

## Section 2 Commentary

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### Chapter 5

# **Homelessness, housing needs and lettings**

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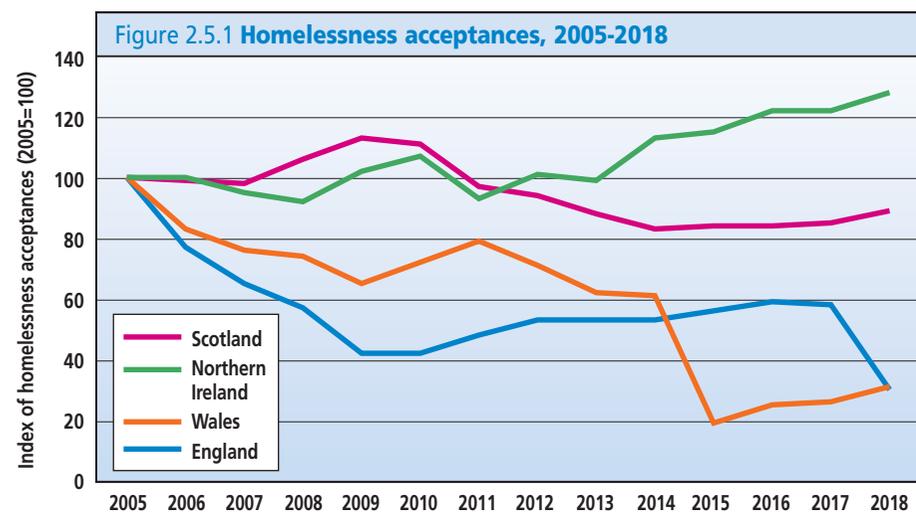
Homelessness continues to be a key contributor to housing need, as well as becoming a prominent political issue. In 2019, the health consequences of being without a home became a focus of media attention, and especially the numbers of deaths among people who are homeless. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism released figures showing that in the 18 months to March 2019 some 796 people across the UK had died while on the streets or in temporary accommodation: a quarter of those deaths were in Northern Ireland. Where the age of the victim was known, across the UK more than a quarter were under 40 when they died, and nearly a third of the deaths were from potentially treatable illnesses.<sup>1</sup> Separate ONS data for England and Wales indicate that in 2018 there were 726 deaths of homeless people, 22 per cent more than in 2017 and the highest total since 2013.<sup>2</sup>

The ONS data suggest that most deaths among people who were homeless were caused by drug-related poisoning, suicide, and alcohol-specific deaths. However, an examination of the causes of death among people previously admitted to hospital and seen by specialist homeless health schemes also highlighted the importance of chronic and potentially preventable diseases, such as coronary heart disease, respiratory disease and cancer.<sup>3</sup>

Scale and trends in homelessness continue to vary across the UK. As this chapter explains, it is difficult to make direct comparisons between UK countries or sometimes within countries over a run of years, although in addition to the *Review's* comparisons the ONS has now made available an interactive tool for comparing UK homelessness statistics.<sup>4</sup> Figure 2.5.1 shows the pattern of homelessness across the four UK administrations. The falls in homelessness acceptances in England and Wales, in particular, are due to recent legislative changes meaning more people who approach their local authority for help receive assistance *prior* to being formally accepted as owed the main homelessness duty. Slightly lower levels in Scotland are due to earlier policy changes, while in Northern Ireland recent trends appear to reflect growth in real housing need.

Statutory homelessness grew in England from 2010 and reached a peak in 2016/17. In 2017/18 main duty acceptances fell slightly but remained 42 per cent higher than at their 2009/10 low point. Then in April 2018 the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) came into force, making a dramatic difference, with figures for 2018/19 showing a sharp fall in acceptances. For example, in January-March 2019 there were 7,570 households accepted as owed a main duty, 43 per cent fewer than in the same quarter in 2018. Under the HRA, homeless households are initially assessed as being owed either a *prevention* or a *relief* duty. For those already homeless, or for whom the prevention duty does not succeed in resolving their housing crisis, the relief duty applies for 56 days and is succeeded by the main rehousing duty only if the household is unintentionally homeless and meets the priority need criteria. The number of households recorded as being owed the main duty after April 2018 was therefore expected to fall as compared with previous years.

Regional trends in homelessness acceptances in England were strongly contrasting for most of the past decade – rising sharply in London and the South, while static or falling in the North and Midlands, reflecting varying housing market conditions and the uneven effects of welfare reform. But a more regionally convergent pattern appeared to be emerging just before the HRA came into force. It will be interesting to track whether these regional patterns are re-established as the new legislative framework beds in.



Source: Compendium Table 89 and Northern Ireland Housing Statistics Table 3.11.

As in England, there have been lower levels of homelessness acceptances in Scotland and, more especially, in Wales over the past few years, again the result of policy and/or legal changes, although in both cases acceptances appear to be rising again. Wales made the change to a prevention-focused statutory homelessness regime earlier than England, from April 2015. The number of 'homeless – main duty accepted' decisions fell to only 31 per cent of its previous level in the new system's first full year. While the figure has subsequently risen, the 2018/19 total was still only slightly more than half that in 2014/15. In the Welsh instance, the introduction of prevention and relief duties appears to have led to a lasting reduction in the numbers of households accepted as being owed the main rehousing duty, and it remains to be seen if the same transpires in England.

