

One in 25 people homeless in some areas of England

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A recent study carried out by the homeless charity Shelter calculates there are now 268,000 people in England classed as homeless. The figure for the whole of the UK stands at 307,000.

Even these figures are a conservative estimate, with many more going unrecorded. Often described as the hidden face of homelessness, they include those who are “sofa surfing”, having to move from one place to the next.

The number of homeless has risen by four percent since 2016. Legally this includes not just rough sleepers, the visible aspect of homelessness with people sleeping out on the streets, but also single people in hostels, and those in temporary accommodation.

According to Shelter, this would mean that at least one in every 200 people across the population are considered homeless. This involves an estimated 4,100 people sleeping out on the streets, 242,000 in temporary accommodation, and another 21,000 staying in hostels, or being housed temporarily by social services.

London has the highest number of homeless people in the country, and accounts for 31 of the worst hotspots, including the borough of Newham, with one in 25 people being recorded as homeless. However, other areas have been identified across the country including Brighton, with one in 69, and Birmingham, one in 88.

In the last year, the number of homeless people has risen by 13,000. Local authorities, who process homelessness applications, record the reason statutory homeless households have lost their last settled home.

The main cause is the loss of a private tenancy. Three in ten statutory homelessness applications are due to this, and these numbers have soared since cuts to housing benefit were introduced in 2011. The introduction of the Local Housing Allowance that

applies to private tenancies has placed a ceiling on what rent will be paid on tenancies in particular areas, and has led to many people being unable to find a place they can afford to rent.

The rise in rental costs places enormous financial burdens on people trying to find accommodations. In London, rents in the private rented sector have soared, going up by 24 percent since 2010, eight times the average rise in earnings.

Local authorities face rising financial demands as they are left to foot the bill for the increase in homelessness. Local authorities are housing the equivalent of an extra secondary school’s worth of homeless children in temporary accommodation every month.

In 2015/16, the majority of the £1.1 billion spent on housing was used for providing temporary accommodation. That has increased by 39 percent in real terms since 2010/11, from £606 million to £845 million, and over the same period, spending on other services, prevention, ongoing support and administration has fallen by 9 percent, from £334 million to £303 million.

In August, the homeless charity Crisis reported that it estimates that by 2041 the number of homeless people in Britain will have doubled to 575,000. The numbers of people estimated to be sleeping rough will quadruple, from a 2016 figure of 9,100, to 41,000.

Those placed in bed and breakfast accommodation by local authorities are expected to rise from 19,300 to 117,500.

Rising homelessness is often associated with urban, inner city areas of the country, yet it is becoming a growing problem in rural areas. A study carried out by the Institute for Public Policy Research, found that in 2015/16, 6,270 households were accepted as homeless

in England, across 91 largely, rural local authorities. This accounts for, on average, 1.3 people out of every 1000 households.

In sixteen of these predominantly rural areas, the figure rose to 2.0 in every 1,000 households. This is a higher rate than for urban areas for 2010/11. The figures for rough sleeping in largely rural areas increased by 52 percent between 2010 to 2016.

The rise in rural homelessness is not too dissimilar from urban homelessness, often associated with family breakdown, and the end of a short hold assured tenancy.

Many cases of homelessness, including rough sleeping, are hidden due to people bedding down for the night in places not in the public view—barns, out houses, parked cars, tents, and fields. It is likely that the numbers are in fact higher as they are harder to find and record.

Rural areas face specific problems, associated with communities often being isolated, having limited transport infrastructure, not able to effectively deliver services to homeless people and with restraints being placed on overstretched budgets.

These problems are exacerbated by the lack of housing supply and affordability, with homes in rural areas being less affordable than homes in urban areas. The growth of second homes and holiday lets are another factor contributing to the lack of supply. The figures for Devon in 2016 show that the number of second homes accounted for three percent of the total housing stock, 12,000 homes. This pressure on local housing stock has led to many local residents not being able to find anywhere to live.

The problem has been exacerbated by the lack of any major home building programme over the last 30 years. At the same time there have been major cuts to services working to prevent homelessness and a lack of decent temporary accommodation.

These cuts have been carried out with the complicity of local Labour authorities across the country. Despite all the hand wringing from Labour MPs such as Jim McMahon Labour MP for West Royton, who said, “This is a crisis of the government's own making”, one would have to ask, which government is he referring to?

According to government figures, the number of additional dwellings built between 2016/17 was

217,350, an increase of 15 percent on last year. This included 41,530 dwellings built in England that were classed as affordable, a figure well below the average for the past ten years.

Following last week's budget statement, the government announced a further 300,000 homes a year to be built. Not even a fifth of these homes will be affordable, condemning many people to insecure accommodation for the rest of their lives.



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