibility and allocations**

The lack of sensitivity to individual circumstances in the way allocations restrictions are applied by some councils and housing providers make it more difficult for single homeless people to find stable housing and thus take steps to find and sustain work. As councils prepare for the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) this is an opportune time to review the impact of social housing eligibility restrictions and to consider whether adjustments are needed to policy and practice.

- **Restrictions related to household income and affordability**

There is evidence that the use of affordability and other financial eligibility criteria by some housing providers has the effect of screening out those on the lowest incomes.¹⁶⁶ While this reduces providers' exposure to the risks caused by higher rents and a sometimes-inadequate Housing Benefit safety net, it also reduces the supply of housing to those on the lowest incomes, including single homeless people. Sometimes social housing providers have little choice; the impact of restrictions on Housing Benefit eligibility can mean that in parts of the country low income households are literally unable to pay their rent. The introduction of the shared accommodation rate (SAR) to social housing looks set to extend this problem to many more single people aged under 35.¹⁶⁷ But the evidence presented in this report suggests that even where housing benefit will actually cover the cost of a social or affordable rent, it cannot be assumed that single homeless people will be able to get access to social housing. While some housing providers have adopted a flexible approach to the use of financial eligibility criteria, aiming to ensure that those on the lowest incomes continue to have access to social housing where viable, these practices are not universal.

As councils prepare for the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act there is a clear case for reviewing policy and practice on rental affordability and rent setting to ensure that an appropriate proportion of social housing remains accessible to those on the lowest incomes.

¹⁶⁵ Which refers here to people who are not responsible for dependent children.

¹⁶⁶ Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. & Watts, B. (2017) *The homelessness monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis/JRF

¹⁶⁷ National Housing Federation (2016) *Research briefing: Impact of applying Local Housing Allowance rates to general needs social tenants*; Cole, I., Green, S., Pattison, B., Reeve, K., Wilson, I., (2017) *Capping aspiration: the millennial challenge*, Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University.

If restrictions on the availability of Housing Benefit for under-35s are indeed introduced for social housing, homelessness prevention strategies will need to prioritise the delivery of more shared or self-contained housing within SAR limits.

Allocations policy and financial/affordability restrictions that limit access to social housing for homeless people exacerbate the underlying impact of the continued decline in the size of the social rented sector and the supply of homes available at social rent levels. Far fewer new tenants are getting access to social housing. There has been an absolute and proportionate reduction in the number of social lettings to all homeless households since 2007/08. This is likely to have been influenced by the increased focus on homelessness prevention since 2003, and changes in allocations practice in the years preceding the Localism Act (2011) reforms. Lettings to single homeless people have, however, declined disproportionately in recent years, suggesting that they have been particularly affected by the combined impact of the reducing overall supply of social lettings and changes in allocations policy and practice. As a consequence, some single homeless people are stuck, unnecessarily, in temporary supported housing or other temporary, insecure shelter with no route out of homelessness.

5.4 Next steps

The Government should take urgent steps to ensure there is a supply of housing available to single homeless people as well as others in housing need. In its recent Housing White Paper, the Government acknowledged that more needs to be done to tackle our

dysfunctional housing market, and to help households currently priced out of the market.¹⁶⁸ While it identified a range of measures to stimulate affordable housing supply and tackle the most severe problems with private renting, it needs to go much further to improve access to housing for single homeless people and others on the lowest incomes.

The evidence presented in this report helps explain why the Government's proposals to stimulate the supply of affordable rented, but not social rented, housing are likely to have only a marginal direct impact on the supply of homes available to single homeless people in many parts of the country.¹⁶⁹ It also highlights the risk that current approaches to social housing allocations will undermine the Government's aim of preventing homelessness.

This report identifies a cohort of in the region of 26,000 single homeless people with low or no support needs across England as a whole who require permanent housing on any given night. Over the course of a year this number is likely to fluctuate with the annual flow of people experiencing homelessness substantially greater.

A key challenge for Government now is to ensure that there is an adequate supply of homes across the social and private rented sectors to meet the needs of this group as well as others in housing need. Translating the number of single homeless people identified here into an estimate of additional housing requirements is beyond the scope of this report. But local authorities should ensure that the specific

needs of single homeless people are considered alongside the needs of other groups in their assessments of local housing requirements,¹⁷⁰ and are in turn reflected in affordable housing policy requirements for new housing provision as well as in local housing and homelessness strategies.

Some of this need could be met in the existing stock by addressing the barriers to access to both social and private rented housing examined in this report. But to reduce the flow of newly arising homelessness, the underlying problems of housing affordability and related supply issues need to be addressed. While it was not within the scope of this report to address wider debates about rent setting, Housing Benefit entitlement, public subsidy for "bricks or benefits",¹⁷¹ or the tension between housing providers' social purpose and commercial imperative,¹⁷² these factors do provide the context within which the recommendations below have been formulated. Crisis is carrying out further work to identify cost-effective solutions to boost the supply of affordable housing that meets the needs of single homeless people, and will report separately on this.