For historic policy and practice reasons, both Scotland and Northern Ireland have much higher rates of homelessness acceptances per head of population than England and Wales. In Scotland this mainly reflects the wider definition of statutory homelessness since the abolition of the 'priority need' criterion in 2012, which meant that virtually all homeless households (not just families with children and 'vulnerable' adults) became entitled to the full rehousing duty. Towards the end of 2019 further reforms were implemented, relating to local authorities' duty to assess whether households have made themselves 'intentionally' homeless through deliberate action or inaction. Scottish local authorities now have a power, but not a duty, to investigate intentionality, and Scottish ministers are also expected to make an order restricting the operation of the 'local connection' referral rules within the next year. These changes are intended to reduce the barriers to homeless people exercising their statutory rights and of course their impact is yet to be felt; but it is unlikely to match the dramatic effects of the abolition of priority need.

In Northern Ireland the total number of homelessness *presentations* has been virtually static over the past few years, but 'full duty applicant' cases (i.e. homeless acceptances) have been steadily rising, increasing by 26 per cent since 2009/10. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive's practice of processing rehousing applications of people affected by ill health and occupying unsuitable housing via

the homelessness legislation rather than through the 'normal' allocations system significantly contributes to the historically high recorded incidence of statutory homelessness in Northern Ireland compared with the rest of the UK.

### Action to prevent homelessness

Across the UK, the importance of more flexible and informal homelessness 'prevention' or 'relief' interventions, sometimes termed 'Housing Options', has been growing for almost two decades. In England the implementation of the HRA now embeds this approach in the main statutory framework, as had already happened in Wales from 2015 under part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 (HWA).

The HRA, which came into force in April 2018, with 'new burdens' funding of £72.7 million, introduced new local authority prevention and relief duties owed to all eligible households which are homeless or at risk. Crucially, these new duties apply regardless of 'priority need' status, and thus are owed to (non-vulnerable) single person households as well as families with children.

While an official evaluation of HRA 2017 is ongoing, a number of early assessments are available. For example, the feedback from local authorities in the annual *Homelessness Monitor* survey around six months after the legislation came into force was largely positive, emphasising the favourable 'culture' change it had precipitated, with almost two-thirds (62 per cent) of councils indicating that it had helped to enable a more 'person-centred approach'. A similar proportion of councils (65 per cent) saw the Act as having had positive effects for single homeless people in particular. There was, however, widespread concern about the burden imposed by the record-keeping and monitoring requirements embedded in the new legislation. A survey conducted by the Local Government Association (LGA) similarly found that the most significant implementation challenge for councils was operating the new 'H-CLIC' statistical return.<sup>5</sup>

Though caution is required as the new statutory system beds down, 'experimental' official homelessness statistics from its first year of operation indicate that significant numbers of 'non-priority' people are now receiving material assistance

under the new prevention or relief duties. In the second half of 2018, local authorities accepted 91 per cent of all applicants as being owed one of these duties, 65 per cent of whom were adults without dependent children who would not previously have been helped unless they could meet an exacting standard of 'vulnerability'.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, and crucially, analysis of the data for October-December 2018 indicates that 58 per cent of households owed the prevention duty, and 42 per cent of those owed a relief duty, were helped to secure accommodation.

If sustained or improved upon, these sorts of results would indicate significantly improved service responses and outcomes for single homeless people as a direct result of the HRA, notwithstanding the oft-made (and valid) point that the legislation does not in itself resolve the acute shortage of affordable private and social rented housing in many areas.<sup>7</sup> Recent Crisis-funded research found that in 94 per cent of areas across Great Britain, one in five (or fewer) privately rented homes are affordable within local housing allowance rates to single people, couples, or families with one or two children.<sup>8</sup>

One key area of concern with the HRA was its provisions that enable local authorities to end these duties because the applicant had 'deliberately and unreasonably refused to cooperate'. But use of these powers appears to have been very rare, affecting only around 0.4 per cent of all applicants. As already noted, the number of main duty homelessness acceptances has declined sharply since the HRA regime was introduced, though if Wales serves as an example, we might see these acceptance figures bounce back up again before they settle down to a level well below the pre-2018 numbers.

The prevention-orientated statutory regime instituted by the HWA 2014 in Wales has, from the start, enjoyed a considerable measure of support across both statutory and voluntary sectors, and a positive official evaluation has been published.<sup>9</sup> Subsequent legal changes, in December 2019, mean that with respect to most homeless families with children and young people under 21, Welsh local authorities can no longer apply the 'intentionality' test to restrict access to settled housing. The Welsh Government has also commissioned a review on amending the priority need test or abolishing it altogether.<sup>10</sup>

In Scotland, the 'Housing Options' prevention approach was introduced in 2010 as part of efforts to deliver on the abolition of priority need by 2012 and the commitment that all those assessed as unintentionally homeless would be entitled to settled accommodation. The PREVENT1 monitoring system, which began in 2014/15, aims to calibrate the resulting activity. There has been a one-third fall in the cases recorded under this system in the four years to 2018/19. As noted in earlier editions of the *Review*, this is most likely due to changed practices on the part of Scottish local authorities rather than being indicative of any underlying easing in homelessness pressures. Dramatic variations both between Scottish local authorities, and over time, cast doubt on the reliability of the PREVENT1 data as a means of gauging homelessness pressures, at least at present.

