

UNITED KINGDOM



Across the UK, local authorities have a duty to collect data on activities fulfilled under homelessness legislation. Both the data and legislation vary between England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

The past year has seen a mixture of statistical outcomes across each of the countries. However, the sector has become a topic of great interest on the political agendas in England, Scotland and Wales, each with significant changes made over the past 12 months. Here is an overview of each country.

ENGLAND

KEY STATISTICS

The following statistics are from the England Homeless Monitor 2018 produced by Crisis.

At just over 59,000, annual homelessness acceptances were some 19,000 higher across England in 2016/17 than in 2009/10.

With a rise of 2 per cent over the past year, acceptances by Local Authorities now stand 48 per cent above their 2009/10 low point.

Statistics routinely collected by the CHAIN system similarly show London rough sleeping having more than doubled since 2010.

Since 2010/11 homeless placements in temporary accommodation have risen sharply, at twice the rate of homelessness acceptances; the overall national total rose by 8 per cent in the year to 31 March 2017, up 61 per cent on the low point six years earlier.

INCREASE/DECREASE IN NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

As can be seen in the key statistics, despite there being an improvement in political will to improve the lives of people who are homelessness across the UK, the figures remain high and in England are on the increase.

According to the Homelessness Monitor (England), the number of homeless families and individuals placed in

temporary accommodation jumped to 78,000 last year, an 8% rise on the year and a massive 60% rise since 2012. The number of homeless households placed in B&Bs – which are often cramped, unsuitable, and sometimes even dangerous – rose particularly quickly, with a 10% rise on the year. If trends continue as they are the research reveals that 100,000 households will be living in B&Bs, hostels and other temporary accommodation.

In England, the most robust and comprehensive rough sleeper monitoring data is collected by Greater London Authority's CHAIN system. The recent CHAIN report demonstrates there has been a substantial expansion in all forms of recorded homelessness since 2009/10, although for all indicators except the national rough sleeping estimates, the rate of increase has significantly slowed in the most recent financial year.

England continues to see an ongoing upward trend in (officially estimated) rough sleeper numbers in 2017, with the national total up by 169 per cent since 2010 and by 15 per cent since the previous year. Looking across the country, the numbers grew fastest in the North of England, up by 32 per cent - albeit on a small base. Over the longer term, however, increases have been particularly rapid in the South of England outside London – 194 per cent higher in 2017 than in 2010.

Since 2016, Government has required local authorities to provide some more detailed information about rough sleepers. In 2017, it is estimated that some 86 per cent of rough sleepers were men while just over a fifth (22%) were non-UK nationals. Of these, most (17% of all rough sleepers) were thought to be EU nationals.

CHANGE IN PROFILE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

Overall the profile of the statutory homelessness population remains fairly stable, but recent years show a steady increase in presentations to local authorities being made by young people (under 25 years).

The Youth Homelessness Databank published by Centrepont state that in 2016 / 17 60,673 young people

approached their local authorities as homeless, with 23,919 then assessed as homeless, 11,003 accepted as statutory homeless, and 27,404 received help in the form of prevention and relief. In line with the cause behind homelessness is relationship breakdowns.

There continues to be concerns about the rising homelessness amongst migrants. In 2017, it is estimated that just over a fifth (22%) of all rough sleepers were non-UK nationals. Of these, most (17% of all rough sleepers) were thought to be EU nationals. The highest concentration of people represented in these figures are within London and the majority (as with rough sleeping overall) are male.

Changes to the welfare system have third sector organisations expecting 'hidden homelessness' numbers to have increased too. Hidden homelessness affects people who may be considered homeless but whose situation is not 'visible' either on the streets or in official statistics. This includes concealed households, sharing households and overcrowded households.

POLICIES & STRATEGIES

2018 has seen some of the greatest progression in homelessness in England in the past 40 years, with the introduction of The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. This came into force 3rd April 2018.

The Act both modifies and expands the existing homelessness protection in a number of key ways:

Improved advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness.

Extension of the period 'threatened with homelessness' Under previous legislation, an applicant is only assessed as threatened with homelessness if they are likely to become homeless within 28 days; this is extended to 56 days.

The prevention of homelessness for all eligible people, regardless of priority need and intentionality. This should reduce single homelessness in particular over time, entitling people who are found to be homeless (or threatened with homelessness) to more tailored support from the housing authority, regardless of priority need and intentionality.