In the short-term, and in view of the declining availability of social lettings to single homeless people at a time of continued recent rises in rough sleeping, there is a case for local authorities to set targets or quotas to ensure a supply of homes is available for single homeless people as well as other categories of household. Such targets might be set for lettings in both the social and private rented sectors (for example via Help-to-Rent projects or social lettings agencies), taking account of local housing market conditions.

Registered housing providers are currently required by the Homes and Communities Agency Tenancy Standard to co-operate with local authorities, helping meet councils' homelessness duties. The evidence of this report suggests that some housing providers are doing more than others to address the mainstream housing needs of single homeless people.

Government must also address the significant challenges councils and other social housing providers face in ensuring single homeless people can pay their rent against a backdrop of cuts to Housing Benefit entitlement, and particularly the application of the Shared Accommodation Rate to mainstream social housing from April 2019, and in the context of the affordable rent regime.

Recommendations

Improving access to the private rented sector is of critical importance to provide homes for homeless people unable to gain access to social renting. Crisis has previously called on Government to improve access to privately rented housing for homeless people by:

- Providing a funding stream to support the delivery of "Help to Rent" projects (providing pre- and in-tenancy support) and a nationally funded tenancy deposit scheme to increase access to private renting for homeless people.
- Addressing deficiencies in the Local Housing Allowance regime which mean that rent levels are increasingly out of step with the amount of Housing Benefit that can be paid.

¹⁶⁸DCLG (2017) *Fixing our broken housing market London*: DCLG. A commitment to deliver measures to boost housing supply set out in the White Paper was included in the 2017 Conservative Party Manifesto.

¹⁶⁹The Conservative Manifesto included a commitment to building more council and housing association homes, and in a press statement the Prime Minister committed to "a new generation of homes for social rent" see Birch, J., May 14 2017 The Conservative manifesto plan for housing. <https://julesbirch.com/2017/05/14/the-conservative-manifesto-plan/> Subsequently however the then Housing Minister suggested that the intention was instead to build more homes for affordable rent – not social rent – see Barnes, S. 2 June 2017 Inside Housing, *Barwell: New homes for 'social rent' will be let at affordable rent levels*: <http://www.insidehousing.co.uk/barwell-new-homes-for-social-rent-will-be-let-at-affordable-rent-levels/7020225.article#>

¹⁷⁰In the Housing White Paper - DCLG (2017) *Fixing our broken housing market London*: DCLG- the Government indicated its intention to consult on proposals that will deliver a more standardised approach to assessing housing requirements.

¹⁷¹Webb, K. (2012). *Bricks or benefits?*: London. Shelter; Capital Economics, Building new social rent homes (Capital Economics, London), 2015.

¹⁷²Nicola Slawson Profit or purpose? *The fight over the future of social housing in Britain* (The Guardian) 14th August 2015; Gregory, J. Mullins, D. Murie, A. and Redmand P. (2016) *Social Housing and the Good Society*. University of Birmingham

- Ensuring local authorities are resourced and incentivised to develop their market stewardship role, providing effective oversight of the lower end of the private rental market and supporting their role in homelessness prevention.

In addition, there is an urgent need to increase the supply of homes at rent levels that those on the lowest incomes can afford and which, critically, are within Local Housing Allowance rates. Government must enable councils and other social housing providers to build new homes at social rent levels (or an equivalent formula set with reference to the National Living Wage or other appropriate measure of low earnings), and must set national and local/city region targets for this genuinely affordable supply.

To address the additional barriers to social housing for single homeless people identified in this report, and to enable local authorities to ensure effective implementation of their new duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017):

1. National government must end the use of blanket housing register exclusions that shut out people in housing need.

Government must revise national policy on social housing allocations in the light of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) to ensure that single homeless people and others in housing need are not prevented from joining housing registers.

2. National government must ensure there is a supply of mainstream housing that single homeless people can afford.

To achieve this Government must instruct the new homelessness reduction task force to:

- a. Set targets for the adequate supply of housing that is

accessible and affordable to single and other homeless people. This should include targets for the supply of shared housing accessible to single homeless people aged under 35 within the Shared Accommodation Rate.

b. Review arrangements for ensuring that all Registered Housing Providers fulfil their responsibilities to co-operate with local authorities specifically to assist the latter in meeting their homelessness duties.