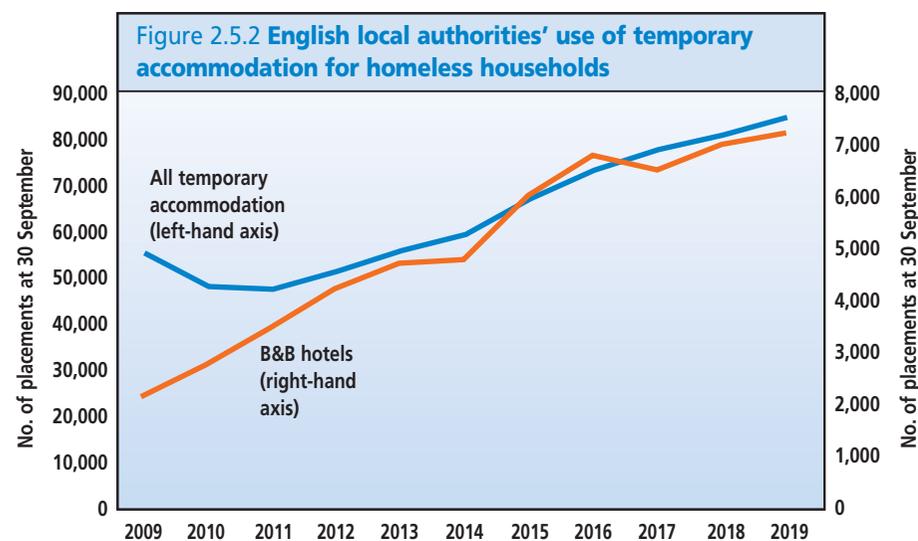
The Scottish Government's commitments in its Ending Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan, published in 2018<sup>11</sup> and backed by a £50 million fund, have continued to be followed through in 2019. A key implementation mechanism is local authority five-year Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans, with £15 million being made available to support the development of these plans and enable local authorities to reduce their use of temporary accommodation.<sup>12</sup> The Scottish Government has also committed up to £6.5 million over the next three years to support the Housing First Scotland pathfinder programme in five cities in partnership with Social Bite and other charities. A Scotland Prevention Review Group has been convened by Crisis, on the invitation of the Scottish Government, to bring forward proposals to extend more robust homelessness prevention duties to local authorities and other public bodies.<sup>13</sup> A consultation paper on improving temporary accommodation has been published,<sup>14</sup> and an updated version of the Homelessness Code of Guidance has been issued ahead of a more thoroughgoing overhaul.<sup>15</sup>

Northern Ireland's current 2017-22 homelessness strategy has a strong preventative focus, and a Housing Options-style 'Housing Solutions and Support' model was fully rolled-out by March 2018.<sup>16</sup> If trends in Northern Ireland had moved towards those in the rest of the UK, we would have expected to see an immediate and sharp reduction in statutory homelessness acceptances after the introduction of this new preventative model. So far, however, this does not appear to have materialised.

## Temporary accommodation placements for those accepted as homeless

Since bottoming out in 2010/11, homeless placements in temporary accommodation (TA) are rising remorselessly in England, despite the fall in homelessness acceptances. The total again rose by five per cent year-on-year and at June 2019 was over 86,000 – 79 per cent above its low point eight years ago (see Figure 2.5.2). With the implementation of the HRA it was hoped that the trajectory would slow down, but this has not yet happened, though trends in TA do often lag behind those in acceptances. London continues to account for two-thirds of the total number of TA placements at any one point in time (57,000 as at June 2019).

Reported TA expenditure by local authorities is also growing quickly, totalling almost £1.1 billion in the year to March 2019, a 78 per cent rise in just five years. A London Assembly report in May 2019 highlighted that the biggest TA spending is by Newham (£61 million in 2017/18) but that the largest increase was in Hackney, whose TA expenditure doubled in just five years.<sup>17</sup> The growing pressure



Source: MHCLG statutory homelessness statistics. Note: 2019 figures for 30 June.

reflects shrinkage in suitable social housing options and the impact of benefit restrictions that severely limit access to the PRS in many areas.

The bulk of TA placements are in self-contained housing in England (now only 20 per cent is non-self-contained). However, 7,110 households were living in bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation, an increase of 3.2 per cent from 6,890 at the same time in 2018, and 246 per cent higher than in 2009. Signs of stress are also evident in the levels of out-of-borough TA use in England. As at June 2019 such placements numbered 23,430, 86 per cent of these from London boroughs. At 27 per cent of the national total of TA placements, this is substantial although the proportion has stayed steady for the past few years.