Introducing assessments and personalised housing plans, setting out the actions housing authorities and individuals will take to secure accommodation.

Encouraging public bodies to work together to prevent and relieve homelessness through a duty to refer. Under the Act, public bodies in England will have a duty to refer an individual's case (with consent) to a housing authority they identify. The duty provides an 'impetus to develop effective referral arrangements and accommodation pathways that involve all relevant agencies to provide appropriate jointly planned help and support to prevent homelessness.

Priority need covers various groups including households: with dependent children; who have a household member who is pregnant; if you are 16 or 17; if you are a care leaver 18 – 20; if someone in the household is classed as 'vulnerable' for example:

physical or learning disabilities

older age

mental health problems

fleeing domestic abuse or violence

time spent in care, prison or the armed forces

If someone is unhappy with the decision there is 21 days to appeal the outcome.

Alongside the Act, there is a Code of Guidance outlining how local authorities should exercise their homelessness functions in accordance with legislative changes.

REMARKS ON KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Positive

It is clear that homelessness has been given much greater importance both by the UK media and the English political agenda over the past year. All of the major party manifestos made mention of homelessness in the June 2017 election, and the Conservatives pledged to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminate it altogether by 2027.

The Introduction of the new Homeless Reduction Act and the supporting Guidance playing a large part to making headway towards this.

England has also established a high-level Rough Sleeping and Homelessness Reduction Taskforce supported by an expert Rough Sleeping Advisory Panel.

As a result of pressure from a number of organisations across the UK (including the Rock Trust, CIH, Crisis and the

National Housing Federation), March 2018 saw the UK Government do a U turn on housing benefit for 18 to 21-year olds. It had briefly implemented a change to regulations so that all 18 to 21-year-olds would no longer be entitled to claim support for housing costs under the new welfare system, this change restored the benefit entitlement, enabling young people to access housing benefits again.

Also, the funding of Supported Accommodation was expected to become devolved to Local Authorities from April 2020, causing concern with many organisations across the country; anticipating that homeless provisions would be lost amongst a number of other priorities covered by local authority areas would become lost and funding would be removed. As a result of a number of consultations it was announced that the funding will remain within the current welfare system and not be devolved as proposed.

Negative

The recent year has seen more positives than negatives in moves within homelessness in England. However, the changes resulting from Brexit remain unknown and unclear.

Both the UK and the EU have accepted that there will be a period of transition between the expiry of the two-year deadline under Article 50 and the UK's future outside of the European Union – the current position set out by the European Commission is that this period would last until the end of 2020. However, meantime, anecdotally we are already becoming very aware of there are negative impacts being seen.

Two areas regularly spoken of within the sector, where issues are increasing as a result of Brexit, are the recruitment of staff and an increase in cases of racism and xenophobia from the general public.

A recent report by Homeless Link and Crisis highlights some of the concerns include: a lack of clarity around the future makes it hard for the sector to plan for the changes, the rights and access for some groups is likely to (negatively) change in the future, the sector is likely to see challenges in retaining its EU workforce and volunteers – resulting in workforce shortages, workplace protections currently in place being removed or weakened, a period of no funding whilst EU funding stops and new funding begins, and a reduction of funding overall.

NORTHERN IRELAND

KEY STATISTICS

The following statistics are from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

In 2016-17 18,573 households presented as homeless 11,889 households (64%) were accepted as full duty applicants and 5,431 (29%) were rejected.

Single males (33%) and families (32%) made up the largest percentage of households presenting to the local authorities. Within the single males category, the highest numbers of presentations were made by people aged between 26 and 59, making up 4,479 of the cases.

INCREASE/DECREASE IN NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

In 2016-17, of the 18,573 households presenting as homeless, 11,889 households (64%) were accepted as full duty applicants and 5,431 (29%) were rejected. Of those households accepted as full duty applicants during the year 1,842 were discharged.

This compares to 18,628 households presenting as homeless to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in 2015-16.