3. City regions and local authorities, working with social housing providers, should:

a. Monitor and report publicly on the flow of social housing lettings to single homeless people and other categories of household within Annual Lettings Plans, taking account of the outcome of nominations to social housing providers. This should be an integral part of the process of reporting on implementation of and outcomes achieved through councils' Homelessness Strategies.

b. Review the impact of social housing eligibility restrictions and restrictions related to affordability on the flow of lettings to homeless people, and consider whether adjustments are needed to policy and practice to ensure effective implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017).

Annex: Housing Allocations - statutory and regulatory requirements

Councils are required by law to operate housing allocation schemes that give 'reasonable preference' to groups defined as having a housing need because they are:¹⁷³

- homeless as defined by Part VII of the 1996 Housing Act. The 2012 guidance notes this includes those who are not in priority need and those who are intentionally homeless;¹⁷⁴
- owed a duty by any housing authority under the homelessness provisions of the 1996 Housing Act;
- occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;
- people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to a disability;
- people who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the housing authority where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or others).

Local authorities are not required to maintain a housing register, but they must have an allocations scheme to determine priorities between applicants, and they have the power to restrict access to social housing allocations by excluding groups of people designated as non-qualifying persons.¹⁷⁵

Allocations Guidance¹⁷⁶ identifies a range of circumstances that may cause councils to avoid such blanket approaches:

- Housing authorities should avoid setting criteria which disqualify groups of people whose members are likely to be accorded reasonable preference, though they may adopt criteria that disqualify individuals who satisfy the reasonable preference criteria (paragraph 3.21).
- When deciding who may not qualify for an allocation, authorities should consider the implications of excluding all members of such groups; for example, when framing residency criteria, authorities may wish to consider the position of people who are moving into the district to take up work or to escape violence or homeless applicants or children in care who are placed out of borough (paragraph 3.22).
- Councils should consider the potential need for different qualification criteria for different types of stock, giving the example of properties which might otherwise be hard to let (paragraph 3.24). It also encourages councils to make explicit provision for dealing with exceptional cases within their qualification rules (paragraph 3.25).

¹⁷³ Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and Localism Act 2011.

¹⁷⁴ DCLG. Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England. Paragraph 4.4 (a) DCLG 2012

¹⁷⁵ These powers are in addition to a duty only to allocate housing to people defined as eligible for an allocation of housing, which excludes certain people from abroad as defined by SI 2006 No. 1294

¹⁷⁶ DCLG (2012) *Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England*. London: DCLG

The guidance also urges councils to consider how they can use their allocation policies to support those in households who want to work, "as well as those who – while unable to engage in paid employment – are contributing to their communities in other ways, for example through voluntary work" (paragraph 4.27).

Supplementary statutory guidance on allocations emphasises the Government's view that councils should prioritise applicants who can demonstrate a close association with their local area.¹⁷⁷ The guidance strongly encourages all housing authorities to adopt residency requirements of at least two years, but it also reminds councils;

- to have regard to their duties under the Equality Act 2010, ensuring that their policies do not discriminate against particular groups of people;
- that where a common allocations policy is shared with neighbours, it may be appropriate to adopt a broader residency test based on residence in any of the partners' districts;
- to consider a flexible approach to enable people to move nearer to family or where someone has employment in an area;
- to consider operating a housing options approach, so that those who have not lived in the area long enough to join the register to instead be provided with "advice and any necessary support to help them find appropriate alternative solutions";
- to consider different criteria for particular types of stock such as hard to let properties – or dis-applying a residency test for hard to let stock;
- of the need to provide for exceptions from the residency requirement for certain members of the Armed Forces;
- to take proper account of "special circumstances" – including for:
 - people who need to move away from another area to escape violence or harm;
 - those who need to return, such as homeless families and care leavers whom the authority have housed outside their district; and
 - those who need support to rehabilitate and integrate back into the community" – and "other appropriate exceptions in the light of local circumstances";
- to exercise discretion to deal with individual cases where there are exceptional circumstances.

¹⁷⁷ DCLG. (2013). *Providing social housing for local people. Statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England.*

For the purposes of the legislation the term "allocation" refers to allocations to council-owned homes and nominations to another housing authority or to "private registered providers" (including for profit providers and not for profit housing associations). Where housing associations allocate homes outside the framework of council nominations agreements they are not governed by these rules, but must instead comply with the Tenancy Standard set by the Homes and Communities Agency.¹⁷⁸ This includes requirements that housing associations:

- let their homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way;
- co-operate with local authorities' strategic housing function and their duties to meet identified local housing needs; and
- clearly set out, and be able to give reasons for, the criteria they use for excluding actual and potential tenants from consideration for allocations, mobility and mutual exchange services.

¹⁷⁸ Homes & Communities Agency. (2012). *Tenancy Standard*. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/419209/Tenancy_Standard_2015.pdf



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Together
we will end
homelessness