After a very marked increase in the years to 2010, Scotland's TA placements have since remained in the range 10-11,000 households at any one time. As of March 2019, there were 10,989 households in TA in Scotland, a similar number to the previous year. Most placements are in ordinary social housing stock (around 60 per cent), and a minority (25 per cent in March 2019) involve 'non-self-contained accommodation' within hostels or B&B (though this does mean that the proportion of non-self-contained provision is higher than in England). Use of B&B peaked recently in 2018 and has since fallen slightly. On average, households spent just under six months in TA in Scotland in 2018/19, but for 14 per cent of statutorily homeless households the period spent was over a year. Average length of stay in TA also varies markedly between local authorities, ranging from a couple of months in lower pressure authorities (like North Ayrshire) to around eight months in high pressure areas (like East Lothian, but also remote authorities such as Shetland).

In Wales, the downward trend in TA placements seen in the period 2012-2015 has subsequently reversed. After a substantial drop in 2015 following the significant legislative change that year, TA placements grew again. At the end of March 2019, there were 2,226 households in TA, an increase of eight per cent on the number in March 2018. This is the highest figure at the end of any quarter since the legislative change in April 2015. Cardiff and Newport were the authorities making most use of TA. Given the success of up-front homelessness prevention efforts (in 2018/19,

68 per cent of households threatened with homelessness were officially recorded as having had this averted), a reduced 'inflow' of cases might have been expected to produce a fall in TA placements. The absence of such a positive effect so far appears to reflect underlying structural pressures driving homelessness in Wales.

Use of temporary accommodation in Northern Ireland remains relatively high, in part because of high levels of acceptances, as discussed above. The overall number of placements has oscillated within a fairly narrow band over recent years.

Nevertheless, the figure for 2017/18 – the latest year for which published data are currently available – was the highest of the decade, at just over 3,000.<sup>18</sup> In a new statistical series, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive reports a breakdown of temporary accommodation placements over a six-month period, according to the type of housing concerned. This shows that bed and breakfast, hostels and similar forms of non-self-contained accommodation accounted for more than half of the 1,629 total placements made in the first and second quarters of 2018/19.

Private single lets account for the bulk of placements at a point in time (reflecting the fact that such placements are, on average, of longer duration).<sup>19</sup> Even so, of the 2,065 placements as at 10 January 2019, some 586 – more than a quarter of the total – were living in non-self-contained premises. Within this cohort, almost half (45 per cent) had been accommodated as such for more than six months, with a quarter (26 per cent) resident in accommodation of this kind for more than a year.

### Rough sleeping

The most extreme manifestation of homelessness, rough sleeping, has maintained a high political profile over the past year, with the Conservative manifesto for the 2019 election promising to 'end the blight of rough sleeping by the end of the next Parliament' and a similar promise being made by the Scottish Government.

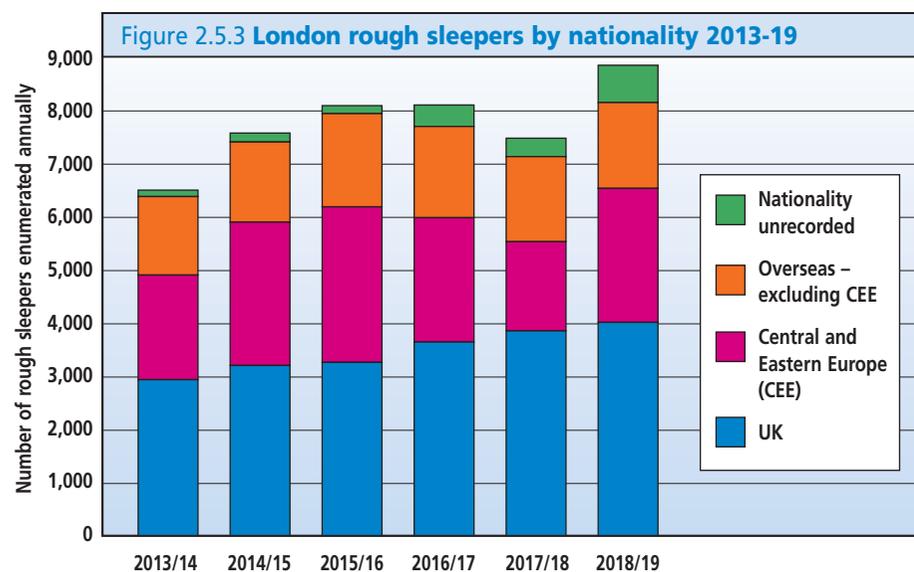
In England, the previous government's target was to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027. It published a Rough Sleeping Strategy in August 2018 and then a delivery plan in December 2018 containing 61 completed or planned

activities,<sup>20</sup> and backed by new funding of £76 million distributed via a targeted Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI). Yet the bigger picture is one of ongoing real-terms cuts to services dealing with street homelessness and for single homeless people more generally. Research for St Mungo's and Homeless Link found that nearly £1 billion less was spent on single homelessness in 2017/18 than in 2008/9 – a fall of more than 50 per cent.<sup>21</sup> This was entirely accounted for by reduced spending on Supporting People activity – which includes a wide range of housing support to help single homeless people and other vulnerable groups maintain tenancies. Overall, more than £5 billion less has been spent on single homelessness between 2008/9 and 2017/18 than would have been spent had funding continued at 2008/9 levels.