According to the National Housing statistics, the reason for homeless applications is different from that of the rest of the UK:

22% Accommodation not reasonable

21% Sharing breakdown / family dispute

14% Loss of rented accommodation

9% Marital / relationship breakdown

8% Neighbourhood harassment

8% No accommodation in Northern Ireland

17% Other

Looking at the longer-term picture, there was an upward trend since 1999, with the number of households

presenting as homeless to the NI Housing Executive (the authority with statutory responsibility for homelessness), peaking in 2006/07 at 21,013 households, and then levelling off between 2006/07 to 2009/10. There was however a sharp increase from 18,664 in 2009/2010 to 20,158 in 2010/2011. In the following two years, the numbers of presenters decreased by 4% (2011-12, n=19737; 2012-13, n=19354).

CHANGE IN PROFILE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

The Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland 2012-17 refers to the “changing nature of the homeless population which includes ex-offenders, young people, older people, those leaving care and migrant workers. Increasing numbers of homeless people are reported to “have mental health and addiction problems and other complex needs and require intensive support.”

POLICIES & STRATEGIES

Northern Ireland has been without a functioning executive since January 2017 and remains the case October 2018. The current period of suspension, after it collapsed is due to policy disagreements within the leadership and the resignation of the late Martin McGuinness. Attempts have been made to restore the assembly but have been unsuccessful. This puts a hold on the movement of any changes in Northern Ireland. It also makes funding and future planning for organisations both difficult and precarious.

Homeless policy in Northern Ireland is contained in the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 as amended (April 1989). The order places a statutory duty on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) to provide temporary and/or permanent accommodation for certain groups of homeless persons, depending upon the assessment of their case.

Those who satisfy the tests of eligibility, homelessness, priority need, and unintentional homelessness are considered to have Full Duty Application Status (FDA). For those not entitled to FDA status there is a statutory duty to provide advice and assistance.

The Housing (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 placed a duty on the Housing Executive to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy. The Act states that an

extensive range of agencies are also obliged to take into account the homelessness strategy in the exercise of their functions. The Department for Social Development (DSD) has overall responsibility to ensure that the stipulations of the Housing Act are enacted. “The Promoting Social Inclusion Homelessness Partnership” - an inter-departmental, cross-sectoral working group that was established by The Department for Social Development - will implement and monitor the new strategy. This interagency body will support the four objectives of the homelessness strategy. A list of performance indicators will be used to monitor progress in implementing the strategy. These will be detailed in an implementation plan to be developed following publication of the strategy.

REMARKS ON KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Due to the current status of the assemble, there are no new developments either of a positive or negative nature.

SCOTLAND

KEY STATISTICS

Homelessness data are collected by all 32 local authorities and published by the Scottish Government every six months and annually. These figures are from information published June 2018 for the period of 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

There were 34,972 homelessness applications recorded in Scotland, 402 (1%) higher than the number of applications received in the same period in 2016/17.

The number of applications in 2017/18 has increased in 17 out of 32 local authorities in Scotland in the latest year.

82% of applicants (28,792 assessments out of a total of 34,950 assessments) were assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness in 2017/18.

27,241 cases were assessed as unintentionally homeless, and therefore entitled to settled accommodation (an increase of 95 cases on 2016/17).

INCREASE/DECREASE IN NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

For the first time in 8 years, Scotland has seen an increase in homelessness, with a rise of 402 (1%) more applications than received in the same period in 2016/17. The annual increase in the latest year follows eight consecutive annual decreases seen in the preceding years, which saw applications fall from a peak of 57,672 in 2008/09 to 34,570 in 2016/17.

The Scottish Government reports that the fall in homelessness applications from 2008/09 to 2016/17 is likely to be due to the impact of housing options and homelessness prevention strategies adopted by most local authorities over the past few years rather than to changes in the underlying drivers of homelessness. This is a model where the application is looked at more holistically, rather than looking at the housing circumstances alone.

For households assessed as unintentionally homeless (with a right to settled accommodation), just over two-thirds (18,457 or 69%) secured a social rented tenancy or a private rented sector tenancy.

As at 31st March 2018:

There were 10,933 households in temporary accommodation, an increase of 60 households (+1%) since last year.

Of these households in temporary accommodation, 3,349 had children – an increase of 118 households (+4%) compared with one year earlier.

The number of children in temporary accommodation increased by 557 children (+9%), to 6,615, compared with the same date one year ago.

