

Homeless thrown back onto the streets as UK lockdown ends

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Thousands of homeless people will be thrown out of the temporary accommodation they were given when Britain's COVID-19 lockdown was declared in March. As soon as Boris Johnson announced his "back-to-work" drive, the government made clear that funding for emergency accommodation will end.

At the time of the lockdown, Johnson et al., already facing widespread public anger at their "herd immunity" policy and refusal to implement any measures to contain the pandemic, did not feel able to ignore concerns that those living on the streets and in cramped hostel accommodation could not realistically practice socially distancing or isolate themselves if infected. Grave warnings were made that the virus would rip through the homeless population, with devastating effect.

Local Authorities across Britain placed 14,500 rough sleepers in temporary accommodation, utilising hotels to prevent some of the most vulnerable from dying on the streets—partially funded with £3.2 million from central government.

Following the ending of lockdown, the Tories feel free to abandon the pose of concern for the fate of the homeless and dump them back where they came from. Funding for the scheme, named "Everyone In," is due to end amid a growing likelihood of a second wave of infections triggered by Johnson's homicidal back-to-work drive. Instead of "Everyone In," it is now "Everyone Out."

The homelessness charity Crisis called the action to house rough sleepers extraordinary, adding, "This has demonstrated that when the political will is there it is possible to end homelessness."

Crisis predicts that ending the scheme will produce a massive rise in rough sleeping. Chief Executive Jon Sparkes said, "There is still a deadly virus out there and, while it's to be commended that over 5,400 people have been given safe temporary accommodation, the job

simply isn't finished."

The surge in homelessness and rough sleeping can be seen across many towns and cities throughout the UK, so the impact of the scheme was dramatic. In Manchester, 1,310 rough sleepers were provided with somewhere to live—50 percent higher than the numbers originally forecast. These were put up in an assortment of hotels and guest houses. Many had their own room and three meals a day for the first time in months and even years.

Having somewhere to live enabled mental health and addiction workers to go in and start working with some of the most entrenched rough sleepers, who have struggled in the past to engage with services. It enabled some to start to move on from the streets.

The actual cost of doing so massively outstripped the funding provided by the Tories. During the pandemic, according to the *Manchester Evening News*, the 10 councils that make up the Greater Manchester Combined Authority alone spent £2 million on accommodating homeless people needing to self-isolate.

Polly Neate, CEO of the housing charity Shelter said, "We cannot allow all the progress made or that safety net to be quietly stripped back now with councils left to pick up the pieces."

The government has countered that it has provided councils with an additional £3.2 million funding to combat COVID-19. But this truly miserly figure is meant to cover a wide range of problems associated with the pandemic, not exclusively homelessness.

Since the onset of the pandemic, many more people have become at risk of losing their homes. Economic forecasts for post COVID-19 are bleak, with the expectation that there will be a recession far greater than anything seen before.

A massive 8.9 million workers have been furloughed via the government's Job Retention Scheme, with double the number of people having to claim benefits compared

to the pre-crisis level. Tens of thousands of workers have already been made redundant by companies.

The largest recruitment firm in the UK, Reed, predicts that the coronavirus crisis could lead to a 15 percent increase in unemployment and 5 million people being out of work. Reed have seen the number of jobs advertised drop by two-thirds in the last two months, while job applications are on the increase. Speaking to the BBC, CEO James Reed said some people had predicted unemployment could reach levels not seen since the 1980s: "I fear it could be a lot worse than that, it might be more like the 1930s."

The Resolution Foundation published a report in May outlining the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis. Despite the furlough scheme, its findings show the largest fall in perceptions of financial wellbeing since the survey began in 2009. Households across the UK report a severe drop in earnings since April and job insecurity figures not seen since the financial crash in 2008.

Crisis carried out a survey of 150 charities and organisations in England, Scotland and Wales. More than half reported a rise in people seeking help during the lockdown. The survey found that some people had already lost their homes because their jobs have gone.

Cash-strapped local authorities will be faced with increased demand as they have to try and deal with those returning to the streets, having been forced out of hotels, as well as new homelessness applications.

Crisis estimates the cost of housing and providing support for those currently in accommodation for another 12 months alone would be £282 million. This is a drop in the financial ocean in comparison to the hundreds of billions of pounds the government have spent during the pandemic via quantitative easing and other schemes to prop up the financial system in the interests of the super-rich.



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