As reported in last year's *Review*, the autumn 2018 national rough sleeper enumeration marked the first reduction in the national total for a decade. Notwithstanding that the England-wide total remained 165 per cent higher than in 2010, it fell back by two per cent on 2017. An internal evaluation of the RSI has claimed success, in that the reduction in rough sleeping has been disproportionately high (19 per cent) in those areas which have received RSI funding.

The autumn 2019 rough sleeping figures, released as the *Review* went to press, show a fall of 411, or nine per cent, compared with 2018. However, the most robust and comprehensive rough sleeper monitoring data in the UK remain those collected routinely by the GLA's CHAIN system managed by St Mungo's, in London only.<sup>22</sup> CHAIN statistics indicate that the numbers of people seen sleeping rough in the capital rose by 18 per cent between 2017/18 and 2018/19 – from 7,484 to 8,855.

As Figure 2.5.3 shows, just under half of those seen rough sleeping in London in 2018/19 were from the UK, a drop from 54 per cent in 2017/18. Almost one-third (31 per cent) were from Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, representing a substantial proportionate increase as compared to the year before (24 per cent). In terms of absolute numbers, the cohort of CEE nationals seen sleeping rough in London increased by 50 per cent between 2017/18 and 2018/19, while the number of UK nationals increased by four per cent.



Source: GLA/CHAIN 'Street to Home' monitoring reports.

CHAIN-equivalent information is not available for the rest of the UK. The Scottish Government monitors the scale of rough sleeping through the statutory homelessness returns. Some 1,643 people applying as homeless in 2018/19 (4.5 per cent of all applicants) reported having slept rough the night preceding their application, with 2,876 applicant households including a member who had slept rough in the previous three months (eight per cent). The current level is about half what it was a decade ago for Scotland as a whole. Authorities reporting the highest levels of rough sleeping linked to homelessness applications are Glasgow, Edinburgh and West Lothian. The numbers sleeping rough on any given night will be much lower. The *Homeless Monitor Scotland 2019* made an estimate for 2017 combining a range of data sources. It suggests the annual number of rough sleepers in Scotland was about 5,300, with a nightly snapshot estimate of just over 700.

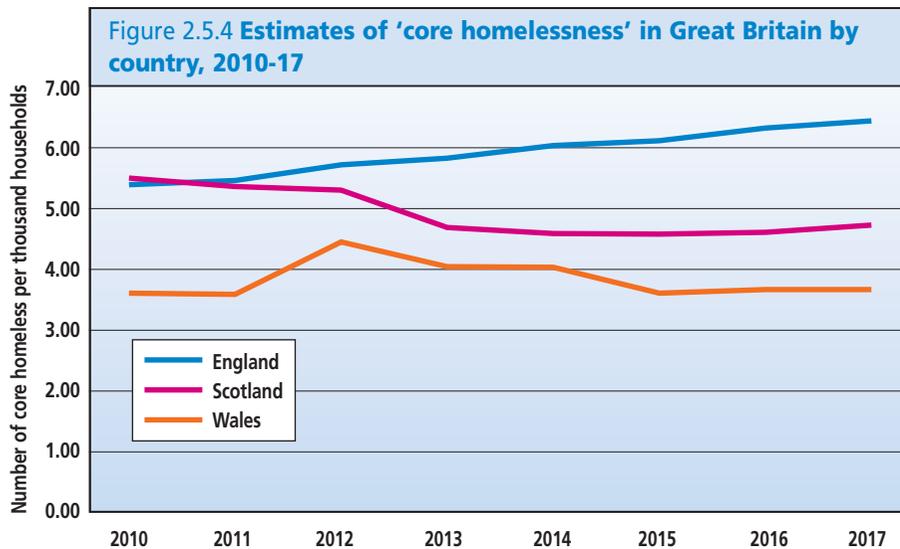
An annual rough sleeping monitoring exercise in Wales has now been running for five years. The latest results estimated that 405 people were sleeping rough over a

two-week period in October 2019, up 17 per cent on the 2018 figure, but with trends varying across Wales.<sup>23</sup> The campaign group Housing Matters Wales claims that £37 million has been cut from homelessness support services over the last six years.<sup>24</sup> The Welsh Government has established a Homelessness Action Group, whose first report describes the situation as a 'rough sleeping emergency' and makes various recommendations for urgent action.<sup>25</sup>

There has been a perceived rise in rough sleeping in Northern Ireland in recent years. This perception is partly related to a visible increase in 'street activity' including begging and street drinking. However, the lack of any historical series data makes it difficult to judge whether rough sleeping in Northern Ireland is, in fact, changing in scale. Drawing on street count data for Belfast, Derry/Londonderry and Newry, as well as estimates for other areas, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive put the November 2018 number of rough sleepers across the jurisdiction at 38. However, as elsewhere in the UK, independent sources of evidence suggest that the overall scale of rough sleeping in Northern Ireland is substantially greater than indicated by street counts. Triangulating data from two survey sources, the *Homelessness Monitor Northern Ireland 2020* estimated that the typical nightly number of rough sleepers in Northern Ireland was around 250.