CHANGE IN PROFILE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

In Scotland, the main reasons for people and households applying as homeless have remained largely unchanged since the previous year; dispute within the household / relationship breakdown is one of the main causes of homelessness applications (30% of all applications) or being asked to leave (25%).

There was a significant increase in applications from home owners, with 1,191 applications made. This is an increase of 101 applications (8%) compared to 2016/17.

There were 6,451 applications from households living in the private rented sector, an increase of 79 applications (1%) compared to 2016/17. Whilst the proportion of applications from the private rented sector in Scotland increased from 13% in 2007/8 to 18% in 2013/14, this proportion has since remained the same up to 2017/18.

The profile of people who are homeless over the past remains broadly unchanged. The majority of applicants tend to be single, younger males, of White Scottish ethnicity.

Almost a third of applications were from those aged 25 to 34 years (32% for both male and female).

The proportion of total applicants for those aged 34 and under for males was 55%, and 61% for females.

This has slightly decreased over time by a few percentage points (from 63% males and 69% for females in 2002/03 for example).

88% of applicants were of White ethnicity (77% were of White Scottish ethnicity).

The proportion of those identifying themselves as in Other ethnic group has increased over time, from about 1% in 2002/03 to about 4% in 2017/18

POLICIES & STRATEGIES

In October 2017, Ministers decided to launch HARSAG (Homeless and Rough Sleeping Action Group) a group of experts from across the country who were brought together to look at the recommendations for how to progress to prevent and eradicate homelessness across Scotland wherever.

The main questions to be answered by the group (through the ideas of experts and service users from across the country) were:

- What can be done to reduce rough sleeping this winter?
- How can we end rough sleeping?
- How can we transform the use of temporary accommodation?
- What needs to be done to end homelessness?

70 recommendations were produced in Spring of 2018 to become part of a 5-year plan in a final report. The highlights from the recommendations included:

The introduction of a rapid rehousing plan, which includes Housing First

The review of the current Homelessness code of guidance (published 2005)

The reduction in the use of Temporary Accommodation

The review of local connection

The review of intentionality

In addition to HARSAG and a move to the recommendations, December 2017 saw a change to the implementation of the Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Act 2016.

The main changes to the tenancy legislation:

It is open-ended, which means a landlord can no longer ask a tenant to leave because the fixed term has ended

It provides more predictable rents and protection for tenants against excessive rent increases

It includes the ability to introduce local rent caps for rent pressure areas

REMARKS ON KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Positive

There is a spotlight on homelessness in Scotland again, backed by a £50 million fund to be spent over 5 years. This has increased a momentum and demonstrates a political will to work with the sector.

There are stronger working relationships between housing, homelessness and health through Health and Social Care Partnerships.

This is also the case with prisons, housing and homelessness; a new piece of guidance that is to provide 'A Sustainable House on Release for Everyone' (SHORE) has also been launched at the end of 2017.

Cross sector working is another of the recommendations from HARSAG, demonstrating there is further room for improvement on the above areas of work.

Negative

Welfare Reform continues to work against some of the housing systems, with large concerns around the amounts of areas that are caused by people and households moving from the old system across to the new.

The £50 million funding pledged by the Scottish Government has been welcomed by Local Authorities and third sector alike, but comes after many years of funding reductions so does not reflect an increase in funding overall.

WALES

KEY STATISTICS

Key Points from the Welsh Government statistics:

Between 2016-17 and 2017-18 there was a small decrease of 2% in the number of households threatened with homelessness within 56 days (to 9,072 households).

Homelessness was successfully prevented for at least 6 months in 66% of cases (6,021 households). This was up from 62% in 2016-17.

In 15 per cent of cases prevention was unsuccessful, and other outcomes (including application withdrawn, assistance refused and other reasons) accounted for the remaining 18% of cases. This compares with 18% and 20% respectively in 2016-17

For the 6,021 households where homelessness was prevented, a third were able to stay in their own home, with the remaining two thirds securing alternative accommodation.

INCREASE/DECREASE IN NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

In Wales as a whole, 67.6 per 10,000 households were assessed as being threatened with homelessness in 2017-18. This compares with a rate of 69.3 a year earlier, with Cardiff reporting the highest number of cases at 1,977 in total.

An increase in the number of households assessed as being homeless and owed a duty to help secure accommodation of 3% to 11,277 was seen between 2016-17 and 2017-18.

In 41% of cases, the local authority successfully helped to secure accommodation that was likely to last for 6 months. For 4,143 households (37 per cent), the local authority was unsuccessful in securing such accommodation. These were similar to the proportions recorded in 2016-17.

30% of households (4,653) secured accommodation in the social sector, 30% in the private sector, with a further 23% in supported accommodation, 9% with family, friends or returned home and 8% secured other accommodation.

At the end of March 2018, there were 2,052 households in temporary accommodation, representing a 2% increase from a year earlier.

CHANGE IN PROFILE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

The following information is also taken from the Welsh Government statistics:

Most households prevented from, or relieved of homelessness during 2017-18 continued to be those where the main/lead applicant was aged 25 or older, accounting for 78% of all households successfully prevented from becoming homeless

In 2017-18 65% of applications where homelessness was prevented, were made by females (and positively discharged under Section 75). The situation was reversed however for those households assessed as homeless (under Section 73) where in 55 per cent of cases the applicant was male.

In 2017-18 the vast majority of applications were from white British households, with 6% of applicants from a black or minority ethnic successfully prevented from becoming homeless.

During 2017-18, the reason given for the homelessness in 28% of all cases was because “a parent, or other relative or friends were no longer willing to accommodate”. This was down slightly on the previous year.

The “breakdown of a relationship with a partner” was given as the main reason for loss of home in over a fifth (21%) of all Section 73 cases; similar to the previous year.

POLICIES & STRATEGIES

After 9 years of some very progressive moves within housing and homelessness policy in Wales, that had started with a 10-year strategy (in 2009) and including the

Housing (Wales) Act 2014, 2018 saw some negative changes unfolding.

The initial proposals of the Welsh Government were viewed by the housing and homelessness sector as disastrous.

Cymorth Cymru (on behalf of the sector), campaigned continuously until the positive changed was announced resulting in the Welsh Government announcing that after carefully considering the experience of pathfinder councils for its poverty prevention grant, it now intends to pursue two separate grants, one housing-related and one non-housing.

This is a relief to the sector and allows the positive work undertaken to date to continue.

Housing (Wales) Act 2014

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 aims to improve the supply, quality and standards of housing in Wales. Some of the key elements of the Act are:

- introduction of a compulsory registration and licensing scheme for private rented sector landlords and letting and management agents
- reform of homelessness law, including placing a stronger duty on local authorities to prevent homelessness and allowing them to use suitable accommodation in the private sector
- introduction of standards for local authorities on rents, service charges and quality of accommodation

Since the Act was passed by the National Assembly, a series of housing pathways have been developed to reduce homelessness for young people, people leaving the secure estate and veterans.

Legislation focusses on preventing homelessness, but not all authorities have effectively organised themselves to fully implement these new duties, according to the Wales Audit Office.

REMARKS ON KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Positive

In February 2018, 2 new policy documents were produced by the Welsh Government to set out new approaches: The

roll out of the Housing First model, and an action plan to reduce rough sleeping.

As well as new funding to their revenue settlements, councils in Wales received grant funding of £2.8m in 2018/19 to embed homelessness prevention best practice models to help to reduce rough sleeping, prevent youth homelessness, improve access to the private rented sector and strengthen services for people with mental health and substance misuse problems.

Negative

As mentioned, there had been a possibility of funding streams changing, to the detriment of homelessness and housing. This has changed to no longer be the case.

The UK Government's programme of welfare reform continues to have a negative impact on people's ability to maintain and access good quality, stable housing. In particular, as with other parts of the UK, areas are proving to be on the increase and evictions seem inevitable to be on the rise in the very near future.

Also, in line with other parts of the UK, the result of the EU referendum has resulted in huge uncertainty in relation to the UK economy, with the value of the pound decreasing and questions being raised about the future location of some employers currently based in the UK.

If 'Brexit has a negative impact on jobs and wages, it could affect people's ability access and remain in housing and contribute to towards an increase in homelessness. In addition, Wales is a net beneficiary of EU funding and there are concerns about the loss of funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) following the UK's exit from the EU. The ESF supports employment and promotes economic and social cohesion in areas of high disadvantage - the loss of this funding could further hinder work to reduce poverty and improve the economic and social outcomes of people in these areas.