### 'Core homelessness' and sofa surfing

In research undertaken for Crisis, Heriot-Watt University has developed the concept of 'core homelessness', which focuses on people who are in the most extreme homeless situations.<sup>26</sup> This includes people who are rough sleeping, but also those who are: sleeping in cars, tents, public transport ('quasi rough sleeping'); squatting or occupying non-residential buildings; staying in hostels, refuges and shelters; in unsuitable temporary accommodation (e.g. B&B, non-self-contained, out-of-area placement), and 'sofa-surfing'. As measurements of core homelessness are less dependent on policy and legal arrangements than officially sourced statistics, it provides an especially valuable vehicle for comparing the position in the three countries in Great Britain, and reviewing trends over time.



Source: Crisis, Homelessness Projections: Core homelessness in Great Britain.  
 Note: See the original publication for details of original source data and calculations of 'core homelessness'.

The latest core homelessness analysis estimated that there were more than 170,000 families and individuals across Great Britain experiencing these worst forms of homelessness on a typical night in 2017.<sup>27</sup> This represents a 23 per cent rise in the absolute number of people affected, and a 19 per cent increase in the rate per 1,000 households across GB since 2010. As Figure 2.5.4 shows, rates of core homelessness were almost identical in Scotland and England in 2010 but have since diverged markedly – steadily worsening in the latter, while improving then stabilising in the former. Meantime, levels of core homelessness in Wales spiked around 2012, but have since returned to 2010 levels, and have throughout remained substantially lower than in either of the other two jurisdictions.

The largest category of core homelessness is sofa-surfing, defined as being forced to stay with a friend or extended family member on a sofa or a floor on a short-term or insecure basis because there is nowhere else to go. Affecting 71,400 (42 per cent of all those in a core homeless situation), sofa surfing is a very common but poorly understood and often invisible form of homelessness. However, new

research by Crisis, based on interviews with 114 people with current or recent experience of sofa surfing, shows how a 'permanent impermanence' characterises the lives of those affected: in the preceding 12 months, six out of ten people with experience of sofa surfing had moved up to four times, while two-fifths had done so more than five times.<sup>28</sup>

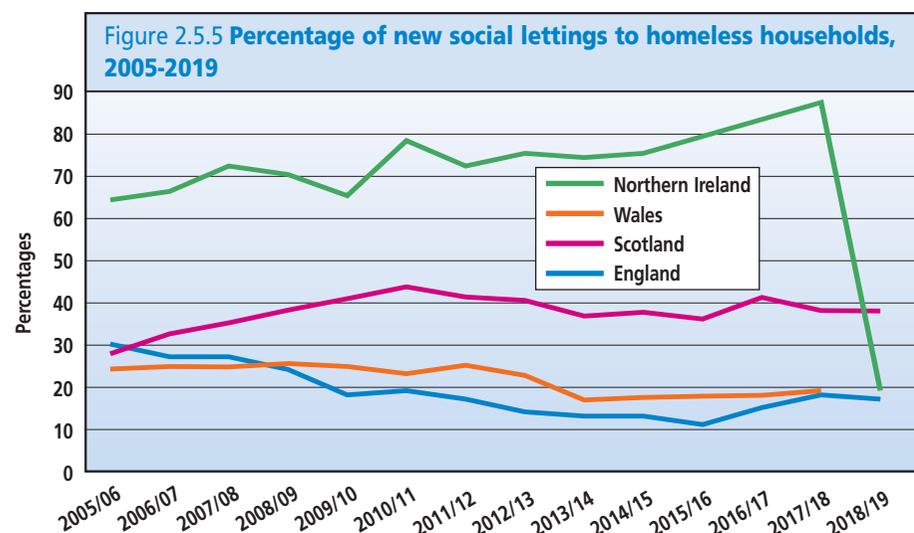
Sofa surfing is detrimental to mental and physical health, with sleeping on a sofa or a floor meaning poor and uncomfortable sleep, no private space, nor the ability to have a personal routine. Six out of ten of those interviewed by Crisis were locked out of the premises during the day. Interestingly, almost all of the research participants (93 per cent) had approached a local authority for housing support yet in fewer than half of cases (46 per cent), where people had engaged with the council prior to sofa surfing, was their new housing status recognised. Crisis argue that in many cases their homelessness could have been prevented.

### Lettings to homeless households

The proportion of social housing lettings going to homeless households normally varies considerably between England and Wales on the one hand and Scotland and Northern Ireland on the other (see Figure 2.5.5). Percentages in England and Wales are similar: England has slipped slightly to 18 per cent, while that in Wales has slightly increased (20 per cent). The higher proportion of lettings used to resolve homelessness in Scotland continues to reflect the extension of the main homelessness duty to all unintentionally homeless households, but for the moment has stabilised. We would expect to see this percentage rise as a result of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans discussed above.

In Northern Ireland, there has been a dramatic fall in the stated proportion of lettings going to homeless applications, despite the continued practice of using the homelessness route to rehouse older people. This coincides with changed methods of data collection, however, so the reasons for the fall warrant further investigation.

In the last *Homelessness Monitor England*, it was reported that ongoing shifts in housing association tenancy allocation policies and practices are perceived by local



Source: Compendium tables 95, 96b, 97 and 100-102.

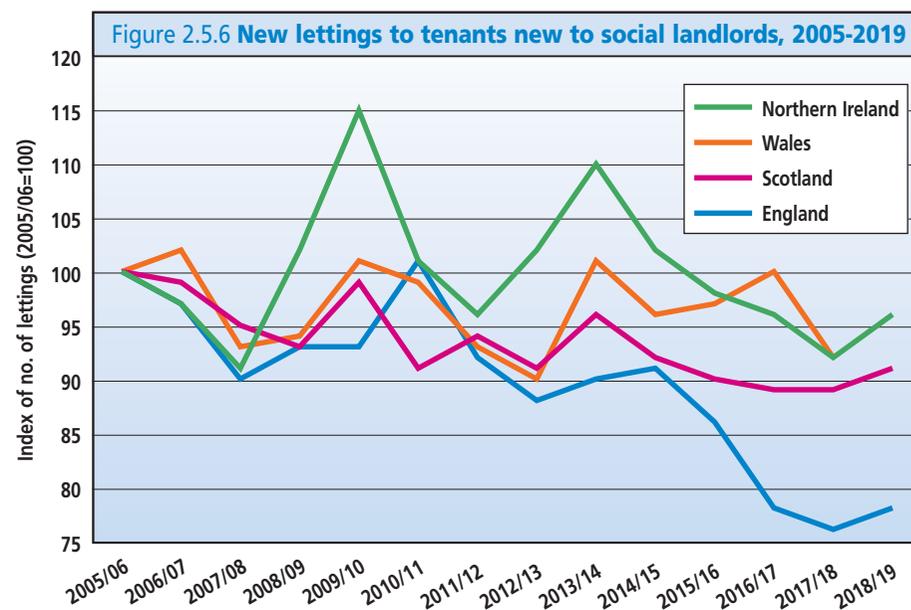
authorities as increasingly affecting their ability to resolve homelessness. Nearly half of council respondents (47 per cent) reported that problematic changes of this kind had recently taken place among housing associations in their area. An even larger proportion (64 per cent) reported that social landlord 'housing affordability' or 'financial capability' checks (usually imposed by housing associations) were making it more difficult for homeless households to access tenancies.

This said, while local authorities are very critical of housing association practices with regard to allocations to homeless households, official data indicate that there are some questions for local authorities to answer too. In light of the decline in absolute numbers of social housing lettings (see below) and rising homelessness, it is reasonable to expect the proportion of lets to homeless households would rise sharply, but in fact the reverse seems to have happened. Whilst the data are illustrative rather than fully robust, they suggest that the proportion of English council lettings to new tenants that are allocated to homeless households has been 24-25 per cent for the last three years, while the equivalent housing association share has remained relatively steady at 22-23 per cent.

In light of these pressures and controversies, and the ongoing challenges of welfare reform, the Chartered Institute of Housing has called for a range of reforms to ensure that social housing organisations are able to meet and balance their allocation objectives. CIH identifies a key tension between housing organisations' objectives to accommodate those in need on the one hand and ensure sustainable tenancies on the other. Central government action is seen as essential to resolving this tension, including ending the right to buy, increasing investment in social house building, ensuring LHA rates cover private rent levels, reversals of some of aspects of the welfare reform programme, and adequate funding for housing-related support.<sup>29</sup>

### Lettings by social landlords to new tenants

Figure 2.5.6 shows trends in social landlords' lettings to new tenants (i.e. lettings not going to a landlord's existing tenants, and which address new need, including homelessness). Although too much should not be read into annual changes, England continues to experience a fairly sharp decline: lettings to new tenants are now at a little more than three-quarters of their 2005/06 level although they have



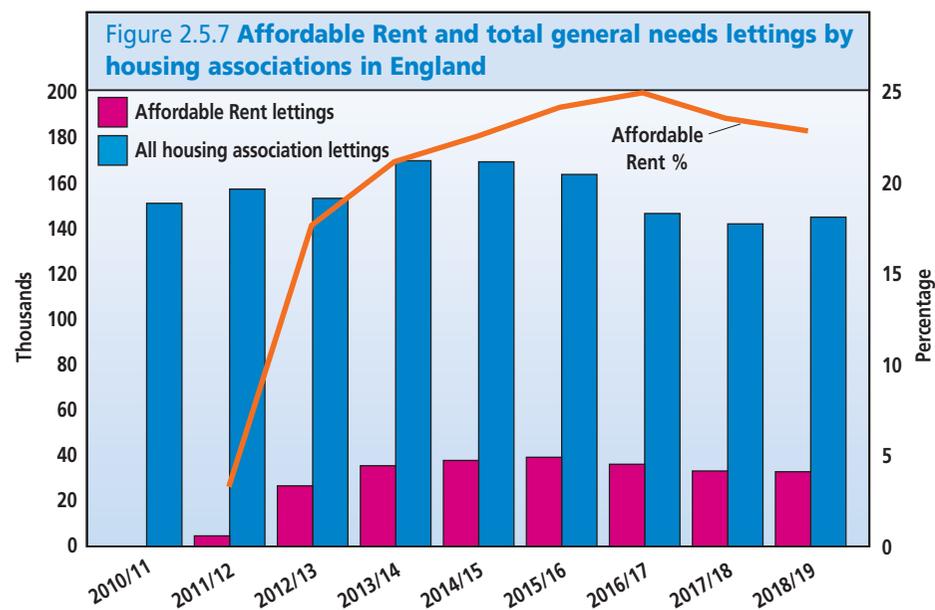
Source: Compendium tables 97, 98, 103, 100-102.

now stabilised. In Northern Ireland and Scotland such lettings have revived slightly, while in Wales where lettings to new tenants rose above their 2005/06 level in 2016/17 they have now fallen again (albeit there is a one-year time lag in the Welsh figures).

### New lettings at Affordable Rents in England

The role of tenancies let at Affordable Rents (AR) has continued to grow. Since their introduction, housing associations have made some 265,000 new lettings at AR. Add the relatively small number of new local authority AR lettings (running at about 3,000 a year), and the total reached 277,000 in 2018/19.

Figure 2.5.7 shows the number of new social lettings for general needs housing made annually by housing associations since 2010/11 and, within these, the number of those let at AR since they were first used in 2011/12 (local authorities could use AR from 2012).



Source: MHCLG Social housing lettings in England, April 2018 to March 2019.  
 Note: General needs lettings only.

The annual number of new general needs lettings at AR by all social landlords peaked in 2015/16 at almost 42,000, but has since fallen by about 14 per cent. Despite this, for six years AR lettings have formed at least one in five of all general needs lettings by associations (but only two per cent of those by local authorities). As pointed out in the previous chapter, while new build for AR continues to increase, conversions of social lettings to AR are now in sharp decline. It therefore seems likely that AR lettings have peaked generally, although they will clearly remain a significant feature of housing association allocations.

### Use of fixed-term tenancies in England

The use of fixed-term tenancies (FTTs) by social housing providers appears to have stabilised over the past year, after a period of significant growth following their introduction by the Localism Act 2011. In 2018/19, 18 per cent of new social housing tenancies were FTTs, around the same level as 2017/18. Local authorities are far less likely to use FTTs than housing associations – only four per cent of new LA tenancies were FTTs (a drop from eight per cent in the previous year) compared to 24 per cent for housing associations. General needs lettings are much more likely to be on a fixed-term basis (21 per cent of lets in 2018/19) than supported housing lettings (only 12 per cent), where licence agreements are most common (45 per cent of tenancies). The decline in use of FTTs by LAs is likely to reflect the dropping of proposals to make FTTs mandatory for the majority of new local authority tenants.

### Key reading

Crisis (with support from JRF) publishes the *Homelessness Monitor* for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (see [www.crisis.org.uk/pages/homelessnessmonitor.html](http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/homelessnessmonitor.html)). The *Review* draws heavily from the various editions of the *Monitor*, with permission from Crisis.

### Notes and references

Where statistics in the text are from the latest official publications (e.g. *Statutory homelessness and homelessness prevention and relief*, *Social housing lettings in England*, rough sleeping counts, etc.) sources are not included in the references below.

- 1 See [www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2019-03-11/homelessness-kills](http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2019-03-11/homelessness-kills)
- 2 See [www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsofhomelesspeopleinenglandandwales/2018](http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsofhomelesspeopleinenglandandwales/2018)
- 3 Aldridge, R. (2019) 'Homelessness a barometer of justice', in *The Lancet Public Health*, 5(1), e2-e3; Aldridge, R., *et al* (2019) 'Causes of death among homeless people: a population-based cross-sectional study of linked hospitalisation and mortality data in England', in *Wellcome Open Research*, 4(49), 4.
- 4 See <https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/tools/GSS-Homelessness-Interactive-Tool/>
- 5 Local Government Association (2019) *Homelessness Reduction Act Survey 2018 – Survey Report March 2019*. London: LGA.
- 6 Davies, L., Johnston, C., & Buchanan, T. (2019) 'Homelessness Reduction Act 2017: one year on', in *Legal Action*, July/August.
- 7 Cowan, D. (2019) 'Reducing homelessness or re-ordering the deckchairs?', in *Modern Law Review*, 82, 105-128.
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- 18 It should be noted that, in enumerating the throughput of placements during the cited financial years, the presentation of TA statistics in Northern Ireland differs from the more conventional 'stock' measure of placements in Great Britain – i.e. the number outstanding on a given date.
- 19 These are defined by DfC as follows: 'A single let is a private dwelling which is made available on a temporary basis to a homeless household while they are waiting for permanent rehousing. These dwellings are normally in the private rented sector.'
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- 22 Because this method enumerates people who have slept rough during a given period (financial year) the resulting figures cannot be directly compared with the 'point in time' snapshot numbers produced under the MHCLG national monitoring methodology as described above.
- 23 See <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2020-02/national-rough-sleeper-count-november-2019-813.pdf>
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- 27 There are significant limitations in the data sources available and methods used to routinely record some of these elements of homelessness. Therefore, to overcome these the research has had to draw on and 'triangulate' a range of different sources to produce estimates, which rely in part on assumptions as well as hard data